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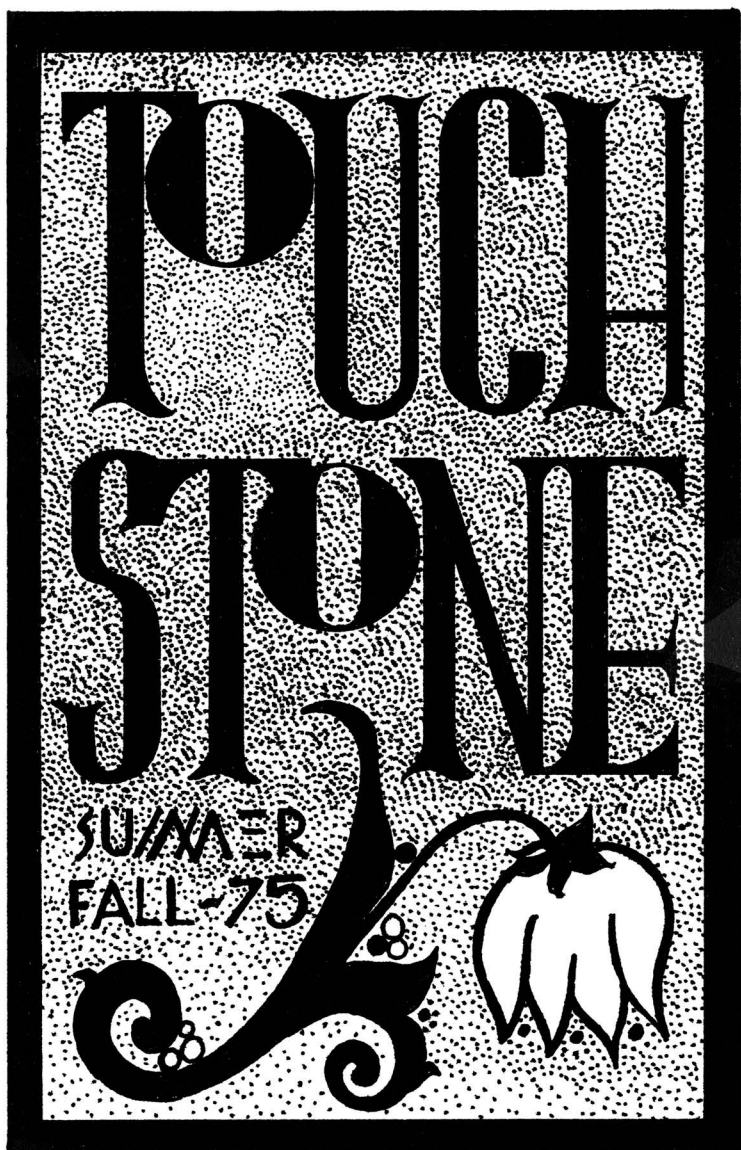
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Eighth Avenue—George Mackenzie

MORNINGSTAR

Bill Macomber

There once was a human named Margolis. He had a human son named Benny whom he loved very much, and a human wife who was warm and good and full of love for her son and husband.

When Benny got up on the day that it happened, he ran into his parents' room and burrowed his way between them up the middle of the bed until they were all three warm and sleepy and cozy. Benny began to squirm and giggle though for he was excited and impatient for the day to start.

Margolis worked operating a railroad bridge on the East River, and his son was going for the day with him while he worked his shift. He was responsible for many things and people at his job, for he worked up in the tower and whenever a high stacked ship needed to go through, he had to phone back up the line and stop the passenger trains that ran every forty-five minutes, pull the levers that raised the middle section of the bridge until the boat was by, lower the bridge, and give the clear signal to the waiting train. (As you see, he had control over the lives of many people.)

He lay that morning with his arm around Benny and his wife and waited for the alarm clock (he didn't need) to go off and prove to him that it was time again to get up and get ready. Usually he was awake before his wife and boy, and would lie thinking about them and planning for them as he stared at the ceiling.

They all three tumbled out of bed together and Margolis told Benny what to wear as his wife shuffled out to the kitchen and began to fix breakfast. After a time they all sat together in the warm little kitchen and ate a noisy meal after Benny thanked God for food and a new day.

Margolis loved to take a long look at the bright new morningstar of each clear day when he walked out of the little house to the car. This morning on the way to work, he explained to his son that it wasn't a star at all. He told him it was the planet Venus reflecting the sun as it came up, like a mirror, like the moon, like the sun on the water on a Sunday at the park. Benny was quite receptive today and attentive to everything his father said, not wanting to miss a thing about this exciting day. This was the first time the circumstances allowed anyone to treat him as though he were worth talking to on a mature level, and though he wasn't aware of that particular sensation, he did feel a warm sense of companionship with his father, vague and indescribable, but strong and real.

When they got to the bridge, Margolis introduced his son to the human who worked the late night shift. He said hello and told Margolis that everything was clear at the moment.

When he was gone, Benny went immediately to the control levers and stared out the large front window at the tracks and the river. The operating gears and cogs that raised and lowered the bridge were right up in the open in

the tower for easy access to the operator in case they got jammed or dry and squeaky. They were set off by a guardrail and Margolis warned his son to stay clear of them. He went from the window to the gears as different trains went by, and waved at the people, who sometimes waved back, or watched the cogs and sprockets turn and fit together like a huge mechanical toy.

After a while, Margolis forgot Benny was there at all, as the boy quietly played and pretended the day away. After lunch, it was the same and before too long, Benny was ready to go home. It had started to rain just after lunch and the bridge and ships and trains were obscured. He still ran to the window when the bridge was coming up, but ran back to watch the gears as it went down.

It was near the end of the day when two large barges came at once to the bridge and needed to come through. They both blasted twice to let Margolis know they were ready. For the last time that he ever would, Margolis picked up the phone and spoke with the signalman up the track. "Better hold back a little extra this time, there's two to come through." The thin bridge raised slowly into the sky and the first barge was through in a few minutes. The second barge let out a blast of smoke and just sat in midstream, its tall stack smokeless for a few minutes. Margolis looked down the track for the oncoming train, and saw the green light flashing back up the track, meaning the clear signal had been given to the train. He panicked for a moment and wondered how the train could have gotten the clear signal. The barge began to slowly move through now and Margolis reached for the down levers, ready to pull as soon as the stack was clear. He heard the bells clanging down on the road to block off the traffic and knew the train was near. He wiped his forehead and as soon as was reasonable, pulled the down levers. An awful chill went up his spine as he heard the whistle of the train come faintly from back up the track. Then, he couldn't believe his ears when he heard a shriek blend in with the end of the whistle, from just on the other side of the tower, near the gears. He whipped frantically around and saw Benny lying on the floor, clutching to the inside of the guardrail, his leg beginning to jerk as his pantleg got pulled further and further into the cogs near the edge of the mechanism. His son screamed for help and Margolis darted for the control levers in a helpless frenzy of motion. He pulled them up and the cogs ground to a halt. Margolis leaped across half the tower with one step and leaned over the rail to grab his son. Benny screamed with the pain of the jerking but his leg wouldn't come loose. Margolis screamed at the ceiling and ran back over to the panel to reverse the gears. Then came the nauseating feeling in the pit of his stomach as he heard the train screech and looked up to see it just entering the far side of the bridge, with the raised section still ten feet off the track. He stood silent for a split second with his eyes closed, looking up through the ceiling to the clouds. Margolis felt every muscle in his body snap when he pulled the lever down and the bridge came the rest of the way down. He screamed so loud and so long that Benny was gone before he turned back around. The train sped safely by and a few people who weren't reading the evening Times looked up and waved as they went by.

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

Becky Compton

You came into the room
and asked why I was crying;
Because I couldn't read
the words in my dictionary;
a pressed orchid some damned fool gave me
stained the pages.

BLEEKER STREET CAFE

Ken Shedd

Love is like a Bleeker Street cafe
entered hesitantly, as one ascends
dimly lighted stairs.

Once there, lovers laugh and toast together
then throw their empty glasses down,
shattered slivers upon the floor.

They overlook smoke-dark walls to
Swiss slopes, Japanese gardens and African velds,
plastered all around.

Their moments of love
are mirrored by dusty bottle-candles,
time-worn but still sustaining,

whose flames flicker demurely, yet
fitfully flash against the dark,
weeping colored waxes

that gradually grow cold,
piling black on blue
on red on gold.

CONFLICT

Dennis J. Rotman

My pink and brown abode with
the steeply flat roof
sits on the corner of the
street with the paint peeled
snuggled homes all alike guarded
by fat rats from
round sentry houses overflowing
with weekly repartions
that leads to the cannery
where dirty grim light-hearted folk
butcher smelly fish
and the street lined with
low white houses fronted
with green grass dotted
with scrolls of the day and
sidewalks so well
planned that one can
walk naturally
and never
step on a crack
that leads to the
clerical offices where
smelly starch-white fish
butcher themselves.

SELF-ASSURANCE?

Dianne Osborn

You sit there poised
Your hands needing no beads
to worry. Very little
would leave you shaken;
then you bend
and pull a cuff down
to hide white socks.



Untitled—Robert Fyfe

DEPOT

Paula Meyers

The boy at the counter leaned on his elbows and thumped his pencil on a dog-eared yellow writing pad. The rhythmic throbbing annoyed me, and I turned my attention to one of the windows lining the room. Like the others, it was clouded with greasy fingerprints and smudges, causing the lights outside to appear mottled. The traffic passing the depot had thinned discernibly as occasional late-night drivers wheezed by. The corner stoplight steadfastly shifted its display of color in the empty street, like an actor in want of an audience.

Inside, the place fit the unpleasant pattern of most bus depots. The walls were veined with cracks, and dirty plaster showed through blistered, peeling paint. Cardboard boxes of various sizes were haphazardly stacked against one wall, while several vending machines, hunched against the opposite wall, boasted automatic satiation. A row of dingy telephones faced me, well-thumbed phonebooks hanging wearily from a couple of them.

There was an overall look of negligence about the place. An offensive film clung to the soiled walls and ceiling. The nauseating combination of cigarette smoke and bus exhaust worked its way into my clothes, hair and skin. The grimy floor gloated up at me as if to say it had no reason to be anything but filthy, for its audience was an everchanging one, an eternal parade of travelers who would not care and would not remember.

Across from me, a thickset man hunched in this seat, one elbow resting on his knee. He grasped a small paperback book and a half-eaten bag of potato chips in one huge hand. The knuckles were like a miniature mountain range across the back of his hand, rough and craggy. With his free hand, he pushed fistfuls of the food against his mouth, groping sloppily for it with his tongue and teeth. The crumbs fell, unnoticed by him, in careless arrangements onto his baggy trousers and dusty canvas shoes.

I watched his eyes chase the words across the pages of the grimy little book. Wrinkles webbed the corners of his eyes and fleshy pockets swelled beneath. His entire face seemed to gather below his chin, as deep furrows stretched the skin to his jaws, where it hung in sluggish pouches. The man raised his hand to adjust the close-fitting wool cap that covered his hair. I gave a start, noticing for the first time that two of his fingers were missing.

Where was he from and where was he going? Who, if anyone, would be waiting there for him when he reached his destination? I tried to envision him as a husband or father. Somewhere tonight, perhaps a family had eaten supper with an empty place at the table. Perhaps a wife in some sleeping town imagined noises downstairs and wished her husband was there to descend the creaky stairs with his flashlight. Or a small girl lay awake, wondering if Daddy would remember to bring her a present from his trip. The man did not fit any of the patterns; he did not belong in any time or place or situation except this one. He was nothing but a stranger in a bus depot on a late March night.

A young black woman occupied the opposite end of the bench on which the man sat reading. There was a worn, scratched suitcase near her feet and she fidgeted incessantly with the frayed strap on an oversized cloth purse. Her hands attracted my eye as they moved along the strap in repeated nervous motions. The fingers were graceful and slender, and the almond-shaped nails were long and well-kept. They were strong, lovely hands, strangely discordant with her face and clothing.

Her uncombed hair lay in stringy clumps upon her head, and with the back of her hand, she brushed a wispy strand from her forehead. Simultaneously, her eyes scanned me for a quick moment. They were bloodshot and dark crescents had stained the skin beneath them. As she once again lowered her eyes to stare at nothing, thin blue lines appeared in the folds of her eyelids, where the eyeshadow had gathered. The woman's slacks and blouse were noticeably soiled, and a beige sweater, stitched in several places with an unmatching color of thread, was draped across her shoulders.

The door opened behind me and the cold draft seemed to swirl inside me. A ruddy man with a lot of slick hair entered and stepped over to the row of phones. He jangled around in his pockets for change, his leather jacket squeaking as he moved his arm.

My stomach had begun to rather loudly declare its present state, and I inspected the contents of the various vending machines from my seat. After rearranging my possessions on the bench, I rose and made my selection at a cookie machine. Returning to the bench, I discreetly avoided the suggestive stare of the man at the phone.

The seats in the depot were wooden with short backs; they were vaguely reminiscent of the pews in our old church, which had been long ago torn down and converted into a parking lot. Deep scratches and etchings were embedded in them, and I read some as I peeled the wrapper off my precious little package.

Graffiti had always held a keen interest for me; I often found myself exploring restroom walls, tops of classroom desks, and other places where graffiti artists etched their offerings to the world of passers-by. I skipped over the off-color humor and went on to read the eternal testimonials of the young and in-love, several names and accompanying dates, and a number of faddish phrases. Then I went back to the off-color humor.

I wondered how the doers of the deeds scratched out their messages unnoticed. I could remember the first time I had tried my hand at it, and I had been consumed with guilt at the time. In the fifth grade, my best friend and I had engraved our initials on the inside of the door to the ladies' restroom in the public library. The librarian had caught us. Nevertheless, the library had gone the fated way of the church; a private club now occupied that lot.

The leather-jacketed character made his departure as gustily as he had entered, and I once again felt the chill that rushed through the open door. Behind the faded panel counter, the boy shuffled and re-shuffled a deck of cards. The black woman pulled her sweater closer around her and leaned her head back to doze. Others across the room had done the same, and one weary

man's head kept falling forward onto his chest. He repeatedly jerked to a comical wide-eyed stupor until his head once again began to nod uncontrollably. I felt a giddy urge to laugh aloud, but he simultaneously struck a soft place inside me, and I felt the sort of pity for him that one feels for a tongue-tied speaker or the fallen victim of an icy sidewalk.

In the space of a moment, a new, intense feeling welled up inside me. I suddenly felt very alone. There, in the middle of a city night, surrounded by travelers going to other black cities and towns, I felt utterly alone. None of these people fit into the life I knew; even the depot itself contrasted so completely with the carpeted comfort of home.

I munched on the crumbly, tasteless cracker and wished passionately that the bus would come. It seemed as if I had never known any other time or place, just this lonely, dirty junction of arrivals and departures. I had never liked those orangy-colored crackers with the film of peanut butter smashed inside. They stuck in my throat, leaving an acrid taste in my mouth.

It was suddenly quite hard to swallow, and I silently cursed the gluey peanut butter, realizing that it was not peanut butter that had formed the painful lump in my throat.



Untitled—Jon Faubion

FOR MY FRIEND LU ANNE RIEGEL:
"spring shower"

Melinda Melhus

it rained yesterday
gently
to bathe budded crocus
and encourage sleepy rosebuds
unintentionally
it also slickened highways
collided with bridges
and took you

FOR DAVID, ASLEEP

Patricia Henshall

There's the vow of rain this night
in the heavy clouds and the cool quick breeze
waltzing the curtains in and out the window.
Above the hills, lightning stitches blue satin runes—
curses or charms—
read after in the thunder's voice.
The storm's approach and the late-night-muted pull and turn
of the city's traffic
are patterns on the hush.
You are asleep, curled to fit the broken-down couch,
your head in the halo of a reading lamp
and your bare feet in soft darkness.
Such profound stillness for you:
all tension and movement and chaining cigarettes when awake;
and now this peace,
this balance:
struck between fluid dreams and taut realites,
held by your softened angles,
as delicate as patterns of hush on sound.

THE VIOLET HOUR

Linda Hieronymus

It is not vital that we know her name, but to some the formality of naming is reassuring; so we will name her. Her name shall be Grishkin. That is not her Christian name, but it will suffice for our more sensitive readers. Her background is not important either, so we will not deal with that aspect of her life. She is a typist, one among many in the union of anonymity whose body occupies a certain desk in a certain office and whose existence is joined to that of those around her only as the mechanical clatter of their machines unites to form a sterile offering to the god of industry. It is while she is at work that we first observe her; her desk, an altar, amass with flawed and mistake-ridden papers that upon perusal would prove unsatisfactory. The clock on the wall mutely proclaims a quarter till four.

Ten minutes later she has produced a copy that only under close scrutiny would be seen to be blemished. She waits for the remaining few minutes to pass and busies herself by straightening her desk. Absentmindedly she discards used papers and arranges her supplies in their necessary martial order. Out of habit she waters the ivy that sits on the window sill near her desk and subconsciously wonders why the plants in her apartment are not doing as well. The scrape of metal chairs on wooden floors, the low murmur of dull voices, and the swish of arms sliding into coat sleeves recalls her. Mechanically she rises and addresses herself to the task of departure. The coat, scarf, and gloves seem to harbor a resentment against her for demanding that they relate to her body and finally she gives up. Tired of tugging at them and satisfied that like parasites they will cling to her at least until her usefulness is overcome, she turns from the desk and follows the path of countless before her, past rows of desks standing rank and file on either side of her, each meticulously in order and now mute when only a few minutes before they droned with sterile clatter. The floor and stairs now creak with hollow indifference reacting immediately to the pressure of her foot.

Once outside, the cold air penetrates her garments as if to rebuke her for not taking more time in preparation. She pauses on the landing as the last hollow note from the bell of the church on the corner reverberates from building to building. The emptiness of the echo seems to drive into her very soul and rampage down the caverns battering itself into nothingness. In a time before this she had thought the bell had a somber, reverent tone, and she had attended Mass at the church, but now she realized the bell only echoed the emptiness of the sanctuary and the hollowness of the lives of those for whom it tolled.

She shivered violently. As the cold had sharpened her sensibilities, it had numbed her hands and feet. She stepped into the slush, the movement sending sharp needles of sensation through her muscles and evoking a dull ache in her bones. The snow that had melted during the day was again solidifying as dark-

ness approached and the crackle and slosh of the semi-solid under her feet grated on her ears in the dull, heavy silence of dusk.

She trudged onward, impervious to the remnants of Yuletide that bestrewed her path. They offered no salute to her, and the gaiety and adoration with which they had once festooned her way was forgotten. They were only relics of the past to be discarded or treasured as those passersby who might follow her steps would see fit. She trudged ahead. Her building was on the left. Her apartment was a walk-up on the third floor. She paused in the foyer. No mail—the clatter of her mailbox lid invading the silence of the musty hall. The stale, heavy air from the radiator by the door assaulted her lungs with its oppressiveness. Her ears began to burn and ring as the heat and silence engulfed her. Her hands and feet were not yet warm enough to throb, but they tingled and prickled as if someone was shooting needles through her flesh. She climbed the stairs in the dim and flickering fluorescent light. “Surely that light will have to be replaced one of these days,” she thought. It was the same thought she had had for weeks about the same light, but no action had been taken to replace the bulb, and even the thought seemed to come out of habit.

The metallic scraping of her key in the lock awakened her from thoughtlessness. The door swung backward easily and automatically with the light pressure of her hand disclosing a two-room flat. To her left was the kitchen-dining room still cluttered with the remains of her breakfast dishes. The dingy yellow flowered paper on the walls no longer attempted the farce of adding cheer and had resigned itself to cracking and peeling at the edges as its attempt at character. Faded yellow curtains draped the dusk that crouched forebodingly outside the window. It no longer was noticeable that the curtains were checkered while the wallpaper was flowered. Instead, they united to complement the uncertainty of color and design that pervaded the rest of the apartment. The only obvious attempt at landscaping the confusion was the row of potted plants on the window sill. The ivies and philodendrons curved in graceful if not extended lines along the sill and curled at the ends in a beckoning motion. They seemed to extend a silent plea for concern and attention, but she looked beyond them to the darkness outside and realized she did not have much time. Ahead of her in the bedroom-living room the sofa was piled with the remnants of a hurried departure, and she knew that she must address herself to the task of making the apartment presentable.

She shed her outer garments and hung them on a wooden coatrack behind the door, then advanced and with mechanical determination attacked the clutter in the kitchen, piling the dishes in a heap in the sink and at the same time replacing the ravages of the previous meal with preparations for the one to come. She then turned her attention to the living room. Automatically, she deposited clothing, shoes and bedding in their proper repositories giving the room the impression of being neat if not clean.

With a feeling of accomplishment she turned and devoted her attention to her personal preparation. The bath water was warm and so relaxing she only wished she could crawl into bed and sleep away the remainder of the weekend,

but she knew this was impossible and resignedly scoured herself dry with the roughest towel available. Automatically, her hands unscrewed jar lids and applied creams, lotions, make-ups, perfumes, and deodorants in an accurate if careless manner. Her softened skin slithered into the silken folds of her dress which, once fastened, draped and clung in a becoming manner. She glanced at herself indifferently in the mirror satisfied that her appearance was presentable although not calculated.

She glanced at the clock that silently commented on his tardy arrival. "I may get to bed early tonight anyway," she thought only to have the thought cut short by a preemptory creak on the stairway followed by a pensive knock at the door.

"Dammit. Well, just make the best of it, lady," she reassured the image that grimaced at her from the mirror. She turned to answer the summons, paused, and then thought better of it. The knock at the door was more persistent this time, and without realizing it she had crossed the room and was turning the latch. The door swung backward easily and there he stood radiating mediocrity and reeking of cheap after-shave lotion. His "Hello, good lookin' " was the most suave rendition of Cagney that practice while climbing three flights of stairs could muster. As he stepped past her his arm sought her waist drawing her to him, and she closed the door as the last hollow notes from the steeple died away at the window in the frigid air beyond. Outside, the violet shades of not yet total darkness scurried past the window at the imminent approach of blackness.

(We need no longer intrude upon their privacy at any great length. Suffice a few objective words to qualify the quantity and quality of their relationship.) The light from their window shines yellow and void of warmth into the deepening blackness until the shade is drawn and soon it shines no more. Their love-making is silent only to be punctuated periodically by the hollow reverberating tones of the bell.

At three o'clock the door opens and he departs. The hall light flickers and dies offering him no guide on the stairway. Inside she moves to prepare herself for sleep. She rises and gulps two aspirin for her headache. "I'm glad that's over. Maybe now I'll get a little rest." She yawns and tugs at the shade to see if it is snowing outside. It's not. She leaves the shade up and goes back to bed.

Outside the backness seems to have become solid and taken on a form that presses its face against her window, but the darkness inside and outside are equal and it cannot see beyond the plants with the withered stems surrounded by cracked, dry earth sitting sterile and lifeless on the window sill.

*At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,*

T.S. Eliot
The Waste Land



Still Life—Jon Faubion

EVENING'S REPOSE

Lisa Foster

The setting sun was suddenly bespeckled with dark gliding shadows of flapping wings and round bodies. Several hundred ducks, headed south and searching for an evening's rest stop, began to circle and lower above the shining water.

The sun was approaching the tree-lined horizon, and the flat sandy beach of the small island across the lake was clearly visible. I could see the top of the dike that stretched parallel to the skyline on the far side of the lake, beyond the skinny river that wound behind the island. With leaves reflecting oranges, reds, yellows, and browns, trees lined the dike and became a hiding place of spider-web intricacies for the burning orange sun. Across the motionless blue lake the sun made a shimmering path. Then, sky, trees, and lake washed into one brilliant collage of color, like a water color whose separate parts diffuse, each into the other. The warm autumn breeze of the day had ceased, and the lake was prostrate, smooth and reflective, like the glass table top I had set my book on, before leaving my house.

I could see distinct flocks of ducks far off, high above the Platte River beyond the dike and trees, and then some closer flocks. Among the closer groups, some stayed high above the lake, surveying the situation, while braver ducks, anxious to take rest upon the body of water, strayed to a more visible level, where I could make out the extended necks and rhythmic movement of body with wings.

In groups, pairs, and one by one, the ducks began to lower onto the multicolored lake. Each duck approached the water flapping furiously, trying to maintain stability and decelerate at the same time. At barely a foot above the water, the wings flapped out to full, open expanse, and held. Tiny webbed feet appeared from under the bellies and stretched toward the water like those of a skydiver preparing for the hard surface of earth. Suddenly, there was a spray of water as the lake's surface, penetrated by the outstretched feet and slapped by the soft round belly, jolted the bird to a stop. There seemed to be no transition between the landing and the settled, smooth movement of the duck in the water, except possibly a few shakes of the wings, but with that, the birds quickly let the rhythm of water and paddling replace their day-long rhythm of flight.

The sun was below the horizon now, but the sky opened to a display of pinks and reds that lingered for almost twenty more minutes. Ducks continued to circle and land, and the dike and island became outlines in the darkness. Warm lake water seeped into the cooling evening air, and the smell of damp grass mixed with the heavier smell of moss and lake weeds moistened the autumn air. By now one whole patch of the lake was so dark with hundreds of bodies of paddling ducks that the water blended in with the darkening background and sky, invisible in the darkness of the birds' shadows. The sky

was quickly changing into a dark blue that would soon be evening. The birth-mark of evening, Venus, sparkled brightly to the left of where the sun had disappeared.

The evening was too young for the moon to appear, and the lake quickly disappeared before my eyes. The birds were everpresent, however. I could hear their movement as the water parted and splashed with their paddling and activity. Sometimes they would fall silent, each seeming to find a place among the thousand that crowded near the far bank. Then, with only the shaking of one pair of wings and a single quack, the whole of the body would be up in arms, surging into a clamor of reproach, then slowly subsiding. I could not see them but I heard their busy-body chatter like a parlor full of gossiping women, huffing and puffing at an unbelievable speed, with no hope of comprehension, or of sorting out a single voice among the bickering.

ANNIE

Antonia Quintana Pigno

For Christmas,
She gives gallon jars
Of homemade pickles
Labeled with Christmas seals.
She wraps presents
With patches of brown bags,
Newspaper and foil.
She mails packages
Of cookie crumbs to nephews
Just across the river.
She wears smock dresses
Belted at the waist—
Bargains from rummage sales.
She giggles shyly
As she cross examines
Newly blushing girls.
She bore a son
Who ate green grass until he died.
He was five.

SEPARATE WORLDS

Richard L. Cramer

The room was dark and quiet, except for the large aquarium. The bubbling filters blanketed the air with the comfortable sound of moving water. Soft yellow light from the hood drifted down and filled the crystal cube with artificial sunshine.

He sat cross-legged on the bed, alone in the dark, watching three small black Mollies pecking at a healthy plant. "You black bastards," he thought for the hundredth time. None of the other fish ever bothered his plants, but the Mollies seemed to enjoy tormenting them. They were the smallest fish in the tank but the first to pick up his feeding routine, and they were seldom satisfied. Hovering at the surface, they could see passing shadows and learned to follow them, shamelessly and constantly begging for food. He often intentionally overfed all the fish in an effort to save his plants from the jet black beggars, but their attacks were not motivated by hunger. Boredom seemed a more logical explanation for their misdirected behavior.

The flash of anger at the Mollies brought him indirectly back to the darkness of his own world, and he glanced down at the luminous hands of his watch. Before time could register her perpetual finality, a telephone bell slammed into the gurgling silent darkness. Momentarily startled, he immediately resumed his attitude of contemplative weariness, and took his time answering.

"Hullo."

"Hello, Mr. Lucas? This is Norman Proser. I'm in your English Lit. II class at 8:30, and I wonder if I could get some information about the paper that's due tomorrow?"

"Proser . . . yes, of course. What do you need?"

He remembered Norman Proser. He always remembered the Norman Proser even better than his good students. They seldom came to class beyond the first week, except to take tests, and then he often caught them cheating. They established a routine of borrowing other people's notes and scavenging for old tests. It made him mad when a Norman Proser could pass one of his classes.

"Well, I was wondering how long it should be, and whether you wanted a bibliography or not."

Always the same. 'How many words do I have to type for a grade?' Never any concern for content, just 'How many pages will make you happy, teacher?'

"It should be six to eight typed pages probably. Bibliographical information can be included in your footnotes, but you won't need to worry about proper form on this assignment. The next one will be a little more rigid, but for now I'm just interested in your rhetorical skills."

He always assigned several papers in an effort to exhaust the Proser's supply of copyable material. He liked forcing them to compete, and sometimes

they even dropped out rather than adapt to his system. That was a victory for him.

"Okay, I better get back to it then. I think that's all I need to know. Thanks a lot."

"That's alright Norman. I hope to see you CLICK . . . in class more often . . . Bastard."

Flakes of food dropped lingeringly through the bright world within his dark room. He watched a gorged Molly try and force one more bite down and then spit it back out, unable to hold any more. Another attempt produced similar results, and it suddenly spurted through the crystal water, scattering the undigested crumbs.

He looked on with disgusted acceptance as the midnight black fish glided downward and nipped idly at a hearty new leaf.

MAKE ME . . .

Donald Froebe

Seeing that yours is the only student body
With which I am concerned,
Tell me. How do I
Stand? What's my
Chances? I too, like many
Of my opponents, am running
On little experience; but let's
Not make an issue of that. Just give
me your vote; I can't be a winner
Unless you make me.

"HAIKU OF A ROSE"

Melinda Melhus

These crimson petals—
your touch on my skin, the crushed
velvet sensations.

THE LIGHT AND DARK OF GRADUATION

Rolf Eric Kuhlman

I saw the stage lights blaring down on me. This seemed most appropriate since the lights were on me and the rest of the graduating seniors from Linn High. Then, I looked out towards the audience, which was made up of friends, relatives, teachers, and other townspeople. These were the people who took credit for getting us through school. But I noticed there were no lights over them. Looking towards them, all I saw was darkness and empty space, and a deafening silence that seemed to be infinite.

I lost interest in the guest speaker whom our class had chosen six weeks before. I felt that he did not, would not, and could not know what to speak about that would be most relevant to our class, our school, and our town. He would probably talk for two hours, saying next to nothing of importance.

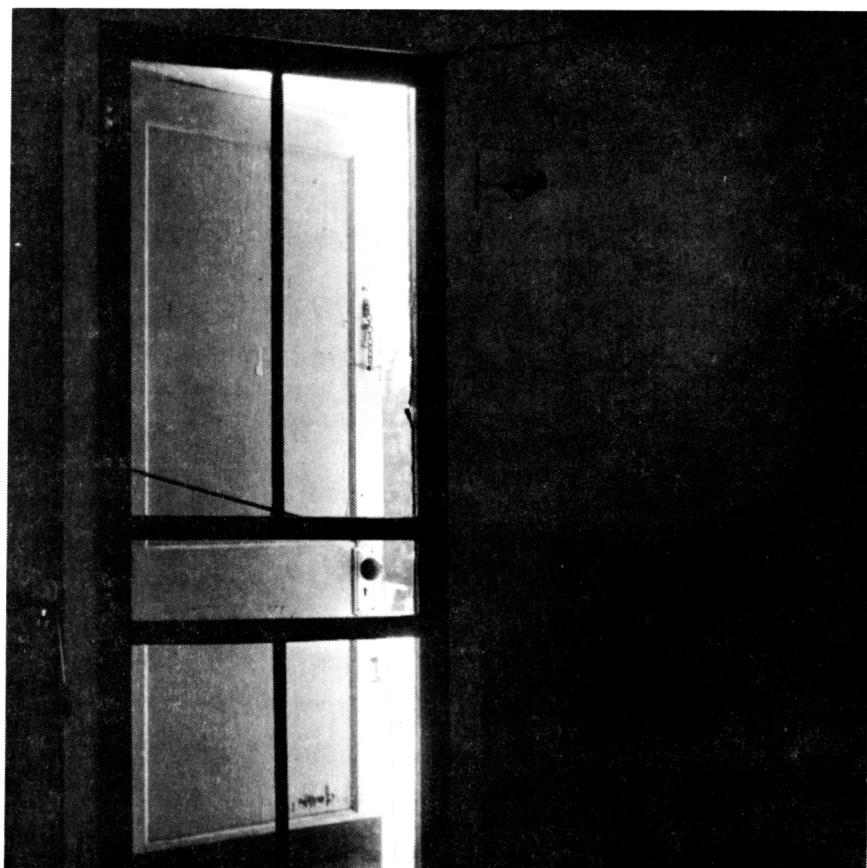
Instead, I sat through the entire graduation message, slumped in my chair thinking about the people in the audience, and wondering who had meant the most and who had helped me the most.

The first people who came to my mind were the teachers. Linn High was notorious for getting teachers fresh out of college. All of them had big ideas and big plans. All of them wanted to be the best teachers anywhere in their field. It was hell breaking in new teachers for four consecutive, long, drawn-out years. We taught them more than they taught us. They placed emphasis on getting to class on time, and opening and shutting our mouths on time. We placed emphasis on the fact that all of this was nonsense by disobeying and fighting them when necessary and when it was really something important.

Our guest speaker interrupted my thoughts with an important point. He mentioned something about how many people from Linn had committed suicide some time in their life after high school graduation. I thought of suicide in high school more times than I wish to remember. I could never imagine where I was going or what I was going to do in the future. The future did not seem to hold much of anything for me. I guess after living in a small town for eighteen years and never being exposed to cultured people really upset me. Linn was made up of about 475 ignorant people. What a pain.

Of course, like a lot of small towns, the people were interested in our sports program. I never did care for football or basketball, so that counted me out from being a popular student in the society of Linn. Taking interest in music and books was of no importance however. The difference between sports and music was the difference between a pat on the back and a swift kick in the ass.

I looked up with these thoughts running through my mind all at the same time, and again saw the stage lights shining brightly on us. The lights reflected off of our gowns, casting a light around us. Again, I saw the darkness out in the audience which now reminded me of what these people meant to me.



Untitled—Steve Beliel

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

C.E. Rogers

Until the universe contracts
pulling matter to its core,
the stars and we travel our slow way
out into infinity.

Beyond this day, beyond this life
beyond the lives of suns and stars
we move, specks in flowing time.

The ocean edge Columbus braved
has stretched to galaxies and on.
And as we look we find with him,
we made the edge up in our mind.
Instead on new-found laws and schemes
the world explains itself to us,
and pulls up pondering the course
that we must take, towards sequences
we cannot shake or witness to.

And if the universe contracts
it returns itself from end to start
tugged by black holes, ligaments
of the great flex, a pace too slow
for us to face, relentless to the end
gathering all to being again.

TUESDAY MORNING

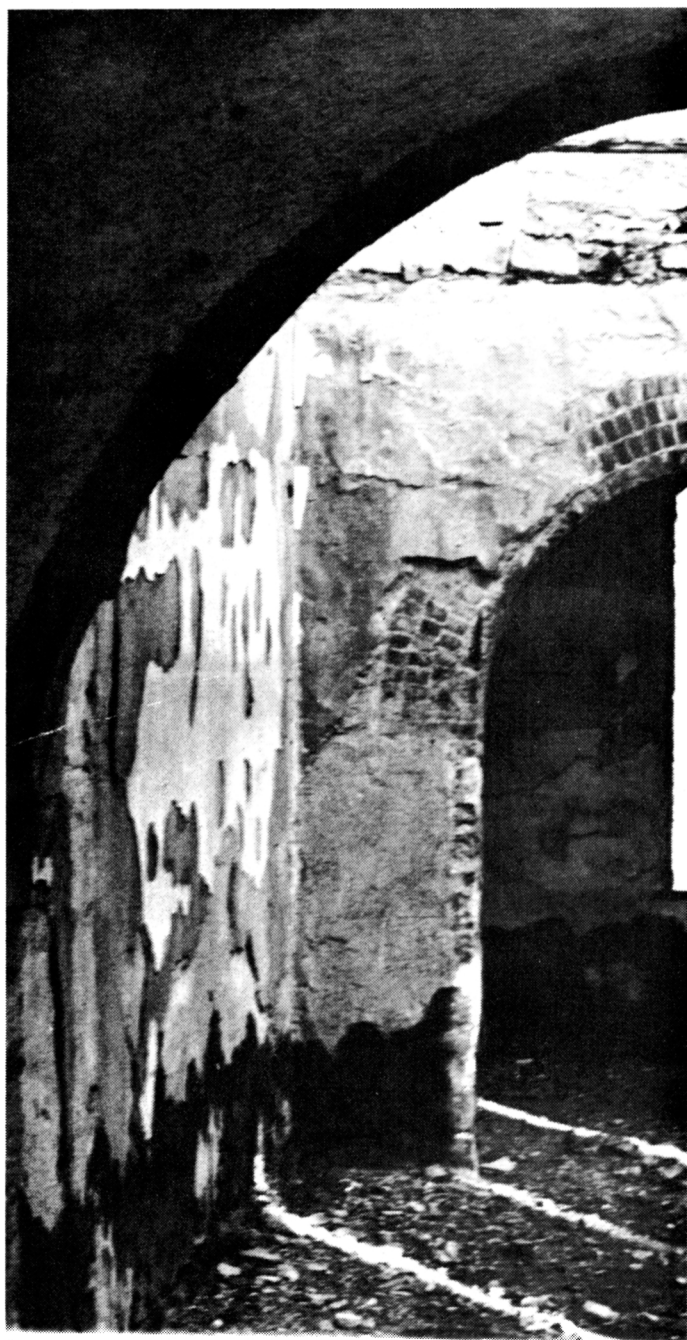
Carol Hillebrandt

i was startled to note
the flowers you sent
occupying their place on my dresser
still fresh and spring-scented . . .
illogically,
i had expected them to die
with their sender, during the night.

THE NIGHT THE MONUMENT FELL

Ed Chambers

His name was Ziolkowski—
 Korczak Ziolkowski.
But no one remembered him
 the night the monument fell.
Too much time had passed since his death
 to the death of his creation.
No one knew his name,
 and no one knew it was his work,
 because eighty thousand years had passed
 and the monument no longer looked like one.
Eighty thousand years
 of rain,
 snow
 and wind
 had eroded it beyond recognition.
Eighty thousand years
 after the death of Ziolkowski,
 everyone thought that the arm
 was a natural bridge.
It did not look like an arm.
The monument did not look
 like a man
 riding a horse.
It looked natural.
So, everyone thought that a little bit
 of nature died
 the night the monument fell.
But they were wrong.
It was Ziolkowski dying.
Again.





Hallway—Robert Fyfe

THE ENDING

Ayn Gilliland

Today I went to your apartment for one last look around. It was a new sensation for me, being there without you knowing. I felt I was stepping into another intimate part of you. And I thought I had experienced it all. Inward concentration becomes intense emotion and the silence I once found so deafening has suddenly become essential.

Your living room was cluttered with the things we left there last evening. My wine glass that I carried to the door was still on the table in the foyer. Ashes of incense powdered the top shelf of your bookcase, and half-smoked cigarettes filled your one ashtray made from a mayonnaise jar lid. The album of Bach I brought you lay sealed in its cellophane on the coffee table next to the volume of love poems I gave you for your birthday two months ago. I never noticed until today that the price was still on the front cover.

The kitchen was in disarray as the result of our attempt at beef stroganoff. And in the trash was the box our pizza came in. Somehow it didn't matter then. I never have cared much for beef stroganoff. You cried. I told you it just wasn't important. Now I wonder what it was that I thought wasn't important. Something is happening to us; the long pauses of silence when we talk, in some way knowing our love-making Thursday night was the last time because it was greater than it had been for months, and finding those things I thought so attractive about you before are really not so attractive.

Standing on the threshold of that small room you called your "study," I imagined myself a God to be witness to another existence of you. You never allowed me here, claiming you needed time and space away from me sometimes, your own special corner of life in which you were free to be a spectator far removed from participation. The beginnings of a dozen poems, some wadded into tight balls to be discarded, some wadded and reopened and spread out to be reconsidered again lay scattered about the floor. The drafting table next to the window was covered with books piled in heights of three and four; T.S. Eliot, Milton, Homer—and a small thin book entitled, "Reflections of My Life" written by you. I question the validity of the concept you display toward your own literary creativity and achievement.

The bedroom was darkened by the opaque drapes pulled tightly closed. The covers on your bed seemed deep in slumber, undisturbed by the clothing strewn over them. On your vanity table in the far corner of the room was a makeup mirror with snapshots of your shepherd pup stuck in around the edges, obstructing any image that might be reflected there. There was an empty bottle of Crepe de Chine perfume from Paris on your dresser, evaporated with age, a remnant of what used to be a leather shoe lace, two pennies, and a picture of you and me, the frame dusty from neglect, covered with a cracked glass. I couldn't remember the glass being broken before.

I sat on the edge of your bed for a while and noticed you'd left the bathroom light on again. I found soft dust woolies at my feet, peeking out from under the mattress frame, and beneath your bedstand was a half-used book of matches and one of those hard-to-see bobby pins. In the silence of solitude I thought of the privacy of that world disguised as a room and how it experienced us. Remembering our intimacies, I wanted to find a way to make it all happen again; watching you sleep, turning slowly to let one slender arm emerge from beneath a sheet and the yellow quilted spread, musing at the way your upper lip disappears at the corners of your mouth before joining the lower one to the rear; tangled hair, damp shower towels, wrinkled clothing, and crumbs between the cushions on the couch.

Suddenly I felt I had to get out. In allowing myself the pleasure of you one more time—alone—I had forgotten how crowded with you my life has become. I toyed with the idea of writing you a note of explanation, but I didn't know what to say. So I left my key to your apartment on the table in the foyer beside my wine glass with the discovery that I liked you a whole lot more than I thought I loved you.

SOMETIMES

Bob Lyons

when snow doesn't fall
i look out at long dead trees
being dead or playing
dead,
stand next to blue sky
last wishes of soundless air
caressing each parted
crevice between old fibers
whispering and wishing
that it would snow
not just for beauty
but for cover from the
cold.

FUTURE UTOPIA

Tricia Cavenee

A vinyl rainbow
In the plastic sky
Appears in calculated sequence.
After polyester rain,
Styrofoam women and
Plexiglass men
Walk down the
Laminated paths to see
Xerox flowers bloom
Under tupperware trees,
And silicone rivers
Splash down nylon waterfalls.
Soon a computer
Will switch off
The microwave sun
And turn on
A neon moon and
Butane stars.
The darkness will be real.

LOVE STORY

Antonia Quintana Pigno

He called her "Reina"
And in it thought himself kingly.
He gave eight children to serve her
While he traveled summers and falls
Leaving her with purpose—
Food to be found,
Garments to fashion.

Old, he stayed home
That she might bathe his arthritic legs,
Listen to his last breath.
Later she told her daughter
That he had loved her, "Reina,
In my own way." And that
was enough for the queen she was.

EAU DE YOU

Paula Meyers

Like my favorite perfume,
You make me feel
Dainty, delicate, complete.
Sometimes
You come on too strong,
Are embarrassingly intense,
Other times
You lose your persistence,
Your strength fades,
You vanish.
Gentle, pleasant, familiar,
You sometimes evoke sentimentality,
Bringing back memories
Of other times, other places.
Just a little more special
Than the others,
You have become a part of me.
I like you best
When your touch on my skin
Stays with me all day.
Always lingering.

POSTERS

Kathy Garrelts

Posters peeling off the wall
Hanging only by the bottom.
Wads of masking tape,
Remind me of myself,
Hanging tenaciously to you,
But trying to pull away.

Melinda Melhus

you came into my life on wednesday
and left on thursday
but gave me a smile

SURRENDER

Ken Shedd

Undersea light seeps in through venetian blinds
spilling on aura of surrender.
One by one, oval pebbles sink
into the waters within me.

The sea dusk thickens
and waves roll into motion,
Waves like hands, that advance, then recede,
caressing and warming my legs.

And I lie still,
watching the waves come and go,
waves whose lips are frothing with white,
grimacing from endless tides.

Then the waves draw off,
exposing the tomb-cool sand,
sand littered like graveyards
with decaying orange peels and cigarette butts,

all the tacky wreckage of my life.
At the edge of vision,
the sea gathers itself,
and in one sweeping tide, embraces me.

FOR A.S., HOPING HE'LL GROW HIS HAIR LONG AGAIN

Patricia Henshall

like champagne
your hair sparkled,
pouring into my cupped hands;
spilling in spiraling torrents
around my wrists and down my arms,
splashing at my elbows
and shooting bubbles up my spine.

SLICES

Paula Meyers

Sunlight did you justice:
Sparked your smile
And stained your skin
From sweaty hours
Of revelling and running
Beneath its steaming streamings.

When the heavy clouds
Blocked the blinding beacon
And the days grew dark and dingy,
You blessed me,
There on the sidelines,
With your presence.

The night loved you:
Sculptured your features
And splashed inside you,
Where you gave it color,
Tinged it with neon and romance,
Belonged to the blackness.

Sometimes, I opened my midnight door to you
Where you stood,
Still and hesitant and alone.
I quelled the uncertainty
That misted your eyes
And caught in your throat.

Precious cloudburst, dear nightfall.

Melinda Melhus

children playing games,
we had our own private club
until you began taking giant steps
and left me on the merry-go-round



Tombstones—Robert Fyfe

RATIONALITY

Dennis Rotman

The fanciful splashing stream,
Communion of sun, sense, and tree root,
By bitter winter logic
Is first masked with a chilly sensible glaze,
Then stilled, killed—frigidly reasoned—
To the heart,
Until it becomes, bank to bank,
A bridge, useful.

PRAIRIE PEOPLE

Jan Carton

The black coupe rattled down the road, dusty from the trip to town and pestered by the ruts newly washed from last week's downpour. Why, he'd just gotten used to the old ones, and now here they were all changed again. He sputtered and muttered his way down the road (road! why it wasn't much more than a trail, actually), grumbling at the heat and wincing as he bounced from rock to rock. To tell the truth, he secretly enjoyed his jaunts to "the city"—he liked hauling the supplies and cattle feed, he enjoyed sporting around town visiting the friends and relatives; but he was happiest being parked in front of Davis's general store, for it was there that all the kids would come and marvel at his snappy black paint job, his red spoke wheels and his heady maroon interior. He always ran better after a visit to town—he was sure he could go a mile or so on the admiration alone.

But he was eight miles from Davis's now, and the admiration had run out long ago. Town was far behind and he moved alone in the wide expanse of prairie.

He began to consider this strange new country he'd become a partner with. It was wide—no, that didn't carry the same feeling of loneliness the land conveyed. It was more of an awesome grandeur without the reverence—that's what made it so frightening. The vastness was there, the power was there, and yes, even the beauty was ever-present; and yet there was no peace, no stillness, no softening—it was harsh and stark, this land. It could be known and understood—and even loved; but this land could never be trusted.

He was a little sorry for that; he'd come to care for the strangeness, the silence, the musty earthy smell of the damp prairie at early morning. He was sad—for he knew that this same strangeness, the same silence, the very way of the prairie itself would in the end cause his destruction; and yet he could not hate it. He could only wait and prepare to pay his tribute to its lonely might. He shuddered as if to shake off the thought, then lapsed into a steady clatter the rest of the way home.

The young man guiding the wayward contraption was in a reverie of his own. The day in town had pleased him. His wheat crop of the spring had brought a good price; he'd been able to invest the surplus in the future's market and according to John Galston, the sky was the limit. Oh, sure, he was a little scared of playing with chance—knowing as much as he knew about the cantankerous nature of weather—but a man had to get ahead and provide for a family, and if it was possible to get some extra money fast, then maybe a man should try it. Still, it was a risk—he might end up with nothing. It was a hard decision but he was satisfied.

He couldn't wait to tell Abby—she'd be as excited as he was. He thought of his wife and smiled as he pictured her. No doubt she'd be worn to a frazzle

after chasing Matt and Jennie all day. He could see the wisp of black hair curling down her forehead, her glasses steamy from exertion. She worked hard at being a wife and mother—and he loved her. A shade of irritation flicked across his face and he worried for a moment at her illness. She wasn't well, but the doctors couldn't be specific yet—they didn't seem to think it was serious, just some "woman's troubles." It might mean that they'd have to leave the farm.

Though the thought had been with him for weeks, he had never voiced it and now it shocked him. To leave the farm—to sell the land—where would he go, and more important, what would he do? Farming was his life; his dad had been a farmer, his brothers were all farming now. He knew farming, he knew the land—he belonged here.

Looking out over the prairie, he saw it as for the first time. The puny road cutting a small swath across the vastness, marked on either side by strings of barbed wire and telephone poles—as if to keep the road from getting lost. He sniffed the air. Mingled with the heat and dust and gasoline fumes was the pungent odor of green crops and pasture grass. From the silence came the occasional piercing-sweet trademark of the meadowlark—how he loved that sound. It was as if the land saved up its bustlings and clamor to be let loose in that shatteringly beautiful burst of song. That made the emptiness all the more meaningful—as a prelude to the miniature orchestra of the prairie.

A man could get lonely here, he supposed. He knew that some people thought of this country as mile after mile of dreary sameness, of vast spaces and little company. And maybe it was like that at times, when he'd put in a long day's work only to stand back and see it dwarfed by the prairie's immenseness. It was then he'd look for human reassurance, for someone to tell him that the land was not mocking him or making light of his effort—that he was doing good work and ought to feel proud. But those times were rare. He enjoyed the solitude—a man could think and ponder, ask questions and have the time to work out the answers. A man could come to be at ease with his soul and be sure of his strength. And though the land strove to defeat his efforts, a man learned to bend with the wind and to spring back—or else he broke and the land swallowed him.

This was his land—it was strong and proud and rich and tough. It never gave but what a man took from it. Yet if a man knew where to look he could find its weaknesses and gentle parts. The bank of ferns crowding his creek, the dainty spring wildflowers that pushed through the tough prairie sod; he remembered the gray light of early dawn over the barn, how the land was distant mist and shadows, how it grew with the light and swelled with the first sun; he remembered easy showers at dusk that blew up from the west, heat lightning and swift, swirling winds that carried the smell of rain. He was in love with the land and though he might leave it, it would not leave him.

Sam pulled up short before the barn, and with a pat of apology for the car, stepped down stretching and dusting his jacket.

"You know, Annie," he addressed the car, "this was a really fine day. It's enough to make a man feel fat and sassy. And hungry!" he added, heading for

the yellow square that marked the kitchen window. Splashed by light from the window, the pump washed the day from his face and arms. Before he closed the screen door behind him, the plaintive call of a mourning dove signalled the passing of the light.

Inside, the house was warm, almost stuffy. The kitchen apparently had been the scene of the day's major activities for he saw the flatirons still out and flour dust (from pie-making, he hoped!) brushing the pantry door handle. The red calico curtains cheerily defied attempts by the heavy stove to make the room somber and serious; and Abby's blue pitcher of orange and red zinnias seemed somehow to bind the stove and curtains in a loose sort of fellowship. At any rate, the room certainly appeared cozy and comfortable.

"I'm home, Abby! And I brought you something," he announced as she appeared in the doorway. "But first, something for a starving Sam!"

He strode to her, hugged her tightly, smacked her once on the forehead, and then again on the behind to get her started on his dinner. As she heated the oyster soup, he told her of his day.

"Saw Percy Williams on my way in. Said that Lora was feeling poorly, but she seemed a lot better this morning. He didn't really know what was troubling her, unless it might be her rheumatism . . . I guess she's been up to the clinic to see Doc Long about it, but he just can't seem to help her. Oh, and he said they heard from young Bill back in St. Louis. He's got a job on the railroad—on the Rocket—and might be able to stop over here on his way to Denver. They aren't sure whether he's an engineer, ticket-taker or what, but they said he sounds happy, so I guess they are. He's a good boy."

"Also ran into Tom Barton. He and Naomi send their best. He said they've got a new bull and for us to come by some time and see him; also for you to bring some of your cherry pie and we'll have a picnic."

"Well, you know I went in to see John. He said that the wheat futures look real good and for us to put our money there if we wanted the safest quickest return. Now calm yourself; I know it's a risk, but farming's a slow business. A man puts his whole life in it so by the time he's ninety, well, he might have something. But I guess I just don't want to wait that long. Abby, you know I wouldn't do this with our hard money, but this was extra—like a bonus. And if we're lucky, we'll have something to show for it. When I think of the improvements we could make with the extra we did get . . . sometimes I wonder if I did right. But I just had to try it, you understand? I just couldn't let the opportunity go by. Be patient with me, Abby, and see me through this one, sure?"

He could see her frown soften, and he knew it was all right. That Abby, she never let him down.

"Aren't you curious about your surprise? Hank Davis sent it out. It's in the car with the flour and lard you wanted."

"You bet your Bridges, Sam, let's go!"

He chuckled. This was an old joke between them. Abby always said that any man named Sam Bridges ought to expect a little joshing now and then, especially when he married an Abigail Rivers.

They walked out into the night, pausing on the doorstep to let the damp coolness wash over them, and to breathe in the smell of new-mown hay. Between the crickets and the bullfrogs, the night was a slow rhythmic pulse of life, quickened now and then by the squeal from a mouse suddenly victimized by a swooping owl or the fall of a far-off star.

They laughed. Both had heard the splash from the creek behind the barn. "Something nearly got old Grandad that time; but I bet he ends up outliving us all."

Arm in arm they strolled toward the car and were lost in the night.

The sun had only been up a few moments when Abby laid aside the quilt and softly slid out of bed. She liked this time of day; it seemed her very own. This was the time to walk down to the pasture gate, to lean back on it and watch the night steal away. She had always done this as a girl; she would probably have them haul her out there on her deathbed. This was the only time that she felt she really belonged—that she wasn't an intruder. She was sure that it was only a matter of time til some meadowlark mistook her for a fence post and sang his greeting from her shoulder. She would like that.

These mornings gave her strength. She had time to think and dream and see; the earth was hers, and the fullness thereof. "And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land . . ." She felt a kinship with the turtle; she ached to speak with him. If only all the day were this. She understood what it was—she was free. For this short time she could turn herself inside out and expose her self to the warm fingers of the sun, like a young green shoot. Sometimes she just wanted to start walking and follow the sun from morning to morning. And other times she wanted to lie beneath a tree all day and watch it sweep over her and disappear. Sam sometimes accused her of being a silly sentimentalist, but there had been mornings when he rose with her and they dreamed and strolled and gazed together. She knew. . . .

"Aaabbbyy . . . ! The kids are up and it's time for work . . . Come on—you can dawdle again tomorrow . . ."

She sighed. Well, she knew that her mornings didn't stay; but they were all the more precious for that. She loved Sam; she loved the farm and their life. But if it ever came to choosing—between her mornings and her life—she couldn't be sure which one had her heart. She only hoped the choice would never come.

Abby kneaded her arm muscles, trying to work out the ache from a day of washing and ironing. Squinting at the sun she predicted another four hours of light. That meant she ought to be able to finish weeding the corn and still have supper on the table when Sam got back from planting the far field. He hadn't been in at noon, which either meant that things were going well and he didn't want to stop, or things were going awful and he couldn't afford to stop. She knew which one she favored.

She rocked back on her heels for a rest. About twelve more rows it looked

like. She was tired. She'd finally packed Matt and Jennie off to the creek to look for crawdads—anything, she sighed, to have their bickering transferred somewhere else. Only trouble was, they'd been gone an hour and it was just about time for one of them to make the other mad and cause 'em to come charging indignantly back to her. A slight grin licked her lips. They were rascals, the two of them, but she preferred that to being mealy-mouthed and clinging. Still, they were sometimes more than she could take, and she often sent them off on their own down to the creek or to Sam's mother up the road about a half-mile for cookies. Jennie especially liked to go; Abby recalled the time Jennie was lost. A delivery man had stopped on his rounds that day, then about an hour later Abby had noticed that Jenny had disappeared. Sam had gone to the neighbors down the road to see if they had seen Jenny in the man's truck. In the meantime, Abby had checked the creek and the old windmill shaft. It was nearing sundown when over the rise they had seen a faded blue calico figure wheeling a rickety doll buggy and coaxing Dewey, her dog, to take a ride. Jennie'd been to Grandma's and had helped gather the chicken eggs; she hadn't wanted to leave until she'd gotten her cookies. Thinking of them made Abby wonder where the two were now—if they weren't by the creek or windmill or with Sam, she didn't know where they were. The thought hit home. Why, she didn't know her kids much better than she knew the Jennings's or the Claytons'. She'd borne them, nursed them, raised them; yet they were merely creatures, little gamins of trouble and mischief and joy and grief. Abby was shocked. A glance at the sun softened the novelty; she didn't have time to worry about it now. There were twelve more rows to weed and supper to fix and a good sized pile of mending to do. Maybe when she had more time, she'd come back to the thought. But right now, she was busy.

For thirteen years they worked the farm. Planting, harvesting, plowing, sowing, disking, spreading, reaping, resting. Waiting for the rain, waiting for the sun. Getting hit by hail, getting hit by wind. Seeing bumper crops, seeing clumps of dust. Hurting in the morning, hurting more at night. Always, always, squinting at the sun; figuring, calculating, estimating, sighing.

"Abby, our land is just blowing away. I can't work it anymore without eating more than I turn. We've got to do something. Jim Whitely planted alfalfa all over his. Said he wouldn't get as much, maybe even nothing, but he'd keep his dirt, and maybe when the drought was over he'd have enough dirt to plant wheat in again."

Sun up, sun down. Time was moving fast. Long, tired days, but never enough time. Weariness, aching, exhaustion, anger. Fury for the weather, fury for the market, fury for the merchant and the dealer and the crop. Sweat and sunburn, cheeks of tan; pale, sickly forehead, there's farmer Sam.

Rain on Sunday, sun on Monday, flowers on Tuesday, fruit by Wednesday, bugs by Thursday, dust by Friday. Sweet spring water flowing in a cup to ease the harvest sun. Parched lips, dry hands, work never done. And the land . . . the land groaned, the land bucked, it strove and pushed and worked; the land gave

birth to the plants of the field, it gave life to man. The land lay exhausted and old, spent and gasping. It cried and wept and bore fruit again. And the men came on, beating at it, using it, cursing at its failures, never satisfied with success. The men grew fat; the land grew lean. It yielded, it forgave; and then one day, because it could do no more, the land gave up the ghost and was still.

For days the silence lay heavy over the earth. Then one morning the men rose and felt the stirrings of a breeze and watched the land hopefully. By midday the breeze was firm, by nightfall their land was gone. Some wept. Most gazed after the wind as if to bring it back; they scratched idly in the dust to pass the time. The land had deserted them; some schemed, many dreamed, all waited. It was a time for waiting, a time for watching, a time for following the wind.

"Abby, it's time. We're losing out. We're being blown away, piece by piece, bit by bit. I can't watch it any more. This is *mine*—I built this place! I dug every post hole, I strung every fence. I sweated over this land, Abby, you know I did. I poured out every strength, every feeling, every drop of blood my body holds into this place. I won't watch it surrender. Abby, we're pulling out. I've had John draw up the papers. I'm selling to my brother. We're moving into town."

"THE PERFECT DILEMMA"

Paul J. Hart

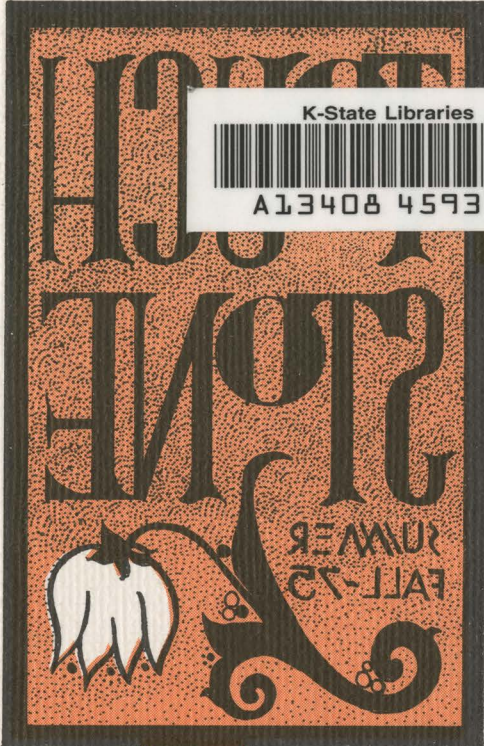
for Ann Price

Ecstasy as we experience the
Perfect cadence of evening sun
A reflection—fire of the morrow's dawn.

Ocean breezes drift endless thoughts,
Salted air onto mossed rocks—
To be drowned within the aged depths.

Twelve scorched shells
Lie naked upon the virgin sand as
The tide bids them farewell.

Reeds sway happily into oblivion,
We once again experience
The perfect dilemma of time.



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