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TOUCHSTONE

TOUCHSTONE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
SADNESS OVER MAPS	Susan Mae Pauly 2
PRAIRIE CURE	Jeff Boyer 4
GRADING PAPERS ON THE FLOOR	Jeff Gundy 5
THE HEART'S DISTANT HEAT	Bill Macomber 6
DAYS OF THE KHRUSCHEV THAW	Karl Tierney 22
NEARLY FALL	David Weimer 23
MORNING ST. LOUIS/DIANA	Jon V. Schlosser 24
APPRENTICE GAZING	Philip Paradis 25
SMOKED GLASS	Missy-Marie Tomko 26
GRAVEYARD SHIFT	Kim Rector 27
THE MOUSE POEM	Kim Rector 28
MARRAKECH	Missy-Marie Tomko 29
LETTIE	Ann Carrel 30
MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY	Stuart Frieber 44
KANSAS SUMMER	Frank Smoot 45
ONE REASON TO LEAVE JERSEY	Vince Corvaia 46
[B.J. PLAYS AT PINBALL]	John V. Schlosser 47
NIGHT SNOW	William Virgil Davis 48
NIGHT LIFE	Kimberly Ingalls-Reese 49
GOING OUT WILLINGLY	Mariann Hofer 50
GRACE	Ralph Wilson 51
A WOMAN IS STANDING OUTSIDE	Frank Smoot 66
WHERE SHADOWS KEEP	Elaine Zahller 67
A DAY	Dan Matthews 68
HOUSES	Susan Mae Pauly 70
CONTRIBUTORS	72
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	74

Belatedly, and with ashes on our foreheads, we are pleased to announce the Fall/Winter issue of Touchstone. Fresh from the Christmas holiday, this issue marks the emergence of a new look to Touchstone: the perfect binding, the pictures and the drawings all help to distinguish what we hope is the successful flag of our newly biannual magazine.

This issue is also the appropriate time to announce the special contests that will premiere in the spring in these pages. The Master Teacher Institute for the Arts is sponsoring a high school writer's award for the best writing in prose and poetry to come out of Kansas high schools this year. Likewise, the Kansas State University's English Department has agreed to fund an award for the best undergraduate writing in prose and poetry submitted. Further details are available from the editors upon request.

I would like to acknowledge in large the generous help of the many individuals who have supplied us with their time and effort over the past semester, and I wish all a good season to come.

I would especially like to thank my associate editors, Roger Friedmann and Debbie Leasure, for their persistence and dedication throughout what has been a trying semester of difficult work.

Charles W. Davis

SADNESS OVER MAPS

Susan Mae Pauly

This spot here
this straight line
this short distance
is not where I grew up.
The streets I rode
my bike down were not
flat and direct,
they had fans of green excitement
hanging over them in spring,
their pavement was warm
and swelling with anticipation.

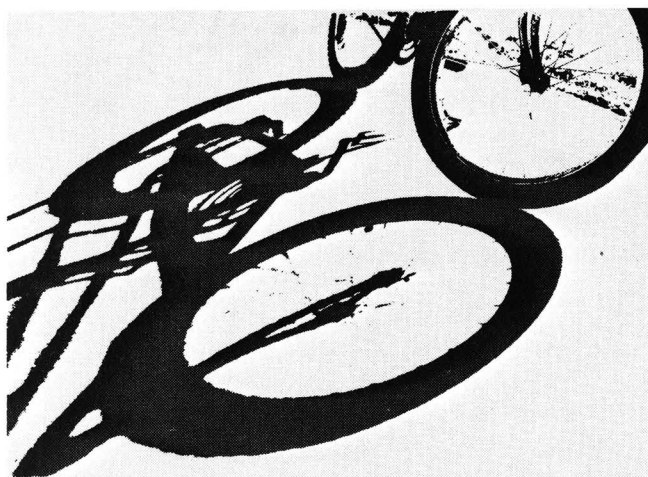
Julie's house where we used to
 upstairs back when we
were just kids and it
didn't really count.
The pink smell of her room
is not there on that
dead end street next to
a small green square/the park
we made up dark stories in.

On the map you can't tell
the good parts of town from
the bad. Places where
adrenalin would tingle in our heads
as we hitch-hiked where we knew
it wasn't safe, across from
liquor stores where welfare
checks were cashed and men
who knows how old
would offer rides in their wide
worn out front seats.

The tiny place marked

Thomas Beach doesn't show
the blocks of bodies standing
sitting and talking that summer
when everyone was a hippie
and we all bought/sold
LSD psillicibin mescaline.
The block letter words
don't describe the young
naked midriiffs over
embroidered smelly jeans,
or long shiny hair.

How could anyone tell
by reading a map
how much Hennepin Avenue
has changed. Who could see
the panhandlers, shoplifters
pimps and sometimes whores
who stood passing talk
dimes and time from the first
thaw in May till the first
snow in the fall. Who could
see the nostalgia that
hangs over renovation now
that these people are gone.
Who could see them.
Who could see me.



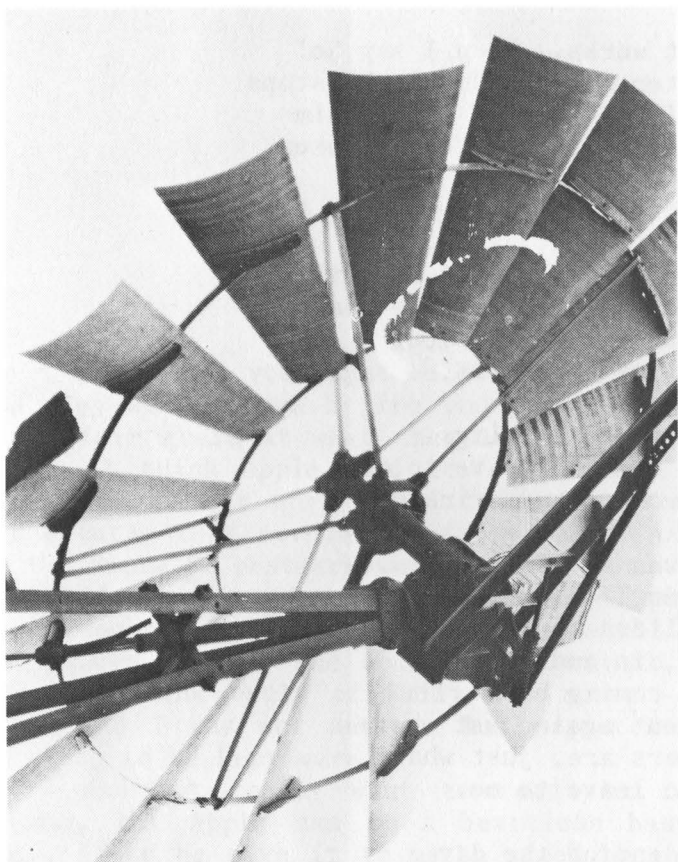
PRAIRIE CURE

Kansas is just that vacant lot
between KC and Denver.

--anon. interstate traveller

Jeff Boyer

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.



Miriam Shaheed

GRADING PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Jeff Gundy

It almost works. When I say No!
and tighten my lips firmly he stops
until I look away; if I move him
he'll spend three or four minutes
with his blocks or his car.

But he can't stay away
from what's new to him, he loves
the slide and crinkle, the chance
the scatter my categories.
I try all my negatives,
all my voices, son,
I tell him, some things
you just have to leave to me
no matter how they crinkle.

He believes me, I know it,
every time I tell him,
but it slides through him
like air, in and out,
he keeps coming back
to find out again just where
his borders are, just what
he has to leave to me.

It's the end of the day
and he's flopped on my lap,
gazing at the TV,
finally too weary
to do anything but trust me
to walk him up the stairs
and lay him down in the darkness.

The Heart's Distant Heat

Bill Macomber

I

I heard once you ought to know the characters of a good play well enough by the end of the second act to make a fair guess at what they are going to do in the third. I think Apple said it. I mention it because that's how I felt when Apple tossed the letter on my work counter that morning we first heard. As soon as I saw the Santa Fe postmark and Jim Howl's handwriting, I knew Emily was getting married. Emily had been gone for six months by then, but I think I still knew Emily well enough to know she would find a way to marry Jim. I do not think badly of Emily for this. I was not bitter and I was not angry. Emily just needs, above all else, to be kept warm.

I did not really want to read the letter that morning, but Apple can be a heartless bastard sometimes. After he gave it to me he stood by the shipping room window that looks out at the lower chairlift and the beginner slopes, and tapped his foot on the floor. That was Apple making it clear; he intended to remain and stew while I read the letter, so I read. Apple and I live and work in the same house, and there was nowhere to go.

In the letter Jim called Emily "...the stunning creature who breathes new color into my gray," and asked how he could possibly miss the chance to possess such a creature forever. The "forever" caught my eye especially. Jim had already been married three times. Emily tends to have that effect on men.

Towards the end of Jim's letter came the superla-

tives and the general astonishment at how wonderful the universe is that always seem to accompany letters from the lovestruck, no matter what age. That part of the letter was hard for me to read. Jim is looking back at 50 now, Emily 22, and I guess I hadn't really pictured the two of them making love until I read those words. Not that I didn't think it wasn't happening, but what I envisioned before was a vague, proprietary image of wrinkled and hairy Jim trying to climb on top for one last throw, and sweet little Emily, like a gothic heroine, squirming to get out from underneath him, one hand on her petticoat and one hand groping for a blunt object on the bedside table. Jim's letter made it clear things were not that way at all.

Jim's letter ended with a P.S. about trying something new with a couple of paintings for the fall show "there in Vail." All he said was that they wouldn't be cowboys. There was no message from Emily.

If I had known when I read the letter what the new paintings would be, I might have been upset, but as it was, I think I took the letter pretty well. Not having seen anyone else for so long after Emily left, of course, I'd had quite a bit of time to let it all settle. I hadn't been brooding, as Apple insisted-- it was more like savoring.

The letter seemed to upset Apple, actually, more than me. When I finished reading I remember Apple turned from the window and went into this long tirade about the problems we would have now with Jim Howl getting his paintings to us on time, the problems we would have convincing our galleries to hang anything but Jim's cowboys. Apple knew as well as I did that he was blowing smoke, so I didn't say anything.

Then he called Emily a bitch and said she would ruin Jim--have him sitting in front of the television, or lying on top of her in the bedroom all day long. Now we were on the subject bothering Apple, and that was as close as I came to blowing up that day. I explained to Apple he was being a fool, and told him not to call Emily a bitch. I think my face must have been a little red, because Apple's one tiny little moment of concern for me came then. It didn't last long. "You okay?" I told him I was and that was that.

I could of said a lot that morning on Emily's

behalf. If nothing else, I'm sure Emily knows what it means to her financially for Jim to keep working. She probably loves him too.

I could have said a lot to Apple, but I didn't. It would have just embarrassed us both.

The first time I ever saw Emily was on a Sunday morning, late August, and she was sound asleep on the couch we keep in the office behind the shipping room. She was scrunched up in a little ball and covered with a green army coat, shivering. Even then she looked beautiful. Emily has a wild kind of beauty that seems to live on its own, apart from a face or features, hovering two or three inches above the surface of her skin. I think she'll always have it, even when she gets old.

When I first saw Emily that morning I assumed she was just another of Apple's Saturday night quarry, one that had gotten away, and my first impulse was to get her up and out before Apple woke up. When things go wrong for him, as they apparently had the night before, or Emily wouldn't have been sleeping on the couch, Apple can be unpleasant as hell.

But when I woke Emily and asked if she had a purse, she sat up on the couch, wrapped the army coat around her shoulders, and told me she was staying. "I'm the new cook." She rubbed her hands together. "In return for room and board," she added firmly, and looked at me. Since she seemed to be telling me instead of asking, I just nodded my head and went away.

Emily never did tell me where she met Apple, or how he came to offer her a job, but when she got up that first Sunday morning and cooked breakfast I could see the wheels that must have been spinning in the back of Apple's balding head the night before. Emily's figure, even in rumpled clothes, looked as good as any I have ever seen in our quarters.

I was sure Apple didn't have Emily's cooking in mind when he invited her home, and truthfully, it made me feel a little sorry for him. Apple, who is only a little younger than Jim Howl, gets a little frantic sometimes about having lots of young women. Every year he spends a little more time and a little more money at the ski bars near our house, coaxing women from there up to his bedroom. Since I moved in with Apple four

years ago to do the shipping and the books, I've probably seen a hundred new faces at the breakfast table, most of them pretty and most of them about Emily's age. Rarely do I see the same face twice.

Emily was different though. Apple tried hard with Emily, harder than I've ever seen him try with any woman, and he never got what he wanted from her.

Every Friday and Saturday night that first month Emily lived with us she came along to eat out with Apple and me, at Apple's insistence. "It's on Apple," he'd say, gesticulating magnanimously, "anything on the menu," and put his arm around Emily for a magnanimous squeeze. Apple even brought Emily along to a business dinner after Jim Howl's September showing. That's how Emily first met Jim. He didn't seem to pay much attention to her then.

Apple also took Emily out and bought her clothes, nice clothes from the ski shop next door to us. He bought Emily a goose down parka, very expensive, and several tight wool sweaters people wear for spring skiing. He bought her boots, pants, and a couple of skirts. I know because I keep the receipts for Apple and file them for tax time. He always thinks he can deduct everything.

Emily must have been grateful for the clothes, because the only thing she brought when she moved in with us was a large canvas satchel and sleeping bag, but the clothes didn't get Apple any further than the dinners out.

Night after night that first month Emily got up from the rocking chair in the front room, said goodnight, and walked down the hallway to the couch in the office where she slept. There was something final in the way she did this.

Apple tried his damndest to make out it wasn't bothering him, and he did a fairly good job for a time.

Hugs in the kitchen, brotherly, and pats on the knee, were as far as he went. He even quit going out every night drinking, and for something like three or four weeks brought no one home with him. Apple the homebody.

God knows I didn't blame him for trying, and I guess for a while I just assumed he would eventually get what he wants from Emily. He usually does. Sometimes that's the thing I like best about him.

If Apple had kept on the right track it's hard to say what might have happened. I like to think Emily would have stayed clear, but who knows? I don't think I knew enough to even feel it back then, but I didn't want Emily to come and go like the others, and maybe I was pleased underneath when the two had their falling out.

It was late September, a couple of weeks after the fall show, just before dinner. I was in the kitchen talking to Emily, and we heard Apple come pounding up the stairs from the street more loudly than usual. I myself have come up the stairs a few times like that, so drunk I had to verify that each wooden step was really there by stomping on it as hard as I could.

It was just starting to get cold in the evenings, really cold, and Apple had on his sheepskin coat. The coat was still buttoned up to his beard when he marched into the hall and boomed a hearty good evening and "a top of the cock to you all," to us.

Emily was standing over the stove with a spatula in her hand and didn't turn around. She was moving things in the frying pan. Apple leaned against the kitchen doorway and I tried to talk with him for a little bit, but he was too drunk to follow what I was saying. He gets that way sometimes, about once a month. Apple fell silent and looked over at Emily for a while. He grinned at me, I remember, moved very deliberately across the kitchen to where Emily was standing by the stove, said, "What's t'eat, sweetness," and slowly rubbed his red hand over the blue jeans covering Emily's ass. Apple was tilting his head at me and trying to wink when the edge of the spatula came down on his knuckles hard enough for me to hear it from across the room.

Apple hopped forward a little, like a bird, and then straightened up fast. He was bright red. It's funny how at times like this you notice the damndest things, and they eventually become the only things you remember. Emily's brownish hair was flown sideways across her forehead. It looked almost red covering her skin like that. She looked more lovely than I can describe. From way down low in her throat she said, "Don't you ever come at me like that again." I stared at Emily as she put down the spatula and marched like a

little bear on fire down the hall and into the office. Apple, as drunk as he was, said "shit" on the way back down the stairs that night, and we didn't see him again until the following afternoon.

Thinking back, what happened next with Emily was as much a surprise to me as it was to anyone. I can honestly say that if I encouraged it, I don't remember how, and I don't remember when.

From the time Emily first moved in with us, I tried simply to regard her as one of Apple's indulgences—he has more than most—with which, I have learned, it is best not to interfere. Perhaps because of our age difference, Apple and I are good about keeping out of each other's way around the house, so I had been friendly with Emily, but I was certainly not aggressive. That, and the abruptness of it, was why I was so surprised when, a couple of nights after Emily hit Apple with the spatula, she moved into my room.

I remember that it was dark and cold as hell when I woke up, and Emily was already in the room with the door shut. I really don't know why, but I didn't say anything, not even, "who il it?" At the time I didn't think of Apple at all. What I did was move over. Emily didn't say much of anything either that night, just, "I'm freezing to death," before dropping the blanket draped around her bare shoulders and climbing into bed.

When Emily wrapped herself around me and started moving that night it scared me to feel how cold her skin really was. As we made love she warmed up, but at first her legs, especially, were cold as the brass bars at the foot of my bed.

The next morning I could hear Emily up and cooking breakfast, and it sounded as if she was alone. When I got up I saw her canvas satchel and sleeping bag stacked neatly in the corner of my bedroom, both zipped up tight. In the closet her clothes were hung carefully next to mine, to the rear of the closet, out of the way, with a gap between where hers started and mine ended. I don't know when she did all this.

Although it was clear Apple resented Emily from then on, to this day he has only made one reference

directly to me about her sleeping with me. It didn't come until four months after that first morning Emily woke up in my room, just after we all went to the hot springs, just before Emily left for Santa Fe.

Apple and I were alone skiing one of the top sections and got stuck together on a chairlift above the upper basin. I remember it was snowing like crazy. There are not many places I know of colder than a broken down chairlift in a snowstorm, swinging back and forth forty feet off the ground and the wind trying to rip the skis off the bottom of your feet. We both were well bundled, poles tucked under our armpits and collars pulled over our chins. Out of nowhere Apple said, "Jim's called three times this week about Emily." I didn't say anything and he was quiet for a while. Finally he added, "You know she's going to end up stepping all over you, don't you?" By then it wasn't that bitter, really, the way he said it, just a tired, settled kind of resentment. I looked down between my skis at the basin below us for a while. After all that time he really didn't understand. "Nobody's stepping on nobody," was all I told him that day, and that ended it.

I knew well enough by then how things looked, especially after Jim Howl began calling for Emily to come and help with the spring show in Santa Fe. Somehow, though, I just never got around to feeling all that crushed about the thought of Emily leaving.

Emily had a built-in distance to her, not cold really, just a distance, and we never got that far with each other. Besides sharing the same room and the same bed that winter, in fact, nothing really changed between Emily and me. She cooked and cleaned, and I kept up with the shipping and the books, and by and large we were more like two employees working under the same roof than a real couple. At first it may have bothered me a little, but Emily pulled it off so well, made so little fuss about it. Anyone else, I think, and it would have been impossible.

Only once did she even get near discussing it, and that was more like a simple courtesy than real talk. She just looked up from her plate one day at lunch and asked, "You don't mind me staying in you room, do you?" the same way she might have asked if my salad was all

right. Apple was out of the house. I looked up at her for a moment before answering and Emily was digging around in her salad. "Uh uh," I answered with a piece of lettuce stuck to my gum. Emily reached across the table, squeezed my hand once, hard, pronounced, "It's so cold in the office," and went on digging in her salad. I thought maybe Emily was halfway through a sentence and had paused to gather some significant statement and deliver it with a dramatic flourish. I wait through most of the rest of that lunch for it to come, but if Emily had planned on saying anything else, she never did get it out.

I know if I told Apple this he would say that my masculinity should be enraged that the deepest part of Emily's affection for me seemed to plumbed and exhausted by this statement of her at lunch; I guess I might have been mad if I hadn't been so damned happy.

It's not often you can feel like you're giving someone else exactly what they need, and also feel like what you are giving them is enough. Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever find anyone I can understand like Emily. It seems to me Emily just put things where they already stand between most people, except with ten or fifteen of the layers peeled away. And my God, a little body heat is not a lot to give.

II

In October Apple said we couldn't afford Emily anymore, in November that she was getting in the way around the house, and in December Apple settled into a churning unpleasantness towards Emily which suddenly disappeared at Christmas when Jim Howl came out for an unexpected visit and stayed a week. It didn't occur to me at the time that Jim had designed his trip around Emily, or that he would end up marrying her.

In late January Apple talked Emily and me into going with him to a private hot springs. "There are pools built into the side of the mountain," he said. I believe Apple wanted to see Emily's body before she left Vail.

Later Apple told me that Jim Howl had started calling right after Christmas to contrive a way for Emily to come out to his home in Santa Fe, and that Emily knew about his calls by the time we went to the

hot springs. I think that is why Emily began to say goodbye there.

When Apple, Emily and I pulled through the snow past the lower gate of the hot springs and up to the lower pool, the first thing we saw was a pale blond woman with large naked breasts standing on the deck next to the pool. She was rubbing herself with a towel and jumping up and down trying to stay warm. The sun was out, spilling a little heat over the mountain, but it was still cold.

Emily didn't say anything, and I stared at the woman through the front windshield of Apple's car. The large blond woman turned her head for a moment and talked to someone I couldn't see behind her. When she turned around her head whinnied high in the air and her mouth opened wide in a horselaugh. It looked like the inside of a manhole with no lid and I looked away.

Apple parked the car under some trees and we got out. He had not said a word about the attire. "What's this?" I asked Apple when we got out of the car. The woman by the pool had gotten herself into some blue jeans by then and was tugging a wool sweater over her chest. All of the sudden, I knew what was happening and wanted very badly to slap the top of Apple's bald head until it became red. "This is it," he said, and smiled.

Early Friday night Apple stopped by our cabin and asked us if we wanted to go with him and soak at the lower pool. He had a towel around his neck and a stupid looking cowboy hat perched on the top of his head. "Go to hell," I advised him, and he left. I built a fire in our cabin. For a long time Emily sat close to the fire, her legs propped on a chair, and said nothing. She was still there when I went to sleep.

On Saturday afternoon Emily and I bundled ourselves up, stuffed a bottle of bourbon and two towels into a knapsack, and trudged through snow to the upper pool. I had seen the upper pool on a map hanging above the fireplace in our cabin, and felt sure no one would be up there at that time of year. Emily and I did want to lie in warm water, and may have even been able to get used to the idea of running around naked in front

of strangers, but there was something obscene about the thought of doing so in front of Apple. I felt it for Emily, even if she didn't.

The upper pool was empty. From it we could see all the way across the wide valley we had travelled the day before to come to the hot springs. A gnarled pine tree stood to one side of the pool, and we hung our clothes, two large mounds of insulated color, over one of the lower branches.

Though the water was almost hot, Emily shivered for the first five minutes we lay there, all of her immersed but her head. She took large drinks from the bourbon, which floated in the water next to us and became warm. I had never seen her drink like that, but it stopped the shivering.

By the time the sun went down and lights flickered out of farmhouse windows in the valley, my head felt like a tight melon. We talked much about nothing in particular and the whole time all the blood in my body seemed to move back and forth between my head and my crotch, thumping.

I thought at the time it was the drink making Emily so talkative. Then she began telling me things. It was like a thick pane of glass came sliding down through the mountain air and landed between us.

Emily floated on her back and told me she had never known her parents. She had grown up in a girl's home south of Pueblo, Colorado, which she hated, and had walked most of the way from there to Eagle, Colorado. There she had lived two years before coming to us. "It was my great act of defiance," Emily said of walking to Eagle. The Emily I knew seemed then to float away on the polar air and out across the valley.

Patches of snow vibrated in the moonlight around the pool of warm water, and Emily said, "Then I saw this cat." Emily's voice drifted down a couple of notches, as if she were speaking more to herself than to me. "I woke up the last morning, just outside of Eagle, and I couldn't feel my legs in the sleeping bag." Emily paused and I tried to look through the dark water of the pool to the pebbles at the bottom. "I swear it was cold as outer space," she continued. "I had to walk an hour before my legs started even to hurt. I was so afraid of what I was doing all of a

sudden, it was like I forgot everything else. I think that fear drove the mean craziness right out of me." I listened silently to Emily, and the pebbles on the bottom of the pool swam together and appeared to move away from me. "Then I saw the cat in the middle of the road, just outside of Eagle. It was stretched out between the white lines with not a mark on it. Frozen solid, eyes open. I stared at it a long time and started thinking about how the heat stays on the highway after the sun goes down. I ran for a mile."

Emily wasn't looking at me, or at anything around us, as far as I could tell. She was somewhere far off. A small part of me said to try and go there with her, but the larger part of me only wanted to turn the other way. I felt very tired suddenly. "You know when you're that cold and alone and scared, it's like something snaps inside," Emily continued softly. "Something broke inside me in that cold, like a part of my heart, maybe, and the fear took that part away forever. All of a sudden, there I was." Emily's voice changed again and I knew she was speaking to me again, looking at me where I lay in the pool. "I knew I could do whatever I had to. All of a sudden the little fears were gone and I knew I would do anything to keep the big fear away." Emily stopped, and it was very quiet around us in the pool. If she said anything else after that, I didn't hear it.

I might have been asleep when Apple arrived. It's hard to tell. Apple was with the woman I had seen drying off at the lower pool, and he carried in his right hand a large gas lantern I had never seen before. The lantern threw an unnatural light over the snow and the rocks. Emily immediately fell silent. "Hi ho," Apple said and steam plumed from his mouth. He hung the lantern on the gnarled pine tree next to where our clothes drooped over the branch, stiffening.

"God, it's wonderful up here," the woman said, and unzipped her parka. She was still blond and had a large bulbous nose which I had not noticed when she stood by the pool. "Let's go," whispered Emily. "Don't let us drive you off," said Apple. He didn't introduce the woman.

We waited until they were in the pool. Emily stood up and waded over to our clothes. Steam lifted

off her shoulders and legs and swirled around her in the harsh white light of the lantern. I stood up behind her and we both dressed quickly. Our teeth chattered like small metal machines.

I barely recognized Emily when she was finally dressed and bundled. I only wanted to lie in the warm cabin below and sleep. Emily started down the path without saying anything. Apple called out, "See you in the morning." I turned around and looked in the pool before I started down after Emily. The bottle of bourbon, almost empty, was tipped over floating in the water. Apple was lying on his back and the blond woman was floating slowly across the pool towards the bottle. She looked like a bloated white fish someone had pushed away from shore.

Three weeks after we returned from the hot springs Jim Howl arranged with Apple for Emily to come and hostess his spring show in Santa Fe. Apple was the one who told me she was going.

I drove Emily to the Denver airport where she kissed me on the forehead. When I got home I noticed that she had left her sleeping bag and the canvas satchel in the corner of my bedroom.

Six weeks and four phone calls later I made a trip to the small wooden shack which is Vail's bus terminal, and shipped the rest of Emily's clothes to Santa Fe in taped cardboard boxes. She had written and said to send the clothes and keep the gear she had left in my bedroom. There was nothing she needed there.

I don't suppose I ever had what you might call real love for Emily, but there was still a small gap opened up when she left. Just big enough for the wind to whistle through at night. Apple centered himself around his work and his groin when Emily was gone, and his mood was much improved. It seemed to me he thwacked himself against the bodies of more visitors than I could count for a long time.

III

The last time I saw Emily in Vail she wasn't even there. She had remained in Santa Fe and Jim Howl had come out alone for the fall show mentioned in the letter. Jim goes to all his shows alone now.

Apple and I were talking to the manager of the Belltower Inn when Jim came in on the Friday morning of the show around ten o'clock. We have Jim's shows in the lobby of the Belltower Inn because the hand-carved staircases, the rich color on the walls, and the elaborate wood trim around the doors make a good balance to the stark, lined faces Jim paints. No one is quite sure how he has done it, but Jim has made an entire career, an entire fortune, in fact, with one black and white painting after another of exactly the same thing. Sometimes he shows the shoulders, but usually there is simply the immense wrinkled face of an old, worn out cowboy staring out from the canvas at whoever is looking.

Apple and I had all the lights set and the display walls positioned by the time Jim walked in, but the paintings hadn't arrived yet, and Apple, who was already apprehensive about showing Jim's new paintings sight unseen, was getting a little nervous. All we knew still was what Jim had said in the letter; that they wouldn't be cowboys. Apple does not get nervous well.

Jim told us the paintings were on the way and I persuaded Apple to go and sit with Jim over at the house for a while and have some lunch.

I settled with the manager of the Belltower, a small red-faced man who still, I think, slightly distrusts blue-jeaned and bearded Apple and requests, even after three years, that we pay in advance for the use of his lobby. I rearranged some of the display walls, laid out Jim's biographical brochures, and ate a hamburger in the darkly lit bar off the main dining room.

The truck with the paintings had arrived by the time I finished lunch. When I came back into the lobby, Apple was talking to the driver, who disappeared out the front door before I reached them.

It took only a half hour to unload the truck, and I was just coming in with the last of the wooden crates when Apple started poking around among the stacks we had made against a wall. "Where's the new ones," he called out louder than he needed. Jim was standing right next to him. I set the last crate down to the side while Jim picked one out and handed to Apple. Apple took it over to one of the display walls and

started opening it while Jim and I separated the other new paintings, still crated, from the rest.

I heard the nails creak when Apple pried the lid of the container off, the sound of crunching wood when the sides of the crate folded down, and then I heard Apple make a hissing ejaculation. I couldn't see the painting from where I was. I moved the crates holding the new paintings over to the other side of the room where we were going to hang them in a group. By the time I had the last one moved, Apple was there and cracking open another. He was chattering happily. Apple was his estatic self again, the way he usually is at the shows.

Jim was not paying attention to Apple when I came over to take a look at the painting Apple had opened first. He was standing in front of the display wall where Apple had leaned the newly opened piece, his arms folded over his chest, and his head tilted a little sideways, gazing down at the painting with a sort of lost look on his face. Apple was crouched over by the wall opening crates, still buzzing. Jim didn't notice me when I stepped around by his side and looked at the painting. It was a nude. I knew right away who it was, and I stared at her a long time.

Jim had painted her lying lengthwise to the angle of vision, her head looking away from the viewer. The rest of her body was detailed, though, and every line was perfect.

Her body was floating a couple of inches off the surface of the ground. A dim shadow fell onto the space where her body would have been had it been touching the ground. Her skin looked stretched tight over her bones, implying she might snap in two if the painting was jarred.

I started to feel hot looking at the painting. Though I did not see anything specific after a while behind a blur of color, her image burned inside me, as though she had floated the rest of the way up off the floor and out of the painting and into my body. I felt an impulse to touch the body in the picture, to believe until my finger reached the canvas that she was really there. The burning inside me and the warm show lights glowing in the semi-darkness over the painting caused the back of my neck to sweat. I felt wet and a little

dizzy, and slowly became aware that I was not alone.

When I broke away from the painting, I saw that Jim was still next to me with his arms folded. He was looking at me and there was a tiny question in his eyes, a question no bigger than the space a forgotten name or disembodied face leaves in the back of your mind when it departs. There was kindness there. "It's beautiful, Jim," I told him. He just barely moved his mouth when he turned and walked over to where Apple was still rumbling among the wooden crates. I believe what he said, though I am still not sure, was yes.

Apple was as near speechless over the new paintings as I have ever seen him. There were six new paintings all told, all only slight variations of the one I looked at. All were completely different.

Apple was talking enthusiastically to Jim about opening new markets with the nudes when I passed through the doors of the hotel lobby and out into the mid-afternoon sun that day. I still felt hot, and must have been dizzy than I thought, because I nearly knocked over one of the display walls on the way out.

The cold September air, colder than usual for that time of year, took the breath away from my lungs for a few seconds, and then cleared things up a little as I walked down Main Street Vail toward home.

When I got to my room, I lay down down for a while and closed my eyes. The light was fading outside my window when I opened them again, and I could barely see enough without the overhead light to pick up Emily's canvas satchel and sleeping bag from the floor and put them, without looking inside, on the highest shelf at the back of my closet, to the rear and out of the way. Doing that made me feel better, feel almost nothing for a while.

I fixed dinner. I worried a little that Apple might be mad about me running out like that. I worried about Apple keeping the checks from the buyers straight, and getting all the paper-work together for when we paid Jim, but I did not go back to the hotel.

At nine o'clock I heard Apple coming up the stairs. I turned on the lamp standing next to my chair in the front room. He came into the room through the kitchen and sat down. I wondered to myself what he was doing home, but neither of us said anything. After the

show we keep a free bar open until midnight. This is usually Apple's favorite long moment of the show.

"Jim was tired. He went up to his room an hour ago," Apple finally said.

"Sorry I ran out on you," I told him.

Apple fluttered his hand at me a little. He wasn't mad. "Let's go have a drink," he said. "All the new stuff sold first. They're all down and packed up. Right after the last bid was in."

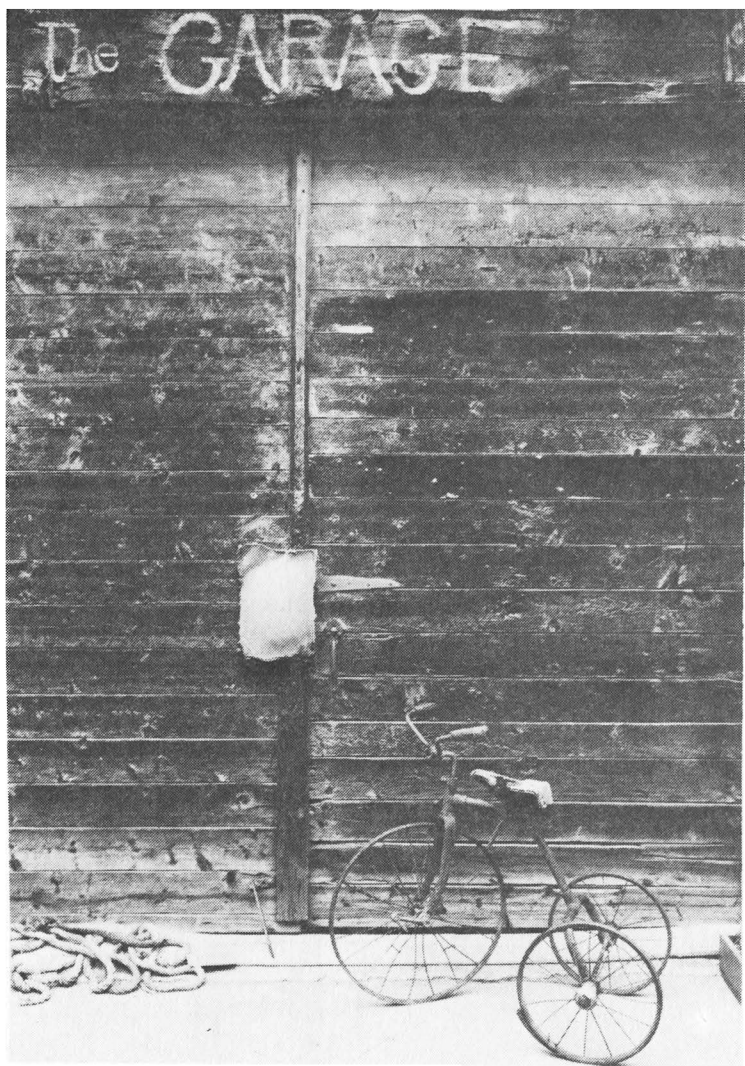
I looked at him and didn't say anything, and he gave me one of his fatherly smiles I usually can't stand because Apple's no father and I'm sure no son.

"Let's go have a drink," he said again. He got up out of his chair, buttoned his coat, and walked over to the hatrack and put on one of his ridiculous cowboy hats. He stood in the doorway of the kitchen and looked down at me. "There's a couple of women over there yet," he said, and rubbed his hands together and tried to look evil. Apple turned his head sideways the way a bird looks at a worm and showed his yellow teeth to me through his beard.

It was still surprisingly cold for early fall when Apple and I headed for the hotel, spitefully cold. On the narrow sidewalk strangers clutched themselves and moved forward quickly. For a brief moment, as Apple and I walked, I felt his arm go around my shoulder. Then it was gone.

I looked over at Apple. His cowboy hat was pulled down low over his forehead, his shoulders were hunched forward to keep his neck warm, and the hand he had put around my shoulder was sliding back into his coat pocket.

Perhaps it was the darkness, or the cold, but Apple suddenly looked smaller to me, and for the first time since I met him, old. Apple's hand dug deeper into his coat pocket. I realized his hand would not come out again for anything on a night that damn cold for September, and I felt a chill where it had touched my shoulder, lasting only a couple of heartbeats. It was as if something had come across a great distance to warm itself against my back, and then vanished.



Barb Rutherford

DAYS OF THE KHRUSCHEV THAW--ASTRAKHAN,
1956

Karl Tierney

As one turn deserves another, he rolls over in
bed,

waiting, a-wed. The steppes of Russia
slant outside the door. The onion breath
of Khrushchev sighs against the window sill.
The callalillies are in bloom again.
It is, after all, June again, and Gogol eyes
and bulbous-hooped skirts slouch toward Bethlehem,
waiting to be born again. The just-around-the-bend
of his derriere coyly sings, oh astral star of
Astrakhan.

Vienna in its better days is not very far
nor through, and his dark hue enjoys no
connoisseur.

That Sidney Poitier has already made his movie
debut or that
Adlai Stevenson plays (again) the groom does not
occur to him.
From Stalingrad waking in its pain, the trains
come and come
entering this hot Volga delta quite on queue.

In Tokyo, Yukio Mishima enters a gray salon or
sedan.
Somewhere someone steps on the grave of Genghis
Khan,
and Mamie Eisenhower, unbeknownst to the press,
lets loose one nasty drool on an unenviable
pillow.

NEARLY FALL

David Weimer

The rains came.
The starlings no longer swirled,
probably together like so many old men
not even grumbling.
One cow
bogged down in the silt where the creek overflowed
patiently bellowed.
Dap Winslow would be headed home by now.
The rusted pick-up looked grimier in the rain,
it jumped from one solid spot to another.
Shotgun rattled in the rear window.
Somewhere over the next hill
a dog barked. The hill slowly spilled onto the
road.
Dusty summer leaves were scrubbed clean,
the first chrysanthemum bloomed.
Dap had seen rain before.

MORNING ST. LOUIS/DIANA

John V. Schlosser

Morning St. Louis
Cold air advanced
Misty state of brick brown buildings
Harder now because of winter
Little black children with hats and mittens
Other hatted people run 'round face in coat

so inside, warm and dark like Diana
who opens door and smiles
when you try to read her poetry
who views living as opposites confused
and sits down quietly on the edge of the bed

Live in a world of little dark children
Hatted, black children, white eyed
And morning cold: sudden tug of mother
Slate grey skies, exclamation to come along

so soft, dark and warm like Diana
who says the world is black and white at once
toasted brown Diana who holds me now

I wonder why it still feels strange
Violent tug of mother softly

come along dear, come along

APPRENTICE GAZING UPON CELLINI'S SALTCELLAR

Philip Paradis

The goldsmith's touch
quietly astonishes. A moment
lives in the face of the goddess.
Has the power of the sea
awakened her? Lowered, her
eyelashes conquer Poseidon,
the self-possessed.

Gazing upon the master's work,
the King and Queen of France
will see themselves--
god and goddess beholding
the king and queen in
each other--their mortal hearts
captured by the immortal pair.

How the master's touch
awakens my love
and me. Even now he
calls us forth.

SMOKED GLASS

Missy-Marie Tomko

This morning
I left you a letter,
stuck with a band-aid
on the bathroom mirror.
I am running again.
We both thought
I'd been cured
but lately
inside I have felt
like smoked glass.
You could have seen it
if you had looked hard enough
could have seen
that my eyes
have been cloudy
and my fingers have shaken
listening
to the tempo of the wind
or the sound
of glass breaking.

GRAVEYARD SHIFT

K.K. Rector

Unpeeled mornings,
not yet touched
by the stench of exhaust
rising like a foot
above the amber skyline.
Driving home
the endless chainsmell
of bacon and coffee
assault my nostrils
like a fist.
Last night I watched
the traffic light
clockwork change
unnoticed
on the empty street.
Am I the only one alive
at 3am 4am 5am?
Surely somewhere
a fat baker
covered in flour
is silently cursing the hour.

THE MOUSE POEM

K.K. Rector

The screen from my window
has the mouse bombarded
yet wine in me now
I welcome him—
even ask him to join me
and read my poems.
I am curious to ask him
if he sees the moon in my Chablis
since the curtain is open
a cool breeze falling in.
I cannot offer you a cigarette
dear mouse
hiding behind the stove
and refrigerator.
If I take the screen away
and invite you in slowly
cautiously, would you come?
My plants have died.
I should be thankful for you—
the only living thing here.

MARRAKECH

Missy-Marie Tomko

In the Souks
there are mountains
of olives, oily
and smelling sightly sour.
The bearded men sell
spices in buckets
and the air around them
is pungent
with spice-smell.
The women hide themselves
in yards of wool
and they rummage through baskets
of flat, round
loaves of bread
pinching and prodding each
until a satisfactory loaf
is chosen.
Live chickens
are carried by their feet
like handbags
bumping their heads on the ground.
Weaving in and out of the alleys
are small children who are
quick to spot foreign elbows
and beg for dirhams
in four languages.

LETTIE

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
—Andrew Marvell

Ann Carrel

A small drop of yogurt fell from the tip of her plastic spoon to the middle of the page she was grading. Cathy Paddleford's face came to mind, the round wire-rimmed glasses, the faint glint of oil on her nose, the articulate eyes that would squint: "Why is there food on my paper?"

"Catherine, you ask inane questions," Lettie thought as she tried to lift the congealed drop off the page with her middle fingernail. The drop smeared.

The pink day-glow clock on Ivan's desk said 3:20. It was time for Ivan. In a moment the door opened and their small Temporary Instructor's office was filled with the aroma of "Wood-hue Gold" pipe tobacco. Ivan was next to her, laying his butter-smooth brown leather driving cap on the stack of manuscripts he was proofing for StokeRiver, his poetry journal. Bending over his desk, he murmured hello without looking up, tapped and straightened his pile of graded compositions, paper-clipping the left corner. She watched the back of his head out of the corner of her eye and noticed how evenly the hair was clipped across the nape of his neck. "Ten minutes 'til post-time," he said as the door clicked behind him. Both she and Ivan taught 3:30

Composition I classes; Lettie had six more themes to grade.

"Just six," she said and pressed the side of her palm onto the paper. Her voice grew deep: "It's 3:23. Your Comp. class meets at 3:30. You have six more themes to grade. What will you do? What will you do?" She thought of Karl Malden standing outside of her classroom looking concerned in his felt fedora, and she pressed her palm harder onto the paper, fighting back the smile. 3:24. Usually in these last few minutes everything became funny, tension eased from around her neck and shoulders, her head felt light, she could watch the other Temporary Instructors in the office, Dave and Pam, shuffling their papers and realize that whether their lives were in order or not was unimportant because a year from now, it won't have mattered. They wouldn't be doing this forever, after all; none of them was over twenty-seven, and Lettie herself was only twenty-six. But today she fought the urge to relax, because it was only four weeks into the semester and she was deeply in debt. She owed time to everyone. There were the resumés to send out, the reading she was to help organize for the Lit. Club, there were the letters to write, a house to clean, there were poems to be written, there was her husband, Michael. Lord, she was always in debt to Michael. 3:27. Well, she could live like Ivan, a dewy jonquil just plucked out of the flower cart, but everybody hated Ivan's guts. How in God's name did he find the time to edit StokeRiver, publish poetry and still sleep with half the men on the faculty. At one time she'd had all those ambitions but the sepia-toned S.O.B. had driven them out of her. And now she was late.

Standing in front of the class, she traced one finger down the list of names on the roster. "Alan, Pete, Penny, Raymond, Alsalih, Barb..." She paused for effect. The six were watching her. "You six will just have to beat me up out in the parking lot, because once again...." She waited for the laugh, but it didn't come. The other class had laughed at that line the last time she failed to grade the papers on time. No, wait. God, it was this class; she had used the same dumb line on Monday when she didn't have all the papers graded. It had saved her then, but now there were only sharp

sighs and the flash of Pete's t-shirt out of the corner of her eye as he slumped back into his chair. Admittedly it had been a weak joke, but just at this moment she was pressed for a better one.

Her smile trembled stupidly around her open mouth. The lime-green anthologies on the student's desks reminded her that she had forgotten to read the essay she'd assigned for today. Feeling their eyes following her, Lettie walked over to the window, a move calculated to buy her a little time. Her students watched her as she leaned back against the pane. "This is a writing class," she said finally in a low, level voice. They watched; the dramatics were something different. Allowing herself the luxury of observing the piece of pink insulation hanging from the cracked ceiling panel above Randy's head, Lettie became uncomfortably aware that inspiration could not be expected to rush to her aid today. She needed more time. The best she could do was fold her arms and beckon with two fingers like a mother urging her children to eat: "So...write," she said quietly. They continued to watch her. She continued to gesture at them with her two fingers until a couple of the more dutiful girls turned back the covers of their spiral notebooks and located their pens. The rest began to groan.

"Write about what?" Adrienne asked.

There was no answer to that question. Today Lettie's mind was like the inside of a fluorescent tube.

"You don't need me to answer that for you. Just write something," she said, and lowered her eyes from Adrienne, who had the same open-mouthed, quizzical expression of stab-victims in the movies.

"Are you going to look at these?" the girl asked. Lettie already had two stacks of unmarked themes at home and didn't want any more, but if she said no, she realized the students would only pretend to write. She said yes.

Sitting down at her desk, Lettie frowned at her open grade-book. Most of the students began to write, or clutch their forelocks, or scribble, a miracle that never lost its wonder for her although she had seen it happen thousands of times. Methodically Lettie turned the pages and made small pencil checks next to names

from past semesters, flipping back occasionally as if to verify a questionable entry, a perfectly meaningless activity but one that gave her time to relax her shoulder muscles and regularize her breathing. Slowly she slipped off one of her penny-loafers under the desk and began to explore the crack in the linoleum with her toe. The floor was cool. She slipped off the other shoe.

This would be an hour she would give herself like a present, she decided, settling back against the wooden chair. The room was quiet except for the hum of the light overhead and the sound of hands moving across paper; the late afternoon glow on the pink cement walls was pleasant. She would use this hour to plan. Not just plan for her next day's class, although that was important; she would use this hour to plan her life. Why not? It could happen like that. It could happen that in a warm and congenial hour in a room full of students that she usually liked, life-altering decisions could be reached.

Like what she was going to do about Michael. Last night had been particularly unpleasant for both of them. She had promised him a long, lingering evening of wine and old Fats Waller recordings, an evening in which they would, in her words, "cook together, for God's sake, just like those stunning young couples in House American or whatever the hell it's called. We can wear cable-knit sweaters!" She had come home late from a faculty meeting and had forgotten to go to the store. They had argued. Their arguments had recently reached a new pitch, so that it was now difficult to achieve emphasis without screaming. Screaming was not unusual for her, but last night was the first time she had heard Michael scream, and it frightened her. And when she lay down in bed that evening and thought about it rationally, it was only the one burner on the electric stove that she had left on low all day while they were at work that had caused him to throw his arms wide like the painting of John Brown and rage at her until she could actually feel a fine spray of spittle on her face. Against her shoulder in the bed, even in his sleep, his back felt tight.

And tonight she could not make it up to him

because she not only had themes to grade, but a pile of mid-terms from her Intro. to the Novel class. If she could have one day that was entirely her own with no interruptions, just as this hour was, then she could get caught up and the next day could be Michael's. At the same time, she was acutely aware that she was wasting her time even as she thought about it. "How much time do I spend like this?" she said. Blushing, she realized that she had asked the question half-aloud. Glancing up, she saw a couple of students' eyes focused on her.

Their attention was quickly diverted from her, however, and she was relieved. A squirrel had decided to make its careful trek along the long window-ledge to the right of the students' desks. Although it was snowing outside, the classroom was stuffy enough to warrant several of the windows being half opened, and when the squirrel stood up to put its paws against one of the panes, its breath made a dense little circle of white steam against the already fog-covered window; steam from the heaters rolled out around its belly and seemed to hang in the air, covering the body until all she could see was the head and the bright, black eye. She glanced at her students, who were entranced by the animal. She glanced back, and was surprised to see the squirrel hadn't moved, then looked to her students who also hadn't moved; smiled and opened her mouth to say, "It's the heat..." but saw in that moment that although students who had been writing were still looking down at their papers, their hands had stopped. So she said, "It's the heat. The squirrel likes the heat," to the absolute quiet of the room, and seeing no movement, she closed her eyes and wetted her lips. She opened her eyes again a few seconds later and the class had resumed writing. The window-ledge was empty.

Lettie felt a stab of anxiety in the pit of her stomach but chose to ignore it. This was an experience she instinctively felt was best left uncatagorized and unclaimed. Cutting class a little short, she walked back to the office.

Ivan was quick to remark that her eyes looked awful. Ivan was always quick to assess the state of her life with an appraisal of her eyes. What stung her was his usual accuracy. "Things going okay with you?"

he asked quietly as she sat down at her desk next to him and removed her coat. "Your eyes look like you don't feel so good."

"Yeah...well," she said, shrugging and smiling. She didn't know why she always affected this sheepish tone with him. "I just need to learn to get some more sleep at night. I was up late grading papers."

"Say," he said, tapping one finger on her desk. "Have you ever thought you might be getting too much sleep in the day?" He paused for her answer, but she could only manage to frown with half-hearted interest. "I mean it," he said, "I mean, you have afternoon classes like me. Why don't you do what I've learned to do? Get up early. Get up with the sun. There's just something about it--the air is...it's invigorating..." he held his hands out expressively and grimaced at the ceiling, searching for words. She found it difficult to concentrate on what he was saying; Ivan's head was too big for his body. "You'd feel so much more productive," he finished, turning on the casters of his chair and wheeling back into the desk.

"You're probably right," she said, shaking her head and smiling. She took out a ditto and began typing an exercise on the uses of the semi-colon. "Let's face it," Lettie thought, "he is right." Right in his insinuations about her state of mind and her home life and her productivity. He was not right in his suggestion that she was sleeping too much in the day. She was not sleeping at night, which necessitated her sleeping in the day. She was not sleeping at night because she and Michael were not making love. They were arguing and going to bed angry. And Michael somehow was turning the whole thing into an artistic coup--when he wasn't teaching at the art center he was working day and night on his light sculptures, and they now had an edge she had never seen in them before. She had tried to write, but nothing came of it.

Maybe, she reasoned, she was giving Michael, with her distance, the time he needed. Maybe anger was what he needed. Anger, quite possibly, was what she needed as well, but she couldn't feel any anger--didn't want it.

Ivan was gone now; this was his time to meet with

his editors of StokeRiver. The others were gone too and she felt suddenly that she could write: there was something about the way light was cutting across the tile in their office with an authority--she guessed that was the term--that was disconcerting. "But good lord," she thought, "that's Emily Dickinson." Still, there was something about it. Returning to her exercise, she began to type: "2. The group included Mr. Brown, the banker of the town; Mr. Hale, a retired farmer; and Dr. James, the dentist." And then without thinking about it--because it had already happened--she knew everything had changed. For a long moment she focused her eyes on the bar across her typewriter, tensing the muscles in her forehead, internally commanding herself to read the numbers etched across the rod. Then her eyes blinked and remained shut. She knew that she could keep them closed and pretend that it wasn't real and that it would go away. Outside the office, she knew, everything had stopped.

The chair squeaked familiarly as she rolled backwards and stood up to open the door. A student's eyes confronted her immediately; Lettie was startled. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the hallway, looking at her with curiosity. About eighteen, he was pimply-faced and sullen, his hair cut short at the sides and in bangs across the forehead. His big, ruddy hand, half hidden by the sleeve on his over-sized letter jacket, clutched a Fortran IV text. Lettie allowed herself to perceive that the boy was not moving. He did not have to be; he could stare at her endlessly with that puzzled look that said there was something he meant to ask although he didn't know her. Nothing need be changed. She could turn around and go back into the office easily.

Looking to her right down the corridor she saw a man frozen in mid-stride, and another, a friend from the Math department, stopped in the middle of a quick turn, his arm held out awkwardly at his side. She watched them carefully. The boy looked as if he would speak, and Lettie's arms fell. Her shoulders found the concrete wall. The corridor was quiet. Her friend was beginning his turn. Her whole back pressed into the wall's surface. The boy looked as if he was trying to remember. She slid gradually down, the crusts of paint

scratching her as her knees sank underneath. Someone had forgotten. She was breathing hard, her legs and fingers and palms finding the floor. The corridor would not give way.

As she swung the refrigerator door open, light arced across the walls of their small, darkened apartment. Lettie watched the light trail back from the bedroom where Michael slept; then she quietly shut the door. He was already in bed when she returned home at 5:30, and when the rooms had begun to darken later in the evening, she had only turned on a small light on her desk. She didn't want to disturb him since he had been up all last night working in the basement he rented for a studio. Tossing the orange she had removed from the refrigerator up lightly and catching it in her palm, she thought of a softball, and somehow the childlike motion reassured her. Methodically she began to slice the orange into even sections on the cutting board. She had chosen to wait until she was fixing dinner in her own kitchen before thinking about the incident.

Lettie put a frozen dinner in the oven and began eating one of the orange sections while standing at the counter. It was time to ask herself why and how, and yet she felt there could be no satisfactory explanation. Once she had read a story about a man who had his first epileptic seizure in his late twenties; the author described how going into and coming out of the seizure had felt--turning the experience into an artistic statement that Lettie could not, just this moment, categorize. The story had been beautiful nonetheless. She asked herself if it were possible that this was a first sign of epilepsy or some physical disorder. But the question was posed more as a way of resting her mind than anything else, because she knew before she asked it that she could now or anytime she wished, stop things. She could do so in the utter clarity and utter awareness of her surroundings.

Lettie decided to retire early. She found Michael's long frame was stretched almost diagonally across the bed, making it difficult for her to get in

without waking him. He looked somehow tonight more like a vulnerable thirteen year-old than the thirty year-old man she had married four years ago. He slept clutching his pillow, damp beneath his open mouth. She undressed and got into bed, moving him gently, discovering he had at least had the presence of mind to undress before collapsing. As he breathed, he grunted and made little clicking noises inside his mouth; Lettie lay very still so as not to wake him. She could feel in the slight dampness of the sheets that he was sweating as usual, and she pulled the blanket next to her so that he would not wake from the heat. After a while, she began to notice an ache in her legs and realized that she was holding herself very stiffly. It occurred to her then that she was afraid, somehow, of waking Michael. For a while she lay there listening to him breathe, and then got up, dressed, put on her coat and walked out of the house.

The air was cold but the wind had stopped blowing so hard, and the foot of snow on the ground made the streets quiet and gave the illusion of close warmth as she walked. Her body was comfortable inside her long down coat and stocking cap, and she tried to concentrate only on the slight burning sensation the chill night air gave her face, and on the foot paths she had to discover where the sidewalks hadn't been scraped. After several blocks, she crossed the street to the baseball diamond and followed a path that she supposed children had made that afternoon to the bleachers. Most of the snow had been trampled from the seats, but she swept a space clear and sat looking across the diamond to the trees in the park. Lettie was cold now, but she felt clear headed, and she knew she must think about this thing before she could go back to the apartment. In the row of houses across the street from the ball-diamond, she could see that almost all the lights were out. She thought how easily and with how little harm she could do it now. A creaking sound behind her and overhead caught her attention then. The sound increased and reminded her of an afternoon when she was a child, sitting in front of a bay-window, watching a porch-swing blowing crazily in the wind. She knew she would let it happen.

In the quiet she glanced upward to where the

sound had last come. Through the chimney smoke and reflection of the moonlight from the snow, the long "V" of a flock of geese shimmered against the black sky, but did not advance. Looking down at her feet, she saw that the blue and red sparkles the street lamp overhead reflected on the snow were now etched, unchanging. Across the diamond the shadows that had moved underneath the elms in the light breeze were still. Lettie hugged herself closer, then broke suddenly into a high-stepping lope across the infield, the snow plowing before her. On the pitcher's mound she began springing up and down, clapping her hands, hugging and slapping her arms. Slipping off her mittens and letting them fall to the snow, she ran her fingers across the skin at her temples, her brow-bone, finding the shape of her cheekbones, trying as her hands trembled, to imagine her own skull. She felt the stab of cold in her lungs as she panted in the night air, felt the cold begin to numb her knees and legs where she had sunk down. With her eyes closed, Lettie tried to see inward, trying to focus on the power that must lie somewhere behind her eyes. It looked black, like always, but she could feel the center of it.

When she began to shake with the cold, she got up and started home. Snow was falling now through the circle of light the streetlamps made and disappearing into the dark. Lettie wondered how it was possible to stop everything yet not stop reflection itself. It seemed to her that the reflection would necessarily involve a space of time--from object to retina--and if so...she could see nothing at all. Unless it were possible to freeze particles of light.... But she decided to stop thinking about it at all; it frightened her. She did not understand how it could be happening to her or how dangerous it might be. There was no proper way to think of it at all; and yet, as she reached for the apartment door, she knew she could not go in until she had finally settled it in her mind. "Give it up," she thought, and paused, as she felt the warm, stale air of the open doorway.

"Look," he said, pushing the calculator across her desk and tapping at it with his pencil. "You said

all I had to do was get an 'eight' on my last theme and you'd give me an 'A' for last semester!" Lettie stared down at the red numerals on the plastic screen, then nodded calmly at Richard. "And so I just want to know what the deal is, because I have added that grade up every way I can think of, even counting in-class participation which I don't know what you gave me on it but...." Watching her own reflection in the lenses of his black plastic glasses she saw that she was leaning forward, her face registering an appropriate concern without looking intimidated. Richard was a big boy whose voice and frame trembled with feeling; she asked him to move around beside her so that they might look at her grade-book, a positioning tactic that managed to calm most students. Adding the scores from her grade-book on his calculator, she found she was not in error.

"Well, see, I'm afraid it was your in-class participation score that did it, Richard," she said, becoming dimly aware that another student was supposed to see her now. What was it? Oh yes, she was supposed to have a paper graded.

"Well, like, you said I was gonna get an 'A' I thought...I mean, if I only got a 'B' on this paper."

Lettie sighed, "Quite frankly, I don't remember telling you that, Richard." She could see only his hooked-nose profile; he had turned away from her and was staring at the wall with his arms folded. "I'm not saying you're wrong," she added quickly, noting his posture.

"I'm not wrong," he hissed.

With her left hand, Lettie felt around on her desk top for Margo's theme. Margo had already taken a vacant seat in the office, and was glancing at the clock. "I'm just saying that it would be hard for me to tell you that before I had figured all the scores."

"Look, you were standing there right after class, and I come up, and you had your grade-book...." Out of the corner of her eye, Lettie could see Ivan's head rise. He was listening.

"Richard, just a second. I have to...to talk to Margo." Margo was standing at the desk.

"I have to be at a chemistry exam right now," Margo said, beaming.

Lettie smiled back. "Margo, I'm...I'm really sorry, but I don't have your paper graded. Could you come...?"

Margo's eyes flew open. "But you said you'd have it graded yesterday. I have to go to work after this; I can't come back. Isn't my next theme due tomorrow? I kind of need to see this one first, don't I?"

"Well, I tell you what, you can turn your paper in late this time. I won't count it late." She could feel Richard smirking beside her.

"But then I won't have a final draft to discuss with the others in class tomorrow--am I supposed to sit there? Will this be an excused absence if I miss? How much will it count off on in-class participation?" Richard was now shifting in his chair to keep from snickering. Ivan had stopped grading entirely and had turned his head to watch.

Lettie felt her stomach leap up under her ribs; there had been no conscious will on her part. She knew it had already happened, and that there would be no further interruptions. She continued to look at Margo's folded paper, then slid open her desk drawer and removed a green pen. Reading the paper once, turning over the stapled pages slowly, she aquired a vague notion that she was reading about a skiing trip to Aspen, Colorado. Without looking up from the paper Lettie began marking spelling and punctuation errors, found an unusual phrase, marked the word "Fresh" in the margin next to it, and circled a 'C' at the bottom of the page. After marking the grade in the grade-book, she smiled up at Margo. "Oh, my mistake," she said, handing it to her.

Michael was in the basement studio that evening when she returned home. She entered the room to find it nearly steaming--Michael always had to have the rooms hot to create. In cut-offs he squatted in the darkness before the red glow of his plexiglass light sculpture, concentrating on the pattern the light was casting on the wall beside him, his weight shifting on his heels, his raised index finger seeming to follow one of the center lines. When her heels clicked across the stone floor behind him, she was surprised at how quickly he stood and turned from his sculpture to her.

"How's it coming?" she asked.

"Great!" he said, hugging her and kissing her on the cheek. "How was school today? Let's go upstairs and you can tell me all about it." This was unusual. She was used to receiving a half-hour recital of the day's catastrophes and successes, as well as the vague reservations he had about his work. He stroked her back. "I want to know what you did today. I never get to see you, sweetheart."

The last time Lettie could remember Michael calling her that was after she had thrown up in the ladies' restroom at her Uncle Frank's funeral.

"Sorry, lamb pie," she replied, regretting immediately the irony in her voice. Both she and Michael relaxed their embrace. "No, really," she said, covering quickly, "nothing much going on today."

Michael turned on the overhead light. The late afternoon sun glowed against his blonde hair and fair skin. He had that sullen look that had attracted her to him at first, dark calm eyes that obviously saw everything with an intensity that only the involuntary muscle twitches around his lips and jaws betrayed. He stood there twitching and looking angelic, a fine glaze of sweat over his face, glowing like porcelain.

She had grown tired of him ever so slowly.

What she unconsciously feared would happen had happened. Last night after she had returned from the park, while they were making love, she had wished to be elsewhere. At that moment she had felt his whole dead weight sink into her arms as she held him, as she lay pinned beneath, struggling to raise her shoulders and turn him from her. Feeling that he was not breathing, she had become terrified. With great effort she had rolled him to her side and reached up to turn on the lamp, grabbing his face in her other hand and searching his tightly closed eyes. Frightened not to feel his chest rise with his breath, yet not wanting to let the moment begin again, she lay propped on one elbow, frozen, staring at him a long time. Slowly she had pulled him against her and waited until she felt him breathing again, and feeling his breath on her body, she had cried. Michael tried to soothe her.

As he stood looking at her now, she was aware that her silence was disappointing him more than usual. He switched off the light. "It's going to be

another quiet evening," he said, and turned to climb the basement stairs. She followed him up. Suddenly, in the stairway, he turned sharply around so that she had to take a step back. His face had the look of extreme hurt that she had seen lately, and she was surprised once again at its suddenness. He took a great breath, then said, "I'm getting tired of you never wanting to talk to me." Lettie put her hand against the wall and lowered her eyes from his, concentrating on his mid-section. She felt the even tone of his voice and knew that his eyes were closed. "You come home, and you mope around, and you mumble. And I'm getting tired of it, Lettie. There's nothing to you anymore."

"I don't know what you want me to do," she said finally.

"I don't know what you want me to do!" he exploded, and grabbed the stair-rail. His white knuckles frightened her; he turned his hand back and forth, gripping it. "What do you want me to do? What is it you want me to be?"

Lettie did not answer. She knew he interpreted her silence to mean she did not want to dignify his question with an answer, but she knew the answer. She did not want him to be anything. She did not want him to be. He waited, his eyes searching her face, but she could only concentrate on the clear light through the storm-door above his head. Michael turned and began climbing the stairs again. When he was opposite the storm-door, she noticed that the wind had stopped in the trees. She pushed her body against him, turning his shoulders at an angle as she squeezed slowly past. Outside, it was a bright, clear day.



**MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY, PARENTS'
ANNIVERSARY: SAME DAMN DAY**

Stuart Friebert

He's standing right in the little scene
before I wake, casting out, looking back
at me in case he gets a strike. Worried
I'll forget the net, make too much noise.
Why don't we get along the way we should?

My throat's dry. I thirst for more than
he can catch. Something to keep the air
wet all night long. Will you start cooking,
he says, flings his line out looking for
the meal. I'll start the pan heating,
dad. I step back, the pier's slippery.

To torture myself I suppose, I wish him
back in traction, calling for water.
My mother looks up from her crossword,
with two motions has him well, me off
the same old spot. It's always up to her.

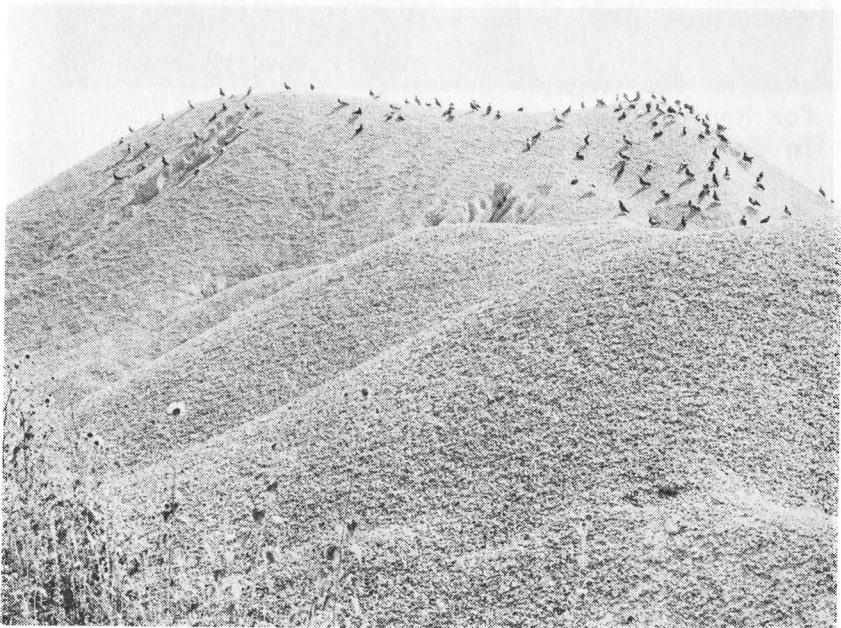
KANSAS SUMMER

Frank Smoot

You are in a wheat field in Kansas, the sky a blue bowl-shaped infinity. Every wheat head is murmuring--and billowing as clouds might if there were any. But no, just a blue infinity

No one you know has ever seen it rain during the daytime of a Kansas summer. Sometimes you think that maybe only the old people have ever seen a cloud on such a day. A thousand ghosts drift in the wind.

They settle on the horizon, lined in a circle around you, closing in. To escape you would have to push between two of them, and which two would you like to touch? No, it is better to sit down in the wheat, let yourself be surrounded.



Barb Rutherford

ONE REASON TO LEAVE JERSEY

Vince Corvaia

Screw trying to
write this poem
I say.

So I tear the sheet
into halves
quarters

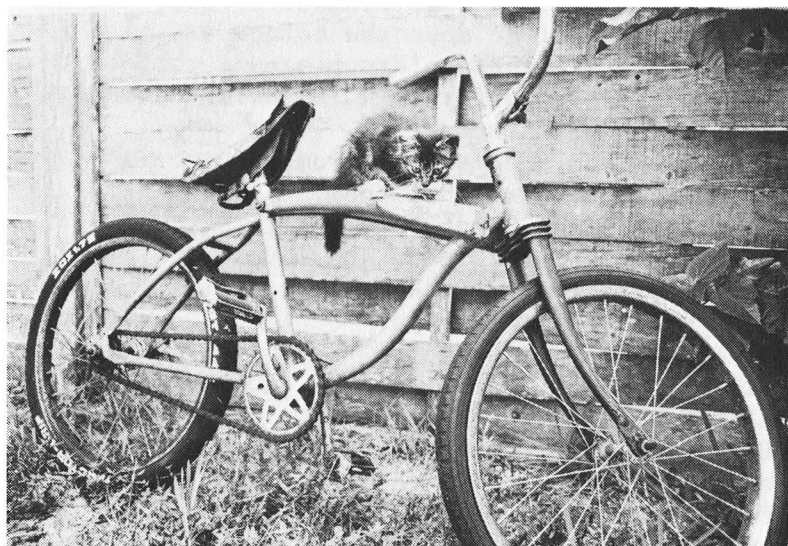
sixty-fourths.
I break the pencil's back
mash the eraser between my teeth.

disembowel the desk
with an ax I keep around
for dry spells.

I torch the waste basket
drag my cat out the back door
throw her into the Chrysler

and gun the engine
for Route 80 West.
In my rear view mirror I see

smoke rise over the Ramapos
and the cat
puke into a Kleenex box.



Barb Rutherford

[B.J. PLAYS AT PINBALL]

John V. Schlosser

B.J. plays at pinball at Fischer's Big Wheel
in blue jean jacket and sneakers.
Ping lights ring and silver go 'round
Watch them bumpers light, numbers roll,
open gate, ball go down the hole.
Tap cigarette ashes in a pop can
and roll away reality.
B.J.'s gone from school,
gone from Mom, who's gone from Dad,
who's gone from both of them.
Gone from tight, gone from cool,
gone from former friends and loves.
Too trapped to try, take what's easy.
take what's comin' to ya
take what's rollin' to ya
Silver, Smooth and rollin' to ya, now -n-
LINE that baby up there!
B.J.'s playin' ball and all his bumpers lit
open gate, ball go 'round
Double bonus, hip flip, bumper bounce
eyes intense, numbers roll,
digits poised -n-...
ball go down the hole.

NIGHT SNOW

William Virgil Davis

This snow is deeper than dreams.
When I awaken it is there,
falling through the house.

My hair has turned white.
My fingers are cold as I write.
It keeps falling slowly, silently.



NIGHT LIFE

Kimberly Ingalls-Reese

A sound travels across
the river's smooth surface--
the great horned owl
calling home his mate.
His amber shadow
is resting above
a rotting stump.
His searing eyes never waver
But continually
sift the darkness
for her gray silhouette.

After the blast
her screeching ended.
The spaniel faltered at first
As he nudged those sharp talons
Which had been clutching
His throat.
But the bird's stillness
Spawned bravery
As his teeth clamped her neck.
The hunter laid aside
The smoking gun.

Sounds cross
That smooth river quickly--
A pinecone's soft fall
into needles,
the clicking song
of the cicada,
a bullfrog's deep bellow.
Predator became prey.

GOING OUT WILLINGLY

Mariann Hofer

No matter how hard you tried, the cows,
during the thunderstorm, wouldn't leave the
shelter
of the woods to walk to the barn. So you waited,
soaked, shivering, but not quite miserable
with them, for the rain to pass.

Years later, in a bar, the cows and storm
come back, as you run your finger slowly over
the rim of the wine glass. There's nothing
wrong, but you shiver and watch the light
pass through the Chablis and condense
into a diamond-shaped point on the table.

You keep staring at the light, and bite
your lip. Walking out into the cold, you
take your friend's hand, then let
go, and get into the car saying
nothing.

It took a long time before you'd go willingly
out to bring in the cows for milking, even if
there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

GRACE

Every sin is the result of a collaboration
—Stephen Crane

Ralph Wilson

"They call me the Pizza-Man, the Pizza-Man, the Pizza-Man...."

He sang it like the ditty about the "Big, Bad Wolf," his voice hoarse and tuneless. He laughed abruptly and sent his cigarette butt out the open window of the Ford's cab with the flick of a fingernail. He turned to his passenger, sharing the dirty-green bench seat on the other side of the gears and laughed again, showing his teeth.

The passenger, a thin man in his early twenties, turned his long, pale face toward him and smiled blankly like an idiot as an appeasement. The Pizza-Man laughed again, pleased. The truck, a sixteen footer with a silver-roofed box fastened unnaturally on back like a dog-house, bobbed and weaved down the lane under oak trees and flowering dogwoods. The sun was just turning orange in the west and the light slanted down through the cracked wind-shield of the Ford, freckling the two occupants inside. The thin man squinted at the world outside, silently peeved.

The Pizza-Man pulled a pack of True cigarettes out of the breast pocket of his denim shirt and held the black wheel of the truck with his elbows as he lit one up. The truck wavered a bit, crossed the yellow centerline, swayed back across and nearly into the ditch, before the Pizza-Man brought it upright with his

left hand. The thin man, having lost his balance and afraid of pitching out the open window, hung with one hand braced against the dashboard, the other clamped like a vise to the back of the bench seat.

"You know where we are yet?" he asked, unlocking his grip and bringing his hand up to his breast where he fingered a small, fish-like medallion dangling within the open V of his shirt.

"Sorta," said the Pizza-Man, smiling. His bright teeth glanced out between his black beard and moustache, his lips faintly red all around them. He was a small, muscular man with a brass loop hanging from one ear.

"All these roads end up somewhere anyhow."

This answer did not really satisfy the thin man, but he leaned again against the bench seat, still fingering his medallion. He could feel a spring wearing through the vinyl into the small of his back.

Presently, the Ford rose over a little hill, the woods on either side magically dispersing, and the thin man could see they were descending into a valley of bare, overturned fields. A gas station soon came into view on one corner of a four-way stop, opposite an I.G.A. market housed in a dirty-white building.

"That's something," said the Pizza-Man, nodding his head at once to affirm its existence and his skills of navigation.

When they parked in front of the market, next to a faded-blue Buick with a broken-out headlight, the thin man was surprised to see that there were no houses anywhere and that the gas station and market were the only buildings visible before the level land rose again to steep hills ringed with trees at their tops.

"What place is this?" he asked the Pizza-Man, who was fiddling with a little leather binder full of brown notecards.

"Somers, or Sumner, or Somewheres," he said, peering mystically into the book. "I been to this I.G.A. before, so I know it's some- thin'."

In a moment, he gave up a little sigh and closed the binder.

"We'll find out," he said confidently.

When they passed through the glass doors of the market, there was suddenly a great fat man in a white

button-down shirt in front of them, smiling broadly.

"It's a Pizza-Man," he bellowed, his voice filling the store. His forehead gleamed as if a measure of cooking oil had been ladled over it.

"Oh," the Pizza-Man said, looking down at the floor.

"You boys been riding long," the fat man deferentially.

"All day," the thin man replied curtly, turning away to survey a shelf of tinned, deviled ham.

"Hey, Mr. Fatz," the Pizza-Man intoned, suddenly stealthy beside him, "just between you and me...." He cocked his head toward him, affecting secrecy as the fat man smiled. "Can you tell me just what the hell place this is?"

The fat man drew the white, pliant heave of his chest up with both hands and looked around him.

"Why it's the I.G.A.," he said matter-of-factly.

The Pizza-Man giggled, his elbows jumping up as if on wires, his face screwed obscenely.

"No, man...what city is this?"

"Oh," the fat man smiled, as if a great realization had come upon him. "Why, Able." He soft-punched the Pizza-Man on the shoulder. "Able. You ought to know that, Pizza-Man."

"We're trying to get to Wheeling," the thin man cut in.

A short silence ensued.

"Well," said the fat man, becoming business-like and walking away down the aisle, apparently implying that they should follow. "I'm gonna need a bunch of pizzas: a dozen large pepperoni...a dozen large cheese...."

The Pizza-Man followed, with the thin man behind him fingering the metal fish-shape at his breast.

Forty minutes later the thin man was seated in the truck while the Pizza-Man and Mr. Fatz concluded their business. He could see them with difficulty through the orange glare of the I.G.A.'s door, the fat man pointing and gesticulating with heavy arms and the Pizza-Man smiling and nodding continually as though a spring were in his neck.

"Want a gem?" he asked, climbing into the cab.

The thin man looked down at the offered package of

little doughnuts in the Pizza-Man's hand. A tattooed panther on his forearm seemed to be ferociously guarding them.

"No thanks," he said.

The Pizza-Man shrugged, settled himself behind the wheel and tore the package open with his teeth. He swallowed down two of the sugared ovals without chewing more than twice.

Minutes later the truck was bounding again down the two-lane asphalt under and over hills. The sun was going down somewhere and the shadows thickened around them. The Pizza-Man flicked on the headlights.

"We almost through?" the thin man asked tiredly. It seemed to him he'd been bumping along for days through some unknown empty country.

"Almost, pardner," replied the Pizza-Man with a grin.

"Well, what about that truck in Wheeling?"

"We'll get there," winked the Pizza-Man.

"Gettin' late," the thin man warned. "Garage'll be closed. I don't want to mess up on my first job."

"The door is always open to the Pizza-Man," the other replied, white powder clinging to his lips. "We'll get your truck."

"Humph," said the thin man.

The two-laner opened up a bit over a hill and became, it seemed to the boy, like a real highway crossing the level stretch of pasture on either side. Then it climbed and climbed, the fields receded and little hillocks surrounded them. They went past neat little two-story houses, street signs appeared and sidewalks, and they were in the midst of a small town poised precariously on the crest of one of those hillocks. The Pizza-Man wheeled the truck into the gray light of a sloping parking lot. A Kroger supermarket gleamed in front of them.

"Better just get a shopping cart and fill her up," the Pizza-Man said, motioning to the back of the truck.

"Bring 'em in when you're ready."

He stalked off into the rectangular fluorescence.

When he had procured a cart and filled it with brown oblong boxes, the thin man pushed it into the store. A few people milled about the aisles and he went by them airily, as if he did not see them. He

found the Pizza-Man standing next to an open cooler in back, attended by a short, wiry, balding man in a white frock.

"Now look at this, just look at this," the man in the frock was saying heatedly, holding several pizzas in front of him. The Pizza-Man was nodding deferentially. He looked concerned.

"Yes sir, I see it. Yes sir."

"Now how's a man supposed to sell something like that? I ain't in the market for penicillin, you know."

The Pizza-Man smiled, still nodding his head.

"You're right, sir; you're right. I'll credit you every one of 'em."

The man in the frock puffed, the insistence suddenly gone out of him.

"We'll see that you do," he said.

The thin man walked the cart up and the two men regarded him.

"See that you do," repeated the man in the frock.

"You want to count these?" asked the Pizza-Man.

"You're damn right," said the store-keeper, eyeing the thin man suspiciously.

He pulled the cart toward him and with a little viciousness tore open the top of a box and began fingering the edges of the pizzas inside.

"Now those are your dozen deluxes," the Pizza-Man began to recount, marking the bill he held against his knee. "Don't just stand there," he said aside to the thin man. "Take those spoils out to the truck." He nodded at a damp, open box on the floor at his feet.

The thin man bent over the piled pizzas and gathered them into his arms. They smelt sour and he could see blue-green spots blooming beneath the cellophane like flowers.

"And here's some of those jalapeño squares," he heard the Pizza-Man say, as he walked off.

It was now almost completely dark as the thin man walked blindly out of the fluorescence of the supermarket, muttering to himself.

"The chaff will be separated," he said, as he set the box on the rear bumper.

He opened the door of the truck and stacked the pizzas in a neat pile in the corner beside several empty beer cans. He wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"Yes indeed," he reflected, "for the burning."

He closed one hand over his medallion, the other closing the door. He tightened the handle with satisfaction.

When he came around the front of the truck and swung into his seat, he saw the Pizza-Man stepping briskly across the lot toward him, throwing his head back over his shoulder and nearly skipping, as though an imagined little dog was yapping at his heels.

"Son-of-a-bitch," he said, climbing up behind the wheel. "That son-of-a-bitch hates my guts!"

He looked at the thin man as though expecting some response of affirmation.

"Why?"

"Why not?" said the Pizza-Man, turning the engine over and revving it into a roar. "Why the hell not?" He pushed the gearstick forward and the truck jerked into motion. They passed out of the parking lot and down a great hill under streetlamps blazing little circles of light into the darkness. When they had passed beyond them, out away from the trimmed lawns and sidewalks and meek house-fronts, the Pizza-Man spoke again.

"Listen," he said intently. "Ain't no reason in the world a man treats another man the way he does. And that's the unreasoning thing about it."

The thin man looked at him. He opened his mouth, his lips arching faintly into something like a snarl, but then his hand came up, closing in a fist around his silver medallion. He turned away and stared blankly out the windshield.

They passed on down the two-laner, the shadows of trees rising up around them and fluttering like dark flames as they went by.

"You sure don't say much, do you?" said the Pizza-Man after awhile. "Not ten complete things in so many hours." He seemed irritated.

"Got nothin' to say," the thin man replied as the road unrolled in front of him.

The Pizza-Man turned toward him, amazed.

"Well if that ain't the damndest reason for keepin' shut," he said with conviction. "That ain't no reason at all."

He went into his top-pocket and pulled out another

cigarette and lit it, the flame leaping up and sending an orange gleam along the ridge of his brow, his hooked nose and thick lips. His eyes burned.

"No reason," he repeated darkly to the wheel, sending two streams of smoke out his nostrils. "Like ridin' with a corpse."

The thin man stiffened beside him.

The Pizza-Man laughed abruptly and smiled over at the thin man whose features he could not make out.

"Like ridin' with a dead man," he clucked a little gleefully.

When the truck rolled up over another hill and started downward, the canopy of trees withered away from the road and the thin man was suddenly aware of the half-face of the moon low on the horizon, sending a milky-silver light across a valley of torn, trenched earth. Great oblong shapes studded the bare stretches on either side, and on the right he saw how the land fled downward into a basin cut away from the hills, and there within it were more of the monstrous shapes congregating in the pit like teeth in an open mouth.

"What's all this?" the thin man asked, fingering his medallion.

"Why this here," said the Pizza-Man levelly, "is Hope; Hope, West Virginia." He threw his cigarette butt out the window. "Kind of a funny name for it, ain't it?"

He chuckled and pushed the gears forward. The truck whined, slowing, and he turned the wheel hard to the left, steering into an uneven gravel lot appearing suddenly there. The truck skidded to a stop. The thin man looked up.

In front them was a two-story, white-washed brick structure which looked curiously like a church. A large wooden garage with three paned-windows on the door was attached at one side and in front of it were three red gas-pumps.

"We're here," the Pizza-Man said.

"For what?" asked the thin man incredulously, surveying the place with wide eyes. He could see no lights or movement. "There's no one here. What are we doin' here?"

The Pizza-Man flung open the door of the cab and sprang out, cat-like. He stretched himself upward in

the moonlight, arms wide, curving from the spine, rising on his tiptoes. He threw his head back and suddenly howled, loud and long, mimicking some real and animal anguish, as if a spike had just been driven through him.

The thin man jerked open his door and was through it in a shot, pale and shaking.

"What the hell!" he cried angrily. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

The Pizza-Man, silent with his back to the other, dropped his arms limply to his sides, his head falling forward and disappearing like a marionette's. Little wires tugged his shoulders upward in a shrug. He half-turned his body toward the thin man, his face rising over the edge of his shoulder. He smiled slyly.

"What's the matter, Dead-Man," he asked softly, "some worm eatin' you?"

"What're we doin' here?" the thin man hissed through clenched teeth. His right hand was balled into a fist. "This ain't no joy-ride. I got to be gettin' someplace."

"This is someplace."

"There's nobody here!"

The Pizza-Man clucked inside his mouth and turned fully around.

"Dead-Man don't see nothin'," he said resignedly, shaking his head. He turned toward the building, took a few brisk steps, hopped, and kicked a pile of stones, sending them clattering against the wooden door of the garage. He pirouetted on one black boot, looked at the thin man, and clamped a hand over his chest.

"I'm here, Dead-Man," he said with something like triumph.

"Well you sure ain't enough," the other spit back at him.

The Pizza-Man laughed. He hung his head, smiling at the ground.

"What if I'm all you got?" he asked, nearly inaudible.

The thin man jerked into motion, swinging himself around the front of the truck and bounding up into the driver's side of the cab.

"Maybe you got time to kill in some Jerkwater nothin' of a town, but I got to be goin' and I aim to.

If you want to come, climb up in here, but I mean to go, with or without."

The Pizza-Man grinned, doglike with an open mouth.

"Uh-uh," he hummed musically, holding up a ring of keys on his index finger.

The thin man leapt down from the truck, a black stain before his eyes like some unformed image of violence. But before he could move, the door of the garage suddenly flew upward, clattering on its metallic rollers. An enormous black man appeared beneath it as it dipped and bobbed on the springs above his head.

"What the holy hell goin' on?" he boomed. A crow-bar gripped and raised in his right hand.

The Pizza-Man dropped to his knees.

"Oh mah Gawd," he wailed with Negro affectation. "He gan ta' kill us. Dat black man gan ta' kill us sho'!"

The black looked at him hard.

"Shee-it!" he said, a smile widening into white rows of teeth. "'s only a good-fo-nuthin' Pizza-Man.... Seth," he yelled toward the dark garage, "'s only a fool of a Pizza-Man."

A small, wan man in green overalls appeared in the open doorway, steadying himself against a runner. His face and hands were startling white and a little halo of ash-blond hair bristled anemically around the egg-oval of his head. He stared off blankly at nothing in front of him.

"Raisin' such a racket," the black man admonished in a thick voice, "think someone been gettin' kilt out heah."

He noticed the thin man, rigid before the truck.

"What we got heah? Some po' soul da grief a ridin' wid you," he said to the Pizza-Man.

"That's a Dead-Man," he replied, slapping the dust from his pants.

"Well, he look lively 'nuff to me. But c'mon in." He waved his arm that they should follow and walked into the unlit garage, the man stealing in before him. "C'mon," the Pizza-Man waved at the boy.

The thin man hesitated, looking at him with keen fire.

"You want to get out of here. Well, come on," the Pizza-Man repeated.

The thin man stuck his hands in his pocket and then sauntered toward the disappearing figure of the Pizza-Man as he went into the non-light of the garage.

"No more. I ain't takin' no more," he mumbled to himself.

With-in the garage he saw a small red truck idle in the dark. At his left was a door cracked open slightly with a dirty-yellow light slanting out from behind it. He heard a scuffle of boots and then the creak of a spring taking on weight. With a shallow, gulped breath, he pushed it open.

Inside, he saw the black man astride an armless adjustable chair, his hulking frame bent over a desktop, scratching with a pencil at something in front of him. The Pizza-Man was half-sitting, half-leaning on a corner of the desk, smoking, pretending not to notice the thin man who hung back in the doorway.

"Dis'll be a doozy. Ahm wonin' you," the black man said. "Dem pads, rotohs, drums--all dat fucked up but good."

"Whatever," the Pizza-Man replied. "It ain't my money. I'm just a flunkie."

"Wait a minute," the other cut in. "This is the truck?" He jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "Wilson told me it'd be in Wheeling."

"Well, Wilson don't know. Broke down right here in Hope. No brakes, no nuthin'. Right here."

"But Wilson told me...."

"But I'm tellin' you now," the Pizza-Man said with irritation. "Don't you see nuthin'. The truck's right out there." He pointed to the wall. "Right under you nose."

"Well, Wilson thinks it's in Wheeling," the thin man said.

The Pizza-Man blew out a long breath.

"Who's signin' this?" the black man asked.

"Him."

"No I'm not," the thin man protested. "I ain't signin' to nothin' that's got anything to do with you. Durn thing is supposed to be in Wheeling."

The black man looked up helplessly, the whites of his eyes rolling from one face to the other.

"I'll sign it," the Pizza-Man said finally, reaching for the pencil. He affixed a signature to the

sheet and then paused, looking it over.

"Whew," he exclaimed. "No wonder you're the richest black man in West Virginia."

The black man laughed, getting out of his chair.

"Dat's a lie. But you know that Seth tell me," he said to the Pizza-Man and including the other at the door. "He tell me's easier for one a dem big earth-movin' machines to pass through de eye of a needle, than fo' a rich nigger ta enta' da house of his daddy." He laughed again.

"Don't dat beat it?" asked the black. "An' I tell him dat's fo' sho', cause he got no daddy noways, an' don't got no house neider dat I seen."

"Yeah that Seth," the Pizza-Man agreed, nodding his head, "he's sure been full of it ever since he saw 'the light.'"

"Oh he ain't bad as some," said the black.

The thin man brought his hand up to his breast in a silent automatic gesture.

"Where'd he be gettin' to, anyway," the Pizza-Man asked.

"Why," answered the black man, "he's out there tinkerin' still wid dat truck. He's puttin' on the fine tunin'."

The thin man leaned back out of the doorway into the dark garage where the truck sat in the center.

"He ain't out here," he said.

The Pizza-Man waved his hand airily at him.

"He don't see nuthin'," he said to the black man.

"Hey, you got a drink around here?"

"He's not out here," the thin man repeated, as the black man reached into a drawer. He held up a bottle and offered it to the Pizza-Man.

"Ain't nothin' but dark out here," the thin man said.

The Pizza-Man stood up and unscrewed the lid of the bottle and took a long swallow. Then he pushed past the thin man into the garage.

"Seth, what you doin', sleepin' under there?" he growled.

There was a metallic sound beneath the truck and then a voice.

"Jest hold yo' horse."

Peering into the dim air in front of him, the thin

man saw for the first time a pair of shoes attached to some green legs protruding from under the vehicle.

"Get out here and have a drink with us," the Pizza-Man said.

"Ain't doin' no drinkin' til I done here," the voice returned.

The black man came up behind the thin man, crowding him by his presence into the garage.

"How can he see anything?" the thin man asked, more to himself than anyone.

The Pizza-Man laughed, handing the bottle to the smiling black who gulped at the end of it.

"Hey Seth," he yelled beneath the truck, "man out here wants to know how can you see anything down there."

The only sound returned was that of some metallic scraping.

"You want a swig?" the black man asked, holding the bottle toward the thin man.

"He don't want nuthin' from the likes of us," the Pizza-Man cut in.

The other glared at him and then turned to the black man.

"Got a long drive yet," he said simply.

"A long drive," the Pizza-man repeated with meaning, taking hold of the bottle. He tipped up the bottom of it and swallowed. "Lawdy, I can feel the bloom of Paradise in my veins," he exclaimed in a cracked voice.

The thin man's jawbone bulged, his teeth tightening.

The Pizza-Man giggled and handed the bottle back. "Hey Seth," he yelled, moving to the truck and kicking lightly at the soles of the feet sticking out from under it, "get a drink with us here."

"I tol' you. I ain't drinkin' til I finish," the voice replied insistently.

"A workin' man ain't a drinkin' man til he be done workin'. An' I ain't drinkin' none o' that devil til I get done what's gotta get. Don't need no devil playin' with what I'm doin'."

"Hell," the Pizza-Man stated gleefully, "devil's gonna play whether you drink or not. Devil's gonna play us all for fools."

"Dat's a fact," the black man agreed, sipping from the bottle.

"And how can you see down there," the Pizza-Man asked again. "How you know it ain't the devil there in the dark with you, undoin' what you doin' quick as he can?"

There was no answer.

"You beware," the Pizza-Man said to the thin one evenly, "of him workin' in the dark. You got a long drive yet and this truck's got to get you there. I'd beware some non-drinkin' fool tinkerin' it in the dark."

"I'd say he knows what he's doin'," the other replied suddenly. "Even in the dark I'd say he's a sight more to trust than what I'm lookin' at. I'd trust any God-fearin', devil-fearin' man afore you. You can't even keep the right side of the road."

The thin man turned from him and looked about. He paced over to the black man reclining on an upright tire against the wall.

"Where's the lights?" he asked.

"Ain't no need," the black man began to explain.

"Where's the damn lights!" the thin man repeated, a little edge of pleading in his voice.

The black man shook his head and slowly rose, and turning to the wall behind him, flicked a switch. The garage glowed into a faint yellow light, still dim and shadowed.

"What the hell," the thin man exclaimed, looking to the ceiling where three bare bulbs had sprung into dirty brightness.

"Don't do much, do dey?" the black man said.

"Where's a work-lamp?" the thin man injected. "You got a work-lamp?"

The black man pointed and the thin man followed his finger into a black corner, taking in hand the caged lamp and cord that he found there. He held aloft the plug.

"Over there," the Pizza-Man motioned.

The thin man plugged it in and the lamp burst into a radiant halo.

"Hey you," he said, getting on his knees at the mechanic's feet and thrusting the light under the truck. "Here's the light so's you can see what you're

doin'."

The black man laughed. The Pizza-Man guffawed, turning away and holding his hand to his mouth.

"Can't see nuthin', mister," the mechanic replied flatly.

The two men laughed loudly. The thin man's cheeks burned.

"Here's the light," he yelled at the mechanic at the other end of the visible feet and coveralls:

"Mister, I can't see nuthin'."

The thin man heard chortling laughter behind him.

"Get out from under there," he demanded.

"Mister...."

"Get your ass outta there," he yelled, taking hold of the mechanic's legs and pulling him on his dolly into plain sight.

But the thin man did not see him at once, turning on his back and squirming underneath the axle.

"This is alright," he said after a moment. "This here looks fine," he repeated with satisfaction. He crawled out and stood up.

"I know my work," said the mechanic simply from where he sat upon the pallet, staring off in front of him.

The thin man looked at him hard, the pale face and blank, pitiless eyes. A sudden abysmal weight dropped into the pit of his stomach.

"I know my work," the mechanic repeated, staring off obliquely over the thin man's shoulder.

"Seth," the black man said softly, "go wash yo'-self. You drippin' fluid all ovuh yo'self."

The mechanic rolled off his pallet and with an elbow helped himself up and made his way carefully through the office door. The thin man followed him with his eyes, and then looked to the black man, then to the Pizza-Man hunched up on a tool box, covering his face with his hand.

"Damn you!" he whispered passionately. "Damn you both," he said, jerking the cab door open and leaping in.

The engine exploded into a roar, echoing and re-echoing in the half lit garage as the thin man's foot plunged down on the accelerator.

"Warn't our fault," the Pizza-Man yelled above the

din, moving across the front of the truck to where the black man stood.

"You blaspheming sons a' bitches," he screamed out the open window.

"See here," the black yelled back excitedly as the truck lurched forward, its tires squealing slightly before the crunch and pop of the caged light disappeared beneath them. Then the vehicle was jerking as though on a wire attached at the grill, pulled forward out of the half-lit garage into the silver half-mooned night, a flurry of stones slung out by the wheels clattering at the feet of the men inside.

They watched as the truck turned out onto the road nearly toppling, and then passed down the asphalt ribbon, becoming a moving silhouette against the black shapes gathered in the bowelled horizon, its tail-lights like two red eyes disappearing into darkness.

"Where's that truck?" the mechanic cried, stumbling out of the office in his haste, nearly falling but for the thick hands of the black man catching at his arms.

"The Dead-Man took it."

"Damn him," the blind mechanic whispered with amazed and bitter anguish, collapsing against the side of the black. "They's no fluid in them brakes." He swallowed at the lump in his throat. "Someone's got ta' put fluid in them brakes."

"He'll figure it out presently," said the Pizza-Man, handing him the bottle.



A WOMAN IS STANDING OUTSIDE**A CHURCH ONE EVENING**

Frank Smoot

Death has come to her
in the rain
When she prays
death is her confessor
and says her amens

That night while death
makes love to her
he is also standing
at her bedroom door
Death, always the gentleman,
lights her cigarette
and kisses her hand

She falls asleep in his arms
and he grows restless,
he rises and walks to the window
He is the breeze
which blows back the curtains
and lets in the night air

WHERE SHADOWS KEEP

Elaine Zahller

your shadow was on the bridge today
in the truck and you waved
your shadow and the broken saddles
from gatepost days of hills and horses.
your shadow was on the bridge today
stretched to the riverfog
to the mists where the green heron stood
hidden as your last name, as silent
as our shadows on sky-oven days
when the grass was brittle grasshoppers
and the water down to stone.
simple
as my clicking-knee farm
as your mountain horses grazing
as ice shadows left on the bridge today.

A DAY

Dan Matthews

Wake up, sleepy-eyed, crawl from the bed wishing
to go back,
pause for a moment,
what's to do for today?
Remembering now,
sliding on clothes,
trying to see if what you have on is right,
but you don't care.

Pulling on your coat, stepping out, but coming
back,
going to work,
you wonder if the money will come through.
Come in,
Nobody looks,
nobody cares;
feeling empty,
you start your work and always end,
but wish to never start.

Relaxing, melodious music filters through the
head,
picking tones and notes of special recognition
make the mind remember fond memories,
of special friends,
romantic interludes,
never lasting long,
but wished longer.

The mind wonders, floats away, never stirring
but always dreaming;
the dream is good,
flirting with ladies,
of walks in the parks,
embracing close,
watching her with the flowers and grass;
she is soft to the touch.

Back to reality, tired and dead, crawling back--
to bed,
pull the covers over your face,
to fear the night's embrace,
slowly drifting away in endless slumber,
at least for a few hours
until the new day begins.

HOUSES

Susan Mae Pauly

he sends me pictures
of houses
postcards printed
in a makeshift darkroom,
and I wonder what
he's trying to tell me/talk me
into domesticity ownership middle age

Galveston TX 1980 Houston
TX 1980 Dallas TX 1980
Austin Port Isabel Brownsville.
he is in Texas, of course.

it started with motels/hotels
the Longhorn
and the one on the coast
that had everything but
Tennessee Williams sipping
mint juleps on the porch.
I wrote back I wanted
to live in that one--
the second story
(not admitting I thought
the bugs wouldn't be as bad
up there.)

then it began
the barrage thru the mail:
the antebellum mansion
on stilts by the shore begging
to be rented in winter,
houses in Houston
midwestern in their arrangement

except for palm trees
in the yard,
smaller modest houses
with green leafy trees like
ones I'm used to,
and recently an adobe
in a town I can't find on my map
but he says the price is right...

I save these pictures
sometimes see myself
sipping wine coolers in white lace,
watching children from front steps,
gardening.
it is the adobe
that frightens me--
compact and bleak
shut up to keep out the heat,
I dream I live there
pacing small rooms
drinking Lone Star beer
when it's too hot to write,
opening blinds at night
watching stars, listening
to locust and waiting
for who to come home.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeff Boyer is finishing his M.A. in Creative Writing at Kansas State University. He is a winner of the Kansas State University English Department's Poetry Contest, holding as well a second place finish in the Fiction Contest. "Prairie Cure" appeared recently as the winner of the monthly poetry contest in The Manhattan Mercury.

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