PRISM *international*

Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

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In this issue:
1993 Journey Prize winner Gayla Reid and new poetry by Lorna Crozier

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Ulf Enhörning Rocks of Love
(oil on canvas)

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Sean Brendan-Brown

two poems

Johnny Kneels On

Johnny kneels on
red plastic prayer pad
and thinks how weird it is
a Major is a priest
when Moses said thoushaltnotkill
and Jesus said dountoothers;
but Johnny kneels on
as the Major distributes
consecrated wafers, his hands
stinking of athlete's foot powder
and warm aftershave.
Dog-tags jangle
as Johnny leans forward,
Major says BODYOFCHRIST
so Johnny bites, earth under
his knees quaking as First Battalion
looses its cannons. INCOMING
Major father screams quickly stuffing
his cassock into his rucksack.
AMEN says Johnny running
to fight, bodyofchrist
in his mouth fortune cookie sweet:
through the black bamboo and mists
staining his high boots red he climbs,
one-two-three concrete walls
separate him from home,
from flags, cloaks, clipped green graves.

Fish Shop, Pike Place

Through the parade
fog shadows drunks
fingering gutter debris
for fallen keys
as I march,
undeclaring war:
                In this world
    you may slip and risk anything.

    Fifteen hundred miles hitch-hiking
    bankrupt, walking between
lives. I needed birds, dirt,
rain and snow, highway litter.
When you're alone, outcast
hard-hearted
a beer or old paper is nice.

                In this world
        you may slip and risk anything,
curse all the reasons, the people
inside pressure and pus of hatred:
I've believed in everything,
my god is a burning village
                crying
you're wrong, don't go,
you're wrong, wait,
let me help you, don't go,
you're wrong, don't go.
                In this world you may slip:
the Korean wrapping three pounds of sole
knows this. He has marched under flags,
filthy and shell-shocked. Now he is free.

Bruce Beasley
three poems

Prayer

Pink light on wet snow, the low
yelloworange of the west:
the neon glaze resumes its place, its one
word obscured by halflit sawmill smoke—

Once I named the names of your sorrows,
but when I wrote them, they grew pale,
indefinite, ink-slurs in snow.
You who know them so well, tell me again.

Doctrine for the Cessation of Misery

I don't know if the Buddha was right, if life

is suffering,
or whether, if all appetite for the world of things
were spent,
I'd lie easy

along this lawn studded
with hundreds of cracked acorns, mangled
moles cats dragged from their tunnels—

I don't know if the October morning sun
would touch me then without touching
anything,
or the damp cool of its wind
press onward toward another more
vulnerable perceiver—

But I know there's a weariness
dulling me: throb
of blood through the temples,
squeak and scrape of mockingbird cry,
train's rattling jangle behind the creek.

I sit in a porch swing and feel nothing
but languor
for language and hunger,
hundreds of pages blurred meaningless by my eyes.

It's dispossession

I want:
bucket's scrape on the dry well's floor,
the tedium
of sentences suffered no more—

This morning in exhaustion I lay down
The Roots of Lyric,
and realize I know nothing
of this seed
before me,
still cupped in its broken shell:
what germinates
when the acorn rots at last into earth,
what purpose
all this seedfulness
could serve.

The oak
stirs its shadows over the shingles,
rattles loose
one acorn drilled with a perfect, tiny hole
I stare into and see nothing,
then crack under my heel
to expose only shallows,
a grainy black sludge . . .

I don't know if the Buddha was right, if all things
are on fire
with weariness, love, and lamentation;
I only know appearances
suffer
my depletion,
as the skin of the cracked acorn
can't be
separated from the rough,
striated wood of the shell;

I see only the world's mingled
appetite
and suppression: tempered sunlight,
loose lid of cloud.

Wind riffles pages before me:
Chant, Charm, Riddle,
Emblem,
            Idiogram

accuse me of disaffection,
the wonder of being dulled
to a world

so lured into words.

Ars Poetica

Fat yellow leaves spiral out of the sky,
ushering August rain.
They fall like manna and quickly blacken.

Rainwater flushes the choked gutters
for hours and floods the yard.
The shadows of the drooped magnolia
wade half an inch deep, gilded by floating pollen.

The storm slacks and moths beat at the door;
the moon and the dippers rise, pale and temporary;
and the magnolia blooms curl inward,

tight as shells,
sponging the white seed wrapped at their cores:
a heavy thirst
slakes itself in secret.

Urban Renewal

Tim Keppel

When your marriage falls apart, move to a big city. New York, Boston, Philadelphia. Try Philadelphia, it's cheaper. You won't know anyone, but that's the point.

Rent an efficiency apartment in the barrio. This will be your credo—efficiency. A spartan, that's what you'll be. You won't need the things you needed before—a car, a house, a wife. You only thought you did. You were weak and indulgent. It's time for lean and mean.

Choose an apartment above a jewelry store called The Golden Miracle. Watch kids play in the vacant lot. They make games of discarded objects, shouting in gleeful Spanish on warm summer nights, bashing TV sets with baseball bats—the great American pastime. One day watch them pitch six bowling pins onto a tin roof, one after the other. Assume they're saving them up there for later.

Go to a bar where women dress in black—make-up, hair dye, nail polish. You'll find this appealing, mysterious, repulsive. Go early and get a stool. Assume an expression midway between content and morose. Order dark beer. Don't eat pork rinds. This is critical. Women find pork rinds a major turn-off. It won't matter though; you'll go home frustrated, inebriated, alone. Turn on music that reminds you of your wife. Turn it off. Unplug your phone and stuff it in the closet.

Take long walks around your block. Inspect the grime graffiti broken glass. Hear the cacophony of car horns trolley brakes drunken laughter. A one-eyed doomsday prophet shouting at the sky. Walk past pawn shops strip joints storefront churches AA NA YMCA everyone loaded or recovering or both spare change spare change spare change a group of entrepreneurs with their car wash/drug emporium hey man toot weed ice? The trolley screeching by again, metal scraping metal, past a boarded-up fire-bombed building which reads North Philadelphia Re-Development Project.

*

Decide your apartment is a bit too spartan. What you need is a nice, comfortable sofa to come home to. Or preferably to share.

A sign down the street says MUST SELL. A man is being evicted. He has a sofa for only thirty-five. Even a van to help you move it.

He's a burly Slovack with thick coily chest hair, shirtless and sweating profusely, lighting one cigarette off the other. Friendly guy with a thick accent. "You're new in ze neighbourhood? I hope for you more luck than I."

Heaving the sofa into his van, lavender with a smiling-faced sun stencilled on the side, he says, "I've had a rough time. My daughter died, then my girlfriend left." His rapid, breathy laugh seems to invite your participation. Think better of it. On the steering wheel, his fingers are stained orange-brown, nails bitten to the quick. "I'm going to live in the van," he says.

Lugging the sofa up your stairs, he throws out his back. You feel bad for not holding up your end. Grimacing, he gives a long, wistful look. "It's better you have it than me. When I get depressed I lie on it for days."

That's when you notice the smell: not smoke, not sweat, but something else. Something unnameable. You were vaguely aware of it at his place.

But now it's at your place.

"Looks good there," he says. You study the sofa from where you are, then go across the room for a different angle.

"You're going to kill me for this," you say. "But I'm going to change my mind."

"WHAT?" His face ages before your eyes.

Tell him it's the nicotine. You're allergic. You're lying through your teeth.

He mashes a cushion to his nose. "I don't smell anything. But I have a bad sense of smell."

"I'm sorry."

"Listen, you keep it. If the smell goes away, send me a cheque. If not . . . " He edges toward the door.

"But I don't have a way to move it!" You hear panic in your voice—more than you'd intended. Not that you'd intended any.

"Wait," you say. The smell is all around you, clinging to your shirt, seeping in your pores. "I'll give you the thirty-five if you haul it away."

The guy looks at you. He looks at the couch. He wipes his brow.

"Forty," he says.

The important thing is, don't look back. Don't think about the sound of her breathing, how she slept with the arch of her foot against your calf.

When cooking, avoid the spices you shared: basil, coriander, thyme. Forget the things she taught you, like: wash onions before cutting so they won't make you cry; don't break the spaghetti.

Go ahead and break it.

Become a minimalist. Buy small amounts of everything—toothpaste, toilet paper, salsa picante. Always buy off-brand products, except for trash bags and razors. Don't be seen carrying leaky trash bags with a bloody face.

Draw strength from your asceticism. Be glad your worldly assets can fit into a shopping cart. Know that you're prepared for an emergency evacuation of the city. Appreciate how little you'll have to leave behind.

Go to the corner market called the Bodega. The new owner is Korean. But he speaks Spanish. He tells you he's been robbed three times—once with a gun, once with a razor, and once with a spoon. Later you realize you confused *cuchara* with *cuchillo*—it was a knife.

The shelves are spare, a mouse scurries across the floor. "I like mouses," the guy says in English. "When you got mouses, you know you don't got rats."

This comment will stay with you. As time goes by, it will seem more and more profound, and applicable to many other situations as well.

Devise elaborate ways to mark the passage of time: haircuts, nail clippings, rings around the tub. The souring of garbage, the expiration of milk. The healing of sores.

Know that time is your enemy; it's trying to take you down. If you make it go faster than it wants, or slower, you win.

One day in the Bodega you see a woman. Slender and tall, wearing an army jacket, combat boots, and black leotards with a run. She's young and innocent-faced, obviously trying to be something she's not. For some reason this appeals to you. And that face! Hair pulled tight against a perfectly shaped head. Lacquer-black eyes and nut-brown skin, evoking lush islands, wild parrots, blue waters.

She's over at the canned goods. Just as you look, she does something remarkable. She picks up a can of SPAM and slips it in her jacket. Time stops. You glance furtively at the Korean guy—he's watching wrestling on a four-inch screen. The woman seizes you with her eyes. She knows you've seen her. She seems to be conveying a message. Then she dashes out the door.

Suddenly you forget why you came. Why you're in the city. Why you exist. Nothing makes sense except following the woman with the SPAM.

You catch up with her at the street corner, teetering at the edge of the traffic. She studies your face. "Why didn't you snitch?"

Just beneath her left eye, her cheek begins to twitch.

Ask, "Why would I do that?"

She deliberates a moment, then smiles. Her teeth are crooked, but in a charming way.

Her fingertips peek out of too-long sleeves, producing the SPAM. "Want to join me?"

The streetlight changes. You look at her, you look at the SPAM. You say no thanks and instantly regret it.

At night you hear loud, rum-slurred voices from the tenement next door.

"Let me in the house, you slut!"

"I have a restraining order, motherfucker."

You lie there sweating on your bedroll, moonlight pouring in the window. It's as hot as high noon. On the power line outside, objects are illuminated—a Nike sneaker hanging by a lace, a twisted beige bra, and an angel-haired baby doll, naked from the waist down, with wide, astonished eyes.

* * *

You see homeless guys everywhere. Asleep on sidewalks, crouched by dumpsters, shadow-boxing in the middle of the street. You open a newspaper box and find a stash of personal items—trousers, sneakers, a disposable razor.

And from out of nowhere, the thin, tinkly notes of an ice cream truck, making its rounds from project to project, going: "Merrily merrily merrily merrily life is but. . . "

To clear your head, go sit in the park. In the daytime it's fairly safe. Busted swing sets, crumbling basketball court—no nets, no rims, no goals.

See the old, white-haired black man feeding the birds. He stares at the park as though it's a garden spot. Maybe he can't see too well. Maybe he can't hear. His eyes are huge behind his paperweight glasses, his ears are enormous. He carries a tattered briefcase, removing sheaves of yellowed paper, and holding them an inch from his face.

You begin to look for her. In the Bodega, the laundromat, the park. You watch for army jackets, combat boots, provocative facial tics. You buy a can of SPAM.

Who knows the mysteries of the human heart?

But wait a minute. Don't forget your credo: you have to stay tough. Don't think about that foot pressed against your calf, those adjacent graveplots. Forget about having a deep, meaningful experience.

What you need is a lot of shallow, superficial interludes.

Develop a big city strut. Walk down the street as if nothing fazes you. Ignore blood stains on the sidewalk, ballistic-sounding noises. Assume cars are backfiring. Pay no attention to suspicious characters lurking in doorways. Avoid eye contact. If someone looks at you, suspect they either want to rob you or have sex with you.

You're in the park by the old man when she sits down on your bench. She's not wearing her army jacket and... But you're not thinking about that. You're mesmerized by her eye twitch. Enchanted by her overbite. Don't confess about the SPAM in your cabinet.

"I feel bad about the other day," she says. "I'm not like that."

Believe her. Wonder what she wants out of life. Wish you could provide it. Ask her name.

Her name is Dawn. She tells you her life story. "I come from a 'dysfunctional family'," she says in a yes-I've-been-to-shrinks voice. She spent time in foster homes, a ward of the state. At eighteen, she was 'emancipated'. She was pregnant but lost the baby.

She wants to be a dancer. She answered an ad but they wanted the other kind.

"What about you?"

Say you're "in between jobs."

Tell her you used to be in a think tank, sort of. An institution. You were into theoretical matters, deconstruction.

Tell her you're a bum.

Tell her you're trying to put things back together, reconstruct.

Explain the theory you're developing about people's lives. How people think they have only one, when really there are more.

"I have an aunt in Texas who sends me money," Dawn says. She glances over to see if you believe her.

The sunlight brightens, then dims. Clouds. You become aware of her facial tic. You feel you should do something, convince her things will be okay.

Consider telling her about the Slav with the sofa. The Korean with the mouses. Instead, mention those car mirrors that say OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR. Convey your bewilderment.

She'll let out a sharp, high laugh and put her fingers to her lips.

You look at each other. It's your best moment yet.

The sky brightens. "That's the nicest old man," she says. "Do you know him?"

"One day he asked me to read to him."

Something pierces your heart. Her eye twitch subsides. A calm descends. Tell her, "*You're* nice." But it doesn't come out right.

Then she kisses you hungrily, though not to excess. There's a shyness about her, like someone undressing reluctantly in front of a crowd, at a place that wants the other kind of dancer.

"I have to go," she says.

Tell her you're above The Golden Miracle.

Observe the city at twilight. Gasoline rainbows, candy-coloured crack vials, fragments of broken glass glimmering like diamonds. Scraps of paper like tinsel in the trees.

A gust of wind swoops up a plastic bag, carries it aloft like a kite: SUPERFRESH! An elderly couple sits in lawn chairs having a picnic beneath the overpass. The din of car horns turns out to be a wedding procession. Cars chase the JUST MARRIED's around corners, through red lights, up one-way streets, unwilling to let them go.

Change your attitude. Go from minimalism to abundance. Buy family packs of everything—Ziplock bags, Tupperware, Q-tips by the thousands. Stock up. Take the long view. You never know.

You're leaving the Bodega when you see her down the street. You recognize her swan-like neck, her coltish legs. Quicken your pace. Think of a line. Tell her you're a different person—your cupboard is full, you're listening to music, you've plugged in your phone.

She rounds the corner on Leithgow Street, approaches a van. You can't see the driver, only his hairy arm. She leans in as if to tell him something, or give him a kiss. The van is lavender with a smiling sun. The sunrays are wavy like a lion's mane. The smile is enigmatic. The woman's name is Dawn. This seems important to remember. She gets in the van and is gone.

Take a seat beside the old man. Stare with him across the park. The sun paints the windows of the sponge factory a brilliant orange. The old man fumbles in his satchel. "Let me show you something." He extracts a grainy, sepia photo. Two rows of boys in suits and ties. A graduation of some kind. A commencement.

"Can you tell which one is me?"

Of course you can, the one with the ears.

"How did you know?" He reaches back in the satchel, his hand mottled, unsteady. "Can you do me a favour? Can you read me this?"

A faded letter, tearing at the creases. From a former employer, attesting to the old man's character—his honesty, integrity.

"I've got others," the old man says.

You read several more. Each one corroborates the first. The sun is setting, the man has to go. He hobbles away on severely bowed legs. You won't see him again. He won't return to the park. But you won't worry about him. He has good references.

Go back to your apartment and sit by the window. The sunset will be brilliant. The air will be cool. The street lights will flick on, buzzing like cicadas. Kids will be playing in the vacant lot, shrieking with delight. One boy will shimmy up a drain pipe, crawl out on the tin roof. Then he'll start tossing the bowling pins, one after the other, down to his friends.

George Kalamaras
two poems

The Fear of Onions

The fear of onions is a fear of empty
space between the paper-thin leaves.

The fear of goats is a soybean's distrust
of air circulating around an alfalfa leaf,

a queasiness in the foam a coconut washes ashore.
The fear of celery, a rational obsession

with the colour red, with the bend of magnolias
in a parrot's voice. A boy holds a sphere

in his left hand, hears the Milky Way
at his mother's waist. A mango tree

is the stance of water about to die.
Does the carp's stroke near the pool's floor,

or does it go gold, then blue? Doesn't coffee
in a half-finished cup always exude something

dark? Thunder remains a liquid wood, a shiver
where two breaths meet. Rain keeps pouring

sound, even a week after it's gone. The emptiness
in dawn has the look of dusk, a shape

like the colour onions become near dark. The sky,
an anaemic green, flies off, somewhere below the rivers

of Bihar. A boy, thirsty, walks the salty stairs
down to slow basement air, holds an onion

in the cup of his hand, hears the floor give way.

Empty Bowl

It began with an aspect of ease. A tree
shifted in the shape of a tone and cut

sound. A fossil heard it in a helix
of birth and clawed the still earth.

Within it, centres of birds settled
and glowed as husks. They craved the sun's

slow habit. They heard certitude
in the word, *word*. They felt its form

watering their gulf. It filled with light
the cavity the jellyfish pawed

in its sac-like shaw. All was as it should
be, if space was enough. If the lack

of sound was sight. If rain was rain. Nothing
arrived but what had already been. The still

edge trembled under the weight.
Centuries from birth, the invertebrate

hour longed to song. Three minutes gathered
in cord. Two seconds to breath. Through this

afference rose a filling of wind. A falling
with the colour grass became near dark. There

was no moon to invest a voice. No sound
for the centric mouth to fulfill. No ear

to proceed. The soft, dark eggs quieted
the tongues of birds that lowed to pause

and went white and empty near the shore's
shift. *Water bruised them. Water became*

them. Water softened to heat. With each
sun it brought inland, no breath

offered calm from shell. No sound
for the trembling touch. Tone settled

to chert and left a word, seeking as seed.
Not quite longing. Not quite seed.

Elizabeth Philips

Life of the River

1.

This morning, I go down to the river, silver-
green and slow, follow a school of small fish, flurry

of minnows flowing in a long darting line upstream.
Though I seek their source fifty yards back

keeping pace with a slack current, the river
so low, I don't find an end, there's no last fish

beginning this abundance. Sun picks out the shoal
as if the water were not spiked with mercury,

as if the shore were not scabbed with refuse, shards
of brown glass cracking under my feet. Those slips

of blue flesh are a river of their own, going against
the body of the larger water. When I turn to go

I take them with me, a pellucid chain, clear as the waters
of childhood, the full creeks in spring

rolling through the thawing town, across cold sand
and down onto the sinking ice of the still frozen lake.

2.

One day I wear the wrong shoes, two miles down-river
my feet painfully blistered, I turn back barefoot

stepping gingerly over sharp stones and the waiting knives
of glass. I can only glance at the river

still polishing its many-jewelled waves, daredevil
swallows diving for the flies that bloom over water.

I am in thrall instead to the dusty paths, the willows
enveloping me in their tender green tresses.

I know another kind of wonder, having been so easily stripped
of my shoes, first conceit of civilization.

When I reach the streets near home, the springy well-fed
boulevards, I'm relieved

to have carried myself this far. My feet are raw
and strained, but they find their way

despite years of half-hearted use, they are the fierce
pink claws of a new animal.

3.

At home, I keep the river
by me, recline

beside the pond, and there
it is, that sweetness

and underneath, decay.
The water lives

because something in it
is always dying.

The pool is an eye
with the river in mind,

it takes me in
whenever I look down.

A shy fingerling
flits through my

reflection, flips
in and out of my mouth

a word I can't quite
grasp. All I catch

is the sound
fish

sibilant rain,
swift face of the river.

4.

South of an island of sand, I lie belly down
in the current, my hands anchor me over drifted silt.

Like a water-bird, merganser or teal, I receive
the small waves, the vibrant sweep of fluvial plain.

I duck my head under and water slides
over my face, breaking in two, the river pours

out of my open eyes. The water
purling around me, born of distant ice-fields, wends its way

hundreds of miles west, to empty into the lake
where I swam as a child. Thirty years downstream

I had despaired of that lost gift, innocent
immersion. But now I am once more blessed by water,

braced by the preponderance of the small. For I am no greater
than any other fish—wafer of brightness, shadow

between shores. The river bottom gives way as I rise,
stumbling. Familiar vertigo, the inevitable fall

back into my walking body, where I must reconcile the long drop
between the land I traverse

and the rivers flooding my heart, circular
and confined.

The Sight of Dolphins

T.L. Freeman-Toole

The drive from the L.A. airport to the Long Beach hospital where my father lies is long enough for my brother to tell me, again, the sequence of events that have brought my father to the verge of having an emergency liver transplant. I keep asking for more details, trying to understand why the doctors didn't see this coming. Why didn't they detect that my father was allergic to Dylantin before the allergic reaction had damaged his liver? Why had they waited so long to do anything? Taylor tells me that there is no treatment for end-stage liver disease, but the doctors had assured them that the liver was a miraculous organ, capable of regenerating itself; all they had to do was wait. So they waited, and Taylor watched my father's skin take on a yellowish tinge which darkened with each passing day. But the miracle never happened. My father's only hope now is a liver transplant. If he doesn't get a new liver, he will die in a matter of days.

My father is asleep when I enter his hospital room. Against the white sheet covering him, his thin, thin, arms are startlingly yellow. Beneath the sheet, his swollen abdomen distorts his outline into unfamiliarity. I hardly recognize this figure as my father. The father I know is barrel-chested, dark-skinned, strong. Peter, the rock.

I slip my hand into my father's slack hand on the bed, and feel the wedding band he's worn for almost forty years. The gold band moves easily with my touch, fairly rattling against his bony fingers. This is the same hospital where my mother died, three years ago. On the bedside table is a picture of her in a silver frame. Staring at the picture, listening, gratefully, to my father's steady breathing, I am reassured by my mother's smile. I realize that the picture is one I took, and that her smile warms me so because it was directed at me, behind the camera.

Some years ago, my parents ate lunch at an elegant old hotel in Napa Valley. They told themselves they'd stay there someday, but they never made it back. After my mother died, my father rode his motorcycle up the coast, and checked into the hotel. He dressed for dinner, went down and ordered an expensive meal. Then he pulled out the picture in the sil-

ver frame, propped it on the table in front of him and raised his glass in a silent toast to my mother. He has always kept his promises.

My father whispers, "Hello, daughter."

I turn to look at his face, and I see that the whites of his eyes are not white, but a turgid yellow. He squeezes my hand and looks at my face for a long minute. I'm scared and sweating. I'm glad I came.

"You've let your beard grow."

He slowly lifts a hand to his beard, which has grown in almost completely white. "I've got no one to complain about it being scratchy anymore."

"Who's complaining?" I laugh, bending to kiss him.

The doctor comes in and asks my father to put out his hands as if he were pushing against a wall. My father is unable to hold his hands still, and we look at the doctor to see what this means. I see the deep lines of worry on each side of his mouth, and I think of the oncologist who cried when my mother died.

"We can't wait any longer for your liver to bounce back," the doctor says. "It's barely functioning. It's not filtering the toxins out of the blood." He raises his hands and shakes them in imitation of my father. "This trembling tells me that the toxins are starting to build up in the brain. I want to get you to the UCLA Medical Center as soon as they have a bed available. There's nothing else we can do for you here. The sooner we can get you there, the sooner you can get on the waiting list for a liver."

When the doctor leaves, I ask my father if he's sure he wants to go through with the transplant.

"I have no choice," he says.

You do have a choice, I think. You could give up, like Mom.

"If I want to live," he finishes after a pause.

There is no question in his voice. Giving up is not an option for him.

I ride in the ambulance with my father from the Long Beach Medical Center to UCLA. The transfer has been arranged for eleven o'clock at night to avoid traffic. We glide silently along without a siren, down dark empty stretches of freeway. My father refuses to lie back, but keeps his head up, looking steadfastly out the window at the back. I ask, "Are you all right?"

He is watching the exit signs on the opposite side of the freeway as they retreat behind us—Rosecrans, El Segundo, Manchester, La Cienega—names, places he's lived with all his life. He says quietly, "I'm wondering if I'll ever come this way again."

I left Los Angeles soon after I learned to drive, and I have never be-

come familiar with the greater Los Angeles area the way my father has. These street names are just names to me, but to my father they're memories of driving his first car downtown on dates with his high school sweetheart, my mother, of installing roof-top antennas all across the city, in the early days of TV when he worked for Dorn's House of Miracles.

At UCLA, I walk behind the gurney as they wheel my father in through the emergency room entrance. We thread our way through a maze of gurneys and wheelchairs, dodging nurses rushing between patients. A doctor is shouting, and behind a screen someone is moaning.

The ambulance driver pushing my father's gurney motions with his head at the commotion all around us. "Freeway accident. Just in." We take the elevator to the seventh floor. Here, the hallways are quiet and empty. All but the most determined visitors have gone home for the night.

Two young nurses bustle about getting my father settled in the liver transplant ward. One has an earring in her nose and wears a bracelet above her elbow. The other one has hair that is shoulder length on one side, and one inch long on the other side. They both warn me not to walk out to the parking lot alone.

In the morning, my father is coherent, but only through an act of will. As the team of transplant doctors introduce themselves, my father repeats the names, making a visible effort to fix their names and faces in his fading mind. They ask him to hold his arms out in front of him with his hands fixed. His hands flick rhythmically, and a wave of nausea washes over me as I see how much more pronounced the reflex is than it was just yesterday. The doctors tell him that the toxins have reached a dangerous level in his brain. The transplant must be done soon or it will be too late.

The doctors explain the process of liver transplantation. To me, it sounds like a series of "even ifs" which progressively narrow my father's chances:

Even if the transplant team accepts him as a transplant candidate, an organ may not be found in time; the waiting list for donor livers is very long; about a third of the people waiting for a new organ die before they get one.

Even if a compatible organ is found in time, the surgery itself carries a considerable risk; it is a lengthy, complicated procedure, much more complicated than any other type of single-organ transplant, due to the number of tiny blood vessels involved.

Even if he comes through the surgery all right, his body may still try to reject the organ; he has only a seventy-percent chance of surviving the first year.

Even if he survives the first year, he can never be considered cured; for the rest of his life, he will be dependent on a combination of costly medications that will work to suppress his immune system, making him more susceptible to illnesses of every kind.

My mind dumbly follows the progression on to its next logical step—*even if* he lives beyond the first year, his life expectancy is. . .

The head of the transplant team, Mr. Busuttil, says, reluctantly, "We really don't know how long these patients are going to live. We only started doing liver transplants five years ago. So we just don't know."

My father struggles to absorb what the doctors are saying. I love him for how hard he's hanging on, my brave, clever, handsome father. With slow, trembling hands, he signs the consent form for the surgery.

Outside the hospital room window, a robin lands on the window ledge. One of the robin's legs is stretched out awkwardly in front of him, and I see that a piece of string is tangled around his leg. The bird pecks at the string half-heartedly. Life suddenly seems grotesque in the extreme. I remember standing in my mother's bedroom as she showed us her misshapen breast. "I don't want to have a mastectomy," she sobbed, "I just want it the way it was."

An orderly comes in to clean up and my father mistakes him for one of the doctors he just met. When he realizes his mistake, he whispers, frightened, "I'm losing it."

He sends breakfast away. "Take it away. I'm dying." The woman with the tray looks at me with raised eyebrows. I tell her to leave the tray, though even I know my father is too far gone to eat. I try to reassure my father but he says, "I feel everything shutting down." His voice is both resigned and wondering, as if to say, "So this is how the end feels."

Towards evening my father slips into a coma. He is transferred to a Critical Care Unit, and his name is moved to the top of the nation-wide waiting list for organs. The transplant team plans to operate in the morning, if they can find a liver in time. I stand in the enclosed room in the CCU staring down at my father. His eyes, the whites gone as yellow as egg yolks, roll from side to side and slowly back again, as if tracking an unseen light. His tongue moves in his mouth like a foreign thing.

I feel profoundly alone. My father has gone somewhere very far from me, and I don't know if he's coming back.

With my father's key, I let myself into his house. He's left his radio on, as is his habit to discourage break-ins. As I sit there in the dusk listening to his favourite classical music station, the light beside me suddenly switches on. Outside, the porch light blinks on. A few minutes later, the sprinklers in the front yard sputter to life. The soothing music of Mozart,

the soft hiss of the water on the lawn, the life he's so carefully arranged here, is going on without him. I sink into the sofa, feeling a deep lethargy overcome me. I can't imagine getting up in the morning and facing that hospital again. I want to stay right here. It would be so easy, so natural to just stay, to slip into the still warm hollow he's left in that animate house, and carry on in his place.

During the night, a liver becomes available in New Hampshire, and an organ retrieval team flies out to get it. When Taylor and I get to the medical centre in the morning, Dr. Busuttil tells us that the donor liver is not in good condition, but it's the only one they can find. They are going ahead with the surgery.

Half-way through the morning, long before the surgery should be over, Dr. Busuttil calls us into his office. We listen, numbed, as he says, "The donor liver ruptured as soon as we put it in. We had to take it out again or your father would have bled to death. He's on a bypass machine right now but he can only stay on it a few hours." He pauses, allowing us time to grasp what he's saying.

"What are the chances of finding another liver in time?" I ask.

Dr. Busuttil sighs, "Very slim. We've put the word out, but there's just nothing out there. Not even a rumour of one. I don't think your father's going to make it. You should prepare yourselves for that possibility."

"But we have a few hours, right?" Taylor asks.

"If we hear of another liver in the next—" he looks at his watch. "Four hours, we may make it. If not. . . . " He hesitates to spell things out for us. "If we don't find a liver, you are going to need to give the okay to take him off the bypass machine."

The transplant coordinator finds us a private place to wait; it is somebody's office, and the fax machine chatters. Taylor and I cry silently until my father's oldest friend is ushered in. He is shocked at the sight of our tears, and shouts, "You're acting as if he's already dead. He's alive, for god's sake!" He digs an old photo of my father out of his wallet and props it on the table. Launching into an amusing story about the two of them in their drinking days, he comforts us, cajoles us, forcibly reminds us just exactly who it is we're so close to giving up. Yet he describes a man I hardly knew. I realize that the times I spent with my father, the weekends working on the house, the summer camping trips, were a very small part of his life. His life was working and drinking. I resist the implication that I, too, was a very small part of his life.

Over the next four hours, Taylor and I look from the picture to the clock on the wall and back again. We want to hope but don't know how. Our ability to hope was atrophied since our mother died. And, our con-

science asks us, what would we be hoping for if we could: for someone to die suddenly, cleanly, in the next few hours, so that our father will live?

The four hours pass all too fast, and we still haven't heard anything. Dr. Busuttil is on the phone. That's a good sign. The transplant coordinator hurries up with the news that they've found a liver here in the area, and they can start surgery very soon. We are amazed they were able to find a local donor; the coordinator says wryly, "That's one of the good things about being in Los Angeles. With all the gang violence, we usually have a steady supply of organs."

It's past midnight. Taylor and I are lying on adjacent couches in the waiting room. I stare up at the glaring white ceiling, at the get well balloons stuck in the grating covering the fluorescent lights. When I close my eyes I feel dizzy and the couch seems to move beneath me. The drone of the air circulation system sounds like an old V-8 engine. It's the sound of our old International Travel-All, big and solid as an armoured car, the sound that lulled my brother and I to sleep in the warm rush of air from my father's open window. My mother, lipsticked and lovely even on those camping trips, slept too, her head against her little travelling pillow. Not long ago my father told me that those years were the best years of his life.

Close to dawn, we rouse ourselves and start wondering out loud when the surgery will be over. It seems to be taking an awfully long time. As light starts to filter in from the tall windows overlooking the courtyard, I notice Taylor's tired face, his wrinkled clothes, and I am suddenly aware of how old we've grown.

At five in the morning, our wait is over. A scrub nurse takes us down to the operating room. Dr. Busuttil avoids our eyes. It's just exhaustion, I tell myself, he's done two transplants on my father in the past twenty-four hours. He tells us that the new liver appears to be functioning normally. I find myself staring down at the blood-spattered booties covering his shoes as he says, "Over three hundred liver transplants, and we've never had a patient lose that much blood."

"Yes, but . . . " we say, wanting assurances.

All he'll say is, "Your father's got a chance."

"When will he wake up?" we ask.

"Well," he says cautiously. "It's going to take a long time for the anaesthesia to clear from his system. He's been under for almost twenty-four hours. It may take several days . . . *if* he comes out of the coma."

The word "if" hangs in the air and we realize our wait is not over yet.

*

Taylor and I arrange a schedule for the next few days so that one of us will be here at all times. Since I have been with my father almost continuously since my arrival, Taylor offers to stay so that I can go back to my father's house and get some rest for a day or two.

The next day, I drive down to the beach just blocks away from my childhood home, take off my shoes, and stand facing the steady breeze from the west. I want the salt air to blow through me, to remove the sterile hospital smell that clings to me, to work as an astringent on the rawness inside me. I start walking north along the beach towards the pier. The grit of the sand is familiar beyond words, beyond memory; the feel of sand between my toes was one of my earliest sensory impressions. Twenty-five years ago, this beach was our summer paradise. Now, the children are gone, as young families are forced inland, where the smog is fierce, but housing is more affordable. At night, the gangs come down from Compton and Inglewood and congregate under the pier. During the day, police patrol the litter-strewn beach on three-wheeled motorcycles.

I sit on the beach, watching two tall, bearded men in robes posing in front of the waves while a passerby takes their picture. Suddenly I notice the fins of a group of dolphins in the water. I walk down to the shoreline to get a better look, and a pair of dolphins split off from the rest and zoom in close to shore. They body surf a wave in tandem, just under the surface of the water. I can see their sleek bodies clearly through the translucent wall of the wave. In all my summers on this beach, I had never seen such a thing. I walk along the beach, keeping even with the dolphins as they swim leisurely along. A wave of excitement follows them on the shore, as people stand up and exclaim, "Look, dolphins!" Despite the presence of gangs, the pollution, the absence of children, the beach still offers up wonders.

The next day, I tentatively negotiate the midday traffic on the freeway. My father is still deep in a coma, and I am in no hurry to see him hooked up to life-support equipment. The freeway traffic stops and starts, and I inch along behind a truck filled with a dozen Latino day labourers; they stand with their elbows folded over the top of the metal pen that encloses the truck bed, talking and smoking in apparent ease. I can't help seeing them as accident victims with head injuries, potential organ donors.

On the third day, the nurse is changing my father's dressing when I arrive; the nurse pokes her head out of the CCU and asks me to give her a few minutes. I walk down to the waiting room, where an elderly man in a soft rumpled gray suit sits by the window, rubbing his face wearily. He asks me who I am here to see, and we exchange stories. Then he stands up and says, "I want to leave you with these words. If you have a pain and

the doctor says it's nothing, don't you believe it. Seven years we were happy down there in Florida, then pow (here he clapped his palms with startling force), my wife's in the hospital. My son says, 'Bring her to UCLA. The best doctors in the country.' Well, they missed the boat. Six weeks she's been here, and they finally did surgery yesterday. Cancer. It's a terrible disease. I guess they're all terrible. She's got cancer here and here and here." He touches his body with his fingertips, collapsing under his own touch as if those parts pained him as well. He turns and walks out of the room, looking lost and out of place. Of all the foreign voices I've heard in L.A., this man's New York accent strikes me as the most foreign of all.

Yes, they are all terrible, but even in the midst of my father's suffering, I can't help feeling relieved that he doesn't have cancer. I remember how pathetically grateful my mother was when I offered to brush her hair. No one wanted to touch her anymore.

I put on a surgical gown and gloves and enter the CCU. My father's body is curiously devoid of life, the ventilator pumping air into his lungs, the rest of him unnaturally still. I can't tell by looking at him if he is asleep, still in the coma, or dying. He seems a creature in suspended animation, free from pain. As much as I want him to wake up, I am reluctant for that moment to arrive.

A blond nurse fiddles with my father's IV, her painted nails glowing pink through her surgical gloves. When a male nurse comes into the room, she asks him, "How do you keep your hair looking so great?"

He says, pleased, "I shampoo it with a little gel, blow dry it, and use some mousse on the sides for a wet look. Then I spray it to keep it in place."

It is night-time. I get an apple from the hospital cafeteria, then go back up to see my father one more time before I drive back to his house for the night. In the CCU, the lights are kept on around the clock, the life-support machines click and blink, technicians come and go, taking blood and X-rays, the nurses keep up a loud, cheerful chatter as they move around their mostly silent patients. How can anyone get well here? I've heard that some patients in CCU, deprived of deep, dream-producing REM sleep, go crazy. For a moment the room is quiet, and I can hear the whoosh of the ventilator forcing air into my father's lungs, the gurgle of oxygen through a water tank, the hiss and hum of various monitors. I sway on my feet, eyes closed, floating inside an aquarium. The outside world seems impossibly far away.

Taylor calls from the hospital to say that my father is waking up and that the ventilator tube has been removed from his throat. I go to the hospital expecting to see my father groggy but otherwise himself. When I

enter the CCU, I see my father propped up in bed, his eyes open. I move quickly to his side, but his gaze remains fixed on a certain point behind me. I turn to see what he is looking at—it's a television that's been turned on without the sound. Though I find it strange that there is a television in a Critical Care Unit, I see nothing remarkable about the commercial on the screen. But my father is staring at it, transfixed. He whispers, his voice hoarse from the ventilator tube, "Look who's on TV." I look, and all I see is a person selling used cars. I wonder who he sees. From the look on his face it could be anyone—my mother, even Jesus himself.

The nurse explains to me that the anaesthesia still lingering in his system is causing the hallucinations, but I can only stand for my father to look through me for so many minutes before I have to leave the room. I remember Dr. Busuttil saying that the toxic build-up in my father's brain may have caused permanent damage. We were waiting for my father to come out of the coma. I see now that consciousness is not enough; we must wait now for his full return.

Taylor is held up in traffic and doesn't arrive until after dark. He walks me out to the car, and I drive through Westwood to get to the freeway. On one corner of Wilshire Boulevard huge floodlights suspended from cranes cast a purplish glow over an old Art Deco building. Someone with a hose is wetting down the sidewalk. Camera crews stand by: a movie scene is being shot.

I remember when I was in junior high, bicycling up to Palos Verdes to watch the filming of a movie at an abandoned church at the edge of a seaside cliff. A few years later, I found myself at the same church on a very dark night with several very drunk young men. We stumbled across the broken flagstones of the courtyard behind the church until, suddenly, the pavement fell away and we were standing at its broken edge, looking down at the phosphorescent waves far below us. One of the boys picked me up and, swaying drunkenly, held me out over the edge of the crumbling cliff, laughing at his strength. The blackness of the night, the sky, the sea, was above me, below me, all around me; then, as now, suspended in darkness, I held my breath and waited forever for the moment to end.

The next day, my father is moved to a regular room on the liver transplant ward. Taylor and I enter the dim, quiet room where my father lies flat on the bed, his eyes closed. His skin colour is normal once again, and the swelling is gone from his belly, but his cheeks are sunken and he has lost so much weight that the contours of his body are scarcely visible beneath the sheets. A white towel has been draped around his head. He's no longer my father, but a saint, an ascetic bearing the suffering of the

world. He suddenly opens his eyes and the spell is broken as he growls, "Get rid of this stupid towel."

A nurse bustles in and says, "His temp was sub-normal, so I put the towel around his head to bring it back up. He looks fine now." She bends over my father and says in a loud animated voice, "You've got some visitors. Do you recognize them?"

Taylor steps up to the bed. My father gives him a blank-eyed look and says, "I've never seen this man before in my life."

The nurse looks at me in alarm. Taylor bursts out laughing, and so do I. Our long wait is over.

"That's my Dad. We've got him back!" Taylor shouts.

A small lopsided grin appears on my father's face. He looks over at me and says my name.

I can go home now.

Before I leave L.A., I drive over to our old neighbourhood to see a friend of mine whose father recently died. She tells me matter-of-factly that since he died, things have been moving around—coffee cups shifted, a teddy bear turned to face the corner of the playpen. She says, "He's trying to tell us he's still here." I look at her baby, sleeping peacefully beside us, and listen to the distant breaking of the waves. A soaring lifts me out of myself, out of the bleak oppression that has lingered since my mother's death. My own father is still here, still with us, after coming within a knife's edge of death. I recognize that unfamiliar feeling as hope; it glides, like the seldom-seen dolphin, just beneath the surface, trailing wonder in its wake. "Right now," I tell my friend, "I'm ready to believe anything."

Lorna Crozier
six poems

Too Much Brightness

Morning opens like a crimson poppy
on a leggy stem. Too much
brightness. As a girl I stood
at the edge of a shimmering pool,
guarded the children. I blew
a silver whistle on a chain
to break the spell, the voices
calling them down and down.
On the back of their necks
water lay its strange maternal
hands, heavy, without bones.

I watched the children
bob and bob hour after hour,
my skin burned and blistered.
Now sun finds the lines it carved
from eye to jaw, around my mouth,
above my freckled knees. It seeks
them out like glacial melt
pushing the ancient river beds
closer to the sea. Soon I'll be
all running light and water.

When I dive in to save someone,
the pool a muscled throat
that swallows me,
I'll find a child huddled
in the blue roar at the bottom,
hair waving above the grate
as if to take root in the earth
under everything. This far from the sun I'll cradle
her head in my luminous hands.
With a watery tongue I'll sing,
I'll sing.

The Pearl is a House of Light

The pearl is a house of light
whether it is the one
on the tip of the penis,
or the other, huge as a fist,
made from snow.

To the oyster
the pearl is an irritation,
then a moon, something
to worship in the small
universe of the flesh.

The pearl is at home
in your navel, the folds
of the vulva,
the hollow at the base of your
throat where your bones
join like wings.

When the moon rained pearls
and they scattered
across the grass, everyone
mistook them for dew

except the girl
with no hands
who crawled across the lawns
at night, collecting each
luminous pebble
with her soft wet mouth.

Fire Breather

(for Patrick)

When I drank what you gave me I burned
my mouth. So much singing on these lips.
A bowl full of fire. You should have told me.

I was used to tasting your homemade soups
with a wooden spoon, testing the flavour.
The windows steamed so I couldn't see out.

Add more barley, I'd say, or those red spices
from the Nile. You'd save everything,
even chicken feet and you'd suck between the toes.

We could be in Japan, our shoes off all the time.
Under my fingers your flesh gives like grass mats,
Blue-Eyed or Brome. O you're a clever one!

Nothing to show, but inside enough heat
to light the tallow candles you bought
from the butcher who gives you soup bones for free.

After I take you in my mouth I can blow flames
across a room. A strange bed for us to lie in,
all these ashes and my feet still cold.

The Woman Who Has Seen Neither Birth Nor Death

I am the crone who comes after,
washes the baby or corpse,
comforts the weeping husband, the mother
with no child in her arms.
My cat bore her kittens
without a sound, brought them to me
only when their eyes were open.

My father's eyes in the hospital
were so blue. That afternoon
he gave me such a look
when I told him I'd be back tomorrow.
He died that night.

A year ago, I was on my way
to Kingston to see a friend,
cancer eating her mouth and tongue.
Her husband left a message
at my hotel somewhere near Kenora.
It's too late. One night I slept
by a barn, waiting for a sow
to give birth, but the pig man
thought I was there for him
and I couldn't stay. The animal smell
of his hands made me die a little.

In my dreams children, some
with the plush feet of lions,
the faces of dogs,
push through narrow doors,
not the bone arches of my body,
and tug at me
for what they need to grow.

I remember my own birth,
tumbling forward
toward the light the dying speak of,
and I seemed to be there
in that bright room
after
everything had happened,
my mother mended,
the smell of blood completely gone.

The Red Onion in Skagway, Alaska

The only thing this town's
got going is the past.
Here the erotics of history,
and vice versa, bring prosperity.
In the Red Onion Saloon
I read what's supposed to be
an amusing tale of the girls upstairs
who worked in "cribs," ten by ten cells,
just enough room to lie
spread-legged. For efficiency

someone built a row of wooden dolls
behind the bar,
an iron rod through their bellies
joining them like paper cut-outs,
below each one
the number of a room.
When one of the girls was occupied,
the bartender flipped a doll
onto her back
and when he righted her
another miner climbed the stairs.

The "Red Rock Ladies" they were called
and on the wall a turn-of-the-century
photograph. Four small town girls
open-faced and plump,
look out at you
like someone in an ad for milk
or someone you used to know,
that quiet girl who caught the bus to school
from Olds or Antelope or Manyberries,
the one who ate her lunch outside alone.

They're in their Sunday best,
long skirts, high collars, all
the buttons buttoned up.
One holds a small dog,
another, a spotted cat.

They make me think of the ponies
who never got to leave the mines,
some born blind inside,
so the stories go,
pulling car after car of gold
in numbing dark. The photographer
has made the Red Rock Ladies smile (I hope
his remark was kind)

but they all look pale,
discomforted,
two with their reluctant pets
tucked into the fleshy curve of their arms,
in the Red Onion,
perhaps all they knew
of love.

The Souls of Animals

If animals have no souls
it's because they do not need them.
There's something forever about their time
on earth, whether they move on wing, paw or hoof,
or slide with huge, cold bodies
across the blue-green worlds.
Wherever they dwell, their gaze
when they look at you
comes from a great height—
the yellow of hawk, the green of lizard eye—
or so close up
you feel they've slipped under the leaves
of your eyelids and stare from the inside out.

In spite of theology and metaphor,
a cat placing its back paws
precisely where the front have been
is simply walking as a cat must walk
across the snow. A dog winding himself
like a pocket watch into dream
is doing what a dog must do. Still,
in books of the dead the human soul
transmogrifies, becomes bird or butterfly,
or soft-pawed, graceful thing.

Grant animals a soul: might they not leave
their bodies in the shape of ours,
assume the best of us, the high forehead,
the shapely arms, the exactitude of
thumb on index finger.
That's what those bright ones are,
those people with a glow about them,
an ecstacy. The souls of animals
crossing from one country to another,
pausing among us
only to rise in glory,
beasts again.

K.V. Skene

The Space Between Two Objects

side by side
close enough
feel that fluttering hollow
of a hunger
chanting yes
more
everything's too clear
we can't change

nothing's out there
some people fake it
make it work
it's surreal
out of focus
like life in prime time
your childhood
wants to happen

in another mind-set
two objects smash/pass
we live our terrible death
free from thought

until hands reach out
grab hours and hours
of memory
no

no

we walk the park
our shoulders almost touch
that old insistent ghost
(a battered crutch
we cling to) sex need
guilt sometimes
we know
ourselves

it's all in our heads
we make it up
(it makes sense
as a dream
makes sense)
after you've rearranged
everything
twice

in the space between
(born blind until
awake) each naked child falls
from innocence

to a heartstopping point
of emptiness
no
more

more

Sue Wheeler

two poems

Long Division

June is a hot shroud, we can barely
catch our breath. On the edge
of understanding, we bend
at the second graveside
but it never quite

makes sense, like being told
any number divided by zero
is infinity. Remember the grade four
stories? The children whose parents

had gone down in ships at sea?
We find our places in the air-
conditioned limos for the drive
back to town past stooped fields

where in the '50's we watched people picking
cotton, dragging their long cloth bags.
Back then all the plots danced toward
rubies, even for orphans. Who imagined

this ocean of soil, this bottled air?
You have to bring down.
You have to carry.

Tourists

From the rented car she calls out
Is the cemetery down this road?
I resist saying it's at the end
of every road. Tell her I've never
been here before. We survive
by whatever strategies we can find.
The skunk cabbage in the ditch
stinks, attracting flies that spread
pollen in their search for the rotting meat.
This afternoon: rain, the claustrophobia
of my motel room, its stingy bars of soap.
Grey light falls through thermopane
thick as the glass in a Mason jar
but what's preserved here, me or this
view of cabins and surf? All day
people offer their stories
like peppermints. The man who clerked
forty years at the Regina Liquor Board
has to give up slow pitch ball,
diabetes choking his reflexes.
The woman on the bus whose dead husband
was born at this beach. How she met him
when he came by her sister's house
during the War. The drawings
on the restaurant wall are feathers
till I look again. Lures.
I'm at eye level with hooks and barbs and I'm
eating local fish.

David Hull

A Journey, Reconsidered

Our pace, of course, is trudge.
Maybe muskeg's claimed us,
Digesting will before
Body; lovely. Wetland:
A sop, of mud, of sludge,
Now of feet and purpose;
And dig you may, no floor
Bolsters this near-quicksand.

The fen's alive, they say,
Sucking pastures, hungry
To sink in earth that's firm
One year, shrivelling smaller
The next. You feel the way,
Vacillating, angry,
This muddy matter squirms
Like a chopped nightcrawler.

Our ankles plough ahead.
Furrows, slight wet partings
That seal themselves with ease,
Open, offering treasures:
Precious glint, arrowhead.
Don't stop though—keep marching,
For those who stopped were seized,
Sank past thinking's measure.

And you and I are lost,
Bog-bound and cold. We've wandered
The path of ampersands,
Question marks and colons.
A switchback course we've crossed,
Double-crossed, and pondered.
The map's pulp. Marsh-wood stands
Waterlogged, soft, swollen.

We wade through mud and wonder
Just why we came at all.
What was wrong with those meadows?
Leave solid ground for this?
Panic, soon; now, hunger
Impels us, our pace a crawl,
Sinking in wetland. Shadows
Suggest an endlessness.

Passport

Gayla Reid

One: Spear Carriers

1.

In 1958, this is what Marion knew about Budapest:

Cardinal Mindszenty.

Sister Agnes had told them about Cardinal Mindszenty. He had been imprisoned by the Communists. He had been tortured but he had not given in.

The freedom fighters. Crushed by Russian tanks.

Marion had heard about their final messages to the world.

Help, help, help. SOS, SOS, SOS. Now I have to run over to the next room to fire some shots.

We shall die for Hungary.

They were devout Catholics, all of them, Sister Agnes said.

They were fighting godless atheistic Communism with their bare hands. For a few days, they had won.

We have wounded who have given their blood for the sacred cause of liberty, but we have no medicine. The last piece of bread has been eaten.

Sacred liberty, betrayal, martyrdom. Such things (Marion knew) were not possible in Australia.

There was Reverend Mother at the front of the classroom, come to introduce Magda Szabo, from Budapest. With her shining red hair.

Marion thought competition for her would be fierce.

But the class was, at that time, preoccupied with other matters. If you drank Coca-Cola at lunch time and put blotting paper in your shoes you'd be drunk by mid-afternoon.

It's working, they shrieked, giggling with fervour.

Magda, who at home drank a glass of wine and was permitted a little of the fiery *barack,* stared.

They took their revenge.

Smells funny, they said.

A DP.

A reffo.

Garlic on her breath.

So it was Marion who walked home, unimpeded, beside Magda. Marion who met Magda's mother.

Magda's mother served little cakes with dark nuts in the middle, and looked at Marion while she ate them.

Marion's mouth went dry.

It was Marion who sat with Magda and Magda's mother in front of their first television set. On Saturday nights, Marion explained *Leave It to Beaver,* and *Sunset Strip.*

In Magda's house Marion found herself, for the first time, an expert. She leaned back; she stretched her arms out along the sofa.

Have some more cakes, Magda's mother said to her.

Thank you very much, Marion said, behaving nicely. Really very tasty. She smiled at Magda's mother.

Warily, Magda's mother smiled back.

Magda's father was an engineer, down at the Snowy, and seldom home. (He had a most peculiar name: Bandi, a fact Marion knew she must, for her own sake, conceal from the other girls.)

Marion's father was buried at Waverley, along with her grandparents and great grandparents. The whole shooting match, Marion explained, to Magda.

Magda had other cemeteries from other shooting matches. Kerepes cemetery in Pest, for one.

Her brother Laszlo is buried there.

After the second invasion, Magda told Marion, they took the freedom fighters and hanged them on the bridges, in clusters.

Like bunches of winter grapes, Magda said.

They walked out at night, across the swamp. They were twelve hours in the swamp.

And at last they were in a hut on the far side. It was cold in the hut. (It was cold everywhere.) A bare lightbulb overhead.

Magda was sleepy, sleepy.

Behind her somewhere, men were talking in low, urgent voices.

Her mother took her handkerchief, wet it with saliva, and tried to clean Magda's face with it.

Furious, Magda pushed her mother away.

Magda showed Marion the pictures of the freedom fighters, from the newspapers.

The freedom fighters dressed in funny old clothes.

They looked, in particular, at a girl in a beret. This girl had a big bandage on her cheek and was immensely serious.

She was their own age. There was no doubt about it.

Just think, Magda told Marion. Think of what I could have done.

I could have saved Laszlo.

2.

Even in the classroom, built in double brick to last as long as faith, it's hot and moist. Out in the garden cicadas are shouting all the way to the convent walls.

Beyond the walls lies the city. Where tar is melting in the streets and flies are forcing their way in. Where good Catholic girls like Marion and Magda are going to be exposed to non-Catholics of a lower moral standard.

Today is the end-of-the-year one-day retreat for the Fourth and Fifth Years. Not to be confused with the big one, the three-day retreat, in the middle of winter. This is just a final tune-up before the summer holidays.

In the morning there is mass and confession in the chapel. In the afternoon it's back to the classroom for the annual lecture on chastity.

The purpose of chastity, the Jesuit says, and writes it on the blackboard, is to control sex attraction. There are two kinds of sex attraction, he says, making two arrows with his chalk: personal sex attraction and physical sex attraction.

Personal sex attraction, says the Jesuit, turning boldly to face them, is the fascination a person can have for a person of the opposite sex.

In the realm of personal sex attraction, he says, a young Catholic girl has a special example to follow, the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For immodest dress in girls provides an occasion of sin to boys.

The serge of her tunic sticks to Marion's thighs. The day is as moist as.

The priest clears his throat and says: For boys have passions that are more easily aroused.

The silence in the room is enormous. It billows out into the garden where the cicadas, abruptly, halt.

Marion is falling from the chapel tower, just like Kim Novak in *Vertigo.* Falling is dangerous and lovely and quiet. Kim Novak's eyes are an incitement to sins against chastity, surely? (For boys, who have passions that are more easily aroused.)

Physical sex attraction, the priest writes next. Outside marriage, he

says—turning very swiftly—this is a mortal sin. He turns back to the board, writes Outside Marriage, and underlines it three times.

It is a mortal sin to enjoy or to desire any sexual pleasure outside marriage, he repeats, tapping at the underlining with his chalk. Whether prolonged or momentary.

(Marion and Magda were in Magda's mother's room, with the blinds down, trying on Magda's mother's underwear. Magda had on her mother's best petticoat, apricot lace and something silky. The soft smell of powder on Magda's skin. Was that prolonged or momentary?)

The priest has fine white hands, with small black hairs growing along his fingers. Sacred fingers, that have touched the host. Never touching himself. No, he never.

For any unmarried person any full consent to venereal pleasure, alone or with others, is a mortal sin.

Marion has seen the word in public lavatories, on little notices made out of tin and painted with enamel.

Venereal, disease.

Venereal, he says, from the Roman goddess Venus. Meaning pleasure that is achieved by movement in the sexual parts of the body.

In the garden Sister Agnes is tying up the agapanthus. Sister Agnes was in Thailand last year, and came back looking yellow.

In Thailand, Sister Agnes said, one can smell the devil.

Agapanthus, Agatha's pants. Huge blue blooms that signal the start of summer.

Agape, love. Anthos, a flower. Will thrive even if neglected. Her father had told her.

Afterwards, Marion and Magda walk home together, as usual. Magda kicks at the footpath. Magda tells Marion this:

Her brother, Laszlo, had a girlfriend, a lover. She had been killed in a big demonstration in Parliament Square, one October Thursday early in the fighting.

A *lover*. It was—European.

Magda said, angrily: Were they mortal sinners? Have they gone to hell?

I don't think so, Marion said, to comfort. Although it followed, they would have gone to hell, wouldn't they? The priest had just spent all afternoon telling them.

What if she said something and Magda went, what? what?

Magda has Laszlo, she has history. *(We shall die for Hungary.)*

Marion walks along beside Magda.

On the other side of the world, Laszlo is in a dark room in Budapest.

He stands at the window. His lover, behind him on the bed, is wearing nothing but her petticoat.

It is unimaginable, venereal.

Russian tanks clank through the streets.

3.

It was Magda who did brilliantly in the Leaving Certificate. Marion didn't do as well as everyone expected.

It's not worth going back and doing it all over again, her mother said.

Money doesn't grow on trees, her mother said. Who's to say you'd do any better next time round?

No, Marion was to do a secretarial course at the Tech.

Then that nice Gerry Connolly had agreed to take her on.

Gerry Connolly was a man who came to their house to say the family rosary. The rosary, which had been top of the charts all the way through the Fifties, was by now somewhat out of fashion. But those who valued the Blessed Virgin Mary weren't going to let themselves be put off by young fools in Rome who were rushing around throwing open doors and windows.

Gerry Connolly and the others had a blessed statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which they took from house to house. They gathered around it and contemplated the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries.

Marion took the bus and went to type things for Gerry Connolly. On his desk, Gerry had a big picture of the family: Gerry and Theresa and the kids—Bernadette, Damien, Aloysius, Kevin, Dominic, Ignatius, and the twins, Gerard and Paul.

Magda went to Sydney University. She dressed all in black and she wore white lipstick.

Marion got a black sweater herself and wore it to the uni with Magda. They sat in the student union and Magda pointed out important people to her.

They went up to the Cross and drank Chianti with their spaghetti bolonaise. Marion giggled at the prostitutes. Magda frowned.

Marion had her own room at home. I'm not one to pry, her mother said, but really she should be keeping the place looking tidy. There was nothing to stop her, nothing at all, from going to the dances the Young Catholic Workers put on. On Saturday afternoons, after she'd helped her mother with the housework, she could have a shower and put on a pretty frock.

On Sundays at St. Kevin's—this being by now the Sixties—there was a lot of talk from the pulpit about the evils of extra-marital sex and birth control, especially the Pill.

But on Saturday nights, in the parish hall, there was dancing.

In St. Kevin's Parish Hall, there is a big picture of the Blessed Maria Goretti, who died rather than commit a sin of impurity.

For the obtuse, four statues of the Virgin Mary.

The girls who'd been at Our Lady of Mercy College dance with the boys who'd been at the Christian Brothers.

Lots of booze. (Nothing wrong with booze.)

One of the boys takes Marion home. Pokes his wet spaniel tongue into her mouth for a few seconds, then says thank you.

On Saturday afternoons in St. Kevin's parish church, there are weddings. Marion is twice a bridesmaid; she has her hair done in a beehive.

Quickly, quickly, they got married.

The babies began. So many babies, like loaves and fishes.

The young wives Marion had been at school with would see her sometimes in the street, at church. I gave him his son and now—I tell him—he can jolly well leave me alone. But of course he won't.

Bragging.

No need to leave home, Marion's mother says. She'd be rattling around in the old place on her own. And for what? To get a flat in Bronte, just a short bus ride away? To live in the city? Up at the *Cross*? Ridiculous! Catch a bus *out* to work in the morning? She'd never heard such a bunch of tommy rot in all her days.

Then Magda. Even Magda, who always sneered.

Do you want to be a bridesmaid at a shotgun wedding? Magda asked.

He was from the uni, of course. He's a nice boy, Magda said. I didn't mean this to happen to him.

But Bill was fabulous! He'd gone to Riverview, the poshest school for Catholic boys in Sydney. He was tall, he was handsome, and he was brainy, too. He was going to do graduate work at Columbia University, in America.

Some people, Marion decided, have just about everything. And aren't even grateful.

Magda invited Marion around to tea.

Marion looked into the bedroom. She saw the double bed.

In the lounge room, Riverview Bill was watching TV. In only three months' time they were going overseas.

Columbia should be very interesting, Magda said. She was going to do

her Masters, she wasn't going to let the baby slow her down.

She'd write, she promised. She'd tell Marion all about it.

On Friday afternoons, at Gerry Connolly's, they have cakes for afternoon tea. Marion buys them at lunch time. She really should go on a diet, but you need a few little treats in life, don't you? Around three-thirty she goes into the cubbyhole they call the kitchen and boils the jug. From there, she can see Gerry, staring into space.

What can he be thinking about? John, the late baby?

This is when The Supremes sing *Oh, how I need your love,* and Gerry Connolly rushes over to Marion, grabs her hand, and puts it right on him. (What would it feel like?) Gerry is wild about her, he can't get any work done he's so crazy for her. He can't stand his wife, the only thing she ever wants to do is say the rosary. And all those kids are getting him down. He's booked a berth on the Southern Aurora, a sleeper, for both of them.

You must come, he cries out, kneeling in front of her. You must, you must.

Late on Friday nights, when her mother has to be asleep, Marion watches TV. She knows all the songs. *I'm a man yes I am and I can't help but love you so.*

But is her mother really asleep? Marion can feel an ear, growing and growing, coming down the hall.

Even later on Friday nights, Magda's Riverview Bill comes and makes love to her. It was Marion he wanted all along.

Not quite exhausted from the fighting in the streets, Laszlo comes and makes love to her, too. Soon, she will be dead in Parliament Square. (And how Magda will cry out; Magda will be overcome.) In his broken English, Laszlo whispers: *sweet little heartbreaker; foxy lady.*

Laszlo looks a lot like Magda; they are so very much alike.

Marion reads the women's advice columns. Join a church group they say.

Ha bloody ha, says Marion.

Magda's letters arrive, from America. Magda and Bill are going to have an open marriage—no more lies, no more pretence.

Magda joins the SDS: I am burning, truly burning, with life, with LIFE, she writes.

I didn't know that people could be so very fine, so careful, so tender and caring about their politics, she writes.

Magda must have a new boyfriend, Marion decides.

It is 1968 and the Tet Offensive; Martin Luther King is assassinated:

the buildings at Columbia are occupied and Magda doesn't sleep for a week. Magda abandons the praxis axis and joins the action faction; she has a new lover; she is becoming truly herself, she tells Marion, in the crucible of politics; there is Paris and the events of May; Bobby Kennedy is assassinated; the Prague Spring continues, defiant; Magda has two lovers at once and sleeps not at all.

Dear Marion:

By the time you read this, we'll be in Chicago for the mobe. As somebody said last week, If you're coming to Chicago, be sure to wear some armour on your hair!!! I don't know what exactly will be going down there but I can tell you there can be no turning back now; our strategy of resistance to this murderous war has been vindicated.

As Teddie says, we have become the *foco,* the small motor that sets the bigger motor of the masses into action.

Last weekend Teddie and Eddie and I managed to get away for the weekend together, just the three of us (four, counting little Laszlo!), to Eddie's parents' place in New Hampshire (they are in Europe for the summer and oblivious, no doubt). Saturday night we did some incredibly mellow dope and watched the stars come out over the mountains. We know we are right on the edge of something big and vast and final—we all three feel it . . . who could not feel it these days, in Amerika, and all over the world.

Are you reading about Prague?

Eddie is so good with L.—sings to him, bathes him. Teddie tells him stories—his favourites are about Che and Camilo in the mountains. Teddie says that L. is one far-out child of the revolution. Of two revolutions, I remind him. L. calls them both deddie, which blows a lot of minds, I can tell you.

How is your mother? You really should (a) move out immediately; (b) pick up a guy and have a far-out, dirty, lost weekend; and (c) get your hands on some dope and blow your mind into a million, shining pieces.

Take care,
Love and Peace

Marion watches them being beaten and maced in Chicago. The whole world is watching, they chant.

Typical American exaggeration.

Dear Marion:

I scarcely know how to write this, but it is important. I will try to put it down quietly and soberly for you, dear friend of my heart, so that you can know who I am, and remember.

On Wednesday, last Wednesday, I am in Chicago while the Russian tanks are in Prague. I am in Grant Park with ten thousand others, at a legal rally. The cops charge us, they begin to beat in heads, and the blood begins to flow.

The thing is this: I am running in Grant Park. I am running towards Michigan Avenue. But I am also running in the streets of Prague. And—and this very, very clearly, with total presence—I am in Budapest. I am home.

I am running with my brother in Rakoski Street, in Ulloi Road. I am running with Laszlo in the crowds in front of Parliament Square, I am running with him into the alley behind the Corvin Cinema. I am with him in front of the AVO building on Andrassy Street: I am with him, hiding behind the overturned train cars in Szena Square.

And even more—and this is just as real, just as luminous—Laszlo is here with me. The grey gas is tearing up his lungs. Laszlo is running north with me and we are trying to find a bridge, we have to find a bridge that isn't manned by the Guard with their machine guns.

Marion, I tell you this: he was *right here* and I was *right there.*

Do you understand what I am saying?

While Magda is running in the streets of Chicago, Prague, and Budapest, Marion is in Sydney, typing.

She still buys the cakes for afternoon tea on Friday, but on Saturday nights no longer goes to the dance at St. Kevin's Parish Hall. As her mother says, she is getting too long in the tooth for the boys at St. Kevin's.

Gerry Connolly brings in a new family picture. Caroline, the late, late baby.

Marion and her mother sit in front of the TV and watch what happens at those folk festivals. Marion sees them jumping in the mud. Some of them have very little on.

Disgusting, her mother says.

Who's going to clean all that mess up? That's what I'd like to know, says Marion.

They watch the marches in Australia against the war in Vietnam.

They should crack down on those youngsters who won't go, Marion's mother says. Crack down hard.

Marion, who doesn't agree with the war, not at all, hears herself saying: Dad went, so I don't see why they shouldn't.

4.

The rosary group is saving up for a trip. Not to Rome, Lourdes, or Fatima. Not even to Knock.

To South East Asia.

Marion's mother is going. She's got her orange travel bag from Hopabout Tours.

All the time her mother is away, Marion will have the house to herself. She could do anything.

She could stay out all night and nobody would know.

This is it, Marion tells herself.

If she doesn't get a move on, if somebody doesn't love her, soon, she's going to miss out.

It can happen, does happen. You see them at mass, the women who've missed out. They put on their blue cloaks and go to the Child of Mary meetings—pathetic, dry old virgins.

Some of them must have been quite good looking once.

How does it happen?

Like this, that's how.

There are other women, the ones Marion watches on TV. They come from the leafy North Shore suburbs, hoity-toity, completely respectable. On Sundays they put on their white gloves and go to church. The Anglican church. Anyway, they run this office for Americans who are in Sydney on leave. You phone them up, and tell them what kind you'd like: height, hair colour, everything. The Americans get off the plane from Vietnam, go to the office, and they match you up and they call you.

It's like knitting socks used to be. To keep up morale.

Marion sits at her desk and waits for Gerry Connolly to go out for the *Mirror*. She stares at the phone. (She took the phone number down when it was on the TV.) What if Gerry Connolly came back and she was in the middle of saying brown hair, blue eyes—what *was* she going to say?

Marion's mother gets shingles. They can't get a proper refund at this late date so it is decided: Marion is to go on the Hopabout Tour in her stead.

Gerry Connolly gives her time off work to get her passport.

There is a young man on the tour; he is the only other person about her age. His name is Roy, and he is travelling with his aunt. They are on their way to Hong Kong and Honolulu. This tour is just a tiny side trip,

they announce, putting everyone else in their place. The aunt has a loud voice. So does Roy. But he's a man.

They go to see the orchids in Singapore and Marion thinks he is going to speak to her. Not just like everybody else—isn't it hot and isn't Singapore tiny, fancy having to hang your washing out the window, and no Hills Hoist—but really talk to her.

Roy doesn't come and sit down beside her even though there was a spare seat and you could tell that people were leaving it, almost inviting him. When they leave the bus, he helps the older women. He helps her.

She feels Roy's hand in the small of her back. Cold, disinterested, propelling.

For this, one is supposed to be grateful.

They look at the orchids: shameless, languid, flamboyant, shouting about sex on humid afternoons.

They visit the temples, to see Buddha reclining, Buddha calming the ocean. The rosary group sit together at the back of the bus. Sometimes, as they are travelling along, they finger their beads, which they keep, discreetly, in the pockets.

Roy notices. He gets a sing-song going: Jill the dill forgot the Pill and now they have a daughter.

Making mock.

It isn't nice of him and it isn't funny, not really. Thank goodness her mother isn't around.

So much for Roy, the straw man.

Marion is sitting in the dining room of the hotel in Chiang Mai, weighing her chances. There is no other woman in the dining room between the ages of eighteen and thirty. So she must be, by definition, in the running (though even that didn't work with Roy).

He's the first interesting stranger to show up at any of the hotels. He looks younger than she is but sometimes they like you to be a bit older, don't they? He's drinking coffee and he has his eye on her.

She's sure of it. Her stomach's all clenched up and she wants to go to the toilet but she can't. If she does he'll think she's leaving. When she gets back he'll be gone.

Marion forces herself to concentrate on dessert. It's pineapple flummery. You make the jelly with boiling water then let it cool. You put in condensed milk and whisk it all up. It comes out spongy and springy, with little bubbles in it. Here, because it's a posh hotel, they've put some bits of fresh pineapple on top.

He's looking over at her again, she's positive.

Gladly, I will sit here all night, she decides.

I will sit here until hell freezes over, if that's what it takes.

What does it take? Dear God, what does it take?

5.

It's early morning and Marion is awake before he is.

She thinks about the low-lying clouds they came through at the end of the flight from KL (she will call it KL, everybody else does). The sun came out, suddenly, on the clouds, and it was so bright, it hurt your eyes to look at them.

She can hear the clatter that's going on down in the kitchens. Doors opening and shutting. Today the tour is scheduled to go into the country, to Lamphun. In Lamphun, she read in the guide book, there are temples from the eighth and eleventh centuries. After the temples, the tour is going to a factory where they make umbrellas.

Well she isn't going. She doesn't care about temples and umbrellas. She's going to call down to the desk and say she's still got her tummy upset. For the second day in a row, she's going to stay here, beside him.

Today she'll send Magda a postcard.

Dear Magda, she writes in her head, I have met this soldier who is on R&R from Vietnam.

She can hear Magda saying: It's about time, kiddo.

Dear Magda: He isn't going back to the war.

Magda will understand.

Dear Magda: He has to get away from this murderous war.

He has to get away, to Sweden.

It was a miracle; it was as simple as that. He looked at me and he believed I was capable of doing such things.

This is how she would describe it, to Magda.

Magda would put back her head and laugh, hah!

The bus group has gone (Roy with them). You can tell they've gone because it's so quiet in the corridor. Nobody around except the cleaners. You can hear the cleaners, with their little trolleys. Going *clunker clunk.*

He didn't know how he was going to do it, get away to Sweden.

You could tell by the look he got on his face when he talked about it.

If only he could talk to Magda; Magda would know how these things were done.

Marion lies in bed thinking in a vague, sleepy way.

He sighs and rolls over in his sleep. She can feel him against her.

She's listening to the cleaners opening up the rooms and going in. They

leave the doors open when they clean because they have their trolley out in the hall.

And at this moment she knows what she can do.

She'll be able to tell Magda. They look a bit alike, him and Roy. Really, they do.

Him and Roy.

Magda and Laszlo.

She is going to get up, go down the hall, and pinch Roy's passport. Roy won't have it with him on the bus. He likes to wear only his little shorts and a singlet. Roy's a showoff.

She's going to swipe that passport and give it to him. She can give him all her money, too. (Well, most of it.) So he can fly away, fly to Sweden.

Down the hall she goes—it's a breezeway, actually—her caftan billowing. She's in Roy's room and she's looking about. She's looking in the cupboards, pulling his suitcase out, finding the key to it in the drawer—bloody obvious place—opening the suitcase, sliding her hands around it, and there! in the flap at the top. She's found it.

The passport.

Her hands have lost all feeling; they've gone numb.

As her feet speed along the breezeway, they do not touch the ground at all.

Swiftly, she is running with Magda and Laszlo in Chicago, she is running with them in Prague, in the streets of Budapest. In front of the AVO building, into the alley behind the Corvin cinema.

She is with Laszlo in the blood-bath at Parliament Square.

She is with Magda, twelve hours in the swamp.

A bit player in the crowd scene of history. In the show, at last.

Two: Rowing to Sweden

1.

He's on the train and he's thinking about the guy who gives Yossarian the money. Go now for God's sake and hurry, this dude says to Yossarian.

It had happened to him, just like that. She'd given him some money. And she'd gotten him that passport. That passport was about to come in mighty handy.

It must be nice in Sweden now, this other guy says to Yossarian. The girls are sweet and the people are so advanced.

Jungle green green green. It was going by, he was on his way. Green green, I'm going away to where the grass is greener still. It was going to be fucking cold in Sweden, he didn't like the cold. But the girls will be sweet.

He has to get out to the airport in Bangkok and use that Aussie Passport. Do you have enough baht for the taxicab? She wanted to know.

Did they have an airline that went straight to Sweden? She thought that maybe they had one that went to Paris.

He'd stay away from Braniff. He'd come to Nam on Braniff. Braniff always pulls out on time, joke. There were these stewardesses handing out cokes and little bags of nuts and they were taking him to the war.

If he couldn't get a plane that went straight to Sweden he'd get one that went to Paris. What if they didn't go to Paris? What if they just went to Germany or someplace like that? He wished he knew the names of some towns in Germany. He didn't know squat about Germany. He knew the names of some of the bases but that was the last thing he was going to need, some gigunda sonofabitch army base.

He was going to keep his cool. He was going to keep his cool, all the way through.

Travis, Guam, Bien Hoa. Now Bangkok, Paris maybe, Stockholm.

It was freaking weird, man. Before all this he'd been to Seattle twice. He'd seen the Space Needle.

He'd already finished eating when they came in. He got his coffee and he watched them.

A bus tour, shit yes. Speaking English, but not English. What would they be? Australians? Maybe. Arty'd had an Australian chick when he was on R&R in Hong Kong. Just like back home, he said, shy and pink at first then all red and juicy later.

He stirred his coffee and checked them out. Old dudes with their wives. Women on their own, old. Two young kids with their parents. One young guy, maybe a few years older than he was.

Then her.

She sat down beside two of the old dames on their own. She didn't sit down at the other table, where the young guy was, nothing doing between them. You could tell by the way she looked at him. He was ordering for his whole table. Loud, she thinks he's loud. Scared by noises most likely.

Arty'd had a picture of this Australian chick. One of those pictures you take in the little booth in the bus station. Arty kept it in a plastic thing in his pocket. The big pocket. The big pocket on the right-hand side of his jungle utilities.

This chick'd sent Arty a PEACE sign. Arty had it in his boonie hat.

Arty was short, real short.

Arty and Mike used to shoot the shit a lot. They both came from Idaho, that was why.

Arty told Mike he'd made this chick in the elevator by the time they'd got to the eleventh floor. Got her all lined up, anyways, in eleven floors flat. Was that just bullshit or was it for real?

Just look at her over there, being so polite.

Arty'd stepped on a shaped charge.

Look at her, using her knife as well as her fork.

On some nasty red hill. Blew his ass to kingdom come.

He only had five more nights, and this was one of them. He'd blown the first two already. Two whole nights of not getting laid, lying on his bed looking at the ceiling, not thinking about Mike and Mitzie, not thinking about them.

He hadn't wanted Bangkok, he'd wanted Hawaii. But after what had gone down he'd just got on the first thing out. Friends in low places.

Bangkok was a downer, nothing doing in Bangkok, he didn't want bar girls, he couldn't get into bar girls.

And there she was. Eating dessert now. He'd had a shower and everything, before he left the guesthouse, just as well.

He'd gone to the train station in Bangkok and he didn't know what the fuck he was doing, he hadn't thought it through, he just caught the next train out and ended up in this place.

Chiang Mai.

Those pamphlet things said the place was full of temples. Wat this and Wat that. Wat Suan Dork. At first he thought it was Wat Susan Dork. He didn't want Wats, nossir. Put a T in front of that and you had what he wanted. And what he wanted you simply could not get. There were nurses of course but they wouldn't give you the time of day. If you were some asshole lifer down at Long Binh, then maybe.

Like Mike said, there was only one memorable thing you could get in the Republic of South Vietnam besides wasted. Heavy shit and plenty of it any old time you wanted.

At prime time, you could count on finding Mike in the bunker, smoking spiked weed. When there was incoming Mitzie liked to be with Mike. She liked to cuddle up.

Mike'd sit on the sandbags and Mitzie'd sit in his shade, going after her fleas. Mike'd read bits of *Catch 22*. Mike knew whole chunks of *Catch 22* off by heart. Specially the last bits, where Yossarian is rowing to Sweden, and goddamn it, making it.

I've got responsibilities now, Yossarian says, I've got to get to Swe-

den. It's a geographic impossibility to get there from here, this other dude says. And Yossarian says: at least I'll be trying.

When he went on R&R, Mike said, that'd be it. Goodbye, KIA Travel.

Mike said he'd go to Hawaii, party some, then fly on to Seattle. Once you got to Seattle, Mike said, all you had to do was follow your nose. As soon as he'd got fixed up, Mike was going to let him know what to do and he'd be gone too. With the Mitz. They weren't going to leave the Mitz behind, no way.

But here he was, instead. And he was travelling light. No Mike and no Mitzie. As soon as he'd gotten himself laid he was rowing to Sweden. At least he'd be trying.

2.

After he'd heard about Mike and Mitzie he'd gone back to the hootch. He felt so freaking tired. It went through his mind that now he'd paid, he could hold his head up, he'd paid. But it didn't work like that, even he knew better than that.

Back at the hootch some fucking new guy was playing *Bridge Over Troubled Water.* He wished to christ he wasn't playing that thing.

Still and all he expected to see them, Mike and Mitzie. He looked up and he expected to see them come into the hootch. He really expected that.

When he first met Mike, he told him you had to stop them someplace. Mike just went un huh, un huh, un huh.

He'd told Arty, too: You had to stop them someplace.

Arty punched him, and laughed. It was Arty's first day back at Battalion after weeks in the bush, Arty was goofing off.

Arty was rolling on the ground with him. They were grabbing each other, sort of wrestling, and laughing. Saigon tomorrow, Spokane the next, Arty was shouting. The Mitz was charging about, joining in. Mike started to sing one of his songs. *So long mommie, I'm off to get a commie.* Then Art was just sitting on top of him and they were all laughing/barking, feeling pretty good.

He was looking at Arty's jungle boots. They'd gone that sickly orange colour.

Why was it Arty out there in the boonies and not him?

Loudmouth at the other table had fucked off. The old dames were leaving the chick's table. She was ordering some more coffee. Good. Excellent, in fact.

She was sitting at the table on her own.

He was going to be in luck for once, he could feel it. It was a long time since Susan. Back in Spokane, he and Susan had been going together since grade ten, he could hardly remember how it was when he first made it with her.

He hoped he wasn't going to blow this.

Go over there and say you'd like to buy her a drink, ask her her name and that.

Mike used to say: You tell them you want to kiss their breasts. Turns them to batter, saying that.

But what do you say first? I mean, you just don't lean over and say I'd like to kiss your breasts. Not straight off.

She looked at me!

I swear, clear as day, she looked right over here.

Yes man, she looked at me.

Tell them they're beautiful, they love to hear they're beautiful. Christ, they *are* beautiful.

She was looking over him again. She was.

Nice little breasts, she'd have these sweet soft warm little breasts with faint blue veins, it made him weak to think of them.

Last time he'd been home with Susan, she'd wanted him to go here, go there, see family all the time. He told Susan he didn't give a rat's ass about going on some dipshit picnic with her whole family. I mean, her parents were coming.

And she starts this thing, I feel I don't know you any more, I just don't know you any more. Jesus H. Christ.

It was crazy, he knew, and no way he'd say this to anyone, but he knew he was carrying them inside him, Mike and Mitzie. He had them inside him, and he was carrying them round with him. He'd hear Mike talk to him, he'd hear Mike's voice that clearly. And he'd see the Mitz looking up at him with those eyes of hers that said, *I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm glad.*

Go over to her, man. Smile, act real nice now. Don't talk too loud and don't swear. Just ask if you can sit down, say may I. Sit down and be sure to ask her about herself. Where has she been? Did she like all those Wats? Sure she would, she'd like them.

Tell her about being on base. Say you checked the supplies and things. You made sure they got out to the LZs. Call them landing zones so she'll know what you're talking about.

Don't mention your best buddy Mike, over at GR point. She won't want to know about Graves Registration, man. And can the KIAs. She

won't want to be hearing about no KIAs. Tell her you're on R&R and the Wats are very beautiful although you haven't seen them yet. But the most beautiful thing you've seen since you left Travis is her. The most beautiful. She'll like that.

And get a move on man, get your ass in gear. She's been sitting there and sitting there and waiting for you to get off your butt. Go to it, man.

It wasn't all that hard, really. She looked up and she blushed. Christ, how long since he'd seen a chick blush real nice like that. And *for him.* And she said, yes, she'd like a drink from the bar. Marion, her name was Marion, he made a mental note. They went to the bar and he said, Marion, what would you like? And she said, white wine.

White wine. He'd forgotten all about white wine. It sat there in its little glass and the glass went all nice and frosty.

He had a beer himself.

And she asked, Are you a student travelling round?

Travelling round. He couldn't get over it, it was heavy-duty man, it was so long since he'd had to deal with this kind of thing.

He told her he was on R&R and she knew what he meant.

Oh, she said, I'm sorry. You must think I'm silly.

Oh no, he said. No. And shook his head, and smiled at her.

She smiled back at him. At first I thought you were Roy, she said. You look a lot like him.

Roy's this guy on the tour. Roy, it turns out, is Loudmouth at the other table.

She liked him, he could tell. They put out these vibes man, Arty'd said, and you don't have to say a thing. He could feel them hanging in the air. He could reach out and take a hold of them. The vibes.

But sooner or later, Arty'd said, they just have to know. They start squirming in their seats, working themselves up to ask. They don't ask right out, but you can see them thinking it.

Have you wasted anyone?

This Marion, she squirmed around a bit and she asked him: Were you in the fighting?

Meaning.

I'm on base, he said. He saw her shoulders relax a little. I mean, she wouldn't want to go climbing into bed with some horny young murderer, now would she?

Mike'd say: What if the President, the Congress and the generals and the colonels and all of them believe, really believe mind you, that they're

doing right. And what if it's just the asshole at the end of the line who can see they're full of it?

About like that.

Mike knew how to say things, he was older. Mike'd done two years at junior college.

Mike said you couldn't expect the army to know its ass from a hole in the ground, it was the army. But what about all those fancy folks back home with their degrees and shit? In foreign relations and everything. Experts, they were. What about them?

He had to concentrate on the job in hand. At the moment she was just sitting there drinking her white wine, with her legs together under the table.

They couldn't sit here drinking all night. See her up to her room? He couldn't ask if he could come in for coffee. Use the washroom? Maybe. He'd kiss her at the door. That might lead to something or it might not.

Sure she liked him. That didn't mean she'd haul him into her room and rip all her clothes off pronto. What if she'd only go for a nighty-night kiss and catch you tomorrow? He didn't have the time.

Tonight, he had to make his move tonight. Round about now.

She worked in an office in this place called Sydney.

He'd thought he'd heard of Sydney. Come to think of it he was nearly sure he'd heard of it.

It's a big city, she said. The biggest in the country.

Bigger than Spokane I guess, he said.

They both laughed.

She wanted to laugh, that was good. And she got a deliberate look on her face and said yes, she'd like another glass of white wine, thank you very much.

The more white wine the better. You better believe it.

Then she brought her face up to his and—can you beat this—she asked: Have you lost anyone close to you?

The dark, all around him. The dark it got out there when there was no moon. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Charlie was out there. Charlie knew his way around in the dark.

He lived there.

3.

He reached over and he put his hand on her leg. She got a bit red in the face. Then, carefully, she put her hand on his. As soon as he felt her do

that, he knew—she'd decided, yes. And he nearly jumped, even though he'd been hoping for it. Migod it was going to be easy, he never expected it would be that easy. All he had to do was reach down and turn her hand over and rub his thumb up and down that fleshy part.

Wet, ah yes, very wet. But tight. Tight as a mouse hole. He figured it out. Christ! He'd never had anyone's cherry before. Susan had done it with Frankie Mankiewicz; with Susan it'd been the first time for him but not for her.

He was embarrassed. How old was she anyway? Old. Must be twenty-one, at least.

He'd never done this before. Was he going to be able to do it right? Give her a fine time, a real fine time.

Gently, taking care, he rubbed his hands across her breasts. He said it: I want to kiss your breasts. And she liked that, she made a little noise.

Then slowly—no hurrying this, he was just going to have to wait for his—he moved down her belly, down and down, to get a taste of her. She panicked a bit and pushed on his head with her hands. So he was quiet for a while. Just stroked her thighs. Told her she was beautiful. And she calmed right down. She got into it, and yes, oh yes. When he slipped in she was out of her mind, or just about.

It wasn't difficult at all. Or not very.

He lay down beside her and she snuggled up under his arm, knowing how. You're a natural, kid, he said, pleased with himself, pleased with her. They'd done okay. They'd done quite nicely, if he did say so himself.

He could smell her hair. Her clean-smelling shampoo.

He felt so tired, so very tired, lying quietly there beside her, like that.

He showed her the photographs, Mike and Mitzie. In the first one, they were in front of Graves, but you couldn't tell that from the photo. Mike was holding Mitzie in his arms. Then there was Mitzie, playing frisbee with the guys. Mitzie at the entrance to the hootch. *Pootch and hootch,* Mike had written on the back of that one.

There were two hootches, he explained to her. The bunker was in between. You can get into the bunker from the hootches, but you have to go into one of the hootches to get to the bunker.

Mitzie had her steak.

She had her shots.

She had her frisbee.

Mitzie had her belly tickled.

Mike got her wormed.

She knew all the best places to catch the shade.

All the guys loved Mitzie.

But Mike worried about her, a lot. What if, uh, what if she was left running around with her little guts all hanging out?

Mike worried about that. Then this guy comes back from Long Binh one day with some jab Mike could give Mitzie if she needed it. If she needed to be, you know, put to sleep.

Mike'd found her in the dump outside the perimeter, just an itty-bitty little thing, sniffing around the slops. He'd put her in the flatbed and got her over to GR point and then he went and got her something to eat. She was Mike's pootch, really. She leapt that high for him. She went everywhere with him, she sat up in that truck and she looked out, real happy.

Mitz was over at GR point with Mike most of the time. The Mitz liked to lie by the reefers.

Reefers?

Reefers are these Conex container things. They have a little generator to keep the bodies cool.

She looked scared.

He shouldn't have explained to her about the GR point, or the reefers.

He shut up fast.

What happened? She wanted to know. He shrugged and turned away. She moved her hand around to the back of his neck, rubbed him there.

Let's get up and go out, she said. Maybe we should go to the cultural centre, she said, looking in her guide books. Or to the university. The roofs of the university are paved with gold, she said. It says here.

They went out walking. For some crazy reason the guest house he'd booked into gave you a bike, for free. So he walked alongside her, pushing this bike, and it was like he was back in high school again, walking Susan home.

They found a park by the river. The Ping River, she said. But this other guide book called it the Meping. Like the Mekong, she goes on. Maybe Me means river, what do you think?

He didn't know. Sometimes he didn't know what to say to her.

Do you have a river in Sydney? he asked. Trying.

She laughed.

He must've said something dumb.

We have a harbour, she said. A big one.

Oh, he said. We have a river in Spokane. The Spokane River.

And she said: The harbour is called the Sydney Harbour.

Very original all round, he said.

At that, they could both laugh.

He moved over on the bench, to be closer to her. He put his arms around her.

Both arms.

She's more interested in this than in small talk, he thought, relieved. Well, he had plenty of this. He could give her plenty of this.

Let's go back to the hotel, he said.

He told her he was getting out, not going back. At the end of his R&R he was going to Sweden.

How are you going to get there? she asked.

How was he going to get there?

Go to Tokyo, maybe. Mike'd told him about these sailors who met in a coffee-house in Tokyo and decided to desert. Mike said some underground group in Japan helped them. They'd got them to Russia, and then finally to Sweden.

How are you going to find this underground group? she asked.

He didn't know. He couldn't remember the name of the group, it was some real weird name. He'd have to find that coffee-house first.

He wasn't sure what a coffee-house in Japan looked like. Was it like the ones near the bases back home? Or did it have Joan Baez playing and college kids sitting around drinking those fancy coffees with the froth on top? In Japan?

He should've paid more attention to Mike. Anyways, he should've gone to Hawaii. From Hawaii you could step on a plane to Seattle and in Seattle he'd know what to do. He was *born* in Washington, for shit's sake.

He lay on the bed, worrying.

How do you feel, they ask Yossarian, just before he splits. Fine, Yossarian says. Then he says, no, I'm frightened. That's good, this other guy says, it shows you're still alive.

Well he was still alive, and he was frightened.

Arty and Mike and Mitzie had bought the farm and he was still alive.

Figure that one out.

4.

He'd been in-country eight weeks and he'd pulled guard duty on the perimeter.

Guard duty is fucking boring man, everyone knows that. You're out there and you're bored shitless. You beat off and you're bored shitless again.

He must've dozed off because next thing he knew the perimeter kind of exploded. Christ, the noise! He had this M60, and he didn't know where the fuck or what the fuck but he was firing it man, he was firing it and firing it.

Next morning there's some guts going loop-de-loop on the wire. The other one's lying very neat, like he's curled up asleep. Only his head's missing.

The thing was: it was no big deal.

The thing was: after a day or two nobody even remembered.

He lay in the hootch and he stared at the ceiling. If you could call it a ceiling. Mitzie came in, nosing about.

Mike said: Get on up there with him, Mitzie. Go on, girl, get up there.

And she did. She got up beside him and settled down, cosy. Pretty soon his hand came out and he was rubbing Mitzie's belly, her tiny pooch nipples.

Mike said: Look at Mitzie, she's got that real spaced-out look on her face.

What they'd have done without the Mitz, he didn't know.

You'll feel guilty, this guy says to Yossarian. Your conscience will give you a bad time. Good for my conscience, says Yossarian, I wouldn't want to live without misgivings.

Guilty about *getting out?*

Mike said "misgivings" was one candy-ass word.

They're at chow one day and these guys at the next table are talking: His nuts, man. The dink's nuts.

Little fuckers.

You can crank up a lot of voltage on a jeep battery.

The little fucker's little fuckers.

Put your foot on the gas and hey presto.

A 12-volt jeep battery.

Guaranfuckinteed.

Like a charm, my man.

Eat your heart out, Ma Bell.

They say this like they're ordering root beer or something.

She came out of the shower and she was all steamed up and she looked so pink and naked he couldn't believe it. She was standing right there with nothing on, smiling for him, and it was too much, he felt like crying, he really did.

Come over here, he said.

He was showing her things. Like how to touch him.

It helped, oh yes, it helped.

They'll bend heaven and earth to catch you, this guy tells Yossarian. You'll have to be on your toes every minute of every day. Yossarian says: I'll be on my toes every minute.

Every minute. Get that, Mike, every minute.

And Mike's voice says: Keep it cool man.

And Mike's voice says: I'm running with you, brother.

He wakes up and she's looking at him. I didn't want to wake you, she says.

Didn't want to wake him. Maybe he'd turn into some crazy and throttle her. That's what they all thought now, Arty said. They were afraid.

She's full of something, she's bursting with it, you can tell.

Her eyes are big like she's been doing some speed. Arty said hookers in Europe used to do some drug or other to make their eyes go all big. Mike said, wasn't any different nowadays, half the time a pro was out of her mind on some shit or other. How come they knew all about hookers and he didn't? It never really occurred to him to go with a pro back home. He wasn't too swift, he knew it.

I got you his passport, she says.

The man on the tour, she says, the one who looks like you. You remember. Loudmouth. He looks enough like you. Really, he does. The photo would have been taken a few years ago, anyway.

Take the passport, she says. Take Roy Dangar's passport.

I'll give you some money, she says. I've got some money.

You have the money, she says. Take the passport and go.

They won't notice it's missing until after you're gone.

She'd gone into this guy Loudmouth's room when the cleaners were in there. The rest of them had gone off on the tour, all except her. She'd stayed behind, to be with him. Called the desk and left a message she was sick.

It wasn't hard to find, she says. In the suitcase, in the little plastic thing under the lid.

Serve him right, she says, about this Loudmouth guy.

Loudmouth must've done something to hurt her. What?

Then it was crazy crazy crazy but he knew in a flash that Mike had arranged all this. For her to be there, for her to get him the passport.

He hadn't thought about a passport. He had his ID papers with him. Weren't they enough?

She looked lovely, with those big hooker eyes.

She gleamed.

You're a sweet little angel, he said, and I love the way you spread your wings.

They went back to the guesthouse off Huai Kaeo Road. They had to keep looking at the map to find it, because the street signs were in Thai.

He packed up and he left the bike, and they went to the train station.

He was grateful. He truly was. He told her so.

But she didn't want grateful.

Already she had begun to look at him with eyes that hoped for things.

Like Arty said: You meet a chick and ball her, both of you having a real fine time, and next morning you wake up and she's writing her first name with your last, holding it out in front of her to see how it looks. Next thing you know she's thinking about furniture. Furniture, man. Tables, chairs, chesterfields, bedroom fixings. *Garden* furniture.

But he was going, he was getting out. He felt easier somehow, knowing he was leaving her. In a few hours he'd be gone.

They sat on a bench and he talked about the war.

The war: Ever since he'd got to Nam he'd been so tired, he didn't know what it was. He was bagged the whole time. Maybe it was all the incoming, and their own. Mortars and rockets are just so incredibly noisy, man. You never get a good night's sleep.

The war: Like his buddy Mike said, it was Charlie's own backyard and as far as he was concerned he could do whatever the fuck he sweet pleased with it. The war: I mean, this is 1970. For shit's sake.

5.

It was an ordinary day in the Republic of South Vietnam. He was getting some stuff together for the choppers. Mike and Mitzie were down at GR point, as usual. He had his transistor going. By the *Time I Get to Phoenix,* followed by *Bridge Over Troubled Water.*

By the time I get to Hawaii, he was thinking, I will lay me down.

He could see the big clouds piling on top of the hills behind the airstrip. It was one of the worst things, he'd decided, the way this place could be beautiful.

As a kid back in Spokane he'd had this thing about the jungle. He'd seen it at the movies.

He's going up this river in the middle of the jungle someplace, in a slow old boat. Brightly coloured birds are flying in and out of the jungle. The old boat is chugging along, all nice and quiet and steady. The boat has a

wide deck with some kind of canvas cover over it to keep the sun off. In the shade of this canvas thing there's a hammock. There's someone in the hammock.

It's him. He's rocking back and forth in the hammock to get a bit of a breeze going. It isn't stifling, like it's really warm but there's a bit of breeze from being on the water. Just nice. You can hear the chug chug chug of the motor. You can hear birds going skwark skwark.

He's lying there, floating up the river. There's this haze all round.

And the smell of jungle flowers. Flowers from the jungle, heavy and sweet. And coming round the bulkhead or the engine room or what-have-you there's this lady. She's a far-out beautiful lady, she's gorgeous. She's got this sarong thing on, the kind of thing they just wrap themselves in. She's coming over and she's getting in the hammock.

Later, she's going to get on top of him. Later, she's going to sit on his face. But not right now, because they're going to take it slow, real slow.

The Nam ruined all that. Jungle: the smell of shit, burning. He'd been excited at first. When they landed at Bien Hoa and he felt the jungle, felt it splash over him like a can of wet paint, he'd thought: *Wow, this is it, I'm in the jungle now.* And it turned him on, it really did, even though he was going to the war.

It was so different from Spokane. It can get mighty cold in Spokane. It gets so crispy cold you can bite it.

This day, he's loading up Willie Peter mortars, white phosphorus, that is. He's moving Willie P and A to B. He knows what WP does, he isn't completely stupid. WP burns and burns and won't stop burning until it's burned right through. So long as it has contact with air, WP burns.

He's thinking about all this, he's loading up the stuff, he's looking up at the great big clouds piling up on the hills. Mother-puffers, he calls them. Big mother-puffers.

In his head he's going blabber blabber blab as usual.

They tell you in school how many yards of guts you've got inside, all tucked up. When you see that shit hanging out like ropy Jell-O, it's weird, you can't help but thinking, *so that's what it's like inside.*

The folks back home were all in favour of sending him over here so's he could figure out things like that. Well thanks folks. Thanks a whole bunch.

Blabber blabber blab.

Round about this time, a chopper crashes into a nearby hill. They medevac some guys out but for some reason known only to the army—meaning, for no reason at all—they leave the KIAs behind. And Mike's NCO over at Graves decides they have to go get them in.

So Mike and Mitzie drive off in the mortuary GR flatbed to go get in the KIAs. Eddie Diaz was supposed to go too but he was taking a crap.

Mike would've loaded the KIAs up on his own. Mitz would have been out of the truck, running around, checking things out. When Mike got back in the truck he would've opened the passenger door and called:

C'mon Mitzie, time to move it.

The Mitz, she'd have come right away. She would've gone anywhere with Mike, and besides, she was crazy about that truck.

Sometimes, when Mike thought no one was watching, he'd bend down and kiss Miss Mitzie's bony head. Did he do that?

Maybe he just petted her some when he leaned over to close the door.

Driving back to base they hit a mine, one motherfucker, almost 175 pounds. Not meant for some shitty little load of KIAS, meant for the armoured cav, for sure.

This thing leaves a hole in the ground about eight deep and the size of your mom and dad's bedroom back home.

The KIAs are blown to shit one more time.

Eddie Diaz has to go out and get them in.

They probably won't know it's missing until they're leaving Bangkok, she says, for about the twentieth time. He's on the train platform now, he's just about to get on the train.

One more day left here then three whole days in Bangkok. You'll be in Stockholm by then, she says. Or Paris at the least, she says.

Over and over, she looks in the passport.

Royden Dangar, the name. Some weird name.

Born, 1945. Older than him.

Chatswood, New South Wales.

It's a suburb of Sydney, she says.

Not that they'll ask, she goes on. They never ask, they just look. Say yes and no. Say them quietly so they won't notice that accent. You're on a holiday. Say "holiday" quickly, don't drag it out. Maybe you can whisper. Say you've got a sore throat; nobody has an accent when they whisper. Once you're on the plane, no worries. Call them mate. That's a good idea. Say, yes mate, no mate.

She says all these things like she's trying to be some experienced gangster. Though you can tell she's just thinking them up this minute.

All flushed and excited, like she's trying to come.

*

Oh baby, he says. I love you, baby. Christ, how she goes for that. How she smiles and sobs at the same time. How she waves and waves.

Any dude in Vietnam or with orders for the war zone could be a political refugee in Sweden, Mike said.

He didn't much like the sound of that word, refugee. He hoped he'd get enough to eat. What do they eat in Sweden, anyway?

He hoped he wasn't going to fuck this up.

He had to be on his toes, every minute.

But he was going to be okay, he just knew it. Now that he and Mike and the Mitz were in this rowboat. They'd made it to the boat and now all they had to do was row easy, row easy and watch the jungle going by.

There were two other dudes in the boat. One of them didn't have a head but he was neat and quiet, no problem. The other one had his guts trailing out behind the boat, trailing in the river.

They were going to make it, he knew it. It was so peaceful, rowing to Sweden.

He was going downstream with this haze all round.

Those other two just sat there. He and Mike were the ones doing the rowing.

Contributors

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David Hull is a Toronto writer who has appeared in a number of magazines, including *Canadian Literature, The Fiddlehead,* and *The Malahat Review.*

George Kalamaras' poems have appeared in such journals as *Caliban, Sulfur, O'blek,* and in two small collections, *Heart Without End* and *Beneath the Breath.* His scholarly book, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension: Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence,* will be published by SUNY press in March. He will travel to India this summer to begin research on another book on silence, Eastern mysticism, and poetics.

Tim Keppel has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mid-American Review, Carolina Quarterly, The Literary Review, Seattle Review, Other Voices, Antietum, Grain,* and elsewhere.

Elizabeth Philips is a poet, journalist, and editor living in Saskatoon. Her most recent collection of poems is *Time in a Green Country.* She has just completed *Hunger,* a new poetry collection.

Gayla Reid's story, "Sister Doyle's Men," first published in Prism *international* 30:4, won the 1993 Journey Prize and the 1993 Silver Medal National Magazine Award for fiction. She was featured in *Coming Attractions '93* and is currently completing her first collection of stories.

K.V. Skene's work has appeared in *Canadian Literature, Antigonish Review,* and *Casleton Arts Review.* Her chapbook, *Pack Rat,* was published in 1992 by Reference West. She recently moved from Victoria, B.C. for an indefinite stay in Oxford, England.

Sue Wheeler's poems have been published in *Arc, Grain, CV2, The Fiddlehead, Poetry Canada, Event,* and will be in an upcoming issue of *The Malahat Review.* She was the recipient of the 1992 Gwendolyn MacEwen Memorial Award.

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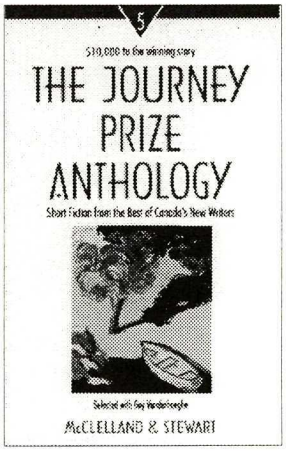

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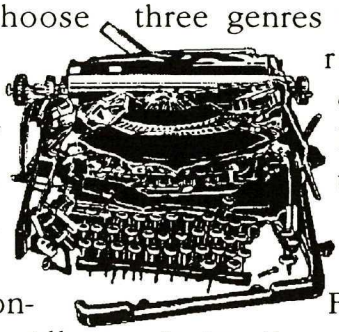

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