CORADDI

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

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The Greenville Incident

Richard Cumbie

The maitre d' seated me at a table next to a middle-aged couple of wealthy appearance. As I waited for my drink, the woman smiled at me precariously. This continued until her husband became aware of my presence. Then, pretending to ignore me, she began conversing in her caliber.

"How was your golf game, Dear?"

"It was O.K. We went to the club afterwards and had lunch."

"Yes, I know. I took the kids swimming. As I was leaving, I saw you in the Tap Room. Who was the little old man you and Bill were eating with?"

"A retired philosophy professor – named Zabel or something. He started talking about creation. God – I thought he'd never get off it."

"What about it?"

"I don't know! Something about humans never get satisifed, because their minds can imagine more than they can really do."

"Well, that only means you have an imagination."

"I know! But to Mr. Zabel it means you never get satisfied. He says there's only one chance at fullfillment, by dying."

"Then why doesn't he go out and kill himself?"

"He says that's why a lot of people do. As soon as they realize they'll never get satisfied, they

decide to kill themselves."

"But you still didn't answer my question. Why doesn't he kill himself?"

"He's a philosopher! They don't really believe that crap, it's their job to sit around and think about it."

While walking to class one morning, a three-legged dog hobbled past. It paused ten feet in front of me, glanced back and continued toward campus. It seemed unnatural at first, because our community was packed with dogs. All kinds. Most roamed loose; gathering in groups and using the entire town for their playground. But I had never noticed this or any three-legged dog before.

Soon, the thought faded. After class, I gathered with friends in the soda shop for lunch. Having the afternoon free, I decide to purchase a bottle of wine on my way home and spend the evening listening to music. With the end of the week approaching, and no afternoon classes, Thursdays became a prelude to my weekends.

My friends accompanied me as far as the package store. As we walked along the sidewalk on Main Street, a different three-legged dog past us. I barely refrained from speaking, but my companions observed the dog and ignored it as if three-legged dogs were common.

After selecting a rose next to the most inexpensive, I started home. My self-consideration avoids the very cheapest wine because of the amount of brain cells each bottle kills. I was still slightly puzzled by my encounters with the two three-legged dogs. While walking home, I began looking for other freak dogs, sometimes walking out of my way to check for a missing leg. As I neared my apartment, an approaching dog drew my attention. He looked normal, but as he past, I discovered his left rear leg was missing. Instantly, all the blood seemed to drain to my feet. When I recovered from the rush, I turned and began coaxing the dog. He quickly responded to my call. I inspected him but found no tags. It occured to me that all three dogs were missing the same leg. All that remained was a nub, extending four inches below the thing's taper of a dog that appeared to be mostly shepherd. New hair partially covered the soft flesh that overgrown the bone. Also, it seemed odd that none of these dogs were seen with other dogs. I decided to take him home. At the conclusion of the weekend he ran away, and I never saw him or any of the three-legged dogs again.

An unusual incident occured along the highway as I drove to Greenville, Alabama to settle some business. My business in Greenville was simple. In order to pay back a debt I owed the town, I decided to destroy the police station. Because of time spent in this small town jail, I knew when the building could be blown up with no casualities resulting from the explosion.

Greenville was a racially stricken town. From gas stations to food stores, including the police, the blacks suffered complete white control.

Five years earlier, the Greenville police jailed me for hitchhiking, but the situation was overbearing. I jumped from a pick up truck returning to the expressway. The driver was drunk and threatened to kill me with a pistol that he waved whenever his anger was aroused. He was middled-aged and ignorant, and repeated like a bigot parrot his disgust at observing a black man and a white girl holding hands in New Orleans I thought I could explain how differently others live, and I had the ridiculous notion that my efforts would erase forty years of his racist beliefs. Finally, I jumped from the truck, and as I ran, he began shooting from the vehicle as it moved down the ramp. I reached a gas station safely and called the police, but they disbelieved my story and arrested me for hitch hiking. Saturday, three days later, at midnight, the police released me, pointing in the direction of the bus station.

The combination bus depot, restaurant, and gas station closed early on Saturday nights, but the bus to Atlanta was due to arrive in an hour. Soon, the word spreak that the hitchhiker arrested three days earlier had been released and was temporarily stranded at the bus depot. Slowly, the parking lot in front of the restaurant filled: blacks parking on one side and whites on the other.

First, a white man sitting alone motioned me to his car. As I advanced reluctantly, I noticed a double barrel shot gun in his back seat. He informed me that I had his support if the blacks created any trouble. Being young and not immune to violence, the thought of a small racial war breaking out made me to freeze up inside. Others followed. Both black and white men individually approached me, assuring their services were at my disposal.

After five years, I felt safe in attempting my mission. I noticed, after crossing the Alabama state line on the trip down that a freshly car-slaughtered animal appeared every mile. Identifying them from my automobile was impossible, but each appeared different. After fifteen miles, I decided to stop and inspect one of the dead creatures. Instead of animals, I discovered a human had been cut in pieces and distributed along the expressway in darkness.

While reading the newspaper one morning, I found an article concerning a man in Colorado trying to commit suicide. In the past year, his suicidal efforts numbered three and on each occassion, he failed miserably. He bought airplanes and educated himself with flying techniques to the point where he could life the plane from the runway enough to crash into a forest beyond the airstrip.

Curiousity forced me to quit work in search of this man who lived in the mountains. After entering the small town, inquiries led me to the bar he frequented. My advance was cautious but

casual, and soon, we became friends. Within a few days, he talked confidently to me. He was broke and in despair because of his previous attempts. I had never met a person who was as honorable as my new friend, and I was certain that more than anything else, he wished to die in a respectably contrived but spectacular situation. Never did he volunteer information about events leading to his decision to kill himself, but still I admired his decision, and the thought of diverting his efforts never occurred to me. Killing himself was the reason he lived.

The following Friday night, he asked me to gather with his friends at his house for dinner. At the conclusion of the meal, he rose from the table, and like a noble dignitary, announced his next attempt at suicide would occur on Sunday afternoon at two o'clock.

His friends were honorable friends and respected his dedication by attending all of the attempts. He instructed us to gather along the side of a large ski jump at a resort near Aspen.

Saturday night I waited in the bar for my friend to arrive. Later in the evening, I realized he would not appear until tomorrow afternoon and for the first time since I had met him, I felt uncomfortable. It was as if I had something to say to him but didn't know what it was.

On Sunday afternoon, we met at the designated location and waited for his appearance. From a distance we heard someone call, and everyone traced the sound to the top of the jump where our friend was crouched on the skiers rest. He waved and silence filled his gallery. Releasing from the rest, he downed the slide in a cannonball position, disappeared into the dip, and then suddenly reappeared thrusting from the edge of the slide in perfect form. As he begun to tumble, everyone broke into cheers and claps. It was certain our friend would not break his neck.

An hour seemed to pass as he descended, flipping in orthodox but unmeditated form. As he neared the ground, his feet unfolded, and he landed safely, gliding to the bottom in despair.

VILLANELLE

Gregory Jerozal

I thought that I could wear you like a feather
– though you were solid pressure, heavy as landscape –
The simple conclusion of being together.

And we could all our joy in order gather,
Table all the fables, feasting on the grape.
I thought that I could wear you like a feather.

All our talks were charming, even idle patter,
I really never thought of wanting to escape
The simple conclusion of being together.

Yes, all that other talk was just another matter;
And I was very pleased with nipple, thigh, and nape.
I thought that I could wear you like a feather.

Now we break our lines up, now we sputter;
Now the faintest touchings's tantamount to rape;
The simple conclusion of being together.

And holding the end of a string, I'd rather
Not know where or when the bough breaks;
I thought that I could wear you like a feather
The simple conclusion of being together.

TO THE BUG ON THE CEILING
(a poem for children)

Terry B. Taylor

How strange it must be
to view the world
ceiling-side down;
floor-side up.
It must be one
of the strangest feelings
to see me laying in bed
and looking down on you.
But I'm not.
It just depends
on your point of view.

UPON SEEING CHRISTINA WYETH'S "CHRISTINA'S WORLD"

Terry B. Taylor

I have often wondered
why you lift your eyes,
perhaps stained with tears,
to simplicity.
    Life is so complex
    and rarely understood,
but weathered, beaten, timeless
stands simplicity.
You sit clothed in simple pastel
on the dark hill of life,
crippled by life and its complexities,
gazing at the answer:
    simplicity

WHITE CATS

Terry B. Taylor

I thought that spring
had missed a mound of snow
on my grandmother's wash-rock.
At the first of July,
I was being led to believe
that the fragile winter snow
could survive the summer's passionate heat.
But a patch of mottled, rock-gray
in the white mound caught me
halfway through my puzzlement.
And then it scattered
as if my questioning had melted it:
forced it to run.

TO A FISH

Terry B. Taylor

unblinking aquaeous stare
(a marble implanted in scale)
moving sinew propulsion
weaving the water with ripples.

FOOTBALL INJURY

Ralph Gerald Nelms

It is that crisp, lusty time of year,
the season when naked bones creak,
limbs ache, and trunks sway back out of shape.
We sat through the sultry sabbaths in leather chairs,
our energy bilged with surging flesh.
Now, clad in leather coats, we rattle from
cold wooden benches. The fresh leather air mixed with
the perfume of molted skins burning in a funeral prye,
has filled our bellies and nulled our minds.
We surrender joyfully our Athenian comforts
for the Spartan way of life; we jog.
We resurrect the skeletons of old giants,
as we begin to resurrect ourselves,
nourished with the odor of the dead. We become
insects to these gods; our unraked skins
carpet the earth; they are piled onto sidewalks.
Unwary children scatter the ashes of burial mounds.

We try on our new coats, our fur-lined jackets,
our chitinous armor, we shed our fat larvae.

It is that crisp, sensitive season
when our eyes are opened to the cold,
when the sheath is torn off and our bones
are bare and cold as marble stones.
Our torn flesh scabs and stings in the smoke and wind.
The sun is too clear. We are blinded like wakers
at the first dawn. We stumble in the light of the world
as if it were the darkest of nights, and
every stone were thrown before our feet to trip us.
The last droplets of summer rains glimmer like rare pearls
in the sunlight, and are absorbed by the earth.
Our knees dig caverns in the mud. The skies cloud and
clear to tease us. The molten earth cools and hardens
into yards and yards of cut greenery and gravel.
On overcast days through falling leaves and smokey haze,
passed pagan ruins of wood, in colorless, sparkling rains,
we see tomorrow play by play against the screen of drizzle
and vapor of the past; we are told of prophetic pains.
We smell the odor of the dead, not the scent of ointment.
Yet, we, needle-skined, punctured with new giant energy,
forget it. The cold rains dampen the old Spirits.
The pains pierce with lion's claws the shoulder.
Old Memory in glasses and sweatshirt tugs at an elbow,
the gnarled, misshapened old Teacher, the experience.
His suit hangs like ice on a leaf-bare skeleton.
He trembles and coughs and lights a wooden pipe.
Overhead, all the birds have taken to frantic flight,
to wing their non-stop ways to brighter times, in the leather air.

It was that sportive time of year,
playing football across three leaf-strewn lawns
to exaggerate a hundred yards out of thirty,
linked together with neighborly understandings.
One boundary is the street, the other the shrubs;
and no passing in the Lazurus' yard —
they get nervous about their picture window,
especially during this crisp, sensitive season.
Mr. Lazurus worries about the cold wind and rain.
It activates an old football injury from childhood.

I was young, maybe seven, perhaps eight,
when I caught my first real game pass:
the strained hand, too small to grip well,
the reddened taught, rough knuckles, the tussled hair,
eyes closed, the tense, tight body, writhing
like a whip under the terrible tackle,
let fly the leather bird, the pidgeon,
the poker chip tossed onto the pile of bets,
our possession, with its foreboding message,
a giant's signature inscribed on its belly,
shadowed by a sleepy sky.
My feet seemed to move on cushions of air. My sleepy body
felt no pain as finger-tips stretched for sublimity.
The dream-like sunshine fell like a spotlight
through the autumn trees on me, like a halo of glory,
a nightmarish glory I will never reach.
I was asleep and this was just a dream during an illness.
The sweat of a fever cooled the body to stone. Suddenly,
all was real once again. The touch of leather was real.
The mixing of sweaty body oils was inevitable,

the odor of Death unmistakable and sickening.
The leather knot was loosened from my gut. Glory
dribbled out of my hands into another's. I was caught
too late to spare the Fates their prophecy.
A hand fisting wasted paper, I crumbled underneath.

My short, stunted life passed as quickly as the football.
While I and my burden slammed against hard ground,
the grandeur and splendor of the light left me
in the shadow of a cave and the lawn.
I lay stunned a moment, half in my grave,
with the insects on the edge of the grass,
with the pearls absorbed into the earth.
My arm was twisted, upward reaching:
a spring twig that would not be severed from its trunk.
There was no air, nor any lungs to hold it in.
For an eternity, I was more dead than alive.
I gave up the ghost of myself for football.
The shadow of Death fell over my crumpled pile,
and, like a chigger, took home in my hair and bones.
He spoke to me then as he speaks to me now —
with the aspen voice of crouched Old Memory
and the incessant tug at the elbows and knees:
It is that crisp, lust time of year,
the season when naked bones creak,
limbs ache and trunks sway back out of shape . . .

MAMA'S LOVE

Ralph Gerald Nelms

We left spring lillies on your grave,
and Mousey squeaked a dirge.
If Mama knew we'd planted you,
she'd kill us, that's for sure.

We brought back shells for your marker,
and Kitty purred goodbye.
If Mama thought what we'd been taught,
she'd whip us 'til we died.

We raked the leaves off your small shrine,
and Doggy barked his lament.
If Mama guessed how you were blessed,
she'd strap us to the fence.

We swept the snow from off your mound;
Night snarled without regret
that Mama unearthed your lonely berth,
and laughed that we should fret.

Saucer Watching

Ralph Gerald Nelms

We never saw any,
but that doesn't mean
there weren't any there.
(It wasn't our fault
we didn't see them,
merely a foible
that God gave our eyes
to cats and left them dumb.
Cats know, but they can't say,
nor would they even if
they could; you know cats.)
We enjoyed it, no matter,
lying on roofs at night
with the quiet breeze
whispering sweet nothings
in the hot passion of summer,
with the stars gazing down
on us, winking as if we knew
the secret we wish we knew.
And occassionally, one of us
would think we saw what

all of us wanted to see,
and point out a course
that could have been light years
off. We had no concept
of void as vast as worlds apart.
And I remember the mistaken
lightening bugs and artful headlights
and eyes of cats on other rooftops
dodging our fingers and
teasing our eyes. And,
as we lay there, high above
the telephones and t.v.'s,
there with the wires, antennae,
and the cats, we might hear
the iambic call to one of us
to hurry home to bed.
A husband might rattle a paper,
a television might roar like real life,
or a car might squeal like a cat,
or a cat squeal like a car, or
a dog might get it into his head
the moon was too near his territory
and begin to howl it away.
We felt eternal as the sun,
as powerless as watchers of the skies.

That summer we lived for
a kind of science fiction.
We lay there for hours under
the traffic of the universe
above the constellations of streetlights.

On these mid-summer nights,
we had to wonder if stars
had bats, too, that circled them,
and what life lived there.
We theorized it was cats,
because space is so dark
only cats could see.
We suspected the alley life
of being spies, so curious
of ignorant earthlings,
so disdainful of us,
and so egocentric.
We feared the rub of fur.

But men are more curious than cats,
watching the skies for less than
nonsense, and yet, a little more
than myth, piling up mirages
parched for a secret, while lain
wasted on a desert of suspicion,
hungry for something, no matter how
nocuous, of importance,the worms
of fame to feed on the inner flesh,
to cause the unsatisfiable appetite.

We got thirsty; we drank illegal beer,
and imagined the unimaginable,
lost our sense of touch, got so hot
that even the breeze couldn't cool us,
and fell off the roof into the wet lawn

The Salesman

John Blackard

"Son, you got any notions about Mr. T?"

Bill, the younger of the two men, said that he did not. The older man, Mr. Randall, said, "Well, I guess after a couple of weeks you will."

The two men were driving back through the dark. They had been to see a client in the southern part of the state earlier in the afternoon. As soon as he had introduced Bill to all his old clients, he was to take over Mr. Randall's territory. He was to take a desk in the district office for Thomas Nightwear.

"You've heard about Mr. T's three sets of books, haven't you, Bill?"

Keeping his eyes on the road and not glancing at Mr. Randall, Bill answered, "No I haven't."

"I don't reckon you'd even been hired yet, but you know Benny Lawson, the district sales director, don't you? Mr. Randall asked, narrowing his eyes in the darkness of the car. "Well, even he believes Mr. Thomas does some funny things with the company books. Benny said to me, 'You know Charlie, Mr. T's got all his employees following an ear of corn like dumb old mules,' and I said to him, 'You're right Benny! Look here. I've been working as a route salesman for over twenty years and Benny, you've been here a lot longer than that. He promised me a promotion and raise, and I expect he promised you one too, just as soon as business picked up: now isn't that something?' I asked him and he said, 'Yeah Charlie, that's something alright.'"

After pausing for just a moment, Mr. Randall asked Bill, "We ought to be back in Williamston in a couple of three hours, shouldn't we?"

"Yes, a little over three hours, sir."

"I don't know what it is," Mr. Randall began, "but it does me unimaginable good to see that sign at the city limits saying 'Williamston: Welcome To Our Fair City.' Even if I've been just a little piece

down the road I feel better when I see it. You know what I mean? But you're new to the town, aren't you; from up north somewheres?"

Bill nodded. He said that he was new to Williamston, as new as he was to Thomas Nightwear, and that he had been raised up north. In Pittsburg.

"My father was born in Williamston," Mr. Randall said. "My mother too, but on the other side of town. You know Father was a fierce business man. He believed that the competitive spirit of free enterprise was – and should rightly so be – the backbone of our American democracy. He'd say, 'A man is as honest and fair as his business!' The only thing Father knew how to do was sell cars. That's what he did all his life. He used to cuss those men that gave his profession a bad name. I wonder if Father could've dealt with Mr. T and his connivings. What you think?"

"I don't really know sir," Bill said. Traffic was building up a little now.

"Well, I'd be willing to bet he would. Maybe if I didn't have so much of my Mama's blood in me, I could've learned more from him."

Mr. Randall folded his hands in his lap. He raised his head with the look of his eyes hidden within the shadow and overhang of his forehead, which rolled forward on his skull and then back again to various points of a receding hairline. His thin brown hair was combed straight back. It waved a little about his temples. A neck that was like leather, sunk easily inside a white shirt. He was in his late fifties.

"I wasn't quite twelve years old when he got right down to what he's been priming me for all along. It all centered around the competitive spirit. I already told you about his saying it was the backbone of democracy, didn't I? Well, no matter. One afternoon he came home from work with six new cutting blades for our old push mower. The next afternoon I was up and down Goldstone Road dragging that mower behind me, asking people if they would let me mow their grass. The next morning after that Father loaded up the mower in the trunk of his car and took me to one of those housing developments a few miles closer into town. He'd written down a sales pitch for me to recite each time I went to a person's door.

"Well, later that afternoon, he came back to get me. I was sitting on the curb waiting for him. When I told him I couldn't remember my sales pitch and how I ran quickly away, he said to me, 'How do you ever expect to get ahead acting that a way boy!"

Bill put on the brakes of the car and stopped for a traffic light. They were passing through some little mill town that had only one stoplight. It was red for them.

"Well, there were other products and other approaches that my father taught me. But he gave up with great finality the summer of my thirteenth year."

Bill asked Mr. Randall why his father gave up on him. He answered that he guessed his father just realized he had too much of his mother's blood in him like he said before. Mr. Randall said that all of his mother's people had always been craftsmen and farmers.

Shifting his weight in the car seat, Mr. Randall went on. "A couple of years ago I went back out to the old homeplace. I found that old Highway 86 had been changed into two lanes each way. Goldstone Avenue had streetlights. They got city sewage and water lines out there too. Only a few of the old story frame houses still standing though. Guess with all those new improvementsthe realtors tore most of them down. They'd been replaced with little brick houses, you know?"

"Tow of those squat little things occupied the space that used to be an open field. It was between my family's house and a Mrs. Cecil's house. I spent as much time as I was allowed lying in that field with the golden rod, big clumps of rabbit tobacco and all. I watched Mrs. Cecil's son move back and forth behind the row of pine trees, working. When I think about it now, those pines seemed to shelter him and his mother from the rest of our neighborhood."

"You know son, no one ever went to see Mrs. Cecil or her son. They only went to get food or supplies at the store three miles down the road . . ."

Mr. Randall paused. Looking at Bill with more determination in his face than he had ever seen at the office in town, he said, "But the summer I was thirteen I went to see Mrs. Cecil. I even went inside her house. That was the same summer my father gave up on my being the kind of saleman he wanted me to be. Father said I didn't have the competitive spirit. But at the time I visited Mrs. Cecil, Father hadn't reached this conclusion and I was still trying."

There came a lax of tension in his voice and Bill listened closer.

"The first time I ever sent into Mrs. Cecil's yard was the time I was selling cards-for-every-occasion. I had been in the woods behind her house many times, though. I discovered a stone fountain that I believed her son built. It was built over a spring. The water flowed inot a cement pool and down its stone side into a small creek. Even though we had never spoken to each other, Mrs. Cecil's son made me feel welcome just from having watched him. Bill, have you ever had that feeling about somebody you never even talked with — that they would just make you feel right at home with them?"

"I think maybe I have," Bill said.

Mr. Randall said, "Really? That's something! That's something that you should know the kind I mean. As best I can remember this person, Mrs. Cecil's son, stayed just a little over five feet tall the whole time we lived next door. When I walked up the drive to the house with my sample book that hot summer day, he had his shirt off. The hair on his arms and chest was thick and curly but his face was as young undeveloped as I'm sure my own face must have been. He had almost no chin and a small pug nose." Mr. Randall placed a thumb on his nose, flattening it. "Like this, see?"

Bill smiled and nodded approvingly. Mr. Randall chuckled quietly at his own sudden playfulness. Then he sighed and the playfulness disappeared.

"Mrs. Cecil and her son looked very much alike, and when opening the front door for me, she smiled like her son. 'Come in young Mr. Randall' she said. 'It is young Mr. Randall, isn't it? Ah yes!' I didn't even realize I had taken a step until Mrs. Cecil closed the door behind. She led me into her parlor to sit. It was then that I noticed just how much she and her son looked alike, and that there was a white dove nesting in her hair."

Her hair was brown and curly with the little plastic dove pinned to the fluff of the curls on the top of her head." Mr. Randall ran his fingers through his own hair. He made no pause for Bill to comment. "Her eyes were small and dark behind the pink frames of her eye glasses. They fit her nose snuggly."

Sliding her hands lightly up and down the sides of her flowered print dress, she said, 'Young Mr. Randall, you'd care for a co'cola while you tell me your business coming to my house. It must be business you wish to see me about. Mustn't it?

You may sit down dear.'

'Yes mam,' I said. Mrs. Cecil handed me a bottle of coca-cola. Lifting the card sample book I had brought with me from my lap, Mrs. Cecil took a seat. She sat in a straight back chair by a small table stacked with boxes. She was resting her own bottle of coca-cola on one knee and opening my sample book with her free hand.

There were two rugs on the polished wood floor. One was covering the space between the sofa I was sitting on the chair Mrs. Cecil was sitting on. The other was before a door leading to the back of the house. The fireplace looked a very clean black color. Next to the stove was a big brown earthenware jar with a peacock's feather in it. A floor lamp stood by Mrs. Cecil's chair but it was not turned on. I had taken all this in and again looked at the stacks of small wooden boxes on the table before she flipped to the second page of my book."

Without looking up, Mrs. Cecil said almost sining, 'Kittie, I hear you. Come in kittie. Don't be shy of young Mr. Randall now. Dear,' she asked, 'what is your first name?'

'It's Charlie, mam.'

'Oh. Kittie, don't be shy of Charlie now. He's a nice young man just here on business. Come into the parlor kittie.'

I hadn't heard anything at all in Mrs. Cecil's house. Except the creak of her chair when she sat down on it. Then through the doorway from the back of the house a little kitten came and crouched on the rug. But for one black paw, the kitten was all white and it crouched there, purring, watching its mistress."

'Like kittens, Charlie?'

'Yes mam.'

'You needn't say you like kittens if you really don't, Charlie. My feelings won't be hurt and as for kittie, I'm sure its feelings won't be hurt either.'

'I like kittens, honest I do.' Bending down, I patted the floor as a sign for the kitten to come be petted. It was still watching its mistress.

'Go say hello to Charlie, kittie.' Walking, the kitten came over just within my reach. I began brushing the fur on the back of its neck.

Mrs. Cecil, looking up for a moment, smiled. She said, 'At night before my son will go to bed, he plays with kittie. She that big brown jar over there? My son sticks kittie in that jar. Its head comes out so suddenly like a jack-in-the-box' she laughed, 'then my son says "Pop goes! Pop goes! Pop goes!"' She laughed and I laughed too. The kitten moved closer to my feet when I looked up at Mrs. Cecil. She was nodding her head and smiling to herself. The bottle of coca-cola that sat by her chair was still full.

"You know Bill, now I wonder if her son played his game with the kitten in the same slow deliberate manner he had when I watched him work in the yard." Mr. Randall let this repeat itself in the silence, isolated, before he began again.

"My father always told me that when trying to sell a customer on your product you must try relating it in some way with the customer himself. You must think of something that would cause him to identify with your product. That's pretty good advice even for the nightwear trade, don't you think Bill?"

"Sure. Sounds valid to me," Bill said.

"Well, I applied my father's rule here. I asked Mrs. Cecil, 'I have some all occasion cards with white doves on them; would you care for anything like that, Mrs. Cecil?' I figured if she liked doves enough to wear them in her hair, she would like doves on her greeting cards as well, wouldn't she? This is the question I though my father might ask himself if he was dealing with Mrs. Cecil instead of me."

'Oh my goodness yes! That would be a glorious thought,' she said. Hurriedly, she began thumbing through the book. Suddenly she stopped, and looking up from her lap right straight inot my eyes, she asked me, 'Ever been visited by a white dove, Charlie?'

The way she was looking at me I felt like I had the time Mama caught me looking at Father's girlie magazines. I wanted to confess, but I said no mam rather unconvincingly. I didn't know why I felt like I was fibbing. I knew full well that a white dove had never visited me.

"Mrs. Cecil told me about the time she was in the hospital with gall stones and feeling terrible. They pained her very much. She was also worried for her son having to do for himself at home. 'I was lying in bed with what felt like boulders rolling around inside of me and no one to keep me company

but those white hospital walls.' She said afterwards that those walls come to resemble the loving face her son sometimes gave her. Before, she couldn't be comforted. Then a white dove flew through her sickroom window. 'For some strange reason, I wasn't even a tiny bit frightened or surprised,' she said. She took a sip of her coca-cola.

She said the dove flew straight way to the head of her hospital bed whispering, ever so gently and kindly, that it was a messenger from God coming to renew and return her to health. 'It was no time at all before I had my operation healed and came back to my son! My spirit was purified. I still feel it. And I knew that the only way for me to express my love for Christ was to paint Him a picture. I used to paint pictures all the time when I was a young lady. The picture I painted for Him is hanging over there behind you.'

On the wall behind me was an oil painting of Jesus. A white dove was resting in His open palm about chest high. The bottom of the gold frame caught Him about His things, but the sky was full and deep and high. The color of the sky was the best thing about the picture. Heavily coated with shellac, the canvas was reflecting a dull light that I needed to move around to see.

'I'm glad you think of white doves too Charlie, even though one hasn't visited you. Maybe someday,' she said. 'Show me the place in your sample book where I might find cards with white doves, please Charlie.'

I stepped over the kitten settled at my feet. I t had been pawing at the strings of my tennis shoes while its mistress had been talking." 'I think they're near the back,' I said. I flipped the pages while the book lay in her lap. 'Those are the ones.'

Mrs. Cecil said, 'Those aren't doves Charlie!'

'Well they're birds aren't they?' I said. 'And they're white?'

'Yes my dear, they're birds, and they're white, but they're not doves. You should recognize a dove, Charlie. If you don't, you'll miss your chance when it comes.

Mr. Cecil was like you, Charlie. He couldn't recognize a dove when he saw one either. He didn't even seem to care much about it. He'd say 'Aw hell, that thing looks like a pigeon to me, and I don't like pigeons.' He missed his chance, Charlie, and now he's dead.'

'Used to be every time I even mentioned the good works of the dove to my husband he's grind his teeth,' Mrs. Cecil said. 'He'd grind on them, and you know how fingernails scrapping on a blackboard makes you draw up, well, that's what his graiding would do to me. He'd grind and grind, and finally had to have his teeth capped. You know that man had ground his front teeth over half way down.?'

"I walked back to the couch and sat down with my back flush and let my legs dangle. I barely touched the floor with the tips of my tennis shoes." Mr. Randall smiled and went on, "I can't hardly imagine my legs ever being that short!"

"Well, even though Mrs. Cecil knew she wouldn't find a card like she wanted, she went on looking at each page one by one. The kitten wasn't around for to play with, or at least I couldn't see it then. Once I saw Mrs. Cecil's son walk past the front window. I tapped the floor with my toes to the sounds of his steps outside. Then I imagined seeing her son sitting on a tree stump with his rake and other tools whirling around him. They were funneling higher and higher, and wider, pulling the whole sky into it. Finally, a voice like my father's said, 'That boy's just sitting there like the eye of a hurricane!'

"It was full dark when Mrs. Cecil said, 'Charlie, have you seen kittie anywhere?'

Lifting myself up from the couch and standing, I said no mama I hadn't seen it. After calling to the kitten and waiting a minute, she bent down to the floor and stuck her arm under the couch. 'There's my kittie. Kittie was up inside the couch, Charlie.'

She pulled it out. Smiling, she kissed it on the nose.

'Do you like kittens, Charlie? My son certainly does.'

'Mrs. Cecil, I think I should be going home now. I was supposed to be back before dark.'

'Oh Charlie, must you? Well, maybe you'll come back again just to talk and play games with kittie. Next time you won't need to worry about business so much.' Then she walked me to the front door and handed me the card sample book.

"I said, 'Goodbye, Mrs. Cecil.'

'Goodbye Charlie.'

I walked down the drive, and then I ran down the road to my house. I came through the kitchen screen door. The supper dishes were already soaking. Going into the parlor, I saw my father was waiting for me. He asked me if I had sold any cards. He said that surely I must have, being gone all that time. I told him I hadn't been able to sell any. But I almost did.

"Father took hold of me by the neck and whipped hell out of me with his belt."

Bill noticed the "Williamston: Welcome . . ." sign as they drove past a little after eleven o'clock. Mr. Randall only looked straight ahead now. He said only enough to give Bill the directions to his home.

As Mr. Randall got out to the car at the Reagon's Boarding House, he said to Bill, "I'll see you tomorrow morning, son."

Bill said, "Goodnight, sir." He backed out of the driveway, and went home wondering just a little about Mrs. Cecil, Mr. Randall's father, and Charlie: the salesman.

AFTERNOON OF A TOURIST

Down the Autostrada del Sole
lofted on immemorial arches
of forgotten aqueducts
channeled through the gallerias
we flow into Rome
swirl through the piazzas
gurgle at the fountains
drain into the illuminated basins
of decaying hotels
(my cousin threw up in the bidet
at the Plaza Hotel in 1967
we had diarrhea at the Margutta)
shall we visit the cloaca maxima

What did we come here for
jostling in the ruins of dead fora
viewing museums
Love, love
press me against this ancient stone
like that one pear tree in Haute Savoie
espaliered against a crubling wall
heavy with fruit

Ann Deagon

a cheshire cat
sat
on an upper limb
of a Christmas tree
he looked at
me
flashed a neon grin
then disintegrated
significantly

It could well be
he
just devoured the lamb
of God
and faded into
hilarity
because christs are such a rarity

Betsy Ross

Betsy Ross

Bald head shining in the sun
He stands beside the gas pump
Uselessly
Or sits inside the office
Scraping paint from stacks of
License plates
To add to his hoard
At the bottom of the lake

Five dollars a week
He earns
Paid in nickels
Which he dumps
In an ice tray
And covers with water
To freeze

Seeping from the dead to the future dead
The clatter of dead men's applause is heard
As brown leaves stride across pavement
Mocking, as death fills tree pulp with ice
And the world with spectoral pallor.
It is but a brief glimpse of a miser's will.

Marilynn Byerly

BONJOUR MARS 1970

Jim Eldridge

somewhere in the teeming mud
of southeast asia lies
enough rotten flesh stamped-out
souls (gone in the name of freedom)
to make his purple heart pound
for america & the pieces of ribbon
they gave him
I hope it was
a merry christmas when he shaved
off his beard a denuded santa
clause on the g. i. bill which
read love for the homeland and
the girl who'd never seen blood
run in river deltas

she had grown
old before her
time meant nothing
and the valiant loyalty
smacked of my adolescence
when letters held tomorrow
& patience promised everything
I wanted to cry
out know this is
not life but exist
tense if you must
we all learn when
the hands of the clock
wander across our bodies

Jim Eldridge

An Old-Fashioned Wedding

Lynn Barrett

The crystalline cold and the wet of the highway met against the window and froze it. Ellen leaned her cheek against the frosted glass and held herself there, chilling her face into numbness.

That Friday, she had joined the ushers, all members of Kevin's group, to travel from the city to Albany for Kevin's wedding. The ceremony was set for Saturday, and she was only a guest, but her Datsun was up for repairs. She had snatched at the available ride when she dropped in on a rehearsal earlier in the week.

Bouncing along in the back of the van, in a spot generally reserved for an amplifier, she watched the group as they marvelled at the mounting drifts along the throughway.

"Hey, it's only the beginning of December," said Dave Rollins, the one they called Angie.

"Yeah, Ange, not even winter yet. Christ, how does anybody live up here?" Steve Evans, or Louie, replied from the driver's seat.

The group, the Bel-Airs, a new fifties rock'n'roll group Ellen's talent agency had picked up the summer before, was a hot item with the nostalgia seekers. They were young—Kevin, the leader, was twenty-four—and they'd never danced to the songs they now sang back in their days of their original popularity. But they were devoted to "their" music, and to recreation of its ways; each had a group name and costume, and at their performances they gloried in greased-back hair and torn tee-shirts. Perhaps, Ellen thought, listening to them practising "Chapel of Love" for the reception as they headed north, perhaps it means sixth grade to them, and to the audiences. They're like children playing at being the grown ups of then. And it's the kids now who like them – the early thirties crowd liked the wild new music, but the kids enjoyed faking their way through a lindy and crying over Teen Angel.

The guys too were like that, young and old-fashioned somehow. Most of all Kevin. Ellen, after her

MERICA 1954

AMERICA 1

two years with the agency since college, was usually assigned to new, young groups. It had been a shock the first time she met these newest charges; before Kevin, she hadn't seen a short-haired singer in all her work. When he'd shown up at her desk – that had been only a week before his engagement announcement, she remembered – she was sure he must be a put-on. A happy, full, clean-shaven face, short-sleeved plaid shirt, straight jeans – he even said "gosh" in his very first sentence: "Miss Volpe? Well, I'm Frankie of the Bel-Airs and gosh I'm pleased to meet you."

The funny part was, she liked him, even if he was impossible to believe and old-fashioned. He was smart about the business, and handled raucus crowds like a pro, but he never did hit her as calculating. Getting married, too, he wanted to, and was proud to be marrying. Ellen hadn't seen a man so whole-heartedly for marriage since she could remember. She wanted no part of it herself, of course, her life was very well arranged, thank you, in the men's department, but she knew better than to trust any of them too far with her independence. But, Kevin's way was intriguing. He always spoke with pride of "his girl Cathy" and he held down a department store job along with his singing to help save so that his girl Cathy could finish at Barnard.

"Hey, we need a female vocalist on this one," Steve hollered over his shoulder.

"Yeah, Miss Volpe, be our Annette?" Dave Rollins, clutching his guitar case on the seat opposite hers, looked at her hopefully. "Sorry, I can't sing. At all. But this isn't business, so try Ellen."

"It's Annette to us," Dave said.

The rest of the ride was dirty highway snow and

Gonna get ma-a-rried
Gee I really love you and we're
Gonna get maa-aa-arried
Go-in' to the cha-pel of love.

They arrived in the village of Elsmere, just past Albany, at four. It was already dusk. The van missed the turn-off near Normanskill – "Just turn right at the stop sign, the big one," Kevin had said. "Can't go wrong." Steve skidded to a stop at last at a service station with a broken sign that was missing so many letters they couldn't tell what brand it was. The ushers were all squabbling while Ellen watched them like a baby sitter letting them tire themselves out.

Brian Tylus, the drummer, solemnly pretended confusion at the directions given by the attendant, a rural greaser who looked much like the "Mannie" Brian himself played in the Bel-Airs. The attendant stood straight man to Brian's "Now, duh, was dat a left or a right after, duh, de foist two miles?" while

the others wavered between amusement and embarrassment. Eventually, the youth advised them to turn around and ask directions near Normanskill. It took only two more passes at the turn-off before they made it to Cathy's house.

Ellen followed the group to the door of the white split-level with the father-doctor's office to the left, the residence to the right. She stood behind the group, who were muttering of bathrooms and dinners. She stood tall, watching past them, curious to see Kevin's old fashioned sweetheart.

Cathy, smooth short hair and a laughing face opened the door. She and Ellen were of a height. Kevin was at the motel, she said, waiting for the ushers.

She gave them the address, and, noticing Ellen, she added, business-like, that they had taken a room for bridesmaids, but the girls from New York City had decided to drive up Saturday, so Kevin had said his friend Miss Volpe should have the room. And, Cathy added, all smiles, it was so nice to meet the talent agent who'd done so much for her Kevin.

She sent them off, with an almost visible push, to the motel. She called the ushers Louie and Mannie, Angie and Joey, Ellen realized; she called Ellen, of course, Miss Volpe.

The motel was a Schrafft's Motor Lodge, with a snow-filled parking lot and snow banked against its long low wall of picture windows.

The ushers moved in a boisterous horde toward the two rooms Kevin had for them, while Ellen stopped at the desk to pick up her key. At the desk a grey-haired young-faced lady surrounded by magazines and candy had her sign for the room. It was Ellen's first motel, her experience being in dorms and apartments, and she felt guilty without having sinned.

"Near the wedding party?" Ellen asked in a hopefully brusque tone.

"Right across from the ushers. You're in 126, they have 125 and 127," the desk lady replied. She did not leer. Ellen was watching for it.

She threw her suitcase into 126 and locked the room. The noise of greeting and joking poured through the door of 125, stopped short when she knocked.

"Come in." Kevin's voice, polite and happy. He unlocked the door. "Ellen. Gosh, I'm glad you're here." He met her warmly as the others, used to ignoring her, resumed wrestling over the beds and fighting for the bathroom, singing and shouting.

"Why?" Ellen asked him, trying as ever to see past the warm, clean-featured face and the neat, square clothes, to see if he could really exist, happy and unselfconcious and alien.

"Why what?" Bluff-faced surprise.

"Why glad I'm here." She hoped for an answer.

"No reason, just glad. I'll figure out why later and let you know." Unconcerned, he led her into the room. "Guess you got to know the group better, coming up with them. Hope they behaved. This goof-off," Kevin went on, good-humoredly kicking a large bearish man who was feigning sleep in the middle of all the chaos, "is my best man, Don Henry. Came up from Pennsylvania today. He got me through high school. Dropped out of Penn State while I was fighting my way through C. U."

Don smiled through the introduction and added, "Draft number 314 came along, so why bother? Not like my friend twenty-six here. If the lucky bastard had broken out in his rash sooner, he'd a been happy working at home like me."

"Allergy, Henry, allergy. Would've sneezed us right out of the war, they told me."

Ellen already knew of this, Kevin talked about it often. She suspected that under the banter he's really wanted to go in. He always called it "serving."

"Let me finish the intro, will you? Make a man your best man and he thinks its his show. Don, Ellen Volpe. Ellen is our agent, and my second-favorite girl in the world."

Again, that was Kevin all over, saying things that no man would say who was aware of how things were done, saying things that always went unsaid among the cautious and smooth men in Ellen's life. Well, she shrugged at the best man, you must be used to him, so what can I say. Don Henry didn't seem to notice her confusion.

Ellen sat in a corner of the room, fashionable and silent in long suede coat and shaved velvet pants, while Don Best Man made the acquaintance of the Bel-Airs and the ensemble plotted the bachelor's party, combing the phone book for bars. She planned an evening of magazines in her room. Kevin, cordial, invited her along, offered to pick her up after the rehearsal.

"– Sure Annette, we need a girl to dance on tables, make it a real party," Brian cut in.

"Forget it, thanks. I couldn't balance well enough. And now it's why, it's six. You'd all better get to the rehearsal."

Kevin was on his feet at once and headed for the door. Ellen followed behind the crew, sending them off, with an almost visible push, to the church.

She was miserable. She was cold and afraid, and walking along the highway. Cars splashed her to the waist with filthy snow as she strode, fast and unhappy, toward the small diner sign, pink in the night.

Once they had left her, she had found she couldn't face the bright family warmth of the motel restaurant, and she had chosen to walk. She wanted to find dramatic misery, physical unhappiness, to be not just solitary but alone alone. She was rotten and they were all good. Snow was hovering in the

air, waiting to descend, and she wished it would, to complete the picture. A truck covered her in filthy ice water just as she turned to Louise's Diner's pink neon entrance. She didn't wipe it off her velvet and suede, but let it dry there as she ordered and ate and paid for a hot and heavy meal.

And she was soaked even more as she walked back in the dark. Over and over she told herself she was not meant to be involved with these people, they were not real, they were impossible. She felt that she had left her own proper world with its proper conduct and casual sins for one which, content as it seemed, was just too nice and cozy-warm for comfort. She wanted to be alone alone. And she thoroughly enjoyed a dank, chilled walk in repudiation of their, of their – Disneyland.

She dripped onto the red Schrafft's lobby rug while she bought a magazine, a "Cosmopolitan" for laughs. The damp velvet, drying stiff, began to chafe her legs as she headed for 126, and as soon as she got in she changed into a long indian print robe. She settled down to read, sulky and miserable and warm and dry.

After an impossibly sinful career girl's diary, "She set the town buzzing" Ellen wandered into the hall with her Schrafft's plastic ice bucket in search of the ice machine promised on its sanitary wrap. As she passed 127 she noticed the door was open and decided to fix it on her return trip. The ice machine, free and full, she found in an alcove which offered a welter of vending machines.

Loaded with three gingerales and her ice, Ellen started back. She had begun to open her own door before she remembered 127 and corssed the hall. The lights were on. Ellen stopped short.

Dave Rollins was sitting on the bed, his short-cropped head bent over his electric guitar. He was restringing one of its wires.

"I-hi!" Ellen began, loud. He flinched at the unexpected sound, but she kept on fast. "I saw the door open, the light, and I thought, well they're all gone and they must have forgotten to – and so I came across on my way back. But you're here." Ellen tried to recall how she looked.

"Yup, I'm here." He kept on fixing his guitar, but not in an unfriendly way.

"How come?"

"Huh?" He looked up half way.

"How come you're here?"

"Don't feel like drinking and I knew Frankie – uh, Kevin, wouldn't mind, so I had them drop me off on the way back from the church."

"How was the rehearsal?" she ventured, sitting on the edge of the other bed.

"Hey, great! You should've seen the minister-guy. He was half ploughed and waving his arms like a conductor. Bring on the bride!" Dave waved on an imaginary procession. In his animation he reminded Ellen of Kevin, short hair and all. She felt Dave's eyes on her as well, sizing her up. Misery may love but – not tonight, she decided, and got up to go.

"Hey, why don't you stay. Watch the tube or something?" Dave offered. "Maybe we can find an old movie."

"No, I think I'll get some sleep, tomorrow's going to be a late one," Ellen said, backing out the door. She closed it after her. Headed for her room, she became furious with herself. God, El, she thought, your mind is deformed. That kid probably just wanted someone to keep him company while he watched John Wayne, and you have to think he's after — you're just too far gone with these people.

Testing her "love quotient," frightening herself with mystery stories and her horoscope, and drowning her sorrows in gingerale convinced Ellen she was ready to go to sleep, and she arranged herself plunk in the middle of the double bed, hauled herself out to double lock the door, plunked herself back in and turned out the lights from her bedside switchboard.

In the still — Doowah Doo Wah Of the ni-ight Doo wah Doowaaah

From across the hall, through two sets of walls, the muffled harmony came. They were back. Kevin's voice alone, strong and sure, the others joining above and below. A central core of song he held while the others made a nonsense echo.

Hold me again
With all of your mi-ight
Dooooooooooo —
In the still
oooooooooo-of
Of the ni-i-ight.

Faintly the crippled voice of an unamplified guitar joined them.

Ellen listened and strained to separate and identify each voice. She did not sleep again until the singing had long since ceased.

Morning was bright, blinding on snow, painful. Ellen, in her cheerful orange wool for the wedding, spent the morning in 127 watching cartoons while one by one the wedding party woke up, staggered over to 125 to dress in the rented tuxes, and returned to join her. Kevin was ready first, and kept checking his fly. He'd once made a concert entrance with his zipper down by mistake, and now it seemed to be his only fear on earth.

Dave entered adjusting his suspenders and in the glaring light from the picture window, Ellen compared them and found no real resemblance between the singer and the guitar player. Somehow the identical costumes showed up their differences more, Kevin always the happy center of things and Dave paler, quieter, more alone.

The best man was the most nervous of them all, it seemed, constantly checking on the ring. Kevin was strong and, Ellen could not deny, very happy. She wanted to feel it was unnatural, and again she wanted to feel that she was the unnatural one. The best man seemed more someone from her world, but she did not like him much.

All were on hand at last, and they watched a spy show in which chimps played all the parts, and well. Then they all headed for Albany, and the church, the groom and the best man going in Kevin's convertible. Drifts were piled around parked cars on both sides of the streets of Albany, and the van had difficulty weaving its way through. They lost Kevin's Chevy, but found the right church by what all agreed repeatedly was a miracle.

Inside, Kevin and Don had arrived first and were practicing their movements. Steve turned into Louie the organist and discovered a harpsichord amid the wine-red velvet and golden wood of the altar arc. He picked out an eerie version of "Duke of Earl" while the Bel-Airs harmonized. Ellen wandered up and down the aisles of the deserted church.

She alone saw Cathy enter at the back of the church, carrying her wedding dress in plastic. Ellen joined her and offered to help if she might.

"Well, yes, you could help me dress. The girls haven't arrived yet, so I came on my own. There's a room upstairs for us to see."

Ellen followed the bride, catching up the well-wrapped gown where it trailed on the floor. They ascended in procession to a room marked "Crib Room." Inside were several playpens and two cribs, which Ellen busied herself with pushing against one wall, clearing a space in front of a mirror. Cathy was undressing, Ellen avoiding looking at her until she stood in bright white new underwear asking, "Could you get the dress ready please, Miss Volpe?"

"Ellen," said Ellen, and unpinned the plastic from the hanger. She gathered up the dress and poised it over Cathy's head. Kevin's bride, she noted, was a slender, almost no-figure girl. The dress of old creamy satin slid about her.

"Your mother's?" Ellen asked hesitantly, afraid of the perfection of such detail.

"Yes. Lucky it fits, side zippers are terrible to squeeze into. And these buttons are impossible. Don't bother with the top one at all." On each sleeve were twenty buttons, each fitting into a delicate thread loop. Cathy stood stoically while Ellen sweated over them. She began to enjoy this rite, this old-fashioned preparation, to feel part of it. Then the bride took a small box from her purse and produced a blue garter and lace hankerchief. "I'm counting the dress for old and the veil for new," Cathy said matter-of-factly and slid the garter over her pantyhose to her thing. "Now the veil," she said and they pinned it on together and, "all set things." A pause.

Ellen could think of nothing to say, just watched the bride reflected in the mirror and felt like a child with a perfect doll. The reflection continued, "Where are those girls. I wouldn't be late to their weddings and they should make it to mine. They all bitched until I had to take all of them as bridesmaids and turned this wedding into a big production and now!" Ellen watched the mirror and felt as if these words were coming from someone other than the old-fashioned bride-doll on display. The businesslike attitude was too startling a contrast.

The bride's mother, slim in pale lilac, and the deep puple bridesmaids, all entered at once. Ellen backed to a corner behind a crib, trying to hide the somehow indecorous orange of her dress. A photographer tapped on the door, was admitted, and began posing dressing the bride pictures. They unbottoned all the sleeve buttons so the bridesmaids could be photographed rebuttoning them. Ellen left unnoticed.

She arrived at the rear of the church, and found that the guests were arriving. Dave approached her and very formally offered her his arm. She felt like a food as he walked her to her seat on the right, among Kevin's work and college friends, just behind his grandmothers. Aside from these two, and his mother, who arrived soon after, Ellen was the only female representative of the groom's faction. She watched large families and college girls fill up the bride's side.

And then – a flutter. And then – the organ. And a long slow marching. Two by two, the ushers. Tuxedo clad fifities' rock singers, the Bel-Airs. Dave smiled at her, she thought, and passed by.

One by one, the bridesmaids. Deep-purple clad, with upswept hair and self-conscious smiles.

And Cathy and Dr. Forbes together. Buttons and satin and a laughing-faced sweetheart. Ellen liked her again, she looked perfect.

A pause, and words, and the doctor handed her over to Kevin and they moved up a step into the golden-wooded, wine-red clothed heart of the church, ushers and bridesmaids to each side. Kneeling and speaking. Kevin's voice first, strong and clear. A star. Dave was right, the minister was a real ham, just like a conductor. And Cathy's voice was weak and timid, faint.

Behind Ellen someone whispered, "They cut out the objections part; they were afraid the Bel-Airs might pull a joke." And Ellen looked up again and it was ending. They were pronounced. It was terrible, awesome. It was over. She could have cried.

Outside the church they all waited in the cold while the wedding party went through it all again for the photographer. A little boy passed out unconverted rice and Ellen played with her handful. Beside her Kevin's grandmothers were drying, then relapsing into tears. When at last the wedding party came out, Ellen threw her rice straight at the bride and headed for the van. The ushers joined her rapidly, and they began an expedition to the country club reception in the Village of Elsmere, near Normanskill.

It was on the reception line that Ellen realized she hadn't eaten since the diner the night before. She found herself afraid that her stomach would growl violently as she met the first few relatives, who were all saying "I don't know you but I'm so happy." Cathy just smiled. Kevin told her quickly, "I m glad you're here, never mind why," and passed her on. The ushers greeted her like a long-lost friend. They knew no one else there except the bride and groom. Ellen headed for the food.

The reception itself was in a room done completely in pink and lavender and white. Ellen again felt that her orange stood out like a banner. There was a central hors d'oevres table impenetrably lined with guests, side tables with chairs for the guests' toast drinking and cake eating, a head table at one end and a bar at the other. Ellen headed for the last, and fought her way in for a whiskey sour. She ate the orange slice and cherry right off and downed the drink in two fast swallows to get some more fruit to eat without stepping away from the bar. She ordered a second drink and took it to a table which the ushers had established as their center of operations.

Amid the black and gray of the tuxedoes, her flaming orange dress found its refuge. She sat with Dave and had him run miniature chicken legs and celery and sours. Ellen began calling Steve Louie and Brian Mannie.

The toasting began. Wine tasted bitter to her after the sours. Laughing-faced Cathy, she noted, was drinking quite a bit. She managed to recapture her fond doll-owner attitude for a moment and pictured the bride as nervous. The dancing began — Kevin and Cathy moving smoothly to the three-piece combo playing old dance tunes.

After he had danced with two mothers and five bridesmaids, Kevin left his wife to her more remote relatives and joined his group. He was exuberant, thanked each of them for being there, and led them to the combo's corner of the room to sing.

The guest crowded around the novelty, and loved it. Ellen noted professionally the varying reactions, standing tall at the edge of the crowd. She hummed along with "Chapel of Love" and sang alone with "Save the Last Dance for Me" and stopped by the bar for another drink.

The cake was cut, the kitchen taking over after the first two pieces.

The single girls lined up to catch the bouquet. Ellen didn't want in, but the Bel-Airs insisted on "their Annette's" taking her place with the group. Cathy turned around, the drums rolled dramatically, the bouquet flew up and headed straight for Ellen. She didn't want it. But, if it came to her she would — a short girl in front of her jumped high and pucked it from the air. All applauded; the murmur went round, the bride's cousin. Relieved, annoyed, Ellen returned to the ushers' table as they arose to line for for the garter.

They fought to catch the lacy scrap. The best man, the tallest won it.

The dancing and drinking continued. The cake was dry; Ellen had to wash it down heavily. Dave was calling her Annette and she sat by his side, looking for something in his open face and close-cropped hair. Kevin was a damn lucky guy, Dave was saying.

"Wasn' goin' on a honeymoon though," Don interposed. Kevin, he said, had to be at work Monday, so they would be staying in Albany just for that night.

"No matter," Steve joined in. "They had their honeymoon a long time back."

Ellen looked at Steve in expressive doubt.

"Oh sure," Don winked. "Didn' you know that 'Nette? Don' tell mother though."

"Can' make much difference now, can it?" Steve put in and the ushers laughed. "'Specially to Frankie."

"Annette wants another drink," she ordered, not wanting to sober up. The bar was closing, the guests were leaving.

"S'Okay," Brian said, "There's a party at an aunt from Elsmere's after this. Plenty to drink there. Le's go."

The Bel-Airs and Ellen got up to leave and Kevin, making his exit joyously, came up to them to say good-bye. He seemed very sober and very happy. "Great day, guys," he said, and "Thanks a lot, Angie," shaking hands, "You were great. I-I really appreciated it fellows." He spoke, as always, the

way one always felt he had borrowed from another time; she couldn't tell how far he meant it even now.

"Ellen Volpe," he was saying, taking hold of her arm, "Fellows, Bel-Airs, I am now going to kiss my second favorite woman, Miss Ellen Volpe. It's my party and I'll kiss if I want to, right, hey? Ellen, I'm glad you're here for some strange reason so —" She shut her eyes and waited through it, embarrassed, pleased. It was a hearty kiss, a Kevin kiss. But too strong, she thought. She opened her eyes as he drew back, and saw that Kevin's eyes were watery. He is drunk, she thought, he talks just the same, drunk or sober. Kevin walked with them to the door, sending her off to liquor and her motel bed. As she swung into her marred coat, going out the door into crystal cold, Kevin leaned close, and whispered in her ear, "Second favorite. At least." And turned, the happy groom, to go.

Ellen left the bed and stood by the picture window, remembering the weight of the other body, the heavy bare shoulders and close-cropped head. She leaned against the glass, pressed against the cold, and watched the snow, more snow falling in the night.

SEARCHING FOR SHARKS TEETH

Jean Rodenbough

they swam in Miocene seas seeking victims
to rip apart to keep alive another month
unaware as we are unaware of those millions
of years spilling out and running through
time sieves — the black teeth glitter fossilized
hidden in salty wet sand — we collect these
reminders for . . . we don't know what for . . .
yet knowing so much more than sharks
about cattails and shells and thick
sea smells and the good friend who
offers unexpected gifts
and we keep walking the beach
thinking about these things
dropping loose teeth into the sack

the center holds
squealing pink decibels
propelled by static force
spin early circles in her
Daddy-made swing
spiral flings land her
tomorrow in my place
her own secret pinknesses
inside
relinquishing, she spins out
to me on the rim of old
generations while you
unchanged
chained to the rock,
chivalrously permit us
to eat at you daily,
and so beget new spinners
forever usurpers

Jean Rodenbough

THE VAMPIRE

Arlene Katz

The quiet is interrputed by frantic
Conversations of insects. Trees
Curl inward by degrees
And night descends apologetic

For its opacity, not meant
to be alarming, a reality
of bland cycles to be
a palliative sweetly lent

To ones who comfortably know
nothing of the powers of cold
Malignity. Summers here fold
Into Spring. I hear the snow

Comes only once or twice
And I who saw my summers fade
Stillborn, am puzzled by such promises made
Of gentle hints of paradise.

DECEMBER SCENARIO

I hear city street songs of dark corners,
Christmas passes
And I catch myself thinking of summer
Instead of this ebbing of the light.

The time leaves me confused
A stranger writes, sending bits of Allen Ginsberg,
with notations,
psychological interpretations.
I grumble that I am tired of listening.

I wander past this city fishlike,
Swim through midtown intersections,
Float twelve flights up in low ceilinged rooms
Staring at old photograph albums.

A friend comforts me, composing wild scenarios
Adventures, dream sequences
We share vague prophecies
Then discuss roads that go nowhere.

Sometimes, when we try to concentrate
Think out our possibilities

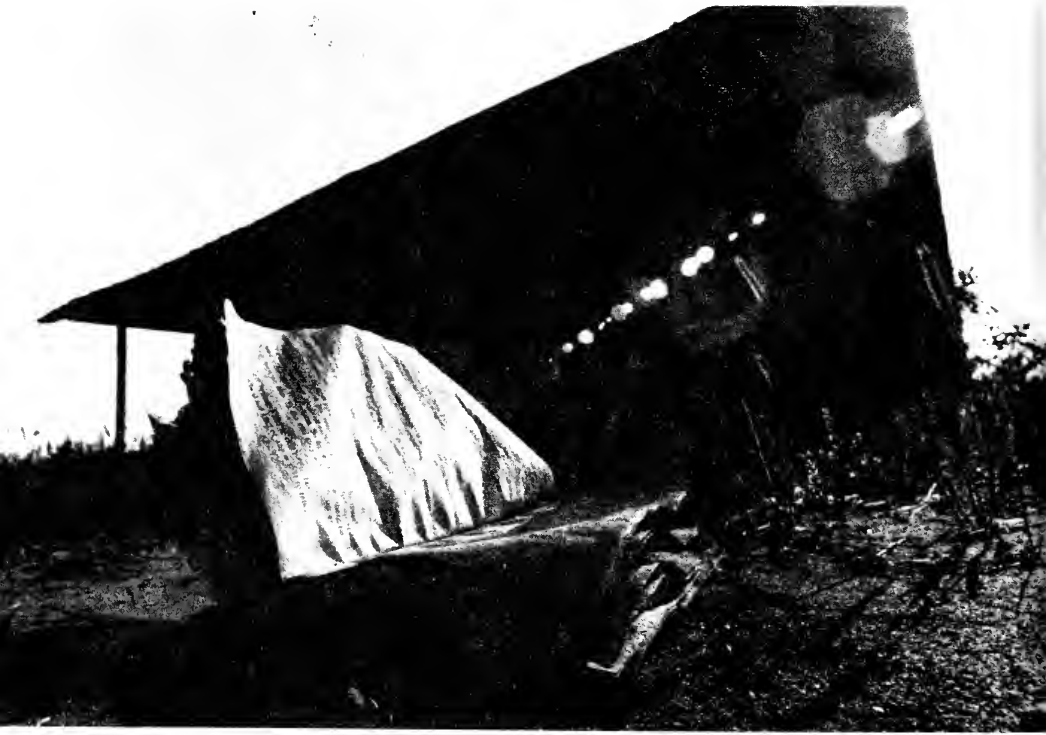
Plot escape routes through the jagged edges of landscape,
Scheme for exits past the rancor of Cerebus,
The city interrupts us
Howling.
We hunger for silence
But the wind chants sad melodies through the alleyways
Through city walls and drains, the cracked brick
the rain-slick concrete.

In this cold we dream
As if we were unborn,
As if we had been here always.
We dwell in the treachery of our memories
Shuddering at winter darkened nightmares
We are orphans of a frozen labyrinth and
we journey through these tunnels to find
a Minataur with an old lover's smile.

You can catch your own image in the gloom
Lost, you retrace steps to find eyes
leering out from dark recesses

I hear the singing of the corners
And have seen this face before.

Arlene Katz



GYPSY PROPHECY

Arlene Katz

Rain dissolves the quiet stars
The night will trace its destiny
Images of tarot cards.

Tides murmur against salt bars
Keeping count of history
Rain dissolves the quiet stars.

The sky is torn in jagged shards
For smothered lines drawn heavily
Images of tarot cards.

Comets wander, abandoned cars
Through veiled ranges of infinity
Rain dissolves the quiet stars.

Watch how promises of glory char
In rain soaked pyres of misery
Images of tarot cards.

See the dream of colors marred
In darkening malignity
Rain dissolves the quiet stars
Images of tarot cards.

Vignette 2

Michael Bohen

Frank Moynihan returned to the dining room with Father Verstrate of the Mother of Mary Missionaries. The tall, heavy priest, German-looking with a florid face and rimless glasses, towered over the short, dark-eyed intensity of Frank.

"I didn't mean to interrupt your dinner but the only flight I could get out of Chicago just flew in. Don't bother yourself, Mrs. Moynihan, please stay seated and finish your dinner. I only came to talk to your son for a few moments."

Mr. Moynihan, setting the napkin carefully by the side of his plate, said that Frank's room upstairs would insure peace and quiet from the tableful of kids.

"Father, seeing that you've just come off the plane, can I get you something, something to freshen you up a bit?"

"A generous shot of Scotch and a glass of water might do the trick," the priest winked back.

Up in the second floor bedroom, straight ahead from the steps, Father Verstrate restlessly paced around, scanning the bookcases and looking out of the two windows on either side of the desk. It was the restlessness of someone who knew what he was doing and had only a small time to do it. When Mr. Moynihan brought his drink and chaser and situated him in an easy chair, he seemed to relax completely as if he always sat just there. He crossed his legs and his white socks showed up rather awkwardly against the black clerical suit, much the same way white socks were out of place at the military high school Frank went to. In spite of it, Father seemed distinguished and sophisticated with his fine, solid head shocked with white, warm blue eyes behind the glasses as if he rather enjoyed interviewing perspective missionaries accompanied by a good shot of Scotch. He turned to Frank who sat on the bed to his left.

"Have you been thinking of the priesthood long, Frank?"

"It's hard to say when I first started thinking of a vocation seriously, Father. You know how the nuns are in grade school and the Christian brothers in high school."

"No, how?"

"They're always on the lookout for students with the basic three qualities: good health, sound moral character and the desire to serve God in the priesthood. Sort of includes almost everybody."

Frank watched to see if Father shared his attempt at humor. He did,but in a way that said go on.

"Anyway, for some reason, the nuns and priests were always after me in one way or another. For some reason I always resisted, especially this one brother with a broad face and a slavic accent, I can see him now. He'd call me out in the hall regularly for conferences. Of course, every kid in the room was on to the game. But one day I came close to deciding. After a conference I came back to class and stared at his broad, foreign face and his black cassock with those two short rectangular pieces of white coming down from the neck like a nun's collar. For some reason, Father, I didn't decide. But I was so close it didn't seem to matter which way I decided. To this day, some five years later, I'm still surprised that I didn't take Brother Josephus' offer. I always wanted to please the brothers."

"From your letters and other things, it seems you've lacked one ingredient so far."

Frank moved to the edge of the bed and clasped his hands over his knees.

"Possibly you've lacked generosity, Frank."

Father Verstrate stopped, fingered his Scotch and took a lingering sip as suspense mounted in the room and Frank moved uneasily not knowing whether to break the silence or not.

"When did you start thinking of the missionary life, Frank?"

"The more I thought about a vocation I kept feeling . . . well a vocation in this country wasn't . . . I'm trying to think of a word to express it."

"Vital?"

"That's it, vital. Christ's words about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked seem more vital elsewhere. Maybe I could get the people I know here involved."

"Sometimes the hungry and the naked are closer in."

Frank watched him take a sip of Scotch, settle a napkin under the glass while beckoning him to go on with a nod of his head.

"But there's always the problem of getting to know a foreign culture and language when it's taken me twenty-one years to know as little as I do about America."

"Don't worry about that, Frank. We've been doing it a long time now and we worry about it for you."

"But Father, there are other problems I can't seem to resolve. Like my mixed emotions about celibacy. And maybe I want to be a missionary because none of my friends are doing it. And my worst fear is whether I can do it or not. No one in my family, going way back on both sides, has ever done anything like it. For that matter even learned a foreign language . . . And, Father, what right do I have intruding in a foreign country?"

"All the right in the world. Christ said for us to go and teach all nations."

"But . . ."

"But what, Frank?"

"I'd feel out of place trying to change people's beliefs to mine."

' Things are not as simple as you imagine or as bad as you fear. You never start off teaching and preaching Catholicism or Christianity. First, you go to one of our missions and learn the culture and language. And even when you know these, the job is not simply to gain converts. I lived among the Hindus and Moslems of Pakistan for five years and did my best to feed their bodies first before administering to their spiritual needs. We fed and clothes and educated whether Catholic or not, Christian or not. As a result a good number converted but there was no force involved. Consequently, I'm happy to report that in a year or so, by 1966, we should have the first native priests from our little corner of Pakistan."

"But don't many of them convert out of gratitude?"

"Some will, I suupose, but we don't try to guess motives. They are all given the same treatment regardless. Christ's will is served and brought to fruition in strange ways."

"But . . ."

"But what, Frank?"

"Does teaching all nations mean converting all nations no matter how you do it?"

By this time, Frank was leaning forward on the bed with both arms on his legs and alternately looking from his sweaty hands to Father's florid face and back again. Father gazed intently at the troubled face of the young man and took a sip of Scotch, halting midway, his eyes probing far away as if they were trying to pin down something out of the past. Then he swallowed the last of the Scotch before Frank's father knocked on the door to freshen his drink. While Mr. Moynihan was gone, Father's eyes came back from their distant country.

"When I talk with young men like yourself, I find so many of them expressing great ambivalence toward the priesthood and especially the missionary life. They show a great lack of confidence in their own powers.This is all quite normal but it makes my job all the more difficult. And it's painful to think that so many of them will continue through life this way. Christ was merciful so the least you can do is be merciful with yourself. Life's too short for so many problems."

Father uncrossed his legs and leaned forward toward the bed where Frank still sat taut and unrelieved.

"I have only one thing to say about all this. A while back, some thirty-five years ago, I first visited Paris. I was about your age. I went to a church there called Saint-Denis. Chiseled on one of the walls in a simple inscription."

Father was looking out of the past directly into the young man's face who wondered if Father was a priest then and if he had gone through what he was going through now.

"Do you know any French?"

"No, Father."

"The saying issimpleyet profound. In English it reads, 'There is more in you than you know.'"

The blue eyes stared through their circles of glass at the intense brown ones returning the stare.

"Keep it in mind, Frank, a spur in these dark times so that the salt shall not lose its flavor."

Mr. Moynihan interrupted with a fresh drink and left as abruptly, leaving a wake of comfortable silence. Father re-crossed his legs, pulled up one of his white socks, afterwards filling his mouth with Scotch and savoring it.

"But more than anything, Frank, I think the problem of your vocation is simple. You have a good mind and good character, you come from a fine family and you have a sensitivity for poverty. What you lack is generosity. Quite simply it is generosity you lack. If you are waiting for God to knock you off your horse like Paul, it won't happen."

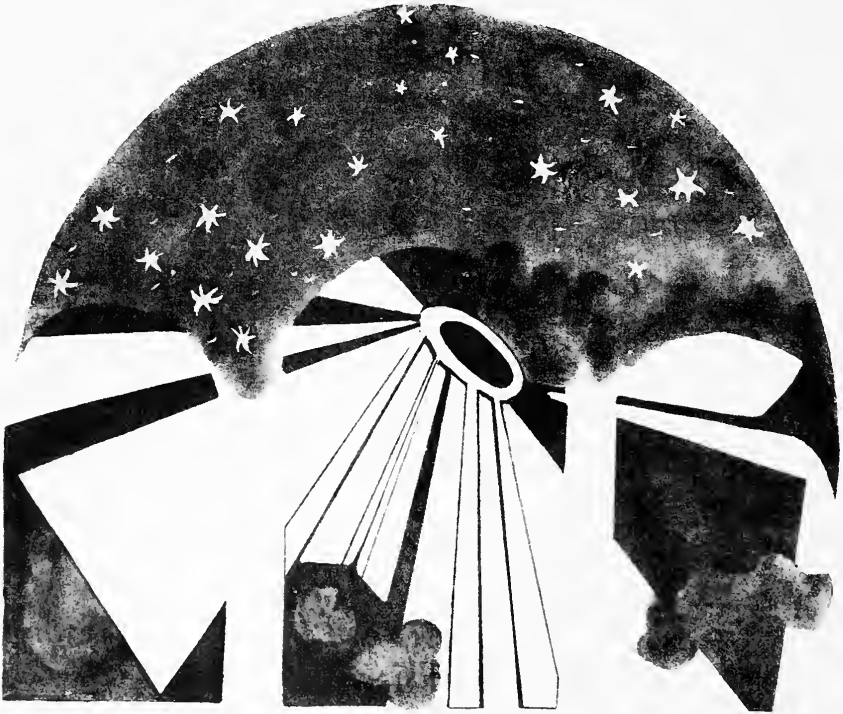
The conversation moved from this point to that and back again. It was not long before it was apparent to both that no definite commitment was forthcoming.

"I didn't come tonight with the idea of signing you up. This was merely a personal visit. You will correspond won't you and let me know how things are going? Good. Well my watch tells me it's time to catch my plane for Chicago."

Frank followed the tall priest down the steps and through the formalities at the door with the parents while a number of brothers and sisters watched from various positions and poses in the living room. The last thing to be seen was Father Verstrate raising his umbrella to protect his grey head, perceptively tired now, against a storm of hail as he said a final good-bye. The lamppost beside the front steps reflected off his glasses and he was gone.

Frank corresponded as he had promised but he didn't go the via Strate; instead he became a special education teacher in a local high school but not without his share of worry at times about whether his salt had lost its flavor. In after years, glad as he was to have met him, he felt like he had wasted the

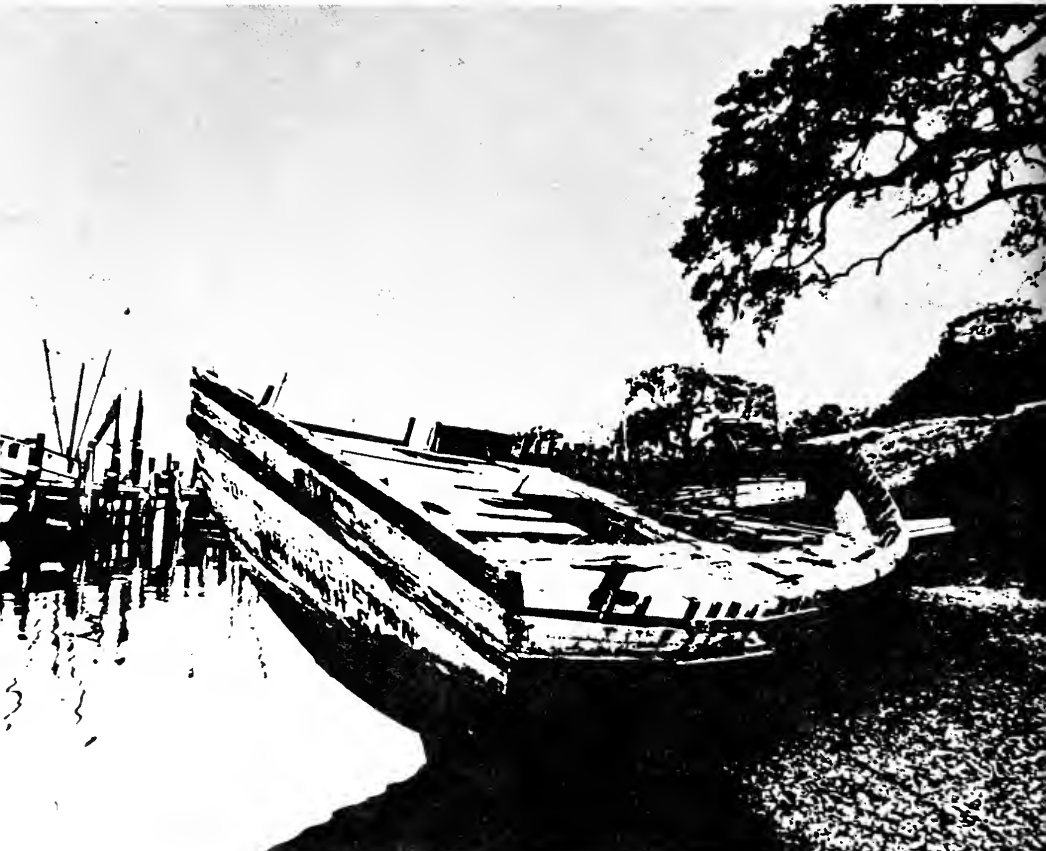
good priest's hard-pressed time. But encounters like these gave him cause to wonder deeply about the providence of the apparent dead ends of life, for bits and pieces of that visit stuck hard like an inscription chiseled on a church.



THE BRONZE JAR

John Blackard

in an old stone shed
    behind my rented house
I found wrapped in leaves
    a small bronze jar
and, to me, it seemed uncommon
    that stamped on its side
    strong and deep was DEATH
and letters like 'r' and 'v' and 'r;'
at first i kept it
    for a vase
filling it abundantly with flowers,
    but i had to stop it,
for their slender stems
    turned hard
yet brittle as abandoned shells
    of oriental beetles.



THE FEELING OF OYSTERS AND SUN

John Lane

There is old wood in the feeling
of oysters and sun:
Caked rusting nails poked
in the marsh winds.
There is old bloodin the energy
passing her stern:
Dependable as silence, as reticent as
death into a young thing.
And there are discarded skins,
and the footprints of crows appear
behind the corners of the eyes,
and the last face has begun to form.
And the beautiful spirits of ancient things
rise in the smell of salt from the living stream
to remember the mutual feelings between oysters,
and beyond to suns.

ROAR OF SUNLIGHT AND STONE

John Lane

In the roar of sunlight and stone
there is a woman nine-years-old
stopped to see the sky buzz with
a message of sun. She is folded into
the boulders and froth as slickly as a fish –
as perfectly as a secret summer nourishing
a single flower – fertilized by the air that is
filled with the brook. She is stoned by the
hypnotic absence of time while life greets her
warm in the face. She has stopped to study
for an infinite strobe of her mind
the energy born with light,
and the ancient cold that is rising around
her ankles in the mountain of her youth.

"SINGLE VISION"

John Lane

There is no other world in the calipers
revealing itself as an inch,
and gieger counters are wasted to probe the sky
searching for the odor of another king,
the microscope has again found virus and body spice
on slides from Cathedrals,
and there seems no other where to turn for reality.
The illusive whyness and whatness has easily slipped away –
into the glare of the spherical greenhouse,
reflection of all that is known.
The empirical sphere – opaque after Einstein –
Increasing its negligible shape into the tyrannical unknown.
The empirical motion outward, like lemmings loosed on an endless desert,
toward a trillion species from now.
Drying skin under an aging yellow sun, piercing the womb
with bits and flashes, demons and gods,
noise and chaff.

Engine Noise

Hugo Hildebrandt

There was one distinct sound George Warner could remember hearing when he thought of the summers he had spent as a boy at his parents' house on the lake – the distant cacophany of engine noise that drifted across the bay on Sunday nights from the speedway several miles inland. That noise, and the cars that had produced it, had been transportation for wondrous dreaming.

But he was now thirty-one, and married, a father, and visits to his ancient parents were infrequent, and it was quite rare to forego Chicago and visit them at the lake. Vacation time had come with August, there was the long drive from Texas to Michigan, and he found his parents as he had left them a year before: white and brittle, close to destruction. They arrived on a Saturday for a two week stay, and the Texas heat had vanished, nights would be cool, and his nine year-old son marvelled at the limitlessness of Lake Michigan.

The house was small and rustic, but with every convenience, and it owned a splendid view. It was built on the leeward side of a three mile peninsula that jutted out diagonally into the lake. The peninsula was narrow, less than several hundred yards across in most places, except at the tip, where it held a small amusement park. The bay was wide and long, and a causeway connected the amusement park and the mainland. From the house you looked almost directly west, into the sunsets, and at night the cars leaving the park in constant streams produced sights of wild color, vivid pictures of white and red, and at times the effect rivaled that made by the sun sinking into the blue water.

George had not seen the house at the lake in several years, not since Tommy had been a small baby, and it seemed smaller, as he had expected it to; it had shrunk, as had his parents. He felt that when his parents died it would simply disappear, that the marsh a quarter of a mile away would devour it; or worse, that it would be sold and thus become truly lost forever, and an insult to his memory.

The first week they would be alone with his parents, the second week his two older sisters, one from Buffalo and one from Denver, would arrive with their families. Tommy would have playmates, Susan would have Jackie's husband to flirt with, and he would have a dentist and a high school history teacher to drink and play cards with. His parents, though, would have everything. George was a real estate broker, and his father had been before his retirement, and he was slightly more than modestly successful, as his father had been.

On Sunday his mother demanded fresh sweet corn and peaches, and his father ordered an afternoon drive up the coast; and so George asked Susan to take them up to Watertown to collect fruits and vegetables and allow his father to delight in roads and farms and lake views through the windows of a large Pontiac. The sights, and the experiences, had given George's father pleasant visions for almost fifty years. George was left with Tommy, who had refused with tears the offer of another car ride. He took out his toy soldiers and played with them in the sunshine and dirt in the field next to the house.

George sat in a red chair in the late afternoon sunshine by his father's dock and watched the water and the many boats and the huge ferris wheel in the distance, which hugged the shoreline of the bay by the amusement park, a mile away. He read the Sunday paper, pleased that the sunshine was soft and lightly shaded by the tall cottonwood trees in the yard. At six-thirty Susan and his parents were still gone, and he assumed that they had stopped for dinner somewhere, probably at his father's suggestion. He called Tommy, who was still playing in the field, and they both went into the house, cool, and so dark it stung their eyes.

"What do you want for dinner?" George asked.

"I don't really care, Dad," Tommy replied. "How 'bout hamburgers cooked outside?"

George thought for a second, then frowned. "Nope. I'll bet there's no charcoal." He stepped to the refrigerator. "Let's see. How about some delicious TV dinners?"

Tommy wrinkled his nose. "That'll be okay, Dad."

"Fine."

George opened the freezer compartment and pulled out two dinners, both heavily crusted with ice. He began to laugh. "I'll bet these things have been in here for years!" He laid them down on the counter next to the sink and looked at his son. "Take your pick, Mr. Thomas Warner. Which will it be: fish or fried chicken?"

"Fish."

"You're a very smart man, Tommy."

After dinner each returned to his spot: George to his chair by the dock and Tommy to a reconstruction of a bloody battle of the Civil War. It was then, while watching a splendid sunset, that

George heard the speedway sounds: dull, heavy whines and thundering. As he listened he built up a picture of the track as he remembered it, and with no effort he slid silently to visions of his boyhood and adolescent past. He rocketed to close, tight pictures of himself as man of action: kissing girls on beaches, building tree forts in the nearby marsh, joyriding in his father's car. A face quickly brought another face, and his mind traveled in cool precision from a red bathing suit to his friend Jimmy to a treehouse to beach parties to beer to lake sunsets to a blonde girl to fast red cars. There were periods of consciousness, and George noticed the absence of Susan and his parents and for a few second worried slightly about them. But it was difficult to fight for too long newly-discovered visions of an idealized past. The sounds from the cars were lubricants for a movement that was time and past and George, a falling down to a part of his brain that kept tightly a secret, powerful dream. It was an old dream, manufactured in the sleep wandering that comes before real sleep, in a child's body wrapped in a light summertime sheet; and it would come so powerful that it would almost bring bright light into a dark bedroom. He could touch his lips to a warm pillow and touch sun-baked, gleaming metal. And there were extravaganzas of glory and reward, of praise, of near death. And through all of it he would be warm and contained; but always he would have to fight the bitter fight at the end of things with the strange, mean being that decreed that you could never dream about the things you fell asleep wanting to dream about. And he seldom won the fight.

George woke from his dreaming in stages, images changed and vanished, and finally he was bitten by a mosquito. He stood-up and looked around for Tommy. The field was empty, but George walked over to where his son had been playing. In the brown dirt his soldiers lay murdered and covered with ants. He walked slowly toward the house, calling his son's name. He found Tommy in the family room watching Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color.

Monday morning Susan drove into town and bought a new bathing suit. She was already very tan, but she came from a dry Texas prairie town and Lake Michigan with its endless fields of water seemed to hypnotize her, and so she spent long hours on the beach stretched out on a balnket under a sun that was warm but not destructive. She helped George's mother with all the meals, did most of the laundry, and humored the old woman's gradmotherly concerns for Tommy. As always, she entertained both grandparents with stories of an alien, rural life. She spoke in a soft, trailing accent that charmed them both, especially George's father, who declared her to be, in his own guttural sounds, a peach of a wife.

All week Tommy engaged in a magical discovery of the lake. Susan and George took him down to the lake every day, where he learned to swim, to build sand castles, and to float on his back. He walked the beach looking at dead fish, both disgusted and fascinated, always eyes wide for the huge fish that he imagined swam somewhere in the lake, the fish show decaying, fly-covered body would be ten times

the size of any other. His grandfather, who as a young man had spent summers working on lake freighters, told him strange tales of shipwrecks and storms, Indians, and long-dead lake sailors. His grandfather showed him how to fish for bass, crappie, and perch from the dock, and in the evenings, while Tommy patiently fished and prayed to catch a bass, his grandfather would fall slowly to sleep in the old red chair. On Wednesday George rented a small outboard and took Tommy and Susan on a ride to a nearby island. On the way back George stopped the boat a mile from shore. They swam in a hundred feet of water, in a blue void, kicking their feet wildly. Tommy was very frightened at first, but strapped into an orange life jacket, he swam with a steadily building confidence from his mother to his father.

George read two novels in three days, took an afternoon drive to Kalamazoo to visit an old college friend, and allowed himself to be sunburned badly playing with Tommy at the beach. One afternoon he consented to play golf with his father, who had not played in several years and who was really too old to play anymore. It took them five hours to play nine holes, even using an electric cart; and once, when the old man whiffed five times before hitting the ball, George had a bright-colored vision of his father's impending death. Yet his father's pleasure in an old love impressed him, and he sat and nodded, warm inside, as they drove home across the causeway surrounded by boats on water. The old man talked excitedly, sometimes almost squealed in childish delight, as he spoke of the week to come when all his family would be with him at the lake.

And all week George tried very hard to be George at eighteen, or at seventeen or sixteen, or at twelve or eleven, or at seven. Often, he did not have to try very hard. When he drove the yellow Oldsmobile into town or past the amusement park, the memories came charging at him with such force that it seemed to him that he was a beautiful woman under assault by a host of suitors. Without thought, he yielded himself up to an old girlfriend, even passing by her shaded, white house; or to the dangerous comedies of wine drinking; or to innumerable speedway visits; or to visions of the faces and bodies of vanished friends, enemies, and summertime employers. In wave after wave of five seconds sensations or minute-long dreaming he allowed his imagination to be captured, burnt-up.

On Friday evening, after dinner, George told Susan that he was going to take Tommy to the speedway Sunday night. They were together in the kitchen. As George spoke, Susan was watching Tommy through the window above the sink. He was out on the dock with his grandfather and grandmother.

"What on earth for," she said, not looking away.

"Oh, I don't know. I think it'll be fun. Give him a chance to see something different."

"Just the two of you? What about your Dad?"

With his arm George turned his wife away from the window. "Are you kidding? He never liked it, Susan. He always thought I was crazy to go as a kid."

She laughed. "You're all three of you looney." Lightly, she placed soapy hands around his neck and kissed him. George winked a reply.

"You know, Susie-Q, I used to really love to go to those things when I was a kid."

Susan turned to go back to the table for more dishes. "George, if you're smart you won't mention anything about Walt Disney between now and then."

"Why not?"

"Well, I've heard him say more than once this week that 'Davy Crockett and the River Pirates' is going to be on Walt Disney Sunday night."

"Shit."

"You can do better than that."

"Damn TV . . . . He watches too much TV."

Susan was over at the table now, scraping the remants of a perch dinner off plates and into a large paper sack. "Well, again all I know is he's pretty excited about it. He told Grandpa that he should watch it too." She smiled, then turned serious. "Your Dad told him some crazy story about a direct descendant of Davy Crockett's owning a boat at the marina."

George sat down quickly at the table and motioned with his hands for Susan to sit down also. The kitchen had become dark.

"My father is seventy-eight years old."

"I realize that. He looks it. He feels it. And he knows it."

"I don't know about that."

"Your mother's still pretty good – but then she's ten years younger than he is. She still has presence of mind. But I feel sorry for her, George. She's sort of lost. She knows she shouldn't be driving anymore, for one thing. I don't know how the two of them made it all the way up here from Chicago last week."

George stood up from the table. The room smelled of fish. "We can have an old-fashioned family conference about it all when Jackie and Carol get here Monday." He picked up a plate and some silverware and headed for the sink. "I don't want to talk about it anymore."

On Sunday night the family ate early, at George's insistence. While the two women cleared the table the conversation turned to the speedway. George began to continue his build up for Tommy – who had been bribed with an unplanned boat trip to give up Walt Disney.

"Just wait, Tommy, you've never seen anything like it." George raised his arm and made quick motions with his hand. "Zoom! Zoom! Zoom!" He was pleased, as Tommy smiled back, slightly startled.

"It's all a waste of time, Son," George's father interrupted suddenly, looking at Tommy. "The whole business should be outlawed. There should be a law against people killing themselves." When he finished, he was looking at George. "Never could see it. Back in 1932 I saw three men killed at one place at one time. Never been to one since."

There was a loud crash. George's mother had dropped one of the plates she was scraping. Susan was there in an instant. "I'll get it, Mother," she said. There was silence for several seconds as she picked up the plate, broken into three pieces.

George stared at his father. "I never heard that story before."

"That's because I never told you."

Susan returned to the table, walked over to Tommy and patted him on the head. "Oh, I think he'll survive it alright, Grandpa."

"Well, I know three who didn't."

"Dad!" George was yelling. "That's not the same thing."

"Yes it is." He strained for breath. "It sure is. I know three who got killed. Burned-up completely. We were right in front of it all, and we could even *smell* them burning."

"Tommy?" It was George's mother. "You pay no attention to your grandfather." All eyes focused on Tommy, who was busy eating his chocolate cake, his head low and almost buried in his plate. George looked at his father, feeling both worried and angry, and noticing his father's eyes; they were a bright blue.

Outside, the evening gloved his dreams tightly; it was warm, almost sticky heat, and the sun was still bright at seven o'clock. As George drove the sun bounced off the waxed hood of the car and sent invisible sparkles into the water that stretched out from either side of the thin causeway. The movement of the car let loose a torrent of images that ran at George without let up while he drove; the same pop-gun flashes of a wonderful past. Still, all the while he spoke to Tommy, who wore proudly his newly-acquired sailor's cap.

"We're a little early, Tommy. But that way we'll be sure to get good seats."

"How fast do the cars go, Dad?"

"Oh, it depends. It depends on the kind of cars that are racing. They have sprint cars tonight. I think they go better than a hundred miles an hour." George's eyes floated across the windshield to Tommy's, looking for reflected sparkles.

"A hundred miles an hour. Dad, didn't we go a hundred miles an hour on the way up here?"

"Well, yes. Sort of. Just for a few seconds. But you see it's different. These cars will be racing. There's a big difference." George turned and smiled at his son; they were entering the parking lot. "You'll see what I mean, Tommy."

At first, quite unexpectedly, George felt uncomfortable. He held Tommy's hand as they jostled in the crowd of people waiting for the ticket window to open. George searched for familiar faces, found none, and was secretly glad. He did not want to have to talk to anyone but his son. They bought their tickets and walked underneath the concrete stands and up one of the short ramps that led to the grandstand. George took Tommy's hand more firmly and led him up the steps to the next to the highest row of seats. When they finally turned toward the track and sat down, George was out of breath.

"Pretty good seats, aren't they?" George asked, smiling. Tommy sat quietly and looked down on the asphalt track. The sun was behind them, and they both felt a warm glow penetrate their shirts and warm their backs. For several seconds Tommy's eyes scanned the track, the infield, the rows of strange machines parked peacefully along the edge of the track, the building and houses in the far distance, the people rapidly filling the seats below him. Then his eyes glued to the high, webbed fence that stretched along the edge of the track directly in front of the grandstand. He pointed to it.

"Dad, is that fence to protect everybody when the cars crack-up?"

"It sure is." George tried hard to smile. "Of course nobody ever has a bad crash. I was here at least fifty times and I never saw a really serious accident."

As they waited for the first heat to be run, George tried to explain to Tommy what sprint cars were, how the races would be run, and the geography of the track. He spoke rapidly, and sometimes the constant effort to explain things simply and concretely irritated him. He felt that he was only confusing his son. At first Tommy nodded vigorously as his father talked, then less so, and finally not at all. George's mouth became dry from the constant explaining. Slow, dead minutes passed. Almost desperate, George went down to one of the refreshment stands and brought back cokes and ice cream.

Finally the cars came out onto the track, engines began to fire and spout screams, and the P. A. system crackled with driver's names and stories of past performances. There would be several preliminary heats, and then a fifty lap feature race. The noise and the movement excited Tommy, and when the first heat began his blue eyes became clear and magnetized, and they carefully followed the multi-colored cars as they roared around the track. Whenever the final lap began, people around them would jump to their feet and yell and scream for their favorites. George and Tommy stood up with them. George felt that his son was rapidly becoming a race fan. He watched his son closely, tried to anticipate his questions, which were frequent and constant now. Sometimes he actually cut his son off in the middle of a question, he was so anxious to aid in the christening of his son's imagination. He felt that they were settling into a closely shared dream.

The cars danced past him with noise and delight. For the thousandth time he became the experience of so many dark nights of his childhood past, with the spotlight sunshine, the wild smells of

gasoline, the spraying of furious noise, and the delicate transformation of boy to man to race car driver. George's eyes followed the lead car, and memory would tighten its hold, and dream, and the numbness made possible and inevitable a leap in time and space and existence. He would simply be in it, the car would accept its new master, perform for him; but give him a slippery wheel, whines, sputters, screams, and falling oil pressure, much competition – and final victory. Then he would be in the pits, face grimy, soiled – but bright, white teeth, a Pepsodent smile, a victory smile.

When the last engine shut off the track settled into death and silence. George watched Tommy fidget in his seat while they waited for the people below them to move out of the stands. When he suggested that they walk down to the pit area and look at the cars, Tommy only asked that they stop for ice cream on the way home. As they reached the bottom of the stands and turned to walk down the ramp, George noticed a group of young boys straining against the webbed fence watching the car crews load their machines into waiting trailers. It was something George had done often in the past. He stopped to watch with them, but Tommy tugged powerfully at his hand.

In the car there was silence for several minutes, then George began to speak.

"How'd you like it, Tommy?"

"Fine, Dad. It was great. I really liked it a lot."

"There was nothing I loved better when I was a little older than you are right now then going to the race track – the one we just left – on Sunday nights. My friends and I looked forward to it all week. One of their fathers would take us. And we'd plan to get there as early as we could. Sometimes we'd get there an hour ahead of time and watch them bring the cars in." George stopped for a second, took in another breath. "They were nights just like this one." He shook his head. "It's a shame there isn't a good track near home. Well, we'll just have to find us one. There's got to be one not too far away. Maybe we'll get you a go-kart when you're a little older." George was smiling, and he passed his eyes, tiny fragile bubbles, across to his son, who had become blurred in the darkness of the car.

"Say, I'll bet you want to be a race car driver when you grow up?"

"Maybe. But I think what I really want to be is a sailor. The captain of a ship."

George began to laugh nervously, and he increased the speed of his car five miles her hour.

"A sailor?"

"Yeah, Dad. Someday I want to be the captain of a big lake freighter."

"Not a race car driver?"

"Well, maybe sometime later. It's awful scary."

"But you can drown in a lake. Did Grandpa ever tell you about the freighter that split in half in a storm on Lake Superior?"

"No. But I'm going to be a great swimmer, Dad. Besides, Grandpa says they all have lifeboats. Not like on the *Titanic*."

George wheeledthe car into a frozen custard stand.

"What do you want, Mr. Thomas Warner, Sea Captain?"

"A ginger-ale float."

George stpped out of the car and walked toward the counter. He stook at the end of a considerable line, but he waited patiently, absorbed in thoughts of serious sins almost committed, and qualitative, personal distinctions; and visions of Sea Scouts and books on naval battles, sea exploration, and Oliver Hazard Perry, and brightly colored plastic clipper ships, submarines, and lake freighters.

Susan was out to meet them before George had cut the engine or the lights.

"I'm glad you're back. I was about to call that stupid track and have you paged. Your father's sick. I think he's had a small stroke."

Without answering, George was out of the car and on his way to the front door. Susan grabbed his sleeve.

"Wait, George. Calm yourself. He's all right. I mean he's not really unconscious." Her voice dropped. "But he's delerious. He has us all mixed-up. He thinks I'm your mother."

"Where is he?"

"In the family room, lying on the couch. I've already called the doctor you have up here and sent for an ambulance." They stopped together just inside the house. Tommy was still in the car.

"Where's Mom?"

"In the bedroom. Your neighbor's with her. She's afraid of him now."

They stood in the kitchen. It was dark. In a simultaneous motion Susan kissed his cheek and squeezed his hand. George could feel nothing. George noticed that the door which opened to the hallway which led out into the family room was closed. "Here," she said, "sit down."

"George, he sat and watched the Walt Disney thing after you left. Then he fell asleep in the chair. Your Mom and I played cards with Mrs. Wilson in the kitchen. About an hour ago he must of woke-up, because he came in here." Susan lowered her voice, almost whispered. "He thought he was back at the dinner table. He started talking to all of us about that automobile crash he saw once. He was scared, George, frightened to death. He was shaking all over. He kept talking about it, your Mother just couldn't stop him. Finally, she started to cry. Then he just left and went back to the family room." She paused, squeezed his hand. George returned the pressure. Lightly.

"George, he's been having nightmares about that crash for years?"

"What?"

"Your Mother told me." George slipped his arm around his wife. "After a few minutes I went out there and he started calling me Lou and just talking nonsense." She wiped her face with her free hand. George released his arm. He heard the front door squeak open.

"Susan, when did you call the ambulance?"

"The doctor did. He said fifteen minutes. It should be here any minute."

George stood up. "Go put Tommy to bed. I'll go out and see Dad."

George found his father lying peacefully on the couch, his hands folded lightly in his lap. He seemed to be sleeping. The light above the TV was burning, the drapes were open and the window formed a huge wall of black. George called to him. "Dad." The blue eyes opened for an instant, then shut again, then opened, then shut. But the old man made no sound. George stepped closer, bent low, placed his hand on his father's shoulder. "Dad," he called, very softly. As he spoke he heard Susan come into the room.

Then the eyes opened, bright blue. The old man stared at Susan, smiling. "Lou," he said, "let's forget the dishes and take the kids swimming. Come-on," he continued, and he began to get up. He was almost off the couch when George gently pushed him back down to a sitting position. George's father reached out his hand. "Tell you what, Lou, we'll do 'em when we get back." His voice had not changed; it was still low and guttural and clear.

George waited for the ambulance in the living room. It was late. Susan and Mrs. Wilson sat with George's father, tried to keep him calm, and humored his strange speech. Occasionaly he heard them talking. His mother sat in the kitchen, midway between the bedroom and the family room, more afraid than ever despite George's assurances that it would all pass. The nightmare had not returned. Tommy came into the living room, wearing his pajamas.

"Grandpa's sick?"

"Yes, Tommy. But we think he'll be okay. There's an ambulance coming to take him to the hospital." George stood-up and held out his hand. "Come-on, we'll go out in the back yard and look for it coming on the causeway."

They walked outside, into the dark, into the wet grass. There were stars in abundance. Across the bay, a half mile away, they could see the brightly-lit causeway, lit like a chinese dragon by the red and white lights from the cars leaving the amusement park. The water reflected the light, sent streams of white and red shootin out across the dark water, almost reaching the dock. They sat down on the picnic table. Within seconds they saw it: a terrible, revolving red flash; and the sight brought sound, the pointy scream of the police siren.

George mixed his hand tightly with Tommy's. And he felt all his blood rush to his head, then it

gurgled and coalesced and dripped down rapidly into his throat, swamping him, dorwning him. He choked. Tommy tensed, raised his eyes. Then the blood seemed to explode, a crashing, and he saw himself in a fiery race car, burning. He feared his own memory now. And he felt that his dreams had become a beautiful white albatross, sitting wounded at his side.

IRONIC, AS USUAL 30

Whit Joyner

My curse on this earth
For not loving God
Is that a woman I have wanted
Has repulsed me
And gone home of a night
And dreamed she wanted me
And refused the message of the dream.
And God has told me this.
He said it was out of His hands.