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CORADDI

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

WINTER 1967



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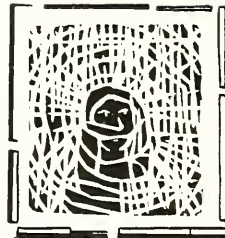
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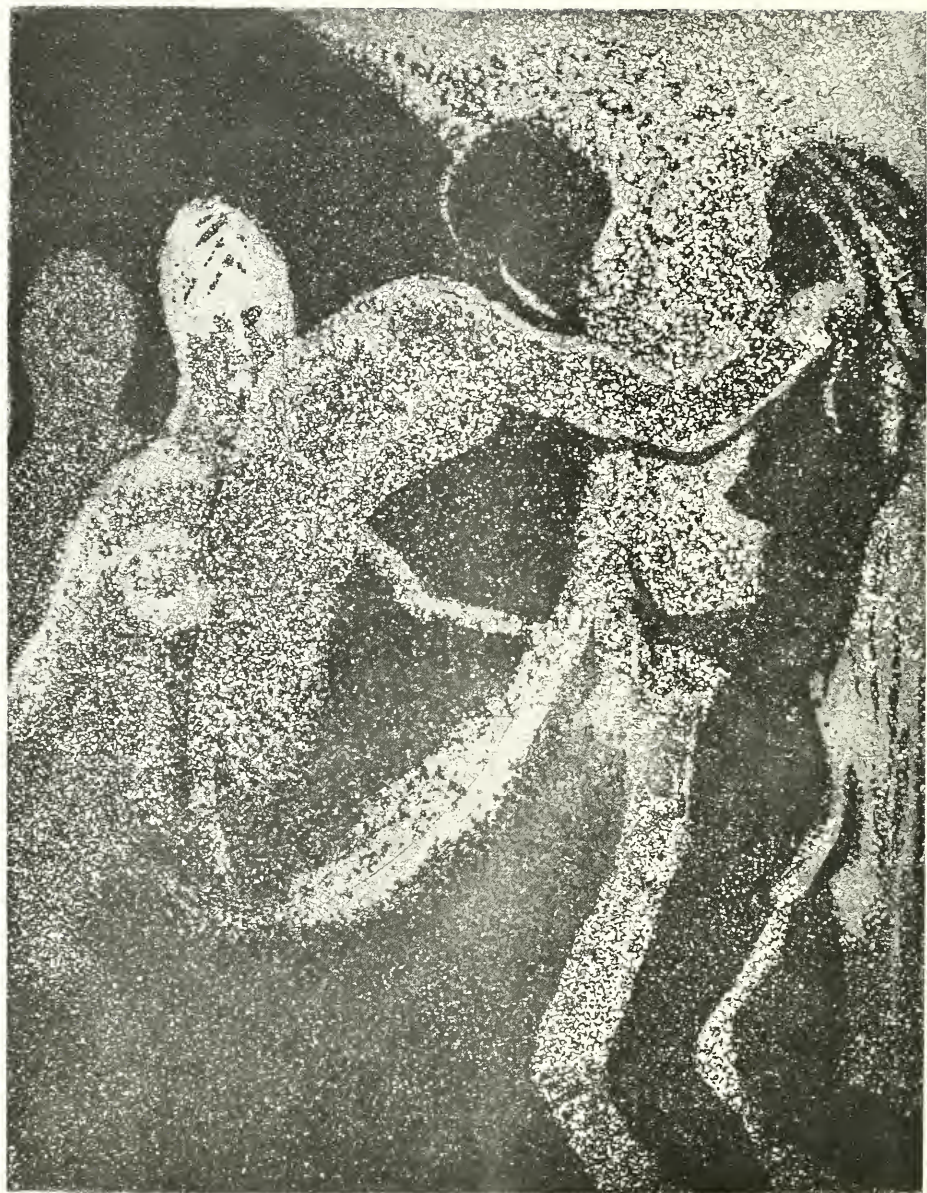
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AS SOON AS JENIFER LEAVES

LILA SUMMER

Toward the end of the Savannah River—past the Isle of Hope—past Hell Hole Swamp, where patrolmen are said to have disappeared forever—and Saint James Island, where a village of Gullahs practice Voodoo using a Hershey Bar Wrapper for a curse symbol—along roads that curve into lumber companies, or shipyards—to the tip end of Cogh Island, is the oldest white house in all those miles. Three stories of narrow porches and hurricane beaten wood dip into the dunes; and it is possible to step from the front living room window into ebb tide. In the living room of this house, Bach's simple harmony and place filled the walls from a General Electric stereo, Grandmother Larquey sat doing needlepoint upon her lap, and Phillip Larquey Rutledge read aloud from *The Communist Manifesto*.

"What a ridiculous man," Mrs. Larquey murmured occasionally from her wheelchair; and Phillip, interrupting the recitation he would have given the same dramatic punctuation even without an audience, would acknowledge, "Quite unbearable."

Phillip was prematurely gray and about to stand the state bar exam, about to, also, if circumstances were different, become one of a disappearing family set whose members actually aspire to sit as Georgia Supreme Court Justices. He found reading Marx a delightfully absurd diversion, chuckling that what he and his brother most enjoyed when they were younger and drove the woodsy roads of farmers and bootleggers was to announce just under an audible tone, "I own all you people." Rather a contrast to Phillip now was Jacob, who had been drunk for seven years. Phillip enjoyed no more than appropriate pretension the thought that his brother Jacob had been able to

do nothing but drink for seven years. As long as he did nothing harmfully disgraceful, Jacob gave Phillip, among other things, the opportunity to whisper to impressionable and sympathetic young women, "My brother Jacob has done nothing but drink for seven years." To those who were harder to woo, he would add with greater and more consciously concealed condescension, "His tongue is black," and half cover his eyes with his hands.

"More tea, Grandm'?" Phillip said. Taking Mrs. Larquey's cup, he walked to the window box to pick a mint, and bowed to exclaim into the glare of the pane, "Mmm, marvelous. . . Grandmother, I see Jacob and Jenifer! Don't you find her entertaining?"

"Of course not. She should be put away."

"Oh, Grandmother."

"I don't mind. Is she coming? Heavens knows it wouldn't matter if I did mind, but Jacob needs a little more. He needs to settle down, Phillip. Yes, I think it's time." Mrs. Larquey had not lived long enough to think that Phillip might ask what Jacob's needs had to do with Jenifer, but she had lived too long to ask if Phillip and Jacob knew any nice girls. Things eventually go the way they should, though Grandmother knew that.

"Jenifer," Phillip tickled his mouth with his tongue. Jenifer he and Jacob had discovered three years back, at a bootlegger's shanty near Saint James. The bootlegger, afraid that new poverty workers would discover him, take away his Buick and make him work, had taken to carrying a butcher knife when he served his customers. Phillip and Jacob had paid a "quarter a shot" for drinks more offensive than dirty water. Before the greased man poured each time, he peered out his kitchen window and door like

an armed weasel reaching for a rabbit too far away, then had sat with the butcher knife sticking straight up from his hand, guarding his establishment. A low giggle, therefore, penetrated the silence all the more loudly. The bootlegger's whole body and chair seemed to fling open the door, where squatted Jenifer, her freckled ear next to the level of the keyhole. All Jenifer did under the man's unsheathed ferment was spoil her symmetrically blotched face with a grin that showered teeth over her face, making the boys' pretense at rescue, ludicrous.

"You both just looked too funny," she had said, "sittin' there with those nasty grown-up expressions on your faces." She was about fifteen.

"I can't help it—it's latched doors, get me every time. And screams. It's like a zoo! Sometimes I pretend to be a chimpanzee escaping from a zookeeper—ha—only, in the woods, there aren't no zookeepers."

The bootlegger had backed to his chair, letting the butcher knife rest under his open palm.

"And where do you find zookeepers?" Phillip asked, pulling his pants further over his shirt with a conscious flair.

She smiled.

"Mr. Suggs?"

Jenifer shook her head.

"Well then, that leaves one of the other two people in the room, doesn't it."

They all wondered when she would stop nodding and let erupt the face-full of breath into words. She poled her whole little arm at Phillip, "You, you're the zookeeper. Mr. Suggs is a weasel—mmm, Appalachian spring kind, I'm a chimpanzee, and Jacob, is Jacob, is. . . an alkie. I don't know but I think maybe Jacob's not an-y-thing. I'm just a chimpanzee for a minute."

"And a delightful one," Phillip laughed. "How do you know our names?"

"Who don't know the Larquey's!" Indignance underneath red curls.

She had liked Jacob better; but it didn't matter. Phillip considered that he would have been insulted if Jenifer had liked him better, but Jacob wasn't. Something about the wild animal of a girl appealed to something serious in Jacob, some part that Phillip either didn't understand or found awfully boring to think about.

Grandmother's blue fingers accepted her teacup, "You might stop that and begin a chorale. I'd like to hear the 144th cantata. How simple it all is."

Phillip caught the order of the music and began to recite, "Head, heart, and mind. . ." to his back-

ground. Simultaneously, Jacob appeared half inside the doorway, his thin face wincing at the scene, then turning to beckon Jenifer.

"Hey, hi ya'll," Jenifer screamed against Bach. Missus Larquey?"

"Fine, I'm just fine."

Jenifer was so sunburned that Jacob looked like a day-dream beside her.

With social grace two years more ingrained than Phillip's, Jacob Rutledge gathered up his shoulders and stood, mummied with gin, with all the apparent resignation of a condemned man, "This is my wife."

Grandmother dropped her needlepoint.

Jenifer caught the silence happily. "Oh, I know you all shocked out of ya' minds. It was such a spur of the moment thing. We had the weddin' in the back yard, with thirteen foldin' chairs from the funeral home, and Japanese lanterns long in the trees."

"I'm sorry I missed it," a line in Phillip's chin emitted from where he had hung himself on a straight chair, while Jacob mouthed that he had been quite, quite drunk, very drunk; and Grandmother blatantly declared, "Drunk as a lord, we all believe that," as Jenifer never stopped talking.

"Oh, we didn't have time to let a lot of people know, you know, Grandmother, nobody thought about a light for the preacher 'till the very last minute, and Momma ran an' ripped a pole lamp out the kitchen and set it up just behind him. And it drew flies, and the flies kept in the way, and just before Jacob could say, 'I do,' the preacher threw his arm up in the air and hit a great fat one that bloodied up his prayer book."

"But he said it," Grandmother said, for the sake of conversation.

"Oh, yes, he said it. We're married. And afterwards we had orange juice, for a reception, and Jesus Christ, Missus Larquey, that was the best orange juice!"

Phillip's first impulse had been to march from the room, but the real life flesh and blood of a ragged woodnymph he'd slept with, now his brother's spouse, when a Larquey expected to practice law in this state, made hopeless any attempt at humor or melodrama. Phillip's mind clicked illegal channels and photostatic copies of divorce cases, calculating also the possibility of committing her into Millageville Institute when there were no doctors in the family. Once the thought mingled through his others—though he would have denied it later—that he should have let his brother die when he caught him smothering in his closed car last year. As if the gray splinter of a

house might float into the ocean without her stabilizing force, Mrs. Larquey festened on a smile for each of them, a few seconds apiece, and said that the new bride must lie down, or freshen up, or see the room that would be hers. Jacob led her by gentle directions upstairs, though Jenifer "aren't a bit tired."

Jacob turned, "I was *very* drunk."

"Jacob, leave out nonessentials," Grandmother said. "The pertinent question is what's to be done...."

"When I expect to practice law...."

"In this state," Jacob finishing both of their sentences. "I've thought about it all the way over, taking everyone into consideration. I don't think it's that serious." He walked into the kitchen.

What most amazed Phillip was not Jacob's apparent inability to take anything seriously, but his ever present smile, warm even through the puffed eye-lids and face that looked as though they had been dragged from the ocean and set up as a monument to careless swimmers, warm and defenseless, attempting no defense, and simply, good-natured. It was more than Phillip could bear.

"Look here," he said, following the archway to the kitchen. "Jenifer's not exactly the perfect hostess for campaign luncheons. They'll be interviews-my god, if a reporter got near Jenifer I couldn't get past a shingle on Dills Bluff Road. You could think about Grandmother. She lives in this house. You could have had some respect for your dead parents. She's a shallow as a bird, she's a hot scatterbrain, and you *know* it, . . . none of this should be necessary."

Jacob, who had been mixing a drink with automatic care and attention to picking up and laying down utensils, watching the flow of alcohol with the calm knowledge of a chemist performing an elementary experiment, now offered the glass to Phillip, who took it with his right hand, because Jacob gave it to that one.

"It isn't. I know all that, thought about it long enough. I have a simple, workable plan. Granted she's not the type for teas," he laughed, "she couldn't even learn croquet rules, much less follow them."

"This is no time for jokes, Jacob Englemann," Grandmother wheeled in.

"I'm sorry," Jacob said. "Croquet parties are less important than interviews with reporters—I have a hard time distinguishing. I'm sorry, that's all I can say. Just let me finish. What I'm trying to say, is that the girl can't be bound—certainly not by us—

she is a scatter-brain. All right. We'll bore her. She doesn't have any concept of manners, or tact, or culture, or whatever—we can't bind her into any respect for tradition. . . .

"Bind her into respect!" Mrs. Larquey started, "There-is-no-question of being bound—culture, manners, come from within, there's a naturalness about it that the lower stocks cannot learn. Jacob, for all you have done, I never knew you not to be a gentleman until this day." It was an oath that only Phillip and Jacob could understand was the worst condemnation Grandmother could—in her eyes—give to her grandson, but more, Jacob smiled comfortingly, for her to say it meant that she had not behaved as a lady; she had declared her angry feelings in uncontrolled vexation. Jenifer had begun to disturb the established order.

"I suppose we will bore the young thing," Grandmother relented weakly.

"She'll grow tired of us, and she'll leave. That's all, I'm sure of it. We'll just wait for her to grow tired of us and leave," Jacob said. "Well, we can't turn her out."

To turn the girl out would be totally unacceptable, far worse than keeping the harlot in the house. Jacob's thesis that Jenifer would grow tired of their kind of lives (He meant Phillip's and Mrs. Larquey's lives, since he fully intended to continue drinking undisturbed), seemed perfectly logical—unaccustomed to the lower stocks as lords proprietors to shepherds as they (it) were—and they would all simply wait her out. Grandmother began to see it the only course to take; and Phillip felt so much nobler for the decision that he became his irrational self again. He even began a study of the girl as man in his primeval innocence. He observed in the following days, then weeks, that the breed possessed outstanding patience. One night after dinner, Jenifer said, "We used to play in the Yum-Yum tree while Momma poured Licker down Daddy just to keep him alive. Then we sat in the hospital room and watched him die, feedin' his livah and watchin' him die." And when Phillip said he was sorry, and Grandmother warned against alcoholics, Jenifer returned, "Oh, there aren't no need to be sorry. It was the way he was." Grandmother would have been touched if she had read it in a book.

There were occasions when Jenifer suggested that they restore the house, "fix up the porch so it don't fall off like that into the water, like, if we have another even little hurricane, this house's gonna go floatin' into the ocean China." Against this

invasion of ignorance, the Larquey's held tight to the patterns of their lives: they did not fix up the house.

Jacob spent most of this time in his room, reading. He had become interested in criminal law. Phillip worked more and more on campaign and acceptance speeches, for next year's state primaries. Mrs. Larquey welcomed Jacob's new interest in law, and considered it a sign of his self-rehabilitation. He was an intelligent man, all the Larqueys were—he would make an excellent criminal lawyer. It was too bad he didn't have Phillip's good judgement of human nature or natural sense of politics, but nonetheless, he would stand well in the courtroom. As soon as Jenifer left, she would talk over the possibility of law school with Jacob. As soon as Jenifer left, she would do it.

Jacob liked to cite examples of mass murders, especially when the murderer afterwards committed suicide, like the high school student in Illinois who gunned down six policemen and two dogs. "A lot of bother, don't you think, Grandmother? Most unnecessary, and they're more interesting ways." Well, it was no doubt a phase. Any day now he would turn to some other subject, something pleasant, like Vatican thieves. Grandmother waited. Phillip waited.

Jenifer galivanted about town, and neighbors talked about how she did, half-naked, and how she went charging groceries on top of groceries, and cooked, and how she had pushed Rosemary the maid to her last straw and Rosemary had quit work after twenty years with the family and sought refuge at the local Voodoo village—but this was only rumor. Rosemary had not quit but stayed, in a terrified state, twiddling her thumbs around the house.

Jenifer's stay was a most tragic episode, Rosemary having some objective knowledge of the heavenly or unheavenly forces that made her feel that the end of Jenifer's stay would result in an equally tragic, but indisputably dignified, manner—the Larqueys weren't, after all, just any employers, they practically dictated the natural laws that would save them from Jenifer.

So then, one morning when the three were having brunch, Jenifer was away, the day-lilies had just opened on the dinner table, and Rosemary the maid poured Jacob's martini, the house fell down. It did, and everyone for miles will say it did, with a single, nonreverberating, simple, and perfectly rhythmical, snap. When Jenifer bounced back around noon, she saw the waves play a hushed heartbeat on the last chimney top as it rocked out the Atlantic; and she cried for a little while.

CORNFIELD

after a painting by Van Gogh

the painter

Will know that world is there

Because it turned him mad;

Yet and that reason

Makes him disbelieve it—

the sickle in a yellow field,

trees that resemble trees,

yellow madness of a summer sky

gone winter on the wall

the back bent scythe, the sickle

in a yellow field,

lake reflections not the same

as landscape—

Whirled cane and hand and faded gold

Will know

No frame for these

Brush-scaffold lines, decided and

Controlled of skeptic madness

(too much knowledge for) the small

farmer, grown out and planted in

Brushed anarchy, brushed,

Controlled and fitted

ACTUALLY-EXACTLY in

A wooden frame.

Lila Summer

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

To George Garrett

When the cherry blossom's bursting in your crab grass yard
And the ruffled grouse is rumpling in the dust,
Better fence in your daughter—wagging tails will be seen
When the running sun is arching rays of lust.

"All these memoos being posted in our town's grocery stores
Must mean something, don't you think, Mary, dove?"
"Lord, they told me yesterday, drafting's gone, the war's won,
And it's all because of Quaker's Instant Love.

It's a product of the sole inquirer Jesus Oats,
Who was eaten by the thought of dying friends.
Some folks say he chose a jail, researching appetites
Of the men who picked dank calm, not Asian winds.

It was there he found the answer to our modern war—
In a cell mutation growing on his shoe,
From the love of fellow loafers kicking Viet Nam
And the color integration—red, white, blue.

Jesus knew germ warfare weighed upon the largest scale
So he made the cells into a breakfast flour.
As strong friendship ate through hierarchy, this staple came to power
In all homes where love was served at morning hour.

When the Quaker company bought this potent recipe
They condensed it with a cow herd's soppish drink.
Now contentment was the end of this many-purpose blend
And it sold in every nation, some folks think.

But the product's been abused—idle warriors mouth and muse:
'While it's time let's sow our oats with plowing must. . .
When the cherry blossom's bursting in our crab grass yards
And the ruffled grouse is rumpling in the dust.'

There'll be new crops a-coming—God, these grains are seasoned hot!
Jesus, save our virgin land!" poor Mary cussed.
"Better fence in our daughters—wagging tails will be seen
When the running sun is arching rays of lust."

Barbara Leary

TWO POEMS by Cynthia Maull

THE DARKER ROOT

I. Deeper Than Dream

Against my pane, the dark pressed gaping lips
And sucked me into silent feline depths
Fathomed by no eye. Gliding swiftly
On my sheet, I left the moon behind.
Into dream (Or was I out of dream?) I whirled
Deep into the desert of my mind. . .

II. Or Sleep

Rough-skinned branches claw the bloodless moon,
Others crack my windows like old bones
Or knuckles of old men; Cold that darkness only
One in tombless sleep can tremble from;
Darker still the coldness that will come
Not unlike a desert night—more empty—
To freeze me in the flower of my thought.
Yet, all flowers sink the darker root.

TO ROSALIE—IN HER GARDEN

I watched her weeding on her knees
Jabbing mud with the glinting hook
Spikey Rooney and I mistook
In peeled off days and mythy lands
For the claws we claimed she had for hands.
(O fallen witch with hoe for broom,
We said you dug there for your son
Or worked to raise a husband from a seed.
Your winter mind was marled with dead
Leaves of memories you tried to plant away.)
I saw instead of witch today,
Gnome, Crouched in a cave of thought,
Squint against the leaving light
Of a digging day turning into night.

TOUR OF KLOSTER EBERBACH

At first we went through with the guide.
He was big and his shoulders bent
Beneath the heavy wet of his black raincoat.
The rain had ended
But his voice carried the rhythm—
Droning, daily, careless of the tongue, the heritage
That was old but new and not my own.
I followed cold and puppet-like—
Stopping, listening, going,
Opening, entering, closing heavy doors with heavy keys
And finally emerging where we had entered.

We were each a stranger.
We had access—but only to the edges
Where we lived and looked through windows
And walked around stalwart walls
Built with stark bulk and wooden ribs.

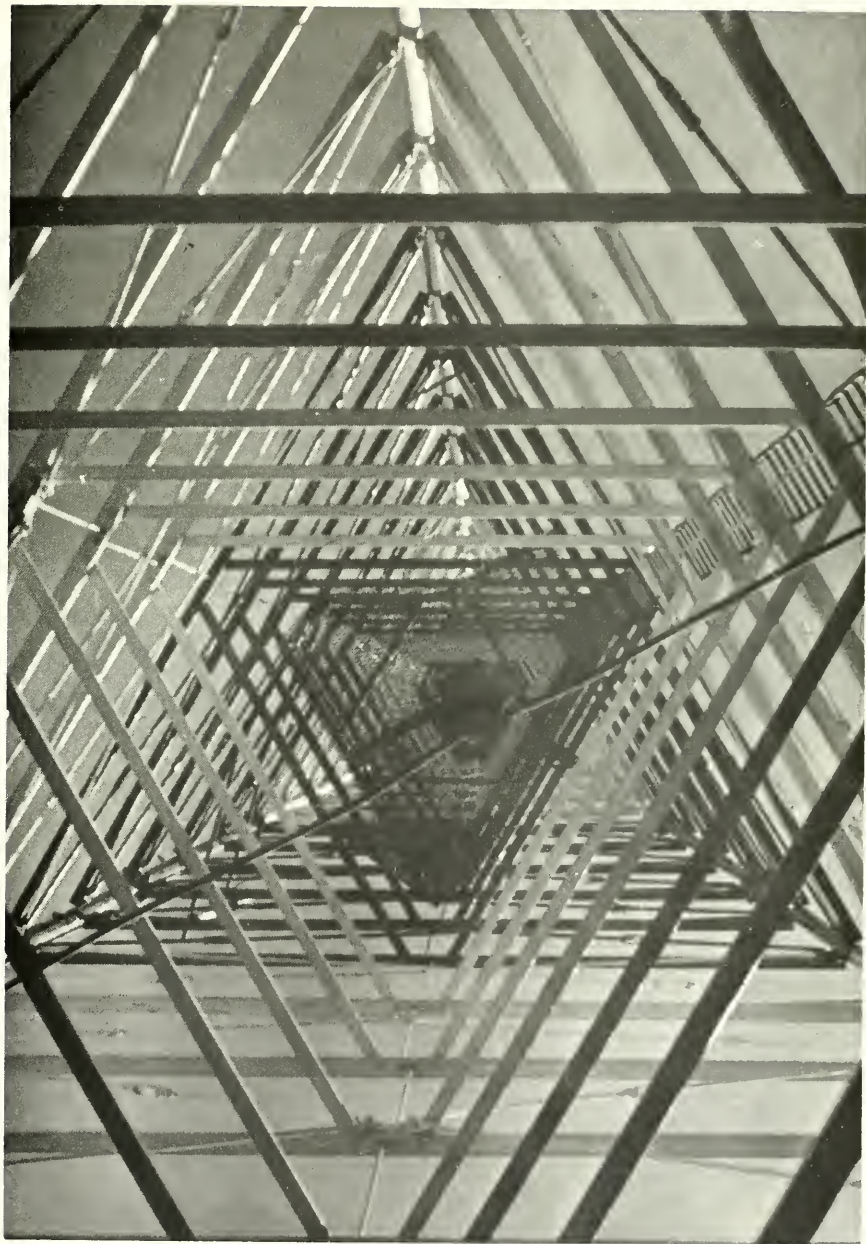
The last day Phillipe and I sat in sunshine
Watching hazy blues and greens engulf our retreating world
Of bleak white soul and ruddy thought.
We spoke as parting friends—
Regretting things that could have been,
Loving things that were.
We thought of walking finally through pristine vineyards
Even cold wet mornings never spoiled,
Or sharing one more last bottle of Rhine wine
In the Gasthaus beyond the wall
Chaperoned by pained dwarfs and framed with rich wainscot.
But still we sat, and I told him of the barren ache
The tour had left.

The door had always been there near holy statues
Which once had faced the world but now the wall
And we saw they were hollow, made of clay—and dusty.
He lifted the stiff latch and told me
He had found it when he arrived,
But I had only seen it, passed it daily
As we stalked the foot-carved stairs.
We waited until the rumbling echoes of a tour had faded.
There was time now. The guide came hourly.
We stooped, broke cobwebs with our faces and stepped through.
My shoes on stones made bouncing empty sounds
So I stopped and took them off.

We measured first the optical columned hall
Where monks had slept on boards and straw—
Then down to the Dom.
It, as the rest, was empty but welcomed voices
For it gathered and devoured them and thrust them back
Vibrantly into each nook of the cross.
Under drunken windows
Tombs of ancient abbots meandered in relief
And now, because I knew I could,
I had no wish to walk across their stony faces.
Instead I touched the hand of the Madonna in the halfmoon.
We felt small there.
We were drawn to where a shimmering arch pierced edificial gloom
To discover the inner garden.
We met corniced figures clinging, shaded
Outside the council room where pastel vines
Climbed inside searching along webbed vaulting.
One tree grew in the garden—a gnarled willow
Cloaking an eternal fountain walls had once enclosed.
But now the water bathed long thin fingers of the willow—
None of man.
And no one ate nearby around the sturdy table in the pannelled room
Surveyed by pink cameoed seasons
Listening for a voice to fill the void by reading from a tome
No longer leaning inside the hand-hewn case
That was carved with boars and brooks.
There I felt the arching
There I felt the aching cold that seeps from stone to feet
And led the way into the sun.

We soon retraced our steps
And listened at the door before we slipped back through
And shoved the latch in place.
We both knew now and smiled
And he went past the statues through a door
And I went down the stairs.

Joyce Shields









**NOTES: On the Thesis That the Redemption of Man
Lies in Half a Worm**

I. NEO-NIMROD

My Shinar is full of towers,
but for Christ's sake!

They fall down so easily.

II. SUB-MOTHER I

For love my grandmother sleeps alone.

Did I say love?
No. For lack

She sleeps with a remembrance of beaus.

III. CRUSADER

Christ it's cold.

We all wear lead drawers
And when we drown
We bubble

but never rise.

IV. PROPRIETY

In boarding school
The first thing one must learn
Is to tell a centaur
From his maiden aunt.

V. UTOPIA

In the chosen country it never rains,

but in my house
it pours
and the ooze
sweats from the walls

and a god-damn eagle crawls on my floors.

VI. EMBARGO

We're destroying the coastline
So the aliens won't get in;

We're in Ohio now.

VII. MATHEMATICIAN

She too has dreams:

Of the number of sand pebbles
Composing the sea. . .
To the nearest infinity
Divisible by two.

VIII. ISCARIOT

I grew up
In a park of cast iron trees

Run over with children
Peddling the plague
And Sunday-gray papers. . .
Corner to corner like catacombs.

Steve Smith

TWO POEMS
by **Jan Samet**

THE PRISM

Seen in the shadows
of an autumn sunset
one man, one woman
together wearing
four leaves.
running down main street
shouting, laughing, chased. . .
by half the policemen in the world
and all the physically uncrippled
old ladies.

While
Meanwhile
Unseen in the shadows
of an autumn sunset
a young girl.
watches from the porch
of her white frame house
and dreams.

THIS RING

You wonder?
Then I shall tell you. . . Hand me the cigarettes.

Once,
I was,
after a fasion
A horseman of apocalypse.
The fifth horseman
for I brought an end of wonder
to a girl, whom I loved but
could not give tomorrow in barter
for her yesterday's of wonder.

Oh, I did not know.
(I would plead ignorance
to my dreams.)
In retrospect, it seems
she knew the rhyme of love too well.

We never spoke,
No lovers speak.
They love;
It is enough.

I never knew she'd not known man
until her blood and Tears
had cleansed
my eyes
my ears
and left my insides screaming No.

There is more;
There is the day after yesterday
four years ago
and the tomorrows ever since.

There is sadness,
The hoofbeats ringing in my ears,
My dreams.
There is death.

. and there is this ring.

A DARK GLASS

(for Ludia, a mad child)

Muddy winds—heavy, torrential,
Make windows breathe and shudder.
This morning's paper scuds crab-like across the lawn
Halting impaled tautly against wire woven barricades—
Fog of world sediments next to bold blocks of Andy Capp.
A neighbor venturing to catch the bus, waits,
Bloating, deflating until clutched together with her hands.
The bus—five minutes late—wheezes up blunt-nosed,
Grumbles off blunt-tailed.
Ugly creature—made for such mornings.
The local stray swims by, walleyed,
Tangled fur blown backwards, wind-whipped—
Afraid, finding nothing visible to avoid.
Dead leaves, brittle thoughts, herded, scattered,
Find uneasy rest against a soothing gutter.
The glass chills.
I find the wind so early strange.

Joyce Shields



Soprano
Piano

SNOW

Chris Tenor
Poem by
Paula Gullledge

Moderato p *simplice*

Moderato p *simplice*

How si-lent-ly we gaze u-pon the snow,

p *as*

si-lent-ly it falls in-to our hearts and

Poco Più Mosso M7

co-vers all in cold and blow-ing white

Poco Più Mosso M7

and when the snow has

p cresc.

blow-ke-ted our dreams we sit and wait we sit and wait; and won-der-ing

cresc.

M7 3

Handwritten musical score for the first system. The vocal line (top staff) begins with the lyrics "why and where Our days have gone" and continues with "and won-der-ing why and where Our days have". The piano accompaniment (bottom staff) features a melodic line with a *cresc.* marking and a bass line with chords. Dynamic markings include *cresc.*, *7*, and *Mf*. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the piano accompaniment.

Handwritten musical score for the second system. The vocal line continues with "gone, we weep. and won-der-ing why and where Our days have". The piano accompaniment includes a *7* chord and dynamic markings of *MP*, *Mf*, and *cresc.*. A fermata is present over the first measure of the piano accompaniment.

Handwritten musical score for the third system. The vocal line continues with "and won-der-ing why and where Our days have gone, we". The piano accompaniment features a *7* chord and dynamic markings of *Mf*, *cresc. molto*, and *7*. A fermata is present over the first measure of the piano accompaniment.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system. The vocal line begins with "weep." and continues with a melodic line. The piano accompaniment features a *7* chord and dynamic markings of *p*, *7*, and *dim.*. A fermata is present over the first measure of the piano accompaniment.

mf and when the snow has blanketed our dreams we sit and wait; we

mp P

pp mf Psub.

Rit. p weep. Moderato p But not a finger do we lift to brush away the snow. How

Moderato

p

Rit. p

cresc. cold, how cold the night. How soon, how soon we go.

mf dim. mf dim.

cresc. mf dim. mf dim.

pp But not a finger do we lift to brush away the snow.

pp



SELENA

SUSAN SETTLEMYRE

Selena broke up with her boyfriend on Saturday, and we had the wreck or whatever you want to call it Saturday night. It seems funny that a flirty little student teacher halfway across the country could make me play mother confessor, but in a way I guess she was responsible.

Selena Corelli and I had been best friends for four years, ever since we were, as Selena said, "dewy-eyed freshmen" at Sevier City High. There were times when I came close to being jealous of Selena. She was half-Italian and the most beautiful person I ever saw—you know, tall and slender, with dark hair and olive skin, and sort of hazel-green eyes. Probably the nicest thing about her was that she was so damn unaware of how pretty she was. But there were a couple of things that kept me from really envying her. Like, back in junior high, she used to run around with a rough crowd who chased boys and had makeout parties, and she got a pretty bad reputation—she didn't deserve it, but who would believe that? The other thing was money. Her real father had been a Catholic, and he'd had to have lots of children of course. Her stepfather was Baptist, but he wanted kids of his own. So there was Selena, the oldest of about six or eight kids with a factory worker's income. Don't get me wrong, Selena wasn't greedy or anything, she just wanted to live like everybody else did. I know she turned down some tough dates because she didn't want people to see her house.

I hadn't ever been to her house either. We maintained our friendship in homeroom at good ol' SCHS, where we sat next to each other. We talked about everything we could think of at the time, our crushes, books (Selena loved romantic adventure stories, and I used to lend her my Mary Stuart paperbacks), clothes, other people, dirty jokes.

In some ways I guess you could say I was wilder than Selena. I started smoking when I was fourteen and drinking when I was sixteen. Selena had played at smoking in junior high (when she was going around with those wild kids), and she told me she had gotten high once on blackberry wine, but she had a bastard of a boyfriend who didn't approve of her doing either. (God knows he did enough him-

self!)

Selena had started going with Bob during sophomore year. He was poor too, so she didn't mind him seeing her house. He was also a hellraiser from way back, the sort who got kicked out of school for painting the pants of the Confederate soldier in the square or writing "Peyton Place" on the door of the principal's office. (He painted the pants red, and the newspaper screamed for two weeks about vandalism and irreverence.) I didn't really think too much of Bob, but I wasn't about to tell Selena. By senior year it was obvious that they were pretty serious, but Bob was only working in a service station, so they hadn't made any definite plans. They used to fight all the time, but Selena didn't seem to see anything wrong with that. I guess her folks quarreled too.

So I was stunned when Selena called me that Saturday night in March, "Ginny, are you busy tonight? This is Selena." At that particular time I was just going out with good buddies or an occasional blind date that I couldn't avoid, so I told her I was depressingly free.

Selena's voice sounded small and unsteady. "Would you like to go for a ride? Bob and I just broke up." She listened to all my inane exclamations of shock and sympathy, and then she said, "I'll tell you about it in the car. We'll be by in a few minutes."

It had to be "we". Selena just had her learner's permit. But I was surprised at the carload of Corellis that was waiting for me in their old green Chevy. Selena was in the back holding the youngest, who was still a baby and cute. A pretty but worn-out-looking woman was behind the wheel.

"Mama." Selena said while I was crawling in, "this is Ginny Corpening."

"Just like a little doll," her mother said. The whole family, including the American side, was so tall that they had fits over anyone small and fair. I was a little embarrassed.

"And this is my mother, Mrs. Fisher," Selena finished.

"How do you do?" I said in a very polite voice and grinned hello to Selena's next-oldest sister, Linda, who was a freshman and who I knew to speak to. Linda was a shy, less exotic version of Selena.

"We're just goin' to pick up Frank at the picture show before you all go on your ride," Mrs. Fisher explained. She had a strong mountain accent, flat, nasal, and assertive. I guessed that the other three children were too small to be left home alone. Two of them were sitting between Selena and me. The other one was crawling over Linda. Nobody seemed to mind, so I ignored the crush too. I did wonder, though, how many were Corellis and how many were Fishers.

Frank was standing in front of the movie. The light was behind him, so I just got an impression that he was husky. I think he must have been about twelve. He climbed in the front and took over the kid that was climbing on Linda. No one bothered to introduce me, but Frank didn't seem to care. I didn't much care either. All Frank said at all was a general statement, "Gah, that was the best show I seen in a long time. They had the best monsters!"

Mrs. Fisher turned down a side street by the movie and wound through a lot of little streets in this shabby neighborhood that I didn't really know, and finally stopped in front of a tiny little house. It was covered in that rough, tar-paper sort of material that reminds you of roof shingles. There was a rickety, unpainted porch with a sagging rocker on it. I still wonder how such a little place could hold all those Corellis and Fishers.

The kids shoved out of the car without caring who they kicked or elbowed. Selena handed her mother the baby, and she and I got into the front. Linda stood by looking shy until everyone else was out. Then she got in back.

"Linda's coming with us," Selena explained, and I murmured, "Fine." usual mother-type speech, "Now y'all be careful and don't you stay out too late."

"Okay, Mama," Selena said, impatiently. Her mother did a modified backbend to get out of the window without bothering the baby. Then she followed the others into the house. Selena slammed the door tight and got the car started, with difficulty, I have to say. Besides being so new at driving, she was obviously jumpy. We drove two or three blocks before she said anything. Then it was "Damn." You have to understand that Selena isn't much of a cussler.

"You want to tell me about it?" I asked. "I mean, I just can't believe y'all have really broken up. What happened?" I was embarrassed and lit a cigarette to cover it up.

"Can I have one too?" Selena asked. I lit her one from mine and handed it to her. I was a little worried because she was having trouble driving the

car as it was.

"Honey, you're upset," I said. "Lo you want me to drive?"

"No, I'm okay. Damn. I want a beer. Linda, you won't tell Mama if we go to Oakboro, will you?"

Linda said she wouldn't. I was worried myself, but I was half-assed enough to think I ought to humor Selena.

Maybe I should explain that Dula County, which is where Sevier City is, is a dry county, and that Oakboro, twenty-five miles east, is where people usually go to get beer—unless they get it from bootleggers, who charge extravagant prices and who are scared to sell to people who look like minors. (I was eighteen, and they wouldn't sell to me.) So Selena headed for the highway, not saying a word, just puffing heavily on her cigarette, like a true non-smoker.

"Oh, Ginny, it's so awful!" she wailed at last, almost running off the pavement at Huffman Curve. "Do you know how long we've been going together?"

"About two and a half years, isn't it?"

"Two years, five months, and ten days, damnit! He was going to get me a ring this summer! Do you know who Debbie Long is?"

"The name's familiar," I said, judiciously. "But I can't place her."

"Well, she's a student teacher at Bethel. Here, put this out for me." She handed me her cigarette, and I tossed it out the window.

"I hate her!" Selena said. "Oh, Ginny, she's real wild. She sleeps with just about anybody. Let me tell you what she's done."

Selena launched into a description of the awful perversions that this Debbie-character indulged in, but I didn't listen as hard as I should have. It reminded me of when we were fifteen, Selena and I had had a masterful system for finding out all about sex then. I'd go to the library and get all this good information. Then Selena would ask her wild friends for the dirty word for it. I guess we built up a pretty good slang vocabulary that way, and we used to laugh at all the innocent kids around us. Anyway, I tuned in again just in time to hear Selena say, "And she isn't even *cute*! She's got old stringy blonde hair, and she's skinnier than I am."

"Now, Selena, I keep telling you you aren't skinny."

"I am too. Anyway, Bob was supposed to call me right after he got off work at one today."

"And he didn't call?"

"No! He didn't call at all. He came over at five-

thirty and said he'd been working all afternoon. But you know his friend Steve? Well, Steve had already called me and said he saw Bob riding around with that...that whore!"

"But, honey," I said, very self-righteous, "you know he was out for only one thing."

"I don't care! We're going steady, and he lied to me, and then we both got mad, and oh damn! What am I going to do?"

"Selena, I don't know what to tell you," I said, about to tell her a number of things, beginning with my opinion of Bob.

"Tell her what he called you," Linda spoke up.

"Oh!" Selena moaned. "He said I was a damn puritan bitch, and I was already acting like a nagging wife, and he certainly wasn't going to get married to someone like that!"

"Poor baby!" I exclaimed. "I don't *believe* he could say things like that. Good God! Honey, that's awful. I think you're well rid of him."

"But I want him back!"

Now, we were going pretty fast. Selena was, maybe unconsciously, taking advantage of the open highway. At this time of night there wasn't much traffic, which was probably a damn good thing, because Selena was weaving all over. It reminded me of these dreams I used to have when I was about ten that some kid my age was driving a car with a lot of children in it. We would be in danger and everybody would know it, but nobody'd much care. That was what it was like then, a scary, suspended, almost dreamy state. But we were getting close to Leesville, which is the last town in the county, so I told Selena to slow down.

"Okay," she said and added a couple of bells very quietly. Then she started talking about Bob again, not really caring whether Linda and I heard her or not.

"I just wish he wasn't so handsome. Oh, he can look at me with those big blue eyes, and I just melt. Oh hell. I bet that bitch feels the same way."

I thought that was a little fatuous. I mean, I have never felt the urge to melt at anybody's eyes, blue, brown, or red. And I have a theory about good-looking guys anyway. I don't think they count for much because people don't expect them to be anything but good-looking, not smart or witty or anything. You ought to see some of the guys I date, but they all have brains. I started to say something about this, but I figured Selena might think it was a cut, so I didn't. I just murmured something soothing like, "Don't think about that. Even good-looking bods can

be rat finks."

Selena slowed the car down abruptly and pitched us all forward. In fact we started *crawling* through Leesville. That made me feel better, but Selena kept aiming to the right the way most new drivers tend to do. I hated to be a backseat driver, but I finally said, "Hey, get a little more to your left."

She did, for a couple of blocks. Then I started talking to Linda about her Spanish teacher, who was a holy terror, and I forgot to keep an eye on Selena. I guess she started heading back to the curb side because suddenly, *wrench!* The car shook, and we heard the scrape of metal. We didn't know what had happened, and Selena went about half a block before she thought to get stopped. We sat there, in the middle of the main drag in Leesville, for about a minute. Then Selena sort of gasped, "Oh God, Ginny, I've hit something!"

Well, we couldn't stay where we were, so I told her to park on a side street. Then we all three got out and walked back to where we guessed whatever Selena hit must be. We didn't even think about her car. We found the other car without any trouble. God knows, half its bumper was crumpled off. The angle of the bumper reminded me of a loose tooth about to come out. We didn't see anyone else around, and Linda whispered, "Let's leave."

We were still standing there thinking about that when a woman came out of a dingy little restaurant across the street. She was a big woman with a dress that was too tight in front, but she didn't look sexy or even fat, just aggressively firm as if it were dress's fault that it hadn't made concessions to her shape. Even across the street, she looked like a bitch. And let me tell you, she was one! She looked at the car and then started running across the street yelling like a fishwife. Unfortunately, there wasn't any traffic coming and she made it over to us, cussing up a storm.

"Who done this to my car? Just look at it! Did you do it?" She picked Selena right off, I guess because she was tallest.

"Yes'm," Selena said. She was very calm, polite too. She acted as if she wasn't going to lower herself to that bitch's level.

"George!" the woman screamed. A man stuck his head out of the restaurant door.

"What's the matter, Mamie?"

"Get the cops. These goddam delinquents just wrecked my car!"

"Look, lady," I said, slow and mad, "we aren't delinquent. We certainly didn't intend to hit your

car. We'd apologize if you'd just stop cussing and let us."

"I don't want none of your damn sass," the bitch said, "I told the cops to come, and I'm not backing out."

"Nobody asked you to," I said, swelling with a drunken, dangerous excitement. "We'll be glad for the police to handle it. At least they've got good sense and good manners."

I won't even tell you the names she called us then. We stopped listening after a while, and Selena and I lit cigarettes to show we didn't give a damn. She kept on cussing until the police came, which was maybe five minutes because Leesville is such a small town. Then she started crying.

Both the patrolmen were young and a little embarrassed. All I noticed about them were blue-gray shirts and red faces. One of them asked what was the matter, was anyone hurt. The bitch was wailing like a stuck pig, and the other girls got scared all of a sudden, so I wound up doing the talking. I told the man that Selena hadn't been driving very long, and we weren't speeding, and all that. I was real bitchy-sweet when I got to the part about the woman coming out. I even called her, "this lady here."

The policemen were nice, and they tried to calm everyone down. They had to see Selena's permit and my license and the car registration. Linda and I window-shopped while they talked to Selena and the bitch. Something made the bitch mad again, and she started yelling. I think she was saying we werd drunk and did it on purpose and the policemen were letting us off easy for dirty reasons, a whole bunch of filthy-minded crap anyway. The policemen kept trying to tell her that nobody was let off yet, but she must have wanted to see us behind bars, because she kept yelling.

Finally Selena came back to us looking pale but otherwise okay. "We can go now," she said. "Mama and I have to come back over here on the eleventh. He doesn't think there's much damage. That's what made the woman so mad."

We remembered to look at our car this time. The bumper was a little mangled, but it didn't look too bad. We got in the way we had before, and Selena started up. It stalled, of course, and she started it again. This time we got maybe halfway up the side street, which was on a hill. I don't know if it stalled again or if Selena stopped it, but we were just sitting there on that dark street. There were houses further up, but here we were alone behind the mainstreet shops.

"Honey, are you all right?" I asked.

"No! Oh, I just can't drive after that, Ginny!" And she put her head down on the wheel and started bawling. I tried patting her on the back, but that doesn't do a hell of a lot of good.

I let her cry a minute more. Then I said, "Why don't you get in the back and let me drive."

She made gulping noises and finally said okay. While she got back with Linda, I slid over to the driver's seat. I hadn't driven a straight-shift since driver's ed, three years ago, but I felt kind of reckless and kind of in charge. Then I tried to pull the seat up so I could reach the pedals, and it wouldn't budge. It probably hadn't been moved in so long it was rusted or something.

"Well, hell," I said and tried to start the car from that position, but my leg was too short to push the clutch in.

I cussed a little bit. Then I said, "Linda, how about getting up front and helping me start this damn thing." We tried with Linda reaching over me to put in the clutch, but that didn't work either. We just kept sliding back down the hill. We got the car stopped, but we didn't dare try to start it again.

"We ought to get help," Linda suggested, but none of us seemed to know anyone in Leesville. I smoked two cigarettes while we tried to decide what to do. Selena alternated between crying and insisting it was all her fault. I was close to panic myself, but the helplessness of the others kept me from losing my head completely.

Then a cop car came down the street. I didn't really think, but I honked the horn and maybe blinked the lights too, I don't remember. At any rate, it stopped. It was the same policemen as earlier, and they were very helpful again—and a little patronizing. I explained our mess, and they laughed like we were poor, helpless, unmechanical females. One of them even said, "just like a woman." I swear.

Well, what happened was that the younger one told his buddy to follow us, that he'd see we didn't get into any more trouble. We let him in on the driver's side, and he got the car started without any difficulty at all—of course. He turned it around in somebody's driveway, got back on the main drag, and drove us to the outskirts of town, saying pacifying, sympathetic things all the way. Then he stood at the door to make sure I had it okay, wished us good luck, and waved goodbye. I don't even remember what he looked like, but I'll bless that guy till my dying day.

I didn't have any difficulty getting back to Sevier

City. There was even less traffic now, and I was certainly a more competent driver than Selena. All the time, mind you, Selena was crying in the back seat. Linda and I talked halfheartedly or tried to comfort Selena, but it was a pretty gloomy trip. I drove to my house instead of Selena's because I didn't really want to be around when Selena told her mother.

At my driveway, I stopped the car and twisted toward the back. "Come on, Selena," I said. "Let's go in and get some coffee. But don't tell my folks this happened out of town." Selena wiped her face, and we all went into the house.

Daddy was watching *Gunsmoke* when we opened the door, but he stood up and called out, "Come in, come in." I made the introductions, and told Daddy we'd had "a little accident downtown." Daddy asked the girls to sit down. Then he said, "Say you had some trouble, eh? Nobody got hurt, did they? Well, that's good. Much damage?" That sort of thing. Now I hate to be the one to say it, but my father is a snowman. He's a big football-player type to begin with, and then he's so damn nice. He doesn't say anything special, but he's always interested in what you have to say. In no time he had the girls smiling and talking. While they were telling him about the accident,

I went to find Mama. She was ironing in the kitchen, but she stopped to put some coffee on and come out to speak.

She made the usual polite, maternal greetings. "Hello, Selena. I've been hearing about you for a long time now. So nice to meet you, Linda. Ginny was telling me about the accident. I hope it wasn't serious." I suspected that she was a little mad at me, but she is much too ladylike to let anything like that show in front of company.

By the time we finished the coffee, everyone was much more relaxed. Then Daddy got into the Corellis' car, with Linda to give him directions, and Selena and I followed in ours.

Selena was more cheerful than she had been all evening. She started giggling about how funny the whole thing really was. Right before we stopped at her house, she turned serious again. "Ginny," she said, "you don't know what you and your folks did for me tonight. You really saved my life. And I've never been in a house where everyone spoke such good English."

There wasn't much I could say to that but "oh" and "good luck" and "good night."

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