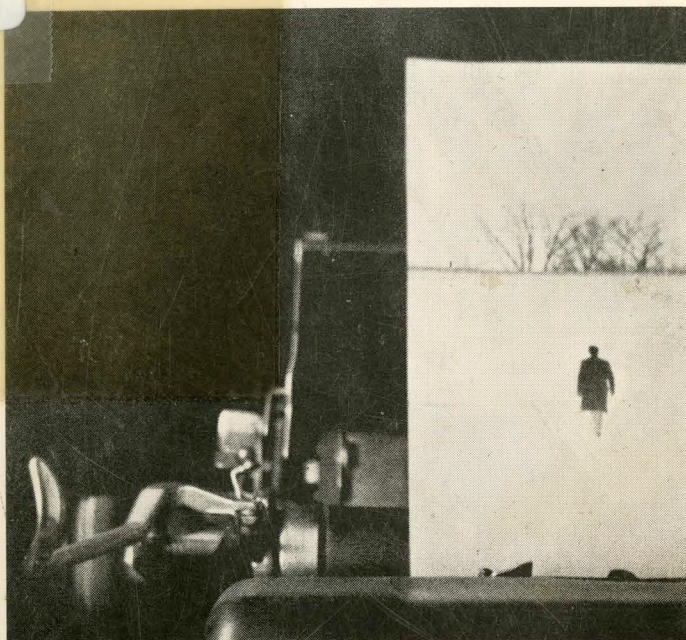


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TOUCHSTONE

WINTER & SPRING 1978

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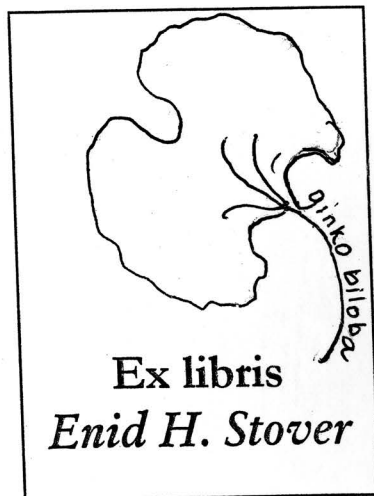
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Writer's Dream of Winter
Design and Photography by Charles Linn, Senior, Architecture

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touchstone

Winter/Spring
1978

A Magazine of Creative Arts

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Additional copies of TOUCHSTONE are available at the SGA office and from staff members.



To Helen

I never believed that I could be a poet
Until you made me believe I was a poem.

Bangle Bracelet For Helen

by Kim Wilson

I

You are like
a silver bangle bracelet,
encircling my wrist,
bumping my flesh—

I, ducking my head, admit
to closing my fingers
and letting you slide—
to sit at home
on the dresser top

while I run to
breathe lake air,
stalk beetles in
bristling weeds, and
tug at overalls
in the panting sun.

But, slowly moving toward home,
yawning cat stretches,
I note the half blue stain
your sound silver has left.
Sensing all along,
that you were witness
to my afternoon jig—
a poor replica of your
life time jangle.

II

When it came
I was scurrying about,
late for this,
unprepared for that,
misplacing you in my stumbling haste,
lost you seemed.

For a time even your
stain began to fade.
But in light,
it'd only soaked
into the web of veins
at my wrist—
a breath of blue
and I knew your
tint was in my blood.

Orchards

by Laura Peck

Apple blossoms stir in sleep,
Rocked and soothed by wind motion,
Dream dusted by visiting bees,
Fall out of bed and awake, apples.

Imbalances

by Megan Marks

My father on growing up decided to be a farmer. With a team of three horses he cultivated the few acres around his parents house. It was fertile land and the wheat crop took well but before harvest an onslaught of birds wiped it out. The next year he planted again and then again the year following. Both crops were successful and feeling secure in his ability he moved farther west and purchased a tract of Kansas prairie land. It was different from the hills and valleys of Missouri and he must have felt misplaced. Nevertheless, allowing no misgivings and feeling secure in the power of a single pair of muscular arms, he built a small house and asked a girl he had known in high school to be his wife. She consented and he then raised a barn to house the cows.

But with her consent they were then two, two sets of arms and two different wills working sometimes against one another. He painted the house and the barn bright red and they could be seen from the state road twenty miles away and anyone driving south through that flat, brown, implacable country could look to the right and feel certain that there at least was Existence.

My father expected the land to give him something more than the annual wheat crop. Fulfillment wouldn't be the right word, nor would satisfaction. Something less plausible, tenderness perhaps. It might have been possible in a different kind of terrain, one where the undulations of the earth are like those of the human body. But the prairie, beautiful in the ways of light and shadow and in constancy and distance, was a landscape apart from the human dimension. The grasses had long since been cut down and my father standing on his land was the tallest thing for miles. Each day it sharpened to a keen, bleeding edge his sense of isolation.

If life is ever in balance, though it is foolish to suggest such a thing because dexterity comes of adjusting the tensions, then my mother would have known that marriage was more than a pattern. She would have gotten up from the piano bench and gone out to stand halfway between the house and the barn so my father could see that she was there with him. He needed her, particularly during the year of the first drought. He needed her because two people felt more secure than one.

They had three children. Though he would have liked more my mother said no after the third was born. We were two boys and a girl. I was the girl, the youngest.

It isn't that they didn't have moments of closeness. I once saw them kissing by the refrigerator. As I remember it the sun was setting and the red light coming through the window caused the floor to glow.

My mother played the piano. It can't be said differently and yet it wasn't just playing. She stormed the house with her music. Not that she played loudly, because there often were passages that could hardly be heard at all, but with an energy fiercer than anything I have met since.

She taught me something of determination. Our family was so poor during the year of the first drought that the furniture and bedding was hocked and we children slept on the floor using as blankets a couple of army coats my father had picked up somewhere. There were months of bean and cornmeal suppers and yet the piano remained. It sat in the corner of the living room and when the top was propped open I stood on the bench to look down inside and I would tease myself by thinking of the great shiny red snake that rested there under the strings.

I learned from her too something of imagination and also the calling up of passion by self induced means, but this I see only now. There were times then when I wanted to slop mud across the keys. She seemed so far away from us, sitting on the bench straight as a needle, her hands spread like spiders and a look in her eyes as though she were seeing nothing. She played for herself and I was jealous of that absorption.

Have you guessed already that she was awkward in her movements? All the dance given to one human body had gone to her hands. The fingers were long and the wrist so thin a child's thumb and forefinger could circle it. They moved with the grace and lightness of leaves. When I speculate on what brought my parents together I think my father must have loved her for those hands. And for my mother it must have been the way he seemed to admire himself when he walked. She must have liked that little vanity.

We children got the broad palmed hands of my father's family and unless hers show up in our offspring, and who knows generations from now maybe they will, they are forever lost among the recessive genes. Sometimes when I'm walking through a museum I pass, along a stairway or in a hall, one of those Renaissance portraits and I see them, her hands, bejeweled and holding a fan, looking white and lifeless against a black background.

She played the piano through most of my growing up. Then when I was a junior in high school my father had it taken out of the house and sold. It happened, peculiarly enough, during the one time the farm was prosperous.

It was raining that night. The three of us were on the couch playing cards, my mother was sitting in the rocker reading a book, and my father knelt at the far corner of the living room and rolled a little red ball across the floor, picked it up from under the piano and rolled it again. All of us looked to see what he was doing but there was nothing in his face to explain. Just the hand starting the ball on its course and the man picking himself up to get it at the other end. The ball always went straight until the piano and then it turned sharply and pocketed itself in the corner. Thinking it was some kind of joke I watched his face for the crowsfeet that often gave him away but the eyes never creased and looking towards my mother I realized that something unspoken was going on between them. Straining to be oblivious of him she rocked back and forth slowly. Her face looked different, the lips seemed unevenly matched and I realize now it was because she was clamping her jaw out of tension. My father, still kneeling and holding the ball beside his foot, said to no one in particular, "This house is settling and it isn't settling straight because that piano is too heavy a weight for a house that's built on cinder blocks, and maybe the best thing to do before this

floor gets too darn crooked to walk on is get a couple of guys to help me shore it up underneath . . .

Or maybe the best thing is to remove the strain from her completely."

My mother looked at him and said, "You will not take away the one thing that I enjoy."

It was obvious that night that something precious had just been lost. Though they argued for a good two weeks before the piano was finally removed, there was a feeling that night that a final decision had just been made. The rain beat on the windows lightly and I remember thinking that this was just another one of the curious bends in a life span and in the more distant perspective of humankind it was only one cruelty among millions, and nothing really that amounted to much. The idea of distancing perspective intrigued me and I imagine it would have been a habitual way of confronting things if I hadn't realized early on that it would quickly deaden my emotions.

It seems that the question of blame must always be raised, and when the facts are held in the hand guilt appears to be heaviest on my father's side, and yet with other, less obvious witness it could just as easily sit on the side of my mother. But I think I'd rather swallow judgment altogether and say that in the inextricable windings of life there aren't any clear distinctions.

Sometimes what she played was so sad you had to stop what you were doing and sit down to listen. Sometimes it was as smooth and patternless as rain streaming down a wooden door. In the summertime when her playing could be heard outside the landscape would seem different, something would be lifted away and maybe it was the loneliness we had grown so accustomed to.

None of her music was singing music. She was too caught up in it, she said, to have to think about words. That she explained to me when I was in the junior high school. I had wanted to do a song for the talent show. I had a nice singing voice and a willingness to show it off and I told her that she wouldn't have to do anything but accompany me. And still she said that while she was playing she couldn't be thinking of words. It made no sense. Why would she have to think of them if she wasn't going to sing?

I realize now that the business of a talent show, that is, the school, the audience, and her daughter's obvious, and probably to her, distasteful desire to show off, all of which she loosely termed 'words,' couldn't be forced because for her playing the piano was the only exit from the world. Those times when the look on her face was almost too personal to watch . . . wasn't it her spirit coming out and directly speaking to God?

I was fifteen and standing on the top of a wall teetering, sometimes falling towards the one side, sometimes towards the other. My brothers could still coax me into fights but more and more I began to dislike their touch. I preferred to spend time with my mother. Something bound us together then and maybe it was a desire for seclusion. Although she too could sometimes front on reality.

There was, for instance, the event of my first date. She had been cleaning and baking all day. It was the afternoon and the house was filled with a smell of yeast. She had starched and ironed my dress and when I put it on it fell in gentle swirls to my knees. At the kitchen sink she washed my hair and then sat me down

with a towel around my shoulders and brushed it dry. She seemed oddly old to me then and it wasn't only because she gathered and combed my hair so gently.

I asked her why didn't she and my father get dressed up one night and go out. She laughed at the idea and said, "We're just two old stay-at-homes." My father, who had sat close by reading the paper, got up and went outside, leaving the door to slam behind him. He came back in carrying a rose he had picked from the vine. It was a yellow one, still a bud. Knowing that it was for me made tears come to my eyes. I didn't want to be a woman yet but the rose pinned to the front of my dress seemed suddenly to say like a fact that I was.

My mother took more pride in me than she did in herself. She had given up her sex and dressing her daughter for the part was a way of atoning. But it wasn't enough because a week later my father rolled the little red ball across the living room floor. The piano, two weeks beyond that, was tied with ropes and pulleys and with the help of three strong men was lifted onto a truck.

It was true that once her music was gone she changed. She did all the things women are rumored to do; she starched his shirts till they stood on their own, baked cakes and pies as well as the usual bread, and dusted and polished more than ever before. She helped him with the planting and the harvest. She often worked outdoors just as long as he did and whether she was happy or sad who could tell. It would have been easy for her to mimic the proper emotion.



by Lisa Scherer

Hattie Mae

by Ruby Stevens

Lonely lives in a railroad shack.
Listen to that whistle, watch what answers back.
Cause you ain't seen lonely
Until you've seen Hattie Mae.
Ain't nobody ever seen Lonely
Until they look at Hattie Mae.
Butcher knife done carved her,
Hard times done starved her,
Hattie Mae got lonely boned on her face.
Hat don't wear lipstick
She hates red rouge
Blackwhite bleaching cream
Can't do Hat no good.
Misery done shaped her.
Good times done raped her.
Hattie's so lonely she wears black lace.
Hat don't moan and Hat don't cry;
She is waiting for the Devil
To spit in his eye.
Lonely/lonely/lonely/
Lonely get another face
Hattie Mae's gonna replace you
And start another race.
Ain't nobody ever seen lonely
Until they look at Hattie Mae.
Butcher knife done carved her,
Hard times done starved her,
Hattie Mae got lonely boned on her face.

Ruby

by Enid Stover

Somber
Eyes see duty.
Feet walk in God's valley.
Fingers snap rich lists of laughter.
Hey, gal . . .

On the Dark Side of the Moon

by Dorothy Cosand

The Vision Lady crashed in my crater
basket in hand and sighing asked:

— Well, how do you like it?

Unprepared for guests
I cornerstare mumbled

— Why have you come?

— I'm here to remind you.

And opened wide the basket's lid . . .

Out leaped Warmth.

Beckoned.

I warily trailed

while the craters grew to grass.

Warmth melted into sunlight.

Trust fluttered to my side.

We silently wandered, watching

high blue cloudless sky

birds and butterflies . . .

til my tongue crept from its cave

whispered a word

and Trust heard. Trust heard!

Furious with delight

I leaped and tossed words at the air,

Dreamtruth! Ship of Friends!

Winevoice! Winevoice!

catching them popcorn-like in my teeth.

Then, crying Family! Family!

Motherlove! Motherlove!

I ran to catch the last one

and Trust tripped me.

Mouthful I sprawled choking

all turning black . . . black.

And she laughed;
slammed the lid tight
returning me to this hole.

— I just stopped to remind you
all once was light
on the dark side of the moon.

The Hawk

by Ann Carrel

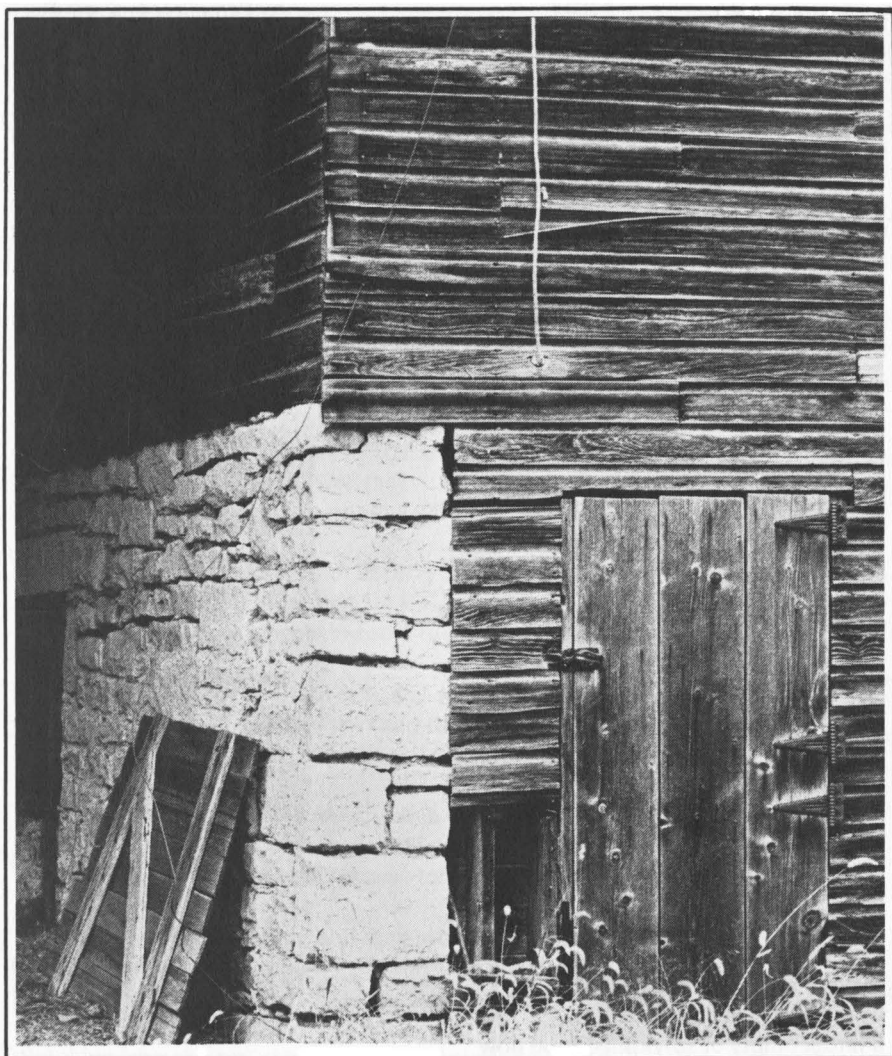
Still, on a stretch of long wire,
Unmoved by angry rituals of wheat
He rests alone
Lord of line and wind torn hedge, impassive,
Suspended on the rim of night, he seems
A shadow anchored fast against the sky—
Yet power independent of all motion,
A bursting dominance of quiet wings
Seizes upon us as our car
Blinks by the slanted visage, empty eyed,
The head too limply hung on power wire,
The gentle billow of the feathers
Just below the crown.

February

a reflection from Les Tres Riches du Duc de Berry

by Ken Shedd

Lightly, lightly, the snow has fallen, gracing the
countryside with winter's votive after-glow — a
white motet that outlines the wooden wheels of a
cart, drapes the wattle-roofed sheepfold, sharpens the spires
of bee hives, and blankets the grain that birds near the
house scratch for. Along the road, a man, chop, chop, chop, chops
into a gnarled oak as a peasant drives his laden,
stumbling donkey into the white-frosted town. One benumbed
prodigal, clutching a wool cloak over his head
and shoulders, hurries home, eyeing the curls of smoke
drifting out the chimney, hearing the strains of
some earlier music that he was born remembering.



by Pam Warren

Message

by Dorothy Cosand

He had spent
his whole life
on the dimeless
end of a pay phone
shouting

Here I am!

Here I am!

and everyone
hanging up
mumbling

Hello?

Hello?

Uninvited Visitor

by Marilyn McCulley

That uninvited visitor has gone again
leaving guest towels as wrinkled
as furrows in my brow,
a larder empty of stockpiled food now
stuck to China dreams dirty in the sink.
Yet he's hidden bread and butter gifts—
a blue flower in the planter, a belt
with an extra notch, a cake
candled even heavier—part of his
intent to add on each year until
the reclaiming of gathered gifts.

Train Away

by Pamela Johnson

Foop.

molten steel
gushing into
and out back.

I am the blur,
exigüe—exigüe—gone—

so
wrap the sweater tighter
toss the chin up
as naked black
silts
to sticky cement.
I am waiting
somewhere
starless.

. . . and
my glossy Newsweek
coldens . . .

I will leave,
but just one more
train away,

or two.

Inopportunity

by Ruby Stevens

Death is
curfew timed . . . De
lib-er-ate-ly . . . to wait
until I'm not ready to say:
"Lights out."

Vision

by Michael Byington

Long silken hair melts.
Her soft form flows as water.
Water drains quickly.

December 7

by Laura Content Peck

The other day when strangeness came to our house
Slipping inside with coral-dusted feet
Banging doors, whispering, stumbling with purpose.

Touseled hair gleamed chestnut about your middy-blouse
You clutched a letter Father sent from Pacific heat
The other day when strangeness came to our house.

He griped about the food, and rain, and wished for grouse
Under glass. Teasing us about that and the snow and sleet
Banging doors, whispering, stumbling with purpose.

Sunday morning we dressed gaily, you in chartreuse
I in rose-pink, and walked to church thinking of Father's fleet
The other day when strangeness came to our house.

News broke of Pearl Harbor, and long-pressed fears arouse
Hurry us home to wait for news and shiver to winter bleak
Banging doors, whispering, stumbling with purpose.

Watching from the sea, ships in ordered rows
You see the final harbor and feel the burning heat
The other day when strangeness came to our house
Banging doors, whispering, stumbling with purpose.

Portrait of a Family

by Judy Sasse

A silent spring touched by soft
Silk brought forth its gift. Wrapped in rounded
Folds of pink over supple
Ribbioned creases of tiny toes— And
Brushed finger tips that climbed
The air in jerky steps— counted by deep
Brown iris stirred in flecks of
Onyx— and straight black hair fallen
Soft and fine upon Mother's breast,
Often-touched flowers blossom
Into stalks grown pliant green.

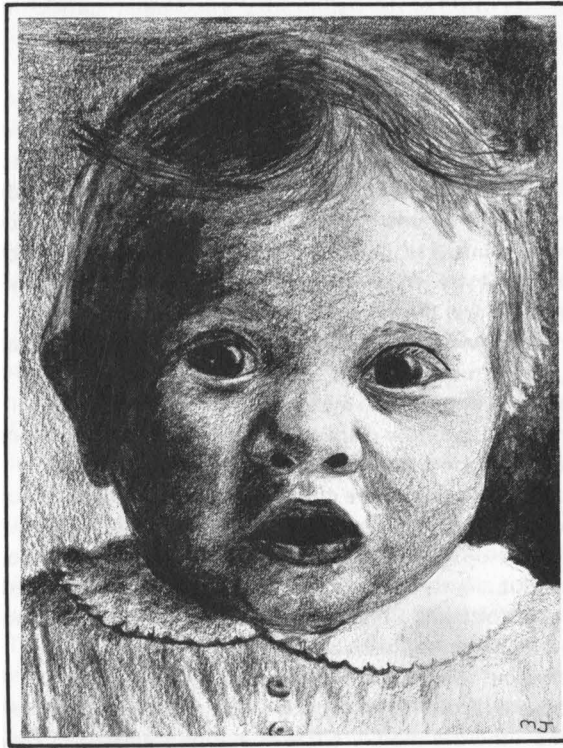
The son of two, downed in
Different-direction soft brown curls
Catered to a small heart-shaped
Face, lifted onto rose lips soft and small
Arch-shaped nose, spun on scents of
Devilry, keeps his rounds
In brown eyes, dancing.

III

The eldest, a child of restraint,
Reaches arms long for butterfly wings, honey-
Bee clover and night-glow of
Earthworms. Treasuring each, he settles
Upon a wooden, chain-linked
Swing, tucks long slender legs and pushes
To heights of toe-touched mushroom
Clouds and fluttering leaves. Aglow
With excitement, he runs to share
With brown eyes shining and they count
The treasures, one by one.

IV

Father, rough around
A shaven jaw and soft brown behind
Black rimmed glasses, quietly
Stands in broad-shoulder shadows settled
On stomach rounded. His regal bearing
Sends patterned waves brushed long standing
On soft fur-bled yoke of lion's mane.



V

Mother, with brown hair curled too
Tightly about her head, stands enchanted
By jewels of dancing light on
Scarlet rose petals lain against smooth
Fair skin, pulls with arms long
To meadows of sunshine and legs that
Skip in step to games of ring-
Around-the rosy and to peals of
Laughter showered on bouncy
Children's heads, and together they roll
In beds of clover-turned giggles.

VI

They weave a pattern of white-
Silver lattice-laced window panes, tinted
With reflections of great-
Grandmother's smiling face and sounds
Of new-born progeny.

Market Women

by Emmanuel Onuegbe

Mother sold cosmetics and brightly coloured damask wrappers in stall A7, line 15, of the Abanga main market. There must have been eight dozen other women selling the same wares, all of them devilishly shrewd and deep locked in the fiercest kind of competition one can imagine. But, in spite of themselves, they were galvanized into a stone-walled guild that helped keep profits.

As a kid of five my routine was simple: morning school, the noon trip to mother's market stall, and the evening trip back home.

One day, on my way back from school, a bigger nine year old stopped me on noticing the big mark of 'good' I had on my slate.

"Hey you little imp, do you mean you are very clever?"

"Yes," I replied, proudly displaying the big mark of 'good' on my slate. "I will show this mark of 'good' to my mother in the market."

"Alright, if you think you are clever, tell me the main rivers of Africa."

That was cheap. As a kid of three, Mother taught me the sing-song: "The rivers of Africa are Nile, Niger, Senegal, Congo, Orange, Limpopo, Zambezi." I sang it perfectly. But clearly bent on humiliating me, the girl replied: "Fool, what about Hadeija and Volta and Benue?" She was in class three, me in class one, we were clearly unmatched in sophistication.

She pressed on: "Sing the Lakayana song."

"See me Lakayana with my spear—with my spear—the spear which the old man gave me—the old man—". It was a song the teacher taught us barely two days before and, naturally, I derailed now and again.

"It's all right, stop murdering that song!" she yelled. "You're just swaggering about for nothing. Why, you don't even know the simple Lakayana song. Shame!"

She crooked her right hand and gave me a hard knock on the head. While I sobbed, she narrated the story of my foolhardiness to one of her classmates.

"Do you not know those things from the boy's school?" asked her peer, "they fly everything above their heads like a flag. Just imagine that mu-mu." She turned round and shouted into my ears "mu-mu," meaning that, in spite of the big 'good' on my slate, I was dumb in the head.

I sobbed on right into my mother's market stall. Mother was worried, but she first tried to cuddle me and wipe out my tears with the loose end of her cloth.

"My tiger why do you cry, why, the teacher gave you a big 'good'. I will buy you some bean cakes for that—but tell me first of all why you cry."

"Nkechi, Nkechi spanked me."

"Did you call her names?"

"No Mama, she said I did not deserve this bold mark of 'good' the teacher gave me. She said I cannot even sing the Lakayana song."

"Elewe my good mother!" Mother exclaimed, "how can anyone expect you to know the song by heart? Is Nkechi your teacher?"

"Mama Osita, Mama Osita" (she called out to Osita's mother who sold joj shawls in stall A8 directly opposite). Mama Osita dashed across to answer the call.

"You see Mama Osi, they want to kill my child."

"Who?" asked an exasperated Agnes, whose son was Osita, was called Mama Osita, clasping both hands across the chest.

"Ah, it's that girl whose mother is Queen of England and whose father is Zik of Africa," Mother replied.

"Who?"

"It's Nkechi, the one whose mother sells imported lace in stall B20, line 18."

"Ha ha, like mother like daughter!" exclaimed Agnes as if she drew an unmistakable inference.

At this point a smart young nurse in clean hospital uniform stepped into Mother's stall and greeted everyone.

"Welcome my daughter." Older women usually called younger women their daughters.

"Thank you Madam, please do you sell Binta powder?"

"Oh yes I have the imported one as well as the one made in Nigeria."

"I do not mind where it comes from so long as it's good." The nurse was unbiased. Most young girls in town preferred imported perfumes to the locally made ones. This was partly because local industries were still in their infancy and also due to the incipient infection which made many people echo the distaste for locally made goods simply because one of their peers loathed such products. In all these, the market women maintained strict ideological neutrality; their business after all was to make profit. Mother looked into the eyes of her customer and read patriotism. And she pounced on it.

"Sure sure my daughter, Binta powder is Binta powder, be it made in Kano or Lagos or Timbuctoo."

"How much do you sell it?" the nurse asked.

"Just nine shillings and sixpence."

"Do you accept six and sixpence?"

"Oh no my daughter."

"O.K. take seven shillings for it."

"My daughter you have tried to bargain hard, but Binta powder sells for nine shillings. But I am ready to back down to eight shillings and sixpence."

"That's too much money still; can't you settle for seven shillings and sixpence?"

"Well, my daughter I will not waste your time singing about the qualities of Binta powder. The least price is eight shillings."

The nurse tossed the tin of Binta powder in her hand, admired the picture of the mysteriously beautiful girl, Binta, and then paid for it.

"I know you will always patronize my stall," mother told her customer as if to sow tomorrow's crops today.

"For sure" replied the customer, "I will buy a lot of goods as soon as they pay us our Ani arrears."

"So they have not paid you people the Ani arrears?" Mother asked as if she had not read about the recent disputes in the papers.

"No, mama they haven't."

"Elewe my good mother!" Mother exclaimed, "this Nigeria—hm—this Nigeria—hm (she sighs) everyday committee—everyday committee—will poor workers eat committee."

"Mama that is the way things are" the nurse replied to her newly found sympathizer. She may not have known that many women, including my mother, were irritated by the callousness of hospital workers who left their patients squirming helplessly in hospital beds all in the name of a work-to-rule action for more pay. "We go on night duty, we carry corpses, we carry shit but we starve. Others merely sit behind long desks, attend committee meetings, speak long verbose English, and ride in long Mercedes sedans."

"Hmn—this Nigeria—" Mother moaned shaking her bowed head in feigned compassion. But it did work. Before she left the nurse bought a few yarns of damask cloth and a dozen pieces of Premier soap.

"Mama Osita" Mother called out again to Agnes who, not wanting to be seen loafing about while Mother made her money, had since gone back to her own stall. She came.

"As I was saying, Mama Osi," Mother started her story again, "my tiger has been ill for three days now and only manages to get himself to school. Now this daughter of the Queen has tried to spank off the remaining thread that holds his life."

"Its sickens me" Agnes complained, "that these days rich people tell their children: 'go out to the streets, hunt for trouble; our money will save you, it sickens me.'"

"Well, riches or no riches they don't feed anyone else. At least they don't feed me," Mother replied.

"No wonder they say that wuru-wuru money makes the loudest noise," concluded Mama Osi.

By talking about wuru-wuru money Mama Osi alluded to a rumour that was widespread throughout Abanga market: Nkechi's mother sold her lace at rockbottom prices because her husband, a stevedore at the Apapa quays, always made sure some of his wife's goods circumvented the customs and therefore paid minimal duties.

"That is what Dr. Zik has been saying in the newspapers. We shall never get anywhere with this kind of wuru-wuru." Moma Osita concluded her sermon.

"It's all their business, how they make their money," Mother said. Then as if to emphasize fatalism she opened her left palm to her listener: "you see its all here (she touches the bold marks on the palm), right here; if God wishes you well, you will get your garri wuru-wuru or no wuru-wuru."

Another customer, this time an older woman, cut short Mother's philosophizing and demanded six yards of block print material.

"Don't you have block print made in Holland?"

"I have locally made ones" Mother replied.

"I want imported material, not these local things they make in Ajamu. The

other day I bought some material and washed it only once. But, my fellow woman, if I tie it round my waist you would mistake me for a lunatic."

"Well," mother replied, cautiously gauging the emotions of her customer like a barometer.

"Its Holland or nothing," the customer kept emphasizing.

"Sure customer, you're right. Our people have to improve a bit more on quality. As for imported block print, that's scarce."

Mother told the truth. Block print material from Holland was scarce because Government imposed high tariffs and smaller import quotas on imported wrappers. Many importers had since suspended orders and those who had precious old stock hoarded them.

"Could you wait for three more weeks?" Mother asked, "our Union has sent a delegation to Dr. Zik; maybe, he might grant the U.A.C. higher quotas."

"My fellow woman" replied the customer, "I wish you well with your U.A.C. and your Dr. Zik. Run your country the way you want. But my daughter weds on Sunday, and I must go to that wedding in block print imported from Holland. Period."

"Elewe my good mother!" Mother exclaimed, "sit down good customer, count out your cool forty pounds, you will have what you want in a minute."

The customer was all action. She dipped her hands into her brazier and drew out a wad of red notes and counted forty out of them. Mother collected the money, took leave of her customer, went into the inner stall and hurriedly scribbled a small missive which she tucked along with thirty three pounds into an envelope.

"My tiger" she called me, "go give this envelope to Mama Oke in stall A19; she knows what to do."

I ran immediately to Mama Oke's stall and, on reading the note, she opened a large trunk full of imported block prints and wrapped up one for me. I dashed back.

"Sharp kid," Mother's customer complimented me "my son you are sharp."

"But he looked sallow a few moments ago" she added turning to my mother.

"Well, you know the kids too well. Sometimes they fight at school—this one came back today with a face as ugly as a rain cloud."

"Why?"

"He said a nine year old girl beat him up."

"But why?" asked Mother's customer, "they are not mates. That girl must be very cruel" Mother's customer patted me gently on the shoulder and then handed me a five shilling note which I declined to accept. She persuaded and persuaded but I still declined her offer.

"I am no longer a stranger here" she pleaded, "as from today, your mother is my good friend. So she won't chide you. Take it and buy some crayons and chalk."

"Take it" Mother cut in at last, I took it. Then they spent a couple of minutes chatting about the rains, about the harvests, about the marriage and

about the workers unrest. As she rose to go, Mother's customer wiggled her waist as if trying to do the famous Ajasa dance.

"Oyoyo" Mother saluted, "oyoyo nwanyi (beautiful woman), I am very happy for you."

"Guess what, I shed a pound last night pondering how on earth I would go to Daughter's wedding not dressed in fine imported block print. All these foul mouthed women of Abango would just spread the news of my wretchedness. But now people will know that I am neither dead nor rotten." She wiggled her buttocks again and then departed.

"Oyoyo" Mother acclaimed once more.

Osita's mother came back for the third time.

"Clever devil where did you get the block print?" she asked.

"Its—a—secret" Mother replied with a broad smile on her face.

"Lucky cat, God put your prey into your mouth—how much did you make on it?"

"Agnes, to God who made me, I made only seven pounds on it."

"Only seven pounds?" Agnes asked, "today block print is gold. Don't you want money?"

"I want money but my late father said that he would rather eat the entrails of a chicken but live ever after than glut to death on a whole bull. This customer is a serious one, she will be regular.

"You are right my fellow woman" Osita's mother conceded.

"You see, the other day Mama Ngozi told me that she made fifteen pounds profit on a piece of block print (they whistle). Well, I asked her to think about tomorrow: God willing, restrictions might be eased and block print will again be common as gwanjo cloth. At that time we would have to cajole these customers. For me, I will also rather have a small chicken for dinner—"

"The proverb says chicken entrails" Mother cut in.

"My grandfather usually talked about eating chicken, not the entrails" replied the other market sage. They argued a bit about the precise wordings of the proverb and then rose to go to Mama Nkechi's stall.

"Mama Nneka" Mother called out to the woman in stall A9, the stall adjacent to ours.

"Eh, can I help you" the other called back.

"Please look after my stall. I will be back in a minute."

The three of us departed for Mama Nkechi's stall. And by the time we arrived, Mother's anger had completely evaporated—maybe because of the time lapse, but certainly due to a good day's business. Even Mama Nkechi appeared calmer and more humble than people often gave her credit for.

"I have good news for everybody" Nkechi's mother shouted as she jumped to her feet.

"What news?"

"The two thirty news says the Ani salary and wage increases have been approved."

There could be no gladder tidings. For two months, Public Service workers and government had been haggling over wage increases and arrears and Justice

Oga Ani was asked to arbitrate. Now that the once stalled talks had reached a happy ending, boom was imminent—though not necessarily in favour of the workers.

“God is gracious!” Mama Osita exclaimed and then heaved a sigh of relief. “As from today, my Binta powder sells for ten shillings, my Sambeya pom-made sells for five shillings (hitherto it sold for only four and three pence).”

“Ah!” it was my mother taking her turn, “My local damask is now twenty pounds, not eighteen.”

“And me too! exclaimed Nkechi’s mother, I have been throwing away my lace for seven pounds a yard; as from today it sells for ten pounds a yard.” Whether Mama Nkechi would stick to her resolve was another question. Who knows, when the wuru-wuru goods start streaming in, she might back down. In any case there was a consensus, even if momentary, that prices should go up.

The three women chatted heartily and after the petty conspiracy, Mother and Agnes rose to go. It was at this point that Mother hinted (as an after thought), that Nkechi spanked me on my way back from school.

“No wonder she has avoided my stall throughout today. She merely dropped in to say she would go to choir practice. Alright, I will strangle her when she comes back.”

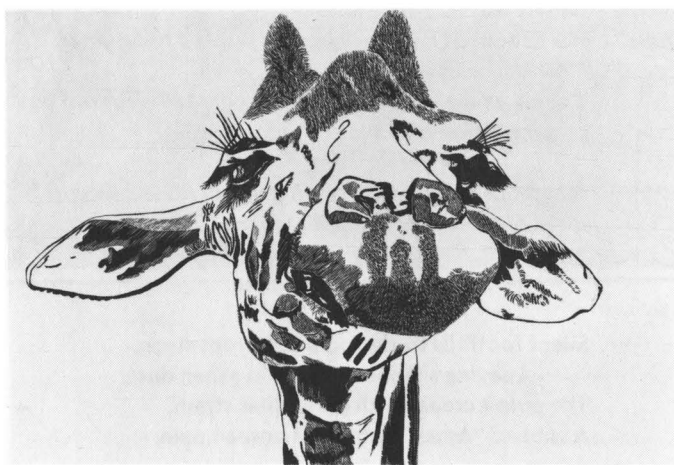
“No, don’t do that.” Mother pleaded.

“I swear I will bury that brute of a girl.”

“Don’t do that” Mother continued pleading.

“Alright, I will not beat her” compromised the irate Mama Nkechi,” but I will pinch her ears and ask her to tell me what sane girl goes about beating up little A B C children.”

Mother’s anger was completely assuaged. As we walked back to her stall, we saw other groups of women. They too were having their own petty conspiracies; the Ani arrears had come and any trader worth her salt should reap a boom out of it.



by Mary Spicer

The Inevitable?

by Heidi Robson

face, creased with abstract
tic-tac-toe lines,
softened by a frizzled cloud
of ancient down,
leaning for support upon
the strength of work-gnarled fingers;
 what clutch me are
 your eyes—
 luminous depths of unanswered echoes
 behind thick lenses which
 only serve
 to
 magnify
 the emptiness.

Searching

by Jim Karas

Waxen ivy searches the walls of a crumbling limestone church,
 Clawing, clasping, scratching for hold.
Tainted stainedglass shatters echoes of countless rituals,
 A muted witness to craven growth.
It creeps web infested cracks and wormeaten molding,
 Leaving fragile trails of twilight shadows.

A figure, long and grey as the eve-tide shadows,
 Pushes open rotting doors.
His calloused hand reaches for crusted holy water,
 As he enters the ruins.
Gazing at skeleton pews, once richly saddled with boyhood life,
 He mumbles silent words.

A mahogany pulpit, cloaked in dust-woven hairshirt,
 Shudders from lingering shafts of light.
A candleless altar bears its naked shell,
 To a choir of earthen rubble.

Silent footfalls trudge up priest-worn steps,
 Leaving shapeless prints in ashen dust.
The pulpit creaks with unfamiliar strain;
A sobbed "Amen" summons unseen pain.



by Linda LaMoyne Scott

Shadow Room

by Ann Carrel

How you fill that corner with your shadow.
You hang there, your back folded, edged inside
The wall's crease, your black print on this grey room
So familiar to me, Father—you can't hide here.
This space is much too empty, holding you
And dust and clouded evening, nothing more.

A child on a porch-swung morning, I hoped for more.
On the sidewalk near our house, I saw your shadow,
Heard your yearly footsteps, ran to meet you;
Your coat was open—I slipped my arms inside
And meant to catch you, meant to fill the shape here
Hanging in this dark, unfurnished room.

I've never found a lamp to light this room;
The light can't touch your darkness; your dark is more.
Somehow I gathered all your pieces here
And couldn't make a man—I made a shadow
Out of wood-light walks, arms I slept inside,
Hollow spaces in between each hint of you.

I've pinned the fragments of a smile on you.
They hang beside a stretch of beach with room
For you to catch a wave and dive inside,
Your kids laughing at you from the sand; but more,
I need more to smooth the outline of this shadow,
More of you than you left scattered here.

Forget the explanations why you left here;
You have no voice. I'm told a war destroyed you,
This from my mother, her eyes caught in shadow.
Returned from German prison camps with room
For nightmares, paper work and little more,
You could never clear a space for us inside.

I have a different battle here inside.
You have been my single prisoner since you left here,
Since the night you came into my room, no more
Than to ask for the song I used to sing with you—
Somehow I couldn't recall. We tried to touch in that room,
As we try now. But we are shadow.

I am my father's daughter, closed with you,
Closed here inside this dark, unfurnished room,
This room devoid of any more than shadow.

The Sower for Helen

by Judy Sasse

Come to the grasslands. Walk along the clover-tilled path. And move, further back into the shade that bends between the Twin Oaks; that stands at the site of this first house, built so long ago.

Run your hand along its cypress-knotted wood. Remember now, the struggle born to raise each beam fitted to the other, each night hewn to form this dwelling of four-cornered wise.

Follow your eyes. How they lift to a reddened clay roof molded to a delicate round by some shadow left of some time ago. It's hinged now, so quietly down, protecting these four walls. Don't leave now . . . The window panes of evergreen bear watching—through keeping her memory living in the tiny smoke curls that wisp the sky on some concert cloud, orchestrated now in deaf tones.

Sifted by the fog, a fragrance seeps through the empress wood. A faint knit of baked bread clouds the door—and we feel the garden crust sticking to our ribs.

Watching now, un-waiting, we see the squirrels chattering on some constant search of bright eyes. And let our gaze Wonder quickly to the white nest of cardinals on the twin oak wood that keeps there also the red jackets. Careful now, for they are busy doing, doing a last farewell before our clouded eyes.

And so we turn to see the flowers . . . an unusual garden variety . . . seeming to cast there shadows in a mist played in golden tones, unfit perhaps for listening. There, in the garden, we see the fallen fruit, soft and ripe . . . from petals blossomed just a short time ago.

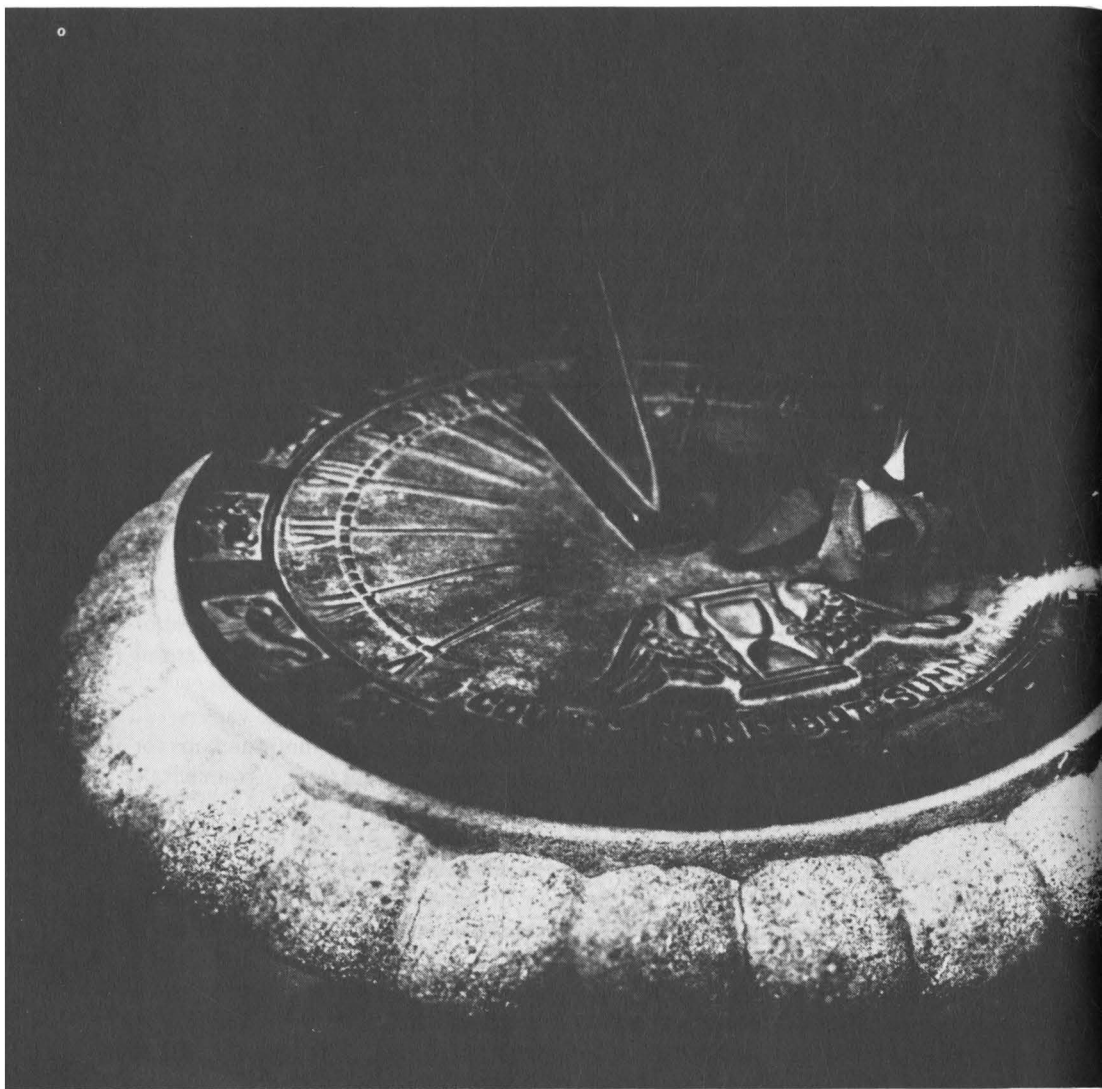
And From Here, notice the fields . . . Cut Down . . . There tassels blink a last farewell. We stay on—as she would want—and learn how harvesting and threshing is done. Down and up the rows of bleeding feet to crush the dry, swollen stalks and strap their vintage to a golden powdered dust . . . This we must also know.

And here, in the garden of living color, she sows for us a covering—spun on her thread; softened with her yellow flame. And waiting there the Lilies white breath form a wreath for her Return.

Haiku

by Enid Stover

tentative as star-
wishes in a spring evening—
this plum blossom cloud.



by Linda LaMoyne Scott

The Time of the Night and the Moon

by Kim Wilson

Forgive my voice if it takes
the tone of a scold.
I know you've noted it before,
but don't just sooth me
with a tickle of a smile
and turn to pick up the Hobbit again.

This offer wells
from what is real in me—
be it the calluses
on my toes, the whisper
of wind that moves through
the marrow of my bones,
or people and poetic lines
that tramp through my mind
twirling me in our sleep,
or maybe my skin
at the tip of your touch . . .
No matter—

Let us be like the
Five Chinese Brothers
and not give in to the reign of cruelty.
If you tire and feel you are drowning—
I will hold breath enough for both of us,
to walk the beauty of the ocean floor.
And they will wait for us to sink
like dead fish float on the water.
And if I begin to burn in their hot-brick oven—
will you come and stand beside me
and shade me for the rest I'll need?

I know, they will hold the torch waiting
for us to catch—
until it dwindles to their fists
and they will be consumed
with their burns—

but their reign will be quenched
in the coolness of what is natural
and right, like the time
of the night and the moon,
at the end of a heated noon.

I called her . . . Lady

by Judy Sasse

and we got along, the Missus
And I . . . over a cup of coffee.
Mostly, she blinked her yellow
Feline eyes, licked a white
Buried paw and welled
A pride around her mis-mused
Head. I couldn't explain
Her behavior—integrity wrapped
In Persian folds—but
On night lakes, when we were
Alone, it was enough to hold.

II

Then, He came
To mow where weeds
Had grown too deep, this
Night Neighbor of thin
Silver grey smile
And rent-to-white
Mist shirt. He tilted
Back the mower black blade
To cut the weeds too deep.

And long, He called to me,
That Here, my cat lay dead.
Too much, I Looked at her,
Now stiffened in warm colors.
. . . I could not remember where
Her life of lady had gone.
. . . To a better good now,
Her purr was not enough
To hold the weeds, deep grown.

III

And now, too many
Hours have passed, of sentiments
Plucked as feathers from a plumed
Peacock. And down, I rested
All my borrowed dreams.
And let it out,
This fallen mist to come
With some light of mourning
. . . when just barely seen,
A full-blossomed sleeve
Rising, rising its pinkened
Bell-petals on arms
That shielded another Face
. . . stitched to my own.
In the cool green
Blades of grass I lay
Down and felt against
My skin a faint whisper
Of lady . . . hushed to daisies white.

HELEN KELLER
for another Helen

by Marilyn McCulley

From utter darkness, that gifted teacher
tamed your animal wildness.
From the pump welled water in a gentle
sluice over your upturned hand.
For the hundredth time came the quick taps
from knowing fingers. Suddenly your features
arranged themselves into braille dots
of wonder and you knew.
Now once more aware, I wish that
from your place of deaf-mute silence,
with patience for my simplicity, you could
spell the meaning into my palms.

For Two Sons

by Ken Shedd

Pools without wrinkle, stilled
by sleep, I have never
seen such eyelids, so like
the lilac flower, nor heard
such breaths, as soft as moths.
Blind mirrors, in which
I see no face but hers,
perhaps in the fall, you
may touch a wrong—see
an absence, growing like
a tree beside you, memories
spreading ring on ring.
Though I want to fill
you with colors and swans,
the swans are gone. Still,
the lake remembers how
white they were. She learns
to hold them with her lights,
finding their shapes in a cloud.

Quilting

by Dorothy Cosand

—Oh Granny! Oh God! Everytime I lose something, someone else, you come back to haunt me. The shadow rocked quietly in the old rocking chair. Silver hair. Bifocals. Rocking in the kitchen of the old country house.

—I would fall down in the yard or the rooster would chase me and I would run crying to the house. You would take my hand and hold it tightly and say: “There there. Wipe away those tears. Here. Let’s go look at the quiltin’ squares. I was thinkin’ of a story for that yellow one you liked so well. We’ll see what you think of it. Yes, yes. That’s better. Here. Sit here . . .”

—Granny, you were forever quilting. Sewing the squares up for all your children, all your children’s children, all your children’s children’s children. You were slow though. Each one was special because for each square you would think up a story of the old days or an image or a special event . . .

“No, Child. These aren’t just quilts sewn up by a senile old woman, though,” you would laugh. “I’m not sayin’ I ain’t a little bit odd. But, no siree. Each square is a special one. While I’m sewin’ it in, I get a picture in my mind or I think of an old story. Like this one. This blue square. See. It’s a special color of blue. I’ve never seen that color anywhere else before, except in your Grandpaw’s eyes. I don’t spose you remember. But if you look real close you can see the sparkle in the material, just like his eyes. Look real close, Child . . .”

—I used to worry you would run out before you ran out of quilts. But you would shake your head and assure me. “I’ve got more pictures and stories than I’ll ever have squares for.” You never told anyone else your stories though, just me.

“I only tell ‘em to myself so I don’t get weary stitchin’. Sew my dress up in it. Ha ha! I done that once. No, no. I just tell ‘em to myself and the squares and then give the finished quilt to who I’m sewin’ it for. The squares remember and whisper to ‘em while the’re sleepin’. A special kinda gift. From soul to soul. I’m thinkin’.”

—You never got my quilt started. You had the squares but then you got sick. I came to see you. Pale white. Melted between the sheets. Smelling of sterilized death. “My my, Child. You’re growin’ up. Come here.” I bent over. We talked for awhile, until your eyes began to flicker with fatigue. I got up to leave. “Child.” You took my hand and looked far over my shoulder, then to my eyes. “Child. I’m thinkin’ you’re gonna have to make up your own quilt-square stories.” You squeezed my hand, then closed your eyes. I never saw you open your eyes again . . .

—Oh Granny . . . She laid quietly, her arm pressed across her eyes. Then abruptly, she leaped from the bed, went to the closet and threw open the door.

—It’s in here somewhere I know. Where though? What’s this? No. Here it is. She pulled out a shoebox and dropped to the floor. She closed her eyes for a moment then lifted off the lid. The box was full of squares, all the same size, a

multitude of colors. She turned the box over, dumped them out on the floor and began sifting through the pile.

— This one starts it. She laid a spring-green square carefully to one side.

— For her. What next? Granny, you don't mind? No, of course not. What next? This blue one? Yes. For the Colorado mountain stream I saw once. Walked in. Ice cold clear racing free over the rocks. Roarin yet peaceful. And this white one next. For the huge yellow-white moon hanging over the white rock country road that early July night. Stars. Night blue summer sky. Wandering in the country. The little creek under the bridge. Hmmm . . . how to start? I don't remember too well . . . I don't suppose it'd be too hard to find someone to show me how to do this again . . .



by Merry Johnson

And in The Time of A Dream

by Charles Linn

(To S.V.)

And in the time of a dream, where elm trees grew in warm summer days between bricken streets and old frame houses shrouded in early morning fog, through the echos of barking dogs long gone, and the aroma of dried leaves and old forest weeds I found him—the magic old man of my childhood days, his face alight with silver glasses and graying beard and he took my soft hand and said quietly, “Follow me.”

Square tubes of pink orange morning light dropped on the city through gray cloud stencils, and I looked as the old man pointed toward a blind woman who had fallen on the ice. All around her the people moved, and we marvelled at the blindness of those who could see, and the deafness of those who heard, and as I stepped to help her, the old man pressed my arm and said “Wait,” and through the bitter women, and the children who never smiled, and the men whose hearts were empty boxes, we saw the blind woman’s miraculous beautiful vision, for she picked herself up, laughing, and her life moved on.

And then the old man pulled me along the street by my muffler, and he turned me around, laughing, and scooted my heels to the curb’s very edge, and pushed me . . . and backward I fell into a bay of tall green rushes and we lounged there on our backs looking at the sky. Pastel clouds drifted on Great God’s brush, and our eyes followed His hands, and the old man spoke of my dreams saying, “My friend you are troubled,” and he pulled the sabled stick from my pocket and broke it, “for you long to paint the dreams, the dreams of your heart, and you try, with only the earthly pigments of want and longing. You have the finest home, and yet you cry for more and more, your stomach is full and yet you cry for more and more, you wear the best clothing and still your heart cries for more and more. And still you suffer each day, painting with pigments which cannot last, turning from the color God has offered you . . .”

And I sat up, and my eyes were blinded by a thousand white stone lambs, which lay in rows in the field, and the old man spoke sadly, saying, “and what one of these infants would trade, even the very heaven which you seek . . . just to have lived one of those days where you have caused yourself to suffer.”

I turned away, and the bay changed to ocean, and we walked along the beach. “You have never moved,” he said, stopping, and he waved his arms like wings.

“Unfurl you heart like a great sail, to catch all the love blowing as the wind on the sea. Do not be timid!!” And the wind rose against the old man’s face, and it beat the clothes on his body—then, it was calm just as suddenly, and he softly said, “It is always there, if you choose to take it. Then, let your love to others be strong in this way, and let it billow the sails of those you surround, giving them cargoes of goodness, and the power to do glorious things. And may your eyes shine like the sun into theirs, letting them grow, not like the lighthouse whose light only guards rocks, and warns, ‘do not come near.’”

“And see that in times of anger and spite that these sails come down, for

these are the jealous and fickle winds which drive the ship to ruin and collapse.

Then we walked through hills and plains, and somewhere two cellos played, speaking to each other in rhyme and prose, and in the wake of their silence, the trees gave a gust of applause. "Hear the music of the morning, and look at it's intent. It can sadden, but never anger, it can suggest, but never criticize, a song may lie, but it will never betray you. Catch this music in those basket ears and learn to play this tune. May your voice be such an instrument, phrasing so carefully, listening to itself. Be given to symphonies, and harmony, and let each mood make it's music, let each one play in it's own time and neighborhood, some for laughter, some for sadness, some for praising God and all His creation. Sing my friend to celebrate the rain coming down, and mice, living in the fields!! Sing for garbage cans and licorice sticks! Sing! Sing!!"

And he drew a great breath of air, and his cheeks grew red and he tilted his head back, sinking to one knee, shaking his silver locks and sang, sounding no more a mortal than any creature of the wild. The sound rolled down the valley and then back again, touching, touching the earth like a featherduster. And so did his song love the earth.

And he picked up a stone with his hands and said, "Your life shows great promise, so build it strong, with truth the mortar, binding the many stones—your friends and loves, your travels and times. Build it to the Lord, as a great Cathedral, reaching toward heaven, it's quantity a symbol of the depth of your love. Let it be intricate, to show your style, and the many ways you are ready to turn for Him."

"Leave it open to all, yet guard it from those who seek only plunder, and those again who could never understand your rites. Be careful of the mortar, and make it a part honesty, a part faith, and of course, three parts love," he said smiling, "for I have seen the greatest cathedrals fall for too little faith or love. Oh, how many loved and longed to be bound together, but it could not be, for between them, there was too little truth."

His eyes filled with water, at this, and he said, "Let your tears in times of sadness be prisms, filling your eyes with color, reminding you of the miracles which cannot arise without the light . . ."

He mopped his eyes. "Ah, that's better." He shook his handkerchief, and a bit of green air fern drifted to the ground like lint. I picked it up.

"You are at times like the fern, growing slowly in the cool and damp, where you are comfortable. Yet you long to lay down your roots, to grow fast and tall. Seek a simple life my friend, with a simple food as this fern. Look at the grasses. They are beautiful, and yet when the plains grow dry, how will they move? The roots which supported them now hold them fast, and grip them to their death. The roots which nourished them now tap an earth which is dry, and clutch them 'til they starve.'"

"Our passions thusly grow at times, entangling us, weaving a potbound frame of mind. As a plant grows lavishly, it's roots grow secretly sick, and so often our active lives hide a consciousness below the surface which grows to a tight, tangled mess, too deep and too far away to see, which in time, strangles us until we, like the plant, may grow no more . . ."

And then I grew very tired, and in the dusk I slept. Blue eyed romantics filled with tears the large drive-in movie screen, which seemed to loom before me in my dreams, and then I awoke with the terror, the total isolation and loneliness. It seemed six in the morning, and through the ashes and smoke, the independence and movement of other lives around me became frighteningly real. And I knew when I died, it would be from sleeping through the sunset, and rushing into the darkness, only to find the other lives had moved on, and left me alone. Oh how I wished I could clutch their essence to my heart and hold it close, to me—I had wanted to make my love wide and infinite, like a piece of the sea, rushing to meet every shore, to kiss every soul. Yet now I found myself drained and dry, longing to touch shores, but barely able to make them wet.

Then the old man appeared one more time, and he bent over my body, touching my heart. He opened his black bag and took out a brass ring, saying, "I love you my friend, and this ring is my gift to you. Hold it for awhile, observe it's qualities, and then pass it on to another, and let that person hold it too, and then let him pass it on to another and another, so in time through this ring the whole world will come to touch and feel a love which started between you and I."

"Then, take this little book. There's a bit of writing in it, but the blank pages, they only mean there is a future, and the rest of the book—that you must write yourself."

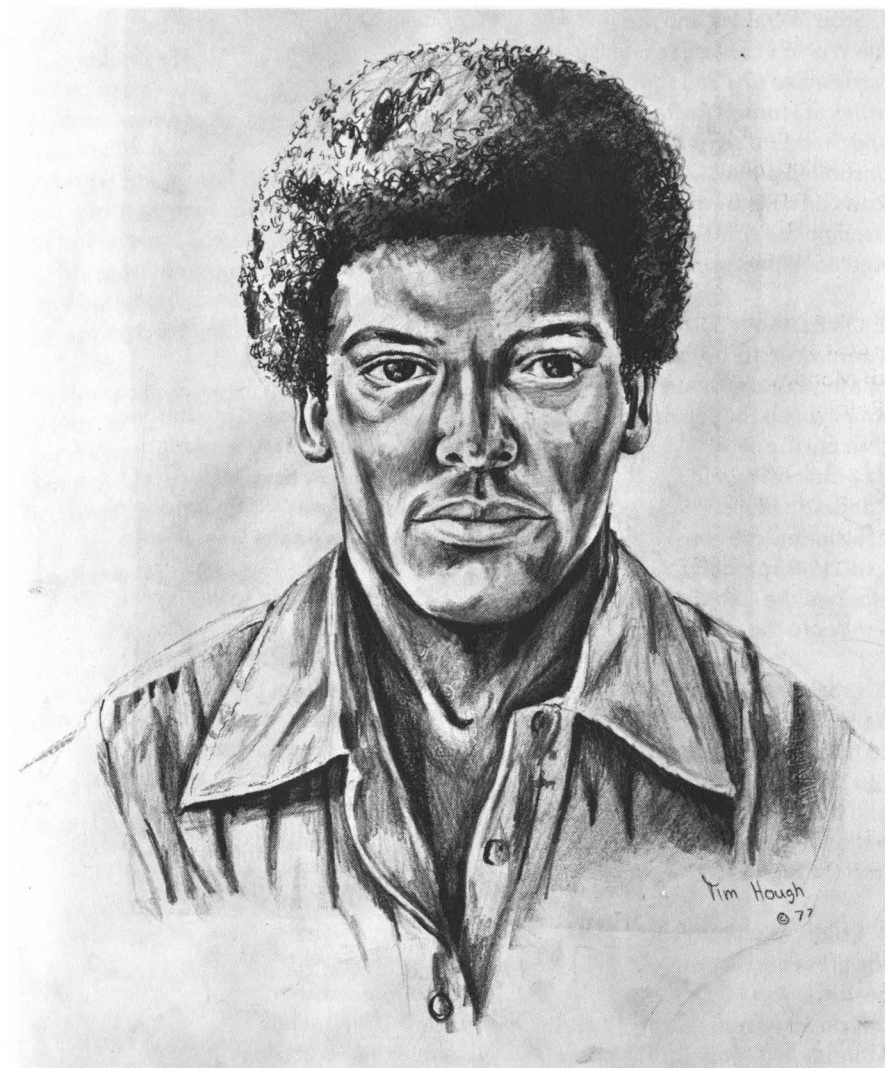
"And for your sensitive and hurting heart, I have no prescription, for as the heart feels no pain, so does it feel no joy, and only to the degree that you cry when I am gone did you ever love me . . . and I, like the others, am only a friend . . ."

And so through the fog and barking dogs and early morning light, the old man faded away, and then, the dream was done.

Kansas Free Fair, 1944

by Marilyn McCulley

As heads turn to "The Caissons go rolling along,"
Two abreast tanks roll the six lane
Boulevard with advance cops on motorcycles shrieking
Importance. Phalanxes of troops thrump by,
Khaki rifles replacing golden shields. Small town
Bands goosestep strident marches to usher in
The jeeps. Cows and pigs retreat into
State corrals where they give themselves prizes
On their Aryan ancestry. Victory garden patriots lob
Corn into jars and shell enough peas to vanquish
The foe. The merry-go-round and ferris wheel "shout
Out their orders so loud and clear" that I allow
Military strength and midway light to blend for longer
Than it takes the broncho buster to bite dust.



by Tim Hough

Inter-state

by Jennifer Deweese

1. Stop in Oakley and see
the World's Largest Prairie Dog,
rattlesnake pits and souvenir jewelry:

Miles of Horne's Restaurants
and Standard signs defend
unspoiled plains:

Rows on rows of wire fence
strangle the cornfields turned to dust
And no-name towns mark the miles to Kansas City.

2. On Eastbound I-70

Tuesday floats by the wake
of Monday afternoon
Raining and the sun can't cut
thru my fog of
day-old-coffee and
Kanorado blues.

Cruisin' Vascar cop
exit-119-turnaround
stopped the Georgia pinto
5 miles to the border.

3. Country music stations blare
ballads twanging midwest tribute
to truck driver queens:

The heartburn from Salina
and beer in Ogallah
bake the gas station's parched remains
into the highway's level night.

4. Colors compromise
the greys and browns of
prairie towns I
left on Sunday night for
Monday afternoon in barrooms
filling the emptiness with booze
while Kansas farmers talked of crops.

5. Wicker rockers
cradle the barren: Grandfather
remembers stories: **working
road gangs to pave Main Street,
Holton, Kansas a fine, steppin'
black horse on the 50-mile-ride.**

6. Memories yield to yellow lines
upon the road. Heart
as dull and faded as the land
marks time from Denver —
forgotten towns strung in days on a map
650 miles: door-to-door
counting the hours in tanks of gas,
empty pop bottles.

7. Mrs. Wilkerson
puts on the tea
3:a.m. Can't sleep
in the heat of
Wichita summers:
static radio sends
thoughts scattering
tumbleweeds over
crusted cemeteries of
prairie-dog-towns:
Cat crawls back
to the spare tire
watching me light a pipe
21 miles from Kiowa.

8. Thoughts ajar:
speed wires night
in neon hotel signs
looking for a bed.
Whistle-Stop-Motel linemen roll
great iron serpents over miles
of unleavened wheatfields
to bring Mr. Perkins the soy
he wanted last week
for spring planting.

9. Time softens
daydreams: familiar signs
proclaim the crossing
Sunrise beckons shadows
to fields and fences

I will not settle here.

10. In the heartlands
words are far apart
as the people.
Mornings go deeper
to warm the roots of
Northrup grasses
and yawning wheat
Where the day falls
on rusted weathervanes
and sun-pleated barns
The eye eternalizes
its vision.



by Ed Guydos

Love Poem #7

by Megan Marks

When continents
stood bare, unpeopled
and the ocean
of winds
rippled the deserts —
when bone
and land was rough,
rusted,
dyed by the sands
to pink and orange,
warmed by the hot,
incredible geysers,
stripped to the muscle
and plunge of rivers,
sometimes —

the sun on your denim
thigh, the car window
pinkness of Colorado
Wyoming and Kansas,
the feeling of passage,
speed, desolation —
the primeval splits in the rock,
the couches of moss
around them — won't you come
lie down

to the muscle, the rush,
the bare-scraped
bone and tendon of feeling,
the same course and currents
of the land.

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