
Always
Look
Both Sides
Before
Deciding

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You are a Faust generation.

—Æthelstan Colgate in conversation

Coraddi

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contents

Fiction

Cover Design by Bob O'Shields

Art

Poetry

O Tempora...!

John M. Schoffstall

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a girl who had a sylph.

The girl's name was J. Celia Vezelay; the sylph's was Astarte. Their relationship, dating from J. Celia's twelfth birthday, had been fruitful and would have been mutually agreeable had J. Celia known that Astarte existed. But she didn't, and in fact she did not even know what a 'sylph' was.

Sylphs are the earthbound souls of dead girls who in their lives were demivierges, flirts, coquettes. These, when their painted flesh finally crumbles about them, go neither to Heaven nor to Hell—for neither place will take them, though Hell will sometimes employ them—but remain about the Earth. Here they associate themselves with living ladies of compatible temperament, acting as their invisible bodyservants and chaperones. In recent years, though, these offices have fallen into decay.*

Once, many girls had sylphs. That so few do now is not an indication that there are fewer flirts in the world, but that there are more. There are not enough sylphs to go

*Readers desiring to know more about sylphs and their lifestyle I refer to Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, Canto I. Mr. Pope's information is a bit dated, but aside from that I can vouch for its accuracy. —J. S.

around. J. Celia Vezelay was simply lucky.

She and Astarte coexisted amicably enough until the year J. Celia turned nineteen; then all the trouble started. It was 1970: the year J. Celia moved to the city, the year she dropped out of Stonybrook and her father found her a position managing the hose sales staff at Saks. 1970: Apollo 13, Cambodia, Kent State, *Sexual Politics*. Especially *Sexual Politics*.

J. Celia read the book; it touched her deeply, as it did many other women. In J. Celia's words, "It means a very great deal to me. It's difficult for me to talk about. You know?"

"Well," said the young man sitting beside her in the singles bar, "how do you mean?"

"Well," J. Celia said, "I mean . . . "

The young man extracted a half dollar from his pocket and began to roll it across his knuckles. "Far out," he said.

"Hey," J. Celia said, "that's neat!"

"So how about going to bed with me," asked the young man.

"I don't know. Are you a sexist?"

The young man considered this. "I voted for Humphrey," he said.

When Astarte heard the double tread on the stairs, she abandoned her usual roost on the bedstead and flitted out the window, to spend the night with the pigeons on the ledge. "Well, hello, Astarte," said the eldest pigeon, a Siamese Flamethrower cock, late of the Bronx Zoo. "We've saved a spot for you. Third time this week, isn't it?"

NOON SUNLIGHT woke her. The record player was singing belligerantly, "*–here and the time is right for fighting in the streeeeeeet, boy!*" In the apartment last night's young man was nowhere evident. J. Celia stood before the closet in her shorts, taking out dresses and flinging them into an overflowing imported Indian rattan trashbasket. Astarte wondered. She came in and sat on the rumpled bed. J. Celia moved to the dresser and began tossing brassieres on top of the dresses. When the drawer was empty, she opened the next and flung out a heap of stockings. She then disappeared into the bathroom, and Astarte could hear a

continuous rattle as jars, sticks, tubes, palettes, cans and tins of cosmetics cascaded into the can. She emerged, grabbed a handbag, and was out the door. Then Astarte understood what was happening. Furious, betrayed, she lay back on the unmade bed and waited.

At two o'clock J. Celia breezed in, followed by a doorman with several large, brown paper parcels. "On the bed, Slim," J. Celia said, fumbling in her purse for the tip.

"Mum," stuttered the doorman.

"What?" said J. Celia. "Oh. She's my roommate. Put 'em on the floor. Here."

"Thank you, mum. Sorry to bother you, miss."

"It's quite all right."

The door closed behind him. "Who the hell are you?" J. Celia said. "And put some clothes on. Then get out. Wait. Are you a lesbian? Are you here to seduce me?"

"Put some clothes on yourself, sweetheart," Astarte said. "Be ashamed! Look at you, blue jeans in the middle of the day, no makeup, hair like rockweed, and *what* are those things on your feet?"

"They're Scholl's exercise sandals. They build leg muscles."

"Which, I presume, you're growing fur to keep warm?"

"I don't have to shave my legs! I'm a New Woman. Look, I'll prove it." Defiantly she strode to the bookcase and seized a paperbound copy of *Sexus*. Planting a cigarette between her lips she touched her Vu-Liter® to both. She drew on the cigarette and dropped the flaming book into an ashtray. "See? Now put on some clothes and get out."

Astarte looked at her. "Aren't you curious on finding a naked girl on your bed in a locked apartment?"

"No."

"I'm a sylph."

"A what?"

Astarte explained. When she had finished, J. Celia favored her with a look of compassion and said, "You're not a sylph. You're just bonkers. I'll call Belleview. Have a Valium while you wait."

She picked up the phone. "Good afternoon, Ms. Vezelay," hissed an oily voice. "Put Astarte on if you would be so kind." J. Celia slammed the phone down. Immediately it rang. "I think it's for you," J. Celia said. "Some man."

Astarte took the receiver. "Hello? . . . Beelzy, honey, how good of you . . . no . . . no . . . it's not too . . . cram it, sport." She replaced the phone on its hook. "No man, sweetheart. My boss."

"A real devil, huh? So's mine."

At that moment the ashtray cracked apart under the heat of the burning book, dropping a heap of flaming paper onto the table. Astarte grabbed it and carried it to the bathroom where she dropped it into the toilet. She came back, thoughtfully examining her hand, which was to all appearances uninjured. "Girlie," she said, "I have been lifting your petticoats clear of the mud for seven years."

"*Petticoats?*"

No, not petticoats, but other things. Some girls have sylphs, others don't. Which are the lucky ones, which are the—so to speak—chosen race? Surely you know women one must look at twice. What is unique about such a woman? You can't say in so many words. But sum the little things: her blouse is always tucked in, her skirt is always straight, she sets her head just *so*—a hair is never out of place. Her makeup never runs in the heat; her stockings never bag; she may walk over that loose tile a thousand times, she will never stumble; the snowball always hits her companion. Around her zippers may burst, bras go askew, the lightning may strike fore and aft, port and starboard, but she will sail through, untouched, unruffled, sublime and absolute. She is aloof from the common cares of femininity, and she knows, though she does not know why. She may not be particularly pretty, nor particularly bright, but she has that *je ne sais quoi*, that extrasensual machinery that the manufacturers would have us believe comes from using the right mascara.

But we know the answer, you and I.

Astarte explained this to J. Celia. "And now," the sylph concluded in a fine rage, "now you have the ingratitude to do this!" She kicked a wastebasket of dresses across the room. She advanced toward the pile of packages on the floor. "And what," she said dangerously, "is this?"

"I'm a New Woman," J. Celia said cautiously.

"Six months ago you discovered you loved Jesus," Astarte countered. "A year ago it was the I Ching. Before that, your quote head was really into acid endquote, and before that it

was transactional analysis. Have you read *Stranger in a Strange Land*? Yes. Were you once mad about the Twist? Yes. Did you own the first hula hoop on your block? Now you're a New Woman, and what have we here?" She picked up a bundle and ripped the paper from it, revealing a pile of Levis. "Blue jeans! Vile, vile blue jeans!" Of their own accord, the jeans rose from her arms, shivered, and disintegrated into shreds, covering both women and half the rug with bits of denim. "That for the blue jeans! And now you can fend for yourself, sweetheart, 'cause I'm leaving." With that, feeling horribly hurt and deliciously self-rightous, Astarte disappeared from J. Celia's sight, and shot out the window and away, leaving the girl standing in the snowflurry of denim whipped up by the backblast of her ethereal pinions.

OVER THE BARREN CITY a sylph flew listlessly. Everywhere she looked the prospect was dreary, and everywhere it was the same: denim, denim, denim. Everywhere were braless girls in lank hair and dusty boots, bodies thin as schoolboys, stupidly exhibiting their faces acne-scarred and unmadeup, eyebrows left criminally unplucked.

Slowly Astarte realized that New York's situation was more desperate than she had guessed. J. Celia Vezelay had been backward. Women, it seemed, had sold their birthright and given their skirts to the Salvation Army, without even J. Celia's pop feminism as excuse. It seemed only the fairies retained any sense of what Astarte thought of as 'style'. In Central Park the muggers wore engineer boots and didn't wash their faces; Astarte remembered when she had had to steel one of her charges against the charms of a pretty highwayman in lace cuffs.

She stole some clothes and went to an employment agency to have herself listed as "bodyservant, female".

"Boy, you birds are rare," the clerk who took her application told her. "You can have your pick. What kind of lady do you want?"

Astarte had thought about it. "The wife of a fashion designer."

The clerk laughed at her. "Honey, they

don't exist. The faggots have the field all sewn up. What else?"

She left, and returned to J. Celia's apartment. She had been away two weeks.

"Oh, thank god you're back," J. Celia exclaimed. "It's been horrible."

"I may not be here too long," Astarte said, yawning.

"Oh, but you mustn't! I'm lost without you. I mean, I've been tripping over things, my seams have been splitting, I was just standing on the street the other day and this dog came along and *relieved* himself on me. And I'm sure I've got bad breath."

"Yeah, that's too bad. Look, I've got to be going, I've got this appointment, and I just– "

"If you do, I'll tell your boss." J. Celia moved ominously towards the phone.

Astarte steely-eyed her. "So?"

"I thought so! You can't walk out, you'd be breaking your contract. Got'cha!"

"Flapdoodle. I may walk out anytime I please– "

"Then do so." She picked up the phone.

" –and while it may be perfectly legal, there would be a tiresome number of explanations to make and forms to submit, and it would really make more sense to settle this little conflict of interests between ourselves. Are you open to a deal?"

"What sort of deal were you thinking of?" J. Celia asked carefully.

Astarte told her.

"But it would be so insin*cere*!" J. Celia protested.

"What do you want?" Astarte asked.

"I want him to love me for my mind! for my integrity! even for my politics!"

"Forget it, sweetheart," Astarte said.

"I guess you're right, " J. Celia conceded.

So they got J. Celia a husband. He was a pleasant, even-tempered, middle-class fellow with no great virtues and no great flaws. He was just what J. Celia wanted. He worked for a Concept-Oriented mutual fund nine-to-five, which gave Astarte her days off; Monday nights when he played poker with the good old boys she had the entire day to herself. But he voted Republican–which would have outraged his hot young Keynsian gunslingers, had they known–and he and his bride had an argument one night which went from politics to sexual politics to just sex, to I never see you anymore! to why did you ever marry me to

begin with?

"There was something special about you," the young market analyst replied, taking his protesting wife in his arms. "There was a *je ne sais quoi*, an extrasensual machinery-- "

"Idiot, idiot!" said his loving wife. "It was all *her* doing!"

"Whose?"

"Astarte!" called J. Celia, and there was Astarte, perched in a fetching position on the bed beside them.

"Who are you?" asked the young market analyst, "and shouldn't you get some clothes on?"

So J. Celia came out with the whole story of Astarte and her *je ne sais quoi* and the pursuit and capture of young market analysts, because she was very angry.

"Then it was all your doing," said the young market analyst, in a tone of voice that made his wife look at him suddenly and hard.

"Yes, indeed," said Astarte.

"It occurs to me that the bedroom door was locked."

"I believe it was."

"I am now very interested in a block of American Airlines stock, and I would like very much to know whether or not their accounting firm is fudging on certain figures pertaining to American's liquidity. However, they keep these figures behind locked doors."

"How much is is worth to you, sport?"

"This is a block of twenty thousand. American closed today at 43½, up ¾."

"Is that enough to finance a small boutique on 5th that will sell velvet jeans on which one can sew hundred-dollar rhinestone appliques, cowboy jackets made out of marmot skins, denim workshirts with silk cuffs and linings, and other simple fripperies that will slowly but inevitably reverse the current lamentable trend in women's fashions?"

"Well, I don't know much about velvet jeans or lamentable trends, but it ought to be enough for a boutique," he replied, running his hand along Astarte's silken thigh. "Do we have a bargain?"

"But what of your wife?" asked Astarte, while her own hand took liberties equal to his.

"My wife has been subject to delusions lately. She believes that her life has been run by supernatural creatures, and even that she has seen them and spoken with them."

"Beast!" J. Celia exclaimed. "You two are

ying to railroad me into an asylum!"

"And," the young market analyst ntinued, "she believes that her husband and st friend are trying to railroad her into an ylum. A textbook case of paranoia."

However, when the truck from Belleview rived, the psychiatrist in charge disagreed, ying that J. Celia's problem was only simple hizophrenia, but he and his boys took her way anyway, kicking and screaming, and the oung market analyst and Astarte spent the st of the night in a most enjoyable fashion. hey were married six months later when the ivorce became final, and when last I talked ith them both were doing quite well in their espective businesses, and told me that from all eports J. Celia was responding well to therapy nd—barring complications—should be released n a year or two.

Astarte's oily-voiced boss, though, has yet o be heard from.

NEUTRON STAR

Arlene Katz

If there were smoke
It could be a warning:
A wound reflected in the gaping sky
A pressure building toward eruption:
A smell of sulpher.
Like scales tipped, a wild swing
Toward balance
Readjustments of matter,
A conversion.

Here, instead, is a folded eye
Like a sealed container.
The hush of sleep without dreaming
The long drop
Here is gravity gone cannibal
A dark drain swallowing the unfixed stars
The final jewel.

PRINCE CHI

The Story of
Prince Chi in the
Court of Chou Hsin

Arlene Katz

In my father's time
The people barred the city's gates
Fearing dragons.
Now I live in court.
The young girls rustle by in silk
Our fierce dragons are gold embroidery
Upon their elbows.
What have we here, to be afraid?

I stand upon the watchtower
Gazing east.
Through gilt halls my emperor rages
Scattering courtiers like chaff behind him.
Last week he executed Li Minh for treason.

The courtesans whisper in the doorways.
Even the Lady Chou is not above suspicion.
I climb the stairs to watch the cranes fleeing southward
And wear my hair
Unbound.

DREAM

Arlene Katz

The ceiling warps, the shingles
Tear away.
You remember this
You have been here
Before.
Perhaps, a dream
This crunch of glass under-foot
This bending light.
A mirror you do not trust.
Walls blow apart, soft as milkweed
And now you are reaching for a door.
Someone pinching your elbow,
A crying child.
A spreading stain.
A handful of dust.

ABYSS

Arlene Katz

At first you thought
It would be sweet
And sharp
Like the snap of bone.
An ivory symmetry
In brittle shards.

Someone has wrapped this edge in cotton wool.
Muted echoes trick the ear
Searching for tunnels through
Or just the walls to feel
Fingers scrape on nothing.
The body sprawls, tips and slides
Free fall.
As the mind
Splinters.

THE HAMLET

Marilynn Byerly

Sleeping the hamlet lies under hump-shouldered trees
Burdened with quiet cobwebs. The town clock,
The chime silent for years, tells the time in a whisper.
"Twelve, Twelve, Twelve," it whispers.
A young man of bronze, green with age, looks forward in anticipation.
"In honor of our brave, young men who died in
The War Between the States." he whispers to
The avenues lined with age-weary Atlases
Stretching supplicant arthritic hands toward heaven.
Past hedges obscuring mock mansions
With white columns and sagging balconies a peeled sign
Crying the name of some Revolutionary son,
No One remembers, marks the border where the town
Begins and ends. Beyond, ebony waters
Are guarded by jealous green trees, with the green locks
of the weeping sisters.
"Twelve . . . Twelve . . . In honor of our brave young men . . .
Twelve . . . Twelve . . . sobs for the dead young men . . .
Twelve . . . You are now entering . . .
Entering . . . entering . . . Twelve . . . Twelve . . . "
They all whisper in one voice. An irreverant bee hums to break the pall
Which holds the hamlet sleeping.
"Twelve . . . Twelve . . . Twelve . . . "

UNDERGROUND ATLANTA

Marilynn Byerly

I, pius Aeneas, pass through the darkened streets
Lighted by neon and wet pavement
Past distressing signs declaring
Peep shows for twenty-five cents
Move past the silent dead waiting
For buses to the inroads of Cumae
Glaring emptily at me as I stumble past.
Foreign to the infernal region
I seek directions from an elderly couple
In evening clothes—tightly clutching
My Golden Bough—my pass and
Declaration of innocence.
Unanswered and questioning I find
The Sybil nestled in a battered MG
Singing in Ambrosian Southern tongue
"The underworld is my home though I feel
No death as all who touch it and come
For I have known the arms of God
And have seen the ways of men . . .
You're going the wrong way honey."
Pressed by the leers of other travelers

I search till reaching the gaping hole
Leading down with pine steps
Past the trickling water of the sewers overhead.
I leave and enter into a world,—cold and musty and hollow.
And I, pius Aeneas, have seen the faces

Of the dead as myriad as the stars
Some reeling drunken and others
Offering newspapers for their cause—all screaming.
The sweet smell of asphodel in sandalwood
And jasmine scent burning in every corner
Every portion of the world becomes Lethe,
Ullyses' lotus, making all forget
That which is above.
"Get comething to eat first,"
An initiate whispers in my ear,
"Try the pomegranates over there—
They're delicious, at 'The Great Gatsby',
You'll love it—such atmosphere,
The 20's you know."

Perched on a barstool I order corned beef
To the sound of arcade machines. "We only
Specialize in war games here."

Kiser Bill, Hitler, Chairman Mao and Ho
The warriors of the dead
All fall down to the sound of machine guns
Fed by quarters while an insane young man
Whispers that I meet him at the streetcar at 10.

A mob watches as the glassblower
Makes a small bit of matter
Grow—twisting and shaping
To become as he wishes
A mouse, a flower, or a swizzle stick
For this is where dreams are made
Fragile and empty, shaped by breath—
A lover's sigh or a whispered promise
To be destroyed by the reality of the floor,
Or remolded over the heat.
Mirrored in each watcher the world
Is created by the glassblower
To be sent home by mail through an ivory tube.

Passing through store upon store upon store
I find the toys of childhood and age

Spilt like life's blood upon the shelves
And racks. China dolls, posters,
And a suede leather coat for only $250.
Songs from all the world and all times
Pour from the Musical museum
Commingling and melting with the clatter of voices

In the street with an um-papa, um-papa
As the faces sip Hurricanes—Gin and
Sticky, sweet syrups whose only virtue
beyond alcohol content is the stem glass
It comes in.
Their eyes nebulous the faces only pause
At a street vendor selling glow-in-the-dark
Yo-yo's.

A breath of air pressing from an entrance
Causes memory to flicker as many pass
But only I turn to leave
For I, Aeneas, have seen the faces of the dead
And only leave behind a golden bough
In payment.

THE SILVER–SCREEN SALOON GIRL

Marilynn Byerly

She smiles at some cowboy and sings a sad song
Exuding sexy and all-American girl
Accompanied by the clinking of her solid gold heart
And the leer of the pie-annie player.
The silver star on the sheriff's chest shines brighter.
Tomorrow she will rescue the handsome
Downtrodden hero from the Dalton gang,
Protect the naive young thing
from her kind of life,
And save the town from destruction.
Tonight the camera discretely fails
To follow the trip upstairs
With a drunken cowboy;
Because after all, all she wants to be
Is a lady.

Vanishings

Suzanne Hunter Brown

THREE MAIDS had come and gone at the Midlers since Amy was small. There were others who had stayed just a week or two, but only three had settled into the house and become the center for Amy's days. Her parents, when they arrived in the evening, swirled the surface of the deep and quiet routine, but next day the house returned to the maid's steady rhythm. Amy could remember Minerva, a brisk, middle-aged woman, tugging a dress down over her head and whirling her around to tie the sash in back. Amy had been four then, and she had been bored during the long hours her parents were at work. She would untie Minerva's shoe-laces as she vacuumed or would refuse to eat unless the maid told her a story, constantly demanding attention and harassing the efficient as she worked. Amy sensed that the maid did not have the same authority as her parents. Minerva just threatened to go to her parents, and then only if Amy were especially provoking. "If you don't let go of my leg so I can make this bed, I'm going to talk to your mother," Minerva would say finally. But she rarely did.

When Amy was almost seven, Minerva faded into Lossy—a young black woman, quick and very pretty. Mrs. Midle discovered that Lossy was a good ironer, and Lossy spent much of her time slowly pressing the good

linens and watching soap operas on television. Amy remembered Lossy laughing on the phone. She had guessed that there was something forbidden about the calls because Lossy always hung up whenever Amy came into the room, and Amy never mentioned the time Lossy spent on the phone to her mother; she didn't quite know why. When Lossy left to take a job as a waitress at the Country Club, Amy missed her, but not much. Lossy was gay, but she smeared mayonnaise on Amy's sandwiches and gave her cold soup at lunch.

Helena was her replacement. She was delicate, and even at eleven Amy had known she was sad. Everything about her was soft and hesitant—her low voice, her gentle movements, her pale brown skin. Helena was an excellent cook, but she stayed only two years, a shorter time than either of the other women. One night Amy had overheard her mother discussing Helena with her father. "I'm glad to loan her money," she was saying in a dissatisfied tone, "but she can't keep her father from getting most of it. And then he goes out and drinks which certainly doesn't help Helena. What shall I do Frank? It's just all so uncomfortable." Her father said nothing; he sat and allowed his wife to bounce questions off him as she worried. Soon afterwards, to Mrs. Midler's relief, Helena left for a better-paying job in a tobacco factory.

And now there was Catherine. Catherine had arrived when Amy was thirteen. She had been forty-three. Amy did not feel the change as she had when she was younger. Her hours at school were longer now, and she had piano lessons two afternoons. She had almost stopped coming home for lunch. Catherine was more a background figure than a presence Amy felt about her in the house. She was really with Catherine only when she was sick. Then Amy would sit propped up in bed beside ginger ale and a box of Kleenex. As she read, she could hear the maid softly rubbing the wooden baseboards in her room or going by her open door with baskets of clothes to hang on the line. Though she liked Catherine, this faint activity disturbed Amy. "You don't have to wash out my sweater; I can do it," she would call from bed. When the maid left for the day, Amy felt that a strain was gone, and she relaxed into her pillows.

Normally, Amy came home just as Catherine was finishing up her work. It had become her job to drive Catherine home at five each day since she'd gotten her license. Amy would stand behind Catherine, swinging her keys, but the maid seemed not to notice. She

would be standing over a floured board cutting out biscuits, singing a hymn. Her hymns had no melody, but Catherine would sing a few words over and over, letting her voice rise and fall. "O, Lo-rd, O-o Lo0rd," she would repeat in a rhythmic plainsong. Catherine was a minister at a local Holiness church. They had found out only when she asked for three days off because her church was holding a big revival. And her W-2 forms were addressed to the Reverend Catherine Williams. While Amy fidgeted, Catherine was calm. Her movements as she rolled out the dough were smooth and unhurried, yet her eyes were unfocused, as if she were mentally counting. Amy felt a strength in the woman's assurance; without realizing it she found Catherine's abstraction commanding and mysterious.

Amy's mother felt nothing mysterious in Catherine, but she was delighted in her accomplishments. "I don't know how Catherine does it all," Mrs. Midler said, "holding down a job and looking after her family and working at the church." Indeed Catherine pleased Mrs. Midler in many ways. Every time they had fried chicken, Mrs. Midler would say, "Catherine, that was the best dinner! No one can fry chicken the way you do." Or she would say, "Catherine, I wish you could have seen Frank eating your cornbread last night—he must have eaten eight pieces!" She infused a special brightness into her voice at such times, the way adults speak to children they are fond of but don't know well. Catherine replied to these ritual remarks with a smile, but the abstracted look never left her eyes.

On days when just Amy and Mrs. Midler were home for lunch, Amy's mother would ask Catherine to eat with them. "I'd better finish the windows," Catherine would say and would only come to the table when the others had left. Not once in four years had Catherine ever eaten with them, but Mrs. Midler continued to ask and continued not to press when refused. It was a very satisfactory arrangement. Catherine never smiled or looked the least ironical, yet Amy felt ridiculous calling her to lunch and once protested to her mother, "You know she won't come."

Mrs Midler was startled. "Of course she will, if she can stop what she's doing," she said.

Because Mrs. Midler was so pleased with Catherine, she was especially distressed when she read the item in the newspaper at the breakfast table. She looked up at her husband and Amy saw thin lines suggestive of pouting

across her forehead. "Catherine's son broke into the Smith's house last night—Ed woke up and called the police and they got him coming out the door. He ran and they . . . had to shoot him in the leg."

"Was it the oldest one?"

"The one that's going to graduate this year—Russell."

"Well, they're going to be tough with him after all the other break-ins around town; people are tired of it," Amy's father said. He scratched the side of his neck with one finger.

"I'm just so sorry for Catherine." Mrs. Midler paused; no one else said anything. "She's such a good person . . . I know all of this has hurt her. Her children certainly come from a good home."

After this tribute she picked up her plate and went into the kitchen. A minute later she called back into the breakfast room. "Amy, why don't you take Catherine this soup I made—it's vegetable and that's her favorite. Tell her not to come to work today." She was pleased with the idea.

Amy felt uncomfortable. "I don't know . . . I'd feel funny going right now."

"As nice as Catherine is to you, I would think you would want to do something now to show her you're sorry. I don't want you to be self-centered."

Amy didn't try to answer but went to the kitchen and came back with the pot of soup. Her mother, well satisfied with the lesson, patted her on the arm as she went by.

It seemed strange not to have Catherine beside her as she followed the familiar rout across town. The streets were wet, but the morning rain had stopped and there was a small, bright edge to the dark clouds. Catherine sometimes remarked on the weather while Amy was driving her home. "I'll be glad when the sun gets out—we've had enough rain for awhile," she would say impassively. The drive was so predictable; sometimes Amy wanted to throw a hand off the steering wheel and say, "Haven't we said all this before?"

Most of the time, however, Catherine was silent. "What is she thinking?" Amy would wonder as she looked at the expressionless profile. Once she asked, but Catherine merely smiled and said, "It's so cold." There was never any feeling concentrated in her voice, no moments when she betrayed her limits and one could say, "So that's what she's like . . ." Amy never knew what Catherine took seriously. If only Catherine was really pleased when Amy's mother praised her biscuits—if only anything in the house mattered to

Catherine so Amy could be assured of its significance to her. Sometimes she felt quite desperate to make Catherine really look at her; Amy wanted to see her existence reflected in the woman's eyes as if she were Tinkerbelle and Catherine's belief was required to save her. Because Catherine was interested in nothing that Amy knew, she seemed superior—devoted to something not found in Amy's life and in possession of greater knowledge and experience.

Amy turned off the street onto the dirt road where Catherine lived; every evening when she made the turn with Catherine, the maid leaned forward, looking toward her own house. Amy guessed she was looking to find her husband's van in the yard; Joe Williams worked for a moving company and sometimes was out until late. If the yard were empty, Catherine would sink back in the seat looking tired.

Amy drove up beside Catherine's house. In February, on a dark day, the street had the starkness of a black and white film; all the houses were small and white, set off by the darkening greys of sky, empty trees, and dirt. Only the white wood fences distinguished the road from the yards; no one on Catherine's street planted winter grass.

Amy stood in front of Catherine's screen door for a moment. Normally, she let Catherine out and never came up the concrete walk herself. Except at Christmas. Each year, Amy was sent with the present (this year it had been a set of water glasses with orange and yellow flowers) and she always went in to visit. She dreaded the occasion but knew it would never do to shove it into someone's hands over the threshold with just a mumbled "Merry Christmas." Amy went in and sat on the sofa in the corner. There would be two or three children in the room who would stop playing and watch dumbly from under the table, waiting for her to leave. Everyone felt the novelty, the strangeness of the situation. After the thank-you's had been said and the package stowed under the scrawny tree loaded with ornaments, Amy would sip a Coke awkwardly. When she finished, she would pull her coat together and rise. "I'd better be going . . . "

The others would rise, and the ordeal was over. "You thank your mama," Catherine would say with a weary animation that faded even before she shut the door.

One Christmas Amy had hung back from going to the Williams. "I don't know what to say . . . " Her mother interrupted impatiently. "Why that's ridiculous . . . you can ask

Catherine about the relatives she has coming from Washington for Christmas . . . "

The door opened while Amy was still thinking. She looked down, startled, at Catherine's youngest girl.

"Is your mother home?"

The girl faded back into the dim house and in a moment Amy saw a bright dress moving slowly forward; it was one her mother had given Catherine. She came to the door; there was no expression on her face and she said nothing.

"Here's some soup . . . Mother said you needn't come to work today . . . I mean, your son . . . " Amy said miserably.

She opened the screen door and Catherine took the soup. The maid stood looking down at it and her face began to pull into a smile. It was grotesque; her lips fell.

Suddenly, she drew back and then slammed the pot past Amy, down onto the concrete steps.

It made a horrible noise. The metal pot clanked violently on the concrete, bounced and scraped a little ways across the rough stone. Orange soup ran between the cracks; the doorway was spattered with it. After the first shock, the terrible sound did not ring, but was seemingly absorbed into the dirt and into the dark faces on the street's porches. The faces acknowledged the violent sound but did not scurry forward to buffer the turbulence in the air; they accepted it and merely watched.

Amy jumped back from the explosion. She looked up at Catherine, who stood looking down at the scene. Amy ran off-balance down the steps, crouched to snatch the pot, on its side in a smear of soup, and ran to the car.

She couldn't find the keys. Frantically she ran her hands ove; the seat and then found them on the dashboard. The car didn't start at first; she looked up. No one had moved. She backed the car into the road and banged over the holes in the dirt road that her father feared would ruin his transmission.

Her feeling was of shame. Instinctively she felt the purity and justice of Catherine's fierceness. She didn't understand, but somehow she had half-expected it. In her sorrow, Catherine had found her intolerable. Amy was humbled before the depth of that sorrow; she bowed before the woman's grief.

But these were only feelings; Amy's mind found nothing which she had done wrong. She had driven out to bring Catherine soup, to express sympathy because her son was shot and in trouble. But Amy felt her guilt and drove home to be judged. Her parents would

understand the wrong she had done and show her the source of her shame.

Her mother was still standing over the sink when Amy opened the side door; her father was still at the breakfast table, reading the paper. Amy was checked. She needed words to revive the scene and she did not know herself what had happened. She could not say merely that Catherine had thrown the pot of soup, and yet, that was all she could say. She was still standing silently when her mother turned around.

"Did Catherine seem pleased with the soup?"

The question had been rhetorical; her mother was deftly scouring another pan with soap suds, so certain was she of Catherine's appreciation. Mrs. Midler looked over her shoulder again and saw the soup pot, covered with orange blotches and dried rivulets.

"Did you spill it?" Mrs. Midler asked in a resigned voice.

Amy looked at her mother's face and was frightened. "No," she said softly, "I gave Catherine the soup, and said I was sorry, and . . . she threw it down the steps. I– "

"She *threw* it at you?" Mr. Midler jerked up from behind the paper.

"No, of course not, just down on the steps, she– "

"Frank, I'm sure she's just upset about the boy–she didn't know what she was doing– "

"I'm sure that's true, but that's really not an excuse to turn on people who are trying to be kind."

Amy grew more and more frightened listening to their voices. That her parents seemed not to understand was more terrifying than her own guilt. She wanted to plead with her mother to see that Catherine needed no defending. Amy wanted her parents to see what she was feeling and explain her emotions in their terms, to tie her feelings to their moral authority. Her instincts rejected all that her parents were saying and cut Amy violently adrift from them. She was terrified of her feelings, afraid they would force her into a foundationless world where she could touch on nothing but her own emotions. Her emotions were powerful and shifting; she wanted to understand her feelings and fasten them to something that could explain their appropriateness and give them rational shape. Amy put her hands to her mouth.

"I spilled the soup going up the walk–Catherine didn't throw it."

"Oh, Amy–why didn't you say so?" Her mother's voice followed her on the way to her

room where Amy shut the door. She wasn't sure whether she had protected Catherine or wronged her parents.

"Call her back," said Mr. Midler.

"No, let her go. Let her be alone to think and she'll be sorry," said Mrs. Midler comfortably, anticipating a repentant afternoon.

Catherine came in to work the next day and gave no indication of what had occured; perhaps there was some relaxing of her attention when Mrs. Midler spoke to her normally about shampooing the den rug. Amy wanted to talk to Catherine, to force a discussion of yesterday's feelings, to explain, to cry, in some way to seek absolution. But enough humility remained from the previous day so that she respected Catherine's reserve. She waited until she was drying dishes beside Catherine before she spoke.

"I'm sorry . . . about yesterday— "

And Catherine curiously echoed Amy's mother, saying dully, "I was just upset . . . about my son . . . "

Amy stopped drying the dish and held it tightly. Catherine did not understand why she had thrown the soup; she was not going to explain. Amy remembered Catherine's fierceness yesterday, the surge of resentment that had so humbled Amy, that had seemed to have some real and just source, and she thought that she had imagined it all.

But when Amy looked up, Catherine was watching her. She was looking directly at the girl, and her eyes were kind.

INTRODUCTIONS

James Barden

Hell-o strange world you
mother of the last great inventor's
note pad and probably about
as illegible. Here comes another myopic
season sliding in safely with its pants down,
a few noses being busted each day & a few
people buried for life. You say
what the hell? and cruise the streets wearing
a pin-on button that says "Support Orphan's Lib"
when all you really want is a tight lay
from the preacher's daughter. And who can blame
the man suffering from good intentions? We all brush
the teeth of the mouth that feeds us, believe
in the card-carrying institutions of hand soap
and dry panties while trying to get home on time.
Just right now I was thinking how nice it is
to be here, your rubbing my chin like
a coffee cup and looking into the blank white
pages of my eyes before they shut on the
panoramic incisions that have walked into
my ear & spoken.

THE LAST STRAW

James Barden

With the electric blanket
set at '2', our mouths
no dryer than peanut brittle

and possibly worse, we
mapped out a night of
awkward encounters first by

rubbing toes, then when
the mood hit
began touching each other

in the dangerous zones.
Warm & willing
you felt like my aunt's

old pillow, a fragrant depository
of skin washed up on the
bed forever, or better yet

the realities of your thigh
keeping me awake all night.
In your room we became

2 match-hungry bottles
of propane gas. We were
jumper cables grappling for

a hot connection.
I can't say anymore about
that room or your brother

dashing in & out
like a track star.
That night we served each other

a generous portion of
ourselves. We
cleaned out plates, cleared

the table & washed our hands
of each other for
good.

BLEAK HOUSE

James Barden

Your eyes this morning
gave off a feeling like
little fingers
trying to touch
something
invisible.
The room dark, I
stumbled on my
tongue, your
silence
like a new shoe
I couldn't get
used to.

ICE BUCKET

James Barden

This cold weather makes me feel
as insecure as Sunday leftovers, having
only a cigarette to warm my lungs and
vaguely pump out smoke in your damp direction.
Right now I'd like nothing better
than to roost in hell forever, lying
on those hot stones and knowing
if you ever came clucking around
again, and being desperate,
I could always bum one. You
spring chicken.

HUMOR/ SATIRE

BLAYLOCK/ MAZZOTTA

The Peanut Butter Embargo

Or Up Yours Peter Pan

David Blaylock

High diplomatic sources report that several foreign countries are planning a peanut butter embargo against the United States for mid-autumn. The immediate effect of this action is that New York harbor will no longer be jammed with tankers loaded with South American Crude or African Crunchy. The more lasting effect will be that this country will find itself plunged into a "Peanut Butter Pickle" (that sounds like a snack for a pregnant woman).

This is too much.

I can take a beef shortage, I can withstand a gasoline shortage, I can even tolerate a shortage of toilet paper, but I can't live without peanut butter. Just think of what this will do to the American people; there will be long peanut butter lines, store owners will be pumping peanut butter only at certain hours, there will be serious injuries to people siphoning peanut butter (most of them from being sucked up the rubber hose), there will be threats and bodily harm to grocers from frustrated shoppers, the black market price of peanut butter will skyrocket, there will

be an increase in peanut butter smuggling and a booming market for lock top peanut butter jars. The American public will become hostile, violent, and just plain nasty (a lot like they are now).

And now, with our very civilization threatened, what has Congress done? Nothing. They refuse to open the armed services' untapped sources of peanut butter, they have tabled the Deep South Pipeline, they have all but killed legislation making peanut butter exploration profitable, and they have held up all off-shore drilling permits.

But Congress is not totally at fault. The peanut butter industry has been lax, they are sitting on their peanut butter depletion allowance and waiting for windfall profits.

The tragic part of this crisis is that Congress will not suffer, nor will the peanut butter industry. The true victims of this embargo will be the American public. Yes, America, you will suffer due to the ineptness of a few.

So in an attempt to ease the impending doom, I am establishing the following guidlines: since we are already on daylight saving time, I won't suggest that, but [1] I am asking that everyone eat peanut butter at 55 (with no exceptions for truck drivers); [2] that everyone keep their body temperature at 68° [3] I am pleading for voluntary compliance with the "Innie-Outie Plan". Under this plan those of you with innie belly buttons will buy peanut butter on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, those of you with outie belly buttons will buy peanut butter on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sauturdays; [4] I am asking that no peanut butter be sold from 5 p.m. Saturday to 9 a.m. Monday to avoid Sunday munchies.

The road ahead is difficult but with the typical American spirit and voluntary compliance with these guidelines, we should be able to avoid rationing.


MILK RUN

"Wanna Drag?"


PENCILS
SHARPENINGS

The Pornographers
(A Pervert's Opinion)

David Blaylock

[Snare drums]

[Voice over:] American smut took another ride on European markets today, reaching its raunchiest point ever in East Germany. It has fallen there considerably since 1971 and this is one pervert who thinks it's time to speak up for the Americans as the sickiest and probably the least appreciated purveyors in all the world.

Many years ago, when I first began reading pornography, I read of seductions on the French Riviera and in Acapulco. Well, who rushed in with men and money to help? The Americans did, that's who.

They have helped control decency in movie theaters, bookstores, and massage parlors. Today, many American stag movie companies are in the red and no foreign land has sent a dollar to help. France, Sweden, and to a lesser extent Denmark and Mexico were pulled out of the debris of morality by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts. None of those countries is today paying even the royalties on its films from the United States.

When the pornographic magazine

was in danger of collapse, it was the Americans who propped it up and their reward was to be swindled in the adult bookstores. I know, I was there, I saw it.

When foreign films are hit by obscenity rulings it is the Americans who rush in to help . . . "Last Tango in Paris" is a recent example. So far 59 American films have been flattened by court rulings. Nobody has helped.

Playboy Enterprises . . . M.G.M. . . . all pumped millions of dollars into foreign countries. And now newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent, horny Americans.

Now . . . I'd like to see just one of those countries make its own pornography flicks.

Come on . . . let's hear it! Does any country have a film to equal "Hard Men are Good to Find", "Deep Throat", or "The Devil in Miss Jones"? If so why don't they watch them? Why does every country except Russia (and you never can tell about them) watch American pornography? Why does no other land on earth even consider putting such trash on the screen?

You talk about Japanese pornography and you get geisha girls. You talk about French pornography and you get postcards. You talk about American pornography and you get streakers, not once, but several times . . . and safely home again. You talk about smut and the Americans put theirs right in the grocery stores for everybody to look at. Even the homosexuals are not pursued and hounded. They're right here, in New York City . . . unless they violate traffic laws . . . getting money from Mom and Dad to spend here.

When the Americans beat this thing . . . and they will . . . who could blame them if they said, "Fuck you" to the rest of the world. Let someone else buy "I Am Curious Yellow". Let someone else improve foreign damns or

design water beds that won't leak in an earthquake.

When the couples of Italy, France, and Sweden were breaking up, it was the Americans who sympathized with them. When Linda Lovelace and her manager got a divorce, nobody lent her an old cabosse. They are still divorced. I can name you thousands of times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble.

Can you name me one time when someone raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was outside help even during "Myra Breckinridge".

America has jerked it alone and I'm one pervert who is tired of hearing them beat around. They will come out of this with their flags high. And when they do, they are entitled to thumb their noses (so to speak) at the perverts gloating over their present puritanism.

I hope there are not many of these. But there are several smug, self-rightous perverts. And finally, the American Stag Film Industry was told at its 48th annual meeting that it was through.

This year's Supreme Court decision, with the year less than ½ over, has taken it all, and nobody . . . but nobody . . . has helped.

TO M. AFTER THE BAR

Tom Kerr

we share poetry with intense soft voices.
the pauses fidget through our fingertips
tapping cold empty cups.
the silence exaggerates itself. our eyes burn across
invisible bridges left by speech,
glance off of each other.

we walk into the night with starry eyes
as shadows
shying away from
WARM
ELECTRIC
DAZZLE
mimic our bodies down the cold sidewalk.

our hearts are clothed in nerve
our nerve is clothed in flesh our flesh is clothed in cotton is clothed
in wool is clothed in leather
our clothes warm us apart.

we yawn excuses for good-night,
you go to your place to read
i go to mine to write
and then we lie to ourselves
dreaming
asleep
beneath warm bed
clothes.

POEM TO A SWEETIE PIE

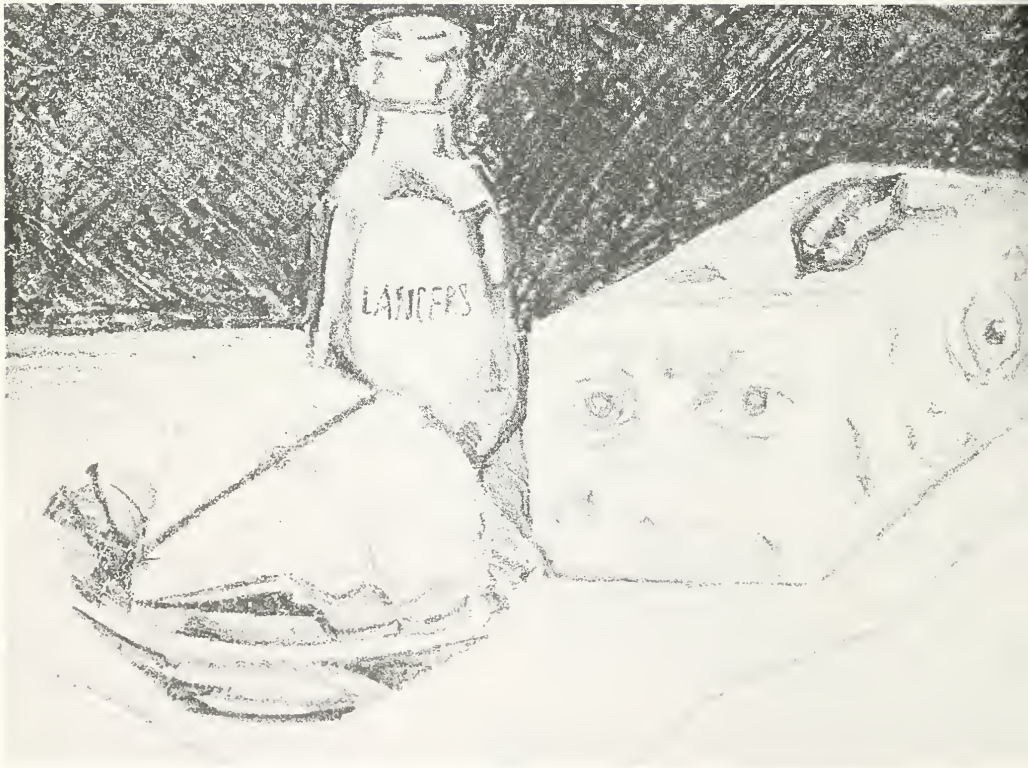
Tom Kerr

yer undyin' affections grow so feeble with age
retreatin' from death to fear
on crutches as dependable as yer weakness.

fear weakens the heart like a cancer web.
ya give me valentines, sturdy hearts with lacy
webbed boundaries
ya give me gold rings like haloes
expensive and brittle . . .
they outshine yer eyes
and outlive my fingers.
ya give me a photograph
capturin'
that special smile

ya smile when ya see the whole world
smilin' too . . .
not *too* toothy,
not *too* broad,
yer eyes smile likewise.
ya look so glossy and lifelike and strong,
such a perfect image of yerself
in a silver frame.
take yer crap and go away.

bring me somethin' ready to die. we'll share it
until it gives up the ghost
and then bring the ghost in deeply . . .
holdin' it there
until the blood is rich
with its fearless mystery.


LAMOTTE

your reflection unfurls across the floor
star-spangled mayhem
of course,
i've confided in the walls,
the doors,
they've crossed their hinges
over and over i'm forced
to hide them
the windows
so you won't stun them
so you won't hurl out their light
so you won't steal
the light
funny the way
your sadism
becomes you
it glides beside your shadow
it runs when you call
i'm shut out
from your darkness
and the small whipped balls
of yesterday
uncurl
at my feet.

Nancy Westbrook

DARK NIGHT
(for Papa)

Terry B. Taylor

Seeds planted in dark night
grow straight and readily
in the full moon's light.

He talks of prices rising like helium balloons—
ten dollars became twelve-fifty in an hour "fer taters."
He says he will do without this year.
But he can't work his evenly plowed garden,
the dizzy spells make the straight lines twist
into curved reflections of serpentine mountain roads.
Arguing lightly with a younger
he knows what he is saying:
"Y' plant taters, corn, jest anythin'
in the dark night
an' the' gro up jest as tall
w'thout fert'lizer or nothin'.
Back yonder days, great world . . . "
Fading off into another tale.

II

He couldn't sleep last night—
voices kept floating through the darkness.
"There'ws a saw a goin' in tha' holler"
(gnarled fingers to the horizon)
"An 'nother in tha' gap 'hind the house"
(roaring, roaring, roaring he says).
And the voices—women to women;
a man from the church.
"Jest as clear as you sittin' here."
He gets up from the uneasy bed;
goes to the porch peering,
thinking he has visitors in the dark.
There is no one there.
"An' no sooner I git back in bed
the saws start roarin' agin."
The saws slacken; the voices fade in.
"Got up ter th' back room—
men gen'lly bring a woman up tha' road."
Nothing there.
He goes back to bed, pulling covers,
stuffing ears, and sleeps.
This morning, he says, while fixing breakfast
"the saws roared agin . . .
and the voices."
Roaring, roaring, roaring.

PARALYZED WITH ICE

Terry B. Taylor

The world presents itself glassine wondered,
cracked in movement; brittled and aged.
Green spring buds in stop motion,
mirrored in wind touch like an arthritic's cane,
tap unsure pavement.
Wind brushing the scene cracks grass
erect in broken mirror rhyme.
Cold moves with an old woman's forgetful time,
slow and intent in penetration of sap and marrow.
With steady pulse power line snap brittle electricity
slowing concavity from pole to pole.
Small birds—feather-huddled; grey—
cling desperately to their perch
frozen with fear.

PORTRAIT

Fragments of self-knowledge
pause statuelike
while ascending and descending
a stairway to oblivion
as the artist depicted his nude
on all steps
at once

AUTUMN – LAST MINUTES

A spider webbery of trees
stretches from one corner of window pane
to another,
etched in black-brown hues;
while an occasional leaf
lies caught and dangling
from the gauzy fibers.

Joyce Whitaker

COLD

Joyce Whitaker

Premature bird voices
strike and freeze on solid air
as I push my way
through crevasses in the cold
chiseling out a new cave
with each step;
while avalanches of air
fill the space behind me.
My breath strikes cold stone
and echoes back to me:
still fighting
until the rock
is tunnelled through.

WINDOW WITCHES

David V. Hughey

The Oktoberfest arrives
with leafy thunderstorms
coffee-brewing on the icy fire
of candle flames snuffed out.
Window witches spin
deflatable cacoons
for Death's head butterfly
and Trilby trembles as she scrapes
smoky frost from eisenglass
and foolishness from her mirror.
Windy songs ring out
as the antique washer babbles
to baby dolls in voodoo flesh
tugging at my gypsy heart.
I vomit up the bitter glass
of painful strawman witches,
shriveling up like crispy bacon
between two slabs of life.

AUTOGRAPH HOUND

David V. Hughey

My dog scribbles
on sidewalks with a bone
and splashes
his Hollywood theater district footprints
in rain puddles of cement.
He notices
rain on tin roofs
before candles wither
like mummies in Chinese caves.
My thoughts rattle
like rusty leaves
walking on apple peel streets.
In the signature of the wind, we search
for other people's names, inscriptions,
dogs in slums, and absentee landlords
hanging spiderwebs in corners
of antique photographs.
It is all psychodrama,
combustable supermarkets of reality,
pristine knapsacks transported
by ex-musicians
of my Mariachi street band.

CITY BEATS

Quentin Powers

An Autumn feeling simmers down
The rail of passages, smelling
Like ten o'clock.
Drinkers, like widows
Of despair caress the night shops,
Nursing their sacrifice.
Then a car, splashing
Last week on heels, breaking
The home of night into snatches of smoke.
Dust clouds the stormy neon
In brusque wind and smacks the city's face.
A distant bus breaks,
Pushes and pulls, mule-
Like in its order from here
To there, to nowhere
And then back—

CIRCUS PAST

Quentin Powers

He would have wanted it that way,
The dead Fair,
With winds strained past the show's fingers:
One huge wheel, globing
The cigar air,

Bones of cars strangled wildly
On a wooden floor, with candy.
A ghost-house, spiritless,
Long trains of anxious, colored rides
Ready to go on stage.

Or the horses with frenzied
Expressions, caught between up and down
In a circle of cartoons, and strange melodies.
He would be interested
To know the animals still care
At night, when secrets ply the air
And little memories of snowy faces

SNOW HABIT

Quentin Powers

Everything has been prepared.
Tufts of wind

Cake about us.

Snow ledges
At our legs, and we pull

Like oxen through the rude dark.
And in the stills of the farmost stars

We imagine the ghosts
Of heaven, nesting in seeds
Of unopened years.

THE INFIRM

Quentin Powers

He's been long
At this pale, cold weakness
In the hospital infirmary
    Where the red-starred
    Youthful nurses
Come with lunch
(Lamb, salad, carrots
With peas)
    Stainless steel bedpans
    And smiles that don't alter
To nurse his health back to ordinary.
He sleeps at frail hours
Or at odd times
    And pokes about the covers,
    Wasting the month, probing his still thoughts.
    Mr. Druger,

His father
Will come at night
And exchange gestures
    In his own exposed
    Sickness of the outside,

    Where other twitching,
    Oily friends reside—

Polishing Apples

Deborah Seabrooke

JANE FELT PEOPLE pressing against her back. The stewardess was waving them to the rear of the plane where there were more empty places. She moved ahead, but suddenly, on her left, she saw him. He was in an aisle seat and his companion was at the window. In the same instant he looked up.

"What are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here? What about you?" she asked.

He half rose, his knees hitting the seat in front. "I meant to call you." His companion turned from the window and looked at him, then smiled up at Jane like a stranger.

The pressure finally pushed her past them. She saw a place next to a young red-headed man.

"Hello, mind if I take this seat?" The people in the aisle moved around her, knocking her ankles with carry-on luggage.

The man's face cleared for a moment, as if he remembered her from somewhere. "The faculty brunch, a year ago last January. You must be Lois Claxton." He stood up and his head hit the rack above the window. Embarrassed, he abruptly put out a hand for her to shake.

"No. I'm Jane Fell."

"Oh yes," he said, fumbling now, trying to return the hand nonchalantly to his side. "Of course, now I remember. You're Fred's, no, . . . ah, Frank's. Yes, you're Frank's wife.

Sorry, I'm new around here, haven't quite learned who's who."

"May I have the seat?"

"Of course! Can I put this up on the rack for you? It's too bad Frank couldn't make it. Preparing his exams, I suppose?"

"No, he's here. In fact, he's right up front." She directed the young man's gaze up the aisle. Frank was reading the plastic card telling where the emergency exits were.

"To bad you can't sit together. I'd be pleased to change seats with him."

"That's all right. I don't want to sit with him. We're separated."

"No! No one told me. It hasn't been for long, has it?"

"Four months."

"Well, I'm sorry. How clumsy of me."

"No need to apologize."

Her partner twitched his lips into a smile, and then looked shyly out the window. The stewardess began the demonstration of the oxygen mask.

"Mr. ah . . . "

"Kurtz, Tom Kurtz. Chemistry department. Sorry." His voice was suddenly high-pitched. Phlegm caught in his throat. "What brings you on this trip all alone?"

"May I ask you the same?"

"Oh, just something to do for a week. Otherwise I'd be rattling in the library."

"Uh-huh, well, same with me. Also, I want to see what it's like to travel alone. I've never been anywhere by myself. Do you think I'm doing all right so far?"

The plane raced down the runway, and their seats began to shake. She leaned back hard in the cushions. Tom Kurtz said something she didn't hear. He showed her an even row of teeth and his neck puffed out—something like a pigeon she once saw mating in the park.

SHE HAD DISCOVERED last week that Frank was going on the trip.

The local radio station was sponsoring a Mediterranean tour the first week in June. A woman wrote in to Vic Verple, the disc jockey, saying she'd sign up if he'd sit next to her on the plane. He read the letter on the air and agreed to the proposal. From then on, people started sending in their deposits. It seemed like it would be fun after all.

Vic Verple scheduled a party at the motel for people to get to know each other, meet the native Italian tour guide, and learn what would

seen anyone so fast on his feet.

"Queeesh Lorraines, Coca-Cola, and shockalate pudeen."

"Delightful." The two women stood there for a moment in silence. Marlene nudged Jane with her elbow.

"Excuse me," Carlos said, "I see that four couples have arrived. I must tell them they're in the right place."

"Why didn't you ask him anything? Really, Jane, he'll think we're the dullest people on the trip."

"No, the dullest people will be the professors."

"Look, get it out of your mind. Frank won't show up on this. What professor wants to travel with a tour group? Professors go to Europe like I travel on the bus to visit my mother. No big deal. Besides, he's got that grant this summer. He told you he'd get it six months ago. And he'll be so busy preparing for it, he won't think twice about going on this tour. Probably hasn't listened to the radio he's been so busy."

"That guide looks Mexican," Jane said to be important to pack in their suitcases. Jane went with her neighbors.

"Why are you so ant-sy tonight? You act as if this was your first high school dance," Marlene said. They were standing by the punch bowl.

"I don't know. It's been a while since I was at a party like this." She saw a short, dark-haired man come toward them. He wore a tuxedo that looked a few sizes too big.

"Good evening. Excited about your trip? My name is Carlos." His smile was automatic and very wide. "What is my name?"

"What?" Jane asked. "Oh, oh, you mean what is *my* name."

"Yes. Of course. What is my name."

"Well, *my* name is Jane."

"So pleased, I'm sure."

"Carlos," Marlene said, blinking her eyes twice, "How long is the flight? And, um, . . . will dinner be served on the plane?"

"The plane ride takes only eight hours and sees-teen minutes. You will eat a light dinner and a con-teen-ental breakfast."

"A light dinner?"

"One moment please, I will get my information."

"Oh God, he's a bad faker," Jane whispered.

"I think he's cute."

In a second he was back. Jane had never change the subject, "We were supposed to have a native Italian."

"What's the difference? Mexican, Italian, they're all the same: dark and hot-blooded!" She stamped her feet and clapped her hands above her head. "It's the flamingo."

Burt, Marlene's husband, crept up behind her.

"Boo!"

"Oh! Oh, it's you, ya big dummy. Hey," she said turning again to Jane, "I wonder where Vic Verple is. I'd like to see what he looks like."

Just when she began to feel comfortable, around eleven, Frank entered with a young woman. He had on a new grey suit with a plaid bow tie. She'd never seen him wear bow ties before.

Then, they were standing back to back, and once he came so close, Jane could have reached behind herself and touched Frank's jacket. She heard the girl say, "Let's go. There are just a bunch of rubes on this trip."

She slipped quietly out of the circle of people she was with and left the ballroom through a side door. It took her almost fifteen minutes to locate where she was in the maze of dead-end hallways. At last, she found the lobby, and signs leading to the ladies room. She pushed on a heavy door that opened into a lounge, all in pink. One wall was a great mirror. Stale cigarette smoke hung in the air. Jane looked at her white face, the tan wool dress, the heavy pocketbook slung on her arm. She wasn't going to cry and upset her mascara. A sane approach, that's what was needed. No fuss, no muss. I'm sure there's a reason for everything.

Her hand went in the pocketbook for a tissue and she blew her nose. "Damn you!" she shouted. Her voice echoed in the empty tiled lounge. Then, a toilet flushed in an inner room. Like an ostrich sticking its head in the sand for cover, she began fixing her hair. A short woman came out through a swinging door, and walked to the mirror. She took a comb from her purse and began teasing her hair. "Some screwball was shouting in here. You see her?"

"Didn't notice anything," Jane said. Maybe I'll meet a gentleman on this trip. Not an Italian in tight stretch trunks, but a nice gentleman. The Mediterranean is loaded with divorcees, people without anything to do but think about money.

Frank sent her a check every month; he agreed to it until she got a job. He hadn't forgotten about her yet. But there would be signs, like tonight, showing she was slipping from his mind. He seemed to be getting along awfully well without her. She thought their separation would be final, a door she'd close

and lean against. But something, like a whining child still clung to her, greedy, insatiable.

She knew this time of year well. Before exams began. Frank used to say that there wasn't enough time to start anything new. So he fooled around the house, repairing furniture, cleaning gutters, golfing on the living room rug. This was the time she'd always hated. His fidgeting made her nervous. Even her plants looked sick when he was around constantly.

Jane became conscious of her image in the mirror, and lost track of her thoughts. Pushing the heavy door open, she walked back to the lobby, called a taxi, and went home.

Newman College was a small girls school. It was Frank's first teaching position. They'd been too excited about it to look any further. The house was another stroke of luck: old, large, with a den for him to work in. She could walk to the campus to meet him every day for lunch.

At first, they weren't invited anywhere and Frank said the girls in his class were trying to test out the new teacher. Then they got the invitation to the annual faculty brunch at the President's house.

"Jane, don't wear that dress." He was standing at their closet reaching into it with one arm. His boxer shorts, new, with the crease crisply running down the front, came almost to his knees.

"What do you mean? You always liked it." It was a simple tan wool dress. She normally wore it with a string of pearls.

"Not to a brunch."

"Frank, I'm sure this isn't formal."

"At the President's house."

"The President of the college, not the United States."

"He's the only President I care about at the moment. And I'm not going to insult him. We're to be dressed to the nines."

"What?"

He pulled out a tuxedo from the closet.

"Where did you get that?"

"I rented it."

"Frank, nowhere on that invitation does it say this is a formal party." She went to her dressing table and picked up the card. "Look. Nothing about tuxedos."

"You are a simpleton, aren't you? Do you think *he* thinks that we have to be told what to wear? Jane, there are certain things one doesn't have to say and this is one of them. 'Come to my brunch,' it says, and in invisible ink, 'this is the classiest affair in town. Dress accordingly."

This was the first time it was clear to her

things were changing between them. She asked herself why he couldn't stay the same way he was in graduate school—a sturdy, resilient guy, a little boisterous at times, but usually only at basketball games. He didn't seem to care much then what people thought of him.

But that morning, when they arrived at the President's house, every face was turned to them, she saw several of the wives try to suppress smiles behind their drinks. The husbands looked at both of them, from Jane's gold shoes to Frank's black tie. That dress, one her mother bought for her junior year, it never fit right, being too tight across her chest, too big around the waist. All yellow chiffon. She hated it, but Frank insisted she wear it this morning. She looked at him now, as he swallowed his prepared salute to the President. They quietly shook his hand and nodded to his wife. She was wearing, Jane told Frank many times on the drive home, a simple wool dress.

She'd known for a long time how he'd been planning for the grant. He told her he'd go to England when he was forty to begin a book on Robert Browning. Just like that. They'd been to Europe when he was thirty-five. The college had sent him to a conference in London for two weeks in March. While she window-shopped, the dampness seeped through her heaviest coat. Later, she persuaded him to go to France for three days—for a little vacation in the sun. He was very impatient to get home: it wouldn't look right to the department chairman, he said, to consider this leave as a vacation. On the beach he sat fully clothed under an umbrella, looking over his notes. She bought strawberry ices from a little truck by the road. She devoured them in seconds and bought more, going from their umbrella to the truck all day. It was not until weeks passed that she began to forget how angry she'd been at him. She still remembered how he looked in the folding chair in the sand, with his shoes and socks on. Sometimes, she wondered why she ever came back home with him.

The neighborhood people seemed totally unimpressed when Frank talked to them about the great responsibility he felt as a teacher. A lot of the men worked at the factory and declined to have much conversation, outside of sports, with anyone on weekends.

At one of the barbecues, given by the Lawndale Civic Association, Jane turned from scraping their hamburgers off the grill and saw Frank by the pond, alone, throwing stones. Once, she would have gone down and coaxed him back to the party, but now she didn't feel

like doing anything about it.

"Let's move," he said one night after dinner.

"Why? I like this house."

"It's too big. I'd rather be closer to the library. There's an apartment available by that new shopping plaza on West Street."

"In the neighborhood where that party was? The one the Math professor gave?"

"Why yes, I didn't think you'd remember."

"But I like this area. I've made friends. Besides, the library is close enough, you can walk to it in ten minutes."

"Still . . . "

"Still, you're out of your element here. These people just don't seem to care much about college life, do they?"

"We've been here long enough—*years*. Look, Jane, I need to be nearer to the rest of the faculty. Not one of them lives in this neighborhood, except that retired woman from the History department on the end of the block."

"Why don't you all live in one of the dorms, then. You can come home on weekends, just like the students."

Frank stared at her a moment, and then got up, knocking over his chair. She heard him in his den, slamming desk drawers, packing books into boxes. He had a lesson to teach her.

SHE GUESSED it had been one of those things that builds up slowly, each event adding on little by little, only, like the leaning tower of Pisa, it never came crashing down. Just grew more lopsided. Sometimes, she felt like a naughty child, pushing on the straining side of the tower, watching it tip just a little more. She and Frank were dizzy basement plumbers connecting the wrong pipes together, making their marriage leak in places and grow rusty.

She had tried to tell him. He could have had his own course in the catalog, the private office, the leave for the conference in London, without all the fuss he made.

"Ive heard some of your friends laughing at you," she told him one night as they undressed for bed. "The grant this summer is going to someone in the English department, and everybody wonders when you're going to put that bright shiny apple on the chairman's desk."

"I don't listen to you anymore, Jane. I do things my way and they seem to work out, don't they?"

"But Frank, it's taken for granted now that every action you take is calculated to get some kind of reward."

"Is that so?"

"Ask yourself."

"You think you sound so clever, turning my questions back to me," he said, getting under the covers, "Your silences are so full of content. It just occured to me, you'd write a great Dear Abby column."

"Sweetheart," Jane said, getting in next to him and putting a hand on his firm, but growing paunch, "It's February. Got your special valentine all cut out and ready to mail to the President?"

"Such a way with words," he mumbled, rolling away from her.

If she could have packed everything that bothered her into boxes, bricks for the leaning tower, the cornerstone would have been Frank's determination. He robbed himself of all surprises. He always wanted to know where he was going. He practiced hard no matter how small the leap.

At home, he was determined she'd learn not to throw eggshells on the compost heap, and to tell him when a faucet leaked. He tried to make his reasons clear to her. When he used to rehearse his lectures aloud, he asked if she understood him. He read the important parts over and over, ferreting out the pieces of his argument, sniffing under the same bushes. When he dropped the conclusion again at her feet, she was supposed to respond, in the affirmative or negative.

It was so simple. They decided quietly after dinner one night to separate. "It might do us good," he said, "To get away from each other and re-consider. Besides, I've got an awful lot of work coming up, and plans are in the making for the grant this summer. I wouldn't have much time to spend with you, anyway."

"I was thinking," she said, "About finding myself a job for a couple hours each day."

It took them a month to settle everything. He had to find an apartment, and they divided up the furniture. But strangely, in the middle of the month, he ceased talking to her and spent nearly the whole day at home, silent, in his den. Then, as she called him to dinner one night, he yelled down the hall that he was going to eat out. He couldn't stand her staring at him over the table.

"The air would do you good, Frank."

He came into the kitchen with his hat and coat on. "You're getting used to me being gone already."

"Well, it's not as if you're leaving to go to South Africa."

"No, it seems like I'll be stuck in this town for a long time."

"Meaning . . . ?"

"Ran out of apples to polish."

"I don't get it."

"It's no worry of yours. Sorry you

prepared all that food. Invite a neighbor over to share it."

"Say, what is all this? For a couple of weeks, you've acted like a zombie. Why the sudden change?"

"Jane, what has always amazed me was your ability to grasp the situation."

"Excuse, Mr. Robert Browning, but you're above my head."

He laughed. "You'll kick yourself someday, sweetheart, for how close you came to a most fitting riposte."

The morning he moved out, Jane left the house. She didn't want to hear him banging his desk drawers in and out. He pulled his books from the shelves, sometimes letting them slam to the floor. A month ago, he seemed elated at the idea of separating. Complimented her on dinner for the first time in years.

She walked to the campus. Girls strolled from the dorms to classroom buildings. As she went past the Library, a senior who had once invited them to dinner at her sorority, came down the steps. She recognized Jane and waved.

After a walk through the garden in front of the student union, bare except for little evergreen shrubs, she decided to go home and fix Frank's lunch. Give him a good send-off. Coming down their sidewalk, she saw him. He stood in the middle of the road with a golf club, swinging at tightly crumpled balls of paper. He hit one powerfully, sending it to the end of their street. Later, Jane found a paper on their lawn under a bush. It was his writing—she didn't understand what the essay was about. But how strange, she thought, that he'd suddenly treat his own work that way.

DINNER HAD been served. Quiche Lorraines like kitchen sponges, and the chocolate pudding reminded her of a paste she'd once made in grade school, of flour and water, and mud. Jane and Tom talked about people they knew mutually at the college. She went back to the ladies room, once to unfasten a garter that was rubbing her, and the other time, to get away from him. When Tom warmed up to a person, a motor started pumping out words. Occasionally, he gathered too much saliva in his mouth and sent her little invisible missiles of it.

The stewardess turned the lights out in the cabin at midnight, and she fell asleep. An hour later, someone was shaking her shoulders and woke her.

"Jane, can I talk to you?" It was Frank, bending down to her. In the darkness, his figure looked huge. Tom turned politely toward the window.

"What? Oh, for goodness sake. *Here?* Really, I didn't think you'd . . . "

"Come on. There must be a place we can go. Just a minute, I'll look around."

Jane saw him walk to the front of the cabin. Then, hurrying, he came back. He took her elbow and led her up the aisle. His companion's seat was empty. She must have gone back to the ladies room, Jane thought.

First, Frank slipped her into a compartment, and with a quick look to the sleeping faces behind them, he went in after her.

"Frank, this is nonsense. The men's room. Really. I can't even stand up straight."

"Sit down then."

"Sit? Where?"

"On the toilet." He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and spread it over the lid.

"Thanks. Real cozy."

"Jane, I didn't think you'd come on this trip."

"And why not? Why the hell not?"

Flustered, Frank accidently put his hand on the push button faucet. Water shot out which started a loud, automatic sucking system in the drain. He waited for the noise to stop. "Well, I just thought you'd stay home. Jane, I didn't get the grant. I knew it before we separated."

"I found out a week ago."

"It was a great shock to me."

"Imagine how *I* felt when I saw you at that party. Remember? Vic Verple was supposed to show up. Not you."

"You saw me at that party? Where were you?"

"Trying to hide."

"Well, this trip seemed to come just in time. I had no idea you'd be on it. What I'm trying to say is, I didn't plan this whole thing, like a soap opera. I didn't bring that woman with me to tease you."

"Who is she?"

"A graduate student." He chuckled a minute, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh Frank, you're too old."

"I know. Don't you think I know? God, you say the most inane things sometimes."

"It's wonderful that we can be so honest with each other, isn't it? Too bad about the grant, Frank. Really, you were so sure. I guess we can't have everything we want."

"I didn't come back here to be psycho-analyzed."

"Oh?"

"I just wanted to apologize. It looks so

lousy."

"Oh, Frank, I think it looks just fine. We're letting everyone see that we're able to strike out on our own, no bad feelings, just two middle-aged, sensible people."

"Stop making a mockery of it. I have a perfect right . . . "

"Have I said you don't? Can I go? Is your soul cleansed now? Can we go back out there, chin up, face to the wind, in front of everybody?"

"I just want you to know I didn't plan for you to be on this trip."

"Did you think the rest of the neighborhood and the faculty have blinders on if I'm not here to share in the comedy? Did you think that *they* won't see your little graduate student?"

"I needed something. It was a bad mistake. But, I simply can't leave her once we get to Italy."

"That would be cruel. No, you'll just have to do your proper duty. Very good of you." She began to cry, and pulled a few squares of toilet paper out of an aluminum box.

Frank sighed. "I never thought I'd see you jealous."

"Jealous? Of what? I'm happy for you, really. If you need that sort of thing. But she's so young."

"Look, I've said what I wanted to say. You'll have to excuse me now. I must get back to my seat, she'll be wondering what I'm doing."

"Tell her it's just a dose of nerves. Diarrhea. Something comical, but an altogether

"Tell her it's just a dose of nerves. Diarrhea. Something comical, but an altogether legitimate affliction. I'm sure she's sympathetic. Did you explain that I am on the plane?"

"Goodby," Frank said, and before she could respond, he shut her alone in the men's room.

The continental breakfast was served in a rush as the plane began to descend. All of a sudden, the lights went on in the cabin, the captain reported that he could see the coast of Italy, and a tired stewardess began to wheel a cart of gooey buns down the aisle. An assistant, blinking her eyes to keep awake, poured coffee. Tom Kurtz asked Jane to get an extra bun for him.

She was pleased by the neatness of her snack tray. After hours of contorting in her seat, trying to find a comfortable sleeping

position without rumpling her dress, the crisp, blue paper place mat soothed her. She held her coffee in her lap because she didn't want to leave wet rings on it.

Warning signs above their heads flashed on, and while Tom was busy looking for the ends of his seat belt, she took a pen and wrote "Sorry." in small letters on the place mat. Then she added, "maybe we ought to talk things over." She folded it neatly into an airplane. Tom started showing her oragomi tricks with his place mat until the stewardess came and took it away.

As they walked from the plane, down the staircase, there were five people between her and Frank. When the crowd fanned out on the pavement to listen to Carlos's instructions about customs, she lost sight of him. Then, the man in front of her stepped aside and she saw him again, walking away from the crowd. Jane aimed and released the paper plane. It landed in front of Frank's companion. She picked it up, and, giggling, threw it back in the direction it came.

ads

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UPON HEARING THE NEWS OF AGNEW'S RESIGNATION

Karen Davis

They dropped vases in the White House.