

# CORNFIELD

## REVIEW





**CORNFIELD REVIEW**  
*An Annual of the Creative Arts*

1991

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## CORNFIELD REVIEW

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*Sheri Szeman*

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WHEN THE DANCER BECOMES THE DANCE

*Art is not the truth. Art is the lie  
that helps us understand the truth.*

*Pablo Picasso*

The phonograph whirs as its needle lowers, then  
violins whisper the key into the lock on  
the door, his pistol from the holster. He lays it  
on the desk. The flame wavers before lighting his  
cigarette. Alone, he paces in the office,  
fingers brushing gleaming wood of the furniture  
as he passes. The dark ballerina appears,  
begins dancing to his music. The violins  
lift her into *arabesque penchée*. He reaches  
out to stroke her cheek, but she shimmers into the  
shaved scarecrow-girl, into dust fluttering in the  
sunlight cascading through closed windows. Winter light  
embraces him before he dons his uniform  
jacket. As each button sighs he becomes the still  
partner in the ballerina's *pas de deux*, his  
hands skimming smooth fabric. The ballerina and  
violins encircle him. Each time he tries to  
take her hand, the other girl touches his, then blends  
into sunlight, pure on his outstretched hand. Bass and  
violas glide him to the chair behind his desk.  
He readies the weapon, caresses the metal.  
The ballerina pirouettes *en manege* as  
he holds its steel length to his jaw, cheek, and temple,  
eying her. With each whirl toward the windows, the light  
flickers her into the pale girl, into itself.  
Ballerina, scarecrow-girl, sunlight, violins  
dance *ritardando*. When they glint into the pale  
girl again, the trigger jerks under his finger.

\* \* \*

The late autumn sun croons to his back as he writes.  
He rises, paces, smoking foreign cigarettes.

The paper mountains on his desk avalanche. He  
flicks on music, pours a drink, resettles himself

behind the desk. Violins harmonize with the  
scratching of his pen. He remolds some paper hills,

signs others. Suddenly, from beyond his window:  
shouting, swearing: *Schmutzige Jude! Hure!* He

twists toward the window, views his guard goading one of  
the prisoners: a pale girl, a shaved scarecrow in

faded garb, seems to move, *lento*, to the music.  
*Toller Hure!* the guard growls. The officer shouts

to the man to silence him. The violins soar,  
buoy the girl in *arabesque*. Her motion fixes

him: his cigarette burns his fingers. He dashes it,  
curses. He positions the phonograph nearer.

The frail scarecrow floats, turns. She pauses after the  
crescendo, the neck of her gown fluttering, eyes

opaque. The guard escorts her with the butt of his  
rifle. Every morning after, the Kommandant's

music swells his garden, the girl's stiff body sways  
near his window, the sun glows on his ashen hair.

\* \* \*

The troupe of tattered women undulates behind  
the high barbed wire fence. The chorus of guards' dogs

is almost hoarse. The Kommandant emerges from  
the shining car, his sleek boots mirroring the dull

mud. The women's sixpointed gold shrills at him, snipes  
at the guards, who scurry to do his orders. His

first inspection lasts hours. Some of the women  
swoon as he strides past. He requests them brought forward,

presents them a pistol-gift to remind them of  
proper etiquette. All that day, in the rain, the

guards flash, the dogs' leashes tense in vibrato, the  
camp inmates invoke alabaster before the

dark of his uniform. Soon the camp trills under  
his touch. Nights, his boots on the desk, he conducts the

phonograph with cigarettes: violins partner  
the smoke on its delicate dance to the ceiling.

\* \* \*

Before the curtain falls on the first movement of  
the new ballet, one of his friends has declared the

five of them desperately in love with the *prima*  
*ballerina*. He scoffs, but through the second half,

the purity of her *grand jeté*, silver-white  
in the darkened theatre, infatuates his

beryl eyes. After curtain call, he lets his friends  
persuade him backstage. Her lashes are long on her

flushed cheeks. Not having brought roses, they present her  
cigarettes. Her laugh forgives. Her has smoked his, so

when they nudge him, his uniform pockets are bare.  
He clicks his heels, bows formally: *my duty and*

*obedience*, leans to graze his lips on her cool  
fingers. His friends hush. On their way home, they spy an

old couple with yellow stars. They truncheons and boots  
remind the two they are breaking sunner curfew.

His brass knuckles order them to remember who  
they are. Then he and his friends saunter home, humming

tunes from the ballet. He hymns the black of her eyes,  
the streetlamps casting haloes around his blond hair.

\* \* \*

In the humming auditorium, the spectacled  
speaker raises his arm, shouts: *we are the sword of*

*the revolution*, and, all around, blond boys leap,  
cheering, to their feet. They worship the soldiers

guarding the speakers. He and his friends parade the  
brilliance of their own black uniforms. *We pledge to*

*you loyalty and bravery*, they intone, bass  
and tenor expanding the auditorium.

*We swear obedience*, they chant, *even unto*  
*death, as God is our witness*. Then they may salute.

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He cheers *continuo*. Next, at their permanent  
table in the local tavern, the age-mates toast

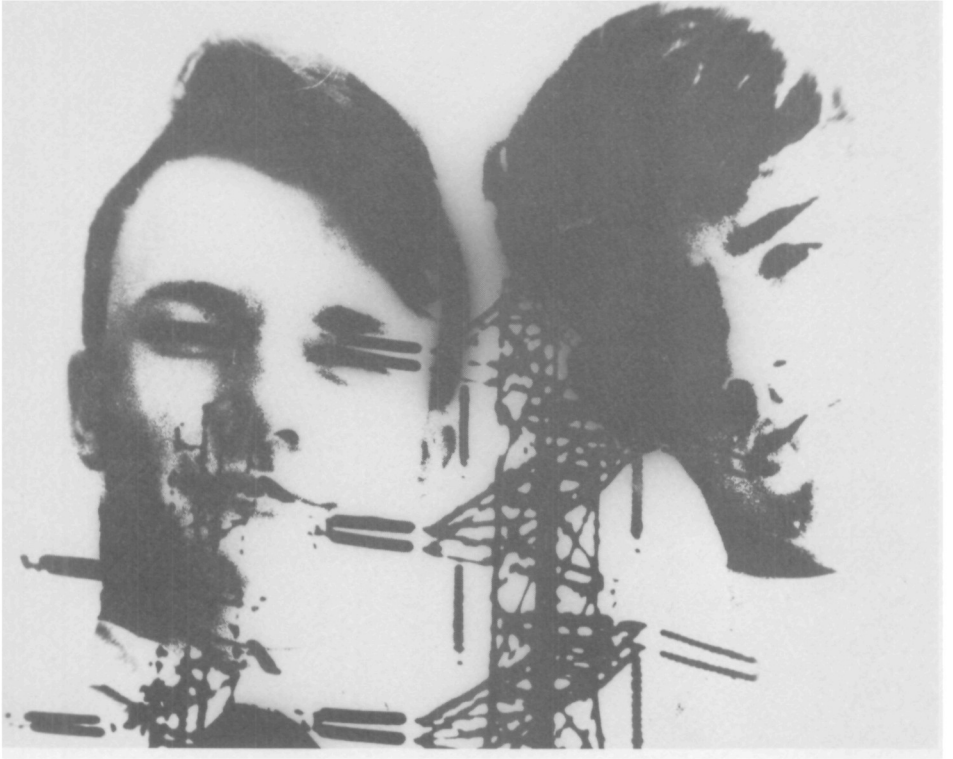
each other, serenade their guns, practice aiming.  
That night, in his room, he and music salute the

mirror, admire the contour of the weapon.  
He mimes his new face, directs the melody from

the phonograph with the gun, abruptly salutes.  
The bleached curtains applaud, arching toward him. He grins,

hugs himself, dances to bed, collapses, pistol  
swaying in violins' rhythm. *Meine Ehre heisst Treue*,

he refrains, *my honor is my loyalty*. The  
spring breezes shroud his eyes, lullaby him to dreams.



*Ann Carter*

---

MARGARET AT THIRTY-FOUR

At fifteen, you wed a gambler in a farmer's church.  
And I, eighteen, stood as witness, my strength focused  
On not causing a stir in that chapel where  
Sunlight passed through dusty curtains,  
Softened all the edges,  
Dazed plain good sense.

Sure, you moved through this haze,  
Said vows for a life I bet would bruise you  
And then he'd be done to do the same somewhere else  
Where the next girl would hope for the best, the reformation.  
Soon you blamed me for, once, being right.

Didn't I say you'd regret it? Didn't you say  
I could do worse? My friend, I did  
And learned a few fine things  
About all my good intentions.  
Margaret, my good intentions!

Now three kids trail you through Safeway,  
And one is in the basket. And life is life.  
We meet by the dairy case, reaching for cream,  
Stroll down the day-old aisle, where the bargains are,  
Each chastened, each selecting carefully--  
Both bread and words.

BEFORE COMPLETION

His chariot overturned, something that has been coming, perhaps, because he has been working so hard, double shifts, and I see the things, the material things he buys with that skill in his hands, his work environment so dangerous I feel my skin peel with guilt when I kiss him off to his shift every morning. Bringing home his calloused hands, a house, car, clothes, and food is his expression of his love. And in this heat.

And the occasional sincerity that pops out whenever his ego is engaged elsewhere. When he's not busy protecting the shell I saw through when we met eight months ago.

How can I not pity him? He's struggling with my filling womb. Day after day it reproaches him. Can he Do it all, he is thinking. And I am this strange woman with green breasts who will soon be saying there is a doctor to go to, baby clothes to buy, diapers, new shoes.

Is that why yesterday he spent one hundred dollars drinking for an afternoon and evening in a bar?

Was he with someone?

It's dangerous for him to be so detached, removed, looking down at me from his safe perch; he might just float away and never be able to find his way back. Or, when he does, it will be too late.

The problem, of course, is change. Permanent change. Think of the risk: you bring a woman into your house and then this woman becomes pregnant with what might be a monster or a unicorn--(it will be a warrior and it will be a she; I can see her now in her white tunic, that sword in the air, a white horse coming out of the sky as she stands upon boulders, wild boars and mountain goats on the stony ground below her). A daughter that will be stronger than her father.

But all he can think about is that his life has changed irrevocably. Will there be a hawk on the top of that ladder? He's full of so many colors that he doesn't want to exhale; he wants to hold his breath forever, fears the next one he takes will not be so beautiful. All the hues he is holding inside--they'll mix together and become black. So he must exhale soon, or the black will wipe out all of us.

He has just vomited for the second time in the bathroom. I set a glass of water beside him on the tile floor so he could rinse his mouth. I tip-toe through the rowhouse, pretending indifference to his hangover.

Of course he thought he had already fulfilled himself; growth was done. But he sees now that each new step reveals another and yet another step, and our feelings are never safe; they never jell unless we are sick.

He's made himself sick. With fear.

The fulfillment of his cup, overturned into his lap. His cup runs over and stains the garments I wash. He's dreaming about all the things he's wanted that now I'll keep him from getting. He drinks instead of pushing himself up to the next plane.

Can I be blamed because he was looking for a woman, the stomach that he wanted to kiss and press his face into, now the soft round belly of a woman swelling with his child? Why do women and men make love if not to have children? We sublimate it, but I am living proof that birth control pills are not infallible. If you come in me a baby might come out. That is what it means to be a woman, whether we take advantage of it or not, that is how we control or lose control of our lives. The woman draws him home after his shift; when he walks into what used to be his own house, he steps into her. And thus I give to him.

But he makes me take from him as well, and in his black nights I am the merciless deity that robbed from him everything he thought he had. I am the moan that slips from between his lips as he lies down now in the bed and turns his face away from my kiss, the room shaded and reeking of alcohol.

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And so I will have to teach him by shock, my grand escape a final attempt at education. I will step out into the world, leaving him completely behind.

For how long should I wait for him to come around? You cannot teach those who do not want to know. And MY lesson has always been for me to be kind to myself.

I have given up; my absence is a matter of time.

For how do you teach someone to love? By loving them or by loving yourself? How many more mornings can I wake hopefully, before I become bitter, before bitterness becomes the second nature I have always promised myself I would never adopt? Because I know there are better men than he.

So I plan my route, my escape. Soon I will know exactly how I will make my move. My girlfriend will

come with her car for my clothes, only two suitcases worth, the rest I can leave behind. My pots and pans to my friend Maria; she can never leave, her feet are nailed to her trailer floor, her two daughters, the man who has had three wives and will not marry her. Yes, I will leave her my iron pots and stainless steel pans to replace her bent aluminum. She will be cooking for the rest of her life.

And me? Not for much more will I be listening for his truck to stop outside the door; soon my world will revolve around the world revolving.

In my escape I will rent a car, borrow a tent, and drive to the ruins, Indian mounds outside the city limits, out in the hills that no one goes to except the ones who live in their trailers, their farm houses, their Vietnam veteran hideaways with no running water. I have a credit card. I have my degree. There is a job waiting for me somewhere. I will leave everything behind and start over.

Just this multiplying seed inside me I will carry as I go. I must protect her from my bile.

A doctor would tell me I was foolish, but I know that my daughter absorbs the food I eat, the oxygen, the water I drink. So how could she not know of my suffering, the bitter taste on my lips, the sweetness gone, all the dreams amounting to nothing? He is drunk again today, just enough after work to make him numb.

And so I will drive to the ruins, the Indian mounds, the caves overlooking the river before it winds its way into town. I will leave a letter and the golden band that is supposed to pass for a wedding ring, on my finger to prevent me, I suppose, from feeling humiliated.

But what do I care! If I were married, it would be to this beautiful man who is no more, suddenly a son of a bitch who looks for pretexts to shout, hiss, scream, rid himself of the frustration that is drowning him.

We have ruined his life, he thinks. Without us there would be nothing to worry about, And thus we will give to him what he thinks he wants--the freedom that used to strangle him. We will empty the house we filled by our presence and give it back to him. He will have again the space that we took away.

For it seems to me that I was never without this child growing inside me. All my life I have been preparing for this. All of my life. My breasts swelling, nipples a deep maroon, my stomach growing round and hard like a basketball. So I will protect this daughter from bitterness though I will be alone, unwed, for the moment unemployed. I can no longer consider her father, his cruelty, the motives behind his fear. Those are problems he must resolve without me. I cannot be his whipping post.

She cannot be our whipping post.

Above all, I must be healthy. For her. And him I will not allow near me unless he is healthy as well. Yes, we will leave him what he thinks he wants, trusting that our leaving is what he has needed all along.

Without us, there is nothing, no reason. Because when a man loves, no matter how he fights it, he can never be the same. He either opens to himself or closes forever.

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I make a list as he lies drunk on the bed. I sit in the next room, feeling the air pass between the front and back doors, in the antique rocking chair he bought when I first told him I was pregnant. Who knows what image he had of me then--an earth-mother rocking in an American primitive, now the great-grandmother with bad breath who perched him on her knees, always held him too tightly and wrapped him in a scratchy blanket. I creak in the hall in the breeze. Like all women, I watch a man in his sleep, hoping he will wake up and talk to me. I need to talk.

But his answer is always a silent If you don't like it, leave.

So I'm leaving. Like that, click. The invisible.

My list: walkman, address book, a few tapes and books, passport, wallet and credit cards, a few clothes (pink dress, sneakers, shorts, sandals, t-shirts, underwear), face and body creme, shampoo and rinse, vitamins. Toothbrush and toothpaste.

Who knows where I will go with my thousand dollar cash advance!

But what I really want to do is crawl in bed beside him, sure he will not turn a stiff back to me, the length of him an indifferent blade against my curved body. I no longer feel safe approaching him: he doesn't love me. The daughter inside me knows he doesn't love me.

I wrap my arms around myself and it is not enough.

And what man would not agree? What man would not want to be left so that he could suffer, the strike a slap on his backside, forcing him to take a breath and yell, squawl his naked infant cry into the wilderness? Until he loves and weeps, he is his own prisoner, until he knows his own limits, he is limited.

A man prays for a woman who will give him enough rope to hang himself.

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The plan in action: today when he goes off to work I am leaving; my friend is driving over in her Volkswagen bus to get me. We will rattle to the car dealership where I will lease an economy car. I will kiss and hug her goodbye and promise to write. I will leave him a note propped up against the bar.

I pretend to be asleep when he turns off the alarm and lights a cigarette. He sits in the half-dawn of what will be a double shift, smoking, tapping his ashes into a bowl filled with more ashes and twisted cigarettes. He does not look at me.

I lie on my back, my stomach a slight immovable swell, fingers placidly pursed at the knuckles. Pretending to sleep, my eyes slitted, just the slightest glint of my light escaping and catching him, there, his slouched profile in the darkness giving him the hump of a burdened man.

But not for long: my two cases are packed and stashed in the closet. There is a gym bag in the front hall, behind the door. He will become a different sort of burdened man.

The burdened man crawls out of bed in the half darkness and pulls on his clothes. He does not touch me before he slides away.

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Perhaps I belong here. Perhaps I have been here before, at the foot of this mound, the scratch marks of others in the earth, looking for ruins.

But I don't remember this sky so blue, so perfect with just that one cloud, hanging forever before me on the horizon, as if there had never been such a thing as wind.

This land, hollows formed when the glaciers melted. They carried all the topsoil away with their rushing rivers, seeking the easiest course, eating their way through mud to the ocean.

The rivers still run, some shrunken to streams. What is left is red clay, sulphur coal. This Indian mound.

Perhaps the diggers were the professors who came here with their students from the university. Miles away, they halted construction of the new highway; someone found other Indian mounds when they were blasting through the cliffs to form their straight path. And the university professors got an injunction, made them go foot by foot while they excavated. They found spearheads and bones, Indian seed pod corn that one of them managed to germinate after it had been two hundred years in the ground, surrounded by ashes. The professor grew a field of it.

And my seed, how long has it been germinating? Four months? A million years?

And my silly tent, with its ridiculous contents of bread, nuts, peanut butter, prenatal vitamins. Did we just arrive? Or have we been waiting to come here?

Perhaps the diggers were amateur archaeologists, fascinated by the Indian nations we destroyed, here for the artifacts.

From the top of this mound I see no where by down and over, out over the hollows whose trees are so tall their tops equal the height where I sit watching their swaying back and forth in the summer heat, the yellow fields beyond dotted with black and white dairy cattle, just the tip of a barn roof peaking out.

Most likely all of the barn is visible in the winter.

The evening before, when I arrived, as I was setting up my tent, fog rose from the streams below me, crawling up through the trees, the sky beige before the blackness descended.

There was no moon.

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He wonders where I am, the house cleaned before I left. His clothes washed, ironed. The note where he can find it, propped against a half-empty bottle that I am sure he will finish.

I don't know how long I'll have to stay here, how long until it will be right for me to leave. I felt this morning a tiny bubbling, my daughter moving inside. Hawks circled above me, round and round, a geometrical design on the white underside of their wings.

A lone runner moves along the road, a woman, steadily up and down the gravel inclines, the straightaways I can see from my perch. For three mornings I have watched her appear, intent, unaware of me. I watched her back until she curved around a bend and I was alone again. On the fourth day she stopped and took the path toward me. She was barely panting when she reached the top of the mound. She stood with her hands on her hips before me as I sat, not looking at me, gazing instead at the view below us, her chest rising and falling, outlined muscles in her long legs at my eye level.

After a moment she turned to me and said, "There are teenaged boys who drive around these roads to drink at night. I noticed you don't have a dog."

She insisted I go with her to the grocery store when she got back from work.

"If you want to do something," she said, "tomorrow you can cut my grass."

Cut her grass. Horizontal lines side by side, leaving little wheel marks. A job well done for one who is doing nothing.

"Call him," she says. "Let me call him."

But I shake my head.

At the supermarket she makes me pick out the vegetables.

"Lots of greens," she coaxes. "I'll go over to the fish counter."

She leaves me with an empty cart and a hand full of empty plastic bags.

He liked spinach.

I choose spinach and broccoli and a dozen oranges. I eye the grapes.

"Buy them," she says. Her crucifix shines. She reached past me into the cart. "Just let me deposit these tomatoes."

I knot the purple grapes without seeds into a baggie. A man weighs everything for me.

On the way home the windows are down and Barbara's short hair flutters about her face, around the frames of her sunglasses. We pass a farm house and she honks twice at a man walking in the front yard with a white cane. He turns toward the sound of her car and waves. She downshifts at the curve, the wheels throwing up gravel. We cruise around a horseshoe-shaped ridge and she honks once more at two women digging in a garden that has sprouted between two trailers.

"I run by here every morning," she explains.

I marvel at the distance, me, whose life has stopped but whose belly grows.

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She tells me nothing about God but her house is full of plants. Every morning I have been here she gets up and runs, returns lathered to what must never have seemed, even before me, an empty house. Then a long shower while I lie in the guest room in a narrow bed beside a closed sewing machine. She's in training, she says, for the city race.

"It runs the length of the river past the suburbs, out into the hills," she promises, "then circles around and comes back."

Then she says: "Call him."

It has been two weeks. My hand always stops before I pick up the receiver.

Last night Barbara and I sat out on her screened porch that looks out over another screened-in porch twenty feet away. Indigestion burned under my ribs.

"It's going to pour," she said. But the rain never materialized.

When he was eighteen, his mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage. He came home from his job at a market, and there she was, lying on the kitchen table, his father, younger brothers, and sister clustered around her body. He said that her feet hung over the edge of the table at the ankles.

"I'm sure he's ashamed of himself," Barbara said over her shoulder to me that night as she dished out the spinach. "He's probably out of his mind with worry."

"What happened to your husband?" I asked.

She shrugged and set the steaming bowl in the center of the table. She sat and unfolded a napkin into her lap, then said a silent grace. I imitated her.

"It started out with exercise," she said, handing me the butter, "and ended with religion." The kitchen was full of yellow light from the evening sun. She gave a half-laugh. "He didn't want me to change without him." She sipped iced tea. "But what's marriage that can't take change? What are people who don't?"

I moved my food around on my plate.

"Call him," she said. Softly. Insistent as a nun.

But what would I say?

"Let him do the talking," she said. "After all, he chased you away. He was mean to you."

Yes. Then why go back at all?

Barbara had an appetite. She devoured carbohydrates.

"Who said anything about going back?" she asked.

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A bright moon and I am alone. Barbara is out. There's a cricket in a shadowed corner of the porch, rubbing its legs together. I have watched the lights in the surrounding houses go out, some one by one as I imagine a

person passing through each room and turning them off. Others must be on a main switch: they all disappear together.

There was a photograph of him, taken on a camping trip, just out of high school. It hung on his living room wall. The day I moved in, he ticked the names of his buddies off, boys clinging riotously together with a whole river behind them.

"That's Joe with the bottle, Jim, Bart. Bart. He never made it back from Vietnam. Bill--his wife took him to the cleaners in their divorce. Smuckers--that son of a bitch got himself killed driving home from the bar six months after the picture was taken."

"Are any of them still married?" I asked.

He flopped onto the couch and put his feet up.

"No. None. Well, yes. Joe's still married. He lives in Tulsa with three kids. Joe went to college. And I guess Tom there--yeah, Tom's still married. Of course."

He named them all that day, my unpacked bags still out in the hall. He trusted me.

A car pulls into the driveway next door, a teenaged girl, her boyfriend borrowing his father's Olds. The engine turns off but they stay in the front seat for a long time, heads close together. Finally the passenger door opens, slams, and a slight figure with waist-length hair runs toward the house. The screen door springs shut behind her as she disappears into a cave of darkness, and I can hear a dead bolt thump into place.

His mother left a five-year-old baby behind when she died, and the girl grew up among men. When she started her period, her brothers teased her that she was dirty. Finally her teacher at school noticed the red stain on the back of her dress and sent her to the nurse to have everything explained.

He and I had been lying in bed that morning, talking about the mystery of birth, how we really are animals, one foot in the heavens and one in the mud, with an aversion to both.

("I wouldn't call it 'aversion'," Barbara had told me. "I'd name it 'fear'.")

And he suddenly remembered his younger sister's first menstration and how none of them had helped her, not even the school nurse, he guessed, because two years later she was pregnant. She lives on welfare now with three kids, all from different men. He called the men bastards, not the children, because the men had all run out on her when she needed them. "And who," he had demanded that morning in bed as he rolled away from me, "would marry her now?"

Tonight the moon is a woman sighing. Her grey eyes mourn above all passage, over the upturned faces of children gazing into the night. My daughter floats in her own ocean, moving like a ripple beneath my ribs.





*W.H. Green*

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THE CAMPANILE AT LSU

For Judith

Recall the flat, mosquito-feeding warmth,  
the tower, and what the night watchman  
(who took us for lovers) did not understand.

The martins, mosquito-delicate,  
engraves spirals in the light  
of the clock above the grass,  
the paper-pale, unwritten earth,  
traced the flickering lines  
of mind cacooning us.

He couldn't see.

Recall that summer, tower-high talk  
that working days and nightwatchmen  
have stopped and asked us to forget.

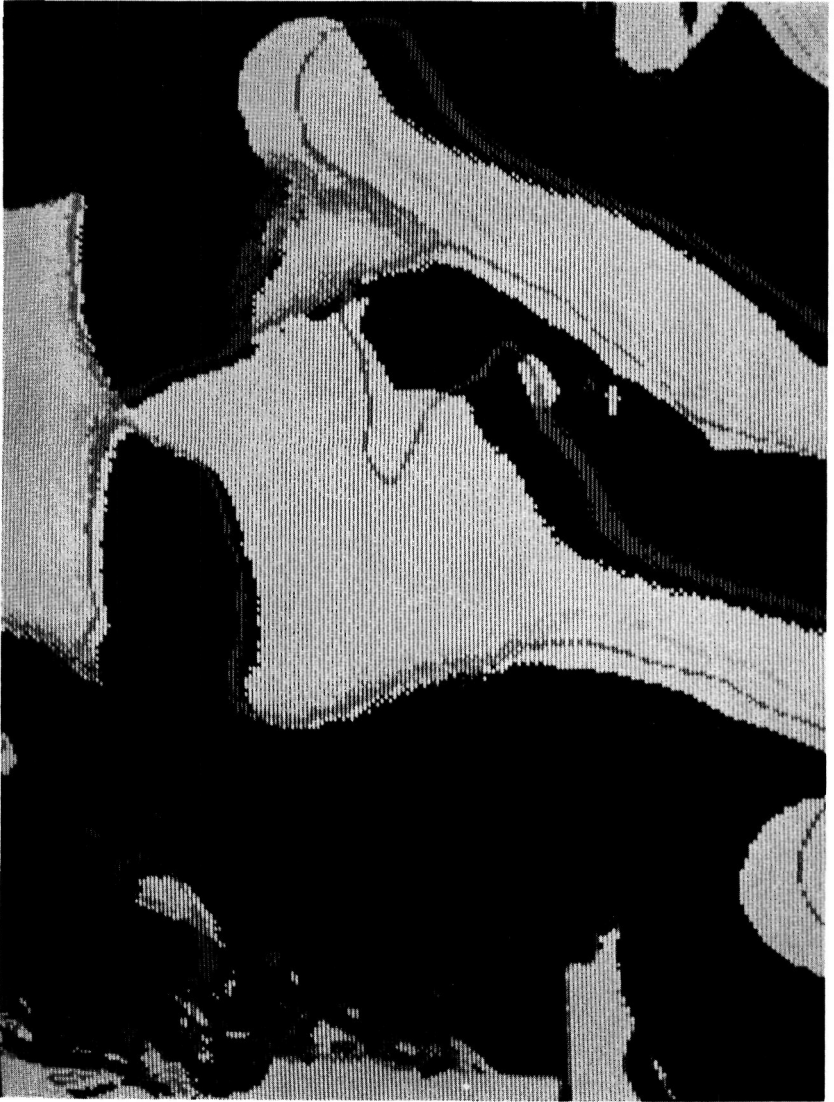
*W.H. Green*

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RUNNING TRACK INCANTATION

Beat black earth like a drum  
drumming immortality.  
But pace yourself. Another comes  
behind you, and his tread  
is silent.

Indefatigable,  
he beats another kind of drum.  
Pace yourself. And run. Run.



*ryan burkhart*

---

Everything is situational,  
based on variables of mood, temper,  
openness, and love.  
the freshness of the last en-  
counter  
still in the mind and the heart.

*Robert Flanagan*

---

FELIS DOMESTICUS

All fur ball and errant hair,  
breath milky, sardine-scented,  
the cat,  
wishing to be petted,  
clambers my easy chair.  
But she does  
and she doesn't:  
so backs and turns,  
tail whisking my beard, and turns  
to a fresh approach  
with delicate, plucking claw  
and rough tongue.

In a rose silk gown, amused,  
you watch us from the couch.

She licks herself into beauty  
-- this alley-get, cast-off  
I've called to many late nights  
for a lap-sitter,  
only to see her, tail-up,  
step stiffly away,  
her own.  
Now she becomes this present  
choice:  
to please or to refuse.  
Seeming to give, I take,  
and act the master with my stroke.

*Ann Bindley-Beickelman*

---

CRYSTAL LAKE BALL

Nothing but  
four reflections  
on the water  
in the moonless  
light appeared  
to be dancing  
like spirits  
attending a  
masquerade ball.  
I could hear  
them waltz  
the last dance  
as the sun  
rose and they  
began to vanish  
but in that  
final second of  
enchantment  
they opened  
their arms to  
summon me,  
welcome me  
to join them.  
Ah... but  
before I could  
they melted  
away with  
that first  
ray...





*Christy Sterling*

---

From time and time for all that stands  
from thing to beast and earth to man  
Is that bestowed but quick of breath  
ne'er to hold, yet have nonetheless.  
By grace its hour of beauty rests  
but light, to wake from innocence.  
Then savor the visage thine heart beholds  
'till drawn from hand so dust shall fold.  
Oh pity but to sigh in grief  
Whence give thy gems to the eminent thief!  
Once truth remains but for pain to see  
the sphere of life manifest in thee.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES IN TRANSITION TO WHERE?

Sounds radiate from the greenish black bullfrog croakin as it leaps from the deadwood tree roots that sit just above the murky emeralish brown water flowin down from the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.

Oh, there are sounds abundant to the eye of one's ears to see that a splash need not be a white mouth bass playin in beams of mornin sunlight, but maybe the ploppin of a cooter fallin off into the water from the eerie deadwood trunks along the banks of my bayou swamp home in Louisiana where these childhood memories remain a part of my transition from rural-to-urbanite consciousness.

"Possum, you be a-gettin your rump up-down,  
causin dat school boat be blowin upriver, you  
hear me now, Possum?"

Ma sure made some cajun sound, it be love, no?

On eve of youthful folly, memories linger not,  
in waning cajun moon, no disillusionment at  
night end, tears, laughter so dismay son of  
raisin daybreak.

Let Possum play at livin memories once again...

"Show be somethin huh ma, wiffin all dat noisey  
Rosie mae,  
Be ah screamin bout pullin her hair, she be lyin,  
ma I no pull nothin!"

"You be hearin me Possum, now gat boy."

School days wif youngins wearin bib coveralls and little misses wif printed dresses on just ridin long the wa-  
ter way learning bout writin, knowin, and numbers sure be somethin back then.

In youth, joy of curiosity to peek outward from self  
in cravins so long and black each echoing back...  
Told you so, onward they grow,  
Rosie mae remains a childhood wif hangins  
down her back--midnight black ringlets.

Bein seven years old often brings about day dreams of exploring wonders of what only a child can find inter-  
esting enough to not question action or deeds until done.

Surveyin Possum is havin a wib-bill cuttin blade  
and one shell for huntin dinner wif, nowyabe ah  
watchin real close at dat thar bush tail jumpin right  
to ziggity left, dar it go Possum...

Rosie mae be ah standin on a hill wif tall elephant  
grass peekin out, if'n she mite catch the woodsman ways?

Pa be aimin, eye shut-open wide, somethin in  
God's playground be bout to die, pow-bang-whoose,  
sulfur burnin-smellin awful, somethin be dyin,  
Rosie mae seein men's way.  
Thar be nothin fun when skinnin back innocent flesh  
bush tail at 7,  
Big brown eyes reflectin tears of no surveyin, Pa  
just sat by lookin forin it to be right,  
Rosie mae backin downward witness to the woodsman way  
of his eye.

In my bayou home of color and sounds thar be grief along'in the way, sight of bones dry'in bare, substance-smellin, no laughter be, as spring turns into robust summer songs of skippin flat rocks crossin old Cooter's Hole shinnie green face, round by-the-way of sugarcane spouts or rice wavin upward at blue skies passin over, just waitin for harvests, Rosie mae skippin by.

Cooter's Hole, Possum-children playin, splashin from  
fallen swings into cool mirror, emerald green life,  
sorrows come in knowin many to few, never  
lost comin to Cooter's Hole, lazy summer noon day at play.

Sorrows at havin cat-eyed marbles hidden away,  
dam mason jar some June day, Rosie mae in circles,  
dismay broken in.

She be a-callin out now, so and so Miss Rosie mae,  
Cooter's Hole be no more Possum hide-away,  
swingin, fallin naked in youth,  
sorrow came, Rosie mae not only to you.

Goin across the bayou wif Pa on a hot sweaty heated day, out to the left be Rosie mae sittin wif her Ma pollin thar way to our trading store wif winter trapins like us to survive.

Her ma be a might manly cause it takes strong back to push at muddy river bottoms bayou movin as I sat thar day dreamin at how Rosie mae had grown...

Long silken black braids, butter skin wif peachie glow  
almond brown eyes lookin from a face of pure delight,  
Demi-jeans cutoffs ripped just right, long slender  
fingers runnin ripples water ways, some Goddess love  
no forgotten.

Cajun Red, did ya see Rosie mae prancin wif her bottom hangin out, she sho be lookin like rock candy so sweet a tooth be beggin, don't she?

Possum you be a day dreamin too much bout dat girl, whar do babies come from anyway? Cajun Red just sorta asked me.

Pa, whar do babies come from? As he poled the muddy bottom to push our way down river as childhood thoughts got the best of me thinkin bout pretty Rosie mae.

"Possum what might you wanta know bout babies forin?  
It no be right unless'n you be jumpin dat stick,  
wif some woman first,  
You be knowin what to do boy when da time comes."

Pa just kept polin wif a smile on his face, be a baldin gray head, must be Rosie mae gettin at him.  
I still be ah wonderin as we be pullin to the tradin store door...

Cajun Red, I be seein some lillie white woman standin in da store wif golden hair just a fallin down her to bout thar it do, bein noway I be a touchin it, just sorta reached out wif my hand, she scream like some wounded cat, she be yellin!!!

"Is dat why your Pa gots to send you North Possum?" Red asked me.

Rosie mae be standin at waters edge, naked as born,  
unknowin of beauty, seein minds eye-spyin we...  
Nothin be more like Rosie mae opennin eyes of knowin  
somebody be watchin her...wonderments of beauty she  
be."

That Black pickinnie boy touched me! Somebody grab, grab him, forein he get away!

Dis be somethin to remember as some hairy long a-be reachin for me cause of some dam gold coloured hair,  
warn't no gold noway! So off I be runnin to my bayou home wif out Pa.

Summer day sweaty wif heat, no breeze a-comin my way  
dis day,  
White line, yellow line, just blackish gray asphalt  
runnin afore me, blindin, turnin, swayin likin  
Dragons back headin somewhar's...  
Sittin back bus movin onward, lights shadows playin.  
Strange sounds be comin in de dead of nite, cold it  
be movin beyond bayou solitude,  
Sittin back, feelin-movin onward, lights blinkin, to  
signs passin-flashin say nothin.  
I's, I's, eyes goin back, goin back, begone aheadin  
way north from home.

Swoosh, the bus sounded as it had pulled into our first Northern city after morin 16 hours. Thar be lights,  
signs, wif people every which-way movin bout in thar Sunday best clothes.

Rosie mae wake-up girl, we be somewhar's for sure!

No Colored Use Back Door, Big water place, Little water  
place, wonder whar a drink be at?  
Welcome signs, how come, whoopin, screamin, scarin souls.  
Yellin, horsemare sounds, nigger boy get yourn ass out  
har...  
Rosie mae sittin wif Baby Sister her'n best friends,  
shakin cryin, next to me,  
Get my baby screams be my ma callin out,  
Rosie mae just took my hand smilin upward,  
mumblin, dragons be roamin bout nite air  
chillin souls of God's children.  
Northbound bein free, free to speak, touch,  
feel, sorrow wifout fear in teardrops runnin

The tallness of the buildings and the noises that came from things racin by wif eyes like lightnin bugs, bel-  
lowin smoke as chimneys layin ah sideways hangin out back, honkins soundin as geese flyin south over by bay-  
ou home, Rosie mae and me just sat on concrete rails at the edge of black asphalt pavins waitin on someone to  
come and rescue us.

"Possum, thar be ah stick pencil layin over thar,  
jump the stick wif me bein scared I be,  
Well forin me somethin cried inside as pride, be  
survival to woman, child, man I be raised cajun first

from birth to grave, it be sayin yes,  
Rosie mae, Rosie mae be askin for our sake.

Rosie mae reaching out ling slender hard/soft hands wif fingers so gentle that a baby stops cryin when touched like me seekin comfort.

Ma bein arisen at gator's yawin, hearin clackin sounds  
muskrat scratchin, muddy water sho to get clean some,  
Singin Ma's song of Naomi, Ruth, Mother Sarah, Rosie mae  
reached within her upbringing-cajun Ethiopian woman,  
Dat be Holy ground da feet naked standin on each,  
Dat green grass so green be Holy ground acrossin over  
dat be teachd,  
Dat ground, dat ground be Holy ground lookin Black like  
we, water burst, after birth, rite of passage man/wo/both  
do stand Holy ground raise we.

This be all that Rosie mae be sayin in sweet sounds of the Ancient Ones.

Somehow the ground weeped that lonely night hour for two children who knew that jumpin a stick meant eternity as symbolic wedding vows were exchanged between Rosie mae and Possum, me.



*Jim DeWitt*

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THE COLOR OF CRANBERRY

The color of cranberry  
is today's sun going down the throat  
of this city's edge  
when heroes hide  
and guns bulge pockets  
and bared bulbs splash dulled gobs of light  
onto bored punks clustered - -  
see sleazymotel office rooms reverting to  
slide-through money trays  
but bed is for nobody who can  
still handle the street  
"yo mister police-man, how ya doin'?"  
and don't just take me to no fancy night spot  
just a place where  
my kahlua can runneth over  
where the burgers are served red-raw  
in an all-night diner  
but around here finding no one  
I repeat no one  
who's looking for "peaceful dreams"

*lyn lifshin*

---

I GIVE UP BALLET

give up reading  
in the Rockies  
give up Imagination  
Celebration May  
with apple boughs  
rose dogwood exploding  
I'm waiting again  
waiting it out as I  
did, madly, for my  
husband to get over  
whatever it was  
that pulled him out  
of my rooms nights  
waiting for my  
period my pap test  
to come back or the  
phone that won't  
ring or for silence  
from the one that  
won't stop ringing  
I give up waiting  
for manuscripts  
to come back still  
homeless don't wait  
for the voice I held  
on my pillow to be  
on my pillow just  
on radio air I  
give up waiting  
for snow to shrivel  
for green to come  
back hardly notice  
lilacs maples going  
from spray to fingers  
I give up wondering  
if I'll ever have  
a life of my own  
give up or put on  
hold wondering  
which of us will  
survive the closeness  
no one else will want  
to know when my period  
starts when it's over  
will remember boys  
who brought or didn't  
bring yellow roses  
Chanel 5 or wore  
Clearasil for pimples

**Cornfield Review-30**



give up fearing my  
mother's mind might  
stop being clear  
or thinking of nursing  
homes my mother at  
89 lbs holds both  
sides of the wall  
sometimes pulls her  
self up stairs I  
give up thoughts of her  
going back to the apart  
ment I wondered since  
the 60's leaving  
Middlebury how I'd  
ever go back there  
with her not waiting  
at the living room  
window or always coming  
down the 27 steep stairs  
when I leave to tell  
me already crying she  
hates to let me go  
give up her this  
morning's plan of how  
we could escape  
my sister's rules and  
pills and bed time  
hours for a cottage  
on the sea give up  
thoughts of any 80th  
birthday party for her  
give up rage at her  
phone calls silver  
bullets hitting  
the heart of  
the bull's eye give  
up sureness she'd  
help me stand by me  
as she, barely able  
to stand alone  
gives up

*Jay Griswold*

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THE SKIN OF THE INVISIBLE

The earth is alive.  
I told you, Walt Whitman, that night  
we sang in the dark Ohio woods,  
drunk, going down shoulder to shoulder  
toward that luminous vein.  
Yes, I know. You never reached  
the Ohio river. Dogwoods bloom  
nevertheless, and the husks  
of last year's milkweed  
rattle like shells in each  
successive wave of wind.  
I don't come to pay homage, old man.  
We must have looked a sight  
when we stripped ourselves naked  
and swam far out in the stagnant current.

I sing a little still  
and miss the sea. You would have touched me  
if you could, your big, human hands  
resting lightly on my shoulders  
to give me something more than words.  
A barge wailed, the melancholy lights  
of Cincinnati fell behind us,  
and in the dark I couldn't see your face,  
just the motion of your white beard  
the wind barely rippled.

Is it true the dead  
rise up through the roots of trees?  
On certain nights the stars are heard  
howling at their own loneliness.  
I touch the things my father's hands  
have touched: smooth wood  
of gunstocks, that bird's-eye maple  
.06 he carved and polished  
alone in the cell of himself  
that winter we spent above the Hudson.  
The river froze. I remember gulls  
perched on the snowdrifts,  
the thud of ice-breakers clearing a channel.

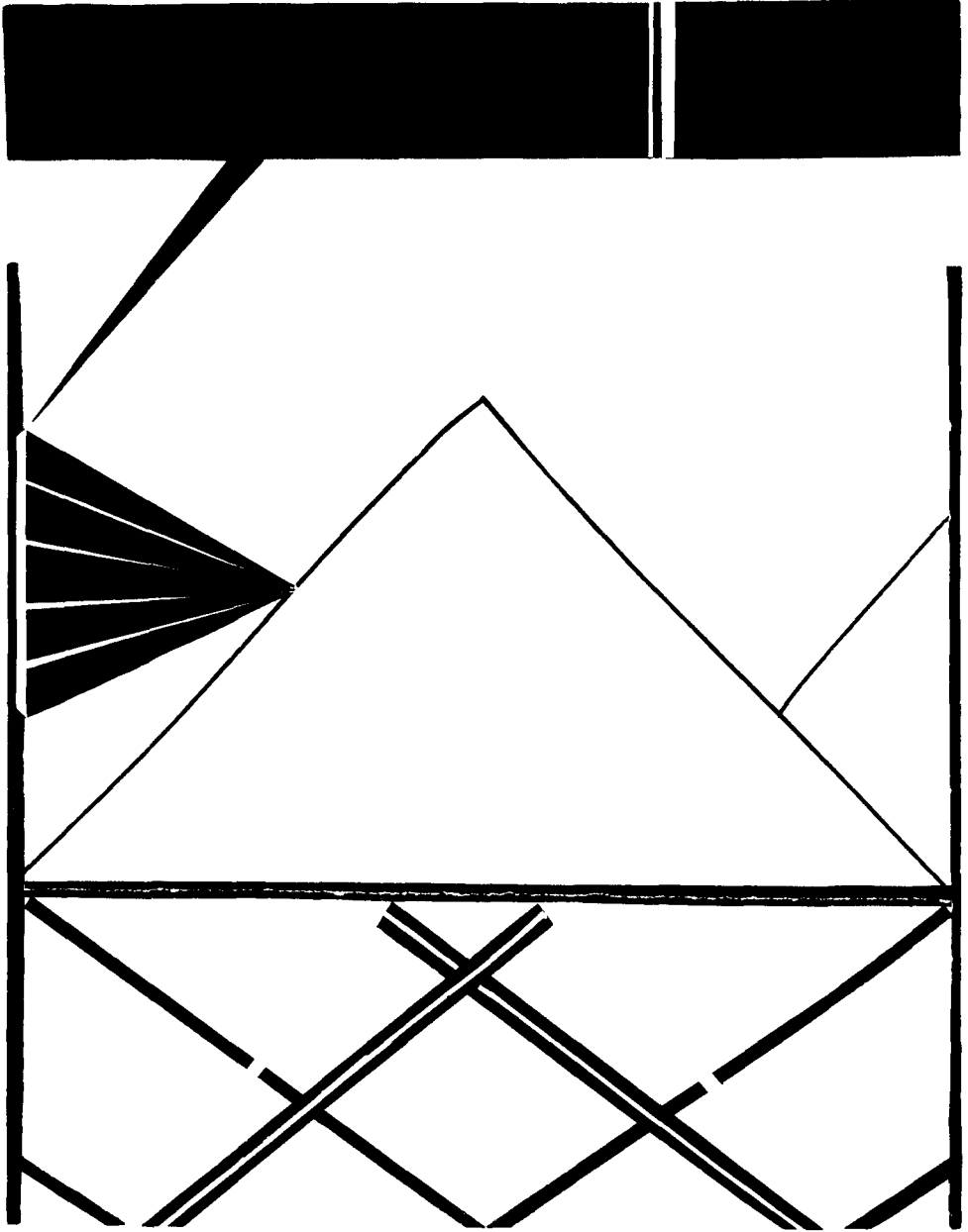
Tonight,  
my father's hands would tremble  
if they touched a living thing.  
He is like an old tree  
leaning in his wisdom toward the forest.  
I don't think he will sing with me  
those songs so sad they end in silence.

And you, Walt Whitman,  
naked as the day you were born,  
huge, and beautiful, and sweet,  
the ink of the Ohio river  
dripping off your skin  
like the ghosts of herons  
who will fly two thousand miles  
just to build a nest in your beard  
among the few surviving angels...

I sing of you, of moss-filled places where the grey  
sky gathers itself: the loneliness  
of loins, the secrets that are buried  
in the fur of the chest,  
the warmth of your breath close to my face.  
Who has seen the skin of the invisible?  
I pass right through  
the mist; I dress  
alone.

And go my way up the slag-  
pitted walls of the grave.  
My father's eyes might say:  
who are you, and what are you doing here?  
Now even he is fading away,  
going back to the dark places.

And you, Walt Whitman,  
what can I say  
but sing a little about the earth?  
Yes, I still touch the rough  
bark of trees,  
the way I wanted to touch  
my father's cheek, and wish him  
Godspeed.  
The trees understand.  
I too wrestle with them  
roaring with love  
in spring, when they grow limber again.



SON DOWN

He's taking himself to the basement again, squeezing into a corner. The place of the travelling brain, in the house's belly. If you found him now, you could dismiss certain things. How he wouldn't like to return to sodajerking at his father's drugstore, how he might sneak cigarettes, how how how. But down here near his father's workbench, where mallards get carved for hunting in winter, there's nothing like the death of a duck to turn him old. And he slowly removes the 12-gauge shotgun from the wall bracket. His hands tremble. A thin coil of smoke issues from him mouth. Are you about to tell him you didn't realize that he's you, after all these years. With a sort of cry, and crossing his lean arm over the brilliant upper part of his body. Don't leave him now. There are things he needs to know.

*Stuart Friebert*

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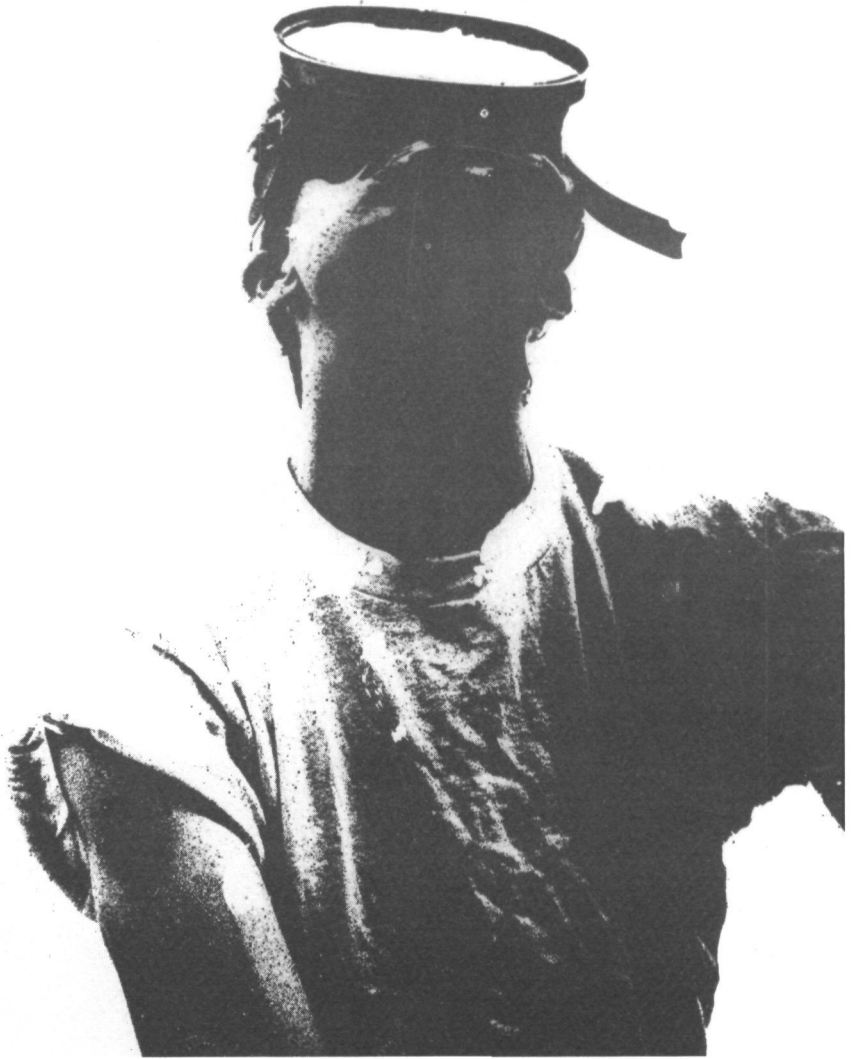
FROM HER BLINDNESS

Clap your hands, Miss House said,  
and we obliged. You may stamp feet  
if the force goes that way, or rap  
your desks, but don't leave the room  
to wander about the halls while I'm  
playing, understand? She began with

The Pilgrim's Chorus: Love  
to the men of old, their sons  
may copy their virtues bold,  
courage and...

Each note as if mailed to our houses,  
until we promised to stick with them  
for good. Once, she took us to Chicago  
for Faust by bus, and sat next to me.  
Her hairspray almost made me choke.

I'm reading her obituary now, which  
my sister sent. 98! Lived alone till  
the end, no "sword in hand" because she  
put one in ours. Courage, courage, she'd  
pound her fist when we left Chorus for  
math or Greek or physics, in an accent  
no one could imitate. Not yet at least,  
it's been so long till our voices rang.



## OHIO AUNTS

My wife hunches over the aquamarine sprawl of the Ohio road map. Red dots tell her where every Sohio gas station is located. "Take a right," she sings out. I swing our Volkswagon off interstate 71 and aim for Exit 42. Washington Street. My rear-view mirror fills up with the glass and steel shafts of downtown Columbus. So we are here. Sarah and Amy are whining in the back seat. They want to go potty again. They are spelling aloud all the Sohio signs as they flit by the windshield like giant red lollipops. My wife thinks she recognizes Washington Street. "Cherry. We want Cherry," she says, her eyes skimming the row of old mansions that now house Mansonic lodges, funeral parlors, Black Muslim temples. My brain aches from breathing inside the truck fume zone for nine hours. I can still smell the Goodyear factories that line I76, each one going flat out, tires stacked behind cyclone fences like black doughnuts. Youngstown, Akron. Dots on the map that translate into columns of black smoke, workers falling into vats of molten rubber, Caterpillar grader tires ten feet high. Now the hard plastic knobs of the steering wheel have put dents in my hands. My eyeballs try to push past my lids just as my wife calls out "Cherry!" and smiles. We really are here. She knows her way now, recognizes the locust trees, the hawthorne hedge, and then the crenelated tower capped by a cone of blue slate: the Bocker house. My wife has not seen it in years. I have only heard about it. But is anyone home? Her four virgin aunts are known to drop everything and rent a Winnebago or a Sioux. Drift through the country trolling for neices, nephews, cousins. We pull into the driveway and see the rear end of a Winnebago the size of a lone Pullman car shunted to a siding. Our Volkswagon folds out its wings. We spill out, shouting the names of my wife's Ohio aunts: Margie! Carol! Aggie! Sarah! The Winnebago's door unseals itself with a pneumatic hiss. Carol's head emerges. She sees the blonde heads of my daughters in the sun. Attempts to move her girth past the threshold head-on and becomes stuck. Aunt Margie pushes from behind, shouts for Three-in-One Oil and then all four aunts pile out like a circus act. Lover barks, whimpers, fawns at my feet. My daughters go wild with delight.

We are sitting around the white kitchen table, our faces dimly reflected in the white porcelain top. I think of their ages again: Sarah 91, Aggie 86, Margie 52, Carol 47. Still here, in Columbus. Still living in the house Grandpa Bocker built in 1921. My head continues to throb from the remembered blasts of truck horns. But I am smiling. Their lives are a wonder. None ever married. They have taken care of each other for more years than I have been alive. Were there any courtships? Surely they have their disagreements, the inevitable tensions. But now Margie offers me some iced tea. Aggie suggests a Budweiser. I ask for an aspirin and set off a hidden alarm: medicine. Guest needs help. Carol rushes towards the half-bath off the kitchen. She forgets her frame. Dives for the open door. Carol is stuck. Margie forces her new Prince racquet between Carol's arm and the door jamb. Starts prying. Carol pops out, grabs the Bufferin bottle from Aggie who was in there first. Carol's strides make the juice glasses tremble on the porcelain. I swallow the Bufferin tablet, hose it down with Ohio apple cider. A sudden thud from upstairs. Someone has fallen. We all leap up from the table. Aunt Sarah's bedroom is on the third floor. Carol bolts for the stairs but becomes wedged between the chestnut newel post and the invalid elevator chair parked at the bottom of the staircase. I squeeze past her, take the steps two at a time. My brain lobes are bouncing inside my skull like small loaves of bread.

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The basement is exactly the same as when Grandpa Bocker lined the storeroom with wicker baskets of Cortlands, Ida Reds, Ohio Macs. Sarah and Amy run behind the oil burner to hide. Galvanized heating vents octopus out of the burner and I think: someone is hiding inside that white plaster, holding up the ground floor like Atlas. My wife, tracking her daughters, peeks behind the oil burner and finds her six-year old self, blue Navy suit smudged be coal dust. Carol shows me the height record Grandpa Bocker penciled on a wooden strut of the old coal bin: Carol Nov 1937 4' 3" Margie Aug 1934 4'1". Margie shows me where she sits to watch Buckeye football games as she pounds chestnuts against the cement floor. With Grandpa Bocker's ballpeen hammer. A photo of Woody Hayes is still taped to the coal bin. Suddenly we hear a thud. Someone has fallen on the kitchen floor over our heads. Aunt Aggie? I leap towards the stairs. Rang my head on the old beam



over the back door landing. As I crumple against the dishwasher I hear Margie screaming that Aggie is caught in the dishwasher. My wife can't pull Amy free. Amy is somewhere inside the oil burner.

\* \* \*

The supper dishes are not completely clean. Tiny pieces of Aunt Aggie stick to my plate like dried egg. Margie is piling rope coils of spaghetti on my plate. "Have some more, Professor!" she shouts happily. She loves the bustle, the noise of the children. Margie holds up a Purina Treat. "Lover!" she cries. And Lover leaps up on her hind legs, walks around the table, paws held high. Her head goes past my left elbow. Her tail swings against my fork. Lover snaps the biscuit off the tip of her nose and patters around the table again. Sarah and Amy go crazy. "Lover!" they shout, waving imaginary Purina treats in the air. Lover rears up. Tap dances past my chair, toenails clicking across the linoleum. "Lover!" sings out Margie. "Be a Professor!" Lover trots over, paws dangling like twin dead mice. She accepts the hornrim glasses Margie places on her snout. Carol opened a James Beard cookbook and spreads it out on the table's edge. Lover holds down the pages with her paws. Her eyes, enlarged by the lenses of the hornrims, begin to cross. A page tries to rise but Lover slaps it down with her left paw. Now she is mumbling something. I can't hear her. I put my fork down and listen: it seems important. "Quiet!" I am shouting. "She's saying something!"

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Margie serves dessert in the living room. The tray she carries makes each slab of orange Jello wobble inside its Waterford champagne glass. Lover circles the living room on her hind legs looking for a Purina Treat. Carol breaks one in half, sets it on Lover's nose. The doorbell rings. Father Tom Bocker is here. He is the priest who married us. He is only a bit heavier, but the fine stalks of red hair on his head have been thinned by an invisible reaper. He has just returned from a four day retreat. On the fourth day there was a Charismatic Prayer Service. He heard people speak in tongues. Row after row of priests praying aloud, stretching out their hands, gesturing at the roof, at the red tabernacular light winking at them from high above the altar. Some priests falling back into the pews, some shouting. He was amazed. "Yet Saint Paul tells us to pray constantly," Father Tom says, eyes gleaming, looking at us for a spark, perhaps a link. "But this is what the Protestants do," says Carol. "What we need is the old mass back," Margie adds. "People would come. I know." Carol flips her fingers and Lover swallows the Purina Treat she has been balancing patiently. Father Tom is excited, waves his arms. "Amazing. You could hear voices, lost languages. Saint Paul. He's the key!" Will Father Tom speak in tongues right here, in front of us, with all these orange slabs quivering? Carol rushes from the room, mounts the stairs. She wants to show Father Tom an article in the Columbus Messenger. But Father Tom is tired, his head sags against the red wingback chair Grandpa Bocker re-upholstered in 1939. Part of him is still in that dim chapel, holding his candle high. Lobbing prayers into the dark air. His eyes begin to dim, focus on the paisley pattern of the wallpaper over my head. "Saint Paul" he mutters. His words start to dribble from his lips, take flight from his chin like butterflies moulting. "Paul. Paul. Bubba. Bubba." The words fly around our chairs, land on the marble mantelpiece, prance around the edge of the rose-colored Tiffany lamp. Suddenly a sound upstairs. Someone has fallen. I dash for the stairs, banging my shins on the footrest of the invalid chairlift. The corpse of Aunt Sarah is sitting in the invalid chair, smiling. "Never mind her," I shout back to Father Tom who is running with his eyes closed. He is chanting "Bubba bubba bubba bubba." We fly past Aunt Sarah taking the steps three at a time. Lover is behind Father Tom, still on her hind legs, taking the steps one at a time, paws held high. She has her hornrims on. I burst into Carol's bedroom on the second floor. Over the years Carol has been piling up bundles of magazines with titles like Modern Romance, Modern Screen, and Hollywood! until they have caressed the pink stucco of her ceiling. Pillars of magazines rise over my head. A temple of love, swaying from tremors. I run down the aisles shouting, "Aunt Carol! Answer me!" I see a flash of her blue dress, then a patch of her thigh the size of a plucked turkey. "Aunt Carol!" Two columns of magazines have fallen on her. A third trembles menacingly over my head. Father Tom and I grab one leg each and pull. "Watch that column," I say, and then spot the cover of an old Modern Screen. Kim Novak is fingering the cleft in Kirk Douglas's chin. She can't be a day older than 27. I seize the magazine and turn quickly to page 17. "Kim. Kim," I sob, my heart nearly breaking. Carol's voice picks its way through the slabs of spilled magazines. "I think I heard a Protestant." Lover bursts through the open door, breathing hard from the climb. But paws still aloft. "Bubba!" cries Lover.

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That night I wake up in Grandpa Bocker's bed. The same bed he died in, surrounded by his sisters, his five daughters. My wife is asleep beside me, head buried under a beige woolen blanket. The moonlight streaming through the lace curtains touches the mirror over an oak dresser. I tiptoe to the bathroom. As I pass the tiny gleam of the nightlight stuck in a socket on the chestnut wallboard I see my feet take shape, then dissolve into blackness. I open the bathroom door. A dim throb of florescence throws shadows on the tiled floor, on the porcelain bathtub held off the floor by four lion paws squeezing balls, on the swollen white lip of the sink. I suck in my breath: Grandpa Bocker sits, chin on his hands, the oval wooden seat holding him like a boiled egg in a cup. A keel of spinal knobs gently stretches the delicate white skin of his back. Thin beams of moonlight manage to pierce the glazed glass of the window to pick out two small moles on his left shoulder. "Grandfather," I whisper, and back slowly out the door. I close it gently behind me. It is nearly dawn. I hear a whining sound. An electric hum. Aunt Sarah is coming down the staircase in her invalid chairlift. She smiles at me in the dark, then her chair turns the corner, drops out of sight behind the cherry spindles of the banister. I wave, but she does not see me. I hear the front door open and then shut. She will walk two miles to the Cathedral downtown to attend the 6:30 mass. And then walk back.

\* \* \*

I wake up in Grandpa Bocker's bed. Sunlight comes through the curtains. I hear the voices of my children downstairs. I smell coffee. Everyone is up. Lover barks hello as I walk into the kitchen. I see that everyone has eaten. Aunt Aggie waits at the stove, hefting a bowl of pancake mix on her hip like a milkmaid lugging a crock of fresh milk. Margie is playing tennis. She is the captain of her team. Aunt Carol is at the B&O Railroad office downtown, typing letters on the same B&O stationery that arrives at our house each Christmas. My children are playing with Lover. They know how to make her rear up on her hind legs. They balance the horn-rims on her snout and cry "Professor, think!" I eat eleven pancakes and ask if I can take Lover for a walk. Aunt Aggie frowns. "Only Margie walks her. She's afraid of the leach breaking." Of losing Lover in the maze of streets surrounding Columbus, of green fenders rising out of the street to bat Lover over cedar stockade fencing, of ticks that drop unseen from the locust trees. But I am insistent. I test the chain leash, double the handle around my wrist. Ask Aunt Aggie to pull it. She is dubious, but lets us go. We wave goodbye. Sarah and Amy walk point position. Lover pants against the length of the chain. I am happy. I watch my daughters dart along the curb, pick dandelions, sniff at trees. I have three dogs, and only one leash. I whistle at my two unleashed dogs. Warn them of cars. Tell them to heel. I watch the houses glide by on my left. Tudor. Some with towers, mimic crossbow slits. Oak doors. Lawns that slope to the sidewalk. The whole street must have been built within a few years of the Bocker house. A green Cadillac turns the corner, tears at the corner of my eye like a hook. "Sarah! Amy!" I call. They heel, whimpering. Lover leans into the leash, rises against the pull, paws clawing air. Two links bend, split open like secrets. The green fender looms in the street: a moving tower of death. "Lover!" I scream. "Lover, come back!"

\* \* \*

My daughters are gone. They have fled back to the house, Lover's blood on their knees, their shins. I walk slowly in the center of the sidewalk carrying Lover. I am trying to put one foot in the exact center of each slab of sidewalk. I can feel warm wetness exploring my crotch. Now I am placing a tiny ruby on every other cement slab. I walk down the Bocker driveway and up the steps of the back porch. I shift Lover's weight to my left hip. Ring the bell with my right hand. The drops fall in one place now, so I make silent bombing patterns on the welcome mat. The door opens. Aunt Margie is home from tennis. Her tennis shorts are still sweaty, smudged on the side where we took a fall. She plays spirited tennis, I note, and say "I'm sorry, Margie." She looks onto my eyes and slowly closes the door and locks it.

\* \* \*

I gently place Lover on the welcome mat and walk up the driveway towards the front of the house. My shoes make crunching sounds in the white gravel. It is nearly dark. I can see lights coming on in the living room. I reach the front door and ring the bell. Silence. I walk across the porch to look in the dining room window. Someone is eating in the kitchen. Now I see everyone at the table: my wife, Amy, Sarah, Margie, Carol, and Aggie. Aunt Sarah is not there. Somehow Lover got in the back door. She is walking around the table on

her hind legs. My daughters are laughing, waving Purina Treats. I rap on the window but no one can hear me over the laughter of the children. I hear the electric hum of the invalid chair. It's coming down the staircase I can see Aunt Sarah gliding to the bottom. She steps out of the chair, walks to the front door. She unlocks the front door and steps onto the porch. She is dressed for the 6:30 mass. The door locks behind her. "Aunt Sarah," I call. But she doesn't hear me. She shuffles down the slate walk, hat on an angle, handbag swinging. Sarah is obviously confused. She thinks this half-dark is early morning. The Cathedral will be locked. She is walking into downtown Columbus alone. Into the night. "Aunt Sarah!" I call louder. My pants legs are beginning to stick to my thighs but I trot after her anyway. She walks more quickly than I would have believed. She is turning the corner at Cherry. Or did she cross to Redford? I sprint down Cherry. Stop. Double back. She must be on Washington Street by now. I cut through Redford and spot her hat flitting like a moth under a street-light. Two shadowy figures are following her. I see her stagger, thrown to the sidewalk. One of the shadows tugs at her handbag. "Aunt Sarah!" I am running straight into my shouts. I am at her side. The shadows have fled. She is on her back, the blue gingham dress hiked above her knees. Mugged at 91, I reflected as I stoop to help her up. The two shadows are back. Now a third. "Gotcha!" one shadow snarls. I am wrestled to the ground. The second shadow whispers "Bastard. She can't be a day younger than 91." The third shadow dangles handcuffs in front of me like gifts of silver. I can say nothing. My blood stained pants are a dead giveaway.

\* \* \*

Wilhelm Bocker is sitting inside the tower of his new house. Only the slate roof over his head is unfinished. The tower pleases him. He likes to peer through out the crossbow slits at the yellow ditch he named Cherry Street. Through the north slit he can see the city of Columbus rising up over the cornfields. Through the east slit he watches the workers come each day to splash Cherry Street with tar, then seal the yellow earth with concrete. A model T rattles by, backfiring. He ponders the sharp edge of the automobile's fender, the gleaming hooks of the bumper. His older sister, Sarah, walks out the front door and heads toward the Cathedral. "Be careful, Sissy," he call through the crossbow slit. She is wearing a blue gingham dress a little too snappy for his taste. And she swings her handbag like child.

\* \* \*

I am on Cherry street. The blood on my pants has dried, scabbed, and fallen away. I walk up the slate steps to the front door of the Bocker house. The handle turns, opens. Aunt Sarah must have forgotten this too. I walk into the kitchen but no one is there. I look out the back window and see that the Winnebago is gone. So is my Volkswagon. The living room couch and all the chairs are shrouded by sheets. I sit down in the invalid chairlift. In the dark I begin to play the Professor. I reach up with my paw. Adjust my hornrims. Press the button that says "START." I rise slowly. The living room drops gently into the blackness in front of me. As I pass the first bend in the stairway I find I am praying constantly.

DIANE ALMENDINGER is currently an art professor at the Ohio State University at Marion. In the past she has taught at Ohio Wesleyan University, Dennison University, and has done teaching stints in Ghana and Nigeria. She has had many exhibitions and shows. ANN M. BINDLEY-BEICKELMAN is a graduating senior of the College of Education at OSU-Marion. She gets by (sort of) working in the library at OSUM and writes poetry as a fun sideline. ryan burkhart is an English major at OSU-Marion. ANN CARTER has taught writing at the University of Arkansas, the Community Writer's Project, and Erie County Community College. She currently resides in Arkansas and enjoys rose-gardening, choral music, and spiritual conjecture. JIM DEWITT instructs writing skills development classes. He is the author of thirty-three books and the managing editor of a publishing house. Mr. DeWitt has had poems and stories published in 159 publications. ROBERT FLANAGAN is the author of two collections of poems, The Full Round and Once You Learn You Never Forget, a novel, Maggot, and a collection of stories, Loving Power. JOHN FRAIM is an inmate at the Marion Correctional Institution where he is enrolled in an art class. STUART FRIEBERT directs the writing program at Oberlin College. He co-edited the second edition of The Longman Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry and has been published in New Yorker, the Iowa Review, Poetry East, and Prairie Schooner. W.H. GREEN teaches English at Chatahoocce Valley State College and Troy State University. He has been published in several publications. JAY GRISWOLD has worked for the last ten years as a Park Ranger in Colorado. He has an M.A. in Creative Writing and a collection of poems set for publication in 1992. KELLEY KALTENBACH is an art major at OSU-Marion. SANDRA KOLANKIEWICZ is a short story writer. LYN LIFSHIN is an avowed feminist. Since she entered the literary scene in the sixties she has authored more than eighty books and edited three anthologies of woman writers. PAUL R. LILLY, JR. has published in Nantucket Review, Aspen Anthology, Pendragon, and the Bellingham Review. He has written a book entitled Words In Search of Victims: the Achievements of Jerzy Kosinski. He is presently chair of the English Department at State University of New York in Oneonta. ERIC PICKERILL is a student at OSU-Marion. VINCENT CARLETON RHODES, from Youngstown, Ohio, began writing poetry and short stories as told to him by family members. ROBERT SCHROEDER is an inmate at Marion Correctional Institution. He is enrolled in an art class through OSU-Marion. CHRISTINE RENAE STERLING is an art major at OSU-Marion. She expresses herself through the medium of pencil portrait. She says her studies in humanities is crucial for personal growth. SHERRI SZEMAN teaches English at Central State University. Her poems have appeared in the Chicago Review, the Centennial Review, the Black Warrior Quarterly, and others.





Marion Campus



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