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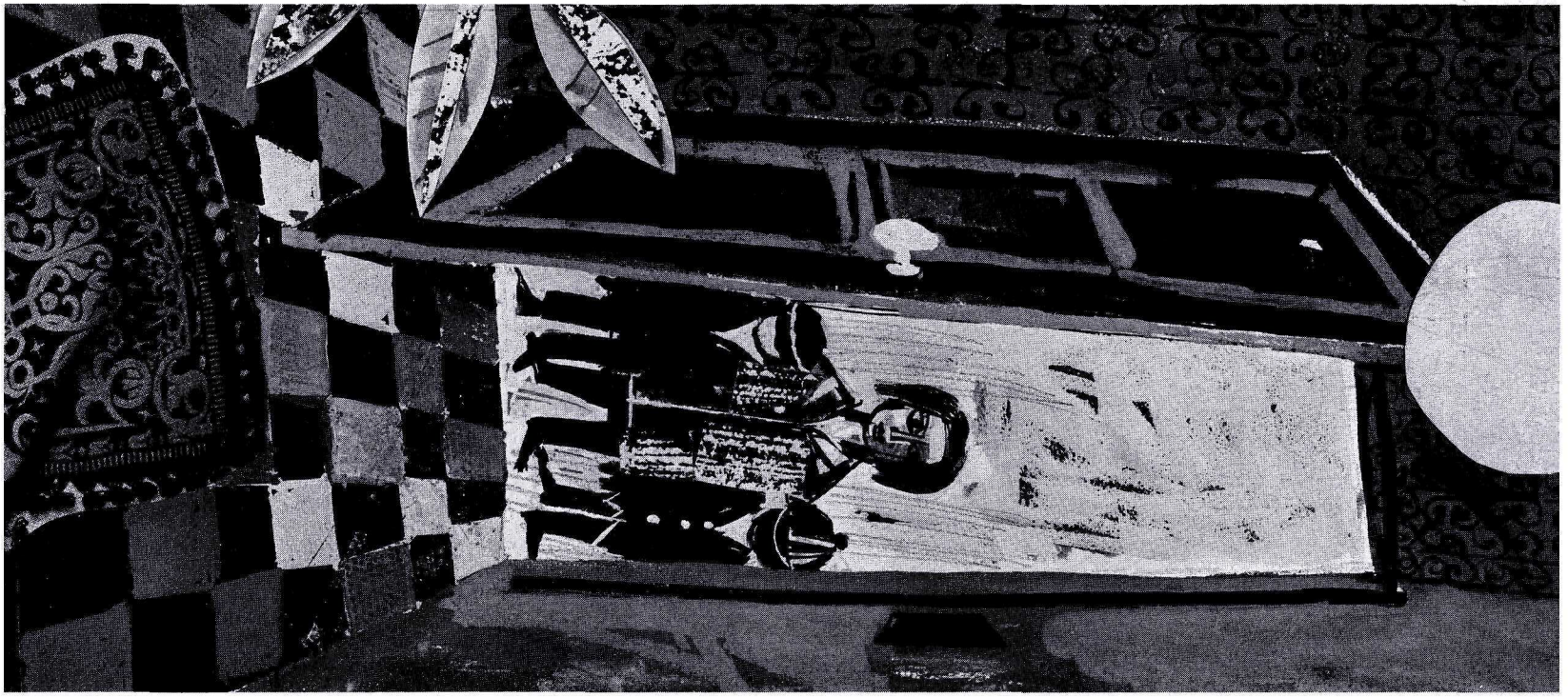


ILLUSTRATION BY BEN LIM

THE ROBERT WAGNER CHORALE AND THE THREE WISE MEN

JOHN KEYES

"IT'S NOT THE Robert Wagner Chorale, Linda," I insisted. "It's the Roger."

You have to talk to her in detail, slowly and with patience. She has always been more reluctant to comprehend than other people. "But you *know* about those things," she would say, when, for example, I taught her the speeds on my new record player (an effort that taxed my fortitude as much as it rewarded her attention). "I just can't get the hang of it." I think it was this very helplessness that led me to her, a helplessness I discerned initially as a flirtatious affectation, part and parcel with her childlike delight and enthusiasm that magnified the most trifling gift or possession. A new can opener, some ball-point pens, could produce brief moments of genuine happiness once I had shown their operation. And show her I did, many times, in a ritual that continued during our five months of wedlock, and promised to continue, as, that evening, upon my usual explanation, she expatiated on the engineering marvels of $1.98 LP's: such beautiful music for such a low price; a concert in your living room, you can't tell the difference. It might have been wearying were she not so very frail, ungainly and nervous now that motherhood was near; I was nervous, too, no doubt, and in no mood for the entertainment of the neighbourhood children who called upon us a few moments later.

"Oh, play it, do," she said, crinkling the cellophane wrapper between her fingers, her hands cupped on the swell of her stomach. "Please, please do. It's so lovely, I can't wait at all. Please play it, Johnny."

I looked with distaste at "The Sweet Old Songs of Yuletide" her mother had so kindly sent, with the three wise men in search of the Star on the red and black Loblaws jacket.

"Some other time," I murmured, ignoring the fall of her face as I discarded the LP in a corner of the divan.

But the children I could not ignore. They came then, their voices plaintive, dissonant, echoing through the walls from the vaulted corridor beyond:

> We three kings of Orient are;
> Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
> Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
> Following yonder star.

To Linda it was a dream incarnate, a concert in the flesh. She squealed upon the "star," bounced up carelessly, and raced out into the hall.

"You'll catch cold out there," I objected, rising after her.

She was standing with one hand on the cast iron balustrade, and the other on the small of her back, her stomach pressed against the balusters, listening eagerly to a feeble, atonal chorus:

> O star of wonder, star of night,
> Star with royal beauty bright,
> Westward leading, still proceeding,
> Guide us to Thy perfect light.

"Children shouldn't see you that way," I said crossly, coming out to interrupt them.

"Oh, aren't they just the sweetest?" Linda affirmed, clapping her hands with glee as she beamed down at the group at the bottom of the stairs, stationed by the tin mail slots. "Just the very sweetest?"

Perhaps that is what annoyed me. Perhaps Linda's effusive little overstatement set me on them from the first, made them immediately the objects of my antagonism, so that my act was stored in me even then. I have never liked to hear children or animals, or anything tasteless or inedible, designated as "sweet." The misapplication of the word has always distressed me somewhat.

Besides, something aroused my suspicion. There were four of them: a hefty girl of eight or nine dressed in a shabby parka, with coal-black eyes that never left you, her large chafed hands set firmly on the shoulders of her charges who were ready to topple from the fatigue of the day's singing labours; and the charges, twin boys in

ripped knee-length coats with oversized hunting caps crushed down upon their ears, a parody of Buckingham palace guards with their eyes invisible and globs of indelicate mucus decorating the rims of their lips, their feet encased in enormous galoshes, one red, one blue, so they seemed more clothing than boy or minstrel (she's dressed them that way, I thought). Diminutive wise men had entered my life, bearing their own special gifts: the passing diversion of their inadequate songs, an idle amusement, no more. And there was a dog, a trembling, snow-coated, flop-eared mongrel that spent its time sensibly nipping icicles out of its fur, indifferent to us all.

Doors opened along the corridor as they sang, their piping voices comically out of tune (she's taught them that too, I imagined), and the Kernahans across from us came out, then the numerous people with faces, not names, people who, in the five months we had lived there, were usually greeted with the briefest, most cursory of nods.

"They're starving," Linda worried. "I bet they're starving and they haven't got anywhere to go and nobody wants them or anything. Couldn't we fix them up somehow?" she pleaded. "They're cold and hungry and shivering so."

"They're trained," I said aloud, too loud, for the Kernahans heard, and fixed me with a stare indicating that even formal nods between us would be through.

But the children were not through. The twins formed a triangle and the girl began to conduct, swinging her arms with verve and skill as they stumbled through "Joy to the World" and "O Tannenbaum" (there was nothing paltry about their repertoire). Along the way, the dog yipped once or twice, then sent up a prolonged howl. For all I could see, someone had stepped on its tail.

We applauded. The performance over, the girl punched the buzzers by the mail boxes, one by one, unnecessary really, for the occupants were standing in the corridor. Then they tramped up the stairs to collect the rewards of their art.

"Those poor things," Linda said. "It's not fair. We've got so much." She hurried into the apartment and bustled about in the kitchen. She had a can opener out, and a pot, and a tin of Irish stew. "Bread," she said. "They'll want bread. And jam. Heaps of it." She swung open cupboard doors and slammed them shut, then tugged at the refrigerator handle.

"Linda," I said, to calm her. "Linda." I took her hands between mine, and kissed the tips of her fingers. "Linda," I said. "No. You

don't want them here. They'd drag dirt in over the floor. Money would do just as well."

I returned to the living room, fished in my pocket for a quarter, and gave it to the brute of a girl who blocked the open doorway. She looked at the coin and then at me, flipped it over once, clamped it in her pudgy fist, and departed with her brood.

I shut the door. "If they get only a dime from every apartment," I said, "they'd make over two dollars in less than an hour. That's more than I get now."

But Linda was standing in the kitchen with an empty stew pot in one hand, and an apple sauce dish in the other. "Sometimes I don't know about you," she said quietly, the tears welling up in her eyes. I had spoiled her party.

She left me but one consolation: "The Sweet Old Songs of Yuletide" had been, for the moment, forgotten.

I worked the next day in a drugstore downtown (a holiday task: I am, by profession, a college instructor), then shopped for a skirt and blouse, some chocolates, the seasonal symbols of affection, and returned home late to a heavy odour of food.

"I could do that myself," I said, perceiving the delicate fog Linda had generated in the kitchen. "You shouldn't be up at all."

"I'm a wife, honey, don't wives do the cooking?" she asked, as she laboured over her frying pan.

"When they're well," I said, sliding up a window.

Linda pouted, then spied the parcels and her fatigue was gone. She cried, and snapped off the burner. "What did you buy?" she asked. "Something for Boopsie? We need booties and blankets, so many things." She tore the wrapping from the parcels, spraying us with fluffs of paper until she reached the skirt. "Oh, what a lovely thought," she said, running her hand over it. She kissed me full on the mouth. "I love you for it, honey, but you'll have to take it back. I'll never be that shape again," she reflected sadly, and sadly, that was true.

"We'll see about it after dinner," I told her wearily.

We didn't. There was no after dinner. Linda was in the process of burning some chops when our life was invaded again, the tuneless music filtering through our paper-thin walls:

> Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
> The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
> The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay
> The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

One slim stanza and the buzzer sounded, intermittent and angry.

Linda didn't squeal. She looked up with as much surprise as I, then a broad smile spread over her pallid face, imparting its own perfect but transient beauty. "They're back," she said softly. I think she loved them a little.

We went to the door together. The girl was there again, a bulky, stubborn creature every bit as large as Linda, her eyes fixed steadfastly upon us. Behind her, an ill-clad twin was requisitioning a few odd coins from the Kernahans. Kernahan gave me a sheepish smile, one I didn't return. He is rather a docile, faceless creature, and seems perfectly cast as a sheep.

"I gave you a quarter," I said to the girl. "Don't you remember?"

"That was yesterday," she said, then, attracted by Linda's stomach, she pointed and inquired: "What's wrong with her?"

I have always regretted slamming that door. It was the conventional response, the one expected of me, and I dislike being defined or interpreted so easily.

The girl rapped on the door with both her fists, then kicked it with her toe.

"Listen, little girl," I said, swinging it open again and finding it stamped with a broad, muddy bootprint, "if you don't leave us alone, I'm going to call the police."

Her tongue was half-way out of her mouth when Linda dropped a fifty-cent piece into the outstretched hand, curtailing our incipient war. Triumphant, the girl marched on to her next victim, with the twins and the dog behind.

"They don't know any better," Linda apologized for them when I faced her in the kitchen.

"Linda," I said angrily. "Don't you know this isn't the end? If you're soft, they'll run all over you. Don't you know they'll be back?"

"Then we'll give again," she said, her voice breaking as it rose. "Again and again and again."

We did, it's true. That night, I gave them the substance of my dreams. Sometime during the middle of my sleep "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," slipped through my bedroom window, punctuated by the erratic sound of buzzing. It was so palpable I rose and went to the door.

The following evening they returned anew, without gratuity of song.

"We won't answer," I said to Linda. "Maybe they'll go away." An idle hope: they had seen the lights in the apartment, and the buzzer started to burr, frittering away at the texture of our nerves.

I opened the door part way, while Linda looked over my shoulder. Their grubby hands were raised, open and optimistic. They didn't ask or demand, they accepted, as though born or created with an unalterable conviction that everything would come to them by nature, that everything was theirs, by right.

"You might at least have sung for us," I said lamely, by way of criticism.

"Why?" said the girl.

"Wouldn't you like to sing for us?" Linda inquired gently.

"Can't you sing for yourself?"

I descended to melodrama, striking the girl on the cheek. The twins, finding me irrepressibly comic, giggled wildly in the background. Their mongrel, no mean critic, growled and nipped at my heels.

"I thought you'd do that," the girl said, totally unruffled, while I booted the dog away.

This was a cue for Kernahan. He came out into the hall, a fat, tamed figure, alert with the season and its sentiments, and little else. "Listen, now, Sinclair," he said, "that's no way to treat her. She's bold, but she's a child, you know."

"Stay out of this, damn it," I answered, striving vainly for the shreds of my composure, as I sought the root of hers.

"Look," he said, slipping a friendly arm about my shoulder (he has always wanted to be my friend, no doubt because I resist his friendship), "let's find out where they live. Maybe we can talk to their father."

"We're orphans," the girl replied, deflecting him, a simple matter of course.

"Orphans," he whispered, his judgement upset. "How can you live with yourself?" he reproached me, a valid question, I suppose, although I have always found myself my own best company.

"Orphans," cried his wife, rushing out and embracing them in one healthy grasp, her boisterous affection bringing the residents flocking from their apartments. "Orphans." The magic word passed from tongue to tongue, opening purse strings and hearts.

The children got a dollar from the Kernahans, a basket of fruit from the next door down, then chocolate bars, used coats, scarves, mittens, a carton of Coke, an old red shawl, a can of pork and beans, some fudge and taffy, ending their rounds at my close-fisted door.

"My little brothers and I thank you kind people," the girl said warmly to her donors clustered down the hall, her deference elevat-

ing their status far above mine, uniting them in a common league to shame me.

I closed my door on the unwholesome little comedy, and found Linda sitting on the divan, contemplating the stirrings in her stomach, engrossed in her time of mystery and fear.

"You hate my baby," she said abruptly.

Three children and a dog and Kernahan were enough to contend with. "Linda, I'm not in the mood for games," I said.

"You hate him but you can't hurt him yet, so you want to hurt those children, children everywhere. There's something wrong with you."

"I hate the baby?" I said hollowly.

"You don't love him, even. He made you marry me."

"Let's not be squalid, Linda. It isn't that important."

"You think you have an answer for everything," she said.

"Arguments depress me," I replied, turning my back and peering out the window to snap the whole thing off.

The children were grouped outside on the snow, looking up at me. They discarded some of their booty, the pork and beans, the old red shawl, then gave me a final, parting thrust, an overdue hymn, its dissonance subdued, shielded by the glass:

> Little Jesus, sweetly sleep, do not stir;
> We will lend a coat of fur,
> We will rock you, rock you, rock you,
> We will rock you, rock you, rock you,
> We will rock you, ROCK YOU, ROCK YOU, ROCK YOU,
> ROCK YOU, ROCK YOU

They capped their ragged ending by placidly thumbing their noses as a token of departure.

It was then I decided to act, in a manner befitting their self-possession. Late that night, while Linda was asleep, I carried the record player into the spare bedroom at the rear of the apartment (reserved for our nursery-den), and slipped "The Sweet Old Songs of Yuletide" from its cardboard jacket. I played it through, listening carefully. Finding the words I wanted, I pressed my hand on the tone arm, crushing the needle deep into the grooves of the song. The record shrieked.

I could have let the children go. Why I didn't has never puzzled me: in simple terms, their departure did not make me free of them. They of course were free of me, exiting from my life as mysteriously,

as arbitrarily, as they entered it, granting peace next evening with the absence of their carols. But my peace was frustrating; the children had left as victors, and when they did not return, I was reduced to seeking them.

"I'll have to go out for a while," I apologized to Linda, as I slipped into an old football jacket, a high school relic.

She was in bed with the telephone on a nearby table and her doctor's number on a pad. "I don't like to be alone now," she said fearfully.

"I'll only be a minute," I insisted.

Which wasn't true. The children were not so easily found. Their territory was broader than I imagined, for they had exhausted the apartment-block business, and were canvassing the houses, the three- and four-room structures cramped in our end of the city, near the stink of the oil and rubber plants. I walked till my face was stinging with cold, turning corners at random, squinting at doorways, listening for anything resembling a hymn. My thoughts passed to Linda as the time flicked by; first babies are not easy ones, and first mothers can be unmanageable, and I wanted to be back. I could see, vividly, Linda writhing in pain, unable to get to the phone; an ambulance speeding through the foggy night; her doctor reproaching me: "I'm sorry, Mr. Sinclair, but there was nothing I could do. Had you been here . . ." I had fallen victim to the melodrama of my fancy. I walked some more. Turning a final corner, I saw the children on a porch, convincing a dumpy housewife of their mystical connection with the Orient and kingship. How they did it, I don't know, but they left with a Christmas tree over their shoulders.

"Well, well, well," I said, when we met on the sidewalk. "Look who's here. Aren't you the lucky ones?" I ran my hand over the tree, examining its length and thickness, which were considerable. "Where are you off to now?" I inquired.

That moment, I am sure, was the most humiliating of my life. The children gaped and didn't reply, for they didn't know who I was. How should they? I was only one of the many they visited, but they were the only ones visiting; they were unique.

Sensing my inadequacy, I crouched down and spoke to the twins. "We're going to have a party," I said, learning to state, not to ask.

They looked up as one to their sister, not for permission, of course, but for confirmation of the fact.

She gave it to them. "We're going to have a party," she repeated, finally placing me with a smile of recognition. She reached inside her parka, and gave me a grubby apple, making me a partner in

their enterprise.

"Adam and Eve?" I joked, biting into it and finding it frozen.

"Macintosh," she muttered.

They led the way back, trudging confidently in their bulky galoshes, taking a makeshift short cut of vacant lots and back yards filled with mud and snow, wire fences, and self-ordained watchdogs. Their mongrel made the best of it, chasing cats and mounting dogs, wavering between war and love. I fared worse, with their Christmas tree clutched in my arms, vulnerable in my down-at-heel loafers. A few steps, and the mud oozed over my ankles. I wiggled my toes in it, and stumbled on, flopping at the heels, spraying the seat of my pants. When the moon went behind a cloud, I sprawled over a low-lying fence. The tree shot up in the air, like a rocket launched from its pad. Pine needles scraped my face. I spat out mud. "Are you quite all right?" said a soft, female voice. "I'm always all right," I said cheerfully, but in the end they guided me home, so distressed and uncomfortable I had not thought of Linda.

We tramped up the grooved wooden steps to my door where the children dutifully removed their boots and stacked them by the wall. I set down their miserable tree.

"You'll have to change your socks," said the girl. I had to change more than that.

I went inside barefoot and peeked in on Linda, asleep with the pad in one hand. The children poked in behind me, scanned her indifferently, then discovered the den by themselves. After washing and dressing, I joined them, locking the door behind me.

"What a nice little doggie," I began. Now totally squandered, it lay on the table, gulping my sandwiches to recover its unusual vigour. "What's its name?"

"Beelzebub," was the girl's ready answer.

I decided to concentrate on the twins.

"And what's yours?" I said, crouching down to one, who looked as much like the other as he did like himself.

"His name's Cocytus," said the girl.

"Let Cocytus answer for himself," I said.

"Cocytus," Cocytus said, looking to his sister for proof of his identity.

"The other one's named Backgammon," the girl volunteered, serving them first, no doubt thinking of Mammon.

"What's your sister's name?" I whispered to Backgammon, who, by the strength of his glance, passed the question on to Cocytus who didn't know the answer either.

"Well?" I said to the girl, a little testily for me. They were sitting in a row on an old spring cot, placidly munching my cookies and chocolates, my soft drink bottles snug between their thighs. They were parodying politeness to annoy me.

"Today I'm Hecate," she said.

If there was a time for Christmas carols, now would be the moment. "Who are you on other days?" I demanded, switching on the record player I had placed on a shelf far above them.

"It depends what mood I'm in," she said. "If I want, I can be anyone I like. Who you are is always a matter of mood."

She stopped. "The Sweet Old Songs of Yuletide" had diverted her. She made a face as "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" spread into the room.

"Don't you like hymns and carols and such?" I asked, elated.

She made another face. "They're too sentimental," she complained. "They all want you to cry about the baby Jesus. He's so small and helpless, it's silly."

"What's silly?"

"To cry over babies. It's babies that do all the crying."

"I bet you'd cry," I said.

She shook her head vigorously. "Only babies cry," she repeated, "and people that can't help themselves."

"You were helpless once." It was a superfluous reminder, for she couldn't grasp the meaning of my thought. Helplessness was a concept alien to her nature. Her self-reliance must have begun at a very early age; she no doubt walked out of her mother's womb.

"Don't you know anyone that's helpless?" I said. "That's weak? That needs understanding and love?"

She gave my question more deliberation than it merited. "My mother's paralyzed," she offered.

"I thought you were an orphan," I seized my opportunity.

"It's all in how you look at it," she said. "She's so paralyzed she can't talk or eat or anything, it's like she isn't there. So we might as well be orphans."

The ease with which she delivered her lie undermined my confidence. I could not have done so well. I looked to the twins for a note of mirth or surprise, but they retained their equanimity, sipping their drinks with an inscrutable smile on their lips.

"If she can't eat she must be awful thin," I countered.

She had an answer for that too. "We stick needles into her."

"How do you know when to stick them?" I asked, caught in the flow of her talk.

"You don't," she said. "You have to feel her out first."

We were back to her matter of moods. I sighed and lapsed into silence while the record spun senselessly above us: a "First Noel," a "Jolly Old St. Nicholas," an interminable "Twelve Days of Christmas." The twins fidgeted. Beelzebub, his belly gorged, slept on the table, his hind legs spraddled and flat. We were left alone, staring at one another, sensing ourselves enemies to the other's self-command.

"You sing to support your poor mother?" I suggested finally, a question she had no intention of answering. "Do you make very much in a day?"

She didn't know. "Counting it won't make it any bigger," she said practically.

Which was true enough, I thought, as my party began to disintegrate. The twins, tired and overfed, had joined Beelzebub in sleep, and I was unable to puncture the marrow of a little girl's poise. I might have despaired had not a new hymn begun;

> Silent Night, Holy Night,
> All is calm yawp is calm yawp is calm yawp
> is calm yawp is calm yawp

It was capital: shrill, like the squeal of chalk over slate, grating like sandpaper over the ragged edges of our nerves.

Blinking wildly, the twins awoke. They glanced at their sister in wonder, then at the record, finally at me. Beelzebub emerged from an erotic dream, yapping accompaniment. Hecate, puzzled, said nothing for a time; she was trying to feel me out.

"Your record's broke," she said at last.

"I know it." I am honest.

Minutes passed. The record whirled giddily on. I studied her, breathing easily. She was the picture of self-assurance, understanding instinctively the role she had to play, and I admired her for it.

Linda rattled the doorknob then, and struck the door with her hand. She was never one for entrances. "Johnny?" she cried through the din. "What's wrong in there?" The rattling meshed with the yawp of the song.

Hecate and I stared at one another, mute and motionless until I turned up the volume. I knew I had won when she glanced at the twins.

They were the first to crack. Cocytus began to giggle. This set Backgammon going. They bounced and shook, then slipped off the

cot and rolled on the floor, holding their stomachs and kicking their heels. They eyes filled. Their faces flushed with blood as the tears rolled down their cheeks. Beelzebub, unable to comprehend, romped about them, joyfully chasing his tail.

Soon they were wailing. They lay on the floor as a gurgling noise arose from the depths of their throats. Drooling, they crawled to the door and tried to push it open, their spittle threatening to choke them. Hecate surveyed them carefully, with a mixture of solicitude for their predicament, shame for their weakness, and finally intervened.

"You're a dirty son of a bitch," she said to me.

I smiled. My pleasure was supreme. I had violated the core of her repose, making her choose between her brothers and herself.

I lifted the tone arm and unlocked the door. The twins bolted out, punching Linda who stood harmlessly by. Beelzebub loped after them, it was all a game to him, followed by his master. I heard them clumping down the stairs. I heard also, I am sure, the swish of the tree behind them. My powers were acute.

"You hurt them somehow, with that horrid noise," Linda accused me.

I didn't care to answer, and looked out the window instead. The twins ran beneath me, followed by Beelzebub snapping at their legs. Screaming, they kicked their pet in the mouth; it drooped its tail and fled.

Then Hecate came out, dragging the tree behind her. Seeing me, she bent down and made a snowball. I saw her put a stone in it. I didn't flinch, not even when it struck the window by my eyes, cracking the pane. The snow melted against the warmth of the pane, the drops running down like tears. I traced a finger over the crack, and looked at my distorted, severed image in the glass.

An intense depression settled over me. How can I lie? My act had been as artificial and contrived as their invasion had been natural. How could it have been otherwise with me?

"Nothing will really hurt them, Linda," I said finally. "They're invulnerable."

Turning about, I saw her sitting on the cot where the twins had sat before, trembling, running her delicate fingers over the curve of her stomach.

She went into the hospital that night.

Now we were three. Linda struggled for a time and released an incubator-sized, red and squalling fluff of life, our Linda Jr., in a

birth so hard, I felt the baby reluctant to come into our world.

Christmas went by. The children were gone, which should have put them from my memory, and given me ease and peace. Another week and Linda returned, thin and sway-backed, older, sickly, as though her baby, to nourish its scrawniness, had sucked some vital nutrient from her blood.

"Isn't she lovely?" she asked me at dinner, although I couldn't tell. She looked at me soberly, and the lines were pronounced and fine beneath her eyes. "Well, isn't she?"

"I suppose she must be if you say so."

"You don't find anything lovely," she said. I couldn't seem to satisfy her.

"Then why did you bother to ask?" I demanded.

She shrivelled up then, recoiled, as if I had struck her somehow. "You'd have to be sick to talk like that," she said. "Yes, you are, you're sick, you just naturally want to hurt things. Only a sick person would have persecuted those children."

Linda is sometimes amusing. She was talking like someone from afternoon television. No doubt, if she were able, she would have tried to probe my mind, to unearth the Oedipal relations or traumatic experiences, and think that she had found an answer, an explanation for my actions. But that sort of thing is superfluous. I was the one being persecuted.

"Are you there?" said a familiar voice at that moment and the Kernahans pushed in, fortified with a bottle of wine. They just had to see the baby. Linda conducted them to the nursery and they made the usual remarks, inspecting it thoroughly and commenting so, you could make a chart of their delights.

There was nothing to do but to open his wine. It was ghastly stuff (he must have made it himself), but I managed some few glasses before they came back. Linda peered at me worriedly, for I am a drinking man only on occasion, and the Kernahans could hardly rate as that.

"You know what's wrong with you, old buddy?" Kernahan said much later, when his wine was done. "You don't like people. You're a mole." He slipped his arm around my neck to show how unprejudiced he was.

"I like the children," I said. "Love them. Can't get them out of my mind."

"What children, old buddy? Do we know any children, hon?"

His wife replied that she was starting on her first.

"The ones that were singing, old buddy." I began an ill-tuned

song about reindeer.

"Oh, those children," he remembered. "Whatever became of them anyway?"

"They died," I said. "Smothered with love."

"Orphans always die," Kernahan reflected, slipping into an *Oliver Twist* mood as I reached for my football jacket. And before anyone could speak, I had bolted out, leaving them astounded.

I stood at a loss in the cold night air, not knowing what I would do, when I spied two dogs in coition, underneath a street lamp. The act was performed in an instant, then the stronger one strutted about, pawed the earth, and sniffed a fire hydrant. Finding it unacceptable, he examined a telephone post and a tree, dismissed them both with lordly indifference, then crossed the street and lifted his leg against the wall of the apartment building. He was inspecting an old place of crime.

"Beelzebub!" I shouted happily. I ran as if to embrace him, but he raced madly away.

The chase began. I followed him down alleys, through back yards and vacant lots, leaping skilfully over fences and tree stumps and puddles. My heart sang. I was gay, expert. I could hear Kernahan tramping behind me, sloshing through the mud, grunting with every step. He bellowed "old buddy" desperately. Then I heard a splash, and my joy was complete.

I followed Beelzebub for miles, it seemed, to a large split-level house of brick and stone, set far in from the road. When I saw the childishly-painted sign Cave Canem on the snow-covered lawn, I knew that I was home. The doorbell chimed when I punched it.

"Be patient, please," said a cultured voice. The door was opened by a sophisticated, middle-aged man, the model of assurance.

"Yes? What is it?" he asked coolly, as I pushed my way into the vestibule.

Behind him was a striking family tableau, the picture of unity. The girl was there, my old protagonist, older, more feminine, in a pink lace dress, her arms draped protectively around the twins. She wasn't in her Hecate mood. The twins, too, had altered; they were fat, healthy monsters, really, more boy than clothing, once divested of their ridiculous garb and clad in proper pyjamas. They recognized me this time, I'm sure, although they didn't show it. Beelzebub, knowing no better, yelped and waggled his tail, his formal welcome. Then their mother entered, a sturdy animal, her dress snug against her muscular stomach and thighs; she was a breeder, unlike my pallid Linda. "Poor Beelzebub," she murmured, pick-

ing him up. "Aren't you the sweetest little woofy? Nasty man won't hurt you." Her words belied her feelings. Resenting my invasion, she grouped her children close about her, as though defying me to harm them. I wouldn't now; there was something in her protective love that intimidated me, a fierce strength and durability, something which I could not share. I felt grossly uncomfortable.

"What does the fellow want?" said the mother. "He doesn't say a word."

"I think he's drunk," said her husband.

"For pity's sake. Well, he can't stay here, you'll have to send him away."

I felt my arm grasped firmly. Prying it loose, I raised my hand with open palm, not asking or demanding, but accepting.

"Why, he's peddling something," said the mother.

"He's begging," the father corrected her.

I muttered and shook my head. Then, as the children watched impassively, the words rushed out, slurred, faint, in a thoughtless chant, not a song:

> God rest ye merry, gentlemen,
> Let nothing you dismay.
> Remember Christ your Saviour
> Was born on Christmas day;
> To save us all from Satan's power
> When we were gone astray,
> Oh, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
> Oh, tidings of —

"Boy, he's really loaded," the father interrupted. "On your way now," he ordered, spinning me about. "The party's over. Out you go."

Fixing my arms about me, he propelled me to the door. It opened and slammed and I bounced down the steps, landing in an ignominious heap on the snow. I struggled to my feet, groping for my dignity, and saw the children inspecting me, their noses flat against the windowpane, not caring enough to be merry at my expense. I had an impulse to throw a snowball at them, but it would have done no good. I could not be them.

Coming up the apartment-house stairs, I heard a familiar, nagging sound. I went in and saw Linda with her baby in her arms, sitting before my record player, transfixed, almost paralyzed by the yawping. Angrily, I snapped the player off. I have never liked

to see things spinning.

"You broke it," she accused me, not bothering to look up. There were tears in her eyes. "Do you hate my mother that much?"

"Your mother?" I said. "Oh, for God's sake, Linda, talk some sense for once in your life. I never think of your mother."

"If you don't love her, you don't love me. You can't love in bits and pieces."

"Well, I'm not in love with your viscera," my voice rose to a shout. My composure was slipping again.

She clutched her baby tightly, shielding it from me. "You'd be gentle if you loved," she said.

"You'd be fierce," I cried, and I felt my voice would break.

Linda wilted and bowed her head, for she had no strength at all. Why should she? My family was not *theirs*. I lapsed into a silence that held much of despair.

Finally, I spoke. There was no sense beating a woman of straw. "I sang to the children," I said, as much for something to say.

She thought it had been my way of atoning, of making up to them. "I bet they enjoyed that a lot," she said.

"Beats me," I said huskily, and her head snapped up at once.

"Why, you're crying, almost," she murmured. Her voice had a particular softness in it. She forgave me for the record and the children. "That's something. At least that shows you're sorry."

"You don't know how sorry I am," I told her.

Three Poems by William Stafford

WINTER ORCHARD

In the bereaved orchard
where a wide cause has burdened the trees
the owner welcomes us, on tiptoe
designing our way over the snow.

Little shakers of birds
fumble branches against the air,
alight and cling — it hurts my hands —
fluttering the edge where darkness stands.

The wind presents an evening design
there at the other end of the row:
trees bow; visitors leave
one at a time — bereave, bereave, bereave.

MEMO FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Around here professors wonder how
people find time to read. Students
cultivate anger, to give their thoughts power.
Politicians live by judicious hate.
The place is dying.

Once a medicine man dreamed animals
came to breathe all at once in this valley:
a serene day bubbled out, and that dream
filled this whole area. There is
a book about it in the library —

How the animals and birds are gone,
a few of them wildly breathing and
singing — desperate survivors —
around the faintest little towns
in the mountains.

THESE DAYS

All those waterfalls in a place like Rome
enable people to stay people, a little:
the most repressive offices usually have
the most fountains; and civilized travelers
crowd around the wonders of Versailles;
newlyweds visit, hand in hand, Niagara.

Presidents, Premiers, and aged Senators
find themselves accepting invitations to
turn on their voices at the spillways of
bigger and bigger dams. We the people
flow to hear them and call, "Viva," "Hurrah,"
"Salud," "Freedom," and stare at the water.

Four Poems by G. V. Downes

GAMES

On ribbed and infinite sands
the children cry
let's play lions,
you be a tiger
and I'll be a lion
I'll fight you.
Dragging a pointed stick
through the resisting sand
they say
here is my house
there is the sofa
you go to sleep, look,
I will draw you a pillow
and then
you can go to sleep

Sleep, sleep — but it is morning still
and the herons are flying, fishing
the distant shallows;
it is morning yet
and the children's cries
rise into the enormous air
before the unseen wind
destroys their voices.
It is early still, but later,
much later, you will drowse,
sink into the warm salt pools,
you will touch, delicately,
the frilled green hair
of abandoned seaweed
when the cannibal tide returns,
drowning the little marks printed on sand,
the simple house where children played
at lions and tigers.

POETIC EVENT

What falls
on the reflective
pond, unconscious
through moving
water,
disturbing an echo of leaves,
procession of fish?
O hand be quick,
close on the dive
before the bright word
falls:
an insect
darts with invisible legs
over broken water,
moves also as shadow below
on the visible sand,
five blurred balls
enormous
walking with fish

OLD TALE

The noise of the returning hunt awoke her
and she stirred, breaking
the fragile glass, the illusory
cage, to find
that the wood rose different around her,
full of surprises;
voices, mellifluous,
sang in thin air
of seven years' gone, the fear
and enchantment of dreams.
Brushing cobwebs that glittered like glass
from delighted hands,
she rose (*where now the vicious*
bite of the poisoned apple?)
and saw in the sun
the road stretching clear to the castle:
but though no menace
lurked in the branches,
cat-like, with claws,
she moved slowly, too slowly
to catch the bright hunt
and the sounds grew fainter and fainter
down glades of the uneasy wood,
the watching trees.

ALICE IN BLUEBEARDLAND

And for years afterwards
she was afraid of mirrors,
flinched
from the simplest door,
had visions of spiders, red-spotted,
hiding in coiled ropes
and maggots on bodies of fowl.

Sleep, sleep — but it is morning still
All keys spoke traps
opening to unknown horror: perhaps
a Thing, naked,
caught between void and meaning
scratching its skin,
counting the creatures on webs
of zigzag walls.

How could she then
hand on the yielding door, tell
what lay in wait in the garden?
whether the apricots were poisoned?
whether the blue flowers smiled truly?
or if the sunlit stones would suddenly
crack as she moved with the door?

THE NOBLE SAVAGE

SEYMOUR MAYNE

Your hair is an a-
mazing jungle
— you are darkest Africa
Your cannibalistic mouth
ravages all my soft-fleshed humanities
& pale amenities
Girl, you're the shaman
who's bewitched me!

But how much longer can this bonfire
last, till you'll begin digging out yams
from the neat furrows, in the humid noon,
and slowly begin to boil the life
out of me with your round domestic pot.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF TIME

A sequence of stories by JOHN METCALF

PART TWO

- *THE HAPPIEST DAYS*
- *GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOUSE*
- *A TOY CALLED PETER DOG*
- *CONSEQUENCES*

Part one appeared in our last issue

THE HAPPIEST DAYS

THE REPORT CARDS ARE YELLOW with brown printing. I am filling in the numbers black Pass red Fail; the aggregate and average attendance for the months of September, October, November, and December excluding Public Holidays; Character Traits; Citizenship, Honesty, Co-operation, Practicality and Idealism.

I am secretly looking at the children. They are supposed to be working and are not. Sometimes it is like a trance. The chalk stops

in the middle of its loops and squeaks, and I want to say something, but cannot. They would not understand. I want to say, "I know. I understand." I would like to rend the neat divisions of their minds, break the rules, shout "Bum."

Like an unwanted child, seeming unconcerned on the borders of the game, I watch them when they play. Twenty years young I ran with you, played the ball, knocked out imaginary teeth, and, as it seems, was happy.

Standing now in the falling chalk-dust, I say, "This is a lyric poem which rhymes ab ab."

In the wood was an old holly tree whose bark was scabbed and peeled like ivory. Some twenty feet above the ground a large branch formed a natural seat, and the glossy leaves made a cage around it, hiding you from view. We went there often to talk and smoke, or just to sit. I can see it clearly.

Below the large branch was a thinner one and David always used to Tarzan-drop through the terrifying space to grasp it, swinging until the bouncing stopped. He never actually said anything to me but I knew. Why should I remember that now?

Years later, after I had been working some two or three years, I went back to the old town, to the wood, to the tree, and everything was still the same. The same tree, the same branches, the same boys though they were different.

We talked and I did the jump — an easy grasp — a drop of two feet, and I swung there for a moment and dropped to the ground. One of the boys said, "We do that, mister." And I said, "I know," and went away.

The children are supposed to be working, and are not. They are supposed to be reading from a book called, *Travels In the Realm of Gold.*

Today is Wednesday and it is my day for duty in the yard. The packs of boys will shout and run, flowing round me like the movements of the tide. Small boys in their first year, moustached with sherbet, play with bald tennis balls, or lick transfers onto their forearms. It is the time of year now for marbles in the cotton drawstring bags. I had a Queenie, beautiful with whorls of misty red and pale smoke blue. Older boys, who carve the rude desks with their unfilled hopes, will be huddled over magazines in secret corners. I wonder if the poses are still the same. Have Naturists changed? Or do they still play ping-pong in the nude?

The cactus plants, in their sand-filled box on the window-ledge, are doing very well. Once a month I water them, judiciously, with

a little watering-can. The atmosphere seems to suit them, for once the green flesh bore tiny pink buds.

Soon it will be coffee time. I will line up, as I always do, and fill my cup from the urn and sit listening to people talking to me. They talk about cars and gardens. A nightmare babble of voices, early flowering miles per hour, a slight adjustment paved with granite. At night I fancy them moving into gear and revving into oblivion, where, in the mulching darkness, they battle with aphids, lost in an orgy of yams and parsnips.

Outside this room the sun is shining, white clouds. Last Sports Day it was warm too and we could supervise their games without getting a chill or having to sit on damp grass. I was in charge of high-jump, sitting by the deep orange sand behind the poles. I could see each white-clad body rise, lie black against the sky and roll gracefully into the sand. One of the boys brought me a cup of tea. It was a pleasant day. It was like a field dotted with white flowers.

Later, I was talking with some of the older boys about T. S. Eliot. *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock.* I remember distinctly. We strolled about slowly in the sunlight and I talked and they listened and asked questions. It was like ancient Greece. That's a conceit, I suppose — but the javelin and discus, and the running, and the teacher with his group of students. In a way, one of the most pleasing things of the year.

But then a mob of boys, throwing a football, ran round us and kicked the ball across our path, and, though no one seemed to notice, I flinched away as I always did.

The report cards are yellow with brown printing. Carter. Carter, John. Age, as of July 10th, fifteen years and one month. Brings bits of motorcycles to school with him and puts them on his desk, touching them lightly with his fingertips, stroking the dull metal. Language 30. Literature 32.

Dawson. Dawson, Peter. Who lives reserved and passionately for his fishing. Regardless of title, every composition is the same. "A Journey." We went a journey on the bus to the river where we started fishing. "The Day the Circus Came to Town." On the day the circus came to town I happened to be fishing. Comments. Should not waste time outside school?

Fielding. Fielding, Tony. Age, as of July, sixteen. Literature 20. Language 32. He is not reading now, though I have spoken to him twice. He is holding *Travels in the Realm of Gold* slackly in his hands and is daydreaming. In his large frame the banked fires are

burning as he daydreams of the pubs he will soon enter and the tart that lives down his way you can touch in the pictures. Of the shoe factory where his dad works and where he works on Friday night and Saturday where the old women laugh and touch you. Of the fight last Thursday down the park where Geof. Brooks hit the parkie, and the half-past eleven night shot with the gold of the chip shop and shouting at those tarts on the way home and his mother saying, "Where do you think you've been until this time!" And his father laughing and saying, "He's been chasing a bit of the other down the park," and giving him a cigarette. Yes, I can imagine it all. Literature 20. Language 32. Every single detail.

The noise has risen to a ridiculous level and I must keep them quiet. Soon Mr. Benson in the next room will hammer on the wall and they will talk about me in the staff room again. The noise of their chatter is irritating and disturbs my work.

"Silence!" I slap my hand on the desk so that it stings. They are quiet, wary, watching me to see what I will do. "You are making far too much noise. Just settle yourselves down." Tony Fielding says something to George.

"Are you deaf, Fielding?"

"No, sir."

"What was the last thing I said?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why not, Fielding?"

"I expect because I wasn't listening, sir."

"Are you trying to be funny, Fielding?"

"No, sir."

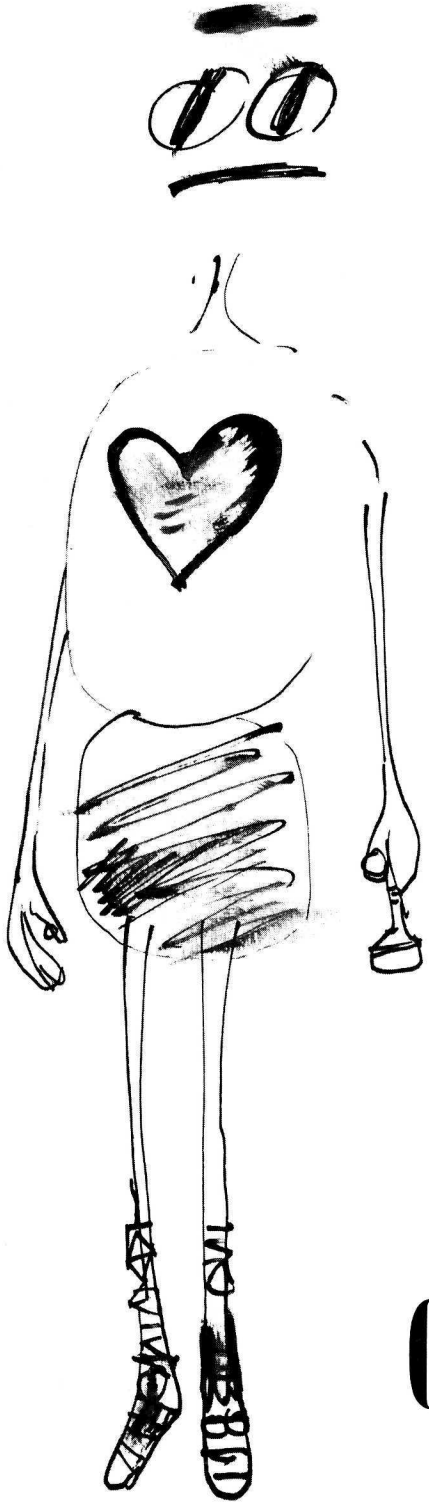
"I think you're trying to be funny, Fielding. Perhaps you're not feeling well, Fielding. Perhaps you feel unwell?"

"No, sir."

I go down the row and stand over him. He is red with embarrassment. "It might be better Fielding," I say, poking his chest with my finger, "if you didn't come to school when you feel unwell. You shouldn't stay out till all hours should you, Fielding?" I cuff him on the side of the head. "You're a growing boy, Fielding. A growing boy." I prod him sharply in the chest. "It's a good job you haven't much up here," rapping the top of his head with my knuckle, "because if you had such behaviour would make your work suffer." Fielding is growing angry and confused. I take hold of his tie near the knot. "You'd be better off, Fielding, if you spent less time with that creature who hangs around the school gate for you. Wouldn't you?" I pull sharply on his tie.

He knocks away my hand and glares at me. "Would you, Fielding? You haven't got the guts." I turn away and hear him get up. At last. He pulls me round and his first punch hits me high on the shoulder. I make no defence. He hits me again, this time in the mouth and I feel the numb impact of his knuckles and then the releasing pain. He hits me again and again in the face and stomach and still I stand there for there is no defence.

The noise of their chatter is irritating and disturbs my work. The noise has risen to a ridiculous level and I must keep them quiet. Soon Mr. Benson in the next room will hammer on the wall and they will talk about me in the staff room again.



Geography of the house

THE YOUNG MAN STOOD OVER THE WASH BASIN and glanced at his reflection in the mirror. Behind his head were the folds of the yellow shower-curtain. The hot water circled the basin and curled down the waste-pipe. He opened the mirror doors of the bathroom cabinet. On the glass shelf stood the can of shaving cream and the Gillette razor. Beside the razor lay the dispenser of stainless Blue Blades with arrows on them, a small bottle of aspirins and a new toothbrush in a celluloid case. Behind the toothbrush stood the stone bottle of expensive after-shave lotion. The cupboard always had a pleasant fragrance. He reached down from the top shelf a new bar of pink soap and tore off the wrapper.

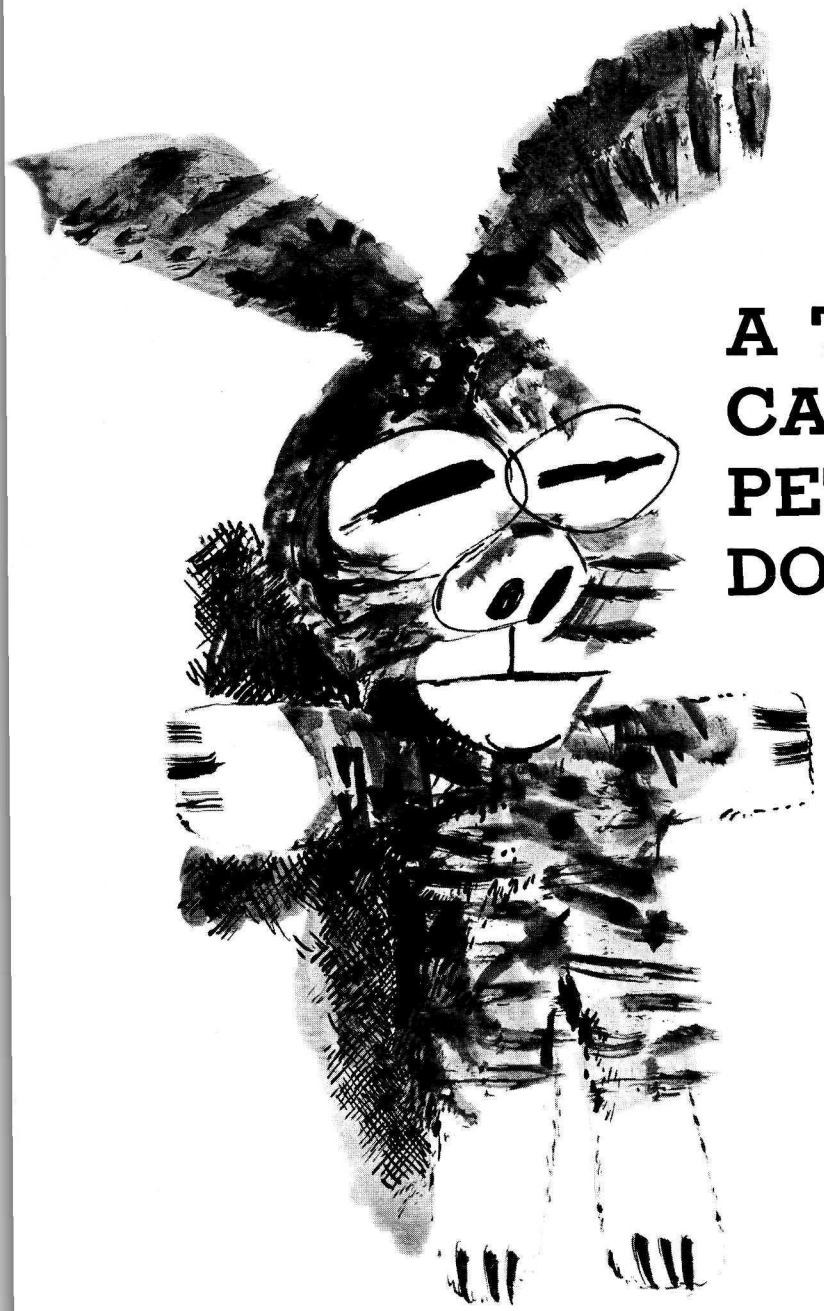
It seemed almost a pity to put the soap under the tap and blur away the sharp trademark. A few drops of water had already splashed it, leaving dull spots on its shiny surface.

He rubbed a rich lather from the soap and gently squeezed his hands, so that the bubbles matted together on the hair on the back of his hands and fingers. When his hands were completely covered in foam he put the tips of his fingers under the tap and watched the water eat into the bubbles and wash them away.

As he watched the water, he noticed, running across his wrist, the blue column of a vein. It seemed enlarged. Slowly he raised his hand and stared closely at it. He could just see the faint rhythm of the vein's movement, the slow regular pulse beating in and out. The cold water dripped from his fingertips.

Below the skin, inside the vein, the blood, his blood, was pulsing. With each throb, his heart, no larger than a human fist, contracted and expanded, pushing the thin blood round and round. His mind went back to the pointing pencil at school, and the plastic heart with its blue and red tubes. Ventricles and chambers and something called the . . . the aorta. He turned his hand over. No larger than a fist. He allowed the water to run over the backs of his hands washing away the last of the lather.

He dried his hands slowly on the towel and turned to leave the bathroom. Then suddenly, he turned again, and peered closely into the mirror at his image.



A TOY CALLED PETER DOG

PETER WASN'T REALLY LISTENING to the music, but he was conscious of it as a pulse beating lightly in the room. He idly tapped the record-cover on his knee, keeping time with the music, and every now and then, between the snatches of conversation, like a sudden flash in his mind, he heard the sparks of a piano solo or sudden bright sprays of notes exploding in the room.

Comforting in his other hand, he was holding a cold glass of beer, beaded with condensation. Between the small pleasurable mouthfuls, he held the beer up to the light, watching the bubbles rising in yellow streams through the amber glass.

They were arguing about Hemingway. They always argued about Hemingway. It was one of the constant factors of friendship. Peter smiled at them and, leaning forward, picked up the fat white and red matchbox from the table. David said loudly, "That's ridiculous, Jim, and you know it. Don't generalize. Give me a specific example."

"You give *me* one."

"Look! You say he has no system of values, right? That he's a slice of lifer? What about *Hills Like White Elephants*? You don't think he assumes *any* moral position there?"

Peter held the fat matchbox between thumb and forefinger and turned it round and round, gently rasping the ball of his thumb against the sand-papered edge. He affectionately watched the emphatic play of David's face.

"What about *Cat in the Rain*?" continued David.

Jim said, "Did you read that article about Hemingway which suggested that he was a repressed homosexual? Playing up the hairy-chest stuff to convince himself."

"Good God!" shouted David. "The same mistake *over* and *over* again. You're side-tracking onto the man and ignoring what he *wrote*."

Peter laughed at this exchange and said, "Why don't you both have another beer and cool off? You can get me one, too."

"Come to think of it," said Jim, "I'm hungry. What have you got, Dave?"

"Yes. Me too," said Peter.

"Another beer all round?" said David.

"Yes, of course. But I'm *hungry*."

David called from the kitchen, "Well. There's some cold apple pie. Bread. And half a pot of marmalade."

"How about this for an idea? Let's go downtown for a meal."

"Yes. That's good," said David. "Chinese, eh?"

"Let's make an evening of it," said Peter. "It seems a pity to break up now."

"What about *The Pleasure Garden*," Jim said. "I swear that waiter actually says 'flied lice'."

"I'm going to have some of that Goo Goo Suck," said Peter, "or whatever it's called."

David handed round the bottles of beer and they sat listening to the music in the room which was getting darker as the afternoon died away. On the far wall there was a reproduction of an early Picasso. Peter looked at the pure strong curve of the woman's back and wondered why it made him feel slightly sad. Perhaps it was the beer. Marjorie had a funny little mark on her back. Just at the bottom of the ribs on the left. It was half-way between a mole and a beauty-spot. He smiled slightly and raised his glass ironically to the perfection of the painting. Once, what seemed now a long time ago, it had had a name. They had called it Mole.

"How's the beer going, Peter? If we leave soon we'll have time to eat and then see a film or something."

"Do you think I ought to shave?" asked David.

"I wouldn't have thought a Hemingway man would have bothered about things like that."

"Oh, shut-up, will you?" said David.

"Turn that thing down a bit, will you?" said Peter. "I'd better phone my wife and tell her I'll be late."

"— What about that film at the — Oh, hello, love. How are things? —"

"Oh."

"I'm at Dave's."

"No, of course not."

"We were thinking of going downtown for a meal so I might be a bit late."

"Oh, no!"

"Is it bad?"

"Well, what do you think?"

"No. You tell me."

"Look! Give me a straight answer."

"You definitely want me to, then?"

"O.K. 'Bye."

Peter held the phone for a moment and then dropped it into its rest with a loud crash. "Well," he said. "That . . . is . . . that. Sorry but I have to go. My wife has developed one of her headaches." David and Jim nodded silently. "Perhaps we'll see you tomorrow, then?" said David. Peter went to get his coat from the closet. "I'll give you a call," he said.

The snow, piled in mounds in the gutters and on the pavements, was beginning to thaw and melt into sullen pools of brown slush. Passing cars threw out a fine spray. Peter trudged along the pavement towards the station with a tight, constricted feeling in his chest. Clambering over a bank of snow to cross the road, he slipped so that icy slush welled over his rubbers and oozed into his left shoe. He stood quite still for a few moments. His shoe was full of icy water. Then he walked slowly on. The discomfort of each sodden step was almost pleasurable.

When he reached his apartment-building he checked his mailbox in the lobby but there was nothing for him. He allowed himself the pleasure of letting the heavy door slam behind him as he started up the stairs. As he approached his front-door he found that he was holding his breath and walking as quietly as he could. He opened the door carefully, making sure that his keys did not jangle. The door brushed over the edge of the carpet. The bedroom door was rimmed with light.

He stood in the dark hallway for a minute, still holding onto the doorknob. He was breathing quietly through his mouth. The house was all about him. Then, life a thief, he made his way silently to the kitchen. Marjorie called out, "Is that you, Pete?" He stood in the darkness of the kitchen hoping that the floor would not creak.

"Pete? Is that you?"

"Yes, dear."

"What are you doing?"

"Just taking off my coat."

Noisily, he switched on the light and chucked his coat over the back of a chair. He took a glass from the cupboard and poured himself some milk from the jug in the fridge.

He still hadn't remembered to buy a new shade for the light. The room was filled with a harsh glare, like the interrogation room in a prison. It glanced off the rims of the plates standing in the rack on the draining-board, and shone in wide paths across the surface of the kitchen table.

He went and opened the fridge, looking for something to eat. It was full of the usual plates and bowls of left-over food. As usual, there was no cheese.

The fridge door banged shut, and as he turned away, his foot kicked against something on the floor. He picked the toy up and sat it in a chair. It was red, black and yellow, and called Peter Dog. Actually, it was a rabbit, but his son called *all* animals dogs. He grinned at the hideous thing and squeezed its sagging middle. It gave a thin, forlorn squeak.

He put the glass in the sink, and just as he was going to switch out the light he saw, hanging on the back of the kitchen door, his wife's old blue dressing gown. The pile of the wool on the lapels was stiff and crusted with milk and dribble. It smelled of babies. He went out switching off the light.

His wife, comfortably propped against two pillows, was reading a novel. When he came in she laid down her book, but did not speak to him. Peter did not look at her, but walked over to the dressing-table, taking off his jacket. She was wearing her ugly pyjamas, buttoned to the throat. They always reminded him of a Salvation Army handout. The top of the dresssing-table was covered with jars and bottles, nail varnish, lipstick, creams, scents, combs, pins and powders. A thin dust of powder speckled the table's top. Sad rearguards against the advance of time.

He slowly eased the knot of his tie and undid the top button of his shirt. Casually, he turned round to face her.

"Are you feeling better now, love?"

"Yes. A bit," she said, still watching him closely.

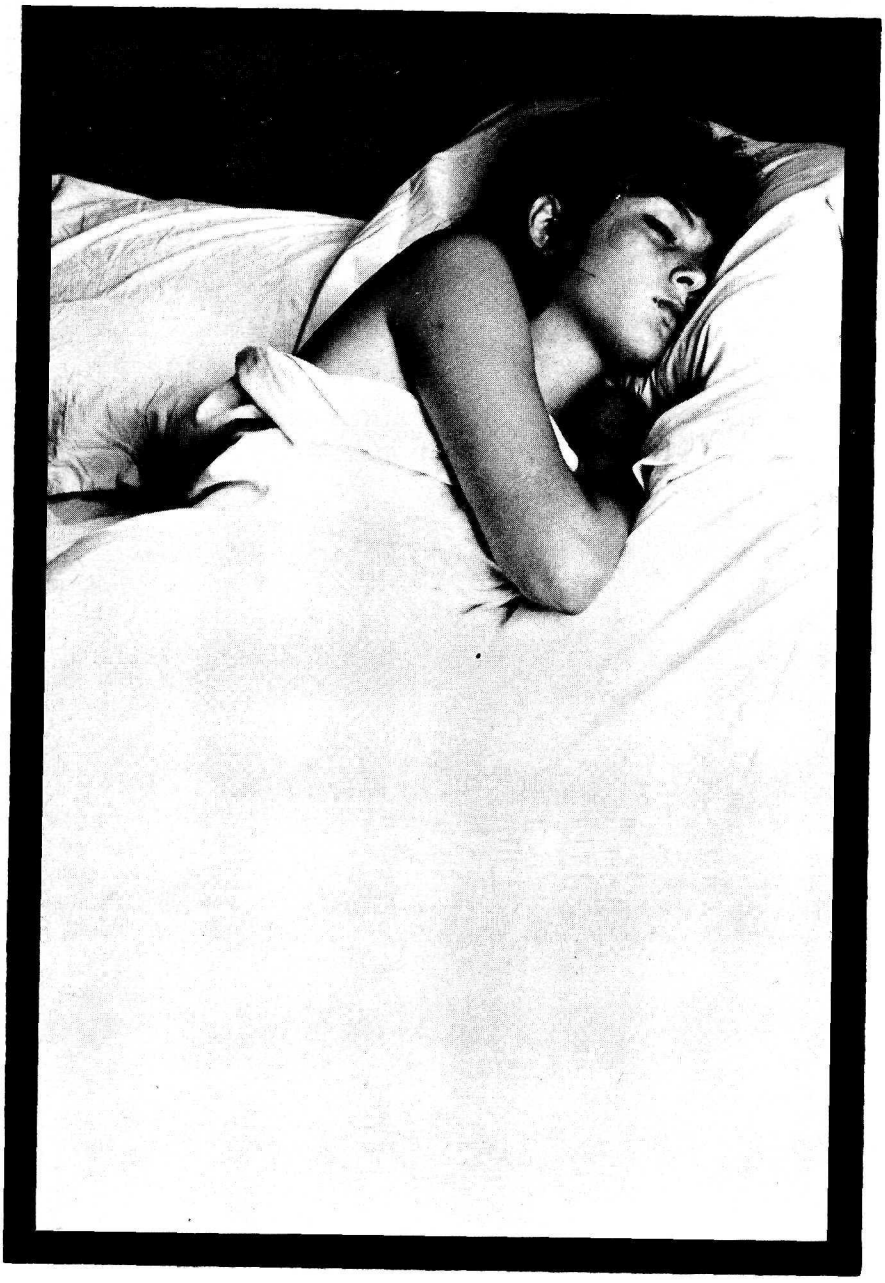
He smiled at her.

"Tired?"

She nodded.

He went over to the bed and stood looking down at her. She looked away from him and he bent and opened the top button of her pyjamas. He sat on the edge of the bed and turned her head towards him. As he kissed her, he mumbled, "You *know* its not fair to hide a beautiful neck like that."

CONSEQUENCES



HIS WIFE LAY IN THE BED with the barrier of her back against him and although she was breathing deeply he knew that she was still awake. He wanted to say, "I'm sorry." But it sounded ridiculous and he knew she wouldn't answer anyway. She had said, "It doesn't matter. Why don't you try to get some sleep? I feel rather tired myself anyway."

The wind bellied the curtains into the room. He turned his head on the pillow and looked at the accusation of her back. He knew that this would go on now perhaps for days, until there was the release of argument or tears. He remembered the last time, when the tears were vented on his being home an hour late, after an abandoned pint of beer.

He thought of the elaborately polite breakfast which would be his and the flaccid goodbye kiss; the formal question in the evening on his return from work, and the endless constrained hours to follow. He would read the newspaper or a novel in the silence and she would work at some unnecessary task. At nine o'clock she would put away her sewing, or whatever she would choose this time, and say, "I think I'll go up now. I have a slight headache. Try not to disturb me when you come." And he would be solicitous and say, "Can I get you an aspirin or something, dear?" And she would say, "No. No. It doesn't matter. I'll be better when I'm lying down."

The bed was hot and the blanket lay heavily on his legs. The old alarm-clock, set for ten to seven, ticked loudly on the bedside table. Its tick seemed to wheeze and jump erratically like an unsteady heart. Light from a street lamp shone in a corner of the ceiling and he stared at it until his eyes began to close. When you were grown-up you could no longer say, "Pax" and halt the game. You could no longer say, "I'm sorry." Consequences was a ritual game. You could — no longer — say, "I'm sorry."

The french windows were open onto the garden, and from where he lay on the rug he could see little black ants boiling out of the cracks in the paving just outside. Around the cracks were tiny banks of dry crumbly soil, fine as dust. It was very hot and the sun was pulsing on his bare legs. Further back in the room, in the shade, his mother was knitting. He was reading a book about pirates and

feeling the hot sun on his bare legs and back. He was wearing his blue bathing costume. There was a continual cool click from the steel knitting needles. He was sweating slightly. As he read, hot in sunshine, he raised and lowered his body and each time he banged against the soft rug he felt good. Suddenly the cool needles stopped and his mother said, "Don't do that. Why are you doing that?"

She came and stood over him and her face was angry and distorted. He felt frightened and said, "Doing what?" And she shouted at him and said, "If you do things like that, you aren't my little boy any more." And the sunlight in the garden went black and the blackness was filled with a melted face and a voice screamed from the middle of the face, and the voice was surrounded with tears, and the voice said, "You aren't my little boy any more. You aren't my little boy any more."

He struggled out of the blackness and the echoing scream, and found that he had moved across the bed close to his wife. He lay quietly in the darkness and listened to the jerky rhythm of the clock. Her breathing was soft and regular. Carefully he put his face against her shoulder, but she mumbled in her sleep and shrugged away.

Two Poems by A. W. Purdy

WILDERNESS GOTHIC

Across Roblin Lake, two shores away,
they are sheathing the church spire
with new metal. Someone hangs in the sky
over there from a piece of rope,
hammering and fitting God's belly-scratcher,
working his way up along the spire
until there's nothing left to nail on —
Perhaps the workman's faith reaches beyond:
touches intangibles, wrestles with Jacob,
replacing rotten timber with pine thews,
pounds hard in the great cave of the sky,
contends heroically with difficult problems
of gravity, sky navigation and mythopoeia,
his volunteer time and labor donated to God,
minus sick benefits of course on a non-union job.

Fields around are yellowing into harvest,
nestling and fingerling are sky and water borne,
death is yodeling quiet in green woodlots,
and bodies of three young birds have disappeared
in the sub-surface of the new county highway.

That picture is incomplete, part left out
that might alter the whole Dürer landscape:
gothic ancestors peer from medieval sky,
dour faces trapped in photographic albums escaping
to clop down iron roads with matched greys:
work-sodden wives groping inside their flesh
for what keeps moving and changing and flashing
beyond and past the long frozen Victorian day.
A sign of fire and brimstone? A two-headed calf
born in the barn last night? A sharp female agony?
An age and a faith moving into transition,
the dinner cold and new-baked bread a failure,
deep woods shiver and water drops hang pendant,
double yolked eggs and the house creaks a little —
Something is about to happen. Leaves are still.
Two shores away, a man hammering in the sky.
Perhaps he will fall.

HOMEMADE BEER

I was justly annoyed 10 years ago
in Vancouver: making beer in a crock
under the kitchen table when this
next door youngster playing with my own
kid managed to sit down in it and
emerged with one end malted —
With excessive moderation I yodeled
at him
"Keep your ass out of my beer!"
And the little monster fled —
Whereupon my wife emerged from the bathroom
where she had been brooding for days
over the injustice of being a woman and
attacked me with a broom —
With commendable savoir faire I broke
the broom across my knee (it hurt too) and
then she grabbed the bread knife and made
for me with fairly obvious intentions —
I tore open my shirt and told her calmly
with bared breast and a minimum of boredom
"Go ahead! Strike! Go ahead!"
Icicles dropped from her fiery eyes as she
snarled
"I wouldn't want to go to jail
for killing a thing like you!"
I could see at once that she loved me
tho it was cleverly concealed —
For the next few weeks I had to distribute
the meals she prepared among neighbouring
dogs because of the rat poison and
addressed her as Missus Borgia —
That was a long time ago and while
at the time I deplored her lack of self
control I find myself sentimental about
it now for it can never happen again —

Apr. 22, 1964 P.S. I was wrong!

Two Poems by Ralph Salisbury

A FAREWELL TO A DREAM OF OUR TIME

Tires screaming like babies torn from laps,
headlights slicing at fingers, to be teeth —
Hovering a moment, the girl's bare shoulders held
for love no more — For protection — Hers or his?
Slash of posts through steel, a wheel rising black
in the upthrown lights. In the quiet another wheel
whirred. The girl buttoned her blouse. For a time
the boy hugged warmth, hoping to feel heroic
or at least lucky. But, in the front seat's glow,
the steering column rose, a blossomless stalk,
and there was a door to be forced, darkness to search.

FROM THE BACK OF THE REFRIGERATOR

The mould that jelly grows,
the gray bracelet of fur
surrounding the bloody marrow:
the fear that the groin will crumble,
that the heart like a breakfast egg
will shatter on kitchen gleams,
that the boss's test-tube eyes
will one day turn slightly cloudy,
that a Red Chinese, blue cuff
braceleting tense fingers,
will trace red veins on a map,
and that the final day.

PICASSO

ELDON GRIER

I. Exhibition

I might have guessed that the school girls would accept
his hegemony, and I noticed at once a peculiar relaxation emanating
from the cloakrooms.

It was a Saturday to remember: guards guarding the treasure,
families plastered on the extra chairs, mothers describing parabolas
to their friends, fathers bottling offences.

II. At Antibes

He came to Antibes ready for the competition;
a thousand platters dropping from his cloak, his eyes
perpetually awake like a pair of perching owls.
There wasn't a day when back to the sun
he couldn't upstage his own production, or drag
the golden loaves of his fingers from the irresistible light.

Poets came and shedding their decorations
wrote voluminously about his face of bread; a team
of photographers chosen for their faith
diced their luck against the smarting walls, blacked
the diamond peepholes of the castle at the stroke
of noon, cooed the phrases of their shaven dean.

It was women though who roused the vice of
his creation with their look of coins; trite and wise
they laced the rhythm of his days with gifts of food
and paregoric drops. Only claims of innocence,
he knew, could guarantee this staid support and such abuse
of love. His flowered brush was wet.

The master's T-shirt hung about the town like
an emblem of the Seasons. A foil for the
unscored zinc of the sea, the old man's tom-cat head
rose above the peeling rails beside the rocks
like a proclamation of magic. Even where the queasy sails
hung languidly, one felt his sharp emprise, the barking of his clock.

NIAGARA

RICHARD EMIL BRAUN

Mist-moist, past the rainbow, we make a small row
at the low wall on the Canadian side:
you, and the other, who, as we approached the roar,
often and oftener groped your shoulder,
and I, a stranger almost, along for the ride.

Hundreds of soulful strangers, high
on the speedy water in their bodies,
lean on this rail, couples, eyes full or floating,
and all of them narcotized
unawares, by the falls, through the eye,
as veritably as by the needle
they despise and call sinful.

Apart from you two by two yards, I scan
the American side for the rapids
I already know; see them as a harum-scarum
taffeta cancan seesawing in sunlight,
now higgledy-piggledy the grey then white shreds

shown then withdrawn in the sexy
wingding; and parted from you two and from
the hundreds by the absence of love in me
(replaced by a drug), I hear
that other's chitchat you answer curtly
often and oftener shrill over the Falls'
singsong, and hear in it pain

which I can not respect. Inspecting the Falls
itself at its summit, I see a vein
of the river split on stone then mend, now folding, next
unfolding until both blend in the mist;
and to you, who have left the other to his pain

momentarily, and his camera,
and have come near me, I liken the white
currents to a groin and she-thighs widening
and clenching. You disagree.
I watch further. I feel Niagara
fill my head through the crown and through my eyes.
Soon, spilling out my mouth

with breath, it returns; encircles my mind;
builds silence. Flowing glee impels me to fall.
To fall, I mount the rail. Suddenly, in unison
with my own thought, you shout *It liquefies me!*
I come down. *Yes, yes*, I tell you. The other, cool,

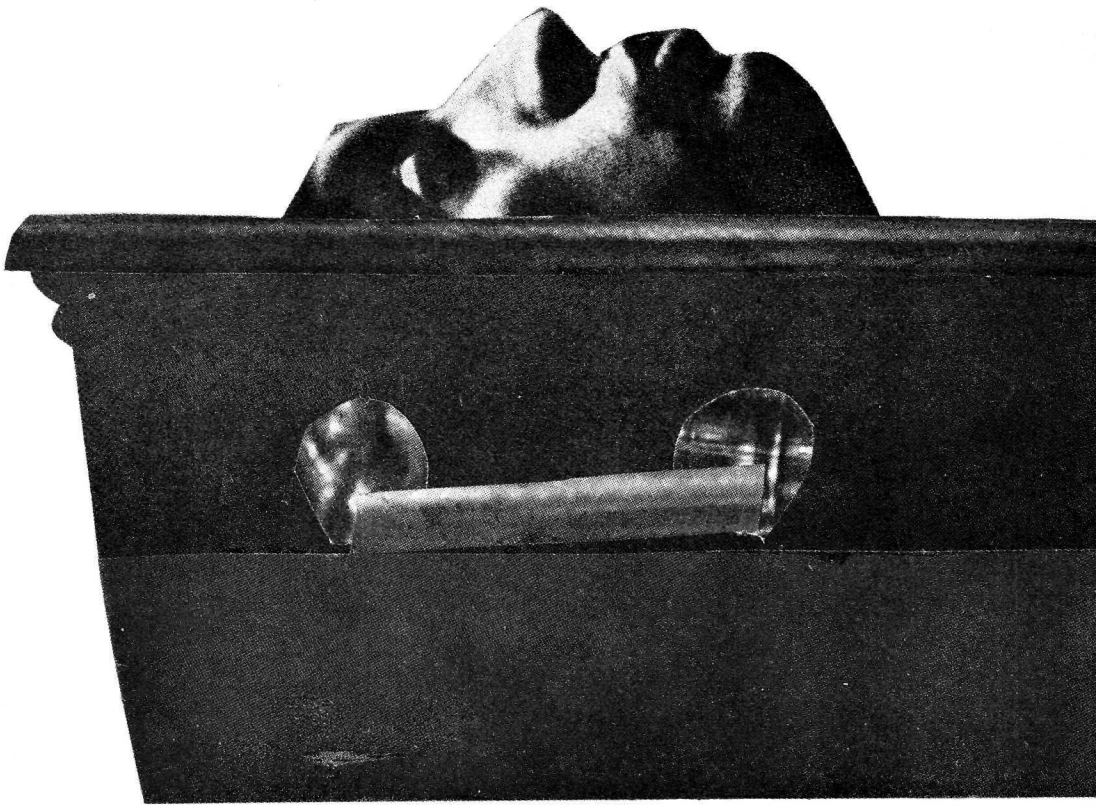
gripping your shoulder, leads you again
past the rainbow, under sobering mist.
I follow. Later I tell you both both
my own story (how I
am free of love through medicine)
and theorize about the hundreds there
high on love and water.

Safe where Niagara is almost hidden
and merely a moist whirr reveals its action,
we two juggle the topic literarily.
The third, unsure, shuffles picture-postcards.
In the park, near the car, in expectation

of franker words in privacy,
I ask again. I hear you, a blur, naming
a seminary where, at dawn, you would run
in pairs or by fours, downwards,
swung to a circular valley,
hills of daisies, grey and white folds, low, up,
lower, to swim secretly.

A SLAVE TO THE LYRE-BIRD, AND A BAD ONE AT THAT

PAUL WEST



AT SIXTY-SEVEN I had given up wearing suits and mailed my inseam and waist to Sam Spiegel's in Chicago who offered a bargain in slacks. You had to request at least two pairs with an option of return within seven days. Two pairs was a discreet idea for anyone with a sphincter as archaic as mine, and it was also, I fancied, a lovely cuckoldry of the centipede, whom I have always envied for being so well treated by God. He, centipede, never has more than he can manage, while we waste our time wondering whether to stoop to fours, *all* our fours, or rear back and pretend to have no legs at all.

I have learned a simple fact: as you get older, a negative personality begins to grow inside you which has much in common with everyone else who is aging but refers to yourself hardly at all. That is why I now excel in transposition, one day becoming a Florida pelican (the "Flying Suitcase") with my long grey scabbard beak at rest on my well-combed chest feathers, and the other a poinciana tossing in the suave Gulf winds like tree-trapped confetti. I sing to myself luxuriously: "He snags the whiskers of his chin, The branches hold his beard." And all the time the macaws in my head are disputing the price of Anheuser Busch when I am anxious only that they should sing the joys of being gaudy and much photographed.

The funeral began it: I mean it began what is so obviously wrong with me. I knew Harry White had retired from teaching to settle in Florida with his mongrel puppy and all the books he had accumulated but had never read. All he had to do was wipe up after the puppy and catch up on his reading: a neat, directed life with, for me, an almost liturgical flavour demanding slogan or heraldic motto. But when he died suddenly, without pain, someone had to go wipe up after the puppy until it was sold, keep turning the pages of the books until they too were sold, and of course see Harry buried, which his long-dead wife still alive in a mental home in California and his revulsed daughter, long since married to a real-estate man in Idaho, would never do. The wife would pray firmly for his agnosticism for fifteen minutes during the mental bagatelle of her institutional day (as she had done for the past fifteen years, according to Harry), and the daughter did pay for the last rite. So it was

not a vulgar, crowded event we imposed on the dead professor.

After saying this, I realize it is not the events but the atmosphere, not the things said but what I thought people were thinking. I remember Harry's white hearse (which he had insisted on years before) rather than what he died of or how I got myself to Saint Petersburg for the funeral. The atmosphere of that place has been singing to me ever since, and I cannot even pretend that I fell victim to the local fauna. No, the lyre-bird is an Australian passerine, one of its genera being the *Harriwhitea* and its long tail-feathers appearing lyre-shaped when spread. I sickened at the coincidence but, out of cowardice or fascination, allowed the link to tighten. I heard birdsong, as of passerine passers-by; I sensed Harry White intact in the turdy clay, and my legs were splayed out like a fan and would have been like a lyre if I had only been one of those pampered multipeds God is so good to. So I allowed the lyre-bird in, and it is there still — a soundless cachinnation from closed, puritan beaks, like a translation into laughter of all I see down here and fear in prospect.

It was a white hearse on white-walled wheels with the matt black casket inside under a mass of wilting flowers in all the pastel colours, like dismembered macaws dusted with poinciana. Harry rolled slowly over the sun-hot streets, followed by half a dozen cream convertibles with curtains of ivory beads inside the front windows. It was like looking through a garlic slicer. I stood under the trees, just short of the ochre-colored hotel with the high white bell-tower whose icing never melted, and I watched the motorcade interrupt the other drivers in that city of the aged where, each second or in adjacent splits of a second, a varicose leg gingerly tests the road for quicksand or stumbles against an uneven piece of terra-cotta sidewalk as if a whole pyramid had loomed out of the downtrodden afternoon. The aged perambulate endlessly. Each day is ticked off on the calendar, each reprieve making tomorrow more dangerous.

A dry wind bullied the tops of the palms and drilled the tricolor flags. I knew how the white hearse appalled streetfuls of the retired as they prospected among the stores for guava- and papaya-marmalades, read the sullen plaques at cut-rate, whispering with oblivious reverence the holy quotes — "Jacob *was* wrestling with heaven", wondering if the italics implied that Jacob might sometimes have *not* been or that, in case the beholder doubted, Jacob really *was* doing that. The seagulls evicted the pigeons from the quay when the hearse came into their sector. The sea went on patting the hulls of the yachts and dinghies. Not many yards away,

the sand endured the calloused feet of retired colonels marching at a brisk clip from one end of the beach to the other, by numbers, touching a fist at each end on the concrete wall to prove they were still in the world, and then off again to scatter flimsy shells and sand-showers over the sun-bathers on lodging-house towels.

Everyone knew. Each day the dead were quietly filed in the cemeteries and their diamonds went into shallow trays in the locked, barred windows of little shops. It was a funeral surrounded in time by hot gospel from the microphone on the bandstand in the city square, percussed at by nocturnal fireworks and breakfast-time bands, and patrolled over by sardine-silver jets keeping an eye on the nearby enemy. Time came and went, a small time, a funeral's time, while senior citizens transferred their savings into the mammoth sky-scraping banks at four per cent and purchased antiques, conned the day's necrology, leaned on their tubular walking-rests as the red lights flicked on at intersections and walked gently through the quiet of the parks.

I stayed on, of course. I was eligible and appropriate. At night I saw an occasional negro lounging in white tuxedo at a street corner; a Charon figure with his boat round the corner behind the seventy-cent fat-free lunch. Derelicts offered one another peanuts under the trees or sipped root-beers in cool uncomfortable alleyways roofed over. The withered and life-tired piloted long-bodied cars at ten miles an hour along the sea-front as if stealing up on salvation itself, with the chrome epitaphs — Catalina, Impala, Monterey, Fairlane, Skychief, Valiant, Metrocruiser — stamped irrevocably on flank, front or rear. Occasionally one of these cream catafalques outwitted the arthritic fingers and exploded into a roadside eating-house at sixty unintended miles an hour, launching the heart-attacked driver into a mess of egg-and-bacon, smashed plates, furious urns of coffee and broken one-handed eaters. You were always watching.

Back on the beach, as women bent for shells in ankle-deep water, whole epics tumbled into view. Where life had forced its way out many decades ago, there were now only blanches of scar, the maternity wrinkles like knitting, legs varicose with congregating blue snails, ankles like plumber's joints and, everywhere, tired hams aching with salt of the sea. And the wrestled-at, depleted bosoms, like twin mares' bellies, weighed on the midriffs and tried to breathe the air. At ten the whole city breathed its last and some senior citizens cowered before the last halitosis commercial they would ever see. At ten the whole city *does* breathe, *is* breathing, its last; and we are all cowering because we remember.

At three in the afternoon they buried Harry White and I wondered what had become of the Chevrolet he drove with such consistent inaccuracy, and if anyone had ever ironed out the dimples from his numerous minor collisions. Six wrecked ladies from some local Chapter stood erect at the graveside bearing small green flags. One wore high heels, and she tripped over a plank when she turned away.

Since one o'clock that day I had been sucking at a fragment of meat caught between two molars. As earth hit the black casket, the meat floated free like a small soul, and I knew then how it felt to die. Before I assess a man's character I like to have nothing stuck in my teeth; and before I appraise a soul I like to be able to do a discreet whistle between my teeth. The spaces, after all, like all but one of my teeth, are my own. I can still take a small pride in that.

After the funeral I bought a five-cent cigarillo and went to sit in the park. A youth in jeans and sweatshirt harangued the passive audience for ten minutes or so ("Jesus finds even those who do not look for Him. Life is made new in Jesus"). That sort of profanity. Then there was a straggling attempt at an awful hymn about a mountain and a light, and the youth disappeared after aiming his ciné-camera at the dumbfounded ancientry. I puffed at the butt of my cigarillo and noted a drunk blundering against the seats as he negotiated the aisle and made for the opposite side of the park where afternoon shoppers in mink stoles in eighty-degree heat were obstructing the arrogant young arriving from school by bus with irregular columns of books before them like bits of rift valley or cliff.

The old faltered home, clutching small brownpaper bags which held just enough victuals to reach this hour tomorrow. And I thought of the solitary egg in the efficiency-apartment saucepan, the fluid white stiffening into pulp to nourish a decaying frame and later to slip out between the unpretty hams into civic water, down the civic pipe and eventually out into shallow sea by the Motel sign at Edgewater. I thought of civic water and civet water. The minnows below the fall pipe from the sewer are deft. *Their* combustion is truly internal; and death — death is at its most when there is, for the first few moments, only you yourself who, if you could know, do know that you have died. It is that first non-knowledge or possible knowledge that counts; it is the loneliest moment in history. Or, as a small unterrified boy once said, death is when you don't look in your schoolbag any more. Or when the Automat opens its door, amputates your hand and serves it back to you, curried, further down the line.

I sat there, brooding brilliantly, for two hours. My mood was, I believe, acrid, as if I had inhaled the ash of my cigarillo. I snorted ash when a group of ardent brothers through blood or sect mounted the platform and found Jesus again. They sang and vowed. The microphones carried their message right across the park to the bus-station where a small male child was making surreptitious water against a low-placed pictorial ad. Then, blessed interval, a vacuous young animal in a Hawaii-type shirt began to prepare a small red car for take-off, and the engine-noise, as of a constipated elephant blurting *seriatim* into a sol-fa series of metal trash-cans, shattered the evening, and I merely saw: on the platform, nylon short-sleeved shirts and wide bow-ties; a few brass wind instruments funnel down and one bald-headed man declaiming. It was such a mime as you expect only a cigarette's time before the end of the world, and the self-damned are queuing up to change their cosmic policies. Then the red car shot off, sputtering and choking, and I heard the roll of faith's artillery again. The quintet were singing now, without instruments, their only competition being the correct toots of the pigeons, the thumping wheezes of departing buses and the sussurus of heels as people hurried home to that underwater TV program. "Jesus will be good to thee; For he was goo-ood to me!" I appreciated the good news, wondering if, on this evening, He would stop that waitress from sweeping the sweat from her left arm with her right. This is what she always does as I drink my chowder where I always eat, I having insufficient interest or initiative to change my dining habits. Each night her sweat-sweep speckles my person and soup with faint brilliants, and by now I am getting accustomed to both the tepid shower and the tiny extra flavor. So, just to see what would happen, I sang sharply on that occasion, canting my head so far back that I heard a slight click from my neck: "He was goo - ood to - o -o me-e!" All the people around me were suddenly nodding and confiding to one another, and I had to nod back at them.

I walked past the quay, pausing only to expectorate at a squirrel (minus its tail it's a rat), and then sat on the sea-wall scowling at the stupid water. By my side, oh joy, I rested my small brownpaper bag of goodies: one half-bottle of cheap champagne; one nasal spray; a phial of eye drops ("instant cleansing relief") and a package of cigarettes ("Don't look for premiums or coupons as the cost of the tobaccos blended in these cigarettes prohibits the use of them"). I always refuse coupons and green stamps if I can. I noted the misuse of *prohibit*. Oh yes, I had a small ten-cent French pastry too, containing, besides ordinary ingredients, mono-diglycerides,

algin leavening, lecithin and sodium propionate, the last "used as a preservative" (where and on whom, I wondered). I stopped grumbling to myself. My friend had been neatly buried. His piles would trouble him no more; and, surely, with sodium whateveritwas to preserve *me*, and in the absence of coupons or premiums, I could gain an instant cleansing relief when my time came. Sir, the clean deceased is in now. Thanks to mono-diglycerides we have the mono-human.

I unpacked the nasal spray and squirted the filth deep into my head cavity. It was bliss, and I knew then that Jesus *would* be good to me if, quietly and without fuss, in front of the ochre-walled hotel whose bell-tower's icing resisted the wild sun, I slid my purchases into the dark water as emissaries and temperature-takers, floated my Matador paper-bag after them, and then slipped in myself, following the Taylor Champagne's hollow bottom with my own hollow bottom and my two-dollar short-sleeved shirt. But not tonight.

As I walked on to deposit my goodies and change my socks before going out to eat, I sniffed the evening air deeply in and knew, just as deeply, that someone *would* be good to me. Doing my best not to seem pigeon-toed among the pigeons, I sang out of sheer exuberance a modern lyric of my own devising. It went like this:

> He will be good to me, in all my sin.
> Oh, *who* will?
> Sodium propionate, and thrill-
> ing lecithin!
> They will be good to me,
> I *know* they will;
> But none so good as these
> Di-gly-cér-ides!

I intoned the last line with a rattle of post-nasal drip which accidentally erupted into an almost operatic viscous fortissimo. A few young men, lolling over the sides of stationary convertibles as if they had been at sea without water for weeks, seemed to stare. I gave them my ferret-smile in which I bare both floors of teeth and then try to point them outwards while squinting my eyes. They winced and turned away.

When I reached my efficiency apartment I popped my diglycerides etc. into the miniature refrigerator which promptly purred into life as if overjoyed at having something to cool. Just like the clay over where Harry White was buried. I decided to stay in town a little longer, just to give the lecithin, the sea, the funeral homes and whatever else a fair opportunity.

The days passed. The sun in its tedious way did its usual thing. I strolled the streets and watched the human flow; but there was more life in the birds and automobiles. I knew by now that something was growing upon me: not the city or the climate, but something foolish. There were some birds I am tempted to call bluebirds, which they were not. Their tails spread into a minor fan just as glossy and brocaded, in light blue on royal blue, as the most elaborate male vests. I thought up rich fantasies about riverboat gamblers and city bankers. Even the palm trees looked human: their trunks were single bandaged legs, swelling slightly where the bulk of the bandage came and slightly concave where the edge of one bandage met the edge of the next. It was as if the trunks were varicose and bound in elastic. Other trees, with their upper branches and all their foliage sawn off, looked like many-fingered agonizing hands planted to the wrist in rich Florida earth. Other trees still had irrelevant plumes or ferns sprouting from their tops as if a passing child, for a prank, had planted a few fairground feathers in the soft centre of the trunk.

Such were the humanities I made of the unhuman scene. I had to, confronted almost everywhere during my walks with appalling, discreet store-windows recommending burial above ground at less than the cost of interment, and extolling the secular and metaphysical dignity of above-ground chambers in spacious halls designed to last. The roof alone, I read, called for 25 tons of steel and 150 tons of concrete. Not only that: there was sufficient area to ensure permanence, which was a relief of sorts. I explored the throbbing streets, thought of Harry White in his trench, and allowed my mind to play on the formulas I had absorbed: "The grave is no divider; it is the key to a new beginning". The grave was a protractor, then. I thought of lovely golden maggots and twenty-one-year-old worms, the latter unrolling their body-saddles in Harry White's mouth. "We have a variety of space to accommodate any desire", I read; as if a baseball ground's acres of humus (or of prestressed mausoleum concrete) could rehabilitate the defunct hedonist. I dreamed of ardent widowers leaping to their ardent widows just because there was enough space to play in, and of TV cables or antennas being let into coffins just because there was enough sky above enough land.

Then I checked myself. They intended nothing like that at all, but some concept consonant with the air-conditioned chamber and the superiority over bronze, wood, stone and marble of prestressed concrete casks, proof against many röntgens. I could see a point, but began to miss it again when I reached belfry music, urn gardens,

free pick-up, niches "clean, dry, ventilated" (as if the niche were an aperture in the slimy body), and budget or de luxe burials After thought, I resolved on a Pet Burial, not a human one. It was better all round. The earth would be mounded to insure dry graves, I was told, and there would be a casket display during the belfry music. So I filled out the coupon on the Best Friend's Folder and entered myself as an old bitch gone in the teeth, predominantly mastiff but some wolverine (an accident while picnicking), so please could I have two caskets and could the carcass be cut exactly in half, the forelegs in the concrete and the rear in the ivory. Each to be three feet in length with a slot for mail and a TV antenna disguised as a congeries of hyacinths.

I received an answer assuring me that my somewhat unusual request had, here, found a sympathetic ear and that predilections or forebodings bizarre to the busy, workaday world would find maximum co-operation when the day came. Death was no divider.... In short, I could rely on BF Happy Hunting Grounds: Weekdays, would I please note, were 8 to 5:30; Sundays by appointment. I thought of Harry White in the clay, in the budget trench, and of the lyre-bird buried with him. I have sold some stock to have them moved above ground: they too merit the de luxe; and the breathing bird will sing to me all the more sweetly while I am waiting.

MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPH OF AN ALASKAN BROWN BEAR SKIN

MARGARET NORDFORS

It hangs head down on a cabin
as though I remember it,
soars motionless-
ly, a flying squirrel with

a muzzle on a board.
I cringe from long claws,
but know the stretched
fur is deep and soft.

A woman I remember
wanted an apology
from me. To be fair,
my letter should be hanging

from her house, grandly,
for pride as shaken out,
lumbering toward
her, as shot with an '06.

I'm asking which one conquers,
the hunter who needs the trophy
or the split bear
which looms and is remaining?

Two Poems by Ralph Gustafson

ASPECTS OF SOME FORSYTHIA BRANCHES

Waiting for these dry sticks in a vase —
Cut (with deliberate shears taken
From the third drawer down on the left) from the bush
In the snow — complicated with leaf
And yellow in the earth elaborated, even
In the wintering sun; as the spiral of a protein
Divides and duplicates the thrust
Of love, the hereditary nose of Caesar,
Alexander's brow and Jennie's
Mole; the aggregation of a galaxy:
So the April science of a bunch
Of sticks cut for an etched glass vase —
Waiting for these to flower in a March
Room — waiting for all this business —
As an act of love, a science of gravel,
A suffering, is this not done
With reliance? One way, dry sticks
Lead to buds, presumably wanted,
To yellow eventually. What common aspects
Can be got. We handle love
For small purposes. Yet they serve.
Shrubs are cut for what is believed in.
Somewhere death's in it. Dignity
Is demanded even for the dead.
So we cut branches two
Days ago. Take great precautions.
Go carefully through a door. Stand
Among deathbeds as though among heroes,
Pausing in winter along windy corridors
With the knowledge ahead of us, to wrap our throats.

CRISTOBAL COLÓN REACHES JUANA

— Letter of Guacanagari the Native to his Nephew, 1562

We fled from the sight inland and that night
We put our seed into the wombs of our women
So that we would live. The great curves
Of the shining cloth were white, and rose
Dry out of the horizons of the sea. My thought
Is: the winds of the sun are many, they
Were between us. The hulls were cities
Many huts high with colours and blinding metal
Between, the heights not coming though they rode
The swell that crashed to us. Three canoes
Such as we could not imagine. We waited, the grass
Not moving though the parrots screamed in the silence
And fell silent at the three thunders. The women
Were beyond the huts. We commanded
The thunder in our ears. My armpits
Wet and I could smell fear. I watched
And the size of the sails in my mind
Became less: man's waste marked the hulls.
The sun shone. They came at noon. I thought of Naa
And her soft breasts. My length was nothing
And tight against me. The shark cut
The shadow and was not afraid. When they came
It was amidst blades lifted on the sea. We moved
Back. The birds rose and were without purpose.
I saw that the gods were encased and whether they had
Hair all over, I do not know. I was sorry to give up
The standard painted with many colours though it was stained
By spume and many hands had not cared for it.

I write as it was. These men are not gods.

Jesus be with you.

AT A HUMANITIES CONFERENCE

WILLIAM STAFFORD

To the man at the door I thought my friend
who looked over my shoulder and handed me back my hand,
I said: "Wisdom we learn is only about the world,
and the world should have been different."
He didn't care.

"Someday," I said, "mountains in Idaho will hear through granite
'This is just God calling — you are to move'; instant
requirements like this that mountains feel occur to us
at odd moments like this, and we feel everything."
He looked away.

"And now that we read so well," I pursued, "the book falls through
the desk; the floor deepens; reduplicated ways run back and forth
and require that we read all the quiet night in order to rest.
And not only books we read — but everything."
He listened, bored.

"My part," I said, "like little canaries taught by the sun, is to move
on an errand so various it can be entrusted to anyone,
twisting at particular buds, abandoning a difficult pose
faster than gravity pulls or gunners pretend —
so — so long, Friend."

But I still think about him. Though some of us try
to be the kind of detective who explores a crime forward
and lets the judgment learn from the punishment,
there are these unreadable events all writhed with emergency
that get us involved.

And there might even be times not to hand back a hand,
but of course this wasn't one.

I ONCE HAD A DOG

RAY OSTERGARD

I once had a dog
Who thought the Earth was a trampoline,
For his four long legs
Criss-crossed distance
In happy stilt-strides,
While his tail, chasing itself in circles,
Dashed ahead of History.

While he slept
He would bound about in his head
So hard it would
Make his nose twitch
And his ears would come up
As if to hear the noise his tail was making
As it whumped and whanged on the ground.

If he ever did stop
It was to sniff and register
Incomplete information on
Things he hadn't seen
Until, at some future date,
His faith rewarded,
He met his sniff nose to nose
And ran.

A car
Who thought the Earth was a flat bowling lane
For its four squat wheels
Clipped off mileage
In twisting torque-turns,
While its tail snapped and snarled at its own heels,
Killed him.

Two Poems by Marilyn Thompson

ANTHROPOLOGY FILM

We were prepared for an ungainly death.
A giraffe, we thought, is stupid and too tall
and the meat is probably tough. So her dance
of astonishment struck us like the arrow
going backward. Rearing like a stiff ship,
she left the men small, standing on anthills,
and ran out her life in verdant kilometers,
thinking pain was distance.

They
tracked her four days. Great were their small needs.
Tall in flat country, she watched them approach.
Again we anticipated ceremony with drums,
a medicine man, fires and beaded wives.
But with their crude spears through her throat
she stood and bled gracefully. Human,

they knew not what to do. Their lives
depended on the magnitude of her death.
She died and stood and they only learned
death when she fell all at once, her own act.
The fruit of her meat muted their starved knives.
She bled us all to a respectful distance.

EVERY SINGLE THING WE DO IS OURS

One of us drops a word at the other and
breaks heaven. The ceiling falls.
Spun from our wheel, bowls, pitchers, tureens
earthquake into our chosen smithereens.

A pipe bursts. A chair topples. Windows
wave calculated curtains from measurable wounds.
A magazine we read without a word
flops across the floor like a hurt bird.

We stand like bombed sculpture, your shirt
cracked, my gown split at its stone seams.
A chip of hair tumbles from your fashioned head.
Each judges the other quickly dead.

The world we make, the world we break, is ours.
Settling into the parts from which we composed,
our wares chorus the universal news:
disaster is any accident we choose.

Our orders too can come crashing down.
Pillars, it seems, are not what they seem.
Water fountains through the splintered floor.
Aftermath's the banging of a door.

CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD EMIL BRAUN, an American poet now living in Edmonton, has appeared in *Accent*, *Antioch*, *Contact* and elsewhere. His *Children Passing*, University of Texas, 1962, is currently being reprinted.

G. V. DOWNES, Victoria, is the author of *Lost Diver*, Toronto, Ryerson. She is also an active scholar and translator of French poetry.

ELDON GRIER, poet and traveler, presently living in Montreal, has published several books, including *The Ring of Ice*, Montreal, 1957.

RALPH GUSTAFSON now lives in N. Hatley, Que. His dozen or more books include three Penguin anthologies and a group of short stories. His "Forsythia" poem in this issue was a prize winner in the Cheltenham Arts Festival's (Guiness) Poetry Competition this year.

JOHN KEYES, a graduate student at the University of Toronto, was formerly in the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His story in this number is his first published work.

SEYMOUR MAYNE, McGill University undergraduate, recently published his first book of poems, *That Monocycle the Moon*. He is editor of *Catapult*, a new poetry magazine.

JOHN METCALF, the English writer now living in Quebec, concludes in this issue the series of stories begun in our July number.

MARGARET NORDFORS, Alaskan by birth, resident of Seattle, was a pupil of Roethke. She has appeared in *Poetry*, *Nation*, *Literary Review*, etc.

RAY OSTERGARD, San Francisco, is a professional lifeguard and adventurer who has written radio and TV plays for C.B.C. His first novel, *The Vernal Equinox*, won the Canadian National Book Club award this year, and a second novel is ready for publication.

A. W. PURDY, one of the most productive and individual poets writing in Canada today, lives in Ameliasburg, Que. He was awarded the President's Medal for the best Canadian poem of 1963. His new book of poems, *The Cariboo Horses*, is on the 1965 spring list of McClelland & Stewart, Toronto. He is presently working on prose fiction and making wild grape wine.

RALPH SALISBURY, recently appointed editor of *Northwest Review* at the University of Oregon, has published poems in numerous American journals, including the *New Yorker*.

WILLIAM STAFFORD, outstanding American poet, won the Shelley Award for his *Traveling through the Dark*, Harper & Row, 1962. The same firm now has a new collection of his poems. He lives in Lake Oswego, Ore.

MARILYN THOMPSON, a young poet and fiction writer, lives in Eugene, Ore.

PAUL WEST, presently at Pennsylvania State University, is an English writer of poetry, fiction and criticism. His second novel will appear shortly and a third is in the writing, as well as critical works on Shakespeare, Dylan Thomas, and Penn Warren.

Guest artists for this issue were CHARLES MAYRS and BEN LIM. Born in China, Ben Lim is a Vancouver art director, designer and illustrator.

BOOKS RECEIVED

WAGNER, LINDA WELSHIMER: *The Poems of William Carlos Williams*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1964; pp. 169; $6.50.

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