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TOUCHSTONE

A MAGAZINE OF CREATIVE ARTS

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MANHATTAN, KS.
WINTER, 1975

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Doorway In Winter
Ted Munger

THE QUILT

Laura Penland

I watched my grandma piece a quilt, one winter,
First caught by shining needle and colored cloth,
Entranced by stories of each piece she added —
Me, caught by thread, a diary through time.

The pattern was the Texas Star that grew
From center out, like ripples on a pond —
So rings of winter darkness became springs,
and jewelled summers muted into falls.

That quilt is long since finished. Now my own
Sits framed and waiting, pieced for memory.
Though I knew stories of each piece, like Grandma,
No children ever saw or came to hear.

A CHRISTMAS OFFERING

Ann Carter

It wasn't any typical bus ride, going home that Christmas. When we got to the station, the bus was late. So there we stood waiting, Ruth and Fred and a girl who worked in food service and me. I was staring around, and I began to think it was true what people said, that a bus station was like a miniature freak show. There were two guys dressed like they belonged in a circus, anyway, and a woman who sure would have qualified for the "Fattest Woman in the World" tent. There was a hunchback there, too. He was very short, shorter than me, maybe Ruth's height, and it seemed like I'd seen him before but I couldn't remember where. He had warts on his face, I remember, and was pretty much altogether strange-looking. He was standing by a seated girl, who was holding a kitten. She was petting the kitten and talking to the man. I was ashamed that she could talk to him like any other person. I was close enough to hear her say that she'd found the cat on the restroom floor, like someone had just ditched it. The hunchback petted the cat and I stepped closer.

"Are you going to keep the cat?" I asked, looking at the man enough so that it would seem to include him in the conversation. The girl looked up and smiled, and asked me if I wanted it, and I thought then that there was something strange about her too. I can't describe what it was, except that she had a funny way of moving her mouth when she talked.

"No," I said. "I just wanted to make sure you weren't going to dump it."

She said, no, that she'd take him home, and she started to describe her parents' reaction when she brought home yet another animal. It seemed she already had three cats and a St. Bernard, and she was explaining the cramped conditions of her room when a tall, middle-aged lady rushed up to us.

"I see you've found the cat," she said, smiling, as if we'd picked it up to amuse ourselves as one would pick up a cute baby out of its cradle. "I let him down in there to run around a little. I thought I should have told someone about him." And with a broad smile still spread across her face, she scooped up the kitten, dropped him in a cloth bag, and walked away. I thought it was rather like the way a woman would stuff away her knitting, but I hadn't seen the kitten protest, so I guessed it was O.K. She had seemed like a nice lady.

By the time the bus arrived there were probably 20 of us waiting. The driver came inside, and we all moved out, I guess in hopes of getting a seat in case it was crowded. Ruth and Fred started talking, and I glanced around and saw the hunchback standing on the other side of me. I smiled and said something about it being cold. He answered with some friendly comment that I don't remember and offered me a cigarette. I shook my head and didn't say much more, but then he didn't answer at all, and I thought that was a little impolite on his part. I wondered if he would sit by me on the bus and I didn't

want it. That made me feel ashamed again, but I looked up towards Fred and tried to get back into the conversation.

When the bus driver finally reappeared, he looked at us and said curtly, "You don't need to stand out here—there aren't any seats on the bus anyway."

So we all wearily trooped back in, me and Ruth and Fred and the food service girl staying near the door. I guess we felt they'd get us seats somehow. I couldn't stand the thought of going back to the dorm. It seemed a small wish, to want to be home for Christmas as soon as possible, and I was getting upset that it was getting so hard. I shifted my weight and found that one rubber sole was stuck to the dirty floor. It could have been three weeks' worth of spilled Coke and who knows what else. I lifted my feet up every few minutes after that, and I wondered if the floor would spot my luggage.

The deformed man was wandering around, his face uplifted, staring at everyone. That stare was sort of penetrating, and I didn't see anyone return it. I wanted to tell him to mind his own business, to stop acting like he belonged in every conversation. But I felt sorry for him too. He was just going from group to group, and no one would look at him.

I knew that I sure didn't want to stay in that bus station much longer, but I guess no one else did either, because when the same bus driver came back in and said he supposed we could stand all the way if we wanted to, we all crowded back out and onto the bus.

We filled the whole aisle from back to front. The food service girl was somewhere behind me, Ruth was standing right in front of me, and Fred was probably still on the sidewalk, reminding himself to pick up his spare tire. A boy offered me his seat, but I didn't take it. I don't know what happened to the hunchback and the girl who found the kitten. I never saw them get on or get off, but I think they must have ridden on that bus.

Maybe part of my feeling was the relief of finally knowing I was on a bus headed home; anyway, it seemed like a real fun experience then, standing up in the aisle. I set my small bag down and opened the box of Christmas cookies a friend had given me that afternoon. "A survival kit for the trip home," she had told me, though the ride didn't take more than two hours. I wasn't at all hungry but nervous enough to want to eat anyway. I took a cookie and passed the box to Ruth and the other girl. They both took some, and then it didn't seem right not to offer them to the others sitting around us. I sort of wanted to, too, since I was getting in a party mood. Nobody else took any, though, and I was a little disappointed. Everyone should eat at a party. But they seemed real friendly, so I was glad I offered. I noticed Ruth had accepted an orange section from the boy sitting on her right, and then he accepted an apple from her. He smiled and said a timid thank-you, so timid it seemed unnatural for his age, but nice. The boy who had offered me his seat on the way in had been nice like that. I hoped I hadn't hurt his feelings by saying no, I'd rather stand. I looked at the two girls sitting on one side of me. The one by the window was talking to the other, her face bright with a child-like happiness. I watched her, and how she moved her mouth, and I looked at the young boy with the apple again, and I guess it was then that I realized that they were retarded too. Much of the bus, I think, was

filled with retarded kids, a little younger than me. Perhaps on a Christmas outing. They certainly looked happy.

The bus started with a jolt, and Ruth and I both grabbed to keep from falling backwards. I noticed the girl by the window look up and smile at our sudden motions. It did seem funny, riding out of town, our right arms stretched out above us, hanging onto the luggage racks. I thought of a deodorant commercial I'd seen on TV and laughed to myself.

"It's working," I shouted at Ruth, and she started laughing when she remembered the commercial too. I was glad this wasn't just an ordinary bus trip. I'd have something funny to tell my family.

I turned and watched the girl by the window write a letter. Her writing was big and clumsy. I watched her write another few words and then she paused and looked up at the row of standers. Her eyes moved slowly all the way to the front of the line and then all the way to the back. A smile grew on her face until she seemed to be beaming.

"You know what would be funny?" she asked me and the girl sitting beside her. "If the first person fell back," she said, pointing to the row in the aisle, "and then one by one each of you fell back until you were all down on the floor." She moved her hand back and down to show the falling dominoes effect. I laughed for her sake, thinking that it wouldn't be all that funny. She was still smiling when I looked away, up to the windows that reflected two soldiers sitting on the other side of me. They were really almost lying down, like they had been trying to sleep. I turned enough to get a glance at them without being obvious. They looked pretty innocent, lying there with their eyes almost closed, their haircuts making them look younger than they probably were. I heard one of them move and when I looked around they were talking. Something about going to my hometown over the weekend for a vacation. That got to me a little because I had never thought of it as a place for a vacation. And here they were, talking like it was some great destination. I kind of felt like asking them if they knew anyone there, but I didn't. I heard them laugh and for some reason I thought they were laughing at me. And I was glad my purse was on the other side of me, and I could check it from time to time.

It wasn't long then until I could tell we were close to home. The radio towers made bright lights in the night sky, and then I saw the building tops, and then the ride was getting jerky again as we got into town. We went past several hotels and I wondered what the soldiers had planned for their vacation.

Then we were pulling into the small station, the bus slowing and straining at the slight incline. When it stopped, we all just stood there, and if the driver hadn't ordered all the standing people off to clear the aisle, I suppose we might have stood there another five minutes. I hurriedly set down my box and bag to pull my hat on tighter because I could feel it slipping off. Then I quickly grabbed my stuff and edged out of the bus with the rest of the travelers. Ruth's relatives were there to meet her, I could see as I set down my bag, and I watched them talking a few minutes, thinking how Ruth looked so different from her sisters.

I guess it was when I started to get my checked luggage that I realized I

didn't have my box of cookies. I thought about not bothering to find them, but that didn't seem very loyal to my friend, so I mumbled an explanation to the driver and scrambled up the steps. The bus was pretty well cleared by then, and I could see way back to where I had been standing and there wasn't any box there. I even went back and checked under the seats around where I had been, but there was nothing. I stepped back out the second time and was headed toward my bag when I noticed a black boy, a man I guess, staring at me. He seemed to recognize me then, because he smiled and came toward me, and he seemed relieved, like he'd been looking for me. He looked like he wanted to tell me something, but he couldn't talk, and I thought he must be with the retarded group on the bus. Then I saw that he was holding my box of cookies, except there wasn't much of them left. The lid was messed up and halfway torn off and the cookies were smashed and mostly crumbs. But right in the middle of that torn-up box was a Hershey bar. A Hershey bar, like he'd found my box all crushed and he'd put in his candy bar to make the disappointment not so bad. And he held it out to me, my old crumpled cookie box, and just kept looking at me, sort of happy and concerned. I took hold of it and stood there, just a moment, looking up in his face.

He was kind-looking, and I don't use that word because it's exactly right, but I can't think of how to describe him. Except that he reminded me of Boo Radley, the silent crazy neighbor in "To Kill a Mockingbird." Maybe it's because I've seen that movie so many times that it seems to live in me, but with us standing there looking at each other, well, he kind of became a Boo Radley and I was Scout Finch. And we were in that scene where I see him standing behind the door and I suddenly know that he's the man who saved my brother Jem's life. And I say real quiet like, "Hey Boo." And I think he smiles then, real timid like, but I'll have to pay attention to that the next time I see the movie.

I wanted to tell my Boo Radley all about that then, but I didn't. I just smiled and said thank you and left. But I held on real tight to my box, with the crumbs and the Hershey bar. And I wished everybody else were still there so I could thank them too.

FINAL EXAM

Kathy Garrelts

The need to sing Christmas carols
Is great,
But this year
You will memorize the thousand-odd
Varieties of Christmas trees for biology
And hate the song
"O, Tannenbaum"
Ever after.

TOURIST'S IMPRESSION

Tricia Cavenee

I saw your apartment last night
For the first time.
You showed me all of it
Bit by bit,
And piece by piece,
You showed me this, that,
And the other —
Everything.
But couldn't you see
I didn't want the
Deluxe Tour?
I couldn't know your life
Anymore than I could
Know Rome,
In a two week
Package deal, hotel and meals
Included.
Last night
I wanted to talk
To you,
And anywhere
Would have been
Fine.

REFLECTIONS

Patricia Henshall

Three years as a mirror:
It could have been a lifetime
but thank the gods I was shattered
before my reflection of you
blinded all my sight

(People always pose for mirrors)

Three years as a mirror:
Now I'm all shards and shattered glass
and leaping pools of quicksilver

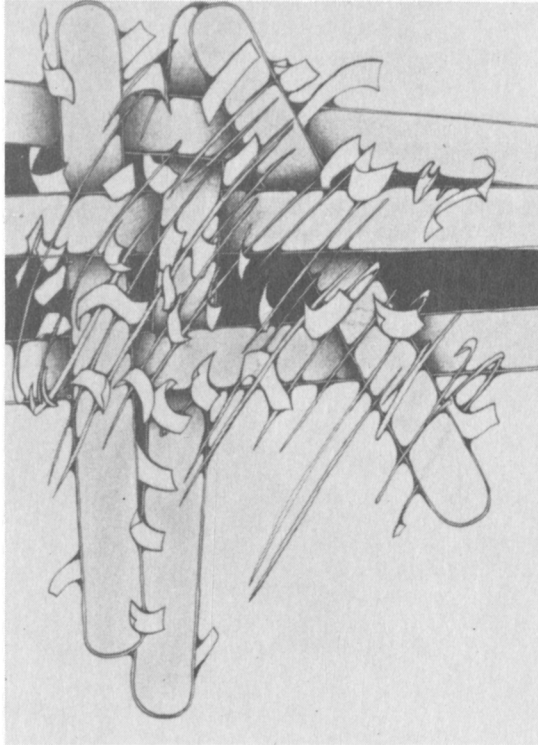
Dare come back
and I'll mirror you once more
but this time true

(No one smiles at broken mirrors)

SONNET 19

Kathy Garrelts

There were those days and days
When three leaf clovers were all I found.
There were months
When falling stars
Only knocked me down
To the ground.
Yes, and even the rabbit's foot
Found its way into the stew.
But March blew in you,
And I was in a field
Of four-leafed clovers that grew
Under a sky of bursting stars,
And around me, mountains of rabbits' feet
Reached into the heavens.



Flat Wound

1974

Vu Ky Nguyen

The Vietnam war is the past nightmare of Americans. It is over now; at least everybody thinks so. Ironically, it is still going on. It is still what makes blood flow like rivers; it is still what makes bones heap like mountains. Thirty years of war has dwelled in each Vietnamese's heart and made up his pattern of living. He has known war from the time he was born, takes it along when he falls down. As a Vietnamese in America, I wish to express the feelings of one who grew up in war and now knows peace for the first time in his life.

A Vietnamese knows war through experiences, not through the mass media. A bomb explosion is merely a terror to someone else, but it is pain to a Vietnamese. It is blood that is shed; it is flesh that tears. Mother, father, brother, sister are in there. Babies know war by their first cries. War is a fact. It is a daily activity, just like eating, sleeping or reading the newspaper to know the casualty of the day. If a man finds his close friend dead, he is not shocked, just a little sorry. Who knows when it is time for himself? Yet although it is a daily activity, war cannot hide its savage face. War is little brother wounded and left crying in the crowd of rushing refugees. War is a girl finding her lover's body sent back in a tiny plastic bag. War is grandma running through the fire, burning like a torch. The tragedy is great, but it is only one of millions. War is barbaric, but man is just a cane in the storm. Everybody lives with it without emotions, accepts it without questions.

So many Vietnamese are born and killed in war that they never know peace in all their lives. I myself wouldn't have known what it is if I had not come to the States. Here I no longer need to carry a pocketful of certification; I can go out anytime, anywhere, securely. I find peace, but it is not as glorious as I had thought. For the peace here is not mine. It is peace among strangers, which never includes me; peace without love in it, which is meaningless. I recall at home how I, like everybody else, longed for peace. Peace is just a quiet night without threatening sounds of guns and deadly thundering of jets. Peace is children's laughter down the road; no more mines on their way to school, only sunshine and joy. Peace is a mother's tears shed upon her son's return home; tears have not been shed for so long. Peace is the beloved train of the past, linking North and South, from Hanoi to Saigon, taking smiling refugees home, bringing happiness to every corner. Peace is sunshine after the storm, shining through the cold cemetery, warming up all those dead hearts, wishing to give the message to all of them . . . Peace has come! Plants and trees grow again in the warm morning sun; smiles once again wash away all hatred and revenge . . .

I almost think that peace has come. But we Vietnamese do not know what peace is in all our lives. It is the luring glory that glows in the dark. We long for peace; we search; we struggle for peace . . . and we stumble in darkness, generation after generation. How can I find the prosperous Vietnam, the very Vietnamese of the past? It seems that God has forgotten my war-torn land.

INTERRUPTION

Paula Meyers

1:30 and the thick black velvet
is pushing
back into the closet
retreating under the bed;
familiar objects
are shedding their dark coats
to be seen once again;
thin blades of light
slice the soft blackness:
night wafers and interrupted dreams.

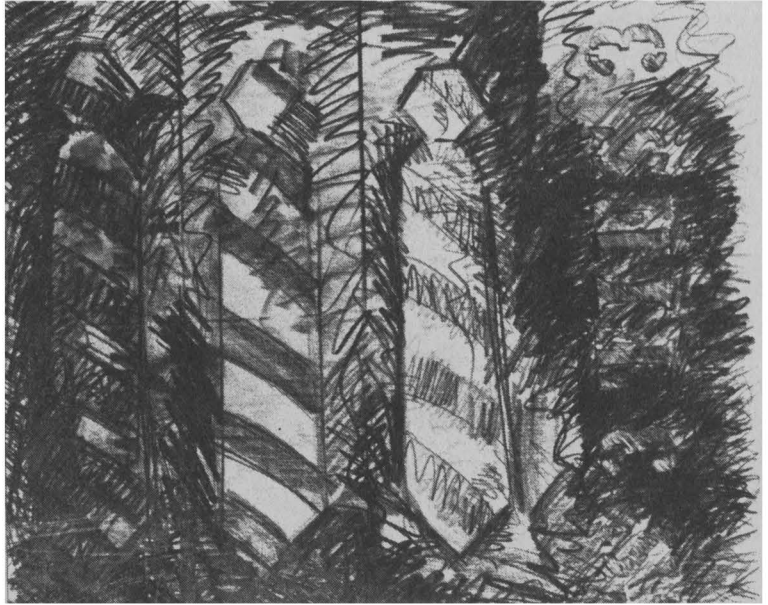
What woke me?
The clock beside me
converses matter-of-factly
with the strange small sounds
that flourish in the night,
and a heartbroken train whistle
punctures the velvet.
From some familiar place
comes the hush of warm rain
whispering to the unseen
and I realize now
that it nudged me from sleep
to share one tender black moment.

A.M.

Paula Meyers

morning creeps
beneath the blankets
lies among
the synthetic fibers
silently soaks
into the woodwork
and melts
into the carpet
ejects the night
from each thread
and particle of the room.

the walls take on
a crystalline quality
become sheathed in light
and powdered jewels
float through the room
until
the magical membranes
dust the day.



Three Ties

N. Jones

A TURRET OR A GABLE

Betsy Stephenson

Everyone has been in one at one time or another. Every college town has them. They are usually along those side streets near the campus with all the older houses. What I refer to are those little old apartments that students live in. But they can't be called apartments really. "Apartments" implies Gold Key, Wildcat or Jardine Terrace. They are the ones with all-electric facilities, wall-to-wall shag carpeting and latex-painted wallboard pre-fab. "Flats" would be a better word, but that isn't quite accurate either. For a flat is a floor of a building used as a residence in kind of a "Tree Grows in Brooklyn" image. I think of a flat and get the big family, blue collar industrial-part-of-a-big-city picture.

No, the places that students live in off-campus are often basement or attic rooms in old clapboard antiquities with old steam radiators and two electrical outlets for a dozen electrical appliances. They can be a tiny single room or a whole house, not just a single floor like a flat. They are characterized by a late-model Mustang sitting in a muddy-rutted alley, a pair of the latest style baggies hung over a pipe on the ceiling, an expensive quad system sitting on a garage sale coffee table. A "private slum" would be more accurate than the word apartment.

The atmosphere of this private slum neighborhood is different from any other part of town. Instead of seeing little children cruising around the block on tricycles, one sees semi-long-haired guys running backwards to get that frisbee. Instead of old couples on porch swings enjoying the summer evenings, one sees young men and women zooming down the streets on ten-speeds. It is an atmosphere of unstructured freedom. Of dreams to be made.

It is the students that live in these areas that make the atmosphere what it is. Students are transient, hometowners in the summer, college-town dwellers in winter, spring and fall. They are usually broke, but not poor; single, but planning marriage; envisioning a glamorous career, but wondering if it is what they really want. College students are half in life and half out of it. Their homes reflect it.

The Royal Purple says, "We tend to categorize people by where they live: Greeks, dormies and apartment-dwellers." Since "apartment-dwellers" is not accurate, what is a better word? I consider the word "batsmickers" appropriate as it is a combination of basement-attic. It is also an abbreviation for Basement Attic Tenements for Migrant College Students. City planners could zone these areas as Batsmurbias. Students hunting for low-rent housing could say, "We went Batsmicking." Those rich enough to afford the Villa II could always keep the label of "apartment-dwellers," but the majority of the student population are batsmickers, and would identify with a word denoting their personal life style. I also like "batsmic" because it is a half-and-half word. Half attic, half basement. It fits the half-and-half situation that is so typical of the college scene.

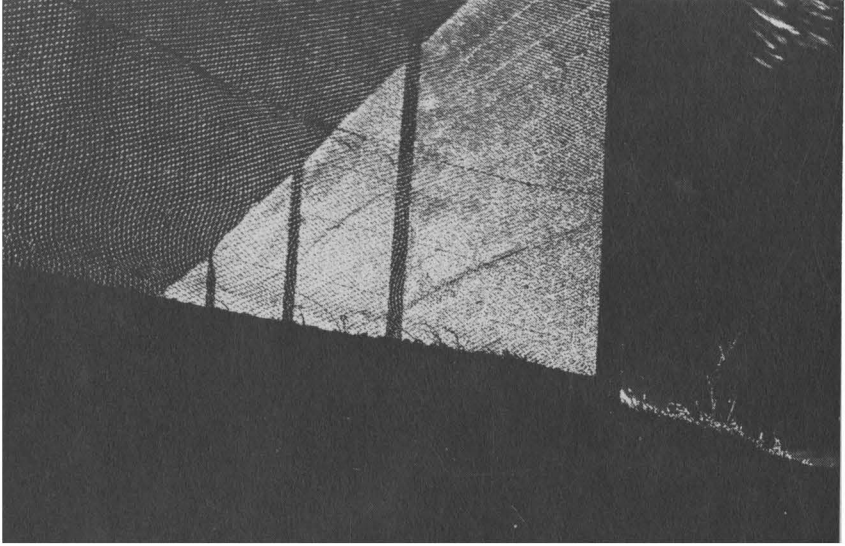


Photo
Keith Philpott

DISGUISE PLOTS

Diane Barker

Paul crossed the plush salt-and-pepper carpet. As the heavy oak door closed with a solid rush of air, he slid some papers across the glass-topped desk. Faithful to ritual, he drew open the expensive macrame drapes. The windows looked out on a small courtyard formed by the inner walls of the square office building. There was nothing to look at if you were on the fifth floor. The area was like a prison yard lined with two-way smoked glass mirrors. Paul never looked out his windows, but today he stepped up close and let his eyes scan the enclosure.

The dead bird rested on the concrete roof of an air conditioning unit level with the floor of Paul's office and about ten feet away. He stared dry-eyed at the beaten-down lump of feathers. The sun and rain had stiffened the pigeon until it resembled a gray rock. The bird was on its back with its head facing away from Paul's window. The scattered remnants of a nest and a perfect white egg lay beside the broken form. Once in a while a breeze would stir the air and slightly raise the feathers, but they were clumped together, lifeless.

"How the hell did that get there?" Paul muttered to himself. He picked up the phone and dialed his associate, whose office faced the same courtyard. He kept an eye on the bird, expecting it to move. Only the tired gray edges of the inert form fluttered.

The usual office talk, accounts, mortgages, interest rates, secretaries and finally, "Have you looked out your window lately?"

"No. Is there something I should see?"

"Yeah, there's this bird out there on that concrete duct."

"Real astute, Paul. It's been there about four months now. Did you also happen to notice it's in a state of decay?"

"Guess I don't look out my windows much. But don't you think it's rather strange? I mean, where do you suppose it came from? No birds ever come in here."

"The city park? Listen, if I'd known about your interest in ornithology I would have pointed this out long ago."

"It couldn't have been nesting there unprotected. It must have fallen from an upper story. And the egg didn't break."

"Amazing. Did I ever tell you how the city of Frankfurt got rid of their pigeon epidemic?"

"No. Of course, the nest could have broken the egg's fall."

"Seems the city was overrun with the damn birds. So the people stole the eggs out of the nests, hard boiled them and then put them back in the nests."

"Do you honestly expect me to believe that?"

"Why not? It worked. The birds sat on those hard-boiled eggs all spring and

the city had no new crop of pigeons. I read it in a Sunday supplement, or saw it on the news."

"Well, that's very interesting, but it doesn't solve this mystery. Besides, I've always heard that if you bother a nest, especially if you disturb the eggs, a bird will abandon the nest. And who went crawling around making house calls on all those nests? The Easter Bunny?"

"Just reporting what I heard."

"What do you suppose killed it?"

"Old age? Bad air? Maybe you ought to stay away from the window if these things bother you so much."

"It doesn't bother me. I just think it should be removed. If these damn windows opened I'd get it myself. What if some client asked what it's doing out there? How would you explain it?"

"I think it's a plot to discredit the company. Something placed there by our competitors. Or a conspiracy by Mother Nature to reclaim the cities. She's going to descend on the city on pigeon wings wreaking havoc and . . ."

"Enough. Enough of your theatrics."

Paul replaced the receiver and let the corners of his mouth lift slightly. He crossed to the window, leaned into the glass and tilted his head and looked up. The building seemed to be moving as the clouds crowded into the small box of sky above the courtyard. His eyes scanned the rows of dark glass and concrete. The windows only reflected more and still more windows until it looked like a fun house full of mirrors. He sighed and turned from the window, the afterimage of the feathers and small white egg imprinted in his mind.

He couldn't identify the obscure anxiety he was experiencing. When he tried to verbalize his feelings he appeared foolish even to himself. The confusion persisted. His wife and two daughters became perturbed when he interrupted dinner with his story about the pigeon. He raised the questions how and why. They had no answers. All he succeeded in doing was to temporarily arrest the clatter of silverware on china. How wouldn't tell him why, anyway, and that was what he really wanted to know.

Paul's jaw went slack as he stood at the window the next morning. He parted the sheers. Not three inches from the first dead pigeon lay another bird. This one was fresh. The feathers were light gray and soft, the body slightly bloated. The breeze ruffled the feathers and spread them back to expose the whitish down close to the skin. His mouth shut purposefully.

"I'll be damned. Right on top of the egg. If that doesn't beat all." I'll figure it out myself, he thought. He settled into his chair and pulled a legal-sized yellow pad of paper and felt-tipped pen from the top drawer of his desk. He drew the perimeter of the courtyard first. Aerial view. Next, the top of the air conditioning unit. The first pigeon. The egg, in proportion, half the size of a chicken egg. Some squiggly lines to represent the fragments of nest. The second bird, it was a pigeon, also. It went on top of the egg, like a transparency. No, that's not right, he thought. Now you can't see the egg. If anyone was to look out there now they would never believe there was an egg under that second pigeon, unless, of course, they could go out there and lift up that dead

bird. What could it all mean? What's the probability that a second pigeon would die and land in this enclosed area on an air conditioning unit on an egg? Paul couldn't leave it alone. On the other hand, he was getting nowhere.

He got up and pressed his forehead against the window and twisted his neck to see the sky. Billowy white clouds, tinted gray by shadows cast by a sun not visible to him, pushed hurriedly across his remote section of sky. It could be the mate returned, only to suffer the fate of the first bird. But right on the egg. That's got to be more than coincidence. Visually, all evidence that the egg ever existed is eradicated. He wished he'd taken a picture, had some sort of documentation. He carefully redrew the picture of two birds lying on the concrete, sans egg. He studied his reflection peering over the top of the desk. This pattern of events means something, he insisted. He admitted defeat, picked up the phone and dialed Maintenance. The phone was still ringing on the other end when he put down the receiver. He could live with it. It would be nice to have a reminder right outside his window. Without questions there are never any answers.



DARKENED ROOMS

Kim Wilson

I'm not a little girl any longer.

I like to walk
In darkened rooms,

Know the solitude,
Lay down
My weary body.
Hear my bones —
Sink to sleep.

PAIN, LOVE, AND BANISHMENT

Ruth Neumann

We are all very much alone, separate entities with our own experiences, our unique inner lives. But we all use language, words. The dictionary defines these words for us, but our inner selves attach meanings to words, connotations, which we do not fully share with anybody. Yet, there is a deep need in us to communicate as much as we can, to show how much more life words have than just a sound, and at times we can. Sometimes, as the words go by, like a film-reel moving slowly and steadily, one word stops the steady movement; it intensifies the action; the characters and images on the screen become enlarged, vivid, colorful.

I am reading a poem; a poem by a dead woman is speaking to me. I love all of it, but three words especially have grown large on the screen and touched my inner life.

I measure every grief I meet
With analytic eyes;
I wonder if it weighs like mine,
Or has an easier size.

I wonder if they bore it long,
Or did it just begin—
I could not tell the date of mine,
It feels so old a pain.

Pain . . . I am a little girl again and I sit at the piano. I am playing a melody my father loved. I play it over and over, wanting to get to know him through the music. My mother said that he used to hum the melody when he was happy. I try to imagine what he looked like. I know he was beautiful. I have a picture of him, where he is holding me, his arm cradled around my tiny body. He looks proud, and I look at his strong arms and feel a yearning I cannot explain. Once, when my mother was not at home, I hid in the attic. There was a big box with letters he had written. He spoke of coming home. I can see him now, in a dirty tent in a dirty uniform, writing the letter, for a moment making his world beautiful with his dream. He sees himself standing in a meadow, covered with flowers, and in the distance he sees his wife and little girl. He starts to run, faster and faster. He is finally home. He reaches them, picks up the little girl and promises her never to go away again. But there never was a meadow with flowers for him again. And I keep playing the melody, trying to find him somewhere.

I wonder if it hurts to live,
And if they have to try,
And whether—could they choose between—
It would not be to die.

I note that some—gone patient long—
At length renew their smile:
An imitation of delight
That has so little oil.

I wonder if when years have piled,
Some thousands, on the harm
That hurt them early, such a lapse
Could give them any balm.

Or would they go on aching still
Through centuries of nerve,
Enlightened to a larger pain
In contrast to the love.

Love . . . Richard sits crouched next to the duffel bag. He is helping his Dad pack. "When will you go to the airport Dad? Please wake me, don't leave without saying Good-bye. Are there dogs in Germany, Dad? Can you bring one home for me?" He is rocking back and forth on his heels, looking small compared to his father. They both are trying to stuff too many things into one bag. "Dad, what will you do in Germany? Who will give you supper, and who will play with you?" The questions are coming fast at first, and then he gets very quiet, and quietly he gets up to go to his room. When he returns he is holding something behind his back and he places it next to his father. It is his nightlight. I remember the countless times Richard has reminded his Dad not to forget to buy new bulbs for his nightlight because he fears the dark so. From where I am sitting I can only see my husband's back, but I can guess at the expression in his face, shyness mixed with embarrassment and fear, fear of having no response. When he turns, he is holding the nightlight gently in his large hands. And I wonder if I could have made this gift of light.

The grieved are many, I am told;
There is the various cause;
Death is but one and comes but once
And only nails the eyes.

There's grief of want, and grief of cold—
A sort they call "despair";
There's banishment from native eyes
In sight of native air.

Banishment . . . I am eight years old again. I am racing home, because I am late. It is dark outside, and I am afraid. I reach the house, anxious to hear my mother say that it is all right, but there is no answer to my knock. There is only a long silence and then my mother's voice says through the door: "You can't be my little girl; she was home ten minutes ago. Good-bye child; you don't belong here; you better find your mother." "Oh Mom, please, let me in, it's me." But there is no answer. "Then who am I?" I curl up against the wall, on the footmat. It is dark in the hallway; there is no sound. I put my head on my knees and cry. "What if she is right? Maybe I don't belong here; maybe she is not my mother?" Panic overwhelms me. I throw myself against the door; I kick it, I tear at it. This has to be my home; otherwise who am I? The darkness around me becomes part of me, and I am in a black world, where nothing can be touched, where one only floats in darkness. There is no end or beginning, only nothingness.

And though I may not guess the kind
Correctly, yet to me
A piercing comfort it affords
In passing Calvary.

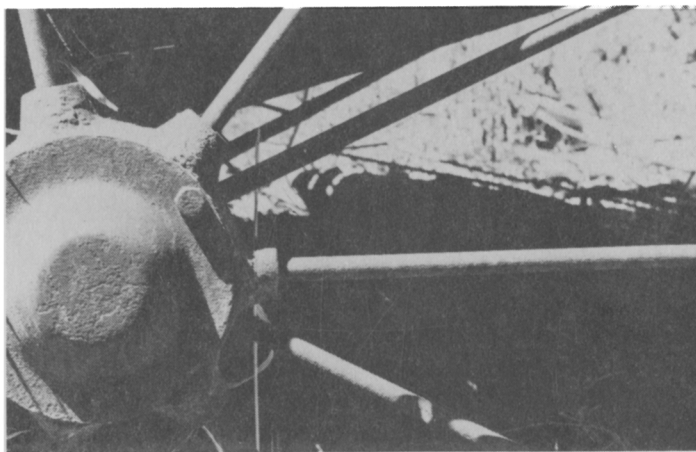
To note the fashions of the cross,
And how they're mostly worn,
Still fascinated to presume
That some are like my own.

The author of this poem is long dead, but her language is still alive. She is still communicating with me. I will never completely share what she felt, when she wrote it, but I feel the meaning of the poem through her words and the images those words evoke in me. I wonder how infinitely lonely she would have felt, had she not been able to put her thoughts and images into words, and I think how lucky for all of us to have language, words. Sharing through language makes the aloneness bearable; it helps us to share each other's reality, if only for a moment.

THE PROMOTER

C. E. Rogers

I met a man
who if he could
would gorge himself on beets.
He'd walk the road
He'd catch a toad (or frog)
and sell his feet (the toad's) for beets.
And he met me.
He said, "Look, we
could make a killing (or living) in beets,
By building a market,
I'll start it,
You stock it.
Hell, the world is crying for beets!"
Well, it's hard to resist
an offer like this
But, I did.
He went back to walking
along the road, talking
to friends and to foes, to dogs and to toads.
And he still loves beets,
pickled, buttered, or borscht.



Martha Wherry

**BATTLE OF BRASOV,
30TH ANNIVERSARY**

(for my Father)

Ruth Neumann

There is a rushing
in the air
as if all the words
ever spoken here
are meeting
to be heard.

There is a whispering
in the leaves
as if all the thoughts
ever lost here
are hoping
to be finished.

There is a pleading
in the wind
as if all the sins
ever left here
are waiting
to be forgiven.

There is a red
in the evening sun
as if all the blood
ever wasted here
is gathering
into light.

STORM

Paula Meyers

Rampaging outside my window
The wind
A hoarse, urgent scream
Above the trees
Whistling, shrieking currents;
Swishing
The exhausted night
Into a hopeless blur.
Memories
Names, faces, places
Smashed to bits in the inevitable collisions
By the elements
Into Eternity
Where
They hang suspended
In the hush of tranquility.

My mind
Scatters my emotions
Into this void
Where
They are preserved
Until further notice.



Paul Hart

THE THIRTEENTH DAY

Pat Osborne

"It's as close to being God as man can get," Alberta thought, leaning on the pitchfork handle.

She eyed the smelly mound before her with pleasure. Sixty-five bushels each of maple and oak leaves, fresh cow manure, grass clippings and weeds had been pulverized by the blades of her lawn mower. Alberta blended the mixture with her pitchfork, adding a few bushels of dirt, a sprinkling of lime, some cottonseed meal and a box or two of barbershop hair clippings.

Now with the Kansas sun blasting down on the huge pile, some of the ingredients made themselves known. There was no denying that the manure was fresh and that some of the grass was not. Only the leaves retained an autumn freshness.

Alberta was not really concerned with the odors and appearance of the pile before her. She was reveling in the thought that she and she alone was going to turn this rank compost into sweet, fresh-smelling black humus. This humus would bring new life to her garden.

Each day for the next two weeks she would turn the compost pile, allowing air to reach the layers, and moistening the pile with buckets of water from the hand pump. By the fourteenth day, Alberta would have created dirt. Alberta stood reflecting that the triumph she felt with the emergence of each pile of humus must at least echo the pleasure of creation that God felt when he looked and saw that it was good.

With her work on the compost finished for the day, Alberta's concentration was broken and she became aware of the heat. The sun immediately overhead shortened her already squat figure and drew its interpretation as a small blob of shadow. She could feel the sweat gravitating inside her shift, soaking elastic and gumming the dress between her shoulder blades. Bits of grass stuck damply itching to her legs and as she bent to scrape her pitchfork clean with a twig, an errant leaf fell from her bowl-cut, steel-streaked hair.

"Come on Dum-Dum," she called. In the coolness under a tomato vine an eye twitched and a small mouth yawned, revealing pink washboard and pointed teeth. Dum-Dum ritually stretched her long Siamese legs and leisurely followed Alberta to the house.

After an efficient bath, Alberta ate a salad selected from the garden early that morning, put a bowl of cat food down for Dum-Dum and then both cat-napped until the setting sun brought relief to house and yard.

By the third day of the compost turning, Alberta was rising at 6:00 a.m. to escape the midday heat as she forked the pile and carried the well water for

dampening. The garden was sparkling at that hour. Dew crisped ferny carrot tops and elephant-eared rhubarb leaves.

"Hang on till you get a dose of this good dirt," Alberta said silently to a vaguely unhealthy tomato plant. "You'll spring up like a stink weed."

* * * * *

The heat remained over the Kansas plain. Before noon each day the sun approached the ground, flattening and dulling the life beneath it. Masses of heat advanced and retreated—sun to earth, earth to sun.

The seventh morning of the compost turning, Dum-Dum, hunting insect snacks between lettuce rows, frightened forth a small green snake. Alberta was just stabbing a cheap outdoor thermometer into the compost when she felt movement across the toes of her bare foot. When Alberta's foot again touched ground, Dum-Dum was gazing at her with reproach for having scared away a tasty treat. Feeling crawly, the old woman abstractedly rubbed her foot and then walked to the house. She pulled on the pair of men's buckle overshoes she wore when the garden was muddy. As she returned to the compost, the thermometer was registering 140 degrees and climbing. Satisfied with the action of unknown bacteria, she pulled the thermometer and began turning the pile. Unsnapped buckles of the overshoes jingled softly with each shift in weight.

* * * * *

"Kansas continues in the grip of record-breaking heat wave," intoned the radio announcer before Alberta clicked him into the distance.

"As if I needed some man on the radio to tell me that," thought Alberta. "Tom foolishness ever havin' the thing when they don't tell you nothin' you don't already know."

Someone else might have said "damn foolishness," but Alberta had long ago named all non-essentials in honor of her husband Tom in memory of his past mistakes. She paused, remembering Tom and the time he'd insisted on using commercial fertilizer on her garden and the crop came in so poor they'd had to eat store-bought potatoes and canned goods half the winter; and the time he'd painted the back fence as a surprise for her and the first good rain washed the paint into the ground because the fool had used whitewash. "Tom foolishness is what you were too," Alberta reminded the radio. "Tom bought you uptown himself and carried you home in a box and plugged you in proud as punch. 'So we can keep up on the world,' he says."

"Well, no matter," she thought with the final pat for the radio. "Tom lies boxed cool six years now in the cemetery and you're still sittin' to remind me of his foolishness."

* * * * *

This was the eleventh morning of the compost turning. Alberta slid her bare feet into the overshoes and curled her toes to keep them on.

"Hey, Dum-Dum," she called. When no cat appeared, she shook her head. "Probably out knockin' down plants in the garden with her chasin' around again," she mused.

The tremendous sun and faithful spading were turning the compost ingredients into indistinguishable charcoal and then to crumbly black humus. Alberta pitched to with satisfaction at the success of her creation. Deciding to give a little of the nearly finished humus to the weak tomato plant, Alberta lifted its lower leaves and saw Dum-Dum stretched on the ground. Distaste flooded Alberta's features as she saw the stilled eyes, the slightly bloodied shoulder, the drops of dew matting the beige fur. Then sorrow came.

"Buried a husband with less tears," she sniffed, spading a hole in an unused corner of the garden. Lifting the cat into the hole she thought, "Would have figured she was heavier than this for all the food she put away. Nothin' much to her."

In the coolness of the evening, eating, Alberta dropped a meat scrap into the bowl on the floor. Then realizing, thought, "Dum foolishness" in order to still the constricted feeling in her chest.

Setting aside her plate, Alberta went to sit outside on a paint-peeling old wood kitchen chair. They had often sat of an evening, Alberta's bare feet stroking Dum-Dum purring on the cement. Tonight, alone, Alberta sat listening to the night sounds; a coyote howling over near the river, a sleepy hen nest-jostled in the pen, and the close warning whine of mosquitoes.

A new noise came intruding upon the familiar—a slithery, feathery sound—a whistling garden rustling. "Some people say their compost piles whistle and gurgle—first time mine ever did nothin'."

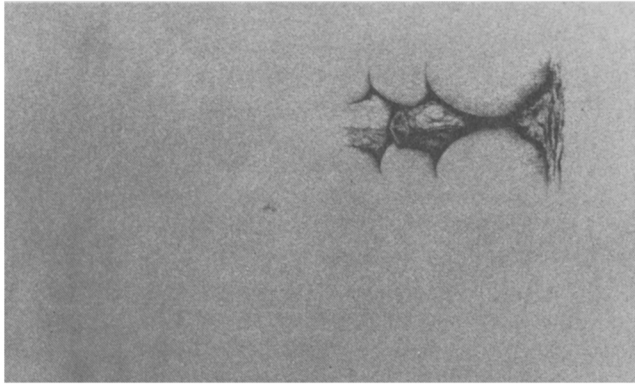
The pavement beneath Alberta's feet was suddenly cold without the company of Dum-Dum and with a slightly confused feeling Alberta turned toward the screendoor and the awaiting bedroom beyond it.

* * * * *

The next morning should have been the twelfth day of the compost turning. Not admitting to herself that she did not want to see the fresh dirt grave in the garden corner, Alberta decided to use the cool morning hours to make a trip to town to pick up her weekly interest check. Although the check was practically her only mail, she paid for a post office box, which saved having to ask for mail from the woman in the general delivery window. Accordingly, she ran a comb through her abrupt hair, slipped into canvas shoes, put grocery money and her house key in a ratty billfold, and pedaled off on her bicycle for town.

* * * * *

The thirteenth day of the compost turning, Alberta ignored the grave and pitched into the compost. The intense heat had gone from the depth of the pile leaving fresh blackness. Alberta plunged her hands deep into the loam, her fingers sifting and casting aside sticks, metal and other oddments which had found their way into her soil. "My creation," she thought. "Beautiful rich soil to turn my garden into a paradise."



Eggs

LOVE IS A CLOWN

Linda Brozanic

I am the clown;
 you are the audience.
I am the joker
 which makes
 the royal flush
 in the poker game,
the happy bum
 with the baggy pants
 and sawed-off cigar,
the smiling face
 underneath the pie-in-the-eye.
I am the marionette
 with the stilted grin
 dancing to the
 tune of tugged strings.
Like a fly caught
 in the steel-like lace
 of a spider's web,
I am bound
 to act the fool
 for your sake.

SPRING FEVER

Laura Penland

Out in sun and wind to greet the gentle
Airs of season's changing — dance with leaves
In joy for solace from the blight that was
Before this softness. Promise of great beginnings
Swirls and lifts with each new puff of sunbright
Dust. And gladness rises, warm with each
Bright day to celebrate this changeling fall.

SEASONAL AFFAIR

Ricky Morton

How strange your art,
Of clothing yourself
For the heat of summer
And then disrobing
For the cold of winter.
It's almost embarrassing.

What passion
You must possess,
To bare your limbs
To his dead hand.
How winter must seduce
You. Are you really that easy?

NIGHT, SIRENS, AND LIGHTNING

Richard Echavez

Three words that convey different sensations to many people, "Night, Sirens, and Lightning." For some these words may signify happiness, safety, and excitement; to others, fear, pain, and death. When some are feeling tranquil and safe, others are crying, praying, and dying.

Have you heard the sirens' piercing wail? It means trouble for most—death, mangled bodies, or possibly the law on someone's trail. Yet a child may jump with glee when he hears a siren. Excitement may flow through the veins of the aged. But in the cities at night the clear night sounds are pierced by the sorrowful wailing of sirens that say watch out, here I come, I have another, hear my wailing! For man is at war in the night, while children sleep, and lovers whisper.

Sirens may create a man-made fear, but nature has a fearful siren of her own—lightning. When lightning flashes, cracks, and strikes, it drives people indoors. Children squirm; they squeal and hide behind their mothers' skirts where it's nice and safe. Or they may jump with glee, while their dads worry about the cattle, but the cattle will take care of themselves. Hear that rumbling? The potato wagons are traveling across the skies. When the storm is over, the elders are relieved, and the children are content.

Meanwhile, when night falls, young men move into bunkers far from their native land. It is time to stand watch; they peer over sandbags, trying to adjust their eyes to the darkness. Out in front of them is barbed wire, moats, and trenches, the obstacles set out to stop the charge. But these young men are not alone, for in the darkness others are moving. In black they crawl like reptiles, bellies close to the ground, slithering along with a purpose; closer and closer these reptiles crawl, over this little hill to that little knoll, and it's close enough.

Further away, other men are also moving; these men are carrying cylinders, each weighing better than a hundred pounds. They set these cylinders on launches and wait. The signal is given by the reptile on the knoll, and with a flash the rockets are launched; from the skies they fall, screaming, cracking, like nature's lightning, striking bringing death.

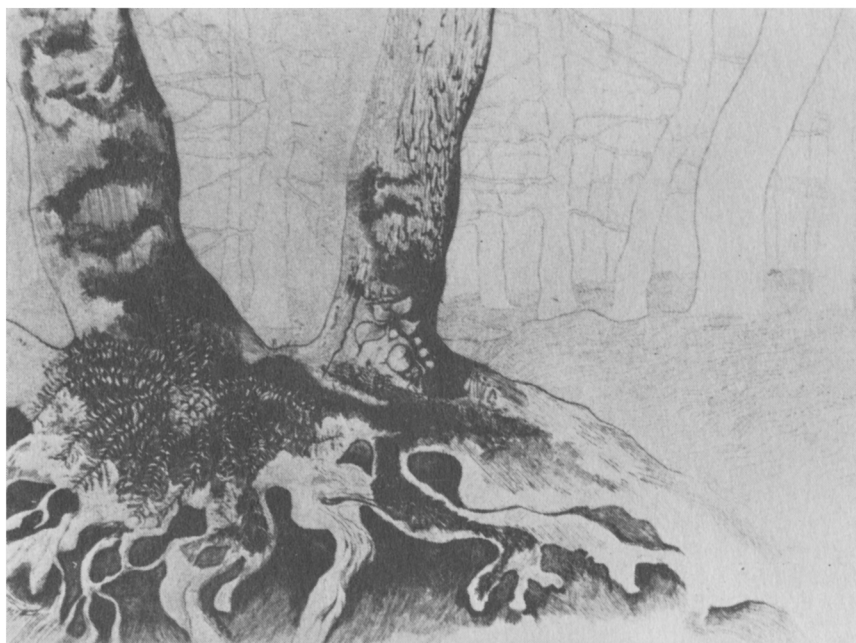
The sirens wail; someone yells, "incoming rockets!" Everyone crouches, and waits for the first lightning-like crack. Somewhere near, the first rocket hits; the waiting is over. When the barrage lifts, crying, and the sound of praying whispers among the dying. Nature and man have done it again.

FRIDAY

Paula Meyers

it seems that
the pencils need to be alphabetized
and the mistakes stapled
the telephone should be erased
and the numbers sharpened
the records should be watered
and the carbons dusted
the bouquet should be filed
but it's five o'clock.

maybe I'll just
shove them under
the typewriter cover
retrieve my smile
from my coffee cup
and find my keys.



Forest, Intaglio
By Anne Schmidt

IMAGININGS

Diane Barker

It reminded her of a funeral, where you put a man down a black hole. Or where you bury a pet in the back yard. You put everything back in the darkness where you won't have to see it, a dog, a dead uncle, a parakeet, a goldfish. But they refuse to stay where you put them. They keep opening up the ground and running after you shouting, "remember the time we . . ." Memories always go like that; the voices may get fainter, but come they will. You can never tell when or where they might decide to take over for a while and take you with them. These revolutions in time used to happen to her frequently in church, in class, or in a dark movie with a boy. She would have to remind herself not to stay away for long, that something important might happen between that boy and her and she'd better pay attention.

The brick house was crying. She could see the shiny tears flow down the window panes and drip off the sills. She wondered if this was an important moment. It certainly felt as if she'd remember this one. All the details seemed so clear. The rough red brick, the ivy on the north side, even the patches of crab grass in the lawn. This is a turning point, a putting aside, a burial, an opportunity to forget and start over. We're putting this house, this neighborhood, this town underground. Somehow she thought she was not the same person. In Akron she would wear her hair short and turned under. She would wear clothes that clung to her body instead of the tenty things her mother bought for her. She would be more careful about the way she spoke. She would choose her words very carefully and not repeat herself. She would be friends with all sorts of weird characters and they would do wild things that would keep people from classifying them as intellectual or delinquent or anything.

Now the porch and walkway became a long ribbonlike tongue. It unfurled behind her and licked gently at her heels. It's fun to bury things, she thought, just up and leave them. Let them know how unimportant they are. But the tongue seemed to follow her right up to the car. It tickled her feet as she squinched into the back seat between suitcases and blankets.

She made the trip in a daze. Dreamily she stared at the backs of her parents' heads or out the windows at the blur of corn fields, fences and small towns that didn't look lived-in. She decided to ride a camel to keep from being bored. So there beside the car she mounted a beautiful two-humped camel. They loped across fields, forded rivers and sedately walked the streets of small downtowns. They passed unnoticed between the parking meters and store fronts. Shoppers, dogs and children paid no attention. Too bad for them, she thought.

The thought occurred to her quite naturally, but it was still mildly surprising. It was as if she had heard a knock at the door and knowing what was there she had been taking her time answering it. So when she finally found

herself opening the door she had almost forgotten hearing the knock. The surprise wasn't what was behind the door as much as it was finding herself at the door. The thought was the fact that she was a 15-year-old girl moving to Akron with her parents and it didn't mean anything. All her plans which had seemed to depend on this move could occur independent of any particular set of circumstances. It was all up to her to create at any point in time what had meaning and what had none. Meanwhile, outside the car, she tied her camel to a bus stop bench and got back in the car. It was too hard to ride and think at the same time.

She thought of her dog. Stork was his name. He had been run over by the trash men and she had run out of the house screaming when she heard the brakes squeal and Stork yelp. She tried to will his blood back inside him. Her mother had to take her inside because she kept rigidly praying, "go back, go back inside, please go back inside him." She almost smiled now to think how stunned she had been and how apologetic the trash man was. He had tears in his eyes and kept saying, "I'm so sorry, what can I say? He was such a beautiful little dog." She dropped deeper into the scene. The blood was red and spread in thin streams from her collie's slack mouth. It would not obey her command to withdraw, to hide its redness, its nakedness from the staring eyes of the people. The blood had its own idea of how it should behave. It disregarded feelings. It claimed its own time and place to shine with living wetness that was soon to dry and clot and blacken and draw flies. To her it was an outrage for blood to



Keith Philpott

slip out like that, sneaky and slimy. She hated to see what a cheat life was, the way it ebbed away and left Stork stranded in death. "Go back, get back where you belong, back inside, damn you." She felt her body trembling with the confused emotions she had felt at that moment when her mother had taken her by the arm and led her into the house. Her mother had guided her into an insulated house, insulated with rock wool, nothing that could bleed. So she let the shock numb her, the zombie-like sensation was actually pleasant. The house surrounded her with quiet and she let her pet be buried. She knew Stork was taken away and the blood washed down the gutter. All traces were removed. Now she was back in the the muddle of queasy confusion she thought had been left behind.

There were two brown stumps in front of her. They became hairy. Her eyes focused and she recognized the backs of her parents' heads. She breathed a sigh of relief; it was ok. It felt good to be in the airtight car. The speed made a cushion of air around them. She could settle back into imagining what her hair would look like turned under and what her new friends would do after school. Maybe some days they wouldn't even go to school. She was in control again, defying time by choosing what space her mind would occupy. She might think about Stork when he was that bundle of softness and trust. Or how he'd wag his whole body when she'd get home from school. But she wasn't ready to deal with the accident. That would have to be dealt with later. Possibly before they got to Akron. Maybe it would have to come up many times before she figured it out. Maybe it would always be there waiting to push her into that throbbing red space. It's better to think of things to come, she told herself, new clothes, new classes, a new house. Not the old one with the tear-streaked windows or—she gasped and drew her feet up under her. It was that tongue again. She wondered why it didn't tickle her parents' feet, or if it did why they didn't respond. She was getting tired of all these intrusions, these visitations. It wasn't fair to be reminded just when she was getting excited about being a new person. Suddenly she wondered what the name of that town was where she parked the camel. She wanted to ride him, maybe the rest of the way to Akron, but she'd forgotten where she'd parked him.

She let the images project on the screen in her head. She was in her bathrobe letting Stork out the front door. It was cold; she turned inside instead of watching him like she was supposed to. Then . . . Now she had seen. Her eyes felt scorched from the inside. She had let the blood out that she could not will back in.

When her tears touched it, the tongue recoiled like a sprung window shade and lay still, back at the front door of the old house. Tears blurred her vision, but she managed to find her camel, remount him, catch up with the car and get situated for the rest of the ride to Akron.



Keith Philpott

ON CONSIDERING SUICIDE

Antonia Pigno

Wool dress — ready at cleaners
Promised Nancy the movies
Call Nina at 7:00
Lamb for dinner,
Mom's birthday next week —
a card.

No death today;
Too many little livings.

RIVER

Karla Hempstead

A single drop of silver
poised at the end of a twig
sparkles moonlight as it falls.
A twisting mirror, sliding,
trailing bands of quicksilver
down the rock face, as it
slips into the stream.

Beneath the rocks the stream now passes.
Into darkness beyond all morning,
into the cool, silent places of the earth's heart;
there is no movement here, in the deep pools,
no sound, until a single drop of water
pauses, hesitating, then leaves its grip on rock,
and shatters the silence with a single crystal tone.

The spring erupts
under moss-covered stone,
back into the light,
the movement of day;
cascades, filling the air
with its voice;
tossing thousands
of prisms to the sky;
flashing, they fall back to the river.



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