

BLISTER'S DILEMMAS:

AN EXCERPT WITH SELECTED POEMS

by

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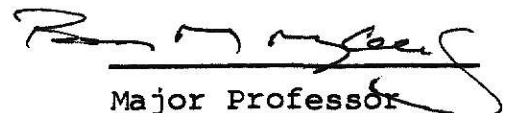
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**THIS BOOK
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SYNOPSIS OF STORY

Jonathan Bliss (nicknamed "Blister") has journeyed to Mexico with a friend in the mid 1970s. His travelmate, Eric, has remained in San Miguel de Allende, a colonial mountain village in the center of the country, to take courses in Spanish and art, and Blister has taken off on his own to journey westerly to the ocean, then south along the coast of Mexico through the states of Michoacan, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Both men were lieutenants in the Army in the early 70s, and though both barely missed having to go to Vietnam, they have spent the past several years trying to deal with the confusing fallout of issues and activism, involvement and confrontation that characterized their college and service experiences. Blister has left behind the young woman he had moved into a farmhouse with, Susan, and he continues to return to their situation and the status of their relationship in his thoughts as he makes his way through the foreign culture of Mexico.

He meets briefly and occasionally travels with several contemporaries of his along the way. One in particular, Strider, seems to typify the burned-out, wayward hippie of clichéd stereotype. Others seem more settled and comfortable with themselves, yet Blister's restlessness and ambivalent feelings toward his past, his own American culture, and Susan's professional career choice trouble him continually as he hitches rides or travels the busses ever southward. In Playa Azul, the first ocean village he reaches, he picks up with two brothers and their sister from New York, the Bookleys, whom he travels with for nearly two weeks. They all, in turn, are picked up by two young marijuana

farmers from Missouri, the neighboring state to Blister's home of Kansas. They are nearly arrested more than once at roadblocks of Federales, Mexican soldiers, or in the towns along the way. Finally, they find what they all have been looking for, a Shangri La of a secluded beach off the beaten track of tourists and Mexicans who serve, and prey on, the richer norteamericanos. They score some excellent marijuana at this beach from some Canadians and party every night for nearly a week, drinking mescal and tequila, eating peyote and psychedelic mushrooms as well as smoking the strong pot. The scene stagnates slightly for all of them, however, and they push on to Acapulco where the two Missourians head back north. After spending some days in this expensive resort city so the Bookley woman can recover from the turistas, Blister and his three hitching mates move on south. The following chapter opens after they have ridden much of the night in the back of the farm truck of a Mexican family. The truck has only one working headlight, the left bright beam, and the trip on the dangerous night roads of Mexico is both harrowing and invigorating. Blister has started to lose his patience with the garrulous Bookleys, for whom every decision is an occasion for debate and careful consideration of alternatives. They have found a way across a fence and into a field for the night after having been dropped off at a fork in the highway that leads toward Puerto Escondido.

In Acapulco, Blister tried to make a long distance call to Susan, but was able only to find her gone and her boss, a young psychiatrist at the clinic where Susan works, and several other people holding a convivial "meeting" at his and Susan's house.

Since Blister's career in the Army was as a psychiatric counselor, and his degree in college pointed him toward a career in that field, the clinic people represent for him what, by all cultural expectations, he should be pursuing in his own life. Instead, he prefers to make the first crucial decisions of what to do with his life while on this trip of uncertainty, guitar playing, drugs, revelry, and discovery.

In addition to his own indecisiveness, Blister is unsure how Susan feels about his "vacation," and about their involvement of a year and a half. Since he grew up in landlocked Kansas, the ocean somehow represents a soothing alternative for Blister, a free and powerful symbol of what alternatives do exist in the world. He is anxious to get back to the comforting seaside, and the chapter opens after an uncomfortable night spent in the rural countryside of Guerrero.

CHAPTER 6: ESCONDIDO

The first sounds Blister noticed were of tugging and the slick stretching sound of grass. The noise repeated in sporadic bursts, followed by a thud, then more pulling, then the odd squeaking, as if someone were stretching clean strands of hair, then another thud, and then a breath. He could hear more noises from the farmhouses in what must be a small village, but instead of the barking of last night's dogs, now it was the crowing of roosters. This rural symphony insinuated itself into his dying dreams, then a louder thud closer by awakened him for good. He saw whiskers, lips, and the calm exhalation of steamy breath from a burro's nostril. He moved slowly so as not to startle the herd, for several burros had surrounded the four figures wrapped in their sleeping bags in the pasture. "This explains the fence," he thought and he slowly raised himself on one elbow. A pretty jenny jerked her neck and snorted, but bent back down to tug more grass.

Bob was sitting up too now. His movements startled the half dozen animals and they scurried off. Their flight was sudden, but not sustained, and they stopped several feet off and resumed grazing. The sun was beginning to shine on some hilltops across the road, and Blister noted that they hadn't traveled nearly as far as he'd thought they had last night in the dark. Bob was reaching for his glasses in his pack, and Sarah and Kerry were waking too.

"I thought I heard some stamping," he heard Sarah say to her younger brother. "It was the strangest sound."

"You did," said Bob, "burros. Seven or eight all around us just now. How many did you see, Jonathan?"

"See for yourself," said Blister. Bob was the only person who insisted on calling him by his full first name. He motioned toward the six animals now placidly strolling away. He could still see Bob cemented to the front of the truck bed last night, road map and flashlight before him, watching for the crucial cutoff. Blister didn't see how it really mattered. Sure, they could have ended up ten miles off the track, but there would have been a village, breakfast. It's unlikely that the driver with his wife and two children would have meant them any harm. But Bob was cautious.

Blister had dug out his shovel and toilet paper. The others were also now up and stirring. They all had found their glasses and were making plans to cook some cereal. Back on the road with only the four of them would mean more decisions by committee.

"I'm going looking for some trees," said Blister to all of them. "Let's not stick around here, we don't know whose land we're on. Those chickens sound pretty close, I think I see some smoke rising from across that draw. We need to hit the road." Let them vote on that while I'm gone, he thought. We pushed our luck enough stumbling in here hours past dark. It had been well past midnight before they'd found the field and laid out their bags. He wanted to get on to Escondido to another beach. No more nights sleeping with the burros. The Bookleys began hashing it out as he walked away.

Blister couldn't help thinking back to his conversation with Alvin. The sun was warm and high in the sky now, and two short

rides had gotten them only twenty miles or so down the road. The three Bookleys were huddled together discussing whether to make sandwiches for lunch or walk back to a roadside village for supplies. It had taken Blister nearly four hours to get a line through to Kansas even though Acapulco was a large, glittery tourist town. He went over the possibilities again in his mind. "Susan isn't here right now, " Alvin had said. "Good God," he'd said, "is it really you, Jonathan?" He was another who always called Blister by his full name. "Where are you, for God's sake?"

"Can't you tell by the static?" Blister asked. "I'm still in Mexico." Why had he felt cross with the other man? Why, for that matter, was Alvin at the farm and Susan not? He'd heard more voices in the background.

"Listen, Johathan," replied Alvin in clipped tones, "we're having a meeting here at Susan's...at your place and Susan's and she's stepped out, well, she's driven to town anyway to get some more ...uh, turn down that noise," he could hear Alvin saying to someone else in the living room. Blister could tell he was on the phone in the bedroom and that other people were in the front room around the woodstove. Blister wondered if his old shepherd dog was around. Under the circumstances, he couldn't very well ask Alvin to hold the receiver up to his ears for godsakes. "That's better," he heard Alvin again. "Susan's gone for more beer actually. We're having this meeting here...good grief, Johathan, no one knew you'd be calling tonight." Alvin sounded a bit flustered.

"Look, Alvin, I didn't know I'd be able to get through either. I can't stay on here very long. How long before Susan gets back? How long's she been gone?" It was ridiculous to try to talk to

Susan's boss under these circumstances. Why would the clinic staff want to drive eight miles out into the country in the winter for a meeting? The whole thing puzzled Blister. A Mexican woman who was waiting for the phone to open up began tapping her foot behind Blister in the drug store. It was humid in the small shop and Blister wondered how cold it was in Kansas and whether there was snow.

"I really don't know, Jonathan. We ran out of beer and Kid and Billie, I mean Susan and Billie said they'd go get more and they've been gone some time. They might be back any minute. Probably any minute." Blister wondered how it had happened that Alvin had answered. Boss's prerogative? Force of habit? Blister shuddered. The phone receiver felt heavy in his hands. "Can I take a message?" Alvin asked.

Blister had paused. "Listen, Alvin, is Sheppy there? Is my dog okay?"

"Who? Oh, good God, the dog. Yes, he's fine. He's around here somewhere...wait a minute," he'd said, "someone's just come in the back door...hey Kid? No sorry, Jonathan. It's Ed and Sandy. Jeez, I wish Susan were here. Can I tell her anything for you, fella?" Blister didn't like the sound of that "fella."

"No, look," he'd said, "I'll try to get back." Blister noticed that three Mexicans were in line for the phone. "Just tell her I said 'hello.' Tell her I'll try to get back in touch. Tell her I'll write." They'd hung up after that. It hadn't been the way he'd wanted the conversation to turn out. He knew Alvin had been a "great help" to Susan after she'd been hired. He was a shrink, but still young. Younger than Blister maybe. He'd been glad that he'd talked the Bookleys into leaving Acapulco the next afternoon. He'd not been

able to think about the conversation much in the day and a half since. Now, it kept coming back to him in patches. He saw a bus pull up to the side of the road several hundred yards away. Bob was approaching from where the three New Yorkers had been trying to flag rides.

"We think we'd like to head back and get some supplies from that fruit stand we passed further back, Jonathan. Want to come?"

"How are you going to get there?" asked Blister. This plan sounded regressive. He wanted to get on with the trip. The Bookleys were going to be in Mexico and Guatamala for several months, Blister wasn't sure he had nearly so much time. He noted that the bus was starting to get back onto the highway.

"We'll walk," said Bob, "can't be more than a mile. We'll leave our packs here if you want to stay. It'll save us time."

Blister was feeling itchy. He had a sudden notion and stood up. Neither man was tall, but Blister was on a slight hump and had the sensation of towering over the youngest Bookley. Sarah and Kerry looked up from their books from near their gear.

"Look, Bobby," he knew the younger man preferred to be called "Robert," "see that bus coming up the road?" Bob turned to look and returned his gaze, blinking behind his glasses.

"Yeah, so what?" he asked.

"Well," said Blister, "I'm going to flag that sucker down and ride to Escondido. Hasta lumbago, senor. See you guys down the coast." It sounded pretty abrupt even to Blister. Bob just stared at him and blinked again.

"We haven't even talked about this, Jonathan. This is rather sudden, isn't it?" Blister could see the other two watching closely.

Sarah did her funny thing with her mouth. She looked even more like an ostrich than ever. Kerry was staring hard through his glasses. "He'll understand," thought Blister, "he'll make the others see."

"Bobby," he said, placing his hands on the younger man's shoulders, "you guys have more time than I do. I need to get some miles under me today. We'll see each other in Escondido." The bus was getting closer and Blister stepped near the shoulder and pointed down the road in the way the Mexicans had of hitching rides. The big diesel slowed loudly to a stop. Blister waved to Kerry and Sarah. Sarah waved limply back. The door opened and Blister stepped up into the bus backwards.

"Adios, amigos," he said once more. The door closed quickly and the bus started immediately, throwing Blister off balance. The driver, a short, squat Mexican with a white shirt and black bowtie motioned with his head toward the back. The bus was fairly full and Blister wound his way toward the rear. The pack was hard to handle with the shifting of the floor under him, but the motion of the vehicle felt good. He tossed his pack into a seat and lurched down beside it. Damn! but it felt good to be moving again. He caught a glimpse of the Bookleys picking up their packs to begin their trek back to the fruit stand. The bus accelerated around a bend in the road. For a brief instant, he thought he saw a patch of blue ocean far to the right.

Blister tried to begin a letter to Susan, but the motion of the bus made it hard to keep from looping the script. He stopped and began to watch the scenery outside. The road turned from the ocean and wound through densely vegetated hills. The trees were

still large, but the climate seemed to be harsher down this far compared to the lush forests of Michoacan. Here, the heat obviously stunted the opulent growth more than in the states to the north. More baked flats were apparent in the lower stretches, and Blister noticed several topless women washing clothes near a stream as the bus crossed a bridge. In the village of Cuajinicuilapa, most of the buildings were the white adobe one immediately associates with Mexico. Most of the people walking about the plaza as the bus pulled into the station wore the white tops and bottoms seen in many travel posters. They would soon be leaving Guerreo, Blister realized, and there'd been few signs of roadblocks or Federales all day. The young boy who took the money for tickets for the driver told Blister that they'd make Escondido by evening. After the fits and starts of hitching, the pace seemed luxurious.

As some of the local passengers were getting off the bus, Blister looked across the aisle into the face of a woman dressed in the loose Indian clothing of the area. She smiled easily at the gringo and bent over to pick up her mesh bag of market goods. The vee neck of her blouse opened and her breasts swayed forward beneath her torso. She was neither old nor young, but her bosom looked inviting. There was a certain sag or droop to her breasts, something Blister would never have thought attractive, yet the unexpected sight held his gaze. She seemed not to mind at all. It had been nearly a month since Blister had left Denver with Eric, he hadn't slept with a woman in all that time. He wondered again about Susan and the party two nights before at the farmhouse, their farmhouse. What was he to make of that? he wondered.

Behind the woman, a man dressed in white nudged her impatiently

She retrieved her bag and stood back up. Blister felt the blood flush his face slightly, the unexpected sight had warmed him all over. The man pushed on the Mexican lady once again, and she smiled at Blister briefly before stepping toward the door of the bus. Was she coming on to him? he wondered. She was slim, but looked like any village mother rather than a prostitute. Was the man her husband? She had appeared to know that she'd exposed her front to the gringo, but maybe an open bosom meant less this far down in Mexico. Blister watched her descend into the plaza and walk away into the crowd of white-suited locals. He reached for his water bottle in the side pocket of his pack and took a long swig. He remembered that Alvin had called Susan "Kid." That familiarity bothered him. It was disturbing to think of that again and he tried to push the thoughts out of his head. The bus jerked again and glided slowly into motion. Blister noticed a group of policia standing in a huddle on a corner. Their dark brown uniforms contrasted with the adobe and whitewash motif of the town. He thought of the healthy baggy of pot stuffed into the foot of his sleeping bag. You've got to hide it somewhere, that was the problem when hitching. He'd have to remember to bury it in the sand as soon as he found a place to sleep in Escondido. He could envision the feel of the cooler sand below the surface. It had become a part of his generation's lifestyle--this stashing and surreptitiousness, always careful and watchful. Was this part of the game? Did it lend to the thrill? Did they really have anything to hide? It seemed pointless in a way. What did it matter that they liked pot and mushrooms? And peyote, acid? What the hell did it matter? The diesel muffled as the bus swung up out of the town and

headed down the highway. He hoped he'd find some hippie-types in Escondido, some "friendlies."

Blister had to change busses in another village along the route. The delay meant that it was nearly sundown by the time he stepped down into the muggy air on the one main street of Puerto Escondido. It looked to be a pleasant place with several homes and buildings built upon a hill along the highway that descended down to the sea. He could hear distant lappings of the surf, and the moderate whirr of a tourist town made him feel welcome. He walked along a street lined with palms that seemed to be headed for a camper park. Various Winnebagos and smaller vans were ensconced among the trees. One American or Canadian man was musing in a hammock outside his truck near the wire fence that set off the park..

"Excuse me, sir. Is this park open to tenters or backpackers?" Blister asked.

The man slowly recovered from his reverie. He was watching the sun set over the water and picking at his teeth. He must have just finished eating a grilled dinner, Blister thought. His wife was probably inside the camper doing the dishes.

"Hmmm? What's that?" he asked. "Oh, this park? Naw. This is for campers only I think." The man looked Blister over closely. He pointed further down along the beach. "There's a ragtag bunch stays on down the way there. Maybe that's your bunch, Ole Buddy." The man looked him over one more instant. "On down the way a bit. You'll see the bunch I mean." He dismissed Blister with a wave of his hand, the same kind of gesture that farmers made from the cab of their pickups in Kansas when they passed on the dirt roads.

Blister thanked him and moved on. The sunset really was a beauty and the reddish glow was tinting the ocean surface and the wet sandy area where the foam pushed up and receded. Blister took off his juarachis once he got to the beach and walked along in the warm, soft sand beyond the water's edge. The harbor stretched in a wide semi-circle and hooked out toward the opening two or more miles out to sea. A high point of land rose at the southern edge of the natural port. Several palapas, thatch and adobe huts with grass roofs, lined the beach off to Blister's left as he walked along. A few meager shelters of palm leaves and ridgepoles appeared as he walked closer to the final point that rose in the distance. The tent-like affairs must be the gathering that the man in the hammock had been directing Blister toward. They were some two or three-hundred yards away from the last of the palapas that served as bars and restaurants along the beach front. It didn't look so much like a home as a temporary place to squat. He saw a bearded young man walking toward him from the rough camp. He was carrying a guitar case in one hand and a bottle in the other. It looked like mescal or tequila. "This must be the place," Blister said to himself.

"Any empty shacks in here?" he asked the fellow with the bottle.

The man stopped and looked at Blister as he pulled on the clear liquid. He fished a section of lime out of his shirt pocket and popped it into his mouth. He squeezed the juice out of it with his teeth and spit the rind toward the water that was advancing in a whirl of motion and sibilant noise.

"You mean down here in 'Doozyville?'" he said as he took another drink from the bottle. Blister could see that it was tequila.

"Here," he said to Blister, "have a hit of this." He offered to bottle and another wedge of lime in the same motion. Blister drank, the hot liquor warming his throat all the way down. The lime juice cut the taste just right and he handed the bottle back to the slightly tipsy man.

"Is that what you call it? 'Doozyville?'" Blister liked the way it rolled off his tongue.

"Yep. This here's Doozyville and we be the 'Bedoozies,' us that stay down here. Over yonder," he pointed back toward the town where Blister had gotten off the bus, "that's 'Turkey City,' that's what we call it anyway. Up there," now he shifted his aim with the bottle to the point that rose above the beach settlement of palm frond tents, "is 'Mantra Hill.' That's where the 'Be-Loveds' stay. They like to get up real early in the morning. Med-i-tate when the sun rises, so they say. Down here, well, we like to stay up a little later. Gets a little rowdy maybe, hell, we don't care."

Blister liked the man's manner. He sounded southern, maybe from Arkansas, or Tennessee. Maybe Virginia. He placed his guitar down on the sand. "You can stay in Junkie Joe's spot if you want. He fooled around last night and got shoved in the jail across the water. Pissed on the boot of the chief-oh-policia last night in town. Hell of a fuck-up." He drew on the tequila again and offered it to Blister once more. "Pardon my French," he said.

Blister took another swig and handed it back. It was fast getting dark and he thought this would do for one night at least.

"Hell, I'll stay down here. Where's this tent, or whatever you call them?"

"I'll help you find it. We call them 'shents.' Shack tents

don't you see? I'll have to introduce you. Hey, Jimmy," he yelled as they walked over toward the triangular huts. A youngish man with long blond hair and a whispish, light beard materialized as they approached the settlement. "This here guy--" he turned back to Blister, "hey, what's your name there fella?" Blister told them. "Hey, I like that. Jimmy, this guy Blister is moving into Joe's old spot. You keep an eye on his stuff too, okay?"

The blond ran a flashlight up and down Blister's gear and nodded.

"Right over there," he said and motioned toward an empty "shent" with his beam. The man with the guitar led Blister over.

"My name's Nick," he said. "They call me 'Nick Namer,' on account I gave all these places their names. That's how it happened. Someone complained about them on Mantra Hill being too damned 'beloved' for their own good. I said if they was 'Beloveds,' then we must be 'Doozies' down here. That's how it stuck. Anyway, I don't suppose you pick, do you?"

Blister was glad he asked. He explained that he did and it had been nearly a week since he'd played. They stowed Blister's gear and broke out Nick's six-string. Both men played the same music and for an hour they traded songs. Blister rolled a joint from his stash and they smoked and drank along with the songs. Blister asked about the local "heat," the police activity.

"Oh hell," said Nick, "you'll hear their little bugle about six in the morning. They have a camp somewhere over the hill there. They march around and shoot every day. It's a Federale camp, so keep an eye out. Better bury that bag of smoke. We always leave someone here to watch out. Tonight it's Jimmy's turn. Every so

often they swoop down and clear this area up. It's been about a month or so since the last sor-tie." Blister liked to listen to the syncopated rhythms of the southerner's speech. "They'll be back soon. I wouldn't settle too permanent if I was you."

"What about this 'Junkie Joe' character?" asked Blister. "What's his story?"

"Double Jay, huh? He gets a little carried away at times. I guess that's what you'd say. He's a speed freak, likes to shoot it. He got hold of some clinical meth somewhere in Mexico City. He's been living on the edge for a month or so. He was even starting to get on everyone's nerves around here, singing too loud and making up his own words when people were trying to jam. You know, getting pushy and all. He was pissing up against a wall of a bar last night, over in the town there." Nick aimed his beard toward the gathering of buildings across the darkened harbor. Blister could see the lights of Puerto Escondido shining on the rippled water of the natural bay. The shushing of the tide on the nearby sandy shore was comforting. "The policia came up behind him, that's the way I get it anyway. He turned around too quickly, speeder's paranoia I guess, and hit some of the officers with a stream of piss. One of them was the Jefe, the chief. He's locked up now. Somehow, one of his buddies smuggled in his stash of meth this morning. When that meth runs out, he's going to be hurting. If he lasts that long. Old Junkie Joe, hope he gets out somehow. I'd hate to be sitting in his spot right now. He'll miss old, cold Chicago pretty soon, you can bet on that."

Blister thought of the two young men in the jail in Zihuatanejo and he wondered if their friends had gotten the card they'd

mailed further down the coast. He realized that except for the most capricious of circumstances, he could very well have been in similar situations. The cool dampness of the approaching night made him shiver. Nick seemed similarly lost in musings of the arbitrary system of Mexican justice. Why have we left secure pasts in the cities and towns of America to risk these "adventures"? he wondered. He wondered what Nick did back home. Maybe he was a marijuana farmer like Barry and Dave from Missouri. Maybe he was one of those good old boys who seemed to get by in the rural south on his physical skills and knowledge of hunting and fishing. Hell, despite his soft, slangy speech, maybe he was studying to become some Tennessee lawyer. It didn't seem particularly important at the moment.

"Nick," Blister broke the silence, "do you suppose we could borrow another six-string? That way we could play some of those fiddle tunes together. I haven't got to play with anyone for quite some time."

Nick propped himself up on one shoulder. "Say, now there's a good idea. Let's pop on up to 'Mantra Hill' and see if Sue Angel's there. She's got a pretty good Yamaha that she might let us use." He was standing and shaking the sand from his clothes.

"Sue Angel?" Blister asked. "Heavenly body?"

"What?" replied Nick. "Oh, she's a looker okay, but you gotta hear her sing. Voice as smooth as pumpkin pie. Real sweet gal, too. From Cal-i-forn-eye-aye. Little blond hippie, sings like an angel." Nick had put his guitar away and was heading towards the base of the rise leading up to the elevated point that was the backdrop to the curved shoreline of Escondido. Blister could see little

groups of others sitting inside various shents of 'Doozyville,' passing joints and bottles. A few had candles lit and Nick spoke to one or another as they passed through. Blister zipped up his down vest and enjoyed the mixture of warmth and damp chill of the beach at night. They started up a dark path toward the large, palm frond palapa that stood on the top of the rise.

"There's the 'city dump,'" said Nick as they passed upward toward the top of the hill. He motioned with his flashlight toward what was evidently where most of the inhabitants of the area went to dig their holes in the sand to use as bathrooms. Wads of tissue and toilet paper could be seen here and there in the scrubby bush of the dune area. "It's no wonder the Federales clear this place out every so often," Blister thought to himself.

Blister could hear the singing as they approached the building where most of the 'Beloveds' evidently stayed. Several people were singing along, but one voice in particular stood out. They were finishing a chorus of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," and one piercingly clear soprano was keeping the others steady. It did sound angelic, he realized. From the higher perspective, the harbor looked even more beautiful than from below. Blister could see the lights of the homes and buildings across the stretch of beach rising in zigzags up the streets that cut back and forth from the highway above the town to the water's edge of the palm-lined main street. A man dressed in white Indian clothing approached the two as they neared the campfire where the singers surrounded a young woman playing a guitar.

Nick introduced Blister to a soft-spoken American named John. Nick told him that they'd come up to see if Susan would mind lend-

ing her guitar. It suddenly occurred to Blister that the young Californian with the pretty voice had the same name as Susan back at home.

"Well, we're finished with the evening meditation," said John in response to Nick's explanation. "We're just singing a few songs to top things off right now. You'll have to ask Susan about the guitar. She's pretty careful with it, you know. Say, Nick," he continued, "what's this about some 'grudge match' on the volleyball court? Are some of the Doozies getting upset just because we beat them the other day?"

"Now John," said Nick, "some people just can't stand to lose. You know that. I don't think there's any 'grudge' involved. Petey and Al just wanted a rematch, that's all. It's no big deal. Hell, if you don't want to play, tell 'em. Don't worry about that."

John stood looking at the two men for a minute. Blister didn't know what the discussion was about. He had noticed a volleyball net as he'd approached Doozyville before dusk. There had been a few people in swim suits batting a beach ball over it, but that was all.

"Yeah, but it's our net and we cleared and built the court. There's no room up here, so we don't mind sharing it with anybody else, but we sure don't want any hard feelings to get started over a game." It sounded like John almost said "for God's sake," but decided against it.

"Oh, let it drop," said Nick. "It's nothing, really. If you don't want to play the 'Doozy demons,' don't play. They'll razz ya, but who cares?" The music had stopped near the campfire, and Nick grabbed Blister's arm and pulled him over into the light.

"Sue baby," he said to the woman with the guitar in her hand.

"Nickie," she responded and came over to them to give Nick a brief hug. "Great, another guitar player. Let's get a jam going."

Blister could feel a constricting in his throat. This Susan was blond and pert. Her hair was bleached from the sun and her face and arms deeply tanned. She looked like she had been on the beaches for quite some time. She wore jeans and an Indian top. The skin below her throat was smooth and lightly freckled. Nick introduced Blister to her and explained that they needed to find an extra guitar so they both could play some fiddle tunes. Sue looked evenly into Blister's face, which made him color slightly. He hoped that the glow of the campfire hid his flush.

"What kind of music do you play?" she asked him.

"Uh, mostly folk and bluegrass," Blister replied. He wanted to say something impressive to her, but felt momentarily foolish. "I can probably play behind most anything, though." Nick laughed beside him.

"I was telling Blister about your fine voice," Nick said. "He seems quite impressed."

"I thought the Joni Mitchell piece sounded wonderful," Blister finally said. Nick laughed again softly beside them.

"Oh, thanks," said Susan. "Bluegrass huh? I'll have to get you fellows to sit down and show me some of those songs. Here, let's sit down and play." Blister liked her easy ways. He followed the two over to the fire and listened while they tuned together. Susan sang "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" "in honor of Nickie" as she said. They asked Blister to take a turn. He looked around to see if anybody had an open bottle of tequila, but

no one seemed to be drinking or smoking. He took Susan's guitar and sang one of his own songs, "Cowboy's Lullaby."

"Oh my," said Susan, "is that one of yours? Are you from the south too?"

"No, from Kansas," Blister replied. "It's in the very central part of the" he didn't know exactly how to identify their mutual country, he'd gotten used to explaining where he was from to the Mexicans he'd been talking to on the busses, ". . . of the states," he finally said. Nick and Susan both laughed.

"Oh sure," she said, "where Dorothy's from. 'Antie Em, Auntie Em!'" she mocked.

"An' Toto, too!" added Nick. They all laughed. Blister couldn't keep from watching the vivacious singer. She reached over to take her guitar from him. Their hands brushed slightly on the neck of the instrument. She smiled at him again, and Blister felt himself going doughy inside. She leaned over to retrieve her pick, and Blister saw further down her bodice. Again, his forehead warmed and he felt like he needed a drink of cerveza or tequila. Some of the others who had gone over near the edge of the dropoff of the hill toward the ocean began returning to the fire. One or two asked Susan to sing some of their own favorites. She smiled at them and strummed a chord or two on her strings.

"I'll tell you what, we'll sing a few more, but then I'm going down the hill with these two bluegrass fellers and drink a beer or two and learn some new songs." She smiled back at Blister and he squirmed on the log he was sitting on. He caught Nick's eye, and the southerner gave him a quick wink. "Could it really happen like this?" Blister wondered to himself. Things just didn't occur quite

this smoothly in real life, did they? As Nick and Susan began to glide into another tune, Blister realized that just this morning, he had awakened amidst donkeys in a dewy field. He looked around at the people and the palapa on top of the hill. It was kind of a serene setting. Several hammocks hung inside the frond shelter, and someone had constructed a neat oven of rocks off to one side of the hut. The individuals around the fire seemed relaxed and comfortable, even tired. Off to one side, a couple were doing some Hatha yoga postures together on a straw mat. Another cluster of folks seemed intent on giving each other foot and back massages. Another very thin youth with a wispy beard sat cross-legged in a corner of the palapa, eyes closed, obviously meditating. Blister wanted to momentarily pull off his boots and stretch out, maybe even do some of the yoga he had learned once. Soon though, they would have to negotiate the pathway back down the hill, and he pulled one of his harmonicas out of his shirt and tested the song for key. They seemed to be right in tune.

Blister awoke to unsteady sounds of a distant bugle. The melody dipped to almost nothing, evidently blown by the wind, then drowned by the wash of the early morning surf. Next to his bedroll was Susan's guitar case and on top of it a note. He reached for the paper and realized that he'd had a bit too much beer and tequila the night before. "Sorry to leave so early. Must run and join John and the others for meditation. It was fun singing last night...fun later too. Susan." For a moment, Blister couldn't exactly remember what had happened after he, Susan, and Nick had traipsed down from Mantra Hill. He recalled a much appreciated

song fest down in Doozyville with joints, bottles, limes, dancing, and jostling. His repertoire of bluegrass standards and his back-up fills to Susan's and Nick's guitar rhythms had juiced up the crowd that began gathering after ten o'clock around the shents and shacks of the lower settlement. The partying had gone on late, and, with the long day on the road an all, Blister hadn't remembered much past about two or three in the morning. He read the note again. He was glad the blond Californian had not signed "Love Ya" before her name. For some reason, that had always irritated him about Susan in Kansas. What did it mean? he wondered. I don't quite "Love" you, but in kind of a minor way I care a great deal about you. It was juvenile, cutesy--or at least it had always seemed so to him. He smelled of his hands, only the slight, scorchy odor of campfire. What was the "fun later" part about? he wondered. The sun was just creeping over the hills up beyond the highway. He slipped forward in his sleeping bag and noticed that he still was in his underpants. No more booze tonight, he promised. Not as much anyway. A loud blast of the bugle rode a breeze from the Federale camp. Nick was right, they were up early for drills. We'd make a nice target, he thought, as he slipped into his trunks. He could see several forms in the triangular frond structures that clustered together around his. They could roll us out early and take us all straight to jail. He shivered as he ran across the wet sand of the shoreline before hitting the water in a full dive. Ah, he thought, if the ocean were only a little closer to Kansas. He swam out in slow strokes, washing the grime and dirt of the previous day off him as he went. The sun was really breaking now, and the reflection off the mottled surface of the waves dazzled

him and caused him to squint. Refreshed, he headed back toward the camp.

Susan was waiting for him at the tent.

"Hey, magic fingers," she called out. He assumed she was referring to his guitar playing. "Finally up I see." In the daylight, her clean, blond features looked pretty. Fresh.

"Listen," he said, dropping down beside her, "what went on here last night? I seem to have checked out sometime after 'Dance All Night, Dance a Little Longer.'" His voice was husky and he shivered again from the cool morning air.

"Oh, why I swan," she mocked, "the gentleman cannot hold his liquor. And such a nice night for a walk by the sea." She carried it off well enough, but Blister could see that she was faking it slightly, the lightness. He reached out for her hand, but she started to pull it away.

"Sue Angel," he started. She turned slightly away from him.

"Don't call me that," she said as she looked back at him. Her light blue eyes were almost gray in the early light. "That's Nick's name for me, but you call me 'Susan,' okay?" She stared straight-forwardly at him.

"Okay," he said, "Susan. Let's get some breakfast. Susan."

She leaned forward and kissed him lightly, then they nuzzled.

"You keep your wits about you, you hear?" she asked playfully as she pulled back and took his head in her hands. He nodded, but he noticed the dampness in the corners of her eyes. It occurred to him again that her name was the same as Susan's in Kansas. How could something like this happen? he wondered. This easily. Had he suddenly been granted what he and his roommates in college

had always yearned for--a way with women? Nothing quite this sudden had occurred to him before and he felt fraudulent as he slipped into his jeans and shirt inside the shelter. Maybe it was the music, but who knew? Why would she have chosen him with so many other men on the beach so obviously infatuated with her music and her prettiness? Her creamy hair blew in the wind as she sat and waited for him at the entrance of the tent-like structure. Nick came staggering out of his shent as they were getting ready to leave.

"Going so soon?" he asked, squinting at them in the bright morning. "Bliss, ole buddy," he said, "we thought you'd watch the stuff today, you being new man and all." Blister turned to look at his fast friend of the night before. "Oh, you guys go on ahead," Nick said, breaking an awkward silence. "I'll take care of things here till you get back. Go on, now," and he headed for the bushes toward "Dump City." Susan squeezed Blister's hand and pulled him toward the row of restaurants along the shore. He could see a slight stirring of activity in a few of them, smoke starting to rise from the ovens near the backs of the thatched-roofed affairs. The salt air rose around him and he felt bouyed by the brightness of the ocean cove.

After watching the shelters around Doozyville for most of the day, Blister was able to get Jimmy to agree to take over for two hours in the late afternoon. Susan had said that she knew of a camp of French Canadians who would let them use their solar shower. Even though Blister had been in the ocean several times during the day, the salt brine still clung to his hair and skin,

and a freshwater shower would feel good. They would be able to get back in time for Susan to help lead the afternoon chanting with the group who lived above Doozyville. She dropped by, and they walked easily through the town and across a road to where the Quebecis had parked their campers and trucks. Blister enjoyed being with Susan, and he wanted to feel that, in some unstated way, they "belonged" to each other, if even for only a short few days. They held hands as they approached the camp.

"They'll like you," Susan had told him, "you'll see."

As they neared, Blister noticed two men with the same dark hair and beard that he wore. The men looked carefully at him as they approached and began to talk softly to one another. A group of three women came around one of the trucks, and one squealed briefly at the sight of Blister and Susan. They began to speak in French to Susan, but more directly to Blister. He could make out very little of what they were saying; his French was rudimentary at best. Yet, they seemed to think that he could understand them. They kept looking at Susan and asking her why her "ami" didn't "comprendre."

"Don't you see?" asked Susan. "They think you're one of them."

Blister looked again at the twenty or so dark-skinned Canadiens who had surrounded them. For the first time in his life, he felt an immediate sense of kinship; nearly all had the same coloring of hair and skin as he did. His dark blue eyes were mirrored almost everywhere he looked, even the texture of his hair and the general muscular smallness seemed duplicated. The Quebecis continued to rattle French questions at him, but all he could do was stumble through various versions of "No comprende, no comprende Francais."

Blister knew that his mother's maiden name was a French one, and he did resemble the photographs of her ancestors, but it had never occurred to him that there might actually be pockets of people anywhere that he might feel this affinity for. Susan laughed and pulled him toward the shower. The laughing eyes of the women twinkled as they walked away toward the wood flooring of the shower. Blister had dug one of the half dozen prophylactic skins out of his pack along with his towel and change of clothes. He hadn't wanted to be too anxious about where he and Susan were headed, but he didn't want to be caught unprepared either. The foil packet crinkled like electricity as he dug out the bar of soap from his bundle of clothing. It fell to the ground as Susan was stepping out of her skirt, and she collapsed against the rough wood of the shower in mock alarm.

"My, my," she said in the southern accent again, "now I ahm mortified." Blister's ears reddened as he bent to pick up the familiarly shaped envelope. "You save that for later," Susan said as she again lightly grabbed his head on both sides, "if I'm right, we'll soon have some company in here."

"Susan," Blister blurted, "I don't want you to think. . ."

She placed her fingers on his lips.

"Shhhh," she said. "Hear them coming?"

Several of the women walked into the shower now, making it crowded in the small, open air enclosure. A couple of the men also entered, all naked and carrying towels. Blister and Susan quickly dropped the rest of their clothes too, and the shower began with a spray from a large drum and several squeals from some of the women.

"Shower with friends, conserve water," said Susan, "it reminds me of Santa Cruz." Blister had a sudden thought of her life in California. They knew remarkably little about each other, he realized; this had not yet occurred to him. In the small conviviality and soapy-bodied atmosphere of the shower, her attractively slender litheness drew his attention. It seemed somewhat odd, to be so far from one's home, to be surrounded by people who spoke a different language, yet seemed so familiar, and to feel so completely comfortable. The Canadians began to sing songs in French and chuckle at Blister and Susan during parts of the refrain. By the time the warmish water had given out, Blister felt wonderfully clean.

They stopped for dinner at a small, family-run restaurant in the town before returning to the campsite. Two smallish Mexican girls with dark complexions waited on them, and their skin shone brightly against the white of their dresses. Susan ordered shrimp and a vegetable, a creamy broccoli dish. Blister had the same. Everything was beginning to take on a rosy glow for him, and he delighted in catching glimpses of Susan's uncluttered attractiveness. The fresh shrimp were succulent, and they washed them down with a Mexican white wine. As the sun dropped below the awnings outside the shop, the warm light splattered over Susan's face and shoulders, warming Blister's back and bathing them in a late afternoon glow. They talked and laughed about the singing and partying of the night before.

"What's this about some volleyball game?" asked Blister.

"Oh, some crazy scheme that Pete dreamed up. He wants to

promote some big rivalry between John and the others up at the ashram. . .you know, the palapa up on the hill and everybody who's staying down below. I guess he thinks that John and some of the others are a little delicate. He's got some macho hangup, some jock compulsion."

"He's the big, bearded fellow isn't he? The lumberjack from Washington?"

Susan laughed, "Yeah. The lumberjack type anyway. Actually, I think his dad owns a construction business in Portland. He played football in some college up in Washington. I don't remember where."

"When is this match supposed to be?" asked Blister.

"Who knows?" said Susan. "I think it's silly. I told John to forget about it." Blister noticed two policia enter the small restaurant and walk over to the counter. They wore the dark brown uniform shirts of the local forces along the coast, and huge pistoles hung at their sides. He remembered Junkie Joe in the city jail, and he wondered how hot it was getting, how itchy the local police were feeling about the large settlement of American backpackers at Doozyville. One of the officers turned to stare at the gringo couple. Blister smiled at the mustacioed man, but he only turned back around and said something to his partner. Both men calmly sipped on beers they had ordered.

Blister and Susan paid their bill and left. The officers had broken the reverie, and the sun was beginning to sink on the horizon. Blister had to return to relieve Jimmy and watch the tents and packs of those who would still be swimming or visiting the bars and restaurants of the village. They walked slowly back, again casually holding hands, neither saying very much. A last

raucous volleyball game was winding down as they approached the camp. Pete's loud voice could be heard exhorting someone to "dive for it, dive for the fucking ball." Blister waved at Nick as they walked up in the soft sand.

"Well, lookie you two, ain't you a pair. Whad 'ya do, wash your hair?" Nick had his guitar out and was softly strumming on the strings. Blister and Susan smiled and dropped their heads in front of him, their long hair falling over his guitar. Blister could see that his own was nearly as long as Susan's, and the intermingled dark and blond locks formed a tent-like canopy between Nick and them.

"Oh my God," said Nick, "smothered by tresses." They all laughed and Blister and Susan sat down by Nick on his straw mat.

"Any music tonight, folks?" asked Nick, "or are you two going to be 'busy?'"

Susan looked toward Blister. They hadn't really discussed any plans.

"I'll have to go get my guitar," she said, "I hope I haven't missed the evening chanting with John." The way she said it made Blister shiver for some reason.

"Look yonder," said Nick, "the guitar comes to Susan."

They turned around to see John and a dozen others from the hill walking toward the group of tents. John was carrying Susan's guitar case, and he and the others were shushing everyone and pointing toward the horizon. The sun was just sinking and the clouds were brilliantly lit with the reds and pinks of a glorious sunset. The group spread out among the shents and began pulling people out to watch the final rays depart. Two or three walked

over to the volleyball game and shushed the players, pointing to the sky.

"What the hell?" boomed Pete's loud voice, but even he quieted down at the overpowering beauty of the sky. John kneeled down with Susan and the two other guitar players and began a soft Hari Krishna, Hari Rama chant, and the others picked it up. Nick strummed a soft G chord and began a chorus of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" which nearly everyong seemed to join. They sang through all four verses and choruses of the song with Nick and Susan trading leads. His nasal tenor and Susan's rich soprano cut through the dusky air beautifully. By the time the last note finally died out and turned into several "Oms" from the chanters, the sky was fading from brilliance to pastel. Pete's voice finally broke the spell: "Let's play one more. C'mon, there's still light." Someone cut loose with a loud "Yeehaaa" and the slapping of the ball could be heard from the area of the net.

John handed Susan her case and sat back down on the mat.

"Susan," he said to her softly, "I finally got hold of Bill, the guy from Pacific Grove. He's leaving sometime tomorrow afternoon. He said we could ride all the way up, so I told him we'd meet him at four tomorrow. We really shouldn't pass up the chance on a ride like that." Blister could see him staring quietly toward Susan as he spoke.

"Gosh, John," Susan was fiddling with the handle on her case and looking down. She glanced briefly at Blister. "I thought we might stay a few more days."

"I think we should catch this chance," repeated John quietly.

"We're going into town for a walk now, want to come along?"

Susan looked back down at her hands. "No. We just came from the Quebecis camp. I'll stay here awhile and play some music."

Blister exchanged a brief look with John. The handsome Californian looked back to Susan and touched her softly on the hand.

"Okay," he said, "we'll be back later then," and he rose nimbly to his feet. Several of the others who had come down with him gathered to walk toward the town.

"Hey, Swami," they could hear Pete yell through the darkness, "you going to give us that game or not?"

"Not tonight, Peter," returned John, "maybe later."

"Aaughhh," was all Pete returned, then, "Hey! gimme my beer." A final few slaps of the volleyball could be heard as the "beloveds" strolled toward the wetter sand near the water.

"They wouldn't stand a chance," said Nick as he began strumming again.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," said Susan, "John lettered at Santa Cruz." She was still looking quietly at her guitar case.

They played music for a while around a fire in Doozyville, but the abandon of the night before wouldn't materialize. Blister was patient, he knew that the interaction between crowd and entertainment was delicate and capricious, sometimes seemingly not there only waiting to flare suddenly and take off in an instant. The beauty of the evening sky had quieted everyone down, and even the boistrous Pete and his sidekick Al decided to drink in town until "things started jumpin'" later. John and the others hadn't returned from Escondido by nine or so, and Susan suddenly told Nick and Blister she thought she'd like to take a walk by the

ocean.

"Bring your bag along," she said to Blister, "I'll leave my guitar here with your stuff." Blister looked at Nick and saw him looking evenly at Susan. Finally, he turned to Blister.

"Sure, that's fine. I'll watch the stuff for you," he said. "You better grab that bag," he said to Blister, "maybe you can roll me a 'doobie' or two from that stash of yours."

Blister told him "sure thing" and dug out his can of pot from beneath his bedroll. There was still plenty left from the two ounces he'd scored from the Canadians back at the coco plantation. He rolled two joints quickly by the light of his flashlight and reburied the can. The sand felt cool and damp on his fingertips as he scraped it back into the hole. He grabbed his sleeping bag and ground cloth and rolled them into a wad. He reached into his pack pocket and pulled out a bottle of tequila, debated taking it, then shoved it into his jeans' pocket. He crawled out of the shent and handed one of the marijuana cigarettes to Nick, who stopped strumming on his guitar and lit the joint at once, dragging deeply on the strong pot.

"She's down there," he said to Blister, pointing with the neck of his six string. Blister could barely make out the silhouette of Susan's form wading in the froth of the surf. It was entirely dark now and the lights of the town shone on the water across the inlet. Nick put his hand softly on Blister's shoulder and passed the joint to him.

"Here, take some of this and get on down there," he said quietly. The soft music of the southerner's speech sounded somewhat loud in the damp air. Blister hit the joint and passed it

back, the smoke making his lungs feel warm.

"Listen Nick," he said, "thanks, huh?"

"Go on, now," repeated the southerner, pushing Blister slightly with his hand. "For a goddamn Yankee, you a lucky bastard, know that Kansas?"

Blister pushed him back and walked down to Susan. Somehow, he felt disoriented, almost silly. He felt of his front pocket and heard the snap of the foil packet. For an instant, he felt a stabbing pang of guilt, but this washed away when he put his arm around Susan's waist and she pushed against him. They walked slowly away from the camp in the opposite direction of the town and circumnavigated the rocks at the base of the hill. The beach stretched back inward into another cove and they followed its curve until the lights and sounds of the settlements and camps disappeared. The moon was out now and the ocean glittered from its reflected light.

"Susan," Blister finally said as he guided her away from the water and spread the bag on ground, "are you really thinking of leaving tomorrow?" She sank down on the cool cover and he sat down beside her.

"Blister," she said, "I like you. I like the way you play guitar and I like your eyes. If we try to get too analytical, we're going to run into walls. People make things too hard on themselves, we're not going to do that, are we?"

Blister didn't know exactly how to respond. On the one hand, he was driven to be expedient, on the other, Susan's response seemed evasive. He wondered what her relationship with John amounted to; it was funny that he hadn't thought much of that before. He had

another quick flash of Susan in Kansas, and the sameness of their names nearly struck him funny.

"I sure could use a drink of something," said Susan, breaking the silence. Blister reached into his back pocket and pulled out the tequila.

"Oh, wonderful," she said and she unscrewed the top and took a small tug. "And what have you been thinking about?" she asked as she passed the bottle to Blister.

"Oh, too many things," he said. The liquor felt warm as he drank on it. He reached around Susan from behind her and crossed his arms along her ribcage. She reached down and placed his hands on her breasts and pushed against them. She made little noises in her throat and Blister nuzzled her neck with his lips.

"I hope you thought to bring your 'package,'" she said. One of Blister's hands had moved down onto her flat belly and she nearly winced as he moved it lower.

"Let's not think for a while," he said. He could feel his body responding as both of them began to breathe in heavy bursts.

"Oh, damnit Blister," she said, "damnit anyway." Blister kicked the bottle away from them and they turned toward each other. He could hear the swishing of the ocean in the distance and the first touch of her breasts on his chest opened him up. "This is it," he thought to himself, "all I ever really wanted. After everything, this is all that matters....the soft crush of skin on skin."

Blister steadied himself against the pole of the volleyball net. The two teams were warming up, batting the ball back and

forth and trying to loosen their arms and legs. Pete was trying too hard to organize the bedoozies into a coherent team, but it was only ten o'clock in the morning and some of them were still suffering from the partying of the night before.

"C'mon, John, it's too damned early for volleyball," blared Pete, "we don't get loosened up till three or so."

"You wanted a game," said John as he deftly set up one of the women on the side of the beloveds. Blister was impressed with his athletic skills. Although thin, he was nearly six feet tall and active. Wiry strong they would have called him in Kansas. The woman spiked the ball expertly and it caroomed off Pete's forearm at an odd angle, finally landing out of bounds.

"Ah shit," he said, "c'mon Blister, we need another player over hear."

"Six on six," said John, "we'll go with what we've got right now. You have four men as it is, we'll play with three and three." This was a side of John that Blister hadn't seen, the self-assured leader. He looked at Susan warming up with the others. She still had on the skirt she'd worn the night before. She hadn't wanted to stay the night in the cove where they'd walked to.

"I should get back on the hill tonight," she'd said after they'd made love twice and smoked the reefer Blister had taken with them.

"Why?" he'd asked. He wanted to wake up with Susan beside him.

"No whys," had been her only answer. They'd walked back to the campsite and found Nick and another guitarist singing for the revelers around the fire at Doozyville. Susan had left her guitar, but gone up to the hill by herself, leaving Blister to join

the late party. The early morning bugle calls of the Federales had again awakened Blister just after sunrise, and he still felt fuzzyheaded from the proceedings. Susan had come down with the others and gone off to breakfast before Blister had gotten up. He hadn't had a chance to find out if she still planned to leave that afternoon. After the ecstatic lovemaking, it wouldn't seem right for her to leave so suddenly. Another female "demon" had joined Pete and the others and some of the beloveds wanted Blister to join their side. He wasn't sure he felt up to a game so early in the day.

"Take Nicky," he said as his friend walked up from the row of restaurants.

"Nicky, Nicky," several of the women on John's side shouted as the agile southerner hustled up to the court.

"Sure, I'll play," he said, "who's turn to kick off?"

Several players on both sides groaned, but the warming up continued. Finally, the games started. They were to play best three out of five. Pete made a big deal of marking the borders in the sand.

"No jungle rules," said John, and he started the volley for serve for the first game. Pete and Al were both large, aggressive players, and the bedoozie side played a sloppy, but hard game. They won the first match fifteen to seven and razzed the others on how easy this was going to be. John's team played more consistently, however, and pulled out a close second game, fifteen to thirteen. They broke for refreshments and changed sides again, beer for the bedoozies, juice for the beloveds. Blister was glad not to have to join and he kept score from the poles. Twice, he

called Al for being in the net and gave the point to John and Susan's team. Pete complained belligerently, but the decisions stood.

"Goddamn chickenshit rules," he repeated as his team lost the second game.

The third match went to a tiebreaker with John slamming the decisive shot through Pete to win twenty to eighteen. Al claimed net, but Blister decided no infraction.

"Why don't you just go on and join their side outright?" squawked Pete in anger, but the bedoozies rallied in the fourth for an easy victory. A good-sized crowd had gathered and the volume of response increased on each point. Both sides were playing well by now, and sweat was dripping from most of the players' bodies.

One of the women on each side decided they'd had enough and Pete again called for Blister to join the bedoozies.

"You're both even, play with six each like you planned," he said.

"Let Jimmy join them," said Pete, "c'mon, we're used to seven on a side now." In a way, Blister wanted to join the bedoozies, they could use a steadying influence and Blister had played a lot of volleyball growing up. On the other hand, his style would also add some power to the finesse game of the beloveds, and he could mix it up on the net with the larger men of the bedoozies. Jimmy was quite a bit lighter than himself, and with his native athletic abilities, Blister would probably tip the balance. He never had to make the choice.

"Look!" someone from the crowd shouted, "Federales!"

Everyone jerked their heads toward the row of restaurants be-

tween the court and the town. About twenty-five green-uniformed soldiers with automatic weapons could be seen pulling some young gringos out of one of the bars and frisking them. A sudden panic ran through the players and spectators of the volleyball match.

"Let's get the bejesus out of here," said someone from Pete's team and they all began running for their camp. Blister knew that running mobs attracted more attention, especially to men with weapons in their hands, than a quiet mob.

"Don't run!" he shouted, "Don't run! Walk! Walk normally!" The same advice had saved a mob panic near the Smithsonian during the famous moratorium riot in 1969. Even after Blister's experiences in the Army, it was one of the most vivid recollections he had of those troubled years. Some collected soul had saved two-hundred people from themselves.

The mob on the beach responded equally well. They slowed to a hurried walk, and everyone headed for his or her gear. Blister quickly scrabbled the sand off his can of pot and threw it into his pack. "Hell if those assholes are going to get this," he thought to himself. Somehow, it was the emblem of what marked his generation as unique from those who wanted to lock them up. He hurried out of his frond shelter and saw Nick tying his bedroll to his own pack. He walked over to his friend to make sure he was all right.

"How you doing, Nickie?" he asked the dark haired southerner.

"Kansas ole boy," he answered, "you look me up in Nashville first time through, hear? I'm going over that hill as fast as these picker's legs will carry me." He'd finished tying his gear up and was closing up the snaps on his guitar case.

Blister embraced him briefly and they exchanged a hard hug.

"Real fine picking with you, brother," said Nick. Blister could see some of the soldiers starting to walk towards the collection of shelters that comprised Doozyville. "They should have surrounded us first," he thought. They were still about five-hundred yards down the beach.

"How're we going to get out of here, Nick?" asked Blister. He thought about Susan up on the hill with her guitar case. Nick saw him gaze up there.

"Don't worry about them," he said, "John will get them out. We'll have to hustle down the beach and overland it to the highway. We can catch a bus, even if we have to wait a day or so." Blister continued to look up the hill. "C'mon!" They slipped quickly around the base of the hill and headed toward the cove where Blister and Susan had spent two and a half hours the night before. The last he saw of the Federales, they had stopped to take down the volleyball net. Why would they even worry about something like that? he wondered. He thought he could see the impressions in the sand where he had spread out his bag the night before as they scurried down the beach and into the bush. Nick clamored ahead with his pack and guitar case. Blister wondered how far they would have to travel through the dense underbrush before they hit the highway. He knew that Puerto Angel lay several miles to the south.

GLIMPSE

Once, while I stopped by a prairie graveplot
to enjoy a view, a brace of crows
hit the hilltop cedars.
Though I had no memory
of a single buried one beneath them,
those noisy birds seemed to know a thing or two
of death.
Some jet or cloudish blemish
dissected the sun up high, and
a shadowshiver crossed the plane
of our encumbrances.
The crows loudly disassembled
like broken promises,
and angular to the wind,
passed slowly by.

HOMAGE TO WHITMAN: VAN WINDOW

In Nacodoches, I am the rounded rocks
That speckle from the houses
In reds and brawny oranges.
I am the men along the shoulder
With their tapes, or on their tractors.
Walt, I am the cigarette pack litter
The roller driver flings back
To the wind--it glints and
I am the folded cellophane
And the plastic band;
I am the red earth receiving
This offal safely beyond the fresh asphalt.
I am the rows of shanties and their frontyard junk,
The engine block which rusts to match the clay,
The dark children who play on the red diamond,
I'm the horses on the green beyond.
I am the older woman--frail and slightly hunkered--
Who mows her lawn,
Whose jaunty stride belies evidence of ecstasies,
Whose body, though old, is still voluptuous,
Whose bosom gently sways in time
Along a four-lane, in Nacodoches.

FELLING THE TREE

The first real day I can recall
is crosscut in my memory
with an oak
that had to go.

"My sons will learn
to work," you dared,
"my sons will learn
to work."

The tree looked fine to me,
but back and forth
we wore it down.

"Son, you cannot push
the saw. You cannot push
the saw." Each thing
said twice, we tugged
the steel between us.

The notch I didn't understand
until the whole damned thing
began to tip. Creaking deep,
its top asway--

"Get back!" (Get back
an echo doubled)
and slowly down
it came.

The stump a sad excuse
for tree, the massive trunk
a horizontal.

Somehow, we let each other down
that day.

THE STORM

Picture a truant squeaking
From the swingset, and the ghostly revolving
Of the merry-go-round,
Riderless now in the dust-whirled yard,
And the cool whiff of ozone
From the blue-black clouds--
Oaks and ashes, maples ashiver
To the sudden wind.
The thickly rippled panes could tremble
Twenty seconds to the thunder,
And we were second in command
To the weather--Mr. Hardeman, Mrs. Bare
Demoted by nature.
We were free to roam the windows
By the books, now parched and fragile:
American History, House on the Prairie.
We loved it when the clock would stop
With a groan--
And the schoolhouse hush.

WAKING TO SPARROWS

Trying to bring myself
To un-nestle the sparrows
Who've clung uninvited
Above a window, fouling
The wood framing,
Clattering each morning,
Waking me to cheap itineraries,
Raising several broods
(Throughout the summer)
Of noisy chicks.
They've no right, I remind myself,
To occupy my space.
They'll have to, by God's grace,
Relocate elsewhere,
Transmogrify, vacation south
For the winter.
The big birds on the posts,
The hawk's eye,
Goad me on.
They pray for such guests.
Forced acquaintance and quick goodbyes
Are the order.

(ABSOLUTELY) THE LAST TIME

A spider sits on my shower room wall
Above the tile where the barnwood begins,
I splatted him with water once to test his mettle
But he never moved.
As brittle as a dry seahorse he stood,
As fragile as a fiddle.
What brought him then, to this unlikely grave?
Perhaps he's of the kind the females mistreat
After love. Did he lull her to sleep
And make a dash for it?
She must have been iired,
And being larger (and a bully)
Caught him easily (what frantic excitement
That must have been.)
Did it hurt, dry spider, when she slipped it to you?
Did you feel the sting?
Did you think she'd be sated
With part of your juices?
Was it worth it?
Would you do it again?

TO A LAWYER IN DALLAS

Through cool gully-pockets of bug heavy air
and sweet aroma of cut alfalfa
sped the wall-eyed Sprite--
at seventeen, our last fishing jaunt
to Minnesota.

The screaming whine of truck tires at eye level
made us feel as indistinct and daring
as heat lightning through the long Dakota night.
Bellowing fun and squashing Bud cans,
we plucked hopes as fat as bass bellies from the sky
as one might grasp at fuzzy stars.
Drunk with air, we tossed the crushed-steel fears
of youth along the roadside.
Hell yes! we were slim as spars.

Now, you dream of money your parents tell me,
Ft. Worth condominiums. Me?
I've kept the photo taken by your uncle--
us both gripping sweating bottles and framing
the sagging chain of fierce-eyed pike.
Something I threw out with the Bud cans
jags my memory. Wife-less, child-less, I wonder
did I toss one fear too many?

REMISSION

My black neighbor must be muttering now.

His name is Roscoe Pitts.

He lives alone.

In there behind the curtains

His dark eyes must be straining

To attach the scraping sound

Of my shovel on the sidewalk

To yardwork, yardwork, yardwork.

It puzzles him,

My disregard for well-kept grass.

Sure, I mow the measly lot

Before it goes to seed each month

Or so, his weedy lawn

Stays closely cropped.

The crannie green in sidewalk cracks

I harvest once (as I am now)

The whole long year.

He has cancer.

The colon kind with bags and tubes

And no longer pedals

His chrome-fendered bike

Around the town. All last winter

Barely home, the battle apparent

In the gaunt, velvet boniness

Of his furry skull.

He's better now, and likely bedeviled

To see me sweating in late summer heat,

Sprucing up the corner, making ours
The only stretch on the railroad block
With clean, wide walkways
And a winter-ready crop
Of level-headed lawn.

We exchange sublime predictions
From time to time, concerning weather
And the ways of man.
He says he's fine now, thank you,
And occasionally misunderstands
When I wave and yell
On the streets downtown.

He forgets sometimes.
But well he must have overheard
My rage one night
At golden-glover Smoothie White
Who'd three nights in a row
Popped weakly to short
With a man on third
In later innings.

"Fucking nigger!" I yelled
On the soft summer air--
He must have heard,
He scowled for weeks
When I passed him.
This sweating now
For six months of tidiness
Is maybe recompense

For my oversight.

 This sound he loves,
This scrape and scraw
Of metal on pavement,
His lone retirement chore
Though weakened by illness.
And the mud-stained sidewalk
With pernicious grass runners shoveled off
Promises cleanly that,
For at least another season,
The snow will settle evenly
On our joining lots.

MY MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY

The restaurant people mistake our party for bigwigs,
And lead us to the choicest alcove.
There, under musing eyes,
Cherubim, busts,
Our patter sparkles.
We present five silver spoons
That complete a set started ages ago;
Conversation lingers over wine and espresso
While we pretend that time can be nibbled
Like pastry.

Later, driving home, my mother catalogs
Her Buick's nuisances,
Especially the pocket of noise
At the driver's ear. This chafing
Of glass on rubber flits like hair,
Or a magnetic field of irritation.
I prescribe talcum powder and she rejoices
At a solution so simple.
Troubles loom as abstract as fen-mist,
As massive as years
Behind trees and barns as we clip along.
I experience the simple joys of obligation,
Of listening quietly
And remaining the child.

SEARCHING A PHOTOGRAPH

The names crop up
as remote to me
as Wyoming plain--
Whiteley, Hawkins--my great-grandmother
does look slightly English,
perhaps her dress,
but milking a cow?
An Uncle Andy looms
off-center, background; it was
his ranch I understand,
if a single shed and treeless
shortgrass can ghost a spread.
What haunts me about this turn-
of-century haze
is the sunless past
the day reflects.
Her face not mine,
the woman turns her gaze
to camera,
the pail, the cow look real,
but a lack of horizon landmarks,
a tree or mountain,
throws me off.
Where are the shadows
these lives should cast?

It's Monday morning and the non-beautifuls
are unsnarling the weekend's luckless passions
with rinse and curling irons. I'm dumb
to be here at these hours, and their indifference
accuses me offhandedly.

I'm stingy too, I suppose, or I'd pay
the standard twelve dollars at some regular salon
or go back to the dry-voiced barbers
I was raised on. Hell, my black "student artist"
cares not a whit for my limp honkey locks
around this carrousel of illusion. Mirrors capture
odd postures of nurse-like women,
arms angled over their own hair
or their neighbor's. Those who were lonely
since Friday try to cadge others
into lunch.

The movies on HBO were "dumb" someone says.
Everything seems so this early in the week
and they worry about a test on pores
and texture. One giddy one studied only "half-uh-hour,"
another through two movies on the tube.

In a corner, a short-waisted, stubby-necked one curls
and combs, and curls again,
but no bouffant desire will stretch the frame.

"Give it up," I could say,
but that's dumb too, and one-by-one
the soppy heads are curried dry.

My trainee asks again too loudly if I'm sure
I only want this much off--she doesn't care
except I'm to blame for the result.

One whose face is less flawed commands an audience
of three others while still another does her over.
The effects perk us all a little--the cut
and blow dry enhances her best feature--cheekbones--
just enough.

We make it do.

PRAIRIE CURE

Kansas is just that vacant lot
between KC and Denver.

--Anon. Interstate Traveller

We could erect barricades
and claim
that things are calmer
in the eye of the continent;
that detraction upsets this thing
we call a fragile balance.
We would let in those, of course,
who need a rest
or healing.
We'd console them with the rustle
of dried grasses
in the evening.
We'd show them how it is
a kind of garden here--how trees can lean
gracefully off-center;
how flat horizon
is only foot of curtain.

CRITICAL AFTERWARD

The terms, Bildungsroman, Entwicklungsroman, Erziehungsroman, and Künstlerroman, are all variations of the Novel of Apprenticeship that I have attempted to write in Blister's Dilemmas. In stories of this kind, the protagonist, usually a young or immature person, comes to learn about his or her place in the world through revelations, experiences, or a combination of the two in such a way that he or she is a different person at the end of the work than at the outset. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship is the most often mentioned of the precedents for this genre, but such other examples as Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, James Joyce's The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel could also be included in a roll call of these kinds of books. Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, while encompassing many other forms of writing, is also similar in that the story centers on the adventures of a young protagonist who is finding his way in the world, even though forces beyond his control play major parts of his struggle. Though Fielding's seminal work is not strictly one of discovery, the elements of the picaresque novel and the adventure travelogue contained in that work also served as a model for the form and structure of my own work.

Blister (whose full name is Jonathan Bliss) travels to Mexico in the mid-1970s after his discharge from the Army. The necessity of his having to work his way through college in the late sixties, and his entrance into the service shortly after his graduation,

kept him from taking any kind of extended trip or long vacation to anyplace before in his life. For one who has always worked while others seemed to be able to "play," the opportunity for unstructured free time presents both opportunity and disorientation. He leaves behind in his native Kansas a young woman whom he has lived with for over a year, but who has begun a career of her own as a speech pathologist after completing her own education. That she is not able, or not willing, to join him on his journey continues to drive him to review and contemplate the status of their life together and their possibly cooling relationship. Combined with this uncertainty is his whole attitude toward the culture of his country, which has seemed to needlessly alienate the ideals and lifestyle of the sixties' activists who turned to drugs, the counterculture, and experimentation for answers rather than to the solutions that served their parents. For this reason, matters of family past are purposely diminished in Blister's Dilemmas, and the interactions with his immediate contemporaries, his chosen "clan," are emphasized and showcased. Whether it is true or not, this is a generation that perceives itself as different and self sufficient. Whether they fought in the conflict in Vietnam, or struggled at home against it, the bond they feel is real and substantial. Blister's struggles center on his attempts to find an appropriate niche in this cross current of values and behavior, and to discover a group or social class to attach himself to. His attempts, of course, echo the "lost generation" themes of earlier twentieth century writers (Fitzgerald and Hemingway to name just two) and the existential patterns of Sartre and Camus.

Blister's involvement in the clandestine activities of the "drug culture" qualify him as a picaro, one who lives more by his wits than his industry, and the novel reflects some of the plotlessness of this class of fiction as well as emphasizing action and adventure. Since he has very little money to spend in his six to eight weeks in Mexico, Blister is forced to travel by the cheapest means available and stay often in the lowest and most dangerous sections of the beaches and villages he visits. Any work of fiction must have unity, but the episodic nature of picaresque novels poses special problems of this nature. One of the difficulties I have encountered in this, my first novel length work, has been to maintain unity of action. Blister's recurring digressions back to his situation with Susan provide part of unifying aspect of the book, but his continual confrontations with the agents of Mexican justice also help provide continuity by introducing the theme of alienation from the mainstream of society that characterized the lives of so many in these troubled years.

Blister resembles the capricious Jack Wilton of Thomas Nashe's sixteenth century work, The Unfortunate Traveller, more than the indigent Lazaro of the Spanish work, Lazarillo de Tormes, translated into English just prior to Nashe's work. In an introduction to The Unfortunate Traveller, H. F. B. Brett-Smith claims that:

With such a rascal (Lazaro) Jack Wilton has nothing in common but a varied and wandering existence, and whereas the Spaniard travelled only in Spain, and from necessity, the Englishman did it from a lively curiosity, and made the grand tour. His poverty in the opening scenes is not the gnawing hunger of the beggar, which

drove Lazaro to steal loaves and small change, but the chronic impecuniosity of the undergraduate or the nobleman's page, a jest in itself, and finding its relief in jest. . . . In fine, Jack Wilton, unscrupulous rascal as he may be, was a hanger-on of aristocracy, capable on occasion of sustaining the dignity of an earl, and extorting from society only so much plunder as was reasonable his due.¹

Blister's poverty is of this kind, then, temporary and somewhat self-imposed, and his motivations for being in Mexico are more akin to Wilton's dilettantism than Lazaro's desperation.

In telling this story of Blister's growing self-confidence and adjustment to the world at large, I have employed the third person narration, but restricted the perspective to Blister as "central consciousness" persona. This imitates Henry James' pattern in The Ambassadors, and is appropriate for a work that attempts to speak for a generation as well as an individual. I have not delved so deeply into the consciousness of the protagonist as D. H. Lawrence does in Sons and Lovers, but have chosen to let most of Blister's feelings be revealed through action and his responses to the situations and people he meets. This follows Wayne C. Booth's contentions of the "implied author" when he says:

Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships

¹ Thomas Nashe, The Unfortunate Traveller, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), p. viii.

with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.²

For models of style, I have relied on the tradition of twentieth century realism along the lines of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. Carlos Baker's quote of Hemingway on descriptive techniques fairly well sums up what I have tried for in my own work:

Hemingway is very clear on this matter of the presented vision. "All good books," he wrote in 1933, "are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was. If you can get so that you can give that to people, then you are a writer."³

Except for the consistent digressions and flashbacks then, I have tried to keep time fairly chronological as befits the episodic nature of the story, and have tried to render the scenes realistically enough that Hemingway's sense of "people and the places and how the weather was" shows through. Only occasionally have I indulged in the popular "stream of consciousness" style of Joyce

² Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 71.

³ Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 73-4.

and Virginia Woolf, nor are there many instances of "vertical time," or simultaneity of perspectives.

Leaving precedents and models behind for the moment, the chapter displayed in this report is a crucial one for Blister and magnifies some of the dilemmas that he is trying to resolve in the time of the story. The contrasting styles of the two camps of gringos, the "beloveds" and "bedoozies" represent the yin and yang, the alpha and omega of Blister's sub-culture. Out of the intellectual and emotional crucible of the late sixties emerged two distinct paths--the one leading to drugs and libertinism, the other to mysticism and spiritualism. As a musician, Blister feels drawn toward both factions. The former provide the vigorous audience appreciation necessary for a performer, while the latter orientation allows the creative atmosphere and stability that seem a natural outgrowth of the antiwar philosophy of the era. The volleyball game, of course, attempts to dramatize this dichotomy and Blister's deliverance from the moment of choice is only a temporary one that he will eventually have to deal with, as all people must make their own determinations along these lines.

His short but satisfying affair with Susan from California serves to heighten his confusion concerning his relationship with Susan in Kansas, but also bolsters his belief that the love bond between men and women is the one surety that will continue to provide pleasure and substance in his life. More interactions with women will follow as he winds his way southward, then decides to turn north toward home and the destiny that awaits him there. The time with Susan from California also gives him confidence in him-

self as an attractive partner, and will lead eventually to his beginning to feel comfortable with who he is sexually and artistically. The fact that he and the singer, Susan, share that common interest will help him begin to see his life as integrated rather than fragmented. The confusing separation with Susan, though, and his unsureness concerning her and John's relationship both provide the realistic lessons that nothing, especially male-female relations, is easy in a decade of broad social change and experimentation.

The various brushes with the Mexican law officials underscore the necessity to take responsibility for one's actions and choices, while it also teaches Blister to live by his wits but not to shrink from life either. By the end of his trip, he will become adept at blending into the Mexican culture of the marketplace as well as crafty in slipping through the official barriers of policia and bureaucrats. He will come to appreciate the Indians for what they are, poor but dignified people who oftentimes open their homes more readily than the more materialistic but stingier norteamericanos of his own country and Canada. The story eventually ends with Blister leaving Mexico more comfortable with both himself and his fellow man, and anxious to return to Kansas to puzzle out his problems with Susan and assume his place in American culture, whatever it turns out to be. Blister's Dilemmas, then, ends on a hopeful note, and points out, like Huckleberry Finn, that a long descent into confusion and deception need not necessarily lead to total destruction or nihilism. Blister's journey is a troubling one, but one of education and deliverance from the partially self-imposed demons that plague all of us at periods in our lives.

POETRY

Robert Scholes, in his brief introduction, Elements of Poetry, distinguishes between dramatic and narrative forms when he states that "a narrative poem gives us a story as told by a narrator from a perspective outside the action, while a dramatic poem presents a fragment of an action (or story) through the voice (or point of view) of a character involved in that action."⁴ Thus, the dramatic tradition presents action more immediately, while the narrative poet recounts action at a later time from the distanced vantage point of reflection. In this way, I have tried in my own poetry to stick closer to the narrative mode and present action after the fact and after the mind or sensibilities of the speaker has had a chance to sort through the significance of the acts being reported. This, then, would probably most closely fit Wordsworth's formula of poetry consisting of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. . . . recollected in tranquility." In fact, much of what Wordsworth states in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads strikes me as still sound in principle as a theoretic basis for the composition of poetry.

The conversational speech patterns that Wordsworth consciously cultivated in his own poems can be found in the influential precedents of the work of William Butler Yeats and Robert Frost in the early part of this century. Although Yeats and Frost wrote mostly in fixed forms, and though much of contemporary poetry is in open form, I have tried to retain some of the diction and feeling

⁴ Robert Scholes, Elements of Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 15.

of these two giants of Modernism. The probing quality that all meditative poetry contains is also evident in the concerns of many of my own poems, and I have consciously tried to go beyond purely descriptive levels to "unearth" or "reveal" the deeper significances of events and actions common to us all.

"(Absolutely) the Last Time," for example, begins with the relatively static situation of an often-noted spider's body in a shower leading the speaker into a reconstruction of what may have occurred to bring the creature to "this unlikely grave." The poem then presents a possible scenario that has more human overtones than animal. This projection of self into the trivial consequences of insect or arachnid lives also echoes, I hope, some of the conceits of the metaphysical poets. Although Donne's "The Flea" is a seduction lyric and my own spider poem an imagined narrative, they both touch on the subtleties of interaction between the sexes. "Glimpse" presents a foreshadowing of mortality through the natural world which, while not dealing with the sublime nor beautiful per se, suggests some of Keats' concerns in his elaborate odes on beauty and the transitory nature of life.

The essential metaphor of the longest poem in this short collection would be that of racial prejudice to an ever lurking cancer in the American consciousness, even though it may appear at times, much like the speaker's neighbor's disease, to be held in abeyance. "Remission," then, attempts to uncover and investigate the small ways in which people can damage one another's feelings, and the connection and mutual fate that we all share with each other.

The subject matter of my poetry varies from any act or activity

that can gain the attention of people, and includes such situations as a householder trying to dislodge pesky sparrows from above the exterior of his bedroom window to trying to seek his own family lineage through looking closely at fading family photographs. Parent and child relationships are included in the subject matter of my poems, and "Felling the Tree" and "My Mother's Birthday" both touch on these important aspects of growing and learning.

I have tried to choose images that are both appropriate for the poems, yet striking enough in their originality to jar and delight the reader at the same time. Thus, in "Storm," the authority of school teachers over their students is interrupted by a violent rainstorm and their "demotion" by nature precedes the independence the children feel coming with their eventual graduation and independence. Likewise, the natural terminology of weather is applied to the poet's home state of Kansas in "Prairie Cure" when the state is termed "the eye of the continent." This suggests both the calmer atmosphere of the plains compared to the urban activity and mountainous terrain of the outlying sections of the country, and implies that there is a safety to be found if one is willing to invest the time to observe more closely.

Rather than viewing the world through the heightened sensibilities of the confessional mode of much of post World War II poetry, I have consciously tried to stay in the tradition of talking about things and events, and let these form the center of my work. I see this as nothing new, but as a continuation of the methods employed by many predecessors, particularly the Romantics and Modernists.

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BLISTER'S DILEMMAS:

AN EXCERPT WITH SELECTED POEMS

by

JEFFREY B. BOYER

B. A., University of Kansas, 1970

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
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Abstract. This combined Master's Report contains a chapter from a novel, Blister's Dilemmas, and a selection of twelve poems from the body I have worked on in the Creative Writing program at Kansas State University. The novel is a combination Apprenticeship Novel and adventure travelogue with precedents in literature of the Sixteenth and Eighteenth centuries as well as in the modern novels of Joyce and Lawrence in the present one. In the work, the protagonist, Johathan Bliss, seeks to find his place in the world on a trip down the west coast of Mexico in the mid-1970s. He is troubled by his disorientation after the confusing conflict of ideas and values of the America of his time, and tries to sort out his own feelings concerning his attachment to his culture as well as his commitment to a relationship with Susan, his girlfriend and housemate who has remained behind in Kansas to pursue her professional career. The novel is episodic in nature, and he meets and travels with various members of his own sub-culture in the course of his journey. He shares with these contemporaries the vague conviction that their answers to the problems that face them will have to be their own, and through a growing confidence in himself and his peers, he begins to accept the Mexican culture he is travelling through as well as elements of his own in the United States. The action of the excerpt centers around a brief, satisfying affair with woman musician from California and a confrontation of sub-groups, the "Beloveds" and "Bedoozies," of his own chosen peer group. The poetry reflects narrative and meditative techniques of previous eras applied to the open form and contemporary concerns of post-modernist poetry of today. The unifying principle of both parts of this report is the ebb and flow of the individual trying to overcome alienation and find his place in the world of today