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Fall 1981



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After three months of hard work, the *Coraddi* staff is proud to present the Fall 1981 issue of UNC-G's semi-annual arts/literary magazine. It is a smaller magazine than usual, but I believe the material presented in this issue is of the highest quality.

I was extremely pleased with the number of submissions for the magazine's contest this semester. We received over 200 poems, along with 20 short stories, 10 pieces of three-dimensional art, nearly 50 pieces of two-dimensional art, as well as approximately 75 photographs. I personally would like to thank all contestants for their entries; I wish we had enough space to print them all.

I also would like to extend special thanks to the judges for the various divisions of the arts/literary contest. They were: Jim Stratford, photography; Marianne Gingher, prose; Ann Deagon poetry; and Cynthia Ference, two- and three-dimensional art. Mr. Stratford is the chief photographer at the *Greensboro Daily News-record*; Ms. Gingher is a fiction teacher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who has taken a year's leave of absence; Ms. Deagon is a professor of classics at Guilford College; and Ms. Ference is the director of Green Hill Art Gallery.

This is the second *Coraddi* publication this fall. In November, *Coraddi* produced its first tabloid newspaper, a special poetry edition which was distributed with the student newspaper, *The Carolinian*. I would like to thank *The Carolinian* for helping us make this idea a reality. We are currently planning a photography/short story tabloid in the spring.

For the spring, *Coraddi* again will hold a contest for art and literary submissions. However, this contest has a different format than previous contests. The new rules are printed on the inside back cover of this issue. The spring issue also will feature some faculty art and literary work.

As editor, this semester has been a learning experience. Although I have served on three previous *Coraddi* staffs, it is a totally new world in the top position. But my job was made much easier with the help and support of faculty, students and friends. I thank you.

Elizabeth F. House

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Special Thanks To Doren

The Coraddi Magazine is published twice a year by the University Media Board of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Subscription rate for the current year is \$5.

The Coraddi Magazine is printed by The Clinton Press, Greensboro, N.C.

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Inside Front Cover by Scott Dodgson

Cover Photography by Herbert Gambill, Jr.
Second Place Photography Winner

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• The Four Ladies •

Jim Booth

Although we must have seen them about a half-dozen times, none of us ever learned much about them. Ralph Burton, Teddy Hatter and I used to sit in the Boulevard Cafe and drink syrupy Cokes, waiting for Jenny Swan to walk by on her way home from school. We must've talked a hundred times about going out the door right after her, and we wasted quite a few hours devising elaborate opening statements that we'd present in order to capture her attentions. When she did go by, though, all we did was surreptitiously follow her with our eyes and picture ourselves saying vague and clever things that would cause her diamond-gloss smile to flash. That's all we did.

That is, until the four ladies. They gave us something else to talk about.

The first time that they came into the restaurant was about a week before Thanksgiving. We were sitting at our usual table by the window waiting for Jenny when the first one came in. She pushed open the plate glass door and walked over to the counter. She didn't say anything and she didn't look either to the right or left. When Calvin, the counterman, didn't come over after about two minutes, she began to tap her foot. After thirty seconds or so the tap had become a stomp. When it got that loud, Calvin came over.

"Yes ma'am, Miss Lelia," said Calvin as he walked down the counter towards her, rubbing it with his grubby towel. We estimated he washed that towel about once a month. "What can I do for you?"

"Is my table reserved?" asked Miss Lelia.

"Yes ma'am, it's your usual table," said Calvin. He hurried down to the end of the counter, took off his apron, tucked in his shirt, and picked up a menu.

"Right this way, Miss Lelia."

Ralph cracked up when he heard the bit about the reserved table. He and we knew that no one else was in the place at four o'clock in the afternoon and that even at the supper rush the place would never be over half full. So the sight of old Calvin leading this old lady to a particular empty table among all the other empty tables was pretty ludicrous.

Calvin went over to a table in the corner and pulled out a chair. He took the lady's coat and kerchief and put them on the coat rack. Then he came back and seated her. She wouldn't sit down until he came and pushed the seat in for her. Calvin went over to the counter and got a pencil and an order pad. He shuffled over to the table and asked, "You ready to order now, ma'am?"

"I suppose so," she said, scanning the menu. "What's the special today?"

"Beef stew, Miss Lelia. It's real good today, too."

"Well, bring me a bowl of that and some crackers," she said.

"How about a vegetable?" asked Calvin. "The spinach looks pretty good."

"No, just the stew," she said. She took the napkin holder on the table, pulled out a paper napkin, unfolded it, and placed it on her lap.

Calvin went into the back and came out a couple of minutes later with a steaming bowl sitting on a plate and a basket full of crackers in cellophane. He placed those before her.

"Anything else, ma'am?" he asked.

"I believe I could do with a glass of iced tea," she said.

Calvin went over to the counter and fixed it. He even took the knife and put a slit in the lemon slice so that he could stick it on the glass and make it look funny. He carried it over to her.

"Everything all right now?" he asked.

"Just fine," she said. "This is real good stew, Calvin."

Calvin beamed. "Thank you, ma'am."

Seeing that the little scene had played out, we shifted our attention back to the street, immediately forgetting the old woman — until the next one came in.

"Hello, Miss Dahlia," said Calvin right away, as if he'd been on the alert.

"Good afternoon, Calvin," she said. "Is Miss Lelia here?"

"Yes ma'am. Right this way please."

He took her back to the table and seated her to the right of the first lady. The same ritual then ensued; he took her order and came back with stew and crackers; he went to the counter and fixed her a glass of tea with the lemon stuck on the lip of the glass. He went back later to see if everything was all right and she complimented him about the stew. It was uncanny. It was only the beginning.

As soon as the second lady was settled a third one showed up. Her name was Miss Geneva. Calvin repeated the ritual without a single change. When she was settled a fourth one came in. Her name was Miss Pansy. Same series of events again. We watched in fascination. It could have been a movie.

When they began to leave, the process by which they entered was simply repeated. Miss Lelia called for her check, scrutinized it, fished in her purse and took out enough money to pay the bill (and a fifteen cent tip, as Calvin told us later), got her coat, and went over to the counter. Calvin rang up the sale and thanked her for the tip. They exchanged pleasantries for a few

moments and then Miss Lelia announced her departure.

"We'll see y'all later, we just talking now," she said.

She marched out. As she opened the door, she looked over towards us and nodded. We nodded in return.

Miss Dahlia, Miss Geneva and Miss Pansy followed in the same order in which they'd entered. When the last one was gone we knocked over tables and chairs getting to the counter to talk to Calvin.

"They always act like that?" Ralph's lips twisted.

"As long as I've known them," said Calvin. "They've been coming here six months out of every year for ten years that I know of."

"Where do they go the other six months?" I asked.

"Oh, they eat at the Tarheel Quick Lunch then," said Calvin.

"Got a fixation on fancy restaurants, huh?" said Teddy, grinning slyly.

"Let up, Teddy," said Ralph. "Do they always act like that?"

"Like what?" Calvin said.

"Coming in one at a time and all, you know, like they did today," said Ralph.

"Yeah, they always go around like that. I always thought of it as sort of like seasons, you know? It being four of them and all."

"Why did they just start coming here?" I asked. "It seems like if they were gonna do it six months on, six months off, they'd set it up to start in January or June, so it would be easy to order the dates."

"Well," said Calvin, "it's kinda funny about that. Seems like, as I remember, they used to go to the Tarheel Quick Lunch all the time. Then, November about ten years ago, it was Miss Pansy's birthday, so for a birthday present she asked to go to a new restaurant. Well, they came here, and I waited on them pretty much the same as I did today, and they seemed to take it so well that they came back every day for a week. Then they didn't come in one day and I thought, 'Well, that's over with,' but no, the next day they came in, and when I got them all served and everything, Miss Lelia (she's kind of the leader of them and all), she called me over and commenced

telling me how they had decided to eat at my place six months a year, then go eat at the Tarheel six months. I won't too sure about it at first, 'cause we get some rowdies in here, especially on the weekends, but nobody has ever offered to bother them. They have been coming here, like I said, for ten years or so."

"That's amazing," said Ralph.

"Yeah, it's romantic as hell," grinned Teddy. Ralph punched him on the arm.

"Can't you be serious at all?" I said.

"Oh, come on, Charlie," said Teddy, "don't start that starry-eyed crap on me. Let's go get a beer."

We left the Cafe full of talk about the four ladies. We made jokes about them, ruminated on their private lives, laughed at crudities about their bathroom habits, and generally amused ourselves with thinking about four harmless old ladies with eccentric dining tastes. And everyday we went down to the Boulevard Cafe to watch them perform their ritual. Then one day they didn't come in. We knew that they showed up about four o'clock, but we stayed 'til six waiting on them. I got yelled at pretty good when I got home.

"Maybe they decided to sample the cuisine at Le Quick Lunch de Tarheel," laughed Teddy as we left the Boulevard Cafe that evening.

The next day when we went to the Cafe, Miss Dahlia was standing at the cash register paying Calvin. It was pretty strange to us that she was the only one in there, but we went over to our table and sat down, so that we could watch her without being obtrusive. After she'd paid, Calvin handed her a stack of those styrofoam containers that restaurants use to put take-out orders in. She started out, balancing the pile of trays rather unsteadily in her arms. As she neared the door, Ralph jumped up and went over to open it for her. She smiled and thanked him. When she started out the door, though, she tripped on the door jamb and stumbled, losing control of the stack of containers. Ralph went down on one knee and caught the stack as they started to fall from her hands. With him standing

there on one knee and her sort of holding her hands down to his, it reminded me of a picture of Gareth and Lynette that I saw in an illustrated copy of *Idylls of the King*, a book we'd been reading in English.

"Why, thank you young man," said Miss Dahlia, casting her eyes down.

"Uh — you're welcome ma'am," said Ralph, a bit flustered, but looking like he felt like Sir Galahad. Suddenly he looked up and said, "How about if I carry these home for you?"

Miss Dahlia looked a bit surprised, but then nodded assent.

Ralph took the styrofoam plates from her and held the door open for her to walk the rest of the way out. She went and then he got up and followed. About the time that he got to the sign that said "Boulevard Cafe," Teddy jumped up and went out the door after him. I sat there for a minute in confusion, but I knew that I didn't want to miss out on anything, so about the time Teddy got even with our table in the window, I got up and went out after him. There we went down the street; Miss Dahlia in front, Ralph a few steps behind with the trays of food, and then a little further back, Teddy, and finally me, Charlie Beagle, tagging along dead last with my hands in my pockets and trying to decide whether to whistle "Jingle Bells," or "Easter Parade." It didn't occur to me until some time later that we must have looked like the ladies, all in a procession like that.

We trudged on about three or four blocks. I caught up with Teddy after a block and a half and asked him why he followed Ralph. He said that he mainly wanted to find out what Ralph was doing. But then he said something that I thought was downright profound.

"You know, Charlie, it's funny about old people. They seem to have a lot more in common with us than, say, people our parents' ages. They sort of fall into a category like the "too young to care" category parents are always yelling at us about. They're sort of "too old to care," if you know what I mean. But it's not like that, really. They have just found out by getting old the same thing that people know when they're young like us, but forget while they're middle-aged and trying to

make a living and all. They know that having friends, and taking care of each other and just making life interesting by doing anything that comes to mind is really more important than owning a new car or brick house or any of that junk. Mainly, what I'm trying to say is, old people try to do what we try to do. They just try to be happy."

I was pretty impressed by Teddy's speech. I was so impressed, in fact, that I almost ran over Ralph as he had stopped in front of a little white frame house. It was one of the places with bannisters in front that are so much fun to vault over when you're little. Anyway, it was kind of tacky once you got to looking at it. It needed a paint job, and when we walked up the porch, it was squeaky and spongy, like it needed re-flooring. Miss Dahlia told me to knock, so I did, and Miss Geneva came to the door.

"Well, what a surprise," she smiled, sort of nervously, I thought.

"Geneva, these nice boys have helped carry our suppers home. I thought we might invite them in for some cake and milk," said Miss Dahlia.

"Why, I'm sure it'll be all right with Lelia," said Geneva.

"Y'all come in."

Miss Dahlia went in. She took the trays from Ralph and said, "I'll just carry these to the kitchen and then we'll get you boys a treat." She went in and sort of pushed the door with her foot, so that it didn't close all the way. We stood on the porch for a while. The wind got to whipping a little bit so that finally Ralph said, "To hell with this — I'm going in." He pushed open the door and walked in. We weren't far behind. There was an entrance hall, and two doors, one on the right only a few steps from the door, and one further on the left. Ralph looked in the doorway to the right and then said, "Will ya look at that."

Teddy and I leaned around the doorway and looked in.

The ladies were scurrying around like crazy trying to get some elaborate setup for us to eat a piece of cake. They had put up a card table there in the parlor and were putting a white linen tablecloth on it. Then they put

out silverware and real cloth napkins. Ralph was in shock.

"Good Lord," he said. "I'll never get through this without a mess."

Evidently Miss Geneva heard him, 'cause she looked up startled, and then said, "Y'all come in. I bet you thought we'd forgotten you."

"Well, the wind was cold and all..." said Teddy.

"Oh, that's all right," she said.

"Y'all come on in and have a seat."

We shuffled into the parlor and sat down in some of those cane bottom chairs that almost everybody in our part of the country has. Three spastic teen-aged boys sitting around a rickety card table is pretty dangerous, but we managed to sit through getting served without disaster. The ladies brought in cake and big glasses of milk in those tall glasses like the hamburger places give out. It was marble cake with chocolate icing and it was really good. We ate like a bunch of pigs, two slices each, and all that milk. The ladies had disappeared, appearing only to give us more cake and milk. Finally, Miss Pansy, who seemed to have a streak of curiosity, came and leaned inside the doorway and watched us. Ralph decided to try to find out more about the ladies.

"Do all of y'all live here together?" he asked. She looked a little surprised at first, but then decided it would be all right to answer.

"Yes, we all stay together. Miss Lelia thought it would be the best thing. We all get Social Security and all, which isn't enough to support us by ourselves, but living together, we can do all right."

"Ain't it kind of crowded?" asked Teddy.

"Well, we have to share rooms," she said. "I stay with Geneva and Dahlia stays with Lelia. That's the way it works." She cast her eyes down. "Y'all don't want to listen to an old woman rattle on." She brightened. "Would you all like some more milk or cake?"

"No thank you," I said. "But I do have a question. Why did y'all not eat at the cafe today?"

"Well, Lelia had another of her spells. She's been having them more and more lately and she won't go to the doctor, no matter how much we fuss and beg."

"Well," I said, "we'd best be going. We didn't mean to be bothering you all with a lady sick and all."

"Oh, that's all right, honey," she said. "Lelia's feeling much better, and she was right cheerful when we told her y'all had helped carry supper home."

"Do you think she'd mind if we said hello?" asked Teddy. Ralph and I looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. Teddy wasn't exactly known as Mr. Sympathy and Good Cheer.

"Why, yes, I think she'd like that," said Miss Pansy. "Let me go ask."

She went back to the bedroom and came back a couple of minutes later with a pleased look on her face. "Y'all go right in," she said.

We got up rather too carefully from the table and stretched; then, with Teddy in the lead, walked down the hall to the bedroom. Teddy stuck his head around the door and said "Hi," and we were invited in.

Miss Lelia was sitting up in bed and she looked okay to me. Teddy went over and took the chair by her bed and started just talking to beat the band. Ralph went over and leaned against the bed post and started talking to Miss Dahlia and Miss Geneva alternately. I was just standing there feeling sort of left out when someone touched my arm. It was Miss Pansy. She motioned for me to come into the hall.

"Would you do something for me?" she asked.

"Well, if I can ma'am."

"I like to take a walk towards evening. Miss Lelia doesn't like for me to go out by myself, so I was wondering if you'd go with me." I didn't know what else to say so I said I would. We went by the parlor to get my coat. I helped her get hers on and we went out.

We walked for a good hour, I guess, and she told me why she never got married. It wasn't something I asked her about or anything, just something I got the impression that she needed to tell. It seems she had this fiance, and he went into the service about 1915. When World War I started for the United States, she was afraid he'd have to go to France and fight. But that wasn't the case. She got a letter

from him telling her that he'd miss all the action because he had to go to Alaska for some surveying work. She was really happy when she got that letter, she told me, because she thought he would be safe. But then, about six months later, he got killed by an avalanche. When she got to that part, she got so shiny-eyed and all that I started doing a bunch of junior high stuff like "skin the cat" on tree branches to get her smiling again. By then we'd been gone nearly an hour, so I shepherd her back to the house. When I got there, Teddy and Ralph were waiting on the porch. The other ladies were standing at the door when Miss Pansy and I came up; they opened the door and said goodbye to us all, and invited us to return again soon.

We did. We decided, sort of unofficially, since we never really had a big discussion, that we'd be sort of protectors for the four ladies. I think it all had to do with that *Idylls of the King* stuff we'd been reading. We all wanted to be Knights, and there aren't many opportunities for sixteen-year-old Galahads anymore.

One Friday night we went out and swiped some scrap lumber from a construction site and took it over to their house the next Saturday to fix that cruddy porch of theirs. We were always doing stuff like that. We went in together and bought a gallon of white paint. We painted the bannisters on the porch, but after we did we were sort of sorry because it made the rest of the house look kind of sad. The ladies liked it though. They were real nice and appreciative about everything we did. Maybe that was the real attraction. So often girls just used us; the ladies always appreciated us.

At Thanksgiving — actually the night after because we had to spend the real day with parents and grandparents — we had a dinner at the Boulevard Cafe. Calvin invited us because he said the ladies wanted us there and because he appreciated everything that we had done for them. We felt like real heroes. Anyway, we had a nice dinner, with turkey and dressing and all the stuff that Calvin fixed, and at the end, after the pump-

kin pie, Miss Geneva brought out a bottle of blackberry wine, and all of us had a glass. We toasted Calvin, then the ladies. Then they got up and toasted us. It was about the best dinner I ever went to. We even had a round table.

The week after Thanksgiving Miss Lelia had another spell and so the ladies stayed home. We took their supper trays by to them, and visited a little. In a couple of days she got right much better, so they came down to the diner on the Friday night a week after Thanksgiving. Calvin was so glad to see them that he set a special table and put one of those candles in the middle. He lit it and turned the lights mostly off while the ladies ate. We sat and watched for a while, really enjoying it, but when we got up to leave, something happened. I threw open the door and the draft whipped in and blew out the candle. Everybody was sitting there in the dark and then one of the ladies, Miss Pansy maybe, said "It's an omen." After that, I got the shivers and had a cold all weekend. I figure she was right.

Teddy called me Sunday night. About the time Teddy got ready to hang up the phone, Ralph showed up at his house. They said they'd come over, so I sort of cleaned up my room. When they arrived, we went into my room to listen to some music. Then we got into a real philosophical discussion. Ralph was saying how the ladies really were like the seasons. He said Miss Geneva and Miss Dahlia were like summer and fall, because Miss Geneva was so warm-hearted and Miss Dahlia always told interesting and colorful stories. Then I got to talking about how Miss Pansy was so romantic and all. Then, Teddy stopped us in our tracks. He looked up and said, "Miss Lelia's the winter." When he said that, he got this look on his face like he had only one other time, when Diana Delight broke up with him in the cafeteria, in front of half the student body, telling him how she didn't love him and never did, and everybody knew it but him. To change the subject, Ralph said it was funny how we'd all caught colds. "Bad luck runs in threes."

"Fours," said Teddy.

On Monday when we went into the cafe, Calvin was wiping the same old counter with the same old towel. He looked up and nodded as we came in, and the look on his face told us that there was something wrong. We went over to the counter to get the bad news.

"Miss Lelia's in the hospital," he said. "They had to take her in last night. She's pretty bad off from what I hear. They ain't expecting her to live."

We all looked at each other in silence.

"Can we go see her?" asked Teddy.

"Yeah, they might let you in. I went this morning." Calvin turned his head and began making furious swipes with that filthy towel of his.

We walked over to our table and sat down. We must have sat there for thirty minutes. Finally, Ralph said that we should go see her. We made plans to go that evening.

We drove to the hospital in near silence, phrasing our sentences for monosyllabic replies. The receptionist at the lobby told us that Miss Lelia was on the second floor, so we took the elevator up. The nurse at the second floor gave us passes that allowed us to visit for fifteen minutes. We went down the hall looking for room 211. Then we saw the other three ladies sitting in folding chairs outside the door of a room and knew it must be the one. They nodded their heads in greeting as we walked up.

"I told Lelia y'all would come," said Miss Dahlia.

"It was nice of y'all boys to come," said Miss Geneva.

"Y'all are sweet boys," said Miss Pansy.

We mumbled thank you's and opened the door to the room quietly. Miss Lelia was lying on the bed in the half-dark room with her face towards the window. When the light from the hall hit her face, she turned towards the door, and when she saw us, she smiled. She looked pale and weak. We stood there shuffling our feet not knowing what to say. She spoke for us.

"I thank you boys for coming. I told Dahlia and them that y'all wouldn't forget me. If you don't want to say anything, that's alright. Y'all having come is enough."

We stood, scuffing our shoes, and feeling relieved from the burden of small talk. A nurse came in a few minutes later and told us that our visiting time was over. We all mumbled best wishes for her recovery and Ralph and I turned to the door. Then Teddy, in a moment of effusiveness, went over to the bed and kissed Miss Lelia on the cheek. We turned around to see Teddy standing there confusedly, and Miss Lelia holding his hand, her face as red as it could be under the circumstances, looking at him with that rapt expression of adoration I thought only occurred in the sixteen-year-olds that Teddy liked to date. When she saw us staring, she let go of his hand.

"Well, y'all better go," she said.

We resaid our good-byes and left.

Later, at Emprey's Dairy Bar, when we asked Teddy why he did it, he merely shrugged his shoulders and said he didn't know.

Miss Lelia died the next morning. Calvin called us at school to tell us. He told us that the funeral would be the next day.

"Isn't that kind of quick," asked Ralph, who got the call.

"Well," said Calvin, "the ladies didn't have much money, so it'll be pretty simple. Be easier on Miss Dahlia and them, too. Franklin Funeral Home recommended it."

Ralph came back from the phone call and told us. Teddy sat there with his face getting whiter and whiter. I kept pinching mine because I could feel it getting numb. Finally, Teddy put his face down on the desk and stayed like that for the rest of the class period. When the bell rang, we went to the office and checked out, pleading communal illness. We went straight to the Boulevard Cafe. It was closed.

"Calvin must be at the funeral home," Ralph said. I recommended that we go to somebody's house and rest up, then go to the funeral home that night. Most places had visiting hours from seven to nine, I told them. Ralph agreed. Teddy didn't say anything. He hadn't said two words since Ralph told him about Miss Lelia.

We went over to Ralph's and sat around until about five-thirty. We

listened to some music, but none of us talked much. Teddy sat there the whole time holding a Rolling Stones album cover and looking at the wall. Finally Ralph took us home so that we could shower and put on coats and ties. When I got home, my parents raised hell about my cutting school. When I told them why, they said they'd write me an excuse saying that I'd gone to my grandmother's.

About the time I got my tie tied halfway right, Ralph called. He said that he'd called Teddy's house and that Mr. Hatter said that Teddy had gone out about twenty minutes before.

"He could be here at my house in five minutes," said Ralph. "You reckon he's took off somewhere to get drunk?"

"I don't know. You know Teddy."

"Yeah."

About that time I heard someone at the front door. I heard my mother telling Teddy hello, so I told Ralph that the prodigal had returned to the fold and hung up the phone. I went into the den and told my folks where we were going, then went to my room, scooped up my coat, and followed Teddy out. Driving down the road a few minutes later, I wanted to ask Teddy why he drove across town to pick me up rather than going by for Ralph, who lived much closer to him. I thought better of it, though. I figured he just wanted a little time to think.

We picked up Ralph and went to the funeral home. The other ladies were there, and Calvin, and a couple of guys who looked like ministers. There were three or four other guys there, but I could tell at a glance that they were mortician types. We went in and spoke to the ladies and to Calvin. The guys who were ministers came over and invited us to Youth Fellowship at their churches. Miss Geneva kept admonishing us to go over and "say good-bye" to Lelia. We couldn't do it, though. We just went over to the row of folding chairs that they always have in viewing rooms and sat there, occasionally making sidelong glances at what was left of Miss Lelia.

A few people drifted in and out, but mostly they talked to the other ladies, so all we did was sit there and get more and more uncomfortable. About eight o'clock, Neil Franklin came over

and asked us to come back to the office. I figured they were going to ask us if we were kin and dun us for the funeral payments. Instead, they merely pointed out that there weren't any pall bearers and asked if we'd mind helping out. With Calvin, they said, we'd make four. We shuffled our feet and agreed. When we came out of the office, Teddy said he didn't want to go back to the viewing room.

"What do you want to do?" I asked.

"Go get a beer," he said.

We slipped out the side door without any good-byes and went around to Teddy's car. He left the parking lot sideways and we tore down Boone Road at about ninety miles an hour. We slid into Kendall's store parking lot and Ralph went in and bought three six packs. We left the parking lot and drove down to the River Road, a dirt road where kids went mostly to park with their dates. When we got there, Teddy grabbed the beer and took off down on the river bank. Ralph and I followed him. It was early December, and the wind blowing off the river was pretty brisk.

"What are you doing? It's cold as hell down here," said Ralph.

"Drink a beer, you'll warm up."

"Come on, Teddy, let's go back and sit in the car," I said.

"I'm staying here. If y'all want to go back to the car, go. Take some of the beer."

We figured if Teddy was going to stay down there and freeze to death, we'd stay with him. We all dragged up logs and rocks to sit on and commenced drinking. Teddy was right. After a couple of beers it didn't seem so cold. The alcohol loosened our tongues and we talked about the ladies, about Jenny Swan, and about a lot of other things. Eventually we ended up on the ladies again.

"I guess Miss Dahlia will be the head lady now," said Ralph.

"I reckon," I said.

"No," said Teddy, "they won't ever be the same again."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't expect the world to go on with three seasons, would you?" he said.

Out of the mouths of drunken babes.





Jill Shuford *Self-Portrait In Silver Screen*



a one-act play by
Steve Willis

CHARACTERS

CALLIE SAUNDERS: thirty, with a simple face and perhaps a somewhat chubby figure.

WAYNE CARLYLE: medium height and build, with a worn look for his twenty-odd years, wears denim clothing, perhaps boots, and a stocking cap, should not be played as a "cowboy-type," but rather should have a sensitivity about him.

SETTING

The 25-Hour-A-Day Diner, a small diner somewhere in the South. There is a bar/counter, a jukebox, perhaps a few tables and chairs. A door upstage leads outside and there is perhaps a plate glass window upstage also. The atmosphere is distinctly Southern. There are perhaps a few assorted Christmas decorations about the room.

TIME:

The present — December 25 — around 7 p.m.

AT RISE, CALLIE is behind the counter. She is listening, rather intently, to a recording of "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas" on a transistor radio. A stack of magazines is on the counter beside her. As the song ends, an announcer's voice comes in, "A recording from quite a few years back. We'll continue with more holiday music, but first, here's a message of Christmas cheer from your friends at..." CALLIE turns off the transistor with a groan. She puts it in her pocket and refills her coffee cup. As she does this, she hums a few bars of the song just heard, then replaces the coffee pot and, very seriously and with great effort, begins to sing, "Have yourself a merry little Christmas, Let-let-let your heart..." clears her throat, "heart be..." She is not a terrific singer and stops. She sighs, "Shoot," then begins thumbing through a magazine. WAYNE enters from the outside door.

WAYNE: I didn't think you were open. *(He crosses to counter.)* You gotta phone somewhere I can use?

CALLIE: There's a pay phone 'round the side of the building. Mr. Phelps don't keep no business phone in here.

WAYNE: *(crossing to door)* I gotta flat tire up the road there. No spare.

CALLIE: You ain't gonna find no tire places open on Christmas night. No service stations, either.

WAYNE: *(slight pause)* Aw, hell. It's Christmas! *(As if he'd forgotten in his frenzy.)*

CALLIE: Sure is. Has been all day.

WAYNE: Is there someone you know who might help me out? You live around here, don't you?

CALLIE: I don't live far from here, but ain't nobody 'round here opening up their service station on Christmas — 'specially not for somebody they don't know. Not much open nowhere on Christmas night.

WAYNE: Well, what the hell are you open for?

CALLIE: Ha! Mr. Phelps ain't closing this place just 'cause it's Christmas. Leastaways, not long as he's got suckers like me who need to make a buck or two. Coffee?

WAYNE: No.

CALLIE: You see, this here's the 25-Hour-A-Day Diner. We never close. This place hadn't been closed since the day it opened that I know of. *(There is a pause. WAYNE is not really listening to all this.)* Anyway, I don't care if it was Christ's coming, Howard Phelps'd keep this diner wide open. Christ's coming and it's Christmas...huh. *(She chuckles.)*

WAYNE: *(dryly)* Ha, ha. Listen, don't you know anybody around here owns a service station or something?

CALLIE: Jimmy Hankins owns the station right back up the road there. You probably passed it. But lordamercy, Jimmy Hankins ain't coming out to work on Christmas, not him, 'specially not for — *(WAYNE tops her line, in unison,)* "somebody he don't know."

WAYNE: Okay, I get it. Shit, I'm really up a tree.

CALLIE: You're up the creek without a paddle, too.

WAYNE: What've you been into? You gotta bottle stuck somewhere behind that counter?

CALLIE: In Howard Phelps' diner? No siree! I swanee, ain't never gonna be no liquor in this place, that's for damn sure.

WAYNE: Too bad.

CALLIE: You like to hit the bottle?

WAYNE: Right now, I would. Jeez, I gotta get on down the road....

CALLIE: With a flat tire? Be kinda bumpy.

WAYNE: Will you shut up! *(catching himself)* I mean, I gotta find a spare tire....

CALLIE: Listen, Mr. Whoever-you-are, if you can't be polite, you can just go out there and sit in your car—

WAYNE: I'm sorry, okay. I'm sorry. I just feel pretty helpless — Up the creek without a paddle.

CALLIE: Well, I feel sorry for you, but it ain't a thing in the world I can do for you, 'cept fix you a hamburger or something to help you pass the time.

WAYNE: No, thanks. I don't want anything to eat. *(He crosses to jukebox.)* Got a real good selection — from last year.

CALLIE: I gotta radio here. *(She takes the transistor from her pocket. She turns it on and a choir is singing "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.")*...That wonderful story of old, *(she joins in)* La da da da da da da dee dum....*(She turns off the radio.)* Well, I guess that ain't exactly your style of music either.

WAYNE: *(Struck by an idea)* Listen, have you got a car?

CALLIE: Parked right outside there.

WAYNE: Got a spare? *(rushing to the window)*

CALLIE: I sure do. I wouldn't get on the road—

WAYNE: Damn! It's a Volkswagen.

CALLIE: So?

WAYNE: So, I got a damn station wagon.

CALLIE: Well, I guess you can't use my spare, then.

WAYNE: Shit, you sure are a lot of help.

CALLIE: Thank you. *(pause)* You had any supper?

WAYNE: No, but I told you, I don't want nothing to eat.

CALLIE: Aw, let me at least pour you a cup of coffee and cut you a slice of brown sugar pie—

WAYNE: No, I don't want no coffee or pie. I just want to get on down the road.

CALLIE: *(gesturing)* Well, you can always stick out your thumb.

WAYNE: How many cars have passed here on the highway today, would you say? Maybe three or four all day long? That's about how many I've seen in the past two hours.

CALLIE: I guess there ain't too many people on the road on Christmas Day.

WAYNE: I was hoping to be in Cooper City — *(glances at clock)* — in an hour.

CALLIE: Looks like somebody in Cooper City's gonna have to wait for you. What's so important in Cooper City anyhow? That always seemed like a tired ol' place to me.

WAYNE: All the places around here are tired.

CALLIE: So, why are you hanging around tired places?

WAYNE: What's it to you?

CALLIE: Nothing, I don't guess.

WAYNE: You say the phone's around the side of the building?

CALLIE: Yeah.

WAYNE: I'm gonna go call my brother back home. *(Goes to door.)*

CALLIE: Where's back home?

(WAYNE appears not to hear her and exits.)

(CALLIE resumes reading her magazine.)

WAYNE: *(entering after a few seconds)* You got any change?

CALLIE: *(chuckling)* You are having a right rough time, I declare.

WAYNE: Here's a dollar. *(She takes it and goes to the cash register for change. WAYNE notices the magazines.)* That what you get paid for? Reading magazines?

CALLIE: Look, I ain't got no customers and ain't really had any all day. Here's your change.

WAYNE: Seems kinda stupid to keep a place open when there ain't no business.

CALLIE: There's plenty of business when it ain't Christmas.

WAYNE: So why keep it open on Christmas if there's no business?

CALLIE: Tradition, I guess.

(WAYNE goes out. CALLIE refills her coffee cup and gets a donut from the glass bell on the counter. After a minute or so, WAYNE returns.)

WAYNE: No answer.

CALLIE: Where's your brother live?

WAYNE: Back in Clayton. Satisfied?

CALLIE: That's a right good ways back.

WAYNE: I know.

CALLIE: Who you going to see in Cooper City?

WAYNE: You know, you followed the wrong calling. You should have worked for a newspaper. *(pause)* A friend.

CALLIE: Huh?

WAYNE: A friend in Cooper City. Who I'm going to see.

CALLIE: Oh, I guess it ain't none of my business. *(pause)* My name's Callie Saunders.

WAYNE: Nice to meet you. I'm Wayne Carlyle.

CALLIE: Pleased to know you, too. You're my fourth customer of the day.

WAYNE: I thought you said you hadn't had *any* customers today.

CALLIE: Well, I hadn't really. Just my momma come over to wish me Merry Christmas and tell me she hated it so bad that I had to work today. Then a man down the road came up here to get some coffee 'cause the grocery stores all closed and his wife didn't get enough to last 'em with their family there and all. Then Clifford Crawford came in and worried me all during lunch hour.

WAYNE: Who's Clifford Crawford?

CALLIE: He lives in the boarding house down the road — turn off about a mile. Clifford's a mess. He ain't never been married. Ain't never been "nothingsed," I don't think. *(She chuckles.)*

WAYNE: Oh, one of them.

CALLIE: Oh, Clifford's all right. He's just kinda pesty and don't know when to stop talking to somebody until he's just about worried the dickens out of 'em. Lordy, lordy. *(She thinks for a second.)* You know what? You oughta go call whoever it is in Cooper City you're going to see — your friend — or they'll be wondering where you are.

WAYNE: No, I doubt it. They don't know I was coming. It was sort of a surprise.

CALLIE: Is it a girl?

WAYNE: Yeah.

CALLIE: Your sister?

WAYNE: *(smiles)* Not exactly. Look, you ask too many questions. I gotta think of what to do to get out of here.

CALLIE: Maybe your brother'll be back after awhile and you can call him then.

WAYNE: Yeah, maybe. Got any more coffee left?

CALLIE: I sure do. I was thinking about making a new pot. I've drunk so much coffee today, I'm bug-eyed. *(She pours WAYNE a cup.)* Here you go. There.

WAYNE: Thanks.

CALLIE: You know what? You surprised *me* tonight. I was expecting to just sit here and read magazines and drink coffee all by my lonesome.

WAYNE: Well, I'm glad I "lifted your spirits."

CALLIE: *(looking through magazines)* All these magazines are old as Methuselah. Connie Elliott, my neighbor, reads 'em, then sends 'em over to me. So I get everything a month later than all the other readers. Sometimes later than that. You ever read magazines?

WAYNE: Huh? No, just the newspaper sometimes. I don't do much reading.

CALLIE: Did you finish high school?

WAYNE: Yeah.

CALLIE: So did I. That's where I started liking magazines. I hated reading novels or anything like that, but I loved to go into the school library and read the magazines. Didn't matter what kind. I used to think I'd like to pose on the cover of one of 'em. Imagine that. Or be a singer. I always wanted to be a singer. Lord, that's even funnier 'cause I can't sing worth half a damn. *(WAYNE rises.)* Where you going?

WAYNE: I'm gonna go call my brother and see if he's home yet.

CALLIE: It ain't hardly been no time since you tried. Give the poor fellow time.

WAYNE: Yeah, maybe you're right. Look, are there any houses down the road here?

CALLIE: Not for a mile or so. Why?

WAYNE: If I could find somebody with an air pump or a spare that would fit a station wagon—

CALLIE: You know what? You don't look like the station wagon type.

WAYNE: Yeah, well it's my brother's car.

CALLIE: You couldn't get along at all if it weren't for your brother, could you? *(She chuckles.)*

WAYNE: You know, you talk a lot.

CALLIE: I guess I'm just trying to make up for being quiet all day. If you hadn't come by I'd probably be talking to myself. Let me give you a donut to go with your coffee. On the house.

WAYNE: No, thanks. You got any more of that brown sugar pie?

CALLIE: Just as much as the first time I asked you did you want a piece. *(She gets pie.)* You know, you ought not to have started out on a trip this far with no spare tire.

WAYNE: Live and learn, I guess.

CALLIE: I'd lend you my Volkswagen, but it's got so many miles on it I'm scared to drive it anywhere but just around here. Here's your pie.

WAYNE: You'd lend me your car? *(shocked)* You ain't known me by no time and here you are ready to let me drive your car off. Jeez, I could leave here and you'd never see me or your Volkswagen again.

CALLIE: No, I don't think so.

WAYNE: Why not? You don't know me.

CALLIE: You're nice. You care about people. I know that. If you didn't, you wouldn't be going to see this girl in Cooper City.

WAYNE: You don't know what I'm going to see her for.

CALLIE: To make up?

WAYNE: Not exactly. *(takes a bite of pie)* The pie's good. You make it?

CALLIE: No. It comes in a cardboard box. Frozen. Surprise, surprise. *(pause)* You was going there to make up, wadn't you?

WAYNE: No, not exactly. Look, it's not really your problem.

CALLIE: I didn't say nothing about a problem.

WAYNE: Well, anyway, it's not—

CALLIE: Any of my business, I know. I guess I'm just trying to make conversation. I mean, you don't like magazines and—

WAYNE: What about the weather or what you got for Christmas? Or just nothing? Do you get to know everybody that comes in here inside out?

CALLIE: No. The people that live around here I know inside out anyway. *(She chuckles.)* The truck drivers I don't mess with much. A girl has to be sorta careful how she comes on to one of them. You can get yourself in a lot of trouble. But you're nice—

WAYNE: Look, I ain't always nice. And I'm not a truck driver. And I've got a big problem here on my hands. And I don't exactly like the idea of sitting here at this counter all night.

CALLIE: I'm sorry.

WAYNE: For what?

CALLIE: I guess I'm about to worry you to death. Like Clifford Crawford worried me at lunch. *(pause)* You want me to go call Jimmy Hankins and see if he'll make an exception and give you a hand?

WAYNE: I don't know. I hate to bother somebody on Christmas just 'cause I'm stupid enough to drive off with no spare tire.

CALLIE: You know what you ought to do? Go 'round there to the phone and call up that girl in Cooper City and tell her you was on your way to see her and you had all this trouble. She might even drive up here herself and meet you.

WAYNE: No, that's not a real good idea.

CALLIE: Do you still care about her?

WAYNE: Look, it's — I don't know — it's not really a matter of caring. It's that — I've got a responsibility to her.

CALLIE: I'm not sure I know what you mean.

WAYNE: *(pause)* She — she's...she's got a kid...a little boy. He's mine.

CALLIE: Lord have mercy. *(pause)* You ain't never seen him, have you?

WAYNE: No. I send money — some money, sometimes — when I can.

CALLIE: Does she live with her folks?

WAYNE: She lives with her sister's family. Her folks don't want her — or him.

CALLIE: But you loved her, didn't you?

WAYNE: I don't know. Maybe for awhile. It was one of those things that wadn't supposed to be so serious. I didn't think it was anyway....

CALLIE: How long ago has it been?

WAYNE: A little over a year. Look, it's not really any use in going through all this. I don't want to talk about it.

CALLIE: I don't mean to sound nosy. You just seem nice, that's all.

WAYNE: Well, you see now, I ain't always so nice.

CALLIE: But if you didn't really love her and didn't mean to get serious, then maybe you did the right thing not marrying her. Maybe she should've give the baby up for adoption.

WAYNE: It's over and done with. I got a couple of presents for him in the car. I'm gonna go try my brother again. *(He goes out.)*

CALLIE: My goodness. *(She gets another donut from under the glass bell, but does not return her attention to the magazines. She seems deep in thought — concerned and somewhat touched. After a minute or so, WAYNE returns.)*

WAYNE: He was there. They'd just gone across the street for awhile. He's gonna drive his wife's car down here in the morning and bring a spare. I told him he was a durn fool not to keep a spare tire in his car. He said I was a durn fool not to see about those things before driving off. I reckon the service stations'll be open tomorrow, won't they?

CALLIE: Yeah, I guess they will.

WAYNE: What time you get off work?

CALLIE: Eleven o'clock. Then Mavis Dawson comes in. She's pretty tough. That's why she works the all-night shift.

WAYNE: You think you could give me a ride to a motel or some place around here I could stay tonight?

CALLIE: I can't leave here 'til I get off at eleven, but it ain't no motels too close by. Just the boarding house I was telling you about.

WAYNE: Where Clifford Crawford lives?

CALLIE: Yeah. But everybody there ain't like Clifford. You think you'll go on into Cooper City tomorrow, after all?

WAYNE: I don't know. It won't be Christmas. *(pause)* I might.

CALLIE: Well, you probably should. I mean — you come this far and all. Is the girl — is she seeing anybody else?

WAYNE: I don't know. I hadn't heard from her for a pretty good while. Do you think there'd be a room at the boarding house I could get for the night?

CALLIE: I don't know. Mrs. Simmons don't usually lend out rooms just for one night. I could call her and ask — *(she thinks)* — ahm — I have a little apartment — it's real small, but it's not too far from here and—

WAYNE: Look, thanks, but I don't think—

CALLIE: No — listen — I'm not being like that. I got a couch you could sleep on and it wouldn't cost you nothing and I could fix you a good breakfast in the morning—

WAYNE: You don't know me! How do you know I wouldn't rob you or rape you or burn your place down with you in it?

CALLIE: I told you. You're nice. You—

WAYNE: You shouldn't be so...so innocent and — damn — you can't go around trusting everybody you meet! That's a good way to lose your neck.

CALLIE: I'm sorry. I'm just trying to help you out. I wadn't trying to make a pass or nothing. I'm not that kind of girl.

WAYNE: Okay, okay. I believe you. I don't know why — but I do. I think I oughta try the boarding house first.

CALLIE: Well, I'll go out and call Mrs. Simmons. *(She gets her coat and puts it on.)* I don't know if she'll let you have a room just for the night. You ain't too particular, are you?

WAYNE: Long as it's clean.

(CALLIE gets a quarter from the cash register and goes out. WAYNE crosses to the jukebox, and then behind the counter to refill his coffee cup. After a minute or so, CALLIE returns.)

CALLIE: All she's got's a couch, just like me. She said you could sleep there for ten dollars.

WAYNE: Ten dollars to sleep on a couch. My lucky day — night.

CALLIE: *(pause)* Well, what are you going to do?

WAYNE: I got a while to decide. *(Glances at the clock.)* You ever do this before?

CALLIE: Do what?

WAYNE: Invite a strange man up to your apartment — to sleep on your couch.

CALLIE: I might have. *(pause)* Not many times. I mean, I never have really cared about anybody much or anything....

WAYNE: What are you talking about?

CALLIE: I've been with men, but I just never cared about anybody enough to be in love or anything. Not a lot, anyway...but — listen, now you're asking *me* a bunch of questions.

WAYNE: I guess I am.

CALLIE: I didn't mean nothing asking you to sleep on my couch. I just — I was just trying to help you out.

WAYNE: Well, thanks. How far'd you say the boarding house was?

CALLIE: About a mile down the road and then turn off and go just a little ways. It's on the left. It's got a sign out front.

WAYNE: Well, I think I'll walk on down that way.

CALLIE: Walk? You can't—

WAYNE: Look, thanks a lot for your help. How much I owe you for the pie and coffee?

CALLIE: Nothing. Merry Christmas — it's on the house. Ahm...look, Wayne?

WAYNE: Yeah?

CALLIE: I really wadn't trying to be...you know—

WAYNE: Yeah, I know. Look, thanks again. *(He takes out his wallet and leaves a dollar on the counter.)* I'll see you. *(He crosses outside to door and exits.)*

CALLIE: *(following to door)* Well, I hope everything'll work out for you— *(She looks out the window, then takes out her transistor and crosses behind the counter as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.





The Real Mule

The real mule, the mule
who has always been there,
won't hide for you anymore.
Even when you are alone
he is with you.
You hear him clop
behind you on the streets
at night, coming into your
house, chewing hay beside
your ear while you watch t.v.
He is in your bedroom
when you try to sleep
sniffing at your shoes
and drooling on your pillow.
When you go to brush
your teeth in the morning
he is grinning beside your
face in the mirror.
He is with you always.
You want to take a shower,
he is already there, singing
and knocking his hooves
against the tiles.
You open the door to the
closet, and he is
wearing white lipstick
puckering his lips
to kiss you.
When you go to breakfast,
he is sitting in your seat,
legs crossed, wearing
your shirt and tie,
reading your newspaper.

You get in your car,
he is there, his big ears
protruding from under your
favorite hat. He won't leave
you alone. He follows you
and tells you jokes,
smokes cigars and
breathes foul breath down
your neck. Don't try
to lose him in the street;
he can't be lost.
Don't tell your neighbors
he's an overgrown dog;
he'll tell them the truth.
Don't be embarrassed when
he comes to your Thanksgiving dinner
wearing a woman's bathing suit;
he isn't embarrassed.
I'm speaking of the real mule,
the mule who has always
been there, the mule
who has stumbled behind you
in everything you've done.
He is, at last, not hiding.
He has, at last,
taken his rightful place.

Joe Gainer



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Prothalamion: A Loose Tongue

Cato the Younger once told me:
“Three days is three days. Take the cure.
Things could be worse.”

So I did. And there were women,
oh my, there was that Sicilian
whore of a woman from Cefalu
and black and oiled Annabelle
and Abreccia in the corner
with Margaret’s tight mouth
the hips of Helen
the thighs, Lord, the thighs

of my sister. Back in Rome,
“Why not keep it in the family?”
Cato said, meaning Abreccia.
“Why not keep it in her?”
I said. They came

for Cato but Marius and I dissuaded—
“He’s quiet, now,” we said, and showed them
Cato asleep on the couch. They left

richer than they came. And I married her.
“Beauty and the beast,” we all three sang,
dancing a circle at the wedding feast;
and tribute—and piper—were paid.

Mark Wallace



Bill Rankin *Catherine*

GEORGIA,

Rose Wright Braxton

Georgia, Georgia, of white bone and blue sky,
Never asked how
Never asked why
Just picked up her pallet, her paint and her brush
And painted a pelvis without any rush
Painted a pelvis against a blue sky
And never asked how
And never asked why.

Georgia, Oh Georgia, who gave you permission?
This is not the technique of Titian
Nor way of Watteau
Nor Cezanne composition
Who told you how — who told you why
You should paint a white pelvis against a blue sky?

Georgia, Georgia, of dusty canyon and red sky
Never asked how, never asked why,
Just picked up her pallet, her paint and her brush
And created the black lace of a cattle rush
Black, lacy cattle against a red sky.
Who told you how, who told you why
You should paint black, lacy cattle against a red sky?

Georgia, Georgia, your great big, red poppy
Greets viewers aesthetic, viewers be-boppy.
“Sex symbols” they say, as they view the pistil,
“Magnanimous expressions, instead of miniscule,
created to give her frustration relief.”
“Poppy Cock!” says Georgia O’Keeffe,
“I made them big, so people would look.
Look at the petal
Look at the leaf
Look at the poppy painted by Georgia O’Keeffe.”

GEORGIA

Georgia, Georgia, went to Taos,
Fearless of natives, fearless of mouse,
When they told her to go away,
Georgia, Georgia, decided to stay.
A message she gave to New Mexico,
"Somebody else will have to go.
I never ask how
I never ask why
I've come to paint a white pelvis
Against a blue sky."

Georgia, Georgia, liked a door,
So she bought the house, and bought the floor
Bought the roof
Bought the ceiling
Because the door was so appealing.
The Catholic Church did not plan to sell it,
Until Georgia decided to nail it,
They had not a chance, not even the Pope,
Where there's such courage, where there's such hope.

Georgia, Georgia, is it not someone's duty
To tell you to cease creating such wanton beauty?
Your *Blue #1*, Your *Blue #2*,
Splashes of color with a curley-cue,
Should you not simply act your age,
And cease this inventive and creative stage?
Why they even say you have taken a lover
and you are old enough to be his grandmother!
Georgia, Georgia, oh is it true?
Tis not geriatric to do as you do!

Georgia, Georgia, you are my lady,
Been original since a baby,
Ate around the doughnut hole,
Practicing up for your future role
To paint around the tailbone of a cow
To never tell why and never tell how.





R A N D Y A.
W I L L I A M S

In one corner of the huge garage sat a 1960 Buick Le Sabre, large and bulky, heavy with metal, like a tank. Except for the preservative gel that saturated its moveable innards and the plastic coating on its skin, it was exactly as it had been when it was rolled out of the factory over sixty years before. Along the back wall of the garage, a myriad assortment of tools hung on plywood boards over a long, neat workbench. On another wall hung a shelf that held a rare collection of old auto manuals. In the middle of the concrete floor sat a bright red 1988 Pontiac Firebird. Like the Buick, it was a classic, in excellent condition, and it had not been out of the garage for twenty years. But now it was ready for the road again.

Michael Shallock finished filling the huge spare gas tank that sat heavily on the back seat of the Firebird. He got out of the car and staggered slight-

ly, euphorically dizzy from the fumes. He wiped his hands on an oily rag and proudly surveyed his machine. He had checked over everything more times than he could remember, and now the car posed before his admiring eyes just as it had when his father gave it to him on his nineteenth birthday. He thought about all the young girls who had been in and out of the Firebird in those days. They all marched barefoot across his memory. They marched off into hiding somewhere, never into plump middle-aged motherhood with daughters to take their places. In an age when "backseat sex" made a comeback, he had kept the Firebird busy where the spare tank now sat, hot and fuming.

He had made some modifications to the car, but only slight ones, only necessary ones. Years before he had gotten rid of enough of the emission control system to render it totally inef-

fective, and he had just added the spare tank that gravity-fed into the car's own tank. But he had not installed the radar and computer communications link devices necessary to make the old Firebird legal on modern highways. He considered such modifications a profanity. The car contained only the standard instrumentation of its day. It was just as he wanted it: a self-contained, independent entity. And now it was a tiger, tensed to spring, waiting.

As he had done many times before, Shallock started the engine and leaned close over it, his big beer-belly resting on the fender. He soaked joyfully in the heat and gas and oil smells. He had always marveled at the wonders of the internal combustion engine, at the magical pistons, at the amazing distributor, at the ingenious transmission, carburetor, spark plugs, camshaft. They all worked together with

the only kind of harmony that was important to him. It was a symbol of man's ingenuity. Its power was a symbol of man's power. The smell of oil and exhaust fumes, apparent in the closed garage, was a symbol of man's dominance over nature. It was the blood of the earth being put to man's use. It was so much warmer than the untouchable, odorless electricity.

Realization suddenly drowned his reverie. The previous night Shallock had sat in the Shifting Sands (a local inn decorated to provide a desert oasis atmosphere) and unloaded his problem on the small crowd of regular customers.

Most of them were men in their fifties and sixties who used the term "last century" as if it were "last year": "Last century I voted for Flore in the presidential race. Remember him?"; "I haven't seen Tim since, oh, last century." It was their unofficial, unassuming rallying cry, a nostalgic invention they used naturally, automatically. The regulars were not simply Shallock's "drinking buddies." They were the nearest thing to a family that he had. And the Shifting Sands was not just his "refueling stop," but, rather, the only thing that could be considered his home (his apartment was a way-station, a bare necessity).

He had laid out the details of his situation, communicating as much with flamboyant, sweeping hands and arms as with words. Most of them had already heard about Albert Echols' plans to convert the gas station to service batcars. They had braced themselves for the pathetic tale of misplaced men and misguided government. Finally, pacing nervously, Shallock had posed the key question: "Now what the hell's a gaser mechanic gonna do in a society without gasers?" Some of them had quietly exchanged glances, but if any of his friends had had an answer or suggestion, it hadn't come out into the suddenly still, solemn air. They had all heard similar stories, known similar situations. They had only shaken their heads sadly and made mumbled comments about how society had gone downhill and how something ought to be done.

He was always in a melancholy mood as he walked back to his apartment, a block south of the gas station. But on that night it had been worse than ever before. Desperation had begun to set in. He had to do something. If he didn't, he would lose not only his job but also the way of life he believed in. He could take one of the government-sponsored jobs everyone was supposedly entitled to. Most of the Shifting Sands' regulars had such jobs. But he didn't consider that option seriously; he was only distastefully aware of it. Michael Shallock was a fighter. He would fight back. Finally, for all of them, something would be done.

And now everything was ready, waiting.

But if there was any way to change Echols' mind, any hope at all of convincing him of the folly of his plans, Shallock would find it. He had to try one more time. He shut off the engine and went through the door into the office.

Albert Echols sat behind the desk, looking out past the oil cans stacked in the window, past the gas pumps, to the noontime bustle of the City Transit Route. Echols was a calm, patient man, a waiter. It came with the job. His ears were tuned to the sound of the bell that announced the arrival of cars, but he was always out the door at first sight of a gaser. Shallock thought he was pretty perky for a man of seventy-two.

"It won't do any good to talk about it, Mike. I've made up my mind." He didn't bother to look up when he said it.

The mechanic moved around to block Echols' view, leaned on the desk with his tough, oil-stained hands, and said as calmly as he could, "You and me, Al, we've had some good times here. Right? A few caravans?" He thought about the rare groups of gasers that had stopped in, on their way to antique vehicle displays or museums. They had kept the pumps happily gushing for the duration of their short visits and made long lines that fondly reminded him of the gas shortages of his youth, when such lines were normal. "It doesn't have to change now. They'll all be back."

Echols looked up at him calmly. "Where have you been all these years? Haven't you seen what's happening, what's happened?"

"I can see all right. I can see right through all this crap. People won't keep buzzing around in little electric boxes or whining around on hydrogen or steam. They'll all come back. And they'll start driving again. All we've got to do is hold out and we'll be sitting pretty."

The station owner shook his head sadly. "No, Mike. This is just like any other business. It doesn't work when there's no demand for the product. People don't need gasoline anymore."

"But what about our regular customers?" He made a sweeping motion with his arm, in no particular direction. "We're letting them down."

They had been through similar arguments lately, and now the patience was beginning to leave Echols' face and voice. He said, "Look at the facts, dammit. This city has thirty-two gasers that are used regularly, and two gas stations. Most of those thirty-two get their gas at Demmerest's. How long has it been since you've had a job?" He didn't give the mechanic time to answer. "Five weeks, that's how long. And what was it? It was an oil change. And why? Because people don't bother anymore when their gasers break down. They just sell them for salvage or display. Then they buy batcars or just use the rapids."

Shallock made an infuriated but restrained growling sound and started pacing the office.

After a silence Echols started talking again, more softly. "Listen, Mike. I know you're probably the best damn internal combustion mechanic in the country. But *look* at the country. Now Africa, South America, some of them could use you. They need good gaser mechanics."

Shallock was still for a long moment. He stared out at the Personal Rapid Transit cars whizzing by on their elevated tracks, and the myriad colors and patterns on the road cars that flashed by, always passing, not even slowing to acknowledge the existence of the little station, of the mechanic. Far out over the PRT tracks he could see the two ever-present rows of silvers

that turned into neat squares as he followed them up the clear sky. He could see the silent, orderly rows of solar power satellites, but the microwave energy they beamed to waiting rectennas was invisible. And it cast no odor on the wind.

He suddenly felt scared. He pulled the oily rag from his pocket and mopped the sweat from his forehead, below the remaining wisps of gray hair. He turned to face Echols again.

"You old son-of-a-bitch" — he almost said "traitor" — "You don't know anything about electric cars."

"There's not much to know. Besides, you know the old saying." He smiled.

But Shallock wasn't there to see the smile. He had already passed through the door back into his domain.

He was much older now, and bulkier, but the driver's seat felt just as comfortable, just as natural, as it had in those early "cruising" days.

"We'll show them," he said to his car, "we'll show them how it used to be; how it can be again."

Shallock wasn't used to being afraid. But now he was afraid of the future and he was afraid of what he was about to do. He was full of the fear of the unknown, but through the fear he felt a swelling excitement. He had a sense of culmination, a feeling that some long-overdue, monumental event was about to take place. And suddenly his greatest fear was that he would change his mind if he delayed.

The Firebird roared to life with a touch, as if it had been aware of events all along and kept itself ready, waiting for the command.

He looked out, through the open garage door, at the moving, shifting world. He thought about the first tune-up he ever did, on his father's car. He thought about all the odd jobs he did to get enough money to buy his first complete tool kit. He thought about the fun he had with his friends when all the streets and roadways of the country were legal for manual driving. He thought about the girls. He was nineteen again, ready to try out his new birthday present.

He put his foot on the accelerator, and the Firebird leaped out of the garage. A rare sound echoed off the garage and vibrated like a public an-

nouncement. It was the desperate screech of tires searching for traction. It left a hot smell of burning rubber.

In his rear-view mirror Shallock caught a glimpse of Echols standing by his pumps, his mouth hanging open. He thought the old man looked comical in his confusion. The mechanic laughed as he sped up the entrance ramp to add his roar to the hums, whines and buzzes.

The City Transit Route was populated with its usual potpourri. Overhead, colorful PRT cars whizzed along their tracks. Unseen and unheard, subterranean trains shuttled thousands of people to and from clean offices, shops, restaurants and new recreational dreamlands and solitudes. On the roadway level the groundcars were full of people, eating and sleeping and talking on phones and making love and luxuriating in artificial environments. Some even looked out at other cars and landscape while faithful electronic commands from the roadway guided their cars to programmed destinations. Most of the vehicles hummed along on battery power, but there were also a number of hydrogen-oxygen cars and a few Lear steamers. And there was one old gaser, speeding past the slower modern cars, leaving behind a faint trail of carbon monoxide that mapped its route, until the wind from the batcars blew it away.

It had been a long time since Shallock had driven a gaser. A couple of times a month he rented a hydroxer and drove it a little on the few remaining legal manual streets. But that was poor compensation. However, he was doing fine now. It felt very natural, as if he were becoming part of the car. He remembered when he first learned to drive. He remembered the exhilaration of having so much power at his command, power that only he controlled. Now that exhilaration was back with him, like an old friend, releasing him from some long, painful interment. It felt good to be back on the road after so long. But the road had changed, like everything else. Once traffic signals and signs, standing ever calm and mute on their metal poles, had lined and overlooked the nation's roadways and streets. Now they only lined the

walls of antique shops and overlooked the crowds at museums and gaser displays. Shallock now recalled many of them. They had displayed messages like "Do Not Enter," "Right Turn Only," "One Way".... Now all that lined the CTR was the huge, always changing video panels that were the descendants of the billboards of the past.

He hadn't worked out much of a plan, beyond vague hopes, but he knew that he had to make his presence known. He felt that all he had to do was show them, demonstrate to them, the power and independence they could have. Once he did that, he was sure many of them would take the first defiant step by switching to manual control.

He paralleled a Ford batcar in the next lane. The side facing him was decorated with the colorful surrealistic images of Salvador Dali's *Tuna Fishing*. Its passenger was a young blonde woman wearing a business suit. She was engrossed in a phone conversation and didn't notice him at first. But the ungainly rumble of the internal combustion engine must have reached her. She turned to look at him. He wasn't sure what to do. He just had time to smile at her impulsively, boyishly, before she shook her head with an expression that said, "You're crazy," and then turned back to her phone. She glanced back at him a couple of times as she talked. He decided she was telling some friend about him. He imagined her words: "There's some old guy in an antique gaser out here, and he's *driving*, for Christ's sake."

But he wasn't much taken aback by the woman's attitude. He only realized he should be more selective with his choice of passengers. He imagined she was a government executive, sold-out to the docile modern lifestyle.

He accelerated, shooting out ahead of the Ford indignantly.

Next he pulled up alongside a huge Oldsmobile hydroxer, embellished with male and female nudes, in the multiple-style, contemporary manner. He looked through the dome to see a mother, father and two young boys, all sitting around a 3-D video game table. They all looked up when they heard his roar. The boys pressed their faces against

the dome and laughed and waved at the loud oddity.

Shallock was delighted. He waved to the boys and then held his hands high on the steering wheel to show the parents that he was controlling the Firebird himself. But the mother gave him a disgusted scowl and touched a control. The mechanic was unexpectedly staring at his own distorted reflection on the sudden shiny opaqueness of the dome.

This is wrong, he thought. They didn't know. They didn't see his message. But someone would if he kept trying.

He approached a Volvo batcar. A young man looked out at traffic and video panels, seemingly lost in thought. He looked at the gaser, gave a slight, smirking laugh as he shook his head slowly, and then made a motion with his hand. Again Shallock saw his own confused face, framed in the window of his relic.

He got on the tail of a Lear steamer and received unheard — though obviously harsh — words from a middle-aged man. A Chevy batcar gave him quick opaqueness. Another Ford with a young couple inside clouded over and displayed a neon flashing message: "Sorry peeper. We don't need help." It was always the same. He would give them a "come and join me" jerk of his head, swerve back and forth, smiling to show his joy, look straight ahead and thrust his shoulders forward and back in an "urging on" motion, and turn back to see his own reflection.

He had made a serious miscalculation. They didn't know what he was saying. He had thought he could simply demonstrate to them and then they would join him to form a magnificent, flowing caravan of independent entities. Then they would perhaps drive to the capitol en masse to protest for the right to drive. It would be a great first step for the eventual return of the gasers. Once they had their independence, they would be aware of their need for power, as individuals. But it wasn't working that way. He now knew that he should have planned his actions carefully. He should have rigged a PA system or a multiple-frequency transmitter. Better

yet, he could have installed an RF signal jammer to invalidate the comm link signals, forcing them into emergency manual operation. But it was too late for that now.

Along the CTR roadway the vehicles went opaque and ignored him or stared at him wonderingly. He started blowing his horn at them, but the only change he saw was in his own reflected face.

"A herd of ignorant sons-of-bitches," he said to his Firebird. "Damn impotent, chauffeured sheep!"

He was furious now. They shouldn't ignore him. They should understand. He would *make* them understand. He would show them what a real man in a real car could do.

He accelerated and swerved into the next lane, only a few feet in front of a Mercury batcar. The Mercury's collision-avoidance system applied the brakes sharply, throwing the two occupants forward into their small conference table while papers, pens and small recorders flew off and hit the dashboard.

The next lane was full, all the cars evenly spaced, all moving at an exact ninety-five kilometers-per-hour, like a spread out train with invisible links. When Shallock crossed in front of one of them, it caused a domino action of braking all along the line. But the severity of the braking decreased rapidly until the sixth car back only had to slow down slightly.

"You lucky bastards!" Shallock screamed out his window. "If this was the old days, you'd be a twisted, flaming, screaming, stinking mass of death."

But they don't know about that, he thought. Would they be able to visualize what he was talking about? People had changed, actually changed. That must be it, he thought. They had all submitted. They had forgotten how it used to be, and they had no intentions of changing back. He suddenly realized that he too could never go back. He felt a terrible, hopeless fear. But soon his fear poured into his rage, fed it, intensified it, until there was nothing left but the need in his seething fury. It was their fault. He decided to show them about twisted masses of death.

He steered the wild gaser toward an AMC batcar with one sleeping passenger. The cars met with a loud crash and metallic scraping sound. The sleeping man leaped up with a start, but before he could orient himself his car was pushed off the roadway, where it slammed into a PRT support.

"There's your mangled mass of death!" he screamed back over his shoulder. The only thing missing was the flames.

Then he noticed his fender. He could see part of the deep dent and scratches over the once beautiful, sleek surface he had painstakingly preserved for so many years.

He screamed with rage and slammed his foot down on the accelerator. He flew across lanes, slamming into cars, sending them into other cars and off the roadway, spinning one into another support.

For a high-speed run he started in the first of the six lanes and sped across at a big Mercury batcar in the outside lane. Too late he realized his mistake. He shot past his target car and painfully bumped over the low concrete outer edge of the roadway, landing on a steep, grassy embankment. He quickly turned the car, aiming it down the embankment so it wouldn't roll over. Only then did he notice that the grass ended in an even, cliff-like edge.

The brief fall covered one entire lifetime. It covered all the wonders of tune-ups and transmissions and pistons and ignition systems. It covered the joy of taking things apart and putting them back together. It covered traffic tickets and drive-in movies and parking meters.

When the nose of the Firebird impacted on the bottom of the dry canal and crumpled, Michael Shallock's unrestrained body slammed down and was stopped when the steering wheel tried to go through his chest. He smiled at the wonderful, familiar smell of the gasoline pouring from the ruptured spare tank. He smiled as the fuel flowed caressingly over and around his body, mixing with the blood coming from his mouth, on its way to an unworkable marriage with the electricity in his dashboard.



John Phillips *Self-Portrait*

Walking Early To Work

1

On a hill facing the dawn
the sun rises cold as a gunshot,
while in the distance
mill smoke climbs on a gray wind,
and my steps flush a fox
from the last leaves.

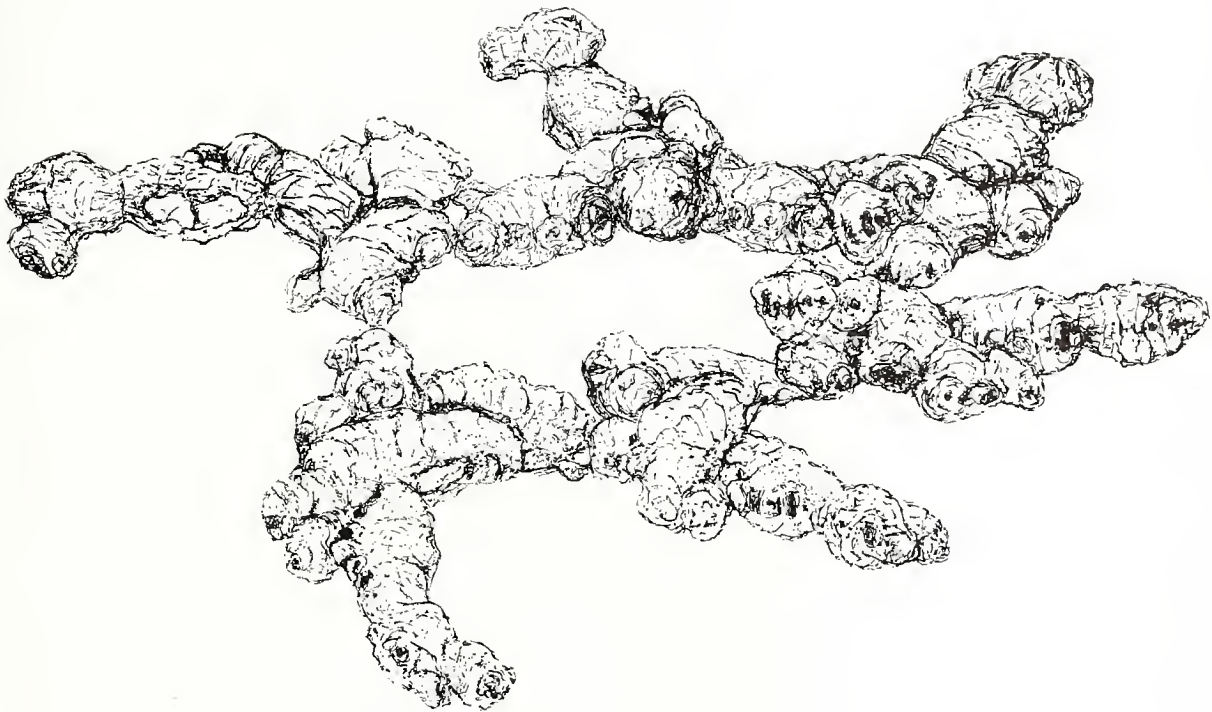
2

At Old Woman Run
I meet the men
as they head for the slaughter house:
Sambo, Erwin, Buddy, Henry T.,
and the one they call 'Wolf'
whose name means late evening,
and who spends his days
sweeping blood into a pit.

In the cold
the men breathe out mist like bulls,
their minds full of farmtowns and dusty streets,
of wheatfields and broken fences,
and of things said at dusk
along country roads, while
your woman carries your child,
and you get high as hell
on nothing but summer wind.

All day it keeps me
dreaming their lives for them,
and wishing for a simple evening
after work, when all my problems
have thinned away, like
mill smoke, now so close
that I can smell it.

Charles McInnis



CONTRIBUTORS

Art

Mary Gay Brady is a senior at UNC-G seeking a BFA in design with a concentration in photography.

Paula Camenzind is an MFA candidate in art with an emphasis in ceramics. She will have a thesis show in January.

Scott Dodgson is a former *Coraddi* editor majoring in English. He is also a playwright.

Herbert Gambill, Jr. is still a senior in the Communications and Theatre Department. He is production supervisor for *The Carolinian*, and has been published in *Coraddi* before. If pressed for a title, he would call his photo (shown on cover) "Martian in Raincoat Studies Terrain of Planet America."

Delene Holloway is a junior majoring in deaf education. She is a former photographer for *The Carolinian*.

Soni Martin is a graduate student from Fayetteville. Her studio concentration is printmaking and figure drawing. She has studied with Ralph Steeds at Pembroke.

Jordan Montgomery is a junior majoring in Art/Design with a concentration in photography. His photograph, "Cane Creek Dam," was taken in Snow Camp, which is the place he would like to call home, although he's never had a permanent residence there.

Keith O. Payne is a photographer who works with local amateur models to create new fashion photographs and nudes. He has been published before in *Coraddi*.

John E. Phillips was born in Zimbabwe, Africa; he will graduate in December. He plans to continue his education at G.T.I.

Bill Rankin is an undergraduate majoring in art who will hopefully graduate in December. He was reluctant, however, to divulge information about himself.

Jill Shuford is a graduate student seeking an MFA in Art with an emphasis in drawing and painting.

Judy McKellar Whisenant is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in painting and printmaking.

Homer Yost is a graduate student in the Art Department. He has been published in the *Foci Literary Magazine*.

Literary

Jim Booth is a graduate student seeking an MA in English. His work appeared in the fall issue of the Wake Forest University literary magazine. He will have a novel published this spring. The story which appears in this issue is taken from that novel.

Rose Wright Braxton is a graduate student who received her BFA from UNC-G in 1980. She taught creative writing at G.T.I. and is appearing for the first time in *Coraddi*.

Joe Gainer is an MFA candidate in creative writing. Over the past three years, he has lived in Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri and West Virginia. The selection published in this issue has been published in *Gargoyle*.

Charles McInnis will be a graduate student in food service management. He is from Fayetteville.

Mark Wallace is an MFA student in creative writing who enjoys house-sitting. He has previously been published in *Coraddi*.

Randy A. Williams is a sophomore from Arkansas. After five years in the Air Force and several years at various civilian jobs, he is pursuing what he terms an "illusive English degree." This is his first short story publication.

Steve Willis is a first-year graduate student seeking an MFA in Acting/Directing. He is a native of Danville, Va., and received his BA from Averett College. He has been previously published in the Averett College literary magazine, *The Ember*.

CORADDI ARTS CONTEST

DEADLINE — February 11, 1982

Coraddi is pleased to invite you to participate in the Spring Arts Contest. Two grand prizes of \$50 will be awarded in Art (from combined categories of 2-D, 3-D and photographic art), and Literature (from combined categories of prose and poetry). There will also be \$25 and \$15 prizes in each individual category of 2-D, 3-D and photographic art, poetry and prose.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Submissions from the community at large are welcome; however, only graduate and undergraduate students of UNC-G are eligible for cash prizes.
2. Only submissions that have the contributor's name, complete address and telephone number will be accepted. Contributors are limited to two (2) entries in each category. However, a contributor may win a cash prize in only one (1) category.
3. Paid staff members of *Coraddi* are not eligible for cash prizes.

MANUSCRIPTS

1. Clean, first copies, double-spaced, typewritten are required.
2. Verse pieces up to 100 lines and prose pieces up to approximately 3,000 words are acceptable.
3. Manuscripts may be given to staff members or brought by Room 205 Elliott University Center.
4. Manuscripts will be returned only if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

ART WORK

1. 35mm slides are acceptable provided the original work is available for photographing.
2. Art work must be picked up from the *Coraddi* office. This is to prevent the work from being damaged.

Works which have been published or are to be published will be considered for publication, but will NOT be considered for a cash prize. Notations should be made as to where the material was published. Submissions will be accepted from December 1, 1981 until February 11, 1982. All contest winners will be announced in *The Carolinian*.

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