




CORADDI



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CORADDI

fall issue

1973

NOT BEYOND BELIEF

Is this creation,
well-intentioned
but itself inert,
so unlike the boardwalk
busily swept
by worn-out women
tangling with ash
& hurricanes?

Kenneth John Atchity

CORAddi

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT GREENSBORO

FALL, 1973

Editor
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Portrait of a man 2.27.78

1978

2000

FRED, THE PATRIOTIC VAMPIRE

Marilynn Byerly

Poor Fred scratches at my window
Pressing nose against pane with three-inch fangs
Mumbling catch phrases of half-forgotten pages
Of a time before he was spawned
From the hollow body of a John Bircher
Dead of seizure at a Klan meeting.
“Another Commie has bit the dust,”
He gurgles; and spits blood
Bitterly tainted by Lenin traces.
“Now the world is safer . . . ”
Although sometimes a red-blooded American virgin
“I does get thirsty on occasion,
But it is for the cause.
I’m saving them fools
They don’t know what is at stake.”
Waving his cape he scratches and calls
“Tell them what I do . . . tell them.”
And flaps away dreaming
Of that great future symbol —
The American Baldheaded Bat.

FOR MISS EMMELINE GRANGERFORD
(THE HORRENDOUS GRAVEYARD GODDESS)

Marilynn Byerly

Sweet Miss Emmeline it grieves me so
That the elegist extraordinare
Has been without elegy these many years
When you were so quick to give your grief
Poetic cadence
In the finest graveyard sense
For dear Stephen Botts, dec'd.
Sweet maid who created
Such poems of greivous comfort
And such beautiful pain in crayon,
You tasted bitter death before your
Goal was reached —
The creation of "suicide's grief."
Divine pain shall n'er more
Be painted in cadence and crayon
Now that Miss Emmeline is dec'd.
Alas.



Rose Mackenbera of NY

Howard 73

MYOPIA PARADOXICA

Kenneth John Atchity

Fathers who wear glasses
smuggly think they know
what life's beauty's all about
when tender infant daughters
goo most vivaciously at them—
& reach to pull those barriers
from dearest daddy's eyes.

Cruelly jealous mothers
too soon disillusion dads
by telling painful truth:
that baby reaches for,
not her favorite parent,
but the midget, double-dancing
reflections of her self.



ROOM STORM

Richard Waynesmith

When you never called
I took to puffing brown cigars
cheap, fat ones
with a ghastly reek
blowing heavy blue smoke
like fumigation
through my rooms
killing any last corner
of lingering perfume
any souvenir of woman smell,
and satisfied with my coverwork
I opened windows
threw back doors
So neutral air could take the rooms

back to an odorless neglect
back to a standstill for either side,
but through a natural incense burn
the stench of fertile May
crawled through those puzzled rooms:
the honeysuckle
with the rose
a smear of grass
the strength of ozone
after noontime rain;
the gathering of respective smells
like massless islands in the wind
the three swirled about a common ground
killing by mixing the smell that was
turning and shaping the smell that is.

ama



1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10 11 12

A HOMILY

John Blackard

How many times we sat together in that stuffy, little barrow he called a studio, and watched the pigeons making nests between the rusty thighs of those old office buildings I do not know. Windows could not be closed. The wood, swollen and chalky, cemented by the blue-grey excrement of pigeons. Besides, it was either too hot to want to close them, or one of us had just farted from gleichgültigkeit.

The pigeons flowed in and out of the studio like the cartooned woof and warp of a gigantic weaving we could not interpret; the stage properties with altered purpose, the plaster of paris mannequins like ikons, to be included in the colorless design of the tapestry. These are the dog days of the summer. The time when people are so easily infected.

Orestes! How strangely the name blends with the man I find sitting behind the squat, institutional green, metal desk, flipping through line drawings of Picasso erotica, slowly catapulting his penis against his belly. Pigeons peer over his shoulder from the window ledge (he has painted the window casements a gilding gold color, giving them a puppet

theatre effect on and through which the pigeons perform for him). Orestes slowly catapults: "Picasso. . . he's quite a ball o'wax, eh, what do you think?. . . Orestes' bulldog face is grinning at me, one eyebrow thrust studied up his forehead, drawing his face into quarters of imaginary black and white, harlequined. Earlier in life, as you have told me, Orestes wanted to be a figure on the dramatic stage, but since has settled into this little death of the mannequin keeper. Before his accident, he had a chance to do character parts on the dinner theatre circuit. Drunk one night in someone's third floor apartment, you were not with him you said, he walked off the balcony: pretty much broke every bone in his face. A right handsome kid before that. Nevertheless, somehow, Orestes wandered into this derivative form of drama; that is, creating the eye-stabbing, viscera-rending, little tableaux we see in the shop windows downtown displaying clothes and fashionable accessories. The common theme for the shoppers in the street, not always subtle, is "Imagine yourself as someone else, someone other than a housewife, secretary, insurance salesman, key punch operator, service station attendant, streetwalker, college professor, garbage man, etc., moving through the idyllic, sybaritic scenes flanking the mannequins in the display window: you (the shopper) would have nothing to wear! Come in and buy something to satisfy that worm in your craw!"

Like scenes from Victorian novels, Orestes constructs display window backdrops, selects the proper cast of mannequins from his studio, and sets the window shopping world imagining. All his clothing store clientele are well pleased with the effect.

The downtown arteries are spilling over with shoppers and office workers on lunchbreaks. Orange and yellow buses are coming up to the curbs of the main street, ejecting its passengers like burned out, empty cartridges, replacing them with others powder-stuffed, and breaking back out into the unending line of traffic. A collage of labials, dental labials, diphthongs, liquids, laterals, nasal fricatives, and voiceless stops are fragmented by machines at work. A blind man (there is at least one on the main drag of

every city) is bracing himself against the side of an office building, selling newspapers or picking his nose. Pigeons are shitting on automobile windshields and screwing in the crosswalks. The downtown arteries are a myriad of moving legs, shuttling arms, elbows acting as turn-signals indicating overtakings, passings, and straddlings. This is taking place on the streets below Orestes' studio, where we sit playing backgammon; Orestes still flip-flopping himself against his belly, the pigeons still performing. The dog days. . . . It was on just such a day as this Orestes and I met.

I was doing a temporary clerical job downtown gotten for me by a parttime employment agency (the college degree in my desk drawer, where it should be, folded into an airplane), and, like so many others, on my lunchbreak. I was standing at the streetcrossing waiting for the walking green when I noticed something move inside the glass display case of "The Southern Darling Fashion Boutique." It was Orestes setting up his background properties, dressing and grouping his mannequins (this tableau exclusively female). A banner hung across the front of the shop advertising a sale of one-third off normal prices. I was fascinated by the artistic flair of his movements, the total ignorance of us black and white cadavers of the street. I missed the walking light describing Orestes to myself in this way:

Some of his long-legged beauties are attached to their heavy glass foundations at the ankle. They tend to be less stout of heart and easy prey. He has no problem with this type. A little less yielding to his advances are his ladies set-screwed on the innerside of a bent knee. They tend to be a little awkward to get down, and when dressed in pantsuits look ridiculous (later Orestes compared these mannequins to you, Eveleine). The ones seeming to intrigue Orestes the most are the ladies femininely unpredictable. These are attached by a chrome-plated square tube running from a glass foundation to a square opening, fitted with a butterfly nut, in the centers of their sweet, molded, little crotches. When he handled this type, the man in Orestes came forward to wrench a poised and delicate arm from its hinged socket, swivel and twist a firm-breasted torso from its legs,

and make her give in. With a pounding in his temples, he lifts and separates his ladies, and lays them down roughly. He pauses to make orderly piles of the clothing he took off them. The two rows of non-glare overhead spotlights in the display windows make it unbelievably hot; Orestes is sweating freely. As I watch him race about like a squat, impressionistic photo of his namesake, distorted by the curtain of glass, hiding him and his private furies, it registers like a double exposure he is very glad to be within the realm of his hollow-shelled lovers. He seems to belong.

As I was about to turn away to cross the street (a good bit of my lunchbreak already wasted), Orestes knuckled on the window glass. This action seemed like breaking the rules of a game. He motioned me closer. His speech garbled like a tape run backwards by the glass. He asked me if I knew how to play backgammon. "Sure," I answered. He must have been confusing me with someone else. But these are, and those were, the dog days, remember, and I took it in stride. Susceptibility to infection and all that.....

He exited from a sliding panel inside the apparel shop, out of sight for a moment, then materialized, everything about him somehow subdued by the atmosphere of the street. "Let's go," he said; "I've got the board all set up."

We walked down the street to the antediluvian office building, "The Dixie" and took the elevator to the third floor. The black elevator girl eyed us both curiously, pulling back the brass, filigree screen, letting us into the hallway. Here is Orestes' workshop and studio where he stores his artificial properties and casts his mannequins in plaster of paris molds. He shares the third floor with a dentist whose clientele lost all need of him years ago, two ladies who run a mimeographing service for the First Day Adventist churches in the area, a beauty salon frequented by indetical blue-headed ladies, and a lounge for the maids and elevator girls working in the building. There is the faint smell of a bird menagerie in the high ceilinged, narrow hallway. Orestes' studio takes up half the hall's floor space and is locked behind ancient, cadmium yellow, double doors. Like a priest invoking the spirit before entering the sanctuary of his god, Orestes hunches over the lock of the door....

Of our first meeting this drypoint etching is essentially all I remember. Now, I don't know if the imagery of the priest is accurate enough, for he could just as well have been a maimed and retarded beggar sitting by the gate of some healer, waiting to be restored whole. (There is probably little difference between these two areas of life anyway.) The two images could be said to embrace one another in Orestes.

"When there are no more pigeons in a city, there is no more life in a city." Orestes discourses philosophically sometimes (homily, is what he calls it), placing a rigid, stubby finger beside his nose. "Pigeons are like ticks," he says, "as long as there is blood to be got from the host, they hang on; or until they are sated by the blood, almost bursting through their husking shells." He is standing now on his workbench, arms crucified in the air.

Wheeling round the muted substance of the city skyline, the pigeons could be seen as scavengers, I agreed, but to see them fluttering and wobbling about on the sidewalks and streetcurbs, it seems unlikely their comings and goings as a species from the city could signify anything as important as Orestes suggests. I sit, looking caught up in his thespianism.

"Pigeons give a city a sense of humor. They are forever blanketing some downtown shopper, forever leaving their corpses at the mouths of alleyways."

I no longer study the backgammon board, but look at this enigma, still standing crucified, watching the blood rise to his cheeks as camouflaged pigeons plunge like divebombers over the rooftops of neighboring office buildings. "Yet," he says, jumping down from the cross, retaking his seat across the backgammon board from me, "pigeons keep a city from becoming completely divorced from natural law." He is trying hard to be objective. "Besides pigeons, only abstract things like businesses die natural deaths in the city. People die in the city only by accident, natural death occurs in the suburbs." He was not limiting himself to physical death, needless to say, Eveleine, but included spiritual, emotional, and mental death as well. He looked drugged.

Shall I repeat my introductory paragraph now, Eveleine, adding that twice a week we played backgammon together in the studio, and that he had begun fashioning a mannequin in plaster of paris after me? The dog days. . . . After covering my typewriter (the parttime, temporary job had somehow become permanent) and putting away the account books, I would leave my little scribe's desk to visit Orestes in "The Dixie." It was a bit like being an usher at a theatre, for sometimes I would catch him creating private little dramatic scenes in his studio, having set up the tableau using his artificial display properties, and staging himself with a favorite mannequin mistress or male mannequin antagonist. Standing outside the double doors, I watched blurred images through the bottle-blue, opaque glass. I was his only audience, besides you (and the pigeons), and I never let him know I witness any of the realities of the inner sanctum.

"I'm thinking of writing a play," he says with the expression of a short, wax-coated bear with honey dripping off his muzzle. He lies his honey-coated, dirty, paw-like hands on the workbench like divining cards out of which truth would flow. "It will be all about me and these beastly pigeons," giving a kick with his head to a swarm lit on the windowsill and others on rooftops of neighboring buildings. "What do you think, eh? Doesn't the pestilence, the real pathos, the cathartic force of it just draw the pus right out of you, eh?" (If the sound of Orestes's voice seems to change from page to page of this homily, don't confuse it with inconsistency, for Orestes is a man of many moods and disguises, possibly even schizophrenic, ha, ha; but then, you, Eveleine, of all people were aware of this I'm sure.)

I am not sitting on the edge of my chair, for I am used to this sort of talk, nevertheless, I try not to stifle him. I look out across the workshop and see the rows of painted, artificial properties for window displays in thier respective bins, the plaster of paris mannequins in various stages of construction and repose, fanning out in soft, white, sexual undulations before his workbench.

“It will be my way of living one of those alternative lives you are always talking about, eh? Yachthada-da-dada (a favorite expression of Orestes)! I’ll model it after the final play of the Oresteian trilogy, *The Eumenides*. How could anything be more appropriate, eh? The curse on the house of Atreus will be this mannequin workshop (I’ll pretend I inherited the business if the play is ever published and biographers start coming round). The matricide will be symbolic on two levels: one, my Orestes, the egg-sucker, could not bring himself to pray for his mother on her deathbed; two, sterility versus fertility, the finelineness between the two, and the unnatural and small deathness of artificiality. Isn’t it fine so far? Now then, the Furies will be in the form of pigeons, seen and felt everywhere by the hero, again carrying several levels of meaning: one, the gross actuality of life (the mother’s curse on the son); two, a preoccupation with pigeons, the little bastards, bordering on eroticism. What do you think, eh? Isn’t it a proper flit?”

He is divorcing you, Eveleine; or rather, you are divorcing him. Orestes corrects himself. He mentions it because he wants me to help move you out of the house soon. “Since she’s lost so much weight, her eye has begun to wander, the little bitch. . . . Looks like my caryatids, here (referring to the mannequins) are the only ones I can count on. . . . Men are paying a bit more attention to her as well, and it’s going to her head. . . . Poor girl doesn’t know what a female orgasm is. . . she never will if I have anything to do with it; they get hard to please once they’ve had it. . . .”

“Of course I’ve been unfaithful to her many times, but that’s another ball o’wax, eh? Last night, for instance: I had the sweetest, little artichoke on that bed over there. Eh? Picked her up at the bar. I’ll tell you, I felt positively demoniac.” (I could see Orestes and his “sweet, little artichoke” sitting across from him in one of the dark, musty back booths of the bar. Of course he is plying her with beer and she is talking to him about her steady boyfriend. He is such a romantic, she is saying. If only he would let himself experience life for once. The girl and her guy are college students. “He knows nothing of the concrete!” she is saying, trying to look serious through wire-rimmed glasses

half-cocked by too many bottles of beer. Later, sitting on the small bed in the corner of the studio, used for taking naps during the heat of the day, the sweet thing is telling Orestes: "Please be gentle with me. . . . I'm virgin. . . . Thought I'd tell you. . . . I know some fellows don't like the thought of being the first. . . ."

Orestes, in his best French accent: "My lovely Therese. . . ."

Static-ridden Ella Fitzgerald picked up on the wireless is reverberating off the rough, high walls. The girl's mouth is a canal of Turkish candy: she kisses horribly. Orestes' onanism presses him onward. Her body is loose, as if balls of baby fat have ripened and are about to drip off her frame to the studio floor. She is unspeakably pudgy. They roll about flaccidly. Her powdered body is sweating, smearing darkly on Orestes' underclothes and bedsheets. He pretends not to notice in the room's half-light. Despite his French accent he is secretly repulsed.

"Aren't you going to de-flower me?" she asks.

Orestes builds up a new head of steam. She stops him.

"I don't think that's my vagina," she says pitifully.

"What?" Orestes lifts himself on elbows.

"Sorry man, guess I just don't know my own body."

Orestes feigns sleep. . . .)

". . . and then there's that Sophie. . . ." Orestes beams, speaking of the black woman who cleans the offices at night. "She's as juicy as fruit. She wandered in here the other night wanting to know if I was planning to throw out any artificial flowers 'Mr. Orestes, sir' or anything, shaking that sumptuous black tail of hers. She wanted them for a flower arrangement to set on her television. We made a fair exchange, we did; Yachthada-da-dada! Nothing like a few trinkets for the natives, eh? What do you say? Juicy as fruit!"

Even the pigeons hide themselves from the grey ennuï of this seventeenth day of August. Orestes is sitting behind his green metal desk comically brooding because I have

defeated him in backgammon three times running. I walk about the studio after sitting for so long a time, imagining: the room is a closet in Citizen Kane's Xanadu: a microcosmic collection of dormant and imprisoned life; the overall pattern of light and dark suggest a Byzantine chapel whose architectural design produces symbolic areas of light and dark, of good and evil, present in the human soul; those bloodless mannequins standing -- all unstrung -- some legs here, arms there, a three dimensional adaptation of a fresco of christian martyrs. As I have said, these are the dog days. . . . All of this and none of this as you know, Eveleine for this is both truth and untruth in one. Would you say that Orestes' studio is actually a smelly, hot warehouse of a room cocked over the city streets like a dog's leg?

I have just discovered a mannequin plaster casting of your head. (Orestes had finished the mannequin he was modelling as my counterpart. I now stand in the window of Belks Department Store swinging a golf club, dressed in doubleknit slacks and knit golfshirt. He nearly choked from laughing when he realized how insulted I was.) I know this is your head represented here, because we met briefly once during the first days of Orestes' and my backgammon playing, remember? I was just leaving the studio when a plump, peroxidized woman appeared at the door. On first sight you impressed me as not being much of Orestes: a stolid, little female provincial, choking of aphorisms, a spiritual gamin. Your face was heavily powdered but somehow beautifully quiet (I guess "nullified" is a better word); your skin like successive layers of transparent polyethylene through which, if one looked long enough, the very marrow in your bones might have become animated and psychedelic.

Having said goodbye, and waiting for the elevator down the hall from the studio, Orestes stuck his head out through the double doors at me, and in a furious whisper said, "Did you have to stare at her so?"

I was puzzled by this, and thought maybe you were self-conscious of your weight, or more accurately (I now realize) because Orestes thought I might discover something about

him, something he willed me ignorant of at the time, by looking at you.

And here I am staring at you again, or at least your image, and I am caught!

Orestes has overcome his anguish at defeat and has wandered over to where I'm standing, still holding the plaster casting of your head in my hands. "I made that casting not long after Eveleine and I married: the occasion might interest you" (And Orestes proceeded to tell me your attempted suicide.) "What made her think of it," he said, "was my anger at her suggestion of having a child. I told her our marriage would be much better off if she were impotent. . . . Well, goddamnit, I shouldn't have been so honest." Then in a well-contrived gunman's slang I cannot begin to describe, Orestes constructed an image of you both after your recovery: standing in the bathroom, see; pushing you up before the mirror, see; forcing you to stare at yourself, kiddo. He stood you there making sure you focused on your own eyes while he gathered data for this plaster casting never to be given a body.

Pylades, let me interrupt briefly, this thing you call "homily" to say something about how it was living with Orestes. If you had not been in bed sick that day he moved me out of the house and had come to help, I might have made some broken-down appeal to you then and there, extending two phytisic hands, palms toward you, face calm as sargasso, and said: "You could have no idea what it's been like. . . . There have been times when I've found myself smouldering in my own breath, consciously attempting to slow down and quiet my own pulse from the force and nature of his lovemaking. . . . In his hands I metamorphosed to cadaverous flesh, inorganic carapace. . . . Orestes, in his injured sex (that ruined face of his at the bottom of his problems), is made for mounting corpses or digging his pleasure out of the vulva of wet plaster of paris. . . . He married me not because I was pretty, easy to talk with, a good cook, or anything like that (and then I would have begun to cry a little), no; but because I am as ordinary as bulkmail. Because I could offer no contradictions. Because I was so quaintly uncomprehending and literal minded in my awareness and interpretations of things. (He sometimes called me the 'sumphole' of his

life, over which he stood like a priest at Delphi.) You begin to see how his mind worked?"

Living with Orestes, I used, sometimes, not to be able to sleep at night for remembering a certain nocturnal event of my childhood. It wasn't unusual for me as a little girl to wake in the dead of night from the sound of crying in our little kitchen. I would crawl out of my bed to peak through the doorway and see my mother sitting there at the kitchen table, naked, holding the slit between her legs, frustrated, wanting someone to finish a job father had begun. I didn't understand, but accepted, as most women do unconsciously, that sooner or later I would be sitting at a similar kitchen table, feeling no better, feeling empty.

Well, you can imagine my surprise when quite by accident I found someone who thawed me out -- at least from the waist down. This is when I decided to divorce Orestes.

Orestes has just trapped two speckled pigeons in a cardboard box filled with brightly colored plastic leaves. "Did you see the little buggers?" he asks me; "coitus overrides self-preservation! Now what would Konrad Lorenz say about that, eh?" He carefully folds the top flaps of the box over, securing them against a mad beating of wings. (Of course you remember, Eveleine, the stench in the studio the night of Oreste's assault; it was the festering, budding smudges of those two pigeons in the box, though symbolically we took it for something released from the gaping fissure in his skull.) He was laughing now, "Yachthada-da-dada!" he repeats over and over again, laughing so hard and carelessly I begin to laugh too. He suddenly stops: gyrations shut-down in midcycle, and his face contorts like a rebuilding of an expression prior to waste, and says, "Relativity! Now there's a real ball o'wax for you eh? I think my wife has finally refuted my remark about impotency."

"Last night we were sitting on the patio behind the house after grilling a couple of steaks. The stars were out, the jagged points of light cutting holes in that little mind of

hers. She was remembering something from her fifth grade science book about stars and planets and the cosmos and the relative insignificance of men. ‘. . . and do you know what that means, Orestes?’ she asked me. ‘That means no one is capable of taking a fall; it means no one is noble enough to successfully pull off a tragic fall, not even you.’

“The dirty, little bitch finally understands me.” (I would like to here your interpretation of this story sometime, Eveleine.)

He is reading from a handwritten manuscript:

“It was mid-August in the dying industrial town. Winds carried sidewalk dust in negative clouds. Insulated over head wires roared with heat. People shopped all through the day like bundles of lint searching for just the right navel.”

“It was the third floor of an office building; the workshop of a young artisan. Many windows, all thrown open by the summer heat, surround a central room. A multitude of pigeons in sight; various geometric planes; wheeling in great, unbroken arcs against the city sky; between the buildings, lining the windows.”

“It was the large, scar-riddled table, mannequins standing like spokes, fanning out to stacked boxes filled with plastic flowers. The young artisan, Orestes, stands before the table, tools scattered around him, mannequins in various degrees of completeness face him. It was the intenseness of his watching the movement of pigeons.”

“Orestes (gesturing to pigeons): What do they posit in the mind’s eye as they susurrate through the city sky? No doubt they watch me watching them, defensively, making out something more than pigeons, remembering fribble on a father’s face, the tycooned mouth a mother tit-for-tatted with everyone. The pigeons are concerned with the lice on our backs, the nests of abandoned spirits, the existential lineage my father and I must admit.”

“(He examines a plaster of paris forearm, neck.) These now bloodless fragments carry

coagulates of sleeping, golden calves from those who wait beside the gate. Cuckoldry, a slow-eating disease, the artificial procreation my only heritage; I wear it like a song of reply." Silence.

"A fustian beginning, eh? This is my homily in the garden of Gethsemane, or something like that." Orestes laughs smally, unconvinced with his humor. "Some ball o'wax, eh?" He is chewing on the soft, inner belly of his cheek, waiting for my reaction to his dramatic fragment. I can think of nothing to say. The silence of the mannequins all around us ("angels passing overhead"), the radio playing unnoticed in the corner, throwing out sounds like wet ropes, covering us. The sound deciphers into the voice of one of those radio preachers; the phrase, ". . . and with mouths like open graves," the preacher says. A sigh over the radio is audible, as the minister begins a new paragraph. He begins: "The jealousy of Christ, uh. . . pardon me; the salvation of Christ. . . etc." And the preacher is thinking to himself it really doesn't matter anyway, it's only on the radio. Then silence again, then broken by the wild, animal laughter of negro maintenance women leaving the building for the evening. Orestes and I are standing face to face, sizing each other up.

He finally says in a tired, febrile tone, "Well, I guess I'll finish this soliloquy tonight."

Not much later I say goodnight and leave him in the workshop puzzling over his manuscript.

This is how Orestes' homily ended: "Let no man reproach me for the symbolic matricide, for that last night between the woman who bore me and my own sense of vacancy; a prayer could not pass between us: our whistles stopped up, issued air at fingertips scaling dry, nothing could replace the insentient guilt. Looks like long-distance traveller's came and went, the sister of on-point hearts too late to course. A polished hardwood floor became our temple when we cracked each other's backs and felt better."

"Remember; mother of father: 'There were excuses for the ferry crossing, then ten years of missed connection, then missing child, then an offering's remainder. . . .'"

"Mother, was it the movement of toys in the night that changed the way you slept, that make you stand over father like a web of blood-stained rebuffs and accusations?"

'No, no,' she said; 'Not one sacred ark in sight to float away the disappointment and hate we stole from one another's baskets.'

"Since then it seems the pigeons miss her like a lover, pursuing me, keeping me from a father's work. No longer do they content themselves with sitting on the ledges, but now they invade my workshop to breed and nest in the boxes of plastic flowers on the shelves to shit behind the cardboard facades."

"Time passes quickly. Positions of lights outside change. Sun and moon sold for streetlights and neonsigns. The sound of a door unlocking can be heard from down the hall -- (and this is the last of that scratching in green ink.) It must have been at this point that the brother of that black maid, Sophie, came into the studio seeking revenge for his sister's exploitation, and reduced Orestes to the pile of smoking meat I found a few evenings later.

I entered the studio to find a new tableau set up, reminiscent of Aeschylean drama. (I felt the way an archaeologist must feel discovering a lost Greek tomb or temple.) The flashing of neonlights from the street below conjured up miasmic images of the studio, revealing Orestes' caryatids standing with smashed faces and lopped off plaster arms, collapsing in hills upon each other, mangled and covered in plastic fall leaves. There were no pigeons present (except for the misinterpreted smell) as Orestes' homily predicted. I found him in his office stripped naked and battered, leaving him looking like the only image of the tableau not frozen in time, decomposing rapidly. The rest, Eveleine, you know. . . .

AND THE BATTLEFIELD WAS BUT AN OPEN LOT

Jack R. Ridl

And the battlefield was but an open lot
We warred until the circus came in May.
We never heard it heave its midway in the night,
But at dawn we wandered through the quiet canvass
Thinking of the spectacle we all would marvel at.
It was assumed.

We came in the afternoon.

My parents pulled against the side show barker's
"C'mon in a little closer. I'm gonna tell you
About the strange people on the inside."
The voice slinked into my ears.
My father tugged me to the cotton candy.

At the big show, behind me with a cigarette
Drrooping from his upper lip, a boy I'd never seen before,
Tapped me on the shoulder saying that
The lion was doped up and that the juggler



Had a magnet on his nose that held
The cane that held the plate that held
The vase that held the rose
He watered with a polka dotted sprinkling can.

I shrugged; but then he laughed
When I applauded Miss Arnelle
Dancing on the tight rope ten feet of the ground.
Later I cheered wildly when she twirled
Above the center ring as Miss Trufoli
Hanging by her teeth above the net.
The grand finale brought her back,
Miss Laine, atop the elephant
Who waddled sluggish, dusty, round the tent
While she waved a faded purple feather fan.

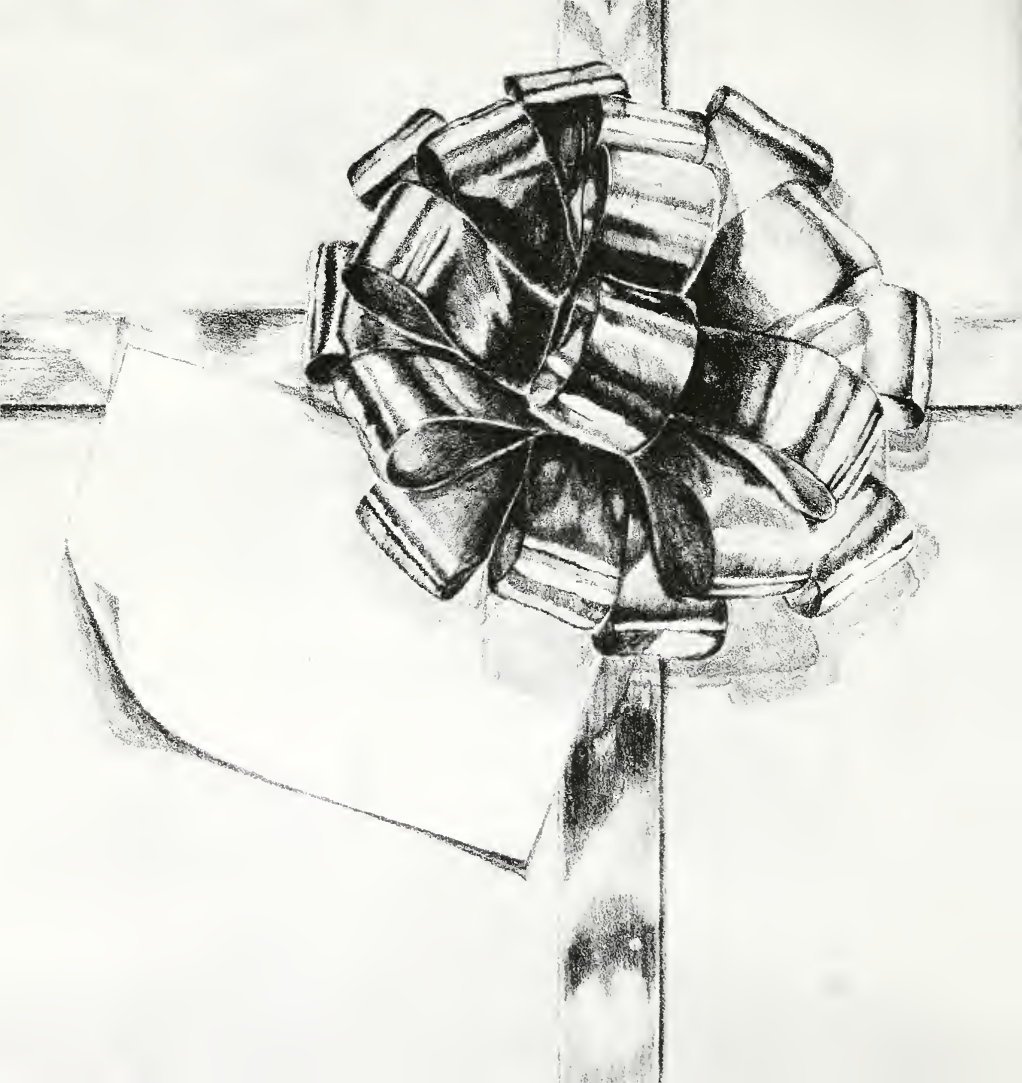
The morning after, I grabbed my gun
And marched back to the field to resume battle.
The grass had yellowed where the tents had bloomed.
And elephant turds dried in the sun
Where cannonballs had dropped to still the war.

HOMeward

Marilynn Byerly

Last night on board of a long dreamed cruise
I pause from packing to say good-bye to the sea
Walking through the ship past drinkers in evenings clothes
Ladies carrying straw bags bought on the islands
Dark-skinned waiters in evening jackets,
Past bands playing seductive bossa novas
In multi-colored rooms lighted only
By cocktail lights and low-cut evening dresses.
Past all visions of cinema and daydream
To the bow where the ship first rips into the sea.
Alone, for no new found lovers walk the deck tonight,
I face the bordered sea encircled by blowing fog
Unable even to see the waves except as webs
Pattered to capture and hold whitecaps.

Chilled by wind and dampness wearing my
First longed-for evening dress
I pause to hear love songs from a distant band;
Lightning flickers, and the sea offers nothing.
Movie and novel decree that I should be here
Giving final fairwell to some man
A newfound lover who will somehow
Always remain forever to be my own true love
But I have spent my time bored in the sun
Reading Henry James and hoping for the expected plot turn.
While romantic islands, white beaches and palms passed
Sailors ogled pretty girls at port
And I met my dinner companion — A Catholic priest.
So here I stand last night on board;
I close my eyes and wait for the kiss
Which will never come
And only the empty sea remains.



Feed the tree
and trim the cat
It's Christmas time
YIPPEE!
Put up the painted people
Two josephs and
a mary
one white-winged rubber fairy
three ogres
and an ox.
Open another box!
Drink the tinsel
Smoke the stars
Close your eyes
and fly to mars
with mary and a shepherd
WILD!

I think we lost the child.

Betsy Ross

THE MONK'S COMPLAINTS

(trans. from the Provençal)

Kenneth John Atchity

I hate to hear, if I may say,
a bungling butler talk all day;
& he who would too gayly slay
another galls me — & a headstrong bay.
And they annoy me (as God knows):
young men who hold their shields too close
& will not risk receiving blows;
monks whose beards conceal their toes;
the jealous man's disjointed nose.

I hold a woman as a boor
when she's as proud as she is poor;
a man who meekly yields the floor,
although his wife were Eleanor!
I cannot bear a knight to boast
when he is far from his own coast
who there has no more valiant post
than pounding mortar, salting roast,
& buttering the morning toast.

It chills the cockles of my soul
to see a coward play the role,
bad hawks who will not leave the pole,
a mouthful in a giant bowl.
And I'm repulsed — in high degree —
when wine is cut too heavily,
or when a beggar bothers me,
or blind man grasps me by the knee.
For in their path I find no glee.

Of lengthy fasts I've had enough;
of meat when it's uncooked & tough;
of priests who make an oath a puff
of wind; of whores too gruff.
It rankles me beyond all measure
when misers waste the joys of leisure,
to be enroute in icy weather,
to flee when loaded down with treasure.
Dice games, cursing — they're no pleasure.

I'm discontent, and long have been,
to eat without a fire when
on watch against the northwest wind

with savors wafting from the inn
to taunt me. And it seems a sin
when she who scours the pots must flirt;
& a wretched husband makes me hurt
when I see his wife is fair & pert
while he is stingy, cruel & curt.

I wince to see — by God's great name! —
poor fiddlers in a hall of fame,
five brothers with a common claim,
a poor priest in a jolly game.
And I'm peeved dearly (by St. Marcel)
by loud & overdone apparel,
huge parties in a tiny castle,
rich men who are poor in revel,
& tourneys marred by bows & arrows.

And I am bugged (as God's my chief!)
by tables long with cloths too brief,
a man whose skin's a bas-relief,
& plated mail that's seen much grief.
I can't stand being stuck in port
when rain & wind blow from the north;

& seeing good friends out of sorts
annoys me near to death — just short! —
when I know their fight is not for sport.

I'll tell you what else grieves me sadly:
old crones who hide their wrinkles madly;
a knight who treats a poor girl badly;
& squires who eye her legs to gladly.
By Pluto! these, too, get me hot:
a fat lass with a skinny twat,
a lord who's shaved & missed a spot,
a tired man restless on his cot —
if something's worse I know not what.

And other things can cause me pain:
to gallop capeless in the rain,
to find a greedy sow has lain
in my steed's stall — ate all his grain!
And these enrage me, more than double:
a saddle shaking at the pommel,
a leather belt without a buckle,
& when a mean man in his home will
speak no words that don't make trouble.

TeAnne Oehler

Let yourself . . .

sew now
quickly now
sew as to wear

double up
roll up
shape up

Pull over
Contrasting notch
split

to fix your lifestyle
that mixes

double up
roll up
shape up

Pull over.



T. 107

Annalese Witzky

I think I should tell you dear . . .

that the car needs grease and oiling.
The light still is out in the kitchen
and again asks you for its life,
DiDi wishes you to fix her tire,
one of the joys of being a father,
and your underwear is hanging on the line,
again of course, since you gave it to me last
night, when I was too tired
to do it before going to bed.

And the dog ran through the screen door
again,
Guess you haven't gotten it right yet,

And the stuff you stick on roofs so they won't leak
spilled all over the tulips you were supposed
to plant, last month.

Your mother's coming, your
fault not mine,
and says you will catch a cold
if you don't dress warmer.
You remember your son Johnny?
he threw a ball through the bathroom window,
and Amy almost drowned in the well,
which you haven't bothered to close in yet.

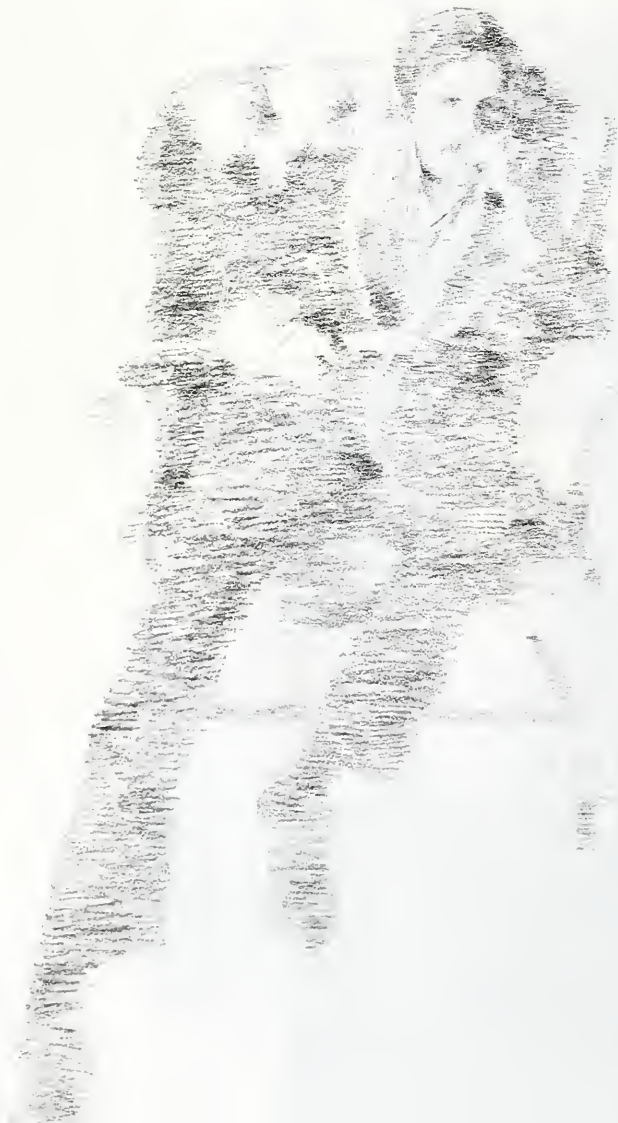
Also, forgive me dear, but being
short, I am unable to remove the
sparrow nest in the rafters,
but their white deposits are making bugs come in.
If you get this note before I'm home for dinner,
there's a sandwich with tomato, lettuce, ham, salami, and
mayonnaise wrapped up in a wax bag in the frig,
cold —
just the way you like it.

Johnny's

SUPPER CLUB







DIDI

Cathy McCandless

“Someday, Didi,” Cardell said, addressing the rocking chair across the room. With fat pink fingers she stroked the blue velvet of Didi’s fancy sofa. It was more of a loveseat, really, she thought, a little blue loveseat. Cardell formed each word carefully in her mind, seeing them spelled out in front of her, going by on ticker tape, and felt their texture in the softness of the velvet. Little blue loveseat. Feeling the shape of the words in her mouth, she half-whispered them, making of each a little package of meaning. Phillip couldn’t understand that, couldn’t understand that words could have character, like people. Darling, he’d say, words can mean anything you want them to. See this, he’d say, holding up his spoon in discussions that invariably took place at dinner, if I say this is a fork, then *it is* a fork. She always pretended to listen but it didn’t make any sense. A spoon was a spoon and it didn’t matter if the French wanted to call it something else. The minute he held it up in the air, the letters would form in front of her. That’s why spelling was so important. If you didn’t spell it right, it wasn’t the right word. If you were spozed to use any old word, she always said to Phillip, everything wouldn’t have a name like it does. Little blue loveseat. She said it to herself again, making the letters she saw recede

into the velvet and disappear.

"Someday, Didi, I'm going to leave him." Cardell spat out the words in crisp units, waiting to feel the full impact of their meaning hit her in the chest and take her breath away as the words bounced off the wall where Didi sat and returned to her with the force of a wave. Instead, to her disappointment, they hovered in mid-air, halfway between the blue sofa and the yellow patch of afternoon sun where Didi's cushioned New England rocker creaked gently back and forth. "Oh, not right now," she continued hurriedly, anticipating Didi's outrage. "Maybe not even anytime soon." She kept pushing the words out willy-nilly, hoping somehow to make them dramatic enough to bounce off the wall and return to her. "Not now, but someday, I know it." The letters formed, heavy and black, and hung in the middle of the room. She wondered if Didi could see them too. It was the first time she'd said it out loud, and frankly, she'd expected more of a reaction from herself. She wasn't sure what, just something more.

"Leave Phillip?" Didi's rocker stopped in mid-stroke. Her disbelief condensed into the Old English letters of Phillip's name and hung suspended in front of her face. Phillip, of course. Who else? Oh, he'd accused her often enough when he'd got drunk, Cardell thought. What's that fella's name, lives across the street, he'd say, spoiling for a fight. John, she'd say, or Jack or Richard or whoever. It didn't matter who he picked; she always fell for it. At times like that, it seemed more important to answer his question right than to second-guess his motives. After all, there *was* a man across the street, and he *did* have a name. If she knew it, what could she do but say it? Know him pretty well, doncha? - the inevitable response - and he'd raise his eyebrows. Never really accuse her outright; it wasn't his style.

"Now Didi," Cardell said, "Don't try to talk me out of it. It won't work." Everything was going wrong. First the words, like spoiled brats that wouldn't come when you wanted them. And the thought of Phillip drunk. Before, when she thought about leaving him, quietly, to herself, she'd been flooded with a strange sadness. It made her remember all the good things about him, never his overindulgence and jealousy. Didi's reaction was the

last straw. She'd expected sympathy - oh you poor dear, what has he done? - not simpleminded disbelief. It was almost as though Didi took Phillip's side in the non-existent quarrel.

"When did you decide this nonsense?" Didi said. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Oh, no, Didi, no!" Cardell said quickly, caressing the blue velvet again. The conversation was getting away from her and she grasped the cushion beside her tightly in a desperate attempt to bring it back. "I only just found out myself." It was a lie, and she hated lies, the spoken-out-loud kind, at least. Words meant something, in spite of what Phillip said, and it wasn't right to make them say things that weren't true. "You're the only person who knows." That, at least, *was* true. She couldn't really tell how long she herself had known it; forever, it seemed like, since she was a little girl. For the past six months she'd been whispering it softly to herself and the words, the saying of it, made it real. The words themselves - and the sadness they brought on - were so pleasant, she repeated them over and over again to herself at night as Phillip lay sleeping beside her or in the morning after he'd gone and she stood over the sink washing the breakfast dishes. They conjured up images of him standing at the front door, kids in tow, pictures rendered all the more tragic by the fact that they *hadn't* any kids. The words had never failed before; she couldn't understand why they wouldn't work now, when she said them aloud.

That crazy girl! Didi resumed her rocking, focusing her eyes in Cardell's direction, looking beyond her so that all she saw was a pleasantly vague blue and gold blur. What would she be wanting next? Dancing grizzly bears and absinthe served by burly Rumanian jugglers. It all made as much sense. Carly, who loved nice things so. Phillip says he'd like to be poor for a week or two, to see how it felt - / couldn't stand it! She'd said that just last week. Carly couldn't stand the shabby furniture that all looked alike, having just three old dresses and all of *them* the same, eating the same left-over food day after day; she said so herself. Didi fingered her own tasteful silk blouse as she thought about it. Well,

she'd like to *see* her leave Phillip, just let her try. She'd see what it was like to have to fend for yourself.

"I won't lie to you, Didi." Cardell's voice drifted across the vast space that separated them, bobbing up and down. "When it first came to me, I was shocked." Didi smoothed her tweed skirt and tried to listen. "Me, of all people. I couldn't believe it." She hadn't any place to go; she must know that. No relatives, nothing. Surely she wouldn't expect her, Didi, to put her up. As if she was really going anywhere at all! A petty quarrel, that's all it was. Didn't Carly think she had anything better to do than to be taking sides in every little spat? Tucking her long fingers beneath the bare backs of her knees, Didi allowed herself a glimpse of her friend across the room. In spite of her pudginess (pudginess, Didi thought, that was the only word for it) Carly looked small all alone in the very corner of the blue couch. If she was making any sense at all, Didi said to herself, joining her fingers beneath her knees and bringing them close together, I'd go beside her and comfort her, try to talk her out of it, at least sympathize. But she's not interested in my sympathy. She's got Phillip to coddle her and no matter what she says or thinks now, she won't leave him.

Didi made Carly's voice fade off into a gentle drone, focusing her eyes straight ahead so Carly wouldn't know she wasn't listening. It was like turning down the sound on the TV without cutting off the picture. She focused on the pink hands, round and soft-looking, that protruded from the tight sleeves of Carly's orangey-gold suit. Not as nice as her own hands, Didi thought. Still, Carly's hands were much nicer than most - clean, carefully manicured, hairless as a baby's. She wondered how they'd feel against her own cool skin. You could tell a lot about a person from their hands, you really could. Some women had hands as rough and square as a man's; there was no excuse for it. At least they could let the nails grow. Even in a man she didn't like ugly hands. Roland's hands were ugly, big and awkward and covered with coarse matted hair. Even if she'd loved him, she could never have married a man with hands like that. The thought of them

caressing her soft bare skin, even now, made her shiver, and she stared hard at Carly's plump smooth fingers to get rid of the image of Roland's ugly hairy ones.

Didi wasn't listening to her, Cardell knew it. Oh, she pretended to be, but she wasn't, not when she got that dreamy look on her face, that funny little frown. Cardell wondered what she thought about that it was always unpleasant, always made her frown. Probably about her family; she came from somewhere out west. Funny she didn't talk about them more. It was stupid to think a lot about people who weren't there. If they weren't around, they were dead, or might as well be. Phillip got mad when she said that. He wrote a lot of letters, but it was stupid, like writing to a corpse. Sure, you might get a letter back, but so what? If you couldn't see a person, couldn't touch them, they were no better than a chair. Not as good. With a chair, at least you could count on its being around when you needed it. She used to tell Mama that Daddy was dead every time he went away on business and Mama'd tell her to hush, he was no such thing and not to say it or it might come true. She'd always say he wasn't staying dead long, just a little while like Jesus, and most the time she'd get sent to her room with no supper. What would your Sunday School teacher think if she heard you, Mama'd say. When Daddy's car hit a tree, Mama cried for a week and said what would they ever do without him. Mrs. Arnold, the Sunday School teacher, said poor Mildred, it's all been so sudden, but that was a lie because they'd all had plenty of practice while he was away doing business. Then Mrs. Arnold said Cardell was brave not to cry and Mama quick hurried her out of the room so she wouldn't say anything about Daddy coming back like Jesus, but Carly knew he wouldn't be dead long, and sure enough he showed up in a dream that very next night.

In a dream you could talk to him face to face and see him and touch him. He was as real as the blue velvet loveseat, which was more than Mama could say when he was off on business. And she did cry, but not then, not until later when she could think about it and be sad and say "He's dead, dead, dead," over and over in a whisper and think about his

body in the red dirt out at the cemetery and the worms crawling around between his toes. It was good to cry sometimes; she liked to do it when she was sad. Phillip didn't understand that and neither did Didi. They never cried, just frowned a lot, like Didi thinking about her family. They didn't do her any good way across the country and she ought to just forget about them so she wouldn't frown so much, Cardell thought. It would be nice if she dreamed about them like she did about Daddy, but she didn't. Once Cardell asked her and Didi said she never dreamed about anybody but herself. If she couldn't dream about her family, she really should try to forget them and maybe she wouldn't frown so much. When I'm sad, Cardell thought, it's because I want to be and I can cry and get it over. She would have liked to cry right then and be sad about someday leaving Phillip, but the words wouldn't affect her right. It was probably the house; she'd never said it in someone else's house and it wasn't the same as if you were home. The words got weaker and the letters were littler and wouldn't come back to you once you said them.

Carly's hands looked better in the shadows than they would have in the sunlight; they were softer that way. In the sun, the rings would sparkle and ruin the effect. She had that huge diamond of Phillip's she'd never taken off since he gave it to her when they first got engaged. Didi hated diamonds, always had. They were so hard and cold and ugly in the sun. Most things she liked better in the sun. Everything except metal and diamonds. It made them hard and cold — everything else got softer and warm. Like your legs when you lay outside getting a suntan. Didi always brought her big pillow out so she could watch her legs in the sun. She'd have liked to have seen Carly's legs in the sun — they were so soft and warm-looking anyway — but Carly never sunbathed. If she did, they could take their towels out on the hill behind her house; nobody else went there. They could go every day after she got off work and she'd bring magazines for them to read, only instead of reading hers she'd watch Carly's legs turn soft and warm in the red sunlight. Or Carly could talk all she wanted and she wouldn't mind listening if she could watch the sun turn

her golden. Carly'd never do it, though, and besides it was too late. Almost October already and the sun went down too soon. It was practically dark out now and not even six o'clock yet.

It always made her sad to see the sun go down; she didn't know why. It was the saddest time of day, much worse than night time. Her favorite poem was about that, only it was about fall, not night time. The girl in it, though, was named Margaret like herself. Oh, she wasn't as stupid as a lot of people thought. She remembered poetry from when she was in school and could quote it if she wanted to. "It is Margaret you mourn for . . ." She used to say that over and over and think that if people called her by her real name instead of Didi, everyone'd know she was smart. But everyone still called her Didi and even Carly thought she was stupid. She'd have to be stupid to listen to all the stuff Carly told her. Leave Phillip, really!

Now Carly's crying, Didi thought, and she looks just like a big goldfish gulping air, all alone in the middle of a blue velvet pond. She keeps gulping air and if somebody doesn't help her she'll die and float to the top. She'd like to have gone to Carly and say, "Don't worry, little goldfish, you can leave your pond and come home with me. We'll live all alone, just us two, and in the afternoons I'll put you in the sun and rub you with oil until you shine and shine and I can see my face in your fins when I look at you."

II

Phillip would be home in just a few minutes, Cardell thought, glancing at the clock; she'd made it in time. She'd fix something quick and take these few minutes to catch her breath. Phillip would want his dinner promptly at six as usual. He had no use for ambiguity; he said that himself. He said a schedule was made to be kept and a disciplined body meant a disciplined mind. He didn't much like her plumpness — said it meant she

had no will-power. He had his own spare tire, Cardell thought, though he wouldn't admit it. Sometimes when they were in bed, all naked, she pinched him on the belly to remind him of it, just out of perversity. He always tried to idealize. "It's as inevitable as growing older," he always said. "I'm not eighteen, you know." She didn't mind, for heaven's sakes. She rather liked it; it made him more human. What would you do with one of those Charles Atlas men, she wondered. Too perfect, hard and cold. She tried to imagine Phillip like that, but couldn't. What he looked like, how he was shaped — it was as much a part of him as the odd things he said. She wondered how the husbands of those before-and-after ladies stood it. "I lost fifty pounds in two months." It would be like living with a stranger. She didn't like to move, not even down the block, things seemed so strange. Always running into walls that didn't used to be there. She knew why blind people got so upset when you moved something. She knew she could never get used to a husband who was fifty pounds thinner than he'd been two months before.

Steps on the front concrete walk — undoubtedly Phillip's. No one else walked like that, sharp and precise. Even when soft and worn, his shoes sounded department-store new on the pavement. Even in snow, or when they mowed the lawn and grass clippings covered the cement. One night the porch had iced up and Phillip came in the back door instead. All night she kept thinking he hadn't really come home.

Whenever he approached it from the front at twilight, Phillip couldn't help noticing that the house looked a little like a ship, and that the pavement, brown-looking because of the redness of the sky, looked like its deck. *If you used your imagination.* He would have liked to have been General Eisenhower on board ship in the midst of a Japanese bombardment. Eisenhower was in the Army, though; he never commanded a ship. Ahab, then, in *Moby Dick*. Phillip saw the movie twice, and, thinking back on it, it seemed to him that maybe Ahab had been the villain. Noah was a ship's captain and a hero too. Not such a bad job when you thought about it, taking care of animals. You had to feed them,

clean up for them, teach them tricks for when company came; in return they'd be eternally faithful. Stooping to pick up the evening paper, he opened the ark door.

Dinner out of tin cans again! He could see the empty cans all the way from here, and even if he couldn't have, he could tell by the smell. You worked hard all day and what did you get to eat? Tin can stew. Late, too, no doubt. He couldn't imagine what she did all day that she couldn't have dinner ready on time. He wanted to say something in protest, but nothing came out. Anyway, they never spoke until dinner was on the table. He sat down to read the paper and wait.

Sometimes she wished he'd just keep walking and walking and never open the front door at all. She liked the crispy sound of his shoes on the cement but the door closed with such a slam. All day she waited for that sound and then, with a slam, it ended. It was like the sun going down. You waited for it to go down all day, for the sky to turn red or golden. When it happened, it was so quick that before you knew it the sun was gone and you wished it was light again. So you started waiting for it to go down again, a full twenty-four hours. Cardell didn't mind so much, though; she liked waiting for things. When she was little she used to dress up and sit on the porch and wait for hours. Sooner or later Mama'd come out and ask what was she doing, didn't she feel well, and she'd say she was waiting, just waiting. For what, Mama wanted to know, always for what, and Cardell would say for company, just to make her go away. Nobody's coming today, Cardell Lee, Mama'd say. Yes they are, she would say, I can tell, even though she knew it was a lie. Sometimes someone would actually come and it made her furious to have to stop waiting and come inside. Cardell Lee said you were coming, Mama would say to the guest, she's a good guesser. That made her mad, too, knowing Mama didn't believe she could predict when company was coming, even though Cardell knew good and well she couldn't. When the old people said someone was coming, their noses itched, Mama believed them, or acted like it; with Cardell, though, it was different.

Phillip would have believed her. He'd believe anything. Once she told him she ran away from home to join the circus when she was nine, just to see how much would he really swallow. She made up lots of details about it, of course, to make it realistic. She told him how she wore a white skirt and walked across the tightrope and how, when she wasn't performing she'd feed the elephants. She'd spent days imagining it all before she ever mentioned it to him so it was scientific, like an experiment, not like a lie. How soon did they catch you and send you home he asked, and she had to quickly think up an answer. Finally she said she didn't know, it seemed like a long time, and he didn't even seem to notice how long she waited before answering. That's what I like, he said, a girl with experience.

Sometimes she wished that she was like Phillip and could believe anything at all that anybody said. She used to, but it had been years and years. Daddy used to tell her the clouds were cotton candy and that sort of thing and she believed him for awhile. Mama said Cardell took after her great grandmother when she believed the things Daddy told her like the moon being made out of cheese. Great-grandma's brother took her out in the woods one day, Mama said, and said to her: Laura, see that bird, I'm going to name it a blackbird and from now on, everyone will call it that. See that tree? I'm gonna name it an oak. As long as she lived, Mama said to her, your great grandma believed Uncle Henry had named the birds and the trees. Until her dying day, Mama said, and Cardell takes after her. She'd decided right then that she wouldn't take after her. She'd seen the pictures, all grey and wrinkled — her face, that was. And she didn't believe just anything, not even then. She'd already stopped believing Daddy when he teased her — brown cows gave chocolate milk — and besides, she didn't believe for a minute that Great-grandma never figured out that Uncle Henry was playing a trick on her.

God, but the paper's depressing, Phillip thought, even the funnies. He'd have liked to give up reading it for good, but what was the use? Things would go right on happening the same whether you knew about it or not. *Something* was happening out there and you

might as well know the truth as to hear little pieces of it from all sorts of places. If you could shut yourself off completely, that would be different. If you didn't know a thing about what was happening, then at least where you were concerned, it could probably be said that *nothing* had happened. Better still, if there was no newspaper at all, then you'd have an excuse. If a tree fell in the middle of a forest and you weren't there to hear it, would it make any noise? What if you didn't hear it yourself, but someone else did? If the sun went down on Wednesday night and nobody knew about it, would it ever be Thursday? He hated things like that; they were even more depressing than the news.

"Dinner," Carly said from the kitchen. It was his signal to speak to her.

"Coming, sugar." Words, then the sharp, crispy shoe sounds on the wooden floor. Sugar — that was a new one. Every week he changed her name it seemed. Some weeks it was honey, or dear — she hated dear — and once every three or four months there'd be a week or two of darlings. He used them one at a time, though, never two names in the same week. He'd changed her real name, too, her given name. I never knew anyone named Cardell before, he said to her before they'd got married, but you don't look like a Cardell. Cardell's Mama's maiden name, she said, and I'm the only child. Why Lee, he said, who's your middle name for? For Grandma; Lee was *her* maiden name. Cardell Lee, he said; it's too long. How about Carcie? So she was Carcie for months and months until he thought about it and decided it wasn't a good contraction — you needed the "L" in there somewhere — and started calling her Carly instead. That was the name that stuck. Everyone in town called her Carly, once in awhile her own mother even used the name. She would rather have had the old long name back — it was, after all, her only *real* name — but Phillip insisted, so she put up with it.

Phillip pulled up a chair and sat on his side, the side with the cigarette burn. He'd rather have sat on the other side — you could look out the window — but it was hers. The burn used to be over there, obviously, since he didn't smoke. One day he turned the table

around while she was out and sat facing the window. When she demanded her usual place, he showed her the burn as proof that he was sitting on the right side of the table after all. You're the only one around here who smokes, he'd said; your side is the one with the burn. Don't pull your tricks on me, Phillip Adler, she'd said, I know which side is mine. That's always been my side facing the window and I don't care how many times you turn the table around, it won't change. Turn it upside down if you want; I'll tell my place by the chairs. Today, as always, she set the places opposite each other so when they bent over their plates to eat they looked like chess players playing out a stalemate. Except for the vase of wilted flowers, the stuff on the table was evenly divided. She had the pepper and ketchup on her side; he had the salt and the vinegar. He had the white pieces and therefore the first move.

"Flowers look a little wilted," he said, chewing on hash.

"They're supposed to be that way," she said. "That's the kind of flower they are."

"Nonsense," he said. "No flowers are *supposed* to be wilted. You didn't water them today, did you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," she said. "If you can't believe that's how they're supposed to be, look at it this way: it's how they are. It's wilted flowers or none at all. Take your pick."

"Then I pick none at all," he said, getting up just long enough to throw the offending flowers in the garbage. He didn't even stop chewing.

"How's your exciting job?" she said after a respectable silence.

"OK," he said, ignoring the sarcasm, figuring she was still pissed about the flowers. "Got a lot done today. Still behind schedule, but I got a lot done."

"You and your schedules," she said. "You'd be happier if you didn't have them, always worrying about getting behind."

"No," he said, "it would be worse." He gestured in the air with his roll for emphasis. "Without a schedule, I'd be lost. I wouldn't know what to do next. Whether I was really behind or not, I'd always be thinking I was. It would never work out."

"Silly," she said, laughing through her peas, "without a schedule you could concentrate on your work. No more behind. Just 'here is how much work I did today'."

"No, it'd never work out. Without a behind-schedule there's no ahead-of-schedule. Without a schedule, I wouldn't have a job at all."

"Don't be ridiculous," she said. "Of course you would. How else would we eat?"

III

Another damned erotic dream, Cardell thought, waking up all at once. Ridiculous, that's what it was. Absolutely crazy. Waiting all that time, just to see if it made it any better. With Phillip, everything had to be perfect or he didn't want it at all. If he enjoyed waiting, that would be different. He probably did enjoy, he must. He'd never admit it, though. "Phillip," she hissed. "Phillip, wake up!" She ran her hand up his leg until she reached the soft inside of his thigh and pinched.

"God damn," he said. "I'm awake. What do you want?"

"You *do* enjoy it, don't you?"

"Enjoy what?"

"Waiting," she said. "Abstaining. You think about things, don't you? Instead of doing it, you think about it, right?"

"Sure I think about it," he said. "Everyone does. Even when I'm doing it I like to think about it."

That she believed. Slow down, he always said. Slow down so I can think. It was absurd. There was a time and place for everything. If you wanted to think about it sometimes, ok. She never did. If you were making love, there was no need to think about it; if you weren't, thinking about it didn't change anything. Maybe if you were one of those people who could come just by pretending hard enough . . . but Phillip wasn't.

She'd read about that somewhere; she wondered if it was true anyway. She'd believe it when she met someone like that. Still, she didn't mind if Phillip wanted to think about sex. That was his business. But in bed, he should *do* something, not just think about it. She'd be happy to trade whatever was supposed to happen in six weeks for a little ordinary lovemaking now. Like money and interest rates: money now is worth more than money later on. She wondered what kind of interest he expected out of his business.

She had to stop thinking about it. She never used to, before this abstaining business started. Except afterwards, after they were through, and that was different. Then you could be sad it was over which was nice in itself. If you slowed way down like Phillip always wanted, you missed that, you were glad when it was finally over and done with. It was one of those funny contradictions, that you could know all along you'd be sad when it was done and still do everything in your power to hurry things up. Like waiting all day for the sun to go down, then wishing it hadn't. It reminded her of the nursery rhyme about the rooster who thought that since the sun came up when he crowed, that it *wouldn't* come up if he didn't crow. One day he overheard the cook say that the next day at sunrise, the rooster's head would be chopped off and he'd be made into chicken soup. Even so, Cardell thought, ready to fall asleep again, he had to crow just one last time, bringing up the sun which woke up the cook who came out and wrung his neck.

Phillip turned over on his back and listened to Carly's breathing get slow and regular; in five minutes she was deep asleep. He could tell he was going to have insomnia the rest of the night. Once he got woke up, he never really got back to sleep right. How many times had he told her not to wake him up for every little thing? And in the middle of a good dream. He'd dreamed he was a second derivative, a mathematical function sort of twice removed from itself. There weren't words to say what it felt like but it was a distinct and not unpleasant sensation. Like floating around in the air, the feeling of being pure math. You'd stay there as long as nobody plugged numbers into your x's and y's. In

his sleep, that's what he thought Carly was doing when she pinched him – plugging numbers into his equation.

He turned again, trying to get comfortable. The mattress hurt his back. It was too hard for his taste but that's the way Carly liked it. Besides, it had been free. Just before he and Carly got married, his parents bought new twin beds. Not his parents, really – his mother and her second husband, his stepfather or something. He used to call him his father, just like he called his real father. It was Carly who'd pointed out the error to him – no one had two fathers. Not that anyone had ever got the two confused. You could always tell from the context of a sentence which one he meant when he said father, and to their faces he called one Dad and the other Pop. Carly said it wasn't precise, though, and finally he started saying "my stepfather" when he was talking about Pop to someone who didn't already know him. Anyway, when Mom and Pop got new beds, they wanted to give the old double bed to him and Carly. He didn't want it – it was practically incest – but Carly insisted. It would hurt their feelings, she said, and besides, a bed was a bed. What did it matter who'd slept on it before? He'd given in and taken the bed in the end, but when he couldn't sleep – or when he and Carly fought in bed, for that matter, or when he was feeling unsexy – he blamed it on the incestuous bed.

Insomnia was a funny thing. Once you realized you had, you were doomed. Exactly opposite from every other thing in the universe. "Identifying the Problem is Half the Solution," someone had put that sign over the main entrance to his department at work. He could imagine the same kind of sign in a doctor's office: "Diagnosis is Half the Cure." He didn't know of anything else that got worse from thinking about it, but with insomnia, you just lay there and brooded until you knew you'd never sleep again. Ten minutes of contemplation usually got him to that point. His ten minutes up, he rolled over and tiptoed out of the room.

Sometimes it was hard to tell if you were awake or asleep. Cardell ran her fingers over the sheet feeling for Phillip and thinking that, if he wasn't within arm's reach, she must be

asleep and still dreaming. when she was awake she could always find him by feeling around the sheet if she set her mind to it. Trouble was, she wasn't dreaming; she'd just finished having a nightmare. You couldn't have dreams within dreams, she thought, especially not nightmares. Unless this was also part of the nightmare and she just hadn't figured it out. Maybe she was stuck somewhere between being asleep and being awake and would never escape. That was much worse than a dream inside a dream It reminded her of the wooden chinamen you bought for a quarter when you were a kid. It would be bad enough to be the third chinaman stuck inside the bellies of the other two, but at least you would know where you stood. That was like having a dream inside a dream. If you got stuck somewhere between the first and second chinamen — not on the outside and not on the inside — that was much worse, and she was afraid *that* was where she was stuck. Only one way to tell for sure, open your eyes. She didn't want to, though. If she found out she was dreaming, then she'd have to figure out which was right, the dream or the idea she was awake. They certainly couldn't both be true, contrary to what Phillip would surely say, and she didn't feel like deciding right now. On the other hand, if she *wasn't* dreaming, what she had thought was a nightmare must actually be true. Not very nice either. Maybe it was better after all to be in limbo for awhile.

Cardell crunched her eyes up tight and tried to concentrate on thinking where Phillip might be. In the bathroom, of course. He must have just got out of bed since she didn't hear the water running yet. He was probably just peeing. She listened for the flush of the toilet. He had the funniest way of peeing, flushing the toilet first. She was sure he had to hurry to finish before the toilet got done flushing. He probably made a game of it, like his damned schedules. She thought she'd ask him about when he came back. *If* he came back. He hadn't even flushed the toilet yet. She tried to think what might possibly happen to him on his way to the john. He could trip over something in the hall, something little, a shoe or something. He'd come crashing down and hit his head on the wall and then he'd lie there on the floor senseless and bleeding, every idea knocked out of him. She would have heard all that, though, and she hadn't heard a thing yet.

She decided to pretend to call him. Phillip, she'd say Phillip where are you? Around, that's what he always said. Around what, for Chrisakes? Around was a preposition; it had to have an object. Around a lamp post maybe, around the pole lamp in the other room. She thought of him spiraled around the lamp, his fat creasing and bulging, the human equivalent of one of those oblong twisted doughnuts. Only raw. He'd have to be raw or his dough wouldn't twist around the lamp. Then the heat from the light bulbs would cook him and he wouldn't be able to get himself loose. At first he wouldn't make a sound, just think and think about how to get unstuck. To himself, naturally. He would never ask her to help him think. Thinking about it wouldn't do him any good, though; in a predicament like that you had to *do* something. That's when he'd call her. Carly, he'd say, only he'd use her real name for once. Cardell Lee, could you help me? Very gently she would knead him and uncurl him from the lamp. Then she would get some people to help her — probably Didi and some of her friends — and tell them to pull on each end of him while she kept kneading. Phillip would groan a little because it would hurt, but he would know she was being as gentle as she could and was doing it for his own good. Afterwards, when they'd got him straightened out, he'd thank her for saving his life.

Phillip tried to be more careful than usual about rustling the blueprints. He didn't want her laughing at him today, at least not this morning. When he tried to be quiet, it seemed like every breath he took rustled the paper and every pen-line made a loud, raucous scratching. His better judgement told him that wasn't true, that he couldn't possibly wake her with the little whispery noises of drawing. He was inclined to believe his better judgement rather than his senses which, in the quiet of the early morning, were bound to be distorted. What was it she always said when she found him drawing? Playing at architect again, Phillip? As if he played at anything anymore. She acted like he got some mysterious, almost erotic pleasure out of designing things. It wasn't true. How many times did he have to tell her he drew things because he had to, not because he particularly

enjoyed it? He had ideas in his head — ideas for houses, for churches, for highways — and they kept rattling around, trying to get out. He could always hold them off for awhile, a week or two, maybe a month. In the end, they demanded to be let out. Obviously he couldn't just go out and build all those things; drawing them was the only way to liberate them from his overcrowded head.

He penciled in three windows on each side of the mountain cabin he was designing. He liked making things that were built around a principle; it was always sort of a game to see if you could do it all. The guiding principle for this house was the number three — three sides, three rooms, three doors. The sides slanted towards each other like a pyramid, only they never quite joined at the top. He wondered what the little top-piece triangle that connected the three sides should be made of. At first he'd wanted to make the top out of glass, a sort of tiny triangular sky-light, but it only emphasized the distance between the three sides. He'd about decided to abandon the glass in favor of wood — the same kind as the walls — to tie the whole thing together. It was an illusion, sure. He would have liked to have the walls meet in a point, but for structural reasons that was impossible. With a wooden triangle at the top, you could always imagine that the sides kept on going and met at some point above the triangle. If you were inside looking out through a glass sky-light you could easily have seen that wasn't the case. He turned his pencil sideways and textured the building's top like the knotty pine of the walls.

Once he'd designed a five-sided house, inspired by a five-sided argument they'd had at work. There was a wall and a room for each point of view so no one would have to compromise; in a five-sided house they could all be right. Didi had seen the drawing and asked about it. "I'd love to live in a house like that," she'd said right away. "Why don't you have it built?"

"You and what four other people?" Carly had wanted to know. A silly thing to ask since he wouldn't be building the house anyway.

“Just me,” Didi said. “That’s all.”

“No need to build it,” he’d tried to explain to them when they kept bothering him for an answer. “It’s here on paper as plain as day.” They couldn’t see that, Carly especially. That’s why he had to keep hiding his drawings all the time. Cleaning up, she was liable to throw one out. She did once and he’d made her dig through the garbage to find it again. It was ruined, though, soaked from a half-full milk carton she’d also thrown away.

“Draw it again,” she said, not even apologizing. “You drew it once; it should be easier the second time.” He tried to, but he never could make it come out right. Once it was down on paper, it was gone from his head for good.

t. kerr

i am on a train of thought heading toward you.
it clatters through tunnels like wells
full of bones
in an earthquake,
past warehouses full of love letters, beds, and dead
flowers pressed into diaries...the dust gathers dust.
past hobos drinking canned heat for a thrill, their chilled fingers quivering
like the last leaf left on the last tree to stiffen its limbs
in the lingering freeze.
alongside a lifeless river
with barges like a flat funeral procession inching toward the grave site
of some overwhelming
corpse.
the boxcars are all empty
except for some bats feeding on spiders
and rats eating mildewed
seed.
the whistle moans
like wind through cracks of an abandoned chamber
empty except for a spider
weaving death around a fly; a tapestry
of holes held delicately together
the way we hold each other as our love
unravels.

Terry B. Taylor

Marigold lady traces dust poems
illuminated, like medieval manuscripts
by midafternoon winter sun
swirling through the room.
She cadences them each by each
the rising, falling dust syllables
in esoteric, atomic meter
changing their tones by moving wizened,
toad-like hands
clock-wise; counter; hand into palm.
Singing all is dust; dust is all.
Her home is a library of dust poems:
bear-claw mahogany poems
twisting-split wicker sonnets
dried villanelle bouquets of marigolds
sweet pungent marigold zinnia and scarlet sage
covered thick with poems on poems
seperated by the tickle of feathers
settling slowly-easy metamorphosized
read anew by the marigold lady
in the brilliant winter sun
singing dust is all; all is dust.

UNDERTOW

Arlene Katz

It begins this way: First
Sliding down the sheets,
The grappling.
These are tunnels where
You don't see endings.
You can't see
What is done,
Or the hands that do it.
Only the sound of breathing
The friction between the legs.
The movement.
You are stretched like a hide
For tanning. First you are
Entered. And then there is nothing
Left when it is
Finished. Except for the emptying out

That comes later.
The fruits.
I mean the dividends.
I mean the people staring as you are
Waddling down the streets.
You are laid still as a lidless eye —
Stretched dry. And then you swell up
Your body is like a balloon you must be careful of.
This lump that is growing inside of you
Pushing your insides out of the way,
Kicking all night.
You must lie knees apart.
Your joints creak as you walk.
Your body panics.
Forgetting how to work,
It rebels.
Your belly swells and then bursts.
You were just a husk
To be split apart.
To be slit open.



PEACH

a found poem

subacid

juicy

drupaceous

fruit of a tree.

T. B. T. ,

ALMOST RAIN AGAIN

Peter Fortunato

Wet heat seeped in
gagged and took us
desperate, deep along
black cinder to trail
gorge waters through dense low air

Everything green, full
open to touch
bad to feel

Amber rocks stuck like thumbs
up through the earth-crust
sweating thin slime
against the thick sweet day almost
foul for things rotten

and broke back down
 into the calm, clammy earth
Stumps flaking and peeling like flesh,
chunks of raw, soaked sienna
Pale, stippled moss smeared like gore
in any tree's wounds
We never reached the stream
 always undulating a sound
 below and to the left
Wraith of water
 promise, a threat
The rain found us,
pattered the frail flat backs of leaves
like needles working cloth

A heavy shower we walked through
that drove us out
 and passed like thirst
 before we'd had enough

blossoms we've felt
will decay to feed yet unsown seeds,
or will overflow each other's groves
to be preserved between poemed pages
as special evenings' wages.

t. kerr



BOZO

Annalese Witzky

Each morning when Bozo
walked through the trees
kicking cans,
the brooks came to meet him halfway.
All around roads opened up for him
as Bozo chucked twigs to the squirrels
and nuts to the fire.

The light seemed to bend to Bozo's
piece of foil,
which he used to light his dinner with.
And leaves fell his way as Bozo
made his home in the space of matted
vines, holding all the pleasures of home —
even the fresh air.

Early in the morning Bozo looked
like a cat, crouching over his shoe laces,

digging fingers into the mud,
searching for anything,
just anything.

While grasses and sassafrass
gave off their gourmet smells
from the rusty wash basin
which served as a stove.

Because Bozo sprinted with the rabbit
and ran with the deer,
elephants, tigers and ostriches
followed him to his village
of a fine bath, kitchen and eloquent cuisine.

Squirrels danced in time to Bozo's tune
of rattling bones and salivary humming
while parades of birds draped him in angel fuzz.
And at night Bozo took the sun
in with him to be his night light,
for in that hole of maggots and gnats,
slept Bozo and his world of wealthy finery.

t. kerr

i spent my last sense on you and got no change back.
i'm broke and the pain mends in my brain
like rain on a sponge.

when i was thirsty you gave me ice,
knowing it would suffice
the way intravenous feeding might.
when i asked you for a light
you burned me and left me,
reeling in the darkness,
like a blind man with his hands tied behind him.

but i will adapt like a cat's eye
and there will be only light
and deeper light.



FOR THE OAK AT THE QUAKER CEMETERY

Peter Fortunato

The great oak rots,
half an oak
its waist is thick
as the trunks of four live trees.
For years just this.
Once
ringing its height like a blade
in the midst of tall pine,
mere seedlings,
at the edge of the Friends' graves.
Headstones like granite stubble.
Two thirds, the upper
tree lies near, broken off
and wracked with spikes.

The stumps of branches
lost like children
down through the years.

The dream: It was Oregon.
Across the bridge
someone gave me a logger's ax.
Double bit, and I swung it
deep into the tree.
I worked hard on it,
then realized I was carving
a totem-animal. Dog without eyes.
An old man stopped me,
took the ax from my shoulder.

A PLACE TO WINTER

Susan Sheriar

your letter came alone to me
to me
alone in this house
halfway up the coast from you
nested by the sea.
Your handwriting is very new to me.
I approach you naked words
from the side.
They are born of tightly locked chambers
warmth that lived in the dark
standing on the page
wet pale blinking
stuck down in blue inking.
I can't quite look them

full in the face
for fear they'll dry up,
erase.

It is a landscape of trust
you've constructed
densely and sparsely
over the page.
my green cloth legs
seek spaces to root
discerning a place to winter
beside you . . .
a place where snow
won't rot us away before spring
when autumn planted feelings
open into summer.



PYGMALION

given alabaster I would carve
your initials into smoothly planed stone
in image evocation expectation
mirror mirage shimmering from white
to cool my want of you.

T. B. T.

MY MOTHER CALLS IT "THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM."

Susan Sheriar

I crouch creviced in a fist of shore rocks.
High tide displaces sunset reds
northwest
blackening them against tightly rolled clouds.
Their pressure strains the bleached fringe
convex.
Stone bones of the harbor
pinned silent under silent gulls.
The white mast sticks
 vulnerable children of the sun
bobble on the tide.

A small chunk of gulls
 comes unpinned
 flapping nervously

and back
their touchings to the bones
shrills raw lightning pillar to the water.
Thunder rattles in the storm's belly
and splits
the fist and the tide.
Startled cloud fringe snaps.
Blackness rolls out threading white nerves to the thunder -
in its eagerness to scatter
forgets its sound.
The gulls stir
 a rising column of screams
 seeking out the thunder's muteness.
but the rain doesn't come.

In the distorted cloud dome
 El Greco's strokes
 speeding masses of heavy vapor
 threaten to crush
 wooden shoreside houses
 stacked as fragile birdskulls
 their lightless eyes staring out to sea
waiting

waiting for the rains to come

I carry the storm's promise
into the night with me.

Its incompleteness burns holes in my brains.

I wait
stilled of activity
until
at last
the leaves and the eaves
tick their drops
around my remembering.

contributors

- K. J. Atchity a widely published, former poet-in-residence, is a professor at Occidental College in San Francisco.
- G. Bailey is well-known at UNC-G for his Hot Meat Series. He is a Senior art major from Eden N. C.
- J. Blackard* is an occasional student, traveler, and determined farmer.
- P. Braxton chief staff photographer for the CAROLINIAN, is a Sophomore history major from High Point.
- L. Bryan a Senior art major from Raleigh, is a gentle soul.
- M. Byerly* a Junior English major from High Point, is the Head Lackey for CORADDI.

* — previously published in CORADDI.

- T. Elliott is a graduate MFA student in art from Evansville, Indiana.
- P. Fortunato from Ithaca, New York, is a grad student in MFA writing program.
- B. Hunt is a freshman from High Point and staff photographer for the Carolinian
- A. Katz* from New York City, is a graduate student in the MFA program.
- T. Kerr* a Sophomore English major, is from Bennettsville, S. C.
- C. McCandless is a former MFA student whose whereabouts are unknown.
- J. Mazzotta is a Sophomore art student from New Jersey. His cartoons appear regularly in CAROLINIAN.
- S. Norgard from N. Plainfield, New Jersey, is a Senior art major at UNC-G.
- T. Oehler is a Sophomore from Myrtle Beach, S. C.

- J. Ridl is a professor at Hope College.
- B. Ross* is a Senior English major from Badin, S. C. She is known as the mysterious flag lady by the staff.
- S. Sheriar lives in Greensboro.
- B. Stevens a Sophomore art major from Bladenboro, N. C., is noted for wearing a red and white baseball cap.
- T. B. Taylor* the Editor, is known affectionately by his close friends as T. Bear.
- R. Tillotson no one knows where he comes from, is a graduate MFA student in art. He has been known to name his cats "Puff."
- R. Waynesmith teaches at Grimsley High. Has been published in the CAROLINA QUARTERLY.
- A. Witzky is a freshman from New Fairfield, Connecticut.



"THE STRUGGLE"

ROBBIE TILLOTSON

