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Louis T. Milic 2 **Editorial**
Judging the Contest

James Shelley 4 **The Kokoon Arts Club, 1911-1940**
Cleveland artists enlivened serious aims with exuberant antics.

Charlotte Newman 15 **Cleveland's First Woman Physician**
Myra Merrick struggled to bring medical care to the poor.

The Gamut Prize in Short Fiction

Lee K. Abbott 30 **Introduction**

Elizabeth Richards 32 **All of Us**

John Richardson 42 **Hangover Mornings**

Mariflo Stephens 52 **Hazed In**

Paulette Schmidt 61 **The Price of Haircuts**

Elizabeth McClelland 68 **John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde**
The young man from Tiffin bestrode the art worlds of early twentieth-century Europe and America.

Claude Clayton Smith 74 **Letter from New Stark, Ohio**
Drought, roaring trucks, and dwindling population.

Hale Chatfield 85 **Poetry**
Why There Is No True Artificial Intelligence

Diane Lefer 87 **Picking Madison Avenue's Brain**
Can writers learn anything from advertising?

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THE COVER: Revelers at a Bal Masqué of the Kokoon Club in 1925. Photo courtesy of the Northeast Ohio Art Museum. See "The Kokoon Arts Club, 1911-1940," pp. 4-14.

Editorial

Judging the Contest

As many of our readers (and more than 850 contestants) know, *The Gamut* recently held a fiction contest. We hold such contests every so often, not because we wish to be thought a literary magazine—which we're not—we're a general interest periodical—but in order to attract attention and possibly subscriptions. This is our equivalent of those multi-million dollar lotteries held by *The Reader's Digest* and Publishers Clearing House. In any case, whether you were a contestant or not, we thought you might like to know how these contests are handled and particularly how the decisions are arrived at.

To begin with, nothing happens until the deadline for submissions has been reached—nothing that is except that the submissions are opened, checked for the presence of a return address and an entry fee and logged in, given a number to insure anonymity in judging. After the deadline date, a team consisting of some of our editors and editorial interns reads all the entries and puts them into two piles: those that will proceed further and those that have reached their limit. These latter (the great majority) will have been read by at least one of our senior editors before landing on the discard pile. The others, in this case some 200 or so, are sent along for reading by all the senior editors, who categorize them as "Yes," "No," or "Maybe." The purpose of this stage is to reduce the pile yet further, to 50 or so, from which the winners will be selected by ourselves and a paid judge (in this case Lee

Abbott, a well-known writer of fiction). The meeting at which these final decisions are made is the most interesting stage of the process.

It is no secret that judgments of literary value are highly subjective. After certain rudiments are taken care of (spelling, agreement of subject and verb, diction), the real value of a short story depends most of all on the reader: whether it piques the interest and sustains it, perhaps whether it has striking characters, a moral point, an innovative technique, good control of language, imagery, directness. . . . Which of these is most important in a given case cannot be determined unless one knows the judges, for each judge has a bias based on his own reading, profession, interests, preferences, and the like. I have not mentioned setting, but setting is important: I cannot read with interest any story set in a bar, but relish anything concerned with universities or even schools. I also find myself quickly worn by the current fad for irrelevant detail: "He inserted the shiny flat blade of the Craftsman No. 3 screwdriver under the edge of the already-gritty surface of the new Lux-Windex aluminum window and pressed gently using only the slight force made available by his carpal muscles"

So if you place around a table laden with 50 short stories two professors of English, one of whom is a poet and literary historian and one a linguist and stylistician, an editor who is a writer and a

writer who is a teacher of writing, as well as several others, it is not surprising that there should be differences of opinion. And differences there were. None of my favorite stories were chosen as winners and several of the winners were stories I would not have chosen. Lest this be considered a gratuitous slur on our winners, I hasten to say that it only indicates what a tricky business judging is and that any writer with confidence in his or her own ability should not find rejection (or failure to win) any cause for melancholy. Any collection of best stories of any year, especially if several decades old, has a distinctly dated look, largely the result of the fact that winners tend to be those that are original in the currently fashionable way: realistic, regional, minimalist, stilted, obscene Editors choose what they think is good or original; original is what they don't regularly see, whereas good is what they see and like regularly. One has only to recall that Clifton Fadiman, the book reviewer of *The New Yorker* in the '30s, regularly panned Faulkner's work; and it is well-known how Keats fared at the hands of the *Quarterly*. The only reliable judge of value in fiction, as in all art, is time, that is, the long succession of readers who constitute the ultimate tribunal, those who decided that Shakespeare was better than Otway, Milton than Cowley, Keats than Montgomery, Blake than Byron, Hawthorne than Howells. One must keep writing and wait. ■

Louis J. Mitic

The Kokoon Arts Club, 1911-1940

James Shelley

Before the art center of the world began to shift from Paris to New York in the late 1930s, there was a place for artists in the smaller cities of America. In the late nineteenth century, Cincinnati had its own high renaissance, producing such artists as Frank Duveneck and John Twachtman. In the early twentieth century it would be the turn of Cleveland, where the flourishing of the commercial arts helped to attract talented artists from across the country.¹ Several artists' organizations sprang up, of which the most notorious was the Kokoon Arts Club.

This unusual group of artists met for the first time in 1911 under the leadership of Carl Moellman. Once a pupil of Duveneck's, Moellman later studied under Robert Henri, another Cincinnati artist, in New York. Imbued with Henri's disdain for the constraints of academic art (i.e., art based on fundamentals of perspective and color), Moellman, while in New York, often exhibited with the group of painters known as "The Eight," generally noted for their use of a darker palette, vigorous brushstrokes, and local subject matter. Depicting the rough vitality of urban life, these artists formed the core of the so-called "Ash Can School." Moellman also worked in the studio of John Sloan (one of "The Eight") where he experimented in lithography to discover whether some of these qualities could be translated into that medium.²

In Cleveland, the Otis Lithograph Company was competing for the growing movie-theater market; it was thought that the theatrical lithography the company was then doing did not adapt well to the action poses of the nickelodeon actors.³ In 1905 the company hired Moellman—by then a well-known poster artist nationally—as superintendent to put something of Henri's loose and free style into its poster designs.

Among the artists whom Moellman hired was an old friend, William Sommer. One of the best poster artists in the country, Sommer shared with Moellman a dislike for the conservatism of academic art. Even then Sommer was described as an "ultra modernist," probably because of his unorthodox use of color and distortion of line (later Sommer would paint portraits of boys with heads as large as their bodies).



The Kokoon Arts Club was the subject of James Shelley's M.A. thesis in history at Case Western Reserve University. "I've always been amazed," he says, "that nobody else has seriously written about this phenomenon, almost lost in Cleveland's past." Shelley's B.A., also in history, is from Miami University in Ohio. During 1984-86 he worked as archivist at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Tarrytown, New York, and currently is a social worker at Hill House in Cleveland. He was an editorial assistant for The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History (1987), for which he wrote two essays, on literature and on art. Shelley is an occasional freelance contributor to local magazines, and has had two plays performed at the Cleveland Public Theatre.

Other artists were drawn to this circle, many of whom—like Moellman and Sommer—had been trained in fine art, but for practical reasons (there weren't many opportunities for artists at that time in America) joined the swelling ranks of commercial artists in the city. The Kokoon Arts Club first began meeting in the summer of 1911 and officially formed in August with Moellman and Sommer as president and vice-president respectively. Its general purpose: to create a communal interest in modern art.

An article in a 1911 issue of *Cleveland Town Topics* announcing the founding of the Kokoon Arts Club claims that it was largely based on the bohemian spirit of the Kit Kat Klub in New York.⁴ The name "Kokoon" reflected the founders' anticipation of an awakening—for the young members as artists and for Cleveland as a city of art. Individual development and expression were stressed, as well as an aversion to dominating personalities—perhaps an influence of the democratic "Ash Can School." The thirteen charter members met two evenings a week in rented space above a tailor's shop on East 36th Street. A pot-bellied stove that was either too hot or too cold made it hard, during the winter, to retain models willing to pose nude.⁵ Membership was limited to thirty (later, in the 1920s, membership would peak at sixty) and open only to men. Throughout the Club's existence, members would come primarily from the commercial arts, and included lithographers, illustrators, commercial designers, decorators, engravers, a landscape architect, and a few art instructors.

The club worked quietly during its first year, providing the artists with an uninhibited outlet for their creative energies. Regular activities included two exhibitions a year, art lectures, and art instruction. A reporter who visited the club at its headquarters described the group as "revolutionary, purposeful, and distinctly unique."⁶ In local art circles their exhibitions initially attracted attention because their paintings were shown untitled, a gimmick to make art, for the viewer, a more purely subjective experience. But it wasn't until 1913 that the Kokoon Club really began to excite public awareness.

In the spring of 1913 the famous Armory Show in New York shook up the American art world with its display of avant-garde work that included the Cubists. Henry Keller, a Kokoon Club member who had had two of his paintings exhibited in the Show, arranged for a showing of ten Cubist works from Paris at the Taylor Department Store Gallery in Cleveland on June 30. An editorial in the *Plain Dealer* said of the exhibition, "To the average mind cubism is tomfoolery, and the defenses and explanations and songs of praise offered by its devotees seem only to strengthen the popular impression."⁷ Despite widespread criticism, the exhibition was well attended by a curious, if somewhat confused, public.

The following year, in January, the Kokoon Club formed an alliance with Cleveland expatriate artist Alexander Warshawsky and a few others to hold an exhibition of modernist works. A *Cleveland Leader* headline proclaimed: "BIGGEST LAUGH IN TOWN THIS WEEK NOT IN THEATER, BUT ART GALLERY. . . Exhibition of Cubists and Post-Impressionists at Taylor Store Expected to Prove a Scream."⁸ Most of the works considered cubist were by New York artists pro-



One of William Sommer's portraits with big heads.

moted by Alfred Stieglitz, the well-known photographer and advocate of modern art. The works exhibited by the Kokoon Club were representative of what most American artists considered modernists were doing at that time—post-impressionism. In an editorial promoting the exhibition, Henry Keller summed up the style: "Every present art has been ransacked for new, vital expression in line or color, all known savage arts sifted through for vivifying elements and the oriental mind penetrated for its subtle psychologies."⁹ Many of the artists were influenced by the French post-impressionist Cezanne, particularly his use of areas of pure color, rather than outline, to build up geometric volumes.¹⁰ But what they saw as modern in Cezanne had already lapsed as the vanguard of European art by the close of the last century.

Also in 1913 the Kokoon Club introduced an event that would sustain its bohemian image for years to come—the Kokoon Arts Club Ball. Conceived as a fund-raising event, the first "Bal Masqué" (the artists did not use an accent) was anticipated with considerable dismay as Clevelanders envisioned a kind of artists' "orgy," in the popular mind attributed to "decadent" cities such as Paris.¹¹ Denied the necessary dance-hall permit, the club made a direct appeal to the progressive Mayor of Cleveland, Newton Baker (later Secretary of War in Woodrow Wilson's cabinet). Baker reportedly spoke of wanting to be an artist himself and showed the applicants some of his own drawings (or cartoons, according to one account) and some mission furniture he'd made in the city's carpentry shop.¹² In the interest of art Baker granted the permit, and in order to allay the misgivings of the community appointed extra dance-hall inspectors for the event.¹³



Decorations for the 1925 Bal Masqué included the club's "K" emblem, designed to suggest a butterfly (side view). Courtesy of the Northeast Ohio Art Museum.

At the door of the Elk's Club Ballroom, silver-winged models greeted artists, musicians, poets, newspapermen—the bohemia of Cleveland—dressed as Turks, clowns, Columbines, harem queens, and strange cubist forms. As in future Bal Masqués, the first began with a procession: four half-naked Nubian slaves carried into the ballroom a gigantic chrysalis set upon a litter. To the clash of cymbals, a beautiful, multi-colored butterfly sprang forth and the revelry began. Later the lights were dimmed and twenty Kokooners scantily dressed as Indians stormed through the crowd in a wild, whooping dance. Newspapers in Cleveland—as well as in other cities¹⁴—gave the event notable attention. Based, presumably, on New York's Beaux Arts Ball, the Bal Masqué for the next thirty-five years would popularly be known as the yearly review of Cleveland's Latin Quarter.

Proceeds from the next two Bal Masqués enabled the club to purchase for its clubhouse an old building on East 36th between Euclid and Superior. Members continued to paint and hold exhibitions but sold very few paintings. Like other Cleveland artists, they would have to wait for the inception of the Cleveland Art Show (the future May Show) in 1919 for the development of a viable local art market. The clubhouse walls were draped with burlap to facilitate the periodic installation and removal of pictures. Exhibitions commonly opened with a music recital; on one occasion the versatile August Biehle, a club member, was featured as a solo vocalist. In 1915 a rather perverse attempt was made to make a plaster life mask of each member's face for posterity, but the attempt was abandoned when the technique could not be painlessly adapted to the club's many bearded faces. The theme for the Bal Masqué that year was "Parisian" with French artists' smocks. The following year the annual event received new inspiration from the explosive color and bold design of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, which stopped in Cleveland to perform Stravinsky's "Firebird." Some of the city's newspapers, perhaps promoting civic pride, boasted that Cleveland's bohemian activity was second only to New York's.¹⁵ Ernst Klein, an early member, asserted that a growing city like Cleveland needed such activity: "All the larger cities that have an art development have a similar club to the Kokoon Club."¹⁶

After the war, new movements in art from Europe, including Fauvism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Dadaism, infused the Kokoon Club with a new spirit and bolder confidence. The influx of these foreign-based movements led to a common misperception among the American public that equated new art with political extremism and immorality.¹⁷ For the Kokoon Club it meant a chronic effort to defend its reputation. It was often—although never in the newspapers—unfairly referred to as the "Cocaine Arts Club."¹⁸ Some members of the then more conservative Cleveland Society of Artists, the city's other major artists' organization, believed the Kokooners weren't serious artists but a rather snobbish group whose main purpose was to have fun.¹⁹ Some Kokoon members, on the other hand, looked at the other organization as an enclave for egotists only interested in glory—a characteristic anathema to the Kokoon Club's fraternal emphasis.²⁰ Despite rival prejudices,



*Revelers at the 1925 Bal Masqué.
Courtesy of the Northeast Ohio Art
Museum.*

the two organizations sometimes combined to put on exhibitions and social events. Henry Keller was a member of both organizations; Frank Wilcox, a leading Society of Artists member, was an associate member of the Kokoon Club.

As a kind of huge performance art spectacle the Bal Masqués of the early 1920s became larger and more risqué. Costumes and posters were inspired by *Gerlach's Jugendbücherei*, a series of books on German Expressionism, a movement based on psychological emotionalism. In Cleveland, such books were generally procured at Laukhuff's Bookstore, in the Taylor Arcade; for years Laukhuff's was the Kokoon Club's link to new art movements in Europe.²¹ In preparation for the Bal Masqué the Club sponsored workshops and demonstrations for costume design and make-up.

The Bal Masqué of 1922 was considered especially good in decorations. Under an enormous "Sacred Gate" embossed with the Roman god Pan in plaster of Paris, the costume committee, as was customary, refused entrance to anyone wearing a conventional costume. Several policemen were also there to verify invitations and enforce the dry laws. From the balconies and ceilings hung clashing, brightly-colored banners, and on the dance floor a girl dressed as a green frog performed acrobatic tricks. An enormous green monster, a mechanical contrivance, staggered haltingly across the room, its eyes blazing magenta fire. Anticipating the imminent discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb, "Egyptian Jazz" was the dance rage. Indeed, one member came dressed as a Cubist King Tut. Carl Moellman was a totem pole, while other members emulated Ali Baba and his forty thieves. Fashionably incongruous, one man came wearing an office building, a plug hat, and a hot water bottle.

But as the Bal Masqué grew more fantastic and outrageous, tension with City Hall increased. Each year the newspapers contained lurid accounts of how much flesh was revealed. Some women exhibited prototypes of the string bikini; others wore even less, ingeniously camouflaging their nakedness with body paint or cellophane.²² Philip Kaplan, a former Kokoon Club president, in remembering some of the 1920s Bal Masqués recalls that "It was no big thing if a woman lost her top; we didn't get upset. We were artists."²³ He acknowledges, however, that some of the members' wives did occasionally voice objections, and that a distinction was observed between nudity and obscenity. Sometimes problems arose with homosexual couples who viewed the event as a rare occasion (in those days) to publicly express themselves. If they became too demonstrative they were generally asked to leave.²⁴ During Prohibition the club discreetly worked out arrangements with local bootleggers; information on how to get alcohol past the police was available at the club headquarters. Nevertheless drunkenness was not tolerated.²⁵ Behavior was regarded as a matter of aesthetics.²⁶

But what the artists judged to be aesthetic did not always meet with the approval of City Hall. In 1923 Mayor Kohler disallowed the Bal Masqué under the pretense that the event fell within Lent. Problems had escalated the previous year when, prior to the event, a letter appeared in one of the newspapers warning Kohler and "his clean-up crew. . . to leave town

in order to not be accessories to the fact."²⁷ Although the club quickly disclaimed the letter, the Mayor was not pleased. As an act of appeasement Kohler and the entire City Council were invited to attend the 1922 affair as special observers. The Mayor accepted at the last minute and a giant seahorse was removed from one of the balconies to make room for "Cleveland Statesmen."

Unfortunately for Kohler, his decision to attend became a political liability in what was still an essentially conservative city. He was embarrassed by his own police department, when, after the Bal Masqué, the manager of Masonic Hall publicly complained that over fifty off-duty policemen had attempted to gain entrance with their badges.²⁸ In order to salvage some of his political integrity—but using Lent as an excuse—the Mayor rejected the club's application for a dance hall permit. The club was furious, but helpless. In an editorial they proclaimed, "For art's sake we cannot say what we think of Mayor Kohler. The truth will live and art is long, while life in office is fleeting."²⁹

In 1924 the Bal Masqué was resumed. In order to ensure its continuation, however, the club's board of governors had to submit a "list of suggestions" to the City Safety Director. Published in the newspapers, the list, among other things, "suggested" that Kokoon Club officers attend in formal attire and remain off the dance floor. Another requirement—perhaps tongue in cheek—stated "That each guest invited must give the name of a club member. This to aid us in determining the character of the guest."³⁰ During the Bal Masqué the restrictions were enforced and—to further assure the public that City Hall was doing its job—there was a police raid midway through the evening.

During the 1920s the club occupied a house at 2121 East 21st Street. Some of the partitions were knocked down to accommodate a multi-purpose room, used variously as a studio, lounge, and gallery. Also used for social events, it featured a piano and—it was rumored in one newspaper—a concealed bar. As a leading artists' organization in Cleveland, the club was commonly praised for bringing to the city major art critics and artists who frequently used the house for lectures and exhibitions. In 1924 special events included four illustrated talks on architecture, watercolors of German impressionist Alois Erbach, and etchings and lithographs of the French artist Lepere. That same year the club sponsored a field trip to the Chesterland caves that involved painting and sketching during the day, and a dinner dance held in the caves during the evening. Other club members gathered to paint at a cottage on Lake Erie, the club's summer home.

In their own exhibitions, usually held twice a year, the Kokooners continued to receive ambivalent reviews in local art columns. The adjectives "extremist," "individualistic," and "bizarre" were often used in description. A critic from the *Cleveland News* castigated them for "mistaking distortions for discoveries."³¹ A 1927 exhibition drew considerable attention mainly because of the many nudes exhibited. As an indication of the public's moral conservatism, not one of the nudes sold, an injustice that pushed one sympathetic critic to sarcastically conclude: "and thus Cleveland may be held up as a shining example for other cities."³²



A chick from the 1927 Bal Masqué. Courtesy of the Northeast Ohio Art Museum.

As a force for modern art in Cleveland, the club exerted influence in restaurants, stores, and theaters, a number of which, wishing to have a modernistic look, hired Kokoon artists to do their interior design.³³ The results were often strikingly reminiscent of past Kokoon Ball themes. Some members, like Philip Kaplan, helped design sets for local little theaters. And businesses wishing to imbue their advertising with a contemporary look used Kokoon artists.³⁴

So exactly who were these Kokoon artists? On June 29, 1980, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* ran a feature entitled "An Early Provincial Modernist," profiling William Sommer. The article discussed the rediscovery of Sommer as an early twentieth-century modernist whose work received some recognition in its day but has remained largely unknown to posterity. As co-founder of the Kokoon Club, and its oldest member, Sommer—along with Moellman and Keller—served as teacher and intellectual leader to the younger generation of Kokoon artists. As he was a lithographer, his paintings are often characterized by bold color and draftsmanship; his favorite subjects were children and farm scenes. Living on a farm south of Cleveland, he became widely known in local art circles as the Sage of Brandywine. A close friend of the poet Hart Crane, Sommer was the subject of Crane's poem, "Sunday Morning Apples." Sommer's son Edwin, also a Kokooner, was widely known for fantasy themes as an illustrator of children's books.

Joseph Jicha, a leading advertising artist whose work frequently appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, distinguished himself as one of Cleveland's best watercolorists. In 1929 he placed first in the annual international water color exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago and for many years served as a juror for that exhibition. August Biehle began as a decorator before mass-produced wall paper came into vogue. He studied painting in Munich and his landscapes, like those of many other Kokoon artists, often exude a strong German feeling. He was one of the few early Kokoon artists who continued to assimilate new artistic values throughout his life; his later works became progressively abstract. Biehle exhibited in twenty-four May Shows at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Born and educated in Germany, Rolf Stoll arrived in New York at the age of twenty-three. He followed the pattern of many Cleveland artists; his tutor recommended Cleveland as a good place to seek a livelihood in the commercial arts, and there he moved. Stoll became the city's finest portrait painter; among his commissions were twenty faculty members of Western Reserve University. Outside of Cleveland he was nationally acclaimed for his flower pieces.³⁵ One of Stoll's portraits is of fellow Kokoon artist Henry Keller, commissioned by the National Academy of Design in 1939 when Keller was elected a member. An art instructor at the Cleveland School of Art (now the Cleveland Institute of Art), Keller in his day was considered one of America's foremost animal painters.³⁶ Although he was one of the club's early revolutionaries, later in life he soured on new movements in art, which he came to view as sensationalist. Though a married man, Keller was also known for his long-standing relationship with Grace Kelly, a



William Sommer (photo by Albert Duval, 1932).

Cleveland artist and later art critic for the *Plain Dealer*, who championed his paintings and was sometimes addressed as "Mrs. Keller."³⁷

As a young man, William Zorach, one of America's most noted modern sculptors, exhibited with the Kokoon Club. Joseph Boersig, a fireman, was one of the few members not professionally employed in some area of art. Boersig's water-colors documented many of the city's worst fires. Some of his most popular paintings were of fire trucks rushing pellmell to the scene of a fire. The club roster also included J. Milton Dyer, a leading architect and national authority on Gothic architecture who—ironically, in view of the club's clashes with city officials—designed City Hall.

Many other Kokoon artists contributed to Cleveland's national reputation in water colors. These included John Anderson, Morris Grossman, Fred Rentschler, Carl Binder, Oscar Liebner, and Robert Konnersman—all now largely forgotten. And what of Moellman, the club's chief organizer? He became a highly successful businessman, the founder and president of Continental Lithograph, at one time employing 150 lithographers.

Like most American artists between the wars, most Kokooners, despite their avowed radicalism, were somewhere between the old masters and moderns. But it was their posters, usually produced in connection with the Bal Masqué, that most distinguished the club.

The poster tradition of course began with Moellman and Sommer, and the club's strong roots in lithographic art. In the early years of the Bal Masqué enormous posters were produced by individual artists and hung on the ballroom walls. Over the years the posters evolved into a continuous frieze (done on butcher's paper), usually seven feet high. A typical frieze might be done in gold, green, and Chinese red, with a procession of dancing figures in a slightly abstracted, rhythmic helter-skelter.



Butcher-paper frieze decorating the ballroom for the 1927 Bal Masqué. Courtesy of the Northeast Ohio Art Museum.



Artist James Minter with his award-winning poster-invitation for the 1931 ball (this time called a "Bal Papillon"—butterfly ball).

The club later introduced an annual contest among its members for the Bal Masqué poster invitation (the posters were folded twice and mailed as invitations). The best design was awarded a prize of \$200, not an inconsiderable sum for an artist in those days. Taken seriously, the competition produced some fantastic and lurid examples of lithographic art. In 1925 Jicha's design placed first; Edwin Sommer's second-place design went on the program cover and Sommer also did the ticket design, printed on gold stock. Stoll contributed a black-and-white drawing for the envelope. Never intended for general public viewing, the posters exhibit a creative license seldom found in the artists' more serious works. In these ephemeral pieces they were at their most modernistic. Some of Jicha's surviving posters, for instance, display a quirky yet intriguing combination of racy art deco motifs with a religious mysticism not unlike that found in the works of William Blake. A commonly used motif in the club's posters was a naked or semi-naked woman, a symbol which—in the bohemian spirit—advertised their liberalism. The poster invitations developed into a unique genre. As transitory as each year's Bal Masqué, most were probably thrown out with the decorations.

By the late 1920s the Kokoon Arts Club had become generally acceptable to the community. At the 1929 Bal Masqué the only reportable incident was of someone throwing snuff into the melee of dancers. The city Safety Director, in attendance the year before, confided to one reporter that since more

clothes were being worn, the event had become rather boring.³⁸ Glenn L. Martin, maker of Martin bombers for the Navy, was there—an indication that the Bal Masqué had made inroads into the upper levels of Cleveland society. Later that year the club held a large auction but, despite the large crowd, paintings sold at disappointingly low prices. The Cleveland Museum of Art's annual May Show was probably partly to blame: as the premiere annual event to promote local artists, it seems to have become the only event at which Clevelanders were willing to pay reasonable prices for locally produced art. Another probable cause was the notoriety of the Bal Masqués, which had obscured the public's perception of the Kokooners as serious artists. Although unjustly so, they were better known in Cleveland for their bohemian exhibitionism than for their artistic abilities. Praise, however, was not entirely absent. In a 1930 retrospective, Cleveland's *Bystander* aptly noted that the club had "encouraged the experimenting, the freedom of thought and view point, the radicalism which makes for progress in art."³⁹

That such an active art life existed in Cleveland in the early part of this century might seem surprising. Because artists had to seek a practical livelihood, they came in large numbers to thriving smaller cities like Cleveland to find work in schools, potteries, publishing and engraving houses, and lithography firms. Many, if not most, had received at least some training abroad; they had experienced new ideas and a larger world. In the provincial cities of America they had only each other; few had their own studios; the galleries and the public did not know them, or if they did, rarely sympathized; and the well-to-do were still primarily interested in collecting the old masters of Europe. In organizations like the Kokoon Arts Club artists encouraged one another, shared ideas, and tried to promote themselves to a benighted public.

During the 1930s the Kokoon Arts Club began a slow but steady decline. Many members lost their jobs because of the Depression and now worked on WPA art projects. In addition to that, many of the original members were no longer involved and, as a club, their style of organized bohemianism was becoming outmoded. By the late 1930s some of the younger members interested in pursuing livelier careers in art moved to New York. Whereas commercial artists in the 1910s and '20s had been concentrated in several large firms, there was now a diversity of artists involved in such relatively new areas as industrial design, working for a greater number of businesses all over the city. Cleveland artists would never again form such a closely knit community. Only 200 attended the Bal Masqué in 1936; 1800 had attended in 1925. The last Bal Masqué was held sometime in the early 1940s. In 1956, down to twenty-five members, the club disbanded. ■

Notes

¹James E. Shelley, "Art," *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: The Indiana University Press, 1987), 50.

²"Art Review," *Cleveland Town Topics*, 29 July 1911, 9.

³John F. Bryan, "Continental Lithograph Adds to Cleveland's Cultural Fame," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 31 May 1950, 13.



Bal Masqué poster-invitation for 1937.

- ⁴⁴"Art Review," *Cleveland Town Topics*, 26 August 1911, 15.
- ⁴⁵Carl Robbin, "Cleveland's Bohemian Art Club," *Bystander*, 10 January 1930, 16.
- ⁴⁶*Cleveland Town Topics*, 26 August 1911, 15.
- ⁴⁷Nancy Wixom, *Cleveland Institute of Art: The First Hundred Years* (Cleveland: Cleveland Institute of Art, 1982), 22.
- ⁴⁸Raymond O'Neil, *Cleveland Leader*, 11 January 1914.
- ⁴⁹Henry Keller, "Editorial," *Cleveland Town Topics*, 10 January 1914, 13.
- ⁵⁰The influence of Cezanne came through Sommer and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Keller, both of whom had significant influence as teachers on the younger members of the club.
- ⁵¹Robbin, 16.
- ⁵²Robbin, 16.
- ⁵³Robbin, 16.
- ⁵⁴Robert Bordner, "Kokoon Bal to Be Riot of Color," *Cleveland Press*, 1 February 1930, 5.
- ⁵⁵The claim that Cleveland's bohemian activity was second only to New York's was periodically voiced in the newspapers, especially during the early 1920s. Although an intriguing assertion, the newspapers do not indicate on what this comparison was based. In the late 1920s the epithet "Cleveland's famous Kokoon Art Club" was commonly used.
- ⁵⁶From undated newspaper clipping, ca. 1918-24 (Clipping File—Kokoon Arts Club, Cleveland Museum of Art Library).
- ⁵⁷Barbara Rose, *American Art Since 1900: A Critical History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 76.
- ⁵⁸Phone interview with Philip Kaplan, 18 May 1986.
- ⁵⁹Interview with Lawrence Blazys, 10 June 1986.
- ⁶⁰Kaplan phone interview.
- ⁶¹Philip Kaplan, "The Making of a Collector: Laukhuff's of Cleveland," *Icarus* 10, no. 2 (1981): 119.
- ⁶²Kaplan interview, 16 June 1986.
- ⁶³Kaplan interview.
- ⁶⁴Kaplan interview.
- ⁶⁵Kaplan interview.
- ⁶⁶It is worth noting that in conversations the author had with former Kokoon Club presidents Philip Kaplan and John Gullo, both men emphatically wished it to be known that lewdness was never condoned in the Bal Masqués.
- ⁶⁷"Art Review," *Cleveland Topics*, 21 January 1922, 15.
- ⁶⁸"Kokoon Arts Club Dance to Be Permitted," *Cleveland Times*, 20 February 1924, 14.
- ⁶⁹*Cleveland Topics*, 21 January 1922, 15.
- ⁷⁰*Cleveland Topics*, 20 February 1924, 15.
- ⁷¹"Sommer Shows 7 of Worst in Exhibition," undated clipping, ca. mid-1920s (Clipping File—Sommer, William, Cleveland Museum of Art Library).
- ⁷²Grace Kelly, "Nudes Go Begging In Kokoon Sale," *Plain Dealer*, 7 December 1927, 20.
- ⁷³Louis H. Merian, *Kokoon Arts Club Narrative and Roster* (Cleveland: Kokoon Arts Club, 1931), 5.
- ⁷⁴Merian, 5.
- ⁷⁵"Cleveland Artist—No. 9," *Cleveland Press*, 30 November 1946, 5.
- ⁷⁶"H. G. Keller Rites Being Arranged," *Plain Dealer*, 4 August 1949, 13.
- ⁷⁷Mark Gottlieb, "In the Time of the Bohemians," *Northern Ohio Live* (November 1982), 53.
- ⁷⁸*Plain Dealer*, 21 February 1928 (Clipping File—Kokoon Arts Club, Cleveland Museum of Art Library).
- ⁷⁹Robbin, 16.

Cleveland's First Woman Physician

Myra Merrick struggled to bring medical care to the poor

Charlotte S. Newman

Few are familiar with the name of Myra King Merrick, Cleveland's first woman physician and the first woman to practice west of the Alleghenies. She was family doctor to some of the city's most influential families; she worked tirelessly for the right of women to enroll in medical schools and practice in hospitals, even founding her own medical school; she began Cleveland's first clinic for working-class women and their children. Yet her name receives scant mention in histories of the city, and only a few medical historians have ever heard of her.

There are two reasons for history's neglect. Women have been left out of general history books because these concentrate on political and industrial developments, and nineteenth-century women were unable to vote, enter contracts, or, if married, hold property in their own names. Secondly, Myra Merrick came from the working class, another group ignored until recently by historians. She had no connections—except as physician—with the city's powerful families. Her medical education, though more thorough than that of most of her fellow physicians, followed an irregular course scorned by the medical establishment.

She was born Myra King on August 15, 1825 in Hinckley, Leicestershire, England, the second child of Richard King, a brickmaker, and his wife Elizabeth.

Oppressed by the brutal working conditions of the time, the King family, with Myra and four-year-old George, joined the many who sought a better life in the United States. They landed on the day before Myra's first birthday, and were soon settled in the mill town of Taunton, Massachusetts, near Boston. Richard King found employment in a printing company, and soon three more children were born. From the age of eight Myra worked in Taunton's labor-hungry textile mills.



Charlotte Newman has been writing and editing for a long time—things like book jackets, catalogue copy, press releases, newsletters for nonprofit organizations, concert program notes—but this is the first article she has had published under her name. Newman earned her B.A. in English at Manhattanville College in New York, and now lives in Cleveland; she describes herself as a student and mother of four. She is an active volunteer for several arts organizations, especially the Cleveland Orchestra and the Cleveland Ballet. She became interested in Myra Merrick while looking into the history of Women's General Hospital for a course. "I became intrigued by the contradictory information. I decided to find out what really happened."

Conditions in New England factories were hardly better than in the English Midlands. Thick stone walls with few windows made the mills damp and cold in winter, stifling in summer. These buildings, always gloomy, produced not only respiratory ailments but fires and explosions. In some mills the women were locked into their workrooms, making escape from fire impossible. The machinery was noisy and dangerous. Mill owners employed whole families: by the mid-1820s, 45% of the workers in those dank, hazard-filled buildings were children.¹ Child laborers like Myra worked twelve to fifteen hours per day, excluding only Sundays.² Unscrupulous overseers sometimes altered clocks or delayed bells in order to squeeze the last bit of productivity from their "girls." Young women could clear \$1 to \$3 per week if they lived in their employers' boarding houses—possibly somewhat more if, like Myra, they lived at home. (For comparison, a weekly newspaper might cost \$2 per year, a house could be rented for about \$400 per year; you could buy a pair of scissors for \$.10 or a bottle of patent medicine for \$1.)³ Under Massachusetts law, children could be employed only nine months per year, with the other three months reserved for schooling. Myra obviously got her education somehow, for what little survives of her writing shows an exceptionally intelligent and literate woman.

Even as an eight-year-old, Myra developed a reputation as a skilled and industrious worker. Years later, she told her daughter-in-law that her manager had told the other workers to "watch Myra, she never blurs her patterns."⁴ This dreary work not only developed a habit of industriousness in Myra, but it cultivated a sympathy for the lot of working women and their children, as well as a determination to escape from the spirit-deadening life of a factory worker.

From 1837 to 1839, America's first economic downturn since the beginning of industrialization threw thousands of mill workers out of work and into poverty. By the end of the decade, the King family had left industrialized Massachusetts and headed southwest.

Census records show that in 1840, Richard King and his family were living in East Liverpool, Ohio, where the growing pottery and ceramics industries could provide employment. The last of their six children was born there that year. The Kings stayed there only until 1842, when they moved, probably via the busy Ohio Canal, to Lorain County.

Among the first settlers in Eaton Township, at that time still mostly forest, they cleared a site for a homestead and a farm, and the family began a gradual climb toward prosperity. Richard King built one of the first brick kilns in Lorain County and sold brick to other pioneers. The family still depended on Myra's earning powers, however, and she worked as a seamstress for a man named Scott in Elyria.

During the mid-1840s, there occurred in Elyria what an early history calls "a serious epidemic of sickness," perhaps malaria or some form of dysentery. (Smallpox had been effectively conquered by vaccination, and epidemics of Asiatic cholera were common only in the crowded larger cities.) Myra volunteered to nurse. "From that time," says the history, "the doctors quarreled as to which might have her in an important case."⁵

Also during the 1840s, Myra met Charles H. Merrick, to whom she was married on June 19, 1848. They moved immediately to New Haven, Connecticut, and, apparently soon after, Charles fell seriously ill. At that point, as an 1894 biographical note quaintly phrases it, "she determined to qualify herself for fighting the battle of life alone."⁶ Charles Merrick's name is missing from the 1850 census, lending credibility to the story of an illness serious enough to confine him to an institution. The same census shows Myra living apart from him in New Haven, with Charles's sister's family.

It has been suggested that Myra became a doctor in order to care for her husband, but it seems more likely that medicine attracted her simply as a way to avoid the squalor and insecurity of factory work. As a physician, she could not be told how long to work; she wouldn't be shut up in a mill; no one could reduce her wages or fire her when times were bad; no man would be her overseer.

The medical profession then bore little resemblance to its twentieth-century version. Medicine was considered simply a trade, like carpentry or harness-making. Medical education was primitive and unregulated. A physician could augment his income by compounding drugs for his patients, but few of his medications had any curative powers, and many had the opposite effect. Basic medical knowledge was extremely limited. Antiseptic surgery was not generally practiced until after the Civil War, and bacterial infection was only beginning to be understood toward the end of the century.

Physicians were divided about methods of treatment. Traditional medicine relied on the concept of allopathy, which held that disease resulted from an imbalance of "humors" in the body, causing excessive tension in the vascular, digestive, and nervous systems. The allopathic physician treated his patients with remedies which produced symptoms opposite to those which the patient exhibited—a sensible approach, one would think, until one considered their techniques. To relieve "vascular pressure," the mainstay was massive bloodletting, using unsterilized instruments and leeches. To flush out dangerous humors, the allopathic physician used blistering agents and harsh emetics containing mercury, arsenic, and strychnine, liberally laced with opium and alcohol. When their therapies failed, physicians applied them with even greater vigor. It's a wonder that any patients survived their treatments—many, especially babies and children, did not.

In reaction, many people turned to physicians trained in irregular traditions, or, in rural areas, to uneducated folk healers. The various irregular schools were united in their opposition to the harsh remedies of the allopaths. Thomsonian physicians promoted the ideas of Samuel Thomson (1769-1843), a New Hampshire herbal practitioner who believed in one disease: internal cold; and one cure: the restoration of bodily heat through steam baths and such "hot" botanic remedies as cayenne pepper. Hydropaths treated illness with either "pure" or mineral waters, shunning drugs. A patient at a hydropathic institute enjoyed a daily schedule of baths and moderate exercise, and a diet which followed the principles of the health reformer Sylvester Graham: fruits, vegetables, and grains, with



Myra King Merrick (1825-1899).

ample water to drink. Eclectic practitioners combined the tenets of these two schools with those of the most influential of the irregular sects, homeopathy.

Homeopathic physicians followed the theories of Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), an advocate of hygiene, exercise, fresh air, and sensible diet. His medical philosophy, set forth in his *Organon of Rational Healing* (1810), hinged on three principles. First, like cures like. A drug which produced certain symptoms in a healthy person would cure those same symptoms in a sick person. Second, drugs were to be administered in extremely diluted form, often as little as one part drug per million parts water. Third, only one drug was to be taken at a time. While the botanical drugs favored by homeopaths were no more effective than those favored by other schools, their extreme dilution at least rendered them harmless and allowed the body to heal itself.

Homeopathy became extremely popular at mid-century, for it had more success than traditional medicine in treating victims of yellow fever in the south and Asiatic cholera in the north. Allopaths were quick to call the irregulars "quacks": the founding of the American Medical Association by the allopathic school in 1847 was partially a reaction to the economic threat posed by the irregulars. In response to the allopaths' attempts to exclude homeopaths from medical associations and hospital staffs, homeopathic physicians started their own colleges, and opened hospitals to provide clinical training for their graduates. (Cleveland's Huron Road Hospital began as a homeopathic institution.)

For both regular and irregular physicians, training was an informal process, unregulated by governments, universities, or professional associations. Marie Zakrewska, one of six women to graduate from Cleveland's Western Reserve Medical College in the 1850s, described the process in her autobiography:

The young student had to find a "preceptor," a physician of good standing, with whom he studied the preliminaries necessary for entering a medical college or school. He also visited patients with this preceptor and assisted the latter in every way possible. The student thus became familiar with the details of practice even before matriculating regularly in a medical college. . . . Any student who could bring certificates from an acceptable preceptor could easily procure a diploma by attending the medical school of any college for two short successive winter sessions, often of only sixteen weeks' duration.⁷

Medical schools were proprietary institutions, operated for the profit of the professors, who sold tickets to their lectures. No entrance examinations were required until 1881, when the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania became the first to test its applicants.

Less prestigious medical schools were willing to take almost any paying customer in order to bolster their enrollments. Completion of two courses of lectures (the second being an exact duplicate of the first) guaranteed a degree, and in most states possession of a degree constituted a license to practice. This freedom from regulation contributed to medicine's lack of prestige, for it allowed the charlatan to practice with impunity. But it also facilitated women's entry into the

field. It was the irregular medical schools that were first to accept women, partly to gain support for their philosophies, partly to sustain enrollment.

Another factor promoting the entrance of women to medical schools was a concern for woman's virtue, which society held to be higher, yet more fragile, than a man's. By midcentury, midwives had gradually been displaced by male doctors—yet contemporary morals promoted the paradox that, while it was improper for a woman to practice medicine, it was also improper for a male doctor to perform a gynecological examination. The result was the absurd practice of requiring a male doctor to deliver babies with a sheet hung between him and his patient. But this moral absurdity denied effective medical care to many women. Ladies were actually praised in some quarters—their obituaries, for example—for putting "virtue" ahead of health.

By the mid-1850s many had begun to see the fallacy of excluding women from midwifery and medicine, though not always for reasons which the twentieth century can accept. If women risked their virtue by consulting male physicians, said the reformers, they should be provided with female doctors. Other reformers used a different argument, holding that the entry of women into the profession would improve its sleazy reputation.

The very anarchy of medicine, then, made it an ideal field for Myra Merrick. The brevity of the training process must have appealed to her, as well as the fact that it was not a profession for the rich, as it had long been in Europe. The only capital required to enter the medicine business was \$50 or so for tuition, plus the price of half a dozen textbooks. After graduation, no expensive and elaborate equipment was necessary to set up a practice. Since the physician was his (or her) own boss, hours could easily be adjusted to accommodate other demands on one's time.

In 1848, Myra's immediate problem was to obtain training. We know that she secured as her preceptors Eli Ives, Professor of Theory and Practice of Medicine at Yale, and his son Levi Ives, a skilled obstetrician, two of New Haven's most respected physicians, and the Merricks' family doctors.

Her apprenticeship served, Myra faced the problem of obtaining a medical degree. She journeyed to New York City, where she studied at Hyatt's Academy Rooms. She also attended the lectures of Mary Gove Nichols, an early advocate of cleanliness, healthy diet, and exercise as a method of preventing disease, and one of the pioneers of the hydropathic movement. Nichols had gained considerable notoriety with the publication of her "Lectures to Ladies on Anatomy and Physiology," in which she argued that women must understand the workings of their bodies in order to maintain their health. It was likely she who encouraged Myra to pursue her education in upstate New York.

The Central Medical College in Syracuse,⁸ an eclectic school, had admitted three women in 1849. In 1851 Myra Merrick enrolled. She graduated at the top of her class on May 27, 1852, and recorded the event in her diary:



It was to escape the grinding poverty that made it a necessity for children like these to labor at unsafe jobs for long hours that Myra Merrick sought medical training.

Have had this afternoon two honors conferred upon me. The degree of Doctor of Medicine by the Faculty of Central Medical College and a prize from the New York State Eclectic Society for making the best proficiency among the students during the spring term. I was surprised when it was stated that I was to receive this prize for I had not directed my efforts to that object and I knew that two or three of the students were striving for it.⁹

Her medical degree in hand, Myra returned to Ohio, where she and Charles chose to settle in Cleveland, then entering a period of dramatic growth as a transportation hub and industrial center. The Cleveland Medical College, under J. J. Delamater, had accepted a few women (though this courtesy would cease with his retirement), and the influential women of the city lent their support financially, if not socially, to the female students. The Ohio Female Education Society, led by Caroline Severance, had established the Medical Loan Fund Association to support women medical students, requiring only that they "give a written pledge of honor that when they shall become well-established. . . they will return to the society, the sum loaned without interest."¹⁰

With her background in hydropathy, Myra would have been aware that a fine facility, the Cleveland Water Cure Establishment, was located only two miles from the center of town. It described itself in the 1852 City Directory: "The ever-living springs are bubbling up from hill and dale in copious profusion, to bless the weary, comfort the distressed and give health to many a sufferer."¹¹ Cleveland also had its own homeopathic institution, the Western College of Homeopathic Medicine on Ohio Street, overlooking the lake. Its advertisement in the City Directory calls it "an ornament to our city," with a faculty composed of "gentlemen of profound scientific and practical ability."¹²

Myra and her husband settled at 33 Miami Street, around the corner from the homeopathic college. Evidently Charles had recovered from whatever ailment plagued him in 1848, for he advertised himself as a builder. By 1856, though, he had abandoned the building trade and was working as a machinist.

Myra's practice grew slowly. Her name appears as attending physician in the county's birth record book beginning in 1852, more frequently later on. The births she attended during the 1850s were to families whose homes were close to her own, so it is likely that she could not afford the horse and buggy which served as a traveling office for the established physician.

No other women practiced medicine in Cleveland until 1857, when, of 105 physicians, three were women: Myra Merrick, homeopath; Elizabeth Grissell, a graduate of the allopathic Cleveland Medical College; and "Mrs. P. M. Price, Clairvoyant."¹³ Though many Cleveland society women were active in reform causes and supported the Medical Loan Fund, they did not turn to physicians of their own sex for medical care, and to invite a woman doctor to tea would have been unthinkable. Myra would have been socially unacceptable on two counts: not only was she a physician, but she was a former factory girl.

Myra's attempts to build a career in Cleveland became complicated when, in 1854 at age twenty-nine, she gave birth to her first child, Richard. A second son, Arthur King Merrick, followed four years later. Most professional women of upper and middle class backgrounds, including those most active in the women's rights movement, retired temporarily after the birth of their first child,¹⁴ but Myra continued to practice medicine, probably because she couldn't afford not to.

In 1858 Charles Merrick borrowed money to open a sawmill and lumber business and moved to North Eaton, Ohio. Myra stayed in Cleveland, maintaining an office in her home, until 1860 when she joined her husband. Finding business success was no easier in rural Lorain County than it had been in Cleveland. Charles took a second job at the local post office to supplement their income. The 1860 census shows that the Merricks were living in relative poverty: their personal property was worth less than \$100, and the value of their real estate was listed at \$1200, which probably included the mill, figures substantially below those given for many of their neighbors. In June, 1861, worried about making the first payment on his debt, Charles joined the Union Army as a private. He was fairly sure that the rebels would be suppressed in short order, though he was not optimistic about preserving the Union after the war.

A skilled fife and bugle player, Charles was appointed principal musician to the Eighth Regiment, Ohio Infantry. He wrote to Myra almost daily for three years, scrawling notes in pencil when his company was on the march. These letters make fascinating (if challenging) reading. When paper was scarce, as it often was, he would fill both sides of the paper with tiny writing, then turn it upside down and write between the finished lines, or turn it sideways and write across the lines.¹⁵

Although he was promoted in 1862 and made do with as little as possible, things were still difficult at home, and the debt was still a long way from being paid. Besides doctoring her neighbors, Myra ran the mill with some help from her brother, planted corn in hope of extra income, took over Charles's job at the North Eaton post office, and cared for the children. When seven-year-old Richard came down with a dangerous fever in the winter of 1862, Charles couldn't come home: the trip would have cost two months' pay. The many pressures of rural life were beginning to affect Myra's health. A photo she sent to her husband in early 1864 revealed a changed woman, and Charles wrote to her in disbelief that "it does look too old for you unless you have had a monstrous sight of care and trouble since I saw you." Tired of isolation and poverty, Myra began to think of returning to her medical practice in Cleveland.

Professionally, she was becoming increasingly frustrated. She missed Cleveland, and felt that she needed additional education in order to improve her medical skills. She considered joining the many women working as nurses in hospitals near the battlefields, but, although the pay would have been fairly generous, she could not leave her children. By the spring of 1863, Myra had had her fill of country life. Accompanied



by her sister Nell, who served as housekeeper and babysitter, she rented a house at 62 Prospect Street and set about rebuilding her practice.

The city had grown rapidly since her departure. During the 1860s its population quadrupled; by 1870 it would reach 93,000, of whom 44% were foreign-born. The war had provided great stimulus to Cleveland's iron, coal-oil, and garment industries, as well as to its railroads. Wartime interruption of European trade had made Cleveland an important trade center for the Great Lakes, while immigrant labor strengthened its shipbuilding industry.

But although war brought prosperity for some, there was hardship for the poor. Housing construction halted during the war effort, and food costs rose. The resulting poverty and overcrowding, along with the appalling number of war casualties, produced more widows, more fatherless children, more sickness. The city's health ordinances and water supplies had failed to keep pace with its growth. There were no sewers, and old wells and cisterns had become contaminated by seepage from outhouses and garbage pits. Contagious diseases swept through the homes of tenement dwellers, attacking children with special fury.

These conditions ensured Myra a practice, though not necessarily a lucrative one. At times she despaired of earning enough to support her children. And she was still in debt. Some sawmill debts remained, and those to whom the debts were owed had their business in Cleveland. By returning she became an easier target for harassment. After prolonged negotiation, a final payment was settled on. Charles was able to send some cash, but even so Myra was hard-pressed to fulfill her husband's desire to "pay it to the last cent even if we have to beg for bread the next day."¹⁶

Boom conditions in post-Civil-War Cleveland left many families still in great poverty, especially single mothers, whom Myra Merrick strove to help.

On July 13, 1864, Charles was discharged from the army, his health permanently damaged by illness and hardship. During his last months as a soldier, he had agonized over what he would do to earn a living. During the summer of 1862, when he had contracted a severe case of dysentery, he had boarded in the camp hospital (which was no more than a tent). While there he had made friends with some of the allopathic surgeons, and, too weak for any assigned duties, had read their books and pamphlets. He had gradually assumed the duties of hospital steward, treating dysentery, pneumonia, scurvy, and venereal disease, as well as battle injuries. As a result, he resolved to study for a medical diploma at one of Cleveland's medical schools. His immediate fear was that he would be drafted back into the army. In that event, a diploma from an allopathic school would secure him an officer's commission and officer's pay. Without a diploma, or with a degree from a homeopathic school, he would be a private again.

Charles entered the first class of the medical college affiliated with St. Vincent's Charity Hospital, which had been founded to care for wounded soldiers. Because of his wartime medical experience he was able to graduate after only one term of lectures. The college was firmly allopathic in philosophy: no homeopaths were allowed on its faculty. Charles's lecture notes show his education to have been an amalgam of new and old techniques. One of his first lectures covered the

The Homeopathic College which first fought against admission of women but later donated space for Myra's dispensary.



use of the stethoscope; the last, on December 9, 1864, discussed "the different ways of bleeding from the veins the arteries and capillaries—cupping, leeching etc."¹⁷ After Charles's graduation, he joined Myra in her offices at their home. Their partnership lasted only a short time; apparently a homeopath and an allopath, even if married, could not be congenial office partners.

During the course of his father's schooling, Arthur, always vulnerable to infections, had been sent back to North Eaton with Nell. He died there on November 6. His death ended a chapter in Myra's life, for her remaining son Richard, at age ten, no longer required close care. Myra's life could now turn outward.

During the late 1860s Myra formed friendships with the few other women physicians in Cleveland, and events thrust her into the role of advocate for the right of women to become physicians. In its early years, the Cleveland Homeopathic Hospital College had accepted women, as had its allopathic rival, the Cleveland Medical College. By October of 1867, conservative elements on the faculty of the homeopathic college, led by its founder Dr. Seth Beckwith, moved to exclude women. His hope was that the exclusion of women would enhance the school's reputation and increase the number of male applicants. Women were to be allowed to purchase tickets to individual lectures, but without hope of graduation. The women students protested, questioning the legality of the action, and presented a petition to the faculty. Their efforts were useless: the treasurer was instructed to refund their fees.

Within a few months, the medical women of Cleveland had organized their own medical college under the leadership of Cleora Seaman, president, and Myra Merrick, professor of obstetrics. The Cleveland Homeopathic Hospital College for Women was located at the corner of Huron and Prospect, "convenient to the principal boarding houses,"¹⁸ and held its first session during the academic year 1867-68. The women declared in their first announcement that

It is not necessary in this enlightened age to enter into extended argument as to the propriety of women approaching the study of medicine with every facility for obtaining a thorough education and with every advantage of technical and clinical instruction afforded the male student.¹⁹

They were firm in their commitment to quality. They used the same textbooks as the rival men's college, and shared faculty in the fields of botany, chemistry, and toxicology. Students were required to be of good moral character, at least twenty years old, and to have apprenticed with a physician for three years. Once admitted, women were required to attend two courses of lectures, and in addition a degree candidate was required to "deliver to the Dean of the Faculty a thesis, composed by herself and in her own hand writing, on some medical subject."²⁰ (No such thesis was required at the men's school.) Arrangements were made for the women to gain clinical experience at the City Infirmary and the new City Hospital.

Recognizing that women were the primary source of health care in families, the school included an innovative program for women who did not intend to practice medicine professionally, "as a means of fitting themselves more fully for domestic and social usefulness."²¹

Myra and Cleora set their tuition at \$60 per term, undercutting their rival's fees by 20%. In addition, some scholarship aid was offered. Tickets for non-degree students were \$12 per course. For its first term, the school attracted between thirty and forty students.

The substantial number of women who applied to the new college was an unhappy surprise to the professors of the Cleveland Homeopathic College. New students had not flocked to their own institution, despite a new (and expensive) building. On April 18, 1868, realizing that a great source of tuition revenue had been excluded, the faculty met and finally agreed to offer the women free use of their lecture rooms for ten years, plus the opportunity for clinical training at the hospital and control of some beds for their patients. Anticipating the failure of any school run by women, they also offered to buy all the assets of the women's college after two years.

The women's response was curt: "We unqualifiedly decline a cooperation with you in your projected plan."²² But they did appoint a committee of trustees to discuss the possibility of women physicians using the hospital facilities of the new building. After discussion, the two groups agreed that a general hospital and a hospital for women would be established at the new building, and that women physicians would have staff privileges at both.

Although a few women did immediately attend the Cleveland Homeopathic College, most women preferred their own school. After the death of Cleora Seaman in 1869, Myra took over the college presidency, retaining her professorship of obstetrics. She involved the students in obstetrical practice, assigning to each her own cases while she stood by to take over a delivery in case of difficulty. Under Myra's direction, the facilities and curriculum of the school expanded. The new science of microscopy was given special attention. Dr. Seaman had left her library and equipment to the school, as well as funds for the establishment of a free dispensary which would accept all patients while giving students experience in a wide range of medical problems.

By August, 1870, the Cleveland Homeopathic College was actively recruiting Myra's students. The faculty printed an extra edition of five thousand copies of its journal, the *Ohio Medical and Surgical Reporter*, featuring a testimonial from a recent graduate. Mrs. Sarah B. Chase detailed the advantages of the college facilities, and urged women to attend:

Could you visit the college during the session and see the perfect order which prevails and the suppression of everything indecorous or ungentlemanly deportment, and observe with what propriety and respect the ladies are treated, you surely would not hesitate to decide in its favor.²³

On July 13, 1871, the Cleveland Homeopathic College placed a newspaper advertisement, welcoming women to its courses and declaring smoothly:

We are convinced by experience that students of both sexes do best under the curriculum of a joint education. We commend these propositions to the careful attention of every woman in the land who is interested in medical education.²⁴

Later that month the boards of trustees of both schools agreed to a merger. It made economic sense, as the women's college was already using the facilities of the other school, and expenses could be reduced by amalgamation. Although Myra Merrick was not opposed in principle to coeducation, some supporters of the women's college were. They protested the legality of the merger, but their efforts were unsuccessful.

Myra was appointed a special lecturer in obstetrics at the homeopathic college, but despite the college's alleged commitment to a "curriculum of joint education," she was permitted to teach only the women. She resigned on October 16, 1871, shortly after the beginning of the fall term. Myra never again taught in a medical school, but she did not sever connections with the college. She continued to serve as preceptor to woman students throughout the 1870s. One of her protégées, Kate Parsons (class of 1873), would later join Myra in establishing a clinic for working-class women. Another, Martha Canfield (class of 1875), won the school's prize for the highest examination grades. A third, Eliza Johnson (class of 1884), married Myra's son Richard and took over her practice when she retired.

In the course of establishing and running the women's college, Myra got to know Hamilton Fisk Biggar, a young Canadian doctor who had graduated from the Cleveland Homeopathic College. Biggar, a surgeon, had influential friends, and when his patients or friends needed a well-qualified obstetrician, he recommended Myra Merrick. In this way she became friends with the reclusive John D. Rockefeller, and the power of this connection enabled her to win as patients the wives of the Standard Oil Company executives. She was present at the birth of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1874, and delivered the daughter of Rockefeller's partner, Samuel Andrews, in 1876. Other prominent Cleveland names appear in the county birth records with Myra's name as attending physician, but her name also appears as obstetrician to many working-class patients, who in fact made up the bulk of her practice.

Meanwhile, her marriage had ended. After an unsuccessful medical career, Charles Merrick left Myra and Cleveland, eventually moving to Seattle. In 1881 Myra divorced him on the grounds of willful absence. Alone, in her fifties, her son Richard an adult, she turned her efforts to benefit more directly the people least served by Cleveland's health care establishment, the poor working women and their children.

More than a decade after its end, the Civil War was still affecting the women of Cleveland. Some had been widowed during the war; the husbands of others had died more slowly of wartime injuries, or had lived on, unable to work. Many husbands who survived the war were killed or crippled in factory accidents. Whatever the reason, women worked, some as domestics, others in factories—rolling cigars or sewing coats



Dr. Hamilton Fisk Biggar steered wealthy patients to Myra and later ran the Free Dispensary's surgical clinic.

and suits. Mothers of young children, unable to afford child care, took in laundry and ironing. Some spent twelve to sixteen hours a day doing piecework for the garment industry, getting such low wages that their children were forced to work alongside them. Others simply left their children unsupervised while they worked in factories. Some women took in boarders, usually male transients who sometimes left them with illegitimate babies. The most desperate were driven to illegal home work—bootlegging and prostitution.

Their poverty allowed them no access to the amenities so crucial for preserving health: decent food, sufficient living space, warm clothing and bedcovers, good water, soap. Living in cold and dirt, their children suffered from rickets, scurvy, stunted growth; from lice and worms; from infected cuts and poorly-healed fractures; from ear and eye problems, from deadly intestinal infections. The women themselves were constantly exhausted and malnourished. Unaccustomed to seeking professional medical help and unable to pay for it, they were, anyway, excluded by the "moral" stance of the medical profession that held that dirt, sickness, and alcoholism were evidence of sinfulness, not of poverty.

Clearly there was a need in Cleveland for sympathetic care for women and children, and Myra Merrick set out to provide it. With the help of Martha Canfield, Kate Parsons, and other friends, she organized and headed the Cleveland Medical and Surgical Dispensary Society. The faculty of the Cleveland Homeopathic College allotted half of the college museum to be converted into a two-room clinic. The dispensary opened on May 1, 1878. It held clinics every morning except Sunday, and was staffed by a permanent dispensary physician and her assistant. In addition, each of the founding physicians donated one morning to seeing patients. Hamilton Biggar provided a free surgical clinic on Thursday afternoons.

The women who flocked to the dispensary received more than medical care. The doctors taught mothers to care properly for their children, and found jobs for many who were unemployed. Women were referred to other community organizations which provided help or hospitalization as needed. During its first year the dispensary served 846 adults and 329 children. The resident physician made 253 home visits. Six babies were delivered. Only five patients died.

In subsequent years, the dispensary grew steadily. During the second year, Rockefeller contributed funds to provide a hospital bed in the homeopathic Huron Road Hospital. By its tenth year, the dispensary treated almost four thousand patients. Over the first decade, the average cost of treating one patient was less than seventeen cents—a figure which attests to the energy and selflessness of its doctors.

Fund raising was always the dispensary's major problem. Though some wealthy Clevelanders sent contributions each year, these gifts were the table-scrap of their philanthropy. Rockefeller, for example, provided only about \$500 per year at a time when he gave away over a million dollars annually.²⁵ Flora Stone Mather sent \$75 in 1888, the same year she gave \$50,000 to endow a chair in history at Western Reserve University. Over the years, she and her husband would give over six million dollars to the University and less than a thousand

to the dispensary. To raise meaningful funds, social contacts were essential. Though Rockefeller's friendship had enhanced Myra's career, it was never able to gain her access to the parlors or the checkbooks of Cleveland society.

Moreover, she was beginning to slow down. Charles Merrick, who had remarried and intermittently practiced medicine in Washington and Oregon, died in 1890. Myra was able to live independently until 1893, when a weakening heart forced her to move in with her son Richard and his wife and daughter. By this time, she had completely retired, though she still remained president of the dispensary. She stayed with her son's family until her death from heart disease on November 10, 1899, aged seventy-four years. Newspapers from Philadelphia to Omaha, as well as the *New York Times*, carried her obituary, praising her "enviable reputation in the art of healing."²⁶ A funeral train took her body to Lorain County, where she was buried next to her parents and her son Arthur.

Before her death, Myra and the other doctors connected with the dispensary were able to take a step toward perpetuating its work beyond their lifetimes. In January of 1894, the Women and Children's Free Medical and Surgical Dispensary was incorporated under the laws of the state of Ohio. Its purposes were formalized: to provide care for poor women and their children, and to provide opportunities for women doctors to practice their profession. Under the leadership of Dr. Martha Canfield, the dispensary survived, and became Women's Hospital, a twelve-bed institution, that grew, by 1929, to be the third-largest maternity center in Cleveland. During the 1950s a modern hospital was built on the old site, and in 1970 it changed its name to Woman's General Hospital, serving both women and men with a staff of primarily women doctors. In 1984, the hospital was disbanded, but one unit, Merrick Hall, a pioneering alcohol and chemical abuse treatment center for women, survived until 1988. The unit is now operated by Koala Center at Meridia Huron Hospital. Myra's portrait still hangs there.

Soon after Myra's death, her colleagues published this tribute to their founder:

She bore burdens unfelt by the women physician of today, but she endured them with such grace and dignity that she honored the profession. The Cleveland women physicians largely owe their safe, assured position to the impression which Dr. Merrick's personality made upon the community. . . . She asked little for herself, and was content to be enshrined in the hearts of the hundreds of mothers whose suffering she had relieved; but she was the champion of every woman physician and woman medical student. She was a public spirited woman.²⁷ ■

Notes

¹Susan E. Kennedy, "If All We Did Was To Weep At Home," *A History of White Working Class Women in America* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 22.

²Kennedy, 35.

³Ads from the *Boston Repertory*, 3 August 1826.

⁴Marion N. Gibbons, "A Woman Carries the Caduceus" (Undated copy in the collection of the Allen Memorial Medical Library, Cleveland OH), 98.

⁵Gibbons, 98.

⁶*Memorial Record of the County of Cuyahoga and the City of Cleveland, Ohio* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1894), 51.

⁷Marie Zakrewska, *A Woman's Quest*, ed. Agnes C. Victor (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 113.

⁸The location of this college is somewhat uncertain. Glenn Jenkins, in "Women Physicians and Women's General Hospital" (*Medicine in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, 1810-1976*, ed. Kent Brown), places the school in Rochester. John Duffy, in *The Healers* (p. 273), refers to a Central Medical College in Syracuse. Regina Morantz, in "The 'Connecting Link'" (an essay in *Sickness in Health in America*, p. 117), refers to the Central Medical School "of Syracuse" as "the first coeducational medical school in the country." As a result of my own research, I've chosen to send Myra to medical school in Syracuse.

⁹Quoted by Glenn Jenkins in "Women Physicians and Women's General Hospital," *Medicine in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, 1810-1976* (Cleveland: Academy of Medicine of Cleveland, 1976), 53.

¹⁰Herriot Hunt, *Glances and Glimpses* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 353.

¹¹*Cleveland City Directory* (Cleveland OH, 1852-53), 49.

¹²*Ibid.*, 49.

¹³*Cleveland City Directory* (Cleveland OH, 1857).

¹⁴Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 86.

¹⁵The primary source of information about Myra Merrick's life during the years 1861-1865 is a collection of letters written by her husband during the Civil War. These letters were kept by their son Richard and were donated to the Western Reserve Historical Society by his widow in 1947. Myra's letters to him did not survive the war.

¹⁶Letter from Myra Merrick, November 14, 1863.

¹⁷Merrick Papers, Folder #1, December 9, 1864.

¹⁸"Third Annual Announcement of the Cleveland Homeopathic College and Hospital for Women, 5.

¹⁹"First Annual Announcement of the Cleveland Homeopathic College and Hospital for Women, 5.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 6.

²¹*Ibid.*, 6.

²²D. H. Beckwith, *The History of the Western College of Homeopathic Medicine from 1850 to 1880* (undated pamphlet), 37.

²³*Ibid.*, 50.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Julius Abels, *The Rockefeller Billions* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 279.

²⁶Obituary, *The New York Times*, 11 November 1899. Included in Charles H. Merrick Papers, The Western Reserve Historical Society.

²⁷"Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Women and Children's Free Medical and Surgical Dispensary," 4.

The Gamut Prize in Short Fiction

First Prize Winner: "All of Us" by Elizabeth Richards

Second Prize Winners: "Hangover Mornings"
by John H. Richardson

"The Price of Haircuts"
by Paulette Schmidt

"Hazed In" by Mariflo Stephens

Judges: Lee K. Abbott
and the editorial committee of *The Gamut*

The Love Stories We Write

Introduction by Lee K. Abbott

In 1709, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, suggested in his *Sensus Communis* that human nature, the rightful subject of the stories we nowadays write, was a function of a duke's mixture of motives, among them "passion, humor, caprice, zeal, faction, and a thousand other springs." As such a description applies to a writer, however, I think it more queer than quaint; for no matter the sort of storyteller each teller of stories is, no matter the material that has seized us or the language peculiar to it, no matter our theme or how, in Joyce Carol Oates's memorable phrase, we decide "to shape the pain," what is central to the nature of writers—and what, indeed, we talk about when we talk about fiction—is, well, love.

Maybe all the best stories we know and invent, certainly the narratives we feel compelled to fling at one another via journals like *The Gamut*, are, in examples delightful to behold, love stories—metaphors for that "engine" Chekhov told us "he and she" are in fiction that moves. In ways an essayist's rhetoric is impotent to make clear, the love stories we write are themselves functions of a love that only story-writing itself can

clarify: we are enraptured by the versions of the world possible in fiction; we prize, as well, the sense that can be made of the otherwise senseless, the structure we can impose on the inchoate, the close examination we can make of those who resist even distant examination, the "stout stake" we can plant in the center of the whirlwind's hurly-burly. "Into this world of wonders one more wonder comes," a country-and-western tune I am charmed by has it, and for my money, story is that wonder of love.

So, if writing is as much an act of love as the acts of love we sometimes, and variously, describe, what then distinguishes, uh, one lover from another? The answer, seductive and bold as words themselves, is technique, the manners and methods and mores that are craft: it is a Point of View rightly used, a Point of Entry exactly made, a Style appropriate to Theme, Characters freely and completely imagined, Scenes rendered, a Place brought vividly to life, a Plot not different finally from Characters—the myriad choices we confront, and accept, when we choose to make story.

"All of Us," the story by Elizabeth Richards, meets the requirements I have of those writers who want my affection for the minutes it takes to read their "secrets." Its people are flesh, its moments credible, its "voice" honest and direct—all virtues validated by craft. It takes me into corners of the world I could not find on my own; it is a whole vastly greater than the sum of its parts. Best of all, Ms. Richards uses her considerable gifts to serve the needs of her characters: it is not writing we are reading, but story we are hearing—reason enough to attend to the love one human nature has wrought. ■

Len G. Arrow

All of Us

Elizabeth Richards

In France one autumn a woman fell on a flight of steps in the Sainte Chapelle, and my grandfather caught her. The report was that she died in his arms, although this is not a detail upon which my grandfather insists. In fact, he prefers to hear us speak of what he's done rather than tell it himself, and he listens with curious amusement, as if he doesn't quite see himself in the various postures being embellished. Apparently he saved the woman from a ruinous fate on the stone steps, although there was nothing to be done about the stroke she was suffering. He rode with her in the ambulance to a hospital in Montparnasse, where she was pronounced dead. My grandmother's version emphasizes the tragic outcome. What I see is the fall, in slow motion, then the pale head of the woman nestled in the crook of my grandfather's arm. The stairwell is dim, the stairs worn smooth, and my grandfather is ascending with unsuspecting grace until he is affronted by the falling woman, who now, it seems, is suddenly his.

The summer my grandfather died I was wrecked and distracted. My sister Caroline and I were in Rhode Island at the home of my grandparents, and there were boys around much of the time. They were athletes from the beach club, and my grandfather was suspicious of their intentions. He commanded a certain respect. His name, T. Willis Horner, was etched on several plaques around town, as a Friend to the Library, a Lifetime Donor to the Nature Conservancy, an ensign in the navy. He was responsible for the design of several of northeastern America's highways. An invaluable member of the Audubon Society and contributor to the National Fund for Cancer Research, he was written up in *Who's Who in America*. These identities, however, did not distinguish him during his final summer. My grandfather is better known for his heroic and disruptive acts.

In late spring we had reason to believe something had happened to him, but the hints were vague and came to us long-distance from my grandmother, for whom worry was usual. She spoke of Tom's shortness of breath, his inability to pay attention. Not about to be affected by gravity or precaution, Caroline and I heaved sighs of boredom when my mother told us subdued behavior was in order for the summer, that our city ways would have to be dispensed with, and she didn't want to hear about us causing other people's



Elizabeth Richards was born and still lives in New York City, where she teaches English and writing courses. She began her education at Harvard University, and transferred to Stanford University where she earned a B.A. in creative writing. Her graduate work was done under the direction of Raymond Carver at Syracuse University, where she earned an M.A. Her work has appeared in Fiction and The Dickinson Review; she is working on a collection of short stories. "My theory about writing is that it's mostly hard work. I suppose what I aim for is to make of what I've known or witnessed a fictional world in which funny and heartbreaking things happen, and in which there is some sort of logic or hope."

nervous breakdowns. My mother was in her detached phase. She was staying in New York for the summer to take a course in Communist doctrine.

We were in high school, Caroline one year behind me. She was the kind of beautiful that made men laugh out loud on the street. This happened on Madison Avenue one afternoon. We were cutting gym. We'd been in a coffee shop watching the Dalton boys hanging around at the bus stop. Out on the curb, four adult men stopped and stared, then smiled at her. One laughed as he passed, and scooped the air with his furled umbrella. I glared at him, ready to say something awful, but his face, wide-eyed and flushed from the early heat, admired Caroline's back so honestly I couldn't speak.

"Did you see that man eyeing you?" I asked her.

"Pay no attention," she said, and walked on with her gaze at nothing in particular, as if she'd been around the world and seen everything.

I wanted to know what about this person who seemed small and sloppy with her friendships and possessions was so stunning. I wanted to know how it was that my parents' best features had been magically mixed to her advantage. At night when we were doing our homework I watched her underlining whole pages with a dull pencil, and I wondered if there was anything going on in her brain while she read. I asked her careful questions.

"Why do you want to borrow that?" I said when she asked for one of my sweaters.

"It's looser than mine," she said. "More comfortable."

"What do you want for your birthday?" I said, although her birthday was in late summer.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, yawning. "A record. You don't have to get me anything."

"What was dancing school like last night?" Caroline went on Thursdays, and I went Tuesdays. Thursdays were jazzier than Tuesdays, shadier, more like a weekend. The whole thing was dreadful anyway, having to wear white gloves and sit in folding chairs waiting to get asked to do the Lindy Hop.

"Boring," she said. "I had to dance with Giovanni the whole time. He won't leave me alone."

Giovanni was thin and handsome in a dark, actorish way and was reputed to know more about sex than anyone at the Dalton School. When he came rushing up to Caroline and me on the street one day I wanted to crawl under a car.

"Don't you have anything to do, Bean?" Caroline said. "Are you bored or something?"

She stayed out later and later on the weekends and this wasn't even mentioned by my mother, who brought her dusty political texts to the breakfast table. I developed insomnia and depressed myself with television. Everything seemed tilted in Caroline's favor, as if she had assumed an elect position and deserved its rewards.

The last day of school, I didn't feel the same old elation. I kept thinking of the beach club in Watch Point, and how it would be with Caroline this year, and how I would take to being her shadow, and what low forms of revenge would occur to me.

That night we got a call. My grandfather had gone out to buy pipe tobacco and had forgotten to come back. I was listening in on the bedroom line.

"I found him on a bench right outside the drugstore, as if it was the living room," my grandmother said. "He didn't recognize me."

"Tell him the girls are coming," my mother said.

"Tell the girls not to expect much," my grandmother said, angrily.

I was shaken by this and by what I'd just discovered, that Caroline had had her period for over a year. I happened to get mine that day in Bloomingdale while I was trying on a pair of jeans. I was so relieved I bought the jeans even though they were a little small. When I mentioned the occurrence to Caroline she said, "Thank God. There's something I didn't tell you. Now I can tell you."

At the train station in Rhode Island my grandmother was acting firm, vexed. She didn't get out of her car. She immediately criticized my ill-fitting jeans, said we'd have to go shopping.

"But right now the thing to do is get out of the heat," she said.

We drove through several towns before we got to Watch Point, each one more progressively wild, with brambles and sandy roads through the properties.

Their house stood back from the road, at the top of a gradual hill. When we got to it, Caroline stuck her head out the window. "Poppy, we're here!" she called out.

"He won't hear you," my grandmother said.

T. Willis Horner was in the back with his birds. He banded birds as a hobby, and his hobby had become somewhat of a town legend. He banded them with bright bits of wire, orange, or red, and sometimes when I watched him clamp the wire around the bird's nearly invisible leg, I winced in imaginary pain. But the birds—goldfinches, chickadees, and robins—were patient during the process, and seemed to understand my grandfather when he told them not to struggle, it would only be a minute. The birds landed in other people's yards and were referred to as Tom's Birds.

He looked thin and caved in at the chest, but his face was still lively, intent. His hands shook quite a bit more than they used to, but he was engaged in his work. The finch he was holding shot darting looks around. Caroline couldn't contain herself long enough to let him maneuver the pliers around the leg.

"Poppy! Look! We're here!"

He turned to her. "So you are," he said. His hair was white, his eyebrows hardly graying. They were thick and dark, and his skin was brown from the sun. He let the bird go. It exploded from his hand and went to settle in a brambly trellis.

"Tom!" my grandmother called from the back porch.

"Time for lunch!"

"Girls," he said, getting up. He took up a new cane, a chrome surgical cane with adjustment capability. "Christina has announced lunch." He raised his voice to the back porch. "Did you see these girls, Christina? They've come up from that severe city! They've come here to make fun of us, I tell you!"

He insisted we go in the house and he'd follow.

"Let's give Daddy a rest," my grandmother said after we'd finished lunch. "I'll take you to the club."

My grandfather was riveted to something that was going on by the birdbanding shack.

"By gum!" he said vengefully. "Those blackbirds are at the seed again. Can you feature that?"

Joe Emory, the lifeguard of the diving pool, came jogging down the pool deck. As soon as my grandmother saw him coming, she took her chair and umbrella down to the sand.

"How's it going?" Joe said. His eyes were the light blue color of the swimming pool. He'd been in the sun for years. "How was the winter?"

"Oh, fine," Caroline said.

"Long and bitterly cold," I said.

"Everyone's a comedian," he said, winking, and he promised to be back after diving practice was over. I positioned myself so I could watch the practice.

"Take a picture. It lasts longer," Caroline said, and buried her face in her towel.

"You're welcome to watch too," I said.

"Not my type," she said.

"Too good-looking?"

"Too eager-beaver," she said, and yawned.

"I hate the first day out in the sun," she said. "You always feel so pasty and slug-like."

"At least you don't have to keep running to the bathroom to change these awful things."

"Tell me about it," she said. "Tell me about thinking you're bleeding to death in Mr. Woods' poetry class and having him bore through you while he's waiting for you to tell him what you think about Puck's function in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*."

"Must have been the worst."

I had always had a crush on Mr. Woods, a wry, war-beaten type who talked about poetry as if he was talking about a beautiful girl who'd gotten away from him.

When Joe stopped by between practices, I was conscious of him appraising the burn on our legs and backs. "I'd be careful. I'd do up some sunblock. My first day out here I got fried."

He went to the guard shack and started talking to Jill, the swimming coach, who'd been guarding the main pool forever.

"I think I'm going to get out of the sun," Caroline said.

"Go home and do up some dinner."

We found my grandmother sitting with Lillian Stuart at a table with an umbrella. They were having iced tea.

"Oh Christina, here are those precious grandchildren of yours," Mrs. Stuart said. She had on dark glasses and a bonnet tied under her chin. "You girls are bigger every year."

Caroline shot me a look. "Nice," she whispered.

T. Willis didn't appear at dinner. The three of us ate chicken and wax beans and watched the dimming yard and the harbor. My grandmother talked distractedly.

"Some nights he'll just forget that people eat dinner. He'll say, 'By gum, Christina, I've got five minutes to live and you're bothering me about a plate of food.'" She stuck her chin out the way T. Willis did when he had his mind made up.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with him," I ventured.

My grandmother said nothing. I don't think she heard me.

The phone rang. "Anything shaking at the Horner property?"

"This is Alexa," I said to Joe. "Did you want to talk to me?"

"As long as you're being straight with me. As long as you're really Alexa and not the maid or your sister pretending to be you or some woman at the other end of a wrong number I've dialed in a stupor."

"Are you in a stupor?" I said.

He was, in fact, in a stupor. Otherwise, I reasoned, he would not have called. Still, before sleep, I imagined making small acknowledgments of his attention, quick smiles, an occasional unconscious brush along his arm or hand. I had him driving, his jaw set, his fingers drumming on the dash of the bright red convertible he was famous for, speeding home, calculating his next move, one that would be met by some resistance on my part, but not enough to deter him completely. I ran my hands, his hands, lightly over myself and whispered into the empty room.

Several nights later, I went to see *Jaws* with Joe, during which time he did not touch me. After this we drove to the club and split a six of beer in the car, during which time he did. When I came in, I was reeling.

My grandmother and Caroline were in the kitchen, acting morose. My grandparents had gone to a party at the Stuarts' mansion, and my grandmother had returned alone.

"I don't know where he went," she said and shook her head in disgust. "For all we know, he could have drowned."

"I doubt that very much," I said with new confidence. "I doubt that very much."

Caroline said there was already an APB out on him. She said "APB" with a good deal of force, then she went upstairs.

My grandmother was drinking coffee. "I'll stay up all night if that's how long it takes to find that crazy man."

I began to theorize. "Sometimes if you don't leave someone alone enough, they run away," I said. "Like if you tell them to go to heaven, they might just go to the other place instead." What I meant was that we shouldn't interrupt him, or he might really leave us.

"He's an *old man*," my grandmother said. "He could *fall down*."

This hadn't occurred to me. There wasn't room in my theory for people to fall down. Typical postures of figures in heaven and hell didn't tend to be falling of their own accord.

"Oh, yes, I'm sorry. I don't know," I said, a stranger to my grandmother and myself. I had a very capable, light feeling below the neck. My head seemed heavy, though, and threatened by the obstacles posed by furniture and doors.

I found Caroline in her bed, propped up by several pillows.

"Tell me everything," she said.

"We went to the movie. It was dismal." I couldn't bring myself to tell her we were in the car afterward with my shirt off and that my nipples felt bruised.

"You aren't telling me everything. More than that has to have happened. Neither of you is dead, after all."

"Why?" I said. "Why does more than that have to have happened? Has it with you?"

"Oh, come on, Bean," she said.

"Well, has it?"

"If you tell Mummy I'll never speak to you again."

"You're kidding. You've done it?"

"Once or twice." She was serious. "It wasn't fun, you know."

"Who cares if it's fun? Who did you do it with?"

"Giovanni. I thought you must have figured it out. I told him I didn't want to see him any more, but he said I'd change my mind. Can you believe him?"

"Oh my God," I said.

"I know. That's what I said."

I looked at her. "I can't believe you didn't tell me."

"It wasn't anything. You just lie there and move your hips around."

"Oh my God." My face was frozen. "Where'd you do it?"

"His house. Alexa, if you're going to get grossed out, don't ask me."

"I can't believe you!" I yelled. "You never tell me anything! You get your period, you don't tell me. You and someone are doing it, you don't tell me. What's it going to be next? Will I have to read about it in the paper? Are you going to be on TV about something?"

"Beaner! Don't get so mad at me! Sit down and let's talk about you and Joe."

"No way," I said. I found the bathroom and got sick. I undressed and looked at myself in the mirror, at my pale face, the drunk granddaughter of a missing person. I went back downstairs in an old wrapper of my grandmother's to tell her I was sorry.

She was sitting in her chair in the den.

"Nan, I've done a million things wrong," I said.

"Don't tell *me* about them," she said. "I've got too many things to worry about." She stared at the space before her, as if someone I couldn't see was there.

Just before dawn my grandfather was driven up to the front of the house by some Rockefeller relatives of Mrs. Stuart's. He had his banjo over one shoulder, and he was carrying his dinner jacket and shoes. I stepped back from the window.

"Christina!" he called from the yard.

"Chris-teen-a! A word with you, if I might."

I heard them downstairs. My grandmother had sat up all night in her armchair in the den. I heard my grandfather singing "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, hold the horse while I get on."

I peeked into Caroline's room. She was sobbing.

"He's fine," I said. "She's fine too."

"Go to sleep," I said. "Come and wake me up if you get scared." I made a monster face and drifted out.

I dreamed of my grandfather dancing at the Stuarts. His shirttails were out, and he was moving through the French doors onto a snowy terrace. "Chris-teen-a!" he kept calling. He was dancing out there alone, scrub pines and moon and sea backing him. The world was mute. The world was nothing in comparison.

The nurse's name was Enid Halloran and she was a last-ditch attempt to keep my grandfather within our jurisdiction. She was bosomy and talkative and my grandmother couldn't stand her. I was in the kitchen when she arrived. She laughed before everything she said.

At lunch she laughed and said, "I heard you were quite the smash hit at the Stuarts' last night, Mr. Horner, what with your banjo playing and dancing around and all that."

My grandmother kept removing and replacing her hairpins. My grandfather watched Enid's chest heaving about the kitchen with amusement.

"Excuse me, Madam," he said, "but where do you hail from? You seem to be of healthy European extraction. Basque, perhaps?"

Enid laughed. "He's a very bad boy," she said to me.

"Honestly," my grandmother said.

"House full of women," T. Willis said.

He drew pictures of us. Except when he was out checking on the birds, or sneaking to the garage and peeling out in a thunderous dustcloud, he drew, upstairs in his attic study. The air in that room was close, and the wood-paneled walls were swollen with heat. The floor was painted gray. All of it was in refreshing contrast to the Victorian clutter downstairs. My grandmother did not go into the attic. She didn't even call it the attic. She called it "the third floor."

"Attic," she said, "is a musty word. It makes you think of prisoners."

But the study was wild with light in the morning, which is when Joe and I found my grandfather doing the drawings of the family. We'd been up all night.

"What crimes have we been committing?" my grandfather said without turning around. He began to whistle "Shady Lady."

I perversely wished I'd had an answer for him. Joe and I had returned from a gentle argument about sex which had left me ferociously angry and him shrugging.

I looked over my grandfather's work. There was one of Caroline in a bikini on some sand that he'd stippled in with great care. There was one of me with an arm draped over the shoulder of a faceless boy, with shaky lines around me to show a lack of balance. He had not spared our feelings in these renderings; they were our payment for his imprison-

ment. He had stopped speaking to us generally, and I sensed his delight over the awkwardness his silence posed at mealtimes.

"How's it going, old man?" Joe said, resting a hand on my grandfather's shoulder.

"It goes on," my grandfather said. "On it goes."

"Good deal," Joe said.

I found a drawing of Enid, naked to the waist. Her breasts were great cylinders, like footballs, with swollen pink nipples.

"Boobs," my grandfather said, looking up at me, his eyes a question.

"Hey, old man," Joe said. "How about a little shuteye? I'm ripe for some shuteye myself. How about we descend to the sleeping floor?"

T. Willis Horner rose as if to give a speech. He stood before the window. He sang, in his deep tenor:

There was a Shady Lady
And she lived at Sutton Place.
She had a very vulgar look
Upon her common face.

"Easy, old man," Joe said, guiding him to the stairs.

The people passed with eyebrows raised
Because they knew full well
About the nights the Shady Lady spent
In the Gramercy Park Hotel.

On the evening of Caroline's birthday we were all out on the porch, except for T. Willis, who'd taken the sports car and disappeared. Caroline was talking about Kevin Trum, the tennis pro who was also a model.

"He says I'm a good player. He says I play, 'inattentively but well.'"

"He sounds like a nice boy," my grandmother said.

"Speaking isn't his only virtue," Joe said, standing up.

"Why, we can't disregard what he has accrued in capital and investment property. Were you aware that young Kevin owns half of Connecticut, and that because of taxes he is forced to underbill for his modeling? It's mind-boggling, positively mind-boggling. And when you begin to think of what—"

"Really," my grandmother said.

"I give up," he said to me. "I'm from the wrong side of the wrong town."

"Personally," I said, "I don't care what Kevin Trum owns or how much he gets paid to get his face on the covers of magazines. Kevin Trum is a zero."

"That's the word I was looking for," Joe said.

"Oh, rubbish," my grandmother said. She went out to hold a watering can over a bed of herbs.

"They're right!" Caroline called after her. "His eyes are too close together!"

"So, why hang around with the guy?" Joe asked her.

"Practice," she told him.

Enid Halloran gave a shrill call from the kitchen.

"He's hee-yer!"

We watched the sports car slam to a halt beside Joe's car. My grandfather opened the trunk and pulled a bottle out of a box. "Champagne for my beautiful girl!" he announced, and Caroline tore out of the house. Before she got to him he'd fallen in the driveway, and the bottle he'd raised had shattered on the stones, champagne foaming over them. I'd seen him sink to his knees, as if simply to pick something up off the ground. Then he fell sideways and hit his head and went still.

The funeral was three days later.

My mother came by plane from New York, and my father came in his car. He hugged her, something I hadn't seen them do in a long time. And he spoke to her in low tones, only to her.

We all went to the church in a limousine with my grandmother in the front seat next to the Portuguese driver.

Everyone was at the church. The Stuarts, Cookie Baldwin who lived next door, the Coatses, Kevin Trum, Joe. There were strangers too, people I learned later were from the several organizations my grandfather had contributed to. Their faces were like the faces of statues, frozen in aspects of deep trouble or reverence, and it was good to see them there. It was good to know that behind where we had to sit there were rows of people come to help, some of whom had been there through time, like elders in a rare tribe.

I heard the eulogy but I didn't listen well. Mention was made of all my grandfather's contributions to the humane causes he rigidly stood by during his life. An anecdote about one of Tom's Famous Birds landing on a wedding cake was related, and then the minister, Barton Hayes, better known as the Town Crier, embarked on a cheerful summary of my grandfather's performance on the banjo at the Stuarts' party.

"Many of you may have last seen Tom . . ."

Afterwards people came to the house. We drank the champagne my grandfather had bought for Caroline's birthday. People were out of control. Lillian Stuart kept assuring me we'd all straighten out soon and things wouldn't seem so off. Enid Halloran talked about rare breeds and intellect. Caroline drank until she passed out, and my father carried her upstairs. I followed him.

My father had driven down from Canada, where he'd been vacationing with his wife. He'd been in a very remote area where you had to leave your car miles from where you were sleeping. He was red-faced and handsome, and he fixed the coverlet around my sister as if she was much younger, as if it was something he was used to doing.

"She thinks it's her fault."

"We must help her not to think such things," my father said.

I wanted him to explain it to me, the very fact that it happened, an afternoon that came and took my grandfather from us, how it was that his death was the only thing to gather us from our various posts on the earth, how deserted I felt, how uncertain.

My mother came in and put her palm to Caroline's forehead. She pulled down the shade.

"Why don't you come down and join us?" she said to my father. Her eyes were scarlet and brimming.

She turned to me.

"Why don't you take your father down, and I'll stay with Carrie a while."

"Pa," I said to him when we got downstairs. "I have a new friend. Poppy called him a first-rate character. He was at the church. A blond guy, strong."

"I heard he's a guard, and you and your sister were knocking them dead over at the club." He staged a frown.

I laughed for the first time in days.

I knew that my grandfather would condone whatever I chose to do. I knew that on the day he died and on the day we buried him. I knew it in my heart and bones and I know it when I am most afraid.

After everyone left the house, and it was just the family there, I went out and walked on the beach. I looked back at the huge square of a house with its random lit windows and its luminous trim. It was a house that should have been photographed and put in a book. It was a house people from far away would look at and say in their own soft language, "Now there is a beautiful house. There's a place I'd like to go and stay." ■

Hangover Mornings

John H. Richardson

In the Sixteenth Century Nino de Guzman marched across Mexico, killing thousands of Indians and founding a city in the valley of Tonalá. There, some four hundred years later, my family settled.

Our house is pink. Its acre of land is surrounded by a thick white wall ten feet high. The front yard, with its gazebo, flame trees, coffee bushes, and cactus garden, is really just an entrance. The back yard is where we live.

The last time I spent any time there the daily routine was the same as always. Except for those times when he drank through the night, my father would get up first, around 7 a.m. Taking a cup of Sanka in hand, he would stroll out back to examine his garden. He'd walk to his row of gardenia bushes and stare at them, bending stiffly down to pluck a snail from a stem and crush it beneath his shoe, or to pinch off a dead leaf. The lemon trees needed little attention, but he would inspect them as well, continuing to the vines he feared were undermining the wall they obscured. The fig tree I begged him to plant always got a skeptical look; its coarse broad leaves offended him. Continuing his morning inspection, he walked to the bougainvillea bushes, which always needed trimming, and scrutinized the wild orchids that hung in the lower branches of the flame tree. They were seated in split coconut husks, and never met with his full approval. First, they were not true orchids. And they were parasites, clinging to the tree and living off air and water. He also disliked the kumquat tree, but he tolerated it because my mother was fond of its fruit.

By the time I got up, he'd be settled on the porch (flagstone, a vine-colored awning), lying back on the cushions of the wrought-iron sofa with a magazine or book in his hand. I would come out with my coffee, sit down, and open my own book, and we would begin our ceremonial morning conversation.

"Another beautiful day," he'd say.

"Yup," I'd answer. "It gets boring."

This always got a laugh.

"Fruit keep you up again?" he'd ask.



John Richardson was born in Washington D.C. in 1954, left at eight months and hasn't stopped moving since: Greece, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, among other places. He now lives with his wife and daughter in California, where he is film critic for the Los Angeles Daily News. After dropping out of school at sixteen, he managed to get a B.A. from the University of Southern California and an M.A. in English from Columbia University. His first short story appeared in Black Warrior Review in 1988. "I'd like," he says, "to write with the lyrical precision of Nabokov, the imagination of Marquez, and the honesty of Lou Reed, but in practice I just try to find a subject that's resonant and true and then not screw it up too much turning it into 'literature.'"

This was another of our ritualistic jokes. At college I lived across the street from a hospital, and had learned to sleep through the ambulance sirens, but I kidded the old man that the sound of his lemons plopping onto the lawn kept me awake.

"What a racket," I said.

"How's the book?"

"Okay," I answered. "What are you reading?"

It was usually either a trash novel or something on politics. If it was on politics, I could expect within the hour an unhappy lecture about the world situation and an admonition to read a weekly newsmagazine.

"I can't say often enough how important it is for you to read a weekly newsmagazine, son. I'd like to see you expand your knowledge of foreign affairs."

"Okay, Dad," I'd say. "Garden looks great."

He'd notice my attempt to change the subject and be gruff.

"I'm thinking of moving the gardenias."

"Why? They're fine where they are."

"I just . . ." And he'd wave his hand, not wanting to discuss it. We kid him about his gardening habits. He is always moving his plants around. Once he imagines the kumquat tree in the front yard, or the rosebushes moved to the side of the house, he can't relax until he is out there digging holes and packing roots. More often than not he kills the plants in the process.

That summer I was hiding out at the folks' house, riding out the end of the 1970's. It was a difficult time. I was just out of school, and instead of asking my innermost feelings on the meaning of life people were asking if I could type—a major reality shock. My father was pretty good about continuing to support me. He grumbled a certain amount, and kept proposing possible careers for me—what about the exciting field of real estate sales? The military? Wall Street?—but basically he let me drift along till the shock wore off.

It was a hard time for him too. He had recently retired, and he wasn't taking it well.

"My life is over," he would say to me. "I've lived my life. Now its time for you to live yours."

And I would answer, "Gee, Pop, I didn't know we were mutually exclusive."

My mother stayed outside our little circle of gloom. "Oh," I'd say, "What a miserable hangover." She'd shake her head and tell me that's what happened when you overdid it. It was just common sense. This made me think, in those days, that she lacked depth.

Dad would throw a little fit about the troubles in Central America or our mishandling of the latest Middle East situation, and she'd just roll her eyes and smile at the birds that flocked to our yard.

"Those noisy birds," she'd say with a smile. "You just can't get any peace and quiet around here."

Then she'd turn to me. It was inevitable. It happened every morning.

"Did the lemons keep you up again last night?"

My father and I went for walks in the Bosque Del Apache, walking slow so our arthritic Russian wolfhound could keep up. Both Dad and dog would casually fart as we walked along, like backfire.

"Economic freedom is the beginning of all freedom," he would tell me.

"Don't I know it," I'd say.

"Who said that?"

"Thomas Jefferson."

"Very good," he said, surprised.

"You've only told me three hundred million times."

The subject would bring him, like swallows to Capistrano, to the subject of his pension and investments. He's a Depression-era Dad.

"Your mother should be quite comfortable when I die."

"Dad, let's not talk about it."

"When I die, I want to be sure she's taken care of."

"Well, it's not going to happen anytime soon. Let's not talk about it."

Sometime that summer I started going with my Dad on his "rounds." The valley of Tonalá was very popular with retired Americans, many of them living on a small Social Security income. Unofficially, out of his own sense of duty and decency, he'd start visiting some of the ones who were lonely or sick. After a while he became known for it, and people would call him to see if he had checked on so-and-so or if he'd heard about so-and-so's financial difficulties.

On Wednesdays the old man played chess with Max Kaminsky, a retired mailman who couldn't get out much any more.

"You'll see what it means to endure," he told me. "You could learn a lot from the people down here."

Kaminsky was about seventy and frail. He moved slowly, protecting his bones. His wife had died the year before and the sudden loneliness, my father told me as we drove over, was sucking the life out of him. "He's gone downhill," Dad said, looking blankly through the windshield.

Then he remembered the reason he brought me. "But he endures," Dad said. "He endures."

While they played I looked at pictures of Kaminsky and his wife, young, in the thirties, standing by those old rounded cars, wearing hats. In one she was carrying some kind of placard.

"Oh, she was a firebrand," Kaminsky told me. "A Wobbly."

"*Que lastima!*"

That was my Dad. He was hunched over the chessboard. He always spoke Spanish while playing chess, a regular litany of little remarks: *Que lastima, hijole, puede pero no se debe*. When he faced a tough move he'd say it sing-song while he thought up his reaction: "*Que lastima. Que lastima. Que LASTima.*"

When we'd play together sometimes we'd "sing" together, as he put it. I'd make a dumb move and he'd say "*Puede*"—"you can"—and I'd pull my piece back and join in: "*Pero NO SE DEBE*."

That meant "But you shouldn't."

He won the game. He almost always did. Afterward, the three of us had a drink, and it was "How are you feeling? Hear from the kids?" What they didn't talk about hung over the aimless conversation, filling the long silences between sentences; his dead wife, his loneliness, the whisper of approaching death. Or that's how it seemed to me.

They shook hands at the door with the curious formality older people have. "Next Wednesday," my father said. "You better practice."

"Oh, I'll never beat you, Arthur," Max said.

We left him standing at his door, the door half-open and Kaminsky holding a hand up in a feeble wave. We stopped at the elevator and my father turned and waved back. I felt the emptiness of the apartment behind Kaminsky. We got on the elevator and I sighed. The elevator seemed motionless. My father looked at me.

"He's a Jew, you know," Dad said.

Every now and then, after I irritated him in some way, Dad would go on a binge. Usually it would last two or three days. His stamina was amazing. He would drink all night, lying in bed with a cigarette burning his fingers and sometimes his blanket, staring at the walls, plodding occasionally to the kitchen to refill his glass. Sometimes in the early morning I would hear a crash and jump out of bed to find him on the floor in the living or dining room, maybe lying in the shards of his tumbler with his blood spotting the tile floor. Sometimes my mother would get up too, and in the darkness we'd look at each other across his body. She'd shake her head. Together we'd help him up and into bed. Even drunk as he was, he'd try to give me a little advice, a bit of wisdom. "Old age is a shipwreck, son," he'd say. "A shipwreck."

But in the morning he would be up again as always, examining his garden as he always did, coffee cup trembling in his hand, his eyes dull with what I was sure was all the hidden sadness of the world.

One hangover morning I tried to cheer him up by telling him I was all fired up to get a job. Under the pressure of the hangover I'd convinced myself. Bad hangovers often give me a sense of hope. I convince myself that now I'm so miserable there's no further to go, I've finally hit bottom, and I'm ready at last to change my life.

Before I could tell him the good news, he said, "Son, I've been thinking."

"Dad, I have too," I said. "I think I've decided that maybe the best thing . . ."

He didn't seem to have heard me.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that the problem you're having is basically a problem of will. It takes will to do anything in this world. Great will. I wonder if you have the will."

This was an old subject. Will and Talent. Neither one was much good without the other, the old man said. He rooted at the two words like a dog tearing at a mole-hole. He had will, but he didn't have talent, he'd decided. I maybe had talent—maybe—but did I have the will? Each time he brought this subject up, for some reason, it was as if he'd just thought of it, as if at last he'd found the clue to where we went wrong.

I sank further into my chair and said nothing, not wanting to encourage him.

He looked at me with his hooded, hangover-sad eyes. "If you knew what was ahead it might encourage you to trim your sails a little bit," he said.

"I guess," I said.

Neither one of us said anything for a while. From where we sat on the back porch, he lifted his head and surveyed his garden, as if trying to gather wisdom from it.

"Old age is a shipwreck," he said. "Do you know who said that?"

"Charles De Gaulle," I said.

"How did you know that?"

I rolled my eyes.

"In the end it comes down to what Voltaire said," he said.

"Tend your garden."

"Uh huh."

And so, because he needed to philosophize after his drunk and I felt guilty, we sat for an hour and he told me, again, how he had evolved from a driven searcher (English, anthropology, politics) into a lover of the simple life. As he spoke, dogs paced the roofs of the houses that stood against our garden wall. They looked down at us, sniffed, and paced away. It was all bullshit, I thought. My complicated father was as close to being a lover of the simple life as I was to being born-again. "None of it means a whole hell of a lot, son. Tend your garden," he finished.

And he walked across the flagstone porch to do just that. The binge wouldn't last more than a day or two more, I figured.

One day we were coming home from a walk and my mother met us at the gate. "I got a letter from Mary," she said. "Jim died."

My father tightened his lips and looked away.

Jim was his best friend, the best man at his wedding.

He'd had cancer of the colon for a while. Until now chemotherapy had kept him alive. He fought at D-Day, married a concentration camp survivor, became a professor of classical languages, raised four boys, retired to Florida. Dad poured a water glass full of Coke and tequila and went into his room.

Thursday nights we went over to Hazel's. Like Kaminsky, she was one of the people Dad made a point of visiting. I usually tried to get out of this one, but Dad always tried to get me to go. He said it would be good for me and that Hazel would like it. "Go with your father," mother said.

Hazel was sixty-five, seventy-five, eighty—it was hard to tell. She was born in China, her parents missionaries, then spent her life working for the United States Information Agency. At some point she was confined to a wheelchair. By now it seemed a part of her. She was sunk into it, swelled fat to fit into its nooks and corners, attached to it by hidden ligaments like a crab to its shell. She smoked constantly, letting the ash drop on her lap. She held her cigarette between two fingers like a hypodermic needle. Her hair was flat and gray and greasy.

"You really should read Buck," Hazel said. "She may be out of fashion now, but history will remember her as one of the great humanists."

"Did she ever actually live in China?" asked my Dad, the good conversationalist.

Her apartment was filled with Chinese stuff left to her by her parents. She would point something out and say Ming or T'ang. And she would get drunk and drunker until we left.

"You've never read Cather? I can't believe that," she said.

When we finally left, I felt like I'd spent a week inside somebody else's smelly straightjacket.

"God, I can't stand that woman," I said. "She's so clingy." Dad drove the car, ignoring me.

"You should have a little more charity," he said. "She's an old woman."

Dad had a lot of roses, but he didn't like them. That summer he was constantly worrying about the Rose Issue.

"Roses," he would say, looking at them with concern, "are really a revolting plant. They have an ugly, prickly little bush and excessively beautiful blooms. There's something vulgar about them."

"Why don't you just get rid of them, then?" I'd say.

He'd shake his head, disgusted with my lack of perception.

"Your mother likes them," he'd answer.

In August, when the summer was almost over and I felt more and more that I had to come to some sort of decision, Kaminsky had a seizure. When there was no answer on his phone the person who made a habit of calling him called Dad. We went over together. We banged on the door. When no one answered, we had the apartment manager bring the key. We found Kaminsky on the floor next to the chessboard, folded in half, his mouth working silently, his eyes fixed on something we couldn't see. The chessboard was overturned, the pieces scattered.

When the ambulance had come and gone, Dad started picking up the chess pieces. "He played by correspondence," Dad said. "He was probably playing a game when it happened. Here, here's the letter."

On his knees, Dad pulled a sheet of paper from under Kaminsky's easy chair.

"Dear Max," he read. "Knight to Queen six. Check to the queen. Get out of that one, you old coot."

Slipping into Kaminsky's chair, Dad started setting up the pieces in starting position, just as he had shown me when I was a small boy. I sat down in the chair he usually used and set up my side of the board. When it was all set up we sat there and looked at the board, then at each other. Dad sighed.

"Let's go," he said.

The next day we went to the hospital to visit Kaminsky. He tried to talk but the words didn't make any sense. "Grod . . . special . . . drink . . . list . . ." He stared at Dad and kept trying to talk, but you could tell from the expression on his face that he knew he wasn't making sense. Still he forced the words out. Dad nodded his head and smiled.

I couldn't take it. I smiled at Kaminsky, patted his arm, and told my father I'd leave them alone for a while. I went as fast as I could to the street and found a bar and downed a couple of beers.

When I got back, Dad was spooning pudding into Kaminsky's mouth. He wiped the dribble off Kaminsky's lips with a napkin. When I got close to the bed, Kaminsky got a look at me. He was lying back on the angled bed looking so terribly frail, and I felt so young and healthy and red with beer. Looking at me, his eyes let loose a fat tear. I watched it glide down his face. I knew he was crying because he could see me all healthy and red and he couldn't get the words out and I still had a life ahead of me.

When we left the room we didn't say anything. As we walked out the hospital door to the car, Dad started crying. When I noticed I put my arm around his shoulders. "It's okay, Dad," I said.

"Terrible," he said.

The tears just continued to stream down his face. I'd never seen him cry before, not once.

We got into the car. He put his hands on the steering wheel and heaved a big sigh.

"I want a drink," he said.

Kaminsky died that night. The next day his son came down from New York. His daughter, who lived in California, was in the middle of a big project and couldn't make it. Kaminsky's son said it was too much trouble to take the body back to the States, so we'd just bury it "in his adopted land." Dad, of course, helped with the arrangements.

After the funeral everybody came over to our house. Aside from the servants, Kaminsky's son and I were the only people under sixty. Most of the old folks didn't know Kaminsky very well but they had a respect for death and made a point of showing up for funerals. "He was a good man," everyone said. "So kind."

"He loved his wife," another said. "After she died . . ."

I thought they were all lying. If I had died, I wouldn't want a bunch of strangers standing around my wake saying I was a good man. I'd want them to say I was pig-headed, hungry, passionate, intemperate—anything, but not some tepid clichés about my alleged virtues. I'd want them to get drunk and smash their cars.

I found myself standing in front of Hazel's wheelchair. At least she was getting drunk. What I could see of her little pig-eyes was bloodshot, her hair stood out from her head in stiff chunks, and her lap was smudged with cigarette ash.

"Your father was like a saint to that man," she was saying. "Personally I had no use for Max Kaminsky. I saw what Marxism did to China and I have no patience with privileged Americans who . . ."

Here she lost her sentence for a moment, puzzling over how to light another cigarette with one hand wrapped around a cocktail glass.

"Let me take that," I said, and held the glass for her while she struck a match.

"Out of gas," she said, showing me a dead Flare lighter, and continued the interrupted sentence.

"Who indulge themselves in the Marxist fantasy."

"His wife was a Wobbly, he told me," I said.

"No better than a damn fairy tale," Hazel said.

"But wasn't it different then?" I asked. "I mean, I've read about conditions in the mines . . ."

Hazel let air flap her lips, a dismissive noise.

"Be a dear and get me another drink," Hazel said.

My father was also getting blotto. I ran into him in the pantry, where we kept the liquor. He was pouring a little warm Coke onto the surface of his rotgut tequila (which, to save a few pennies, he bought direct from the factory).

"Maybe you should have a cup of coffee instead," I said. He just shook his head and ignored me.

"Looks like Hazel is getting blasted too," I said. "She asked me to mix a strong one for her."

"If that's what she wants," he said. "give it to her."

I went off and smoked a joint in the maid's bathroom, as was my habit. When I came back, the wake was in full swing. I could hear Hazel's nasal voice cutting across the crowd. "Ferber was never what you'd call great," she was saying. Kaminsky's son was listening politely to my Dad, who was red-faced and laughing and talking about how Kaminsky never beat him at chess, but was always ready to play another game.

"He was always ready to play another game, your father," Dad said, laughing and wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "'I might not win,' he'd say, 'but by God I'll make it hard for you, Arthur.'"

Dad had something more to say, but he was in the grip of a fit of giggling. A little embarrassed, I raised my eyebrows to Kaminsky's son. What can you do?

Dad continued: "He said, 'you'll have to pull the pawns out of me like . . .'"

Laughter derailed him again. He raised a hand to indicate he'd be okay in a minute.

" . . . wisdom teeth," he finished.

Kaminsky's son smiled weakly.

I went to the kitchen and put on a pot of water. When it boiled I made a cup of coffee and took it out and put it on the table in front of my Dad.

"What's this?" he said.
"Coffee," I said. "You need it."
He ignored me, and I walked off in a huff.

Ten minutes later I was in the kitchen again and ran into my mother.

"You didn't have to do that," she said.
"What?"
"The coffee."
"Oh," I said. "Well, if he doesn't watch it . . ."
She looked at me, critically.
"Don't be such a Puritan," she said.

Much later the party had dwindled to a dozen die-hards. Dad was in that zombie state of a drunk who is, almost successfully, forcing himself to act sober. Kaminsky's son was standing up talking to my mother and swaying in place. Hazel could barely keep her eyes open.

"I think it's time for me to go," she said to me, talking very slowly. "But I don't think your father is in any condition to drive me."

"I'll take you home," I said. She looked at me a little dubiously.

"I don't think you're in any condition either," she said.

"I'm all right," I said.

She reached her hands down to the wheelchair, moving some lever to disengage the brakes. At the same time I grabbed the handles and tried to get her started. I think it was her foot catching on the edge of the carpet that made her lose her balance. She gave a little cry and spilled out of the wheelchair onto the floor. A glass smashed. Her body thumped, half-onto the carpet, half-off. I stood there holding the handles to her wheelchair and everybody looked at me as if it were my fault.

"Hazel! Are you okay?" I said, too loud, reaching down to try to help her up. My father was next to me, leaning into her. He grabbed my wrist hard.

"Hazel, are you all right?" he asked. His voice was very gentle.

"I'm fine, except I plopped right out of my goddamn shell."

"You shouldn't have pushed her," Dad said to me, his voice sharp.

"I didn't push her," I said.

"I fall out all the time," Hazel said. "Not his fault."

I righted the wheelchair and rolled it back in front of her. My father was reaching under her arms to help her up.

"No, Arthur," she said. "I'll do it myself."

You have to remember we were all very drunk. Hazel's voice was slurred. As she reached for the chair, Dad continued to prop her up. She got a hand on the armrest and tried to pull. Dad heaved. Then suddenly she pushed the chair away and plopped back down.

"I have to do it myself," she said firmly. "I can't have help."

My father gave me a look. He nodded his head. Ceremoniously, he walked to the wheelchair and wheeled it back in front of Hazel. Then he stepped back, looking first at me and then at Kaminsky's son.

"Hazel lives alone," he said.

Kaminsky's son nodded his head.

We all stood around in a circle and watched Hazel squirm on the floor. Her skirt was spread up around her knees, exposing her pasty legs, slabs of suet. My mother bent over and smoothed her skirt down. Hazel inched forward, lifting herself on her hands and sliding her hips forward, then moving her hands forward, doing another little pushup, sliding another few inches. When she got to the chair she sat up straight, huffed and puffed, put both hands on the handles and tried to lift herself up.

The chair went shooting out, slapping her back down onto the floor. She still had ahold of the handles. "I forgot to lock the damn thing," she said. She rested, leaning an elbow into the padded seat.

Everyone continued to stand there. She looked up at us. Her expression was a little bewildered.

"It's all right," said my father.

"Why don't you let us help?" said a thin old lady I didn't know.

Hazel shook her head. She reached under the chair and flipped a lever, then tried rolling the chair. The wheels had locked. Again she sat straight and puffed and put both hands on the handles and pulled. She got up halfway, her legs hanging limp beneath her. She tried to twist her body so her rear would fall into the chair, but when she came down she only caught the edge of the chair and slid out to the ground again. She propped herself up on her hands like a dog, her legs folded under, head hanging, chest heaving. The thin old lady, and a few others, murmured things like, "Come on, Hazel. It's all right."

"You don't have to prove anything to us," someone said.

My father shook his head. He moved behind the wheel chair and took ahold of the handles. Hazel lifted her head and looked at it. She didn't seem to recognize it at all.

"Come on, Hazel," my father said. "You can do it."

So I stood there, watching my father poised above Hazel, a chorus of wraiths surrounding him. They made clucking sounds, sounds of encouragement. They waited. Maybe it was the booze or the long night or just being young but I thought it all meant something. I thought that if Hazel could get up it would make a difference for all of us. Because history (I thought) isn't just a nightmare; it is a wound. Somehow it had happened that, in this valley where Spaniards once slaughtered natives for Christ, my old dad was encouraging a crippled old woman to rise. Somehow it had come to this. And the question was, could she do it? Could I? ■

Hazed In

Mariflo Stephens

In his dreams, he was still drinking. Lawson would wake up and miss his morning head in the way that a soldier might miss an enemy to fight. He would recall his dreams; usually a scene or two of himself at a bar, his elbow sliding off the table and jolting him awake and sober enough to catch his drink. Lying awake in bed, he thought he could smell scotch.

In the dreams, his mind had the fuzzy quality it used to have; he'd be spending a long time with the car keys—is the square one the house key or . . . just a minute, let me get it right—then he'd wake up to a clear mind with a sharp thought in it. At first he'd feel relief and gratitude, and his clear mind seemed an endless stretch of blue sky. Then he'd begin to worry.

Today lying still in smooth silk sheets, he worries over his young wife sleeping beside him. He thinks of her lack of curiosity about what he calls "the bad days" and worries what that means about her and them. He remembers her holding a glass of champagne under his nose at a party saying, "Just taste it," and her startled look when his voice came out like a groan from his throat: "I can't." Her startled face read, "What's the big deal?" and he thinks she wears that face a lot.

To relieve himself, he turns his mind to flying. To the clean white look of the Cessna, the instrument panel and the preciseness of it all. The wonderful precision and the control, the control. He loves giving his altitude over the radio while watching the needle quiver and jump on the clockface. "And rising." When he starts the engine, the gentle shake of the plane seems sexual, goes right to his groin. He loves everything about flying, even the lingo. One of the other pilots around the tiny suburban airport will see him and say, "You instrument rated yet?" and he'll say back, "Still flying V.F.R." in a proud way, though he knows an instrument rating is many levels higher than V.F.R. Visual Flight Rules.

Lawson would like to curl around his wife in this post-dawn hour and put his face in her hair, which he knows smells like candy. But he doesn't want her to wake up and find out for the first time in their year-long marriage that he can't sleep past dawn. He begins to think how flying cured him, more than the treatment center, the endless talks with other alcoholics, with doctors. He remembers how excited he was when he called his sister, the younger one, the one who put him in the center, and told her he was learning to fly.



Mariflo Stephens started writing fiction six years ago. Before that she was a journalist in her native Virginia, and in Florida and New Jersey.

Stephens is an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Virginia. This is her first published short story, but she has won awards at the Sherwood Anderson Literary Festival, the Irene Leach Literary Festival and the Chautauqua Festival. In Charlottesville, where she lives with her husband and two daughters, she hosts a weekly radio show, "The Writer's Corner," on WTJU, and writes a column for a weekly newspaper as "The Eavesdropper," a personality who reports on conversations accidentally intercepted by her cordless telephone. She believes that stories have a life of their own, and if the characters are strong enough they'll take their writers where they want to go.

"An airplane, Lawson? An airplane?" she had said, as if he might be drinking again and confusing everything. Her voice had risen almost to the shrill pitch of his older sister, who owns an art gallery and who had said to the younger sister, "Oh, our Lawson has finally found a career? No? Well, who'd hire him anyway."

Lawson looks down at his chest and begins folding the sheets. He presses the lace edging down at the seam, folds it again. He was so nervous about the medical test for his pilot's license, so nervous. But the psychiatric report had read, "alcohol dependency and depression," not "alcoholic" or the code number for alcoholism that would have appeared on the insurance form had the family used insurance to pay the bill. Lawson still doesn't realize that the reason he got his pilot's license is because the doctor and not the insurance company sent through the form. Lawson's family pays for most everything with cash—cars, boats at least—in an almost defiant way, as if to say, "Here you go." But that is the privilege of the second generation rich, and it is Lawson's privilege to have been born the grandson of an inventor of a popular cough syrup. He can still see his grandfather's house. The porch that encircles the front, holding up the large white columns he would swing around as a child, with one hand steady on the white concrete, the white paint faintly rubbing off on his palm, dusting it like flour. The porch where he heard his grandfather's maid say to his father long before he died, "Ain't you glad you got a boy sandwiched between them girls?" In the hands of his two sisters the house had been sold, then razed for a parking lot. He doesn't remember where he was when that decision was made.

Lawson unfolds the sheet and pulls it up to his chin, feeling the lace scratch his beard stubble. He thinks what he needs now is a flight. A short trip to somewhere. He's spending the first week in his new house, a house he let his young wife pick out in the very Maryland subdivision she wanted. But somehow in the move from his old beach house, somehow the move shook everything loose. He's finding that what attracted him to her in the beginning has begun to irritate him. And the first day, standing with her in the yard, even as he was admiring how her hair glinted gold in the sun, she pointed a lacquered nail to the sky, toward what looked at that moment like a silver bullet with his name on it and said, "See, here's your surprise. It's near the airport."

"But," he said, stammering a little, "but this is in the descending pattern."

"So?" she said and gave him that look. What's the big deal.

He watched the plane descend.

Lawson let his wife decorate the house any way she wanted. He thought he'd be pleased; she had such a flair for things. But it all came down to one of her crazy beliefs, one of the things he found so attractive in the beginning. Antiques, she told him, had auras; karma radiated from them. Memories of what had happened around them could become visual. No, she said, she couldn't possibly have them around, and he had watched the uniformed moving men carry away his grandfather's halltree. It was heavy, solid oak, and the men grunted.

He saw the sweat rings under their arms and the pale blue uniforms that looked like the orderlies' in the center. His wife counted the bills from the antique dealer, and he noticed how she held her tongue between her teeth as she counted silently. He used to think that gesture was cute, sexy, but now he thinks it makes her look like a greedy child.

He is filling up the Mr. Coffee machine with water, listening for her soft step down the carpeted hall from the bedroom. He'll never get used to it—the chrome and glass, the high-tech decor. The light fixtures fall from the ceiling and sit inches above square tables, chairs that look like animal traps. The fixtures are all in bright primary colors, metal discs above the bulbs. It all looks sharp to him, and he imagines that if he went on a binge, if he "slipped" as they call it at the A.A. meetings, he'd cut himself to pieces stumbling around the house.

The Mr. Coffee gurgles and burps and he stands beside it, knowing that the one person he wants to see is Rand, his college roommate who lives in a cabin in the Virginia mountains. If he could only see Rand. Rand is the last of a breed, laid back. Rand accepts everything, can understand anything. They'll talk a little, listen to some music. Lawson can pick up a six-pack of Cokes to drink while Rand has his beer. A one-night trip and his wife will be eager for his body when he returns. He'll be eager for hers.

While he shaves, Lawson thinks again that he looks a little like he's had a facelift. He wears his hair close-cropped these days. The weight loss took years off his face, though Lawson's face is one of those eternal baby faces that resist any change. He has taken a renewed interest in his body since his recovery; jogs in the morning while his wife gets ready for work and bicycles furiously in the afternoons, sometimes to fight the frustration of his meetings with the Merrill Lynch people who manage his grandfather's estate. They would like him to stay home and wait for the check; they have been managing this money for years. But Lawson has started to read *The Wall Street Journal* and he has some ideas. They shift in their chairs when I'm there, he thinks, and pulls the sink plug watching the white foam peppered with hair swirl and swirl and disappear. To see Rand, that would be something.

Lawson finds his flight maps from the hall closet and smooths them out on the breakfast table. He traces a line down a mountain range with his finger. On the phone, Rand had said, "Great, I'll pick you up at the airport. I want you to meet my new lady, Tasha." Lawson finds the skyway landmarks, radio station towers and highways, that guide those flying by Visual Flight Rules. It's so easy, he thinks, it's so precise. He finds the place on the map where he'll have to drop the nose of his plane to go into the descending pattern. It has been five years since he's seen Rand.

When he climbs out of the Cessna, Lawson starts looking around for Rand even before he closes the door of the plane. He could always pick Rand out of a crowd; that sloping walk, wide shoulders and a grin, always a grin. He remembers he did pick him out of a crowd; at a Jerry Rubin rally at college.

Lawson squints at the July sun, marveling at the mountains he sailed over so gracefully while he peered at the trees, trying to pinpoint the moment when he could see individual branches.

"You Lawson?" A woman in a long Indian print dress stands before him with her arms crossed.

"I thought so," she said, "I could tell by the clothes. I'm Tasha."

Lawson looks down at his docksiders and at her feet: dirty toenails and worn Buffalo sandals. Her hair is in one long braid and her face is lined. She doesn't hold out her hand, and Lawson suddenly doesn't know what to do, why he is in this strange airport. He pictures himself filling out the L.L. Bean order form for the sailing outfit he's wearing. He had been thinking of his new trim body. An impulse, he thinks, foolish, and then remembers himself.

"Where's Rand?"

"At work. I'm fetchin' you. That's what we say in this part of Virginia. Fetch." She has turned and is walking toward the parking lot. Lawson follows her, talking a little too loud, as if he is still in the plane and is compensating for the engine noise.

"I didn't know Rand worked," he said, "except the land," he added.

The car is an old white Toyota and Lawson can see where it's rusting through on the sides. He feels a familiar pang of guilt; his new Volvo, his young wife with the lacquered nails and the \$50 face misting machine in the closet. Rand, he thinks.

"So your grandfather was the cough syrup person," she's saying, shifting gears roughly with her palm. "Rand's talked about you."

In the back seat of the car Lawson notices piles of rags and old clothes that give off a musty smell. He feels as though he has fallen, has dropped here from the sky in some arbitrary way. He ventures, "A beautiful day for flying."

"First nice day we've had in weeks. It's been so hazy," she says, then, "You're an alcoholic, right?"

"Right. Where does Rand work?" Lawson is thinking of Rand's old girlfriends, thumbing through them in his mind with the distance and the enchantment of looking at a butterfly collection. He can remember their names, Sad Alice, Fern.

"Oh, at the bus station. He unloads the packages, reloads them. He's getting a back problem." She eyes him. "He has to do it. Money. Me, I'm celebrating tonight. Just sold my first piece. The piece was in a window display, not even for sale." She turns up a winding road and Lawson looks out the back window. He wants to go back.

"What's a piece? I mean, what did you sell?"

"I hook rugs. Hand-dyed fabric. So I'm celebrating. Sorry—I'll drink it in the kitchen—but I just bought a bottle of tequila. I have to finish the rug, a duplicate of the display one. Then off I go. As high as I can get."

He felt it then. The blind craving welled up inside him. Pinned him to the car seat. He fought it.

"Don't worry about it," he says.

When she pulls up the mountain road to the cabin, Tasha asks him if he'll help her pick beans from the garden, and Lawson says he can use the exercise. He breaks the beans at the sink, thinking how lonely it feels when the craving hits again. Tasha is in the next room, hooking the rug, and he wonders wildly where she put it. The bottle. He could buy it, any price. Steal it and steal away into the woods and . . . Then Lawson thinks that tomorrow he'll get into the Cessna, and the clear blue sky ahead will break it, snap the craving in two. His mouth begins to feel dry and he wants to interrupt Tasha to ask for coffee; wants to know when Rand is coming, when he hears the gravel grind with steps outside.

"Rand."

Rand's beard is dripping sweat onto his Grateful Dead T-shirt. He wears the same lopsided grin but as Lawson is about to pound his back, he thinks he sees something changed in Rand's eyes.

"I tried to hitch but couldn't get a ride. Laws. Good to have you here. See, I remembered: I bought some Coke for you, beer for me." Rand hands him a heavy paper bag and Lawson takes it, wondering if he should finish the beans.

"Uh, Rand, where's the refrigerator?"

"It's on the back porch. Oh boy, I'm gonna have to get Tasha to walk on my back tonight."

Later Lawson and Rand sit on the lawn chairs out back listening to the crickets. Every few minutes they can hear Tasha's high voice on the phone. She's doing shots. Lawson remembers looking all day for Rand's phone number once. When he finally got him, Rand said, "Settle down, Laws." Most people hung up. They'd say, "You're drunk" with no surprise, the same rhythm as "Good-bye." Lawson had earlier tried all the "remember when" stories and Rand had simply said yes, he remembered. Tasha had been walking on his back. Finally they connect when Rand says, "Ever hear from your ex?"

"No. She haunts me though. I think about her. Wish I could just say 'I'm sorry.'"

"Sorry. What would it mean? She's happy, probably. You're happy. You look good, Laws, lost a few pounds. You got a clean start."

"Yeah, I'm holding steady."

They can hear Tasha's high laugh; hear her say "Really" into the phone in the kitchen.

Lawson spends the night on the sagging couch with a smelly quilt. At dawn he hears Tasha retching in the bathroom. He wishes he liked her enough to feel badly for her. Quietly he pulls a pair of jogging shorts from his duffle bag and goes outside, sitting in the same lawn chair he sat in the night before, picking up the half-empty Coke can. You're not supposed to remember, he thinks, but he does, and he remembers the moment when the booze became not booze but medicine he needed. The first morning that his hands shook so hard that he couldn't shave; was that the first time he poured scotch into his coffee? Lawson watches for the sunrise but it's too hazy. The mountains look like they're wearing halos and he wants them to blow away like giant smoke rings so he can

fly back to his wife while she's still sleeping; sleeping in the bed with the lace on the sheets. He's thinking that the flight must have worked because he's anxious for her again. And he didn't dream of being drunk.

Rand is breaking eggs into a bowl, and Tasha is beside him pouring water from a teakettle into a drip coffee pot. Every few minutes she says "Oh, God," and leans against Rand. Rand cuts the radio down because Lawson is nearby, on the phone doing a weather check with the airport people and he can hear Lawson say, "What?" into the phone.

"I said," the voice says into Lawson's ear, "even the birds are walking."

"But what exactly do you mean," Lawson says, his voice still calm, thinking he will get an interpretation, an exact reading from somewhere of times and altitudes and cloud formations.

"I mean the haze has settled in. Check back any time, but it's settled in. Look out your window, boy; you flying V.F.R. You flying in a cloud; you hit one of those mountains, smack, dab, you hit. You can't see your way, no way, no how. Without your instrument rating, you're grounded. Like I say, even the birds are walking."

Lawson puts the phone back on the hook and says to the wall, "I'm grounded."

"Oh, no. Oh, no." Tasha says, leaning back onto the sink.

"You hungover, baby?" Rand says.

"I didn't finish the rug. When you two went outside, I don't know, I just." She leans into his chest.

"I'm really sorry about this Rand, but I'm going to have to impose on your hospitality."

Rand is holding onto Tasha. She has a glass of orange juice in her hand. "Something wrong with your plane?" he says.

"I'm hazed in," Lawson says, and he goes to the couch to fold up the smelly quilt.

The second day he was hazed in, Lawson decided he didn't have to shave. If the second day went as the first one did, all he could manage was to stay out of Tasha's way and fight the craving. He called the weather station; he jogged around the cabin in a circle and stomped his feet, stomped hard, stomped until pain shot up his shins. What he craved was not the taste or the smell but the numbness, a kind of blindness so he couldn't see the hollow look behind Rand's eyes or the scornful look Tasha wore. That night Rand couldn't get the Toyota started and spent most of the evening in a gas station. Lawson showed some interest in Tasha's rug hooking, and they talked for a few minutes. On the third morning, the dreams came back.

This time he's clutching the quilt at his chest, frozen with the remembering. In the dream he'd been flying, raising the nose of his plane, giving the altitude when suddenly he was drunk. His eyes were unfocused and he thought it was the fog but no, it was . . . Then he was driving a car, sliding down an icy hill and he tried to fight the wheel but he couldn't think—which way's the skid, which way's the . . . Then he was back in the plane and he grabbed the radio microphone. A voice came out of it. "He's going down," the voice said.

Tasha walks past him to the bathroom wearing a plaid bathrobe Lawson remembers is Rand's. He pretends he's asleep. He's remembering his bed at the treatment center and how the attendant taped a tongue depressor to the metal headboard the first night, saying to Lawson, "This is for ya D.T.'s. Case you start to swallow your tongue." He hears the toilet gulp. He pretends again, so well that he does fall asleep and doesn't wake up again until he hears the Toyota start.

They have left him a note taped to the bathroom mirror saying that Rand will be at the bus station all day trying to get some overtime in by selling tickets and that Tasha rode in too to get supplies. He is to make himself at home.

Lawson calls the weather station and then goes outside to see the haze for himself. It is thicker today than yesterday and the yard looks like the English moors. He calls the train station and gets a recording and an 800 number. He learns that the Southern Crescent doesn't go through there anymore, but that there is an Amtrak station 90 miles to the west. When he hangs up he thinks it is one of the few times in his life he didn't say thank you. Finally he finds a crossword puzzle. He is stabbing the pencil through the newsprint before he realizes what he's doing.

At dusk he calls his wife again to tell her about the haze. She is not merely annoyed, like the night before, but angry. She seems to blame him for it. She tells him that the hot water in the shower is off, that she'll have to go to the Anderson party alone tonight, and that the trust fund check came but since he's not there to sign it, it might as well be a piece of toilet tissue.

Lawson tries to whisper over the phone so Rand and Tasha won't realize he's being scolded. They're making a salad together to go with the pizza Lawson offered as a treat.

"She's a little annoyed," Lawson says after hanging up the phone.

"She misses you," Rand says, smiling.

"How old is she," Tasha asks.

Lawson says "Twenty-two," and Tasha snorts, her knife coming down hard on a radish from the garden. Then she says, "I'll take you in to get the pizza."

In the Toyota Lawson shuffles his feet and looks down. Tasha is silent. Lawson sees where the rust has eaten away at the floorboards and he toes gently at the mat, pushing it with the ball of his foot until he exposes a ragged hole. He watches the asphalt rush beneath him like a dark swollen river.

"You know two guys named Moe and Bo?" Tasha says.

Lawson starts in his seat. Does he, should he, he thinks. For once he'd rather be in Tasha's company than Rand's. Earlier he'd offered Rand a loan and Rand said, "I need it but I can't take it." Now they are uneasy with each other.

"Moe and Bo. I don't think so. Are they a comedy team?"

"I wish," Tasha snorts. "They're these two friends of Rand's. They came through last month on their way to California. Bumming joints and sleeping on the couch. They're musicians, or think they're musicians. Rand says they come around every few years. They're parasites. They feed off of Rand's good nature."

"Well, Rand is a good-natured guy, and I guess . . ."

Tasha cut him off, speaking in a soft voice that didn't quite sound like her. "Did you know Rand's father died three months ago? He's been so upset. They had gotten close."

"But he never said."

"Rand doesn't like to talk about anything sad. You know Rand."

Lawson's instinct tells him to take Rand out to a bar and throw back some Dewar's. Really throw them back. No, just force of habit. Then he thinks that the pizza place will have beer. He can taste it; he can feel the bold carbonation in his throat. He can see the foam on the head rising under the tap and dissipating on the top of a frosted mug. The mug slides silently toward him across a polished wooden table. His fingers make wet outlines on the glass.

"I can't," he says aloud.

Tasha has stopped the car with a jerk. They're at the pizza place and the acid smell of tomatoes and the aroma of baked dough sits in the night air. The car windows are down. The summer heat has baked the asphalt.

Lawson says, "I was thinking that I can't fly at night either. You know how they test you for an instrument rating? They put a hood over your head so all you can see is the instrument panel. You can't see a patch of sky."

Tasha leans her head back against the headrest on the car seat. The red neon sign that says "Pizza" has softened her face.

"The day his father died he sat at the kitchen table and cried all night. He wouldn't let me near him."

"What can I do?" Lawson says.

Tasha closes her eyes. "You can go in and get the pizza."

The fourth morning Lawson throws back the quilt and gets up off the couch without thinking. He stands dialing the phone in his bare feet. He doesn't care if he wakes her; she's his wife. A male says hello and he thinks, mistake, then a knock in the phone. "Gimme that." Her voice. He puts the phone receiver back in its cradle but wants to pick it up again and start screaming. The Anderson party. It came to him not as a thought but as a reply to a question he hadn't had time to ask himself. He sits down numbly on the couch. He wants to beat his fist into a pillow, a wall, anything.

Tasha pokes her head around the bedroom door and Lawson sees her smile for the first time. Her whole body is smiling; even her fingers around the door frame.

"Good. Everybody's up. I want everybody to see my piece. I finally finished it. Stayed up about half the night. It isn't exactly like the one in the display window. It's better. I think it might be even better." She says every word as if it's a new and pleasant surprise to her.

"Where's Rand?" Lawson says hoarsely.

"He went out for a walk at dawn. I was keeping him up. Didn't I hear you doing your weather check? Come on in and look at it."

The bedroom is piled with rags and bundles of clothes. There is a screen door in the back and Lawson sees the dyeing vats and the racks she probably uses to hang the fabric on. He sees the mist blurring the trees. Lawson turns to Tasha, stand-

ing, smiling in front of a curtainless window. At first he doesn't see it. His eyes are drawn to a bright rectangle of blue on the bed and he leans over and touches it. It feels knotted, and there are gold threads running through the blue. It feels sturdy, he thinks, rubbing his open palm across the rug, feeling the knots and thinking this is what it must be like to read Braille.

He looks up at Tasha, who unclasps a necklace and holds it out to him, saying, "This is where I got the gold color. I held it up and kept dyeing until I got it right."

"And the blue?" Lawson says.

"The sky," Tasha says in a practical, educating tone, "It's best to get your colors from the sky. Pinks. Oranges. Reds, even."

They see Rand's silhouette on the screen door.

On the way to the bus station in the Toyota, Lawson tells Rand he's sorry to hear about his father, and Rand nods his head, his eyes closing slightly and head bent as if in sudden prayer. When the gears grind and shift, Lawson tells Rand he thinks his wife had a fling while he was gone. Rand shakes his head and starts to say, "Women."

"I'd like to buy one of Tasha's rugs," Lawson says next.

"She'd be thrilled," Rand says.

"I was thinking this morning," Lawson says, "You can abandon your wife, abandon your kids, but you can't abandon an airplane."

"Come down and get it later. Bring your wife. The haze will lift eventually. Now you can leave the driving to Greyhound."

This time Lawson nods. They turn a corner sharply and Lawson grabs the armrest and it comes off in his hand. He holds it up in surprise. It's shaped like a telephone receiver.

"Forget it. Throw it in the back. We're here," Rand says.

Rand parks the car on a side street facing the parking lot where the long gray buses sit at odd angles from each other: two are almost nose to nose. Lawson thinks they look like elephants huddled together; like elephants seeking comfort from each other. He pulls his polyester duffle bag over his shoulder and he can feel the thick flight maps in the bag stab at his ribcage as he walks.

He's planning to get a seat in the rear of the bus; then take a taxi from the station. He's planning to buy a bottle, not scotch, not tequila but gin, the brand that has those bubble-like knots on the bottle. He's planning to sit that bottle down on the glass and chrome coffee table; sit it down the way old Western cowboys put a gun in the middle of a poker table. Sit that bottle down right in front of her and do shots. Maybe he'll take the taxi to the liquor store first. Maybe he won't even buy the bottle today. Maybe today he'll stay straight and maybe even tomorrow. But if he doesn't do it today or tomorrow, he'll do it the next day or the day after that or the day after that. ■

The Price of Haircuts

Paulette Schmidt

Mrs. Bodine's second husband died a mysterious death, in the Ouachita mountains at midnight. He was alone, apparently, and trespassing, at the Exotic Bird Retreat just outside Hot Springs. What Mrs. Bodine wanted to know was what her second husband was doing there when he was supposed to be at a hog auction in Little Rock. But no one could tell her. What they did tell her was this. A ranger on his morning rounds found Mr. Bodine stretched out in front of his pick-up truck, his hands cold and tight around the throat of an ostrich, also dead. No one knew how Mr. Bodine got into the Exotic Bird Retreat. The gates were closed at dusk and none of the fencing was down. The sheriff speculated that Mr. Bodine hid out behind the bushes, which were just high enough to cover his truck, and when everyone else had gone home, went racing through the compound on a joy ride, running head-on with an ostrich crossing the road. The windshield was shattered and Mr. Bodine's face was cut. Though some said it was peck marks, the sheriff insisted he'd hit the glass and went right on through, sliding across the hood to where the big bird was hurt and prone in front of the headlights. Some said the ostrich died on impact and Mr. Bodine was delirious when he tried to choke it to death; others thought the bird was just stunned by the truck and Mr. Bodine's last conscious act was to kill it in pure revenge. But even now no one could say for sure. It was a mystery.

Like this boy who'd been at Mrs. Bodine's for the last three weeks. He was a mystery too, though Mrs. Bodine knew where he'd come from and why. Her daughter Kate had put him on a bus in Tucson and he'd traveled half-way across the country alone because Kate could no longer cope, as she said on the phone. It was just like Kate, keeping something until she was tired of it, then dumping it off on her mama. Dogs and cats were one thing, but little boys? When Kate called to tell her that this boy without a daddy, this child named Free, who now called himself James, was headed for Malvern, there wasn't much Mrs. Bodine could do but go down to the depot and pick him up.



Born in Oklahoma, Paulette Schmidt earned an M.F.A. at the University of Arkansas, and now teaches fiction at Webster University in St. Louis, where she lives with her husband and seven-year-old son. She has published her translations in a number of little magazines, and in a book, I'm Lying—translations of French surrealist Philippe Soupault's poems. "Most of my stories have to do with relationships and their mysteries—the things we don't know about people we love. I started 'The Price of Haircuts' one night on the way to Oklahoma to attend my stepfather's funeral. We passed a number of billboards advertising an exotic animal retreat." The first line of the story, and the ostrich, flashed into her head and she dug out a pen and flashlight and wrote it down. Photo and hat credit: Walter Schmidt.

Her grandson was not a child she knew like she knew the Wilcox boy who mowed her lawn or the kids who came into the Dairy Queen where she used to work before the trouble with her feet. She'd been in the same room with James maybe ten times. His first two years she'd had nothing even to prove she was a grandma but a Polaroid print of a bald and red-faced baby wrapped in a shawl, silky and bright, the very same shawl that Kate had draped around a lamp when she'd come to visit, the year before the baby was born. "How can you live like this, Mama?" she'd said and made a sweeping motion with her arm that took in the living room and the kitchenette. "You got no pizzazz." Then went digging in her backpack for that shawl, that gypsy shawl that stayed there, like a limp flag, on the pole lamp, until Kate left, like she always did, for some other part of the country.

James was small for eleven and the only person in Mrs. Bodine's family who had dark eyes and tight black curls. For a while the occasional snapshot that came through the mail made her think her grandson had Negro blood, then she thought Arab, Iranian maybe, or Black Dutch. Mr. Bodine had called himself Black Dutch, but he didn't look it. His eyes were blue and pale as sheets, and his hair, already white when Mrs. Bodine met and married him, she had trouble imagining any other color, especially not the red he said it was when he was young.

Now why was it, Mrs. Bodine asked herself, that every time she tried to get things right in her head about James, she ended up thinking about her second husband? Mr. Bodine had died years before James was born, and they didn't look anything alike, and certainly didn't act it. James so quiet and grudging with his talk, and Mr. Bodine going on like words were weeds. She'd never known a farmer who talked as much as he did. He'd say things one way, and before Mrs. Bodine had time to say "That so?" or nod a yes, he'd say the same thing again some other way or run on to something else, while his fried chicken turned cold and mealy on his plate. James wasn't like that.

Take last night. They'd just sat down to supper, meatloaf and mashed potatoes, a meal James had specifically asked for. He had definite tastes, Mrs. Bodine had noticed, not that he ever volunteered anything, but he'd tell you straight out if you asked him. At breakfast she'd said, "What do you want to eat tonight?" and without even seeming to think about it he'd answered, "Meatloaf," as if it had been on his mind for days. "Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, tapioca pudding," like he planned menus for a living. Other times, he'd ponder something for a while and then after you'd forgotten what it was you'd asked, he'd come out with it, direct as "Meatloaf" in a way. At supper he didn't say a word till they got to the pudding and then he looked up from the tapioca piled on his plate, pearly as fish eggs, and said, "Kate's nuts." Mrs. Bodine had to think a minute why he'd say something like that when she'd been talking about the price of haircuts, and then she remembered. Right at bedtime, the night James got there, when she was about to turn off the TV, there'd been a public service message on mental illness and she'd asked how Kate was. For some reason they hadn't mentioned Kate before that.

Looking back, she didn't know whether it was the public service message they were thinking of, one in the asking, the other in answering, or if they'd both known all along, without actually saying it, that Kate really was nuts, and it took the question, "So how's Kate," to bring it out in the open.

"Why's that, James?" she asked, as if it was her daughter's cooking they were discussing and no more significant than a fallen cake.

The boy took his time answering, his eyes shifting from the tapioca on his plate to the pots on the stove. He had large nostrils, Mrs. Bodine noticed, for a child, and a way of flaring them when he sniffed that reminded her of a small pony. "It's like she just got weird on me all of a sudden. Crying and yelling."

And then he shut up and went back to his tapioca, like he'd had his say and everything was clear as day. Crying and yelling didn't mean crazy to her. Everybody cried and yelled sometimes. Why should Kate be any different? But there was something that made them both think of Kate when the public service message came on. There had to be.

Mrs. Bodine believed that everything was connected, though she didn't always know how. Life was one big picture that needed piecing together, she thought, like the puzzle Kate gave her for Christmas one year. A thousand pieces, it was a picture of a white horse, reared up on its hind legs with a rope loose at its neck and a storm brewing behind it. That puzzle stayed on the same table for three years before she put it away. It wasn't finished, but she'd managed to put the horse together, or at least the edges of it, where you could see a clear definition between light and dark. The horse was one reason Mrs. Bodine thought Kate might be crazy. "That's me, mama, that puzzle," Kate had said when she'd opened the package. "Figure it out." All the while looking at her with those eyes like ice over water, hard and cold with things moving somewhere down under, things you knew were there but just couldn't see.

Once, when Kate was still in high school, one of her friends banged his head on the concrete playing basketball in his driveway, and then thirty minutes later, in the middle of laughing about a basket he'd just sunk, touched his head, said "Jesus" and fell over dead. Mrs. Bodine sent a green-bean casserole to the funeral dinner, asking Kate to bring back the dish. Kate was barely out of the car when she broke that dish across the mailbox. "Goddamn it, Mama," she was yelling as she came into the house, "Goddamn it," holding what was left of the bowl, a long curved sliver of milky glass. "How could you?"

"How could I what, Kate? What'd I do?"

"I've never been so embarrassed. You put a band-aid on it, a goddamn band-aid." And there, sure enough, on the piece of glass in Kate's hand was the band-aid with Mrs. Bodine's name printed straight across the part over the gauze. Before Mrs. Bodine could tell her that they were out of tape and a band-aid seemed plenty good enough—it stayed stuck and you could write on it, Kate drew back her arm and threw that piece of glass. If Mrs. Bodine hadn't ducked, it would have hit her instead of the wall.

"Stupid," Kate was yelling, "you're goddamn stupid," just as Mr. Bodine walked in the door.

And then there was the devil to pay. Mr. Bodine slapping Kate and Kate slapping back and Mrs. Bodine getting slapped by both of them, trying to stop it. Now that was crazy.

And there were other times. Like when Kate said her pickled peaches were dead babies and then dragged her to the science museum at the junior college in Hot Springs to see a line of little fetuses in formaldehyde. Mrs. Bodine never made pickled peaches again. And they were good, those peaches, one of the best things she pickled. But every time she'd boil some water and start to skin a peach, she'd think of those little babies floating in jars at the junior college. If it wasn't for Kate, Mrs. Bodine would be making peaches today, for James. He wouldn't say they were dead babies.

James ate everything she put in front of him, asked for seconds. And not once in the three weeks he'd been there had he wanted yogurt or granola, or what was it Kate used to make sometimes? A big mound of wheat salad that had a strange sounding name and too much parsley and lemon. Mrs. Bodine would always try what Kate brought with her when she came to visit—pumpkin seeds, dried bananas, even seaweed once, but they tasted odd to her, like something you'd eat if you were starving, certainly not what you'd take off the shelf or out of the icebox when there was plenty of real food there too.

Kate wouldn't touch anything fried, or even Mrs. Bodine's good cornbread, because of the bacon grease she added for flavor. Mrs. Bodine had had two slices of bacon for breakfast every morning of her life. She couldn't imagine breakfast without bacon. And James loved it. But Kate wouldn't stay in the same room with bacon frying. "That's why there's so many rednecks in Arkansas, Mama. All that bacon grease goes straight to their necks, makes those ugly red folds. Rednecks," she'd said, raising an eyebrow at Mrs. Bodine. "Get it?" Mrs. Bodine got it all right. Kate was referring to Mr. Bodine.

Mr. Bodine had been a farmer most of his life, spent a lot of long days in the sun. Of course his neck was red. Rust was how Mrs. Bodine liked to think of it, the color her pecan tree turned in the fall. His neck wasn't ugly; it was a perfectly normal neck for a man his age. Mrs. Bodine would stand behind him sometimes when he was watching TV, and she'd imagine sticking a dime in between those folds. And she'd laugh. But not at Mr. Bodine. She loved everything about him, including his wrinkles.

Mrs. Bodine didn't take the things Kate said to heart. Kate had her reasons. Her daddy had died so young, with Mrs. Bodine still in her thirties and Kate just a kid. It wasn't Kate's fault Mr. Bodine had come along and her mama had fallen hard for him. Though Mrs. Bodine never understood why Kate took such a dislike to her second husband. He tried to please her, at least at first. He bought her a second-hand car before she even turned sixteen. A '53 Ford, sharp as a bullet. And pink. "Titty pink," Mr. Bodine had whispered in his wife's ear, "but not near as pretty as yours." Mrs. Bodine blushed remembering how his hand felt on her breast.

Kate thought she'd been replaced by Mr. Bodine. But it wasn't true. Mrs. Bodine's life was just all the richer, loving twice. She had lots of little rooms in her heart for people to come into. All of Kate's nastiness came from the hurt, Mrs. Bodine knew that. So when Kate would say things like, "You're ugly, Mama, coarse, just like he is," Mrs. Bodine wouldn't pay any attention. If there was one thing she had learned in her sixty-four years it was that there was no use getting worked up about what people said. First of all, there was no guaranteeing it was true, and second, even if it was, there likely wasn't much you could do about it.

Like when she'd first heard stories of Mr. Bodine and women. Somebody's husband would be in Texarkana, say, and think they saw him with a redhead, maybe fried clam night at the Holiday Inn. Or somebody would pass his truck at the scenic pull-over, the windows tight and steamy, and it the middle of winter and nothing to look at, the foliage two months gone. And she'd get a call. "Mrs. Bodine, I just hate to tell you this, but . . ." She'd listen for a while and then excuse herself, saying somebody was at the door or the dog was loose and chasing the mailman.

She never let things like that get to her, except once, when they towed in Mr. Bodine's truck from the Bird Retreat and left it in her driveway. She cleaned out the glove compartment and the trash off the floorboards. There was the usual stuff—registration papers, a pack of Pall Malls, a coke bottle, some gloves, the leather dry and thin at the palms. And under the floormat was an earring. A gold-plated hoop with a glass bead threaded on it, green as jade.

Not that it proved anything, that earring. But it was so real, something she could hold in her hand and wonder about, not just words in the air. And common as Johnson grass. Why, even Kate had a pair, bought off the rack at the drugstore. At first she thought maybe it was Kate's—and it was a horrible thought, not something a mother should be thinking. Besides, Kate hadn't had anything to do with Mr. Bodine for months before his death. She wouldn't eat at the same table with him, let alone ride in his truck, not since the slapping. And that was long before she bought those cheap earrings.

That summer Kate left home. She worked here and then there, waitressing mostly, but never any place for long. She'd call sometimes, usually late at night when Mrs. Bodine was already in bed, or write a postcard. Sometimes she'd just show up, with no warning, for Christmas or Thanksgiving, with a casual "Mama, I'm home," as if she'd just come back from a date. The first Christmas Kate brought James home, when he was still called Free, he was already five years old and not nearly as closemouthed as he was now. He sang a song, she remembered, standing in front of the tree. It wasn't a Christmas song. It was about the Civil War, about Robert E. Lee. It went, "In the winter of '65, we were hungry, just barely alive. . . ." She remembered the words because, for one thing, it was 1965 that Mr. Bodine died, and for another, although she knew it didn't have anything to do with James and Kate, it broke her heart to think that baby might have been hungry somewhere, somewhere far away where she couldn't help. He stood there singing in front of the tree, the Christmas lights

blinking behind him, his little face sober as Job and his body stiff, but his voice easy and clear as a church bell. "The night they drove old Dixie down, and all the people were singing, they went Naaaa Na-Na Na Na Naaaa . . ."

Looking at him now, it was hard to believe he was ever that little boy named Free who sang on command. He was cross-legged on the floor in front of her console TV, watching a rerun of *Lassie*.

"I used to have a collie," Mrs. Bodine told him. "It looked a lot like Lassie."

James didn't answer.

"Of course that was a long time ago, when I was a kid. I called her Thelma."

James looked up at her like he didn't believe any of it, like she'd made it all up. She'd never had a dog named Thelma or been a kid, never been anything but an old woman sitting in a rocker, her feet in a pan of Epsom Salts.

"Is that water hot as it looks?" he asked.

This was the first time she'd had to soak her feet since James had moved in. Sometimes she'd go for months with no problems. Then suddenly, for no reason she could see, they'd swell up big as boats, and she'd have to pad around in socks for a few days and soak them before she went to bed.

"Hot as I can stand it," she said. "See, the heat helps the Epsom Salts draw out the swelling."

"You got big feet for a woman," he said, more observation than criticism. But it wasn't anything Mrs. Bodine wanted to talk about, the size of her feet.

"What do you want to watch next?" she said, flipping through the TV guide.

"What's coming on?"

"Well, here's something you might like, one of those cartoon movies."

"Which one?"

"It's called *Unicorns*. That's those horses with a horn that's so big now. There's a whole shelf of them at the drugstore. Little glass things about so high," she said, spreading her thumb and index finger to indicate the size.

"Kidstuff," said James. "Stupid." He stretched out on the rug, his head next to the TV screen, his feet almost touching her pan of Epsom Salts. "What's the name of that horse in the show we watched yesterday right before the news?" he asked.

"You mean *The Lone Ranger*?"

"No, his horse."

"Why, that's Silver," she said, surprised he wouldn't know something like that.

"Yeah, Silver, he's cool. Not stupid like unicorns. We saw that movie, *Unicorns*, me and Kate. It was dumb. Just us and all these three-year-olds. Stupid," he said, turning back to the TV.

And it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Bodine that it might have been something like that James had been thinking of when he called Kate nuts—her dragging him someplace he didn't want to go, making him watch a kid's movie when he'd rather see a shoot-'em-up, maybe yelling at him to stop complaining, or crying out loud at the sad part, like she had when

Mrs. Bodine took her to see *Bambi*. She hated it that she so often thought the worst of Kate. Earlier when she'd asked James if he'd ever had a dog and he'd answered, "Yeah, but something happened to it" and then shut up with no explanation, the first thing she'd thought of was Kate. Not that it got distemper or was hit by a car, the way most people would think, but that Kate had killed it.

And then just after that, she remembered those chickens, those little colored Easter chicks Kate had when she was six. For some reason Kate decided they needed a bath, and she soaped them down and rinsed them under the outside faucet. It was cold for April and Mrs. Bodine remembered how shocked she was to see those little birds hanging stiff from the line, the clothespins an odd extension of their scrawny legs. And Kate so proud. "Are they dry, Mama, are they dry?" Looking into her daughter's face, Mrs. Bodine honestly couldn't tell whether Kate knew the chicks were dead, or not, Kate grinning, missing two front teeth, and so cute and wide-eyed. So she took the chicks off the line and dropped them in the clothes basket under the sheets, somehow managing to put Kate off until she could get to the feed store to replace them.

Yes, it's likely just that simple, that innocent, James saying Kate was nuts. Why, Kate wasn't crazy, she knew that now, wild maybe, mean sometimes, irresponsible, but not crazy. Not even a liar, like that waitress from Hot Springs Laura Gilpin had called her about. That *cocktail* waitress who'd bragged to Mrs. Gilpin's son that she'd been with Mr. Bodine that night at the Bird Retreat, but threatened to deny it if he told. "It's our little secret," she'd giggled to Ed Gilpin a whole year after Mr. Bodine died. She said they'd hid out drinking rum and coke, and she'd blacked an eye and cut her face when they'd hit, then crawled out a window and hightailed it home, hitching from the highway, since Mr. B.—she'd said that, *Mr. B.*—and the bird were dead and there was nothing to be done.

Mrs. Bodine looked at her grandson stretched full-length in front of her, his hand lightly touching the bottom of the TV, and for no reason at all, she remembered Mr. Bodine's hair. He was sensitive about his hair, wore it parted just above his right temple and brushed straight across his forehead, the long wave secured by spray, like a man not at peace with his baldness. When Kate complained about him using her hairspray, Mrs. Bodine bought a can, though she didn't use hairspray, set it on the shelf next to her Mum, replaced it when she knew it was empty, and never once mentioned it. A bachelor used to his own bed, Mr. Bodine took the spare room for his own when they married. And he wouldn't let her touch his hair, ever, even in their lovemaking. When Mr. Bodine died, the undertaker, new in town and not knowing her second husband, brushed his hair straight back from his forehead. And when Mrs. Bodine looked into the casket, she gasped. Why, Mr. Bodine had a regular hairline, receding, yes, a bit, and thin, but he wasn't bald. And for the very first time she touched his hair, gently ran her fingers along that white line, and wondered, truly amazed at how much you could not know about a person. ■

John Quinn Avant-Garde Angel

Elizabeth McClelland

Like an electronic arrow on a computer screen, the name John Quinn moves through the first quarter of the twentieth century, illuminating the beginnings of modern art and literature. The name pops up throughout William Butler Yeats's letters, in the biography and autobiography of Lady Augusta Gregory, and in any history of the famous 1913 Armory Show. In the photographs taken with Picasso, Yeats, or those with James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford, Quinn's tall, slim, conservative elegance seems out of tune with the other relaxed, rumpled figures. That starched appearance, however, belies the sense of adventure and passion with which he pursued the *avant-garde*. Armed with a formidable intellect, intimidating energy, and a checkbook, he went forth on a personal crusade that ended only with his death in 1924.

John Quinn was born in Tiffin, Ohio on April 24, 1870 to Mary and James Quinn, both Irish immigrants. Shortly after John's birth, the Quinns moved to Fostoria, where James prospered as a baker. He built the Quinn Block, which served as a bakery and shop on the first floor with the family apartment above. It was a close, warm family with seven children born after John, two of whom died in infancy.

Quinn credited his father for his efficiency, but his mother was the cornerstone of his existence. She lovingly encouraged his intellectual pursuits, and stamped with approval almost everything he did. Dr. U. H. Squires, principal of Fostoria's high school, directed Quinn's voracious reading, thereby gaining Quinn's lifelong respect and friendship, and a remembrance in his will. By the time Quinn graduated from high school he possessed an impressive collection of first-edition books, bought with his savings, and a heaping measure of self-assurance.

Precocious in politics also, Quinn nominated former Ohio governor Charles Foster for Congress. Then, still in his teens, he ran Foster's campaign. In 1888 Quinn attended the University of Michigan for one year, but left to go to Washington, D.C. as personal secretary to Foster, who had been appointed Secretary of the Treasury by President Benjamin Harrison. Quinn studied law at Georgetown University at night; following graduation in 1893, he left Washington to study international law at Harvard University.



Elizabeth McClelland lives and works in Cleveland as a freelance writer; she also edits the NOVA (New Organization for the Visual Arts) newsletter. She was educated at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Instituto de Allende, and the Art Students' League. Her interests are far-ranging, from textile surface design to women's art and their art history. McClelland's articles and critical reviews have appeared in numerous publications, including Art in America, Art News, Arts Magazine, and Christian Science Monitor. She has written catalog essays for the exhibitions "Assembled Propositions" and "Visual Logic," and is working now on a book about William Sommer for one of John Carroll University's series on Cleveland artists.

In 1895 Quinn joined General Benjamin F. Tracy's law firm in New York. Five years later, at thirty, he assumed a junior partnership with Alexander and Colby, and there his brilliance as a business and corporate lawyer drew the attention of the National Bank of Commerce, the nation's largest bank. His adroit handling of the legal battle for control of the Equitable Life Assurance Society impressed "Copper King" Thomas Fortune Ryan. With Ryan as a client and with a yearly retainer from the National Bank of Commerce, Quinn established his own office at 31 Nassau Street in 1906.

After his father died in 1897, Quinn strengthened his family ties still more. When he learned of his mother's serious illness on June 20, 1902, he took the first available train to Ohio, sending telegrams to her at every train stop, not knowing that she had died before he left New York. A few days after Mrs. Quinn's funeral, his sister Annie's weak heart failed and she followed her mother in death.

Earlier that year Quinn had planned his first trip to England and Ireland. Emotionally and physically exhausted, and in need of change and intellectual refreshment, he proceeded with the trip, leaving in late July. Quinn was an avid reader, familiar with the poetry of William Butler Yeats. Hearing about an exhibition in London of paintings by the poet's brother Jack, he began a correspondence with the painter; when Quinn arrived in London, Jack Yeats became his guide. Quinn went on to Dublin, where he met the rest of the famous family, including its patriarch John Butler Yeats, artists and writers in the Yeats circle, and Lady Augusta Gregory, one of the founders, with Yeats, of the Abbey Theater.

W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory were central figures in the Irish Literary Revival, and Quinn was as close to an angel as the movement would ever see. With a generous spirit and a checkbook at the ready, he administered financial first aid to the struggling writers. Later Quinn arranged a well-paying lecture tour in this country for W. B. Yeats, providing his own apartment as a home while Yeats was in America. When Lady Gregory, the dedicated mainstay of the Irish Players, brought the company to tour the United States, Quinn gave her the same hospitality. Quinn, in turn, was welcome at Coole Park, Lady Gregory's home and a haven for Ireland's literati.

Trouble began for the Irish Players in New York, where Irish-American groups stirred up audiences, interrupting performances. Irish men and boys called obscenities to the actresses as they left the theater. Obviously, America wasn't ready for the dark humor of John Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Quinn paved the way with the hesitant authorities in Chicago, persuading them to permit the play's performance. When the company was arrested in Philadelphia, Quinn immediately went to the rescue and had charges of immorality and sacrilege dropped. Quinn was angered at the boorish behavior, and his attitude toward his fellow Irish-Americans soured. Lady Gregory was calm throughout because she had had similar experiences in Ireland.

Despite this unpleasantness, Quinn's crusading spirit was not diminished. The year after the tour of the Irish Players, Quinn involved himself in the 1913 Armory Show, the exhibition of modern art that rocked this country's art establishment.



John Quinn (1912). A drawing by John Butler Yeats. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; museum purchase, 1976

Organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors to bring contemporary American and European art before the American public, the show in the Armory at Lexington Avenue and 25th Street in New York revealed for the first time in the United States the works of Picasso, Redon, Matisse, and Brancusi. The New York crowds came to look. The critics attacked. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* was called "an explosion in a shingle factory." Visitors searched for some semblance of a figure among the planes of the Cubist painting. In Chicago the defenders of public morals buzzed like clouds of insects and burned Matisse's *Blue Nude* in effigy. When the show moved to Boston, a polite silence was maintained; the two pieces sold went to buyers from Cambridge.

Quinn was an enthusiastic supporter of the show, helping with planning and acting as the Association's legal advisor. From his own collection, Quinn lent many works by English and Irish artists, in particular those by Augustus John, as well as paintings by Van Gogh, Cassatt, and Gauguin. He opened the New York show with a speech, and closed it by joining in the riotous party that ended with a snake dance and champagne rumored to have been his gift to the celebration. He also purchased more than anyone else, spending \$5,808.75 on paintings and prints by Gauguin, Redon, Pascin, and Signac, and two paintings by his good friend Walt Kuhn, another organizer of the show.

Ohio artists invited to participate were Henry G. Keller, William and Marguerite Zorach, and Alexander Warshawsky. Kuhn sent posters to his friend Keller with instructions to "spread them all over town," meaning Cleveland, where Keller was teaching at the Cleveland School of Art (now the

Cleveland Institute of Art). The hundreds of American works in the show represented a variety of styles, but only a few, such as those by Joseph Stella, John Marin, Maurice Prendergast, and Charles Sheeler, showed an awareness of trends in modern European art.

In 1918 Quinn underwent surgery for cancer; during his recovery he consciously revised his approach to collecting. In the past he had generously supported promising artists, buying their works in order to provide them with life's necessities. Now he decided to concentrate on acquiring "works of museum rank."

That same year Quinn filled a void in his personal life. His sister Jessie had died in 1902, and in 1906 he had made weekend trips to Fostoria to be with his brother Jim, dying of tuberculosis. Another sister, Clara, had entered an Ursuline convent in Tiffin. Quinn's familial devotion now turned to his sister Julia Quinn Anderson and her daughter Mary, and he finally persuaded Julia and her husband, a successful Fostoria pharmacist, to live in New York.

John Quinn avoided marriage even though he was as attracted to women as they were to him. His close companion for the last eight years of his life was Jeanne Robert Foster, an American enamored of Irish literature and an intimate of the Yeats family. She had written several books of poetry and had been on the staffs of the *Transatlantic Review* and the *Review of Reviews*. Intelligent, charming, attractive, Mrs. Foster possessed a gracious manner that complemented Quinn's feverish pace and flashes of temper.

When a first copy of *The Waste Land* arrived from T. S. Eliot, it was Mrs. Foster who read it to Quinn as he shaved one morning in 1922. It was in Mrs. Foster's family plot in the Adirondacks that old J. B. Yeats (the poet's father) was buried when he died in the fourteenth year of his "visit" to New York. Quinn provided the headstone and tenderly informed his family in Ireland.

Even though Quinn lived life at a breakneck tempo, he never took halfway measures. Personal letters and those concerning his collection kept two or three secretaries busy on Sundays as he sat at his dining room table dictating. Often those letters were ten, twelve, or more pages long. He wrote to James Joyce of the hazards of censorship if *Ulysses* were published in America. He fired off detailed directives to Doubleday, Page and Company when Joseph Conrad asked merely for him to keep an eye on transactions for the American publication of his complete works. Such examples from his vast correspondence tell how deeply Quinn was involved in this century's arts and letters.

Quinn's outrage that art over a hundred years old was exempt from duty while contemporary art was not, making it more difficult for living artists to sell, propelled him through several fiery legal battles. Through his efforts the import tax was cut by half in 1921. Later, on the Senate floor, he nearly succeeded in abolishing the tax altogether, but five percent was the best he could do. Through all this he carried on his law practice and, during World War I, because of his expertise in international affairs, acted as advisor to the British and French ambassadors here.

His eleven-room apartment on Central Park West overflowed with books, paintings, and sculpture. Quinn never stored anything, preferring to keep his treasures at hand where he could enjoy them, or pull out something special for a friend. In order to make way for new art (and probably to help pay for it), he sold, not without pangs, his first-edition books and original manuscripts, and most of his English and Irish art.

For Quinn the best times of his life were probably the summers of 1921 and 1923, spent in Europe with Mrs. Foster. They enjoyed many hours with Braque in his studio and with Matisse in his gardens. They visited Rouault, whom Quinn had been sending six hundred dollars a year over and above his purchases. They had extended lunches with Picasso, and dinner with Brancusi, who cooked chicken on his studio forge. Quinn talked all night with writer Henri-Pierre Roché, a friend of Gertrude Stein and in close contact with the Parisian vanguard. Roché became Quinn's art scout when Quinn was back in New York.

Quinn eagerly studied the work of contemporary French artists, for which he developed a decided preference, buying some of their most powerful works. He took abuse from the press and snickers from acquaintances because, although there were a few other collectors of modern art, most Americans, including museum heads, couldn't comprehend its significance. Quinn had a large income but he did not have the resources of Henry Clay Frick or J. Pierpont Morgan. Luckily for future museum collections in this country, the prices of the works Quinn bought were much below those of the Old Masters sought by the wealthy industrialists and financiers. *Le Congre, Etretat*, painted by Matisse in 1920, and now in the Columbus Museum of Art, cost just a little over \$2,000 when Quinn bought it. Two Picasso paintings, purchased at the same time, were under \$7,000. Odilon Redon's *Orpheus*, currently owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art, was only \$702. (In 1987, purchase prices of Redon's work ranged from \$45,000 to \$450,000.)

The Circus by pointillist Georges Pierre Seurat was one of the most expensive pieces in his collection, costing over \$9,000. It was moved up to Quinn's apartment on top of the elevator cage in 1923, and hung in the foyer in celebration of his niece Mary's sixteenth birthday. This was the only painting for which Quinn made a definite disposition, willing it to the Louvre. France too was slow to appreciate its most creative artists and at that time the Louvre did not have one of Seurat's paintings. (Seurat's *La Poudreuse*, also in the Quinn collection, was shown at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1987 in the exhibition from the Courtauld Institute.)

The Sleeping Gypsy by Henri Rousseau was spotted for Quinn by Picasso. That mysterious moonlit scene with a lion hovering over a sleeping figure is now one of the most memorable paintings in the Museum of Modern Art. Quinn purchased it just before he died of cancer on July 28, 1924, only 54 years old.



Two of the paintings in Quinn's collection. Above: "Orpheus," by Odile Redon (painted after 1913); Cleveland Museum of Art, gift from J. H. Wade. Below: "Le Congre, Etretat," by Henri Matisse (1920); Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, gift of Ferdinand Howald.



Unfortunately, he had not used his lawyer's expertise to protect his magnificent collection of modern art. The executors, one of which was the National Bank of Commerce, wanted to be rid of the embarrassing art works as quickly as possible. Julia Anderson also wanted to be relieved of the responsibility for the collection. Only several of the advisors to the estate—Mrs. Foster, who had helped care for Quinn until his death, artists Walter Pach and Arthur B. Davies, and dealer Joseph Brummer—tried to reason with the more powerful executors about the dispersal of the art. Mrs. Foster wrote a lengthy plea explaining the importance of these modern masterpieces, and asking that they not be devalued by dumping them on the market. She had nothing to gain personally except the satisfaction of seeing the collection disassembled in a responsible manner.

The executors reluctantly permitted several hastily arranged sales, one of which was a memorial to Quinn in 1926. Dealers who bought at the sales and held their purchases made great profits later. Collectors such as the Cone sisters, Miss Lillie Bliss, and Dr. Edward Barnes enhanced their holdings as a result of Quinn's brave, prescient choices. Eventually most of Quinn's magnificent hoard became the staple fare, along with Renaissance and Dutch masterpieces, that we expect to see when we visit art museums.

John Quinn's final trip to Fostoria, Ohio is marked by a Celtic cross in the family plot. ■

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Letter From New Stark, Ohio

Claude Clayton Smith

New Stark is not the kind of place you'd like to visit, but you might want to live there—if you enjoy solitude bordering on isolation. This unincorporated village of fifteen people occupies a quarter-mile stretch of Route 30—the old Lincoln Highway—through the flat rural farmland of northwest Ohio. Geographically, New Stark lies near the center of a triangle formed by Toledo to the north, Dayton to the south, and Columbus to the east. Metaphorically, as Ohio T-shirts proclaim, it's "in the heart of it all." Last summer, however, it was in the *heat* of it all—devastated by the worst drought in memory and crisped by record-breaking temperatures.

* * *

"PRAY FOR RAIN" is the plea one area farmer has mowed in large letters across his fields, to make certain it is visible from on high. Area churches have held prayer services. The last good rain—an inch and two tenths—fell on Easter Sunday. Since then there have been two or three false alarms—much wind, with dark clouds and thunder and lightning, and scattered raindrops amounting to less than a tenth of an inch. The unfaithful have sponsored an Indian rain dance, with no success. Others talk of seeding the clouds. But there are no clouds to seed. Rainfall is off ten inches.

"God's testing our character," Bill Rausch's wife tells him. The Rausches farm one thousand acres in and around New Stark, a family enterprise that dates back a hundred years. Bill grew up in New Stark, and his mother, who is seventy-six, recently said to him, "There's nothing I can tell you about weather now. You've seen it all." Marjorie Marquart's mother is ninety-one and can't remember it any worse.

The heat is relentless, with a palpable presence. New Stark bakes and swelters. The grass is the color of straw; the trees are shedding their leaves in self-defense. In the surrounding fields, which stretch away in all directions, the corn stands crippled—half the height it should be—and the soybeans languish, ankle deep. Dark clumps of trees dot the horizon, wrapped by the gauze of a shimmering haze.



*Claude Clayton Smith is a newcomer to Ohio, and, he says, has always been struck by New Stark when he travels Route 30, by its smallness and isolation. He was born in Stratford, Connecticut, and has lived since in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Iowa, as well as abroad. He earned his B.A. at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, an M.A.T. at Yale, an M.F.A. at the University of Iowa, and a D.A. at Carnegie Mellon; he is now an associate professor of English at Ohio Northern University. His publishing credits include two children's books that have sold, together, over a million copies; he is also author of *Quarter-Acre of Heartache* (nonfiction, Pocahontas Press, 1985); and *The Stratford Devil* (a historical novel; Walker & Co., 1984). Photo credit: Eleanor Guy.*

The heat wave began the third weekend in May, when it turned 95 degrees overnight, and temperature records have been broken almost daily since. June was clear and bright, but July has turned hazy. It was 104 when I stopped in New Stark on Friday the 8th of July. I stopped on a whim, struck by a sense of history. There is a certain grim satisfaction in knowing that what you are experiencing is the worst it's ever been.

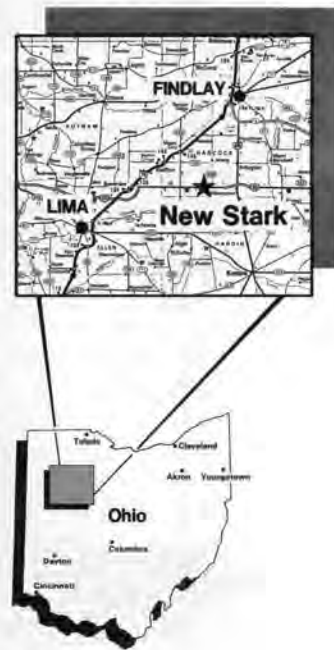
Also, I wanted to learn about the Lincoln Highway. 1988 is the seventy-fifth anniversary of this antique national route, a road constructed through Ohio along old Indian trails, to join San Francisco and New York via Chicago. A commemorative tour, led by California highway historian Lyn Protteau, left New York on June 11 and recently passed through, further contributing to the historical significance of New Stark's summer. According to Protteau, "It is quite probable that the Lincoln Highway played an enormous part in the development of America's economy, establishing the importance of good roads, and making the automobile practical and affordable."

Finally, I stopped in New Stark because I wanted to know if its name was in any way related to the landscape.

* * *

State Route 30, the old Lincoln Highway, is a two-lane road. It's one of the best in Ohio and, as the truckers will tell you, the shortest direct route east-west. The speed limit is 55 mph, so the trucks—huge Mack rigs with sleek airfoils above their cabs and ROADWAY or CAROLINA or some other logo painted broadside on their trailers—blow through at 70. At that speed, you have less than fifteen seconds to see New Stark. But there isn't very much to see. Nine bungalow-type homes hug the quarter-mile strip, between two green-and-white metal signs that announce the village. Three of these houses sit vacant, although it's difficult to tell driving through. There are two mobile homes: one empty; the other closed up, its owners on vacation. The two grandest structures are in disrepair—a gutted church of white clapboards with a tall belfry above the arched front door; and a ten-room, two-story frame home, scarcely visible through a jungle of trees and brush that encase it like a diseased skin. Another dilapidated structure—a two-story frame building of gray clapboards—leans against its one-story addition of yellow brick. Beside it stands a weathered, peaked garage of vertical boards. Route 30 is intersected in the center of New Stark by Van Buren Twp. 61, a narrow township road that runs south several miles to the Hancock County line and dead-ends to the north in the ravaged fields.

But let me take you on a walking tour, retracing my steps as I discovered New Stark. I arrived from the west, parking on the south side of the highway, just inside the NEW STARK sign, along a gravel berm that runs for about one hundred yards. This shoulder is the widest segment of Route 30 for miles, the only decent place to park or turn around. Elsewhere in the village the road comes right to the edge of the straw-colored yards, and along the fields the berm is virtually non-existent, giving way immediately to deep ditches. Yellow lines with cats' eyes mark the center of the highway and unbroken white lines define the edge.



Route 30 is well-maintained—sections near New Stark were repaved last summer—and the asphalt is thick and smooth. There are no potholes, but the road is dangerous. Every driveway has room enough for vehicles to turn around, so the locals don't have to back into traffic. I sat in my car for ten minutes before mustering the courage to get out, daunted by the whoosh of passing trucks. Then I crunched my way along the gravel berm, through chunks of rubber and the carcasses of animals. Just outside of New Stark I had seen a doe and her fawn, freshly killed. The animals get struck and killed, then struck again and flattened, then struck again and shunted to the roadside where, when the birds and broiling sun have done their work, they can be identified only by the color of their fur. I saw a brown squirrel, a black skunk, and a calico cat. As Bill Rausch's daughter Susie says, "In New Stark you get used to losing your pets."

But the loss of human life is the real tragedy. Marjorie Marquart, who's lived in New Stark since 1943, tells of a woman in a VW that went under a semi. She was extricated in pieces. A collision between a car and two semis left a leg in one front yard. The worst occurred when a truck ran into a school bus from behind. Bill Rausch and his wife hunted for the bodies of the children in the soybean field across from their farmhouse. Recently, not far from New Stark, a semi plowed into a home, pinning a woman under her bed for hours. The incident has revived a rallying cry: *Widen the berm!* But the attendant politics move slowly. The Lincoln Highway is supposed to be expanded to four lanes, but as anyone in New Stark will tell you, that kind of talk has been heard for years and the starting date is always a decade away. In rural areas you just have to wait.

To the right of the gravel berm is a half-acre lot overgrown with Queen Anne's lace, goldenrod, and a stalky green weed with pale blue flowers. The rusted T-shaped overhang once sheltered gasoline pumps. The broken refrigerator case and Toledo scales are from a subsequent fruit stand. An abandoned Jeep-like vehicle and a Chevrolet sit further back among some trees, and if you hunt around in there you might find the remains of a tennis court. But if you just stand in the lot and wait for the traffic to thin, the whoosh of trucks will disappear and New Stark will suddenly turn silent, as silent as the white cottonwood seeds sailing overhead on the hot prairie breeze. Then you'll hear birds—although you can't see them—noisy tweeting plus a strange ooh-ing sound that is either an owl or a mourning dove. Then that humming summer loneliness that Huck Finn speaks of overwhelms you. For me the spell wasn't broken until someone stepped from the mobile home in the empty lot across the highway, and suddenly I was no longer the only one outside in the 104-degree July heat of New Stark.

The attractive mobile home sits end-wise to the highway on the first lot at the edge of the fields. A stand of trees separates it from the next lot, where a modular ranch—built in 1981—waits for one hundred pounds of grass seed to emerge from the acre of brown dirt that surrounds it. The Neelys, who have only lived in New Stark for a year and a half, are afraid to use their well to water the seed. Out back is a satel-

Recently, not far from New Stark, a semi plowed into a home, pinning a woman under her bed for hours.

lite dish and further along, a large black barn, the kind that, in other parts of the country, would read CHEW MAIL POUCH TOBACCO. In front of the barn is a rusty mobile home which the Neelys are refurbishing, hoping to rent it out on the next lot up, which they also own. Crossing the highway, I call to the person leaving the first trailer, a lanky youth wearing only cut-off jeans. He is the Neelys' "adopted runaway" son, and he takes me through the trees to his home next door.

Inside, the only central air-conditioning system in New Stark hits me like a knife. It takes my eyes a moment to adjust to the interior darkness. Mrs. Neely is curled up on the sofa, her husband—who retired early with a disability—in his recliner, feet up. They are watching a movie from the satellite on a four-foot-square television screen. Being newcomers, they're afraid they can't tell me much about New Stark. The property with the mobile home had belonged to friends who went bankrupt. The Neelys bought it to help them out, renting it to relatives. Then their own house came on the market through a sheriff's sale. It had replaced an old home destroyed by arson. Years ago the property had held the Gilbert Candy Company; then a haydealer named Stager put up the barn. Stager sold it to Spears, who used the barn for painting buses. Then Spears sold to Hanna, who got burned out and couldn't make mortgage payments on the modular replacement. So the Neelys took over. In addition, they are buying the scrubby field along the berm where I parked my car. They also dick-ered for roadside property near the village, but the owner, who had bought it on speculation that the highway would be widened, is asking too much—three thousand an acre, when farm land is going for eight hundred.

"Maybe someday this place will be called 'Neelyville,'" Mrs. Neely laughs. They don't know why it's called New Stark. Guess it was named for somebody named Stark. What's it like living out here? I ask. "Quiet," says the adopted runaway son. The Neelys have two grown sons of their own. They tell me about the truckers that overturn in the soybean fields, truckers that come in to use the phone, truckers "broke down" from blowouts or other problems. "It gets cold out there in the winter," Mrs. Neely says. "We're always glad to help." She's going to ask their councilman if the speed limit can be reduced to 45 through the village, if she can find out who their councilman is.

But to learn about New Stark, Mr. Neely says, I ought to talk to Old Man Coleman, next house up the highway. He's lived in New Stark for twenty-five years. He's on vacation now, but his daughter's looking after the house, a tidy place painted beige and brown, with an L-shaped front porch. The front windows are open, the steamy air rustling the Swiss-dot curtains, and though I can tell that the Colemans' daughter is in there, she doesn't answer when I knock on the screen door.

* * *

About the only positive effect of the drought is that the mosquito population has dwindled. After last summer's rains an entomologist estimated that there were 500,000 mosquitoes in Ohio *per capita*. This summer I have not encountered a

single mosquito in New Stark. But experts are predicting a mosquito explosion as soon as eggs hatch in the cracks and crevices of dried-up creeks and riverbeds. Birds that feed on mosquitoes are in danger, as are fish in the depleted streams. Scattered fish kills have been reported. Meanwhile, worms are in short supply for fishermen. The price of a dozen Canadian nightcrawlers has doubled.

Bee stings are also down this summer. Flowers aren't growing, so bees can't get nectar. As a result, the fall honey crop will suffer. All wildlife seems confused. Squirrels can't find nuts to store. Raccoons are abandoning their young—I saw one such orphan in a dry stand of trees not far from New Stark—and the deer are ranging wide in search of water. The deer will survive, experts say—if they can avoid the traffic when they cross the Lincoln Highway. But lack of a historical data base for such severe conditions makes it virtually impossible to predict the effects.

Early Saturday morning it is 94 degrees in the shade on the thermometer at Elgene Neiswander's. Elgene's thermometer is from a filling station that used to be in the peaked garage down the street. So New Stark once had *two* gas stations, side by side along the gravel berm. The thermometer is at least three feet tall and says PRESTONE DOES NOT BOIL AWAY, although this summer just might be the exception.

But I began my second day in New Stark back at the Coleman's place, after spending the night with family in Lima—half an hour west on Route 30 and a couple of exits south on I-75. And once again the daughter does not answer, though I walk the L-shaped porch and call through the curtains. Discouraged, I head east up the highway.

On the adjacent lot, which the Colemans own, is an abandoned bungalow with green-shingled siding. Next comes the intersection of Van Buren Twp 61, then another abandoned house—white with a drab tin roof—behind a broken wall of large pinkish stones. This used to be the post office, when New Stark merited the mail. The most recent owners, tired of the long winters, have sold out and moved to Florida.

At the next place I get lucky—Dallas and Alice Cheney are at home, their grandson watching Saturday morning cartoons. Their living room is a comfortable clutter of old, unmatched furniture. Dallas, who is retired, laughs out loud when I tell him I'm interested in New Stark. Alice has lived here for thirty-one years.

Why do they call it New Stark? I ask. "Cuz you have to be stark-raving mad to live here!" Dallas says. On the wall above the television is a portrait of an Indian. Area farmers are forever turning up arrowheads in their fields. The prehistoric Ohio Indians were the Mound Builders. Later tribes—the Shawnee, Wyandots, Miamis, Senecas, Ottawas, Delawares, and Mingoes—were sent west to reservations 150 years ago, about the time that New Stark was founded. There are graphic tales of Indian tortures and executions, and as a local historian says, "These accounts dispel any romantic notions we may have about Indians and make clear the dangers of the wilderness." No mistaking where sympathies lay back then.

The Cheney's place is next to the gutted church. "We own it," Dallas says. 1892 on the cornerstone. First it was the Presbyterian, then Baptist—New Stark Faith Chapel. It's stood vacant for twelve years. The Cheney's couldn't afford it when it first came up for sale, so an out-of-towner bought it and sold off the pews. Then kids shot out the windows with BB guns. Dallas hopes to lower the ceilings in the old structure and use it for storage. Or else raze it to create elbow room next door.

A strange contraption leans against the side of the church, something that looks like the Gossamer Albatross without wings. "Gyrocopter," Dallas says. He got it from an air and space manufacturer in Muncie, Indiana. "NASA built 'em for observation," he explains, "but the engine was too small." He's planning to fix it up for the grandchildren.

From Alice I learn that the old building with the yellow brick addition is the Cherry Tree Antique Shop—New Stark's only business. The trucks have blown the sign down. Margie West has run the shop for twenty years. She's English and doesn't live in town. Before Margie that old place had been a general store. You could get anything over there, Alice says—groceries, hardware, dry goods. Most of all she remembers the "huckster wagon," an old truck that made the rounds from the store every Friday. You went in one end and came out the other. There was penny candy and ice cream. The kids loved it. "And that big old house across the street—you can only see the roof above the trees and wild bushes—my mother once told me it was the Baughman Hotel." Alice pauses as if in disbelief. "People used to say New Stark was popular."

While we're talking Alice writes out a list of names. Marjorie Marquart, Solomon's widow, lives in the little house beyond the church; she's been here the longest, forty-five years. Elgene Neiswander—white brick house across the highway—forty-two years. Bill Rausch is on the farm at the east end of the village. He grew up in this house. The house beyond the Marquarts' is empty.

Marquart, Neiswander, Rausch—all German, in accord with a 1910 history of Van Buren Township I turned up in Lima overnight: "German immigrants, industrious, thrifty, honest and moral, their robust health the result of frugal living, and their solid strength backed up by a fixed determination to succeed in the land of their adoption, soon opened up valuable farms, and today we have not a more industrious, peaceable and contented people in the township"

Marjorie Marquart isn't home, but across the highway at the white brick house I catch Elgene Pore Neiswander drawing her bath. Years ago, she says, New Stark was all Pores—Maud Pore, Paul Pore, Uncle Cloyce—but it's nothing like it was. You don't know the people anymore. There's still the New Stark Social Circle, but nobody from New Stark belongs. Elgene was widowed by her first husband and divorced by her second, who got fancy ideas about women off the television. "Did you know," she says with an air of surprise, "you can get a divorce just by living apart for a year?" Elgene lives with her son, a truck driver. The interior walls of her house are just plaster over the brick, so it gets ice cold in winter. The place is heated by fuel oil, kerosene, and a wood-burning

stove. Out back, the American flag floats from a pole on the garage, though it's the 9th of July. Fireworks were banned on the 4th because of the dryness.

Elgene shows me the trees in her yard. She planted them herself. There are more trees in New Stark than you notice from the highway—a lot of walnut and buckeye and ragged weeping willows—it's just the wide fields and high sky that make it seem empty.

Why do they call it New Stark? I ask Elgene. Because the people came from Stark County over east, she says. Her husband's granddad came from there, about a hundred miles as the crow flies. But she doesn't know how Stark County got its name. And the Lincoln Highway? When her first husband was little, Elgene recalls, the children used to play in the road. Can you believe it? Today, the trucks knock your house down while you sleep. But wait a minute. Elgene goes into the house and fetches me a newspaper clipping, a marvelous reminiscence of New Stark in the early days of the Lincoln Highway. It is by the Rev. Marlon R. Thomas, grandson of the Baughmans, who owned the large abandoned house next door to Elgene's.

The highway was proposed in 1912, Thomas writes, and the Lincoln Highway Association was formed in 1913. At first the road was "piked"—spread with crushed stone to render it passable—then paved with concrete. The asphalt came later. Thomas calls the Lincoln Highway the "Atlantic-to-Pacific-across-the-nation Main Street to America," and his grandparents' big old home was right on it.

"Grandma put up lovely colorful cloth awnings above her huge home windows, refurbished her many bedrooms in style, put up a neat and attractive ROOMS FOR RENT sign in the front lawn, and many customers who drove the Lincoln Highway year after year stayed in New Stark, with an excellent breakfast served before they left. We could visit with people from all across America in days when that was a high privilege."

Thomas waxes poetic about his Grandpa's horseless carriage with the flapping side-curtains, the music from the old Edison, and life in New Stark by the light of a coal oil lamp. "Our people came to the area in 1836," he writes, "and from then on began to clear the farmlands. Brethren and Mennonite people came down the old Indian trail, which became the Lincoln Highway, from Stark County and called their home 'New Stark.'"

* * *

Sunday morning. The day is hot and grainy. The car radio forecasts rain. But we've heard *that* one before. A "yellow alert" is in effect. Polluted air, trapped by the stifling heat wave, is causing health problems. The Ohio EPA adds an ozone warning. If this is the greenhouse effect, I want out. Mandatory water conservation measures will go into effect this week at surrounding municipalities, since voluntary measures have not been working. Truckloads of hay from Virginia and North Carolina are arriving for area dairy farmers. Migrant workers in neighboring counties fear there won't be enough tomatoes and cucumbers on the vine to earn them a

There are more trees in New Stark than you notice from the highway—a lot of walnut and buckeye and ragged weeping willows.

ticket home. Senator Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) is opposing a proposal to divert Great Lakes water into the Mississippi. He claims it's illegal. Finally, this note: the straw-colored grass is just dormant, not yet dead. So much for the news.

In New Stark, Margie West is refinishing furniture at the Cherry Tree Antique Shop. I can hardly see her in there through the crusty plate glass windows of the old general store. A wooden case of Pepsi-Cola bottles sits on a dusty shelf in the dim interior. Margie doesn't have much time to talk. She is preparing for a show in Columbus. She unlocks the rusty chain from within and steps out to greet me, closing the double doors in the face of her dogs. Once, when her dogs got out, they were all killed by the traffic within minutes. Their replacements are small and not very vicious. "But they bark," Margie says. The trucks are rolling by within inches of my back, swirling bits of straw from the roadside into my face. I can hardly hear Margie speak. "Tell me about your place!" I shout.

Margie is about seventy, a year or two older than most of the women in New Stark—all business in her dirty apron. She is from Yorkshire, England, and served with the Admiralty during the war. The shop's really not open to the public any more, she says—except for her regular customers—so it doesn't matter that the trucks blew the sign down. Margie's a purist, only dealing in antiques before 1835. She does all of her work on the premises.

"Handwritten deeds to the property date to 1835," Margie says. "The store was built in 1865." The yellow brick addition used to house a Model T dealership. There was also a saw mill, a chicken hatchery, and a dairy on the property. Margie bought the place in the early '60s, when supermarkets put the general store under. I ask her what she thinks of the old Baughman place. "It was ruined before they let it sit and rot," she says. "They lowered the ceilings inside." She makes it sound worse than the time she was robbed. Two men walked into the shop one day and it was obvious they hadn't come for antiques. They demanded money. When Margie resisted, they beat her up, took her purse, and left her for dead. A neighbor saw them fleeing and came to Margie's aid.

I can tell Margie wants to get back to work, so I excuse myself when the Colemans' daughter comes out to check for the Sunday paper. But by the time I have crossed the highway she has scuttled back into the house. Undaunted, I make it to the east end of the village just in time to catch Marjorie Marquart coming home from church. She is dressed in her summer finery and holds a thick black Bible in her hand. "I saw you around," she says, and suddenly I realize how conspicuous I have been, walking up and down the highway, notebook in hand, while the folks of New Stark have been minding their own business, inside and out of the heat.

The Marquart home is the oldest in New Stark, built in 1873. The interior is neat and clean. Large floor fans push the hot air around. The sign on the wall says "WELCOME FRIENDS." Marjorie has lived in New Stark longer than any current resident—forty-five years. Anticipating my visit, she has made notes and laid out a map. Van Buren Township is one of sixteen in Hancock County. Like the state with its

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eighty-eight counties, the sixteen form a rough square grid. Hancock County, formed in 1820, was named for John Hancock, signer of the Declaration of Independence. Marjorie's late husband was the township supervisor for thirty-three years, which meant he built the roads, mowed the grass, and plowed the snow. "Snow on Sunday, blow on Monday," her husband used to say. Marjorie recalls the winter of 1945, when her husband plowed snow every day from December to February. When it finally stopped snowing he took her outside and showed her a gouge left by a bulldozer—at the top of a telephone pole.

Margie speaks fondly of New Stark, "a thriving town years ago." There was a creamery, a barber shop, and a restaurant. Once a week people came "from far and near" for a trap shoot in the field behind the general store. Marjorie would like to see the folks in the village get together now once a year, but she doesn't think it will ever happen. She can remember when there were thirty-four children in New Stark. Most attended a one-room schoolhouse just outside the village, which was also the site of New Stark String College—"Don't ask me why they called it that," she laughs—where teachers could take the "normal course." For a rural area, Marjorie points out, New Stark has produced its share of professional people—doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, and an entomologist. There simply wasn't enough land for all the kids to make a life of farming, so education was encouraged.

Marjorie is a new breed of senior citizen. A semi-retired LPN, she works at the nearest McDonald's. "You get old quick if you don't keep busy," she says. She owns twelve acres behind her little house, land she rents to an area farmer. This summer it's planted in wheat, the only crop that has managed to survive. An early crop, the wheat was recently harvested, then the stalks were cut for straw—hence the yellow stuff blowing about the highway. Around New Stark, the wheat fields look almost normal—large golden squares amid the withered corn and soybeans and the diverted acres which have been left to ragged weeds.

"Tell me about Route 30."

"It's a death trap," Marjorie says. "I wish they'd move it."

And we talk on through the afternoon. Then a storm warning is issued. Hail and high winds are predicted. It looks like it might rain after all. This just might be the day. The sky has turned black, and the trees—as if in appeal—have turned up their silvery undersides. Expecting the worst, I head back to Lima, but not before arranging to meet Bill Rausch at his farm tomorrow.

Later that evening, thunder begins to roll and lightning rips the sky. There is no hail, but high winds blow the corn flat. In my imagination I am staying at the old Baughman place, looking out at the Lincoln Highway from my rented room. And then it rains—for all of five minutes. Another false alarm in New Stark.

* * *

Monday, July the 11th, is my last day in New Stark. I spend it at the Rausches'—across the highway from Marjorie Marquart's—where the farm pond has dropped two feet since the spring. Its surface is littered with leaves from last night's storm. A large black mongrel called Caesar greets me with fangs bared, but his tail is wagging. "He won't hurt you," the Rausches' daughter calls. And she is right. Bill Rausch has been out in the fields pulling weeds by hand, because the herbicides haven't dissolved in the soil. He's paying his teenage son and his friend to help him. "I offered 'em half the crop," he jokes, "but they want cash instead."

The corn somehow seems taller today, even after the brief rain. "It's unwrapped," Bill explains. Corn wraps itself like a mummy to hide from the heat. How bad is the drought? I ask him. "In New Stark? It's worse than you hear." Bill had a farmer friend who recently got back from a trip through Indiana and Illinois, where the corn still has a chance. But in New Stark it's shot. A disaster. "You can't even use it for silage," Bill says, "because of the nitrates. Nothing to do but plow it under." The drought will cost Bill Rausch \$150,000, and it'll take him two to three years of hard work to make that up.

His soybeans, however, might make it—if it rains soon. Like today. Like *right now*. The Rausches' soybeans go to Pioneer, one of the world's largest seed companies, as a seed crop for next year's planting. But Pioneer is already renting out land in Argentina, where the seasons are opposite ours, to plant soybeans so there'll be seed for next spring. "I'm not going to get depressed and blow my head off," Bill says. "I used the best seed. I planted well. I don't know what I'd rather be doing."

He's already had his banker out for a look at the fields. "I told him to bring his truck," Bill laughs. "What truck?" he said. "The truck you'll need to farm this place, because I can't pay you." Bill's worried because his bank is now based in Cincinnati, where they don't know farming. "People here pay their bills," he says proudly. "But not this year."

I mentioned what I heard on the radio driving over, that the federal government will provide aid in the form of low interest loans—only 4.5%. "We don't need a loan," Bill says. "We need a grant."

When he gets going on the government, Bill Rausch sounds like Huck Finn's father: "Jimmy Carter was a farmer, but he bankrupted himself while in office and never knew it until he went home. We've got to get rid of the surpluses," he says adamantly. "And the embargoes—they kill us. They lose our accounts. The government likes to keep food cheap. Food's always used as a tool to manipulate. If we ever get a farmer's union, watch out. We'll be worse than the teamsters, *without* the Mafia. We'll control food!"

Then Bill tells me about growing up in New Stark—which, as my Sunday night research revealed, is ultimately named for General John Stark, hero of the Battle of Bennington in the Revolutionary War—about how hard it was for him to lie awake on summer nights, listening to the *clink clink* of horse-

Corn wraps itself like a mummy to hide from the heat. How bad is the drought? I ask him. "It's worse than you hear."

shoes down the road by the general store. That's where all the action was, but it was "men only." Dad's night out at Mel's. That's what the place was called. Mel's. There were gasoline pumps out front. So New Stark once had *three* gas stations, all in a row.

Then there was the time Bill's mother sent him to the store for a jar of mayonnaise and he dropped it in the road. He was afraid to go home, and he can still see that hunk of mayonnaise sitting there in the middle of the Lincoln Highway. People were more trusting then, he says. But today. . .

I slap at the flies biting my legs—I have been wearing shorts in New Stark—but the flies don't seem to bother Bill Rausch. Or his wife and son, who come out to join us on the long front porch. Maybe it's the residue of aftershave from yesterday—I put on aftershave to visit Marjorie Marquart. But flies or no, I'm in no hurry to move from the wooden bench I share with Bill Rausch, though it's not the most comfortable bench in the world. So I just keep swatting flies and chewing the fat in New Stark, where the drought and heat continue unabated as the huge trucks blow by on Route 30, and where the sunsets—oh boy, the sunsets—are as long and red as the stripes on Old Glory. ■

Poetry

Hale Chatfield

Why There Is No True Artificial Intelligence

(After an argument by John Haugeland, Univ. of Pittsburgh, May 3, 1986)

We applaud
although
(or do we applaud
because)
she smiles sheepishly,
or do we applaud
irrespective
of her smile?

The girl from the university
in her tight jeans
with her long, swinging hair
whom we like for her
self, her style, her
independence
has once again today
been walking her rat
(some of us say, "You know,
they are smarter than dogs,"
and some say, "They tame better
than cats," and some say, "Anyway,
you can't keep dogs or cats in the dormitories").
Until barely a moment or two ago it has
once again followed ardently
at her proud heel.

Except that today, barely
a moment ago, a stray terrier
skittered from the hedge
erupting a fanfare of yaps
and the terrorized rat in a reflex
fired its tight rat body up
the right leg of her jeans—

Hale Chatfield is founder and co-editor of The Hiram Poetry Review, and is poet-in-residence and chairman of the Department of English at Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio. He earned a B.A. at Wesleyan University and an M.A. at Rutgers University. His poems and criticism have appeared in numerous journals, and he has published six volumes of poetry, the latest being Possessions (Cleveland, 1984). This poem originally appeared in The Hiram Poetry Review and is reprinted by permission.

drove itself so far up her outer thigh
it is trapped there, a taut
living bulge of scared rat
jammed between her skin
and the tight sheath of the denim.

You can see her thinking.
You can see her eyes realize
all the places she dare not try
to go. You can see her poised
for a few seconds, imagining
her quickly diminishing choices.

You can see her hand drop to
the ridge of buttons, the quick
flicker of her fingers as the jeans
drop, the simultaneous
kick of her foot tossing them aside
and the parabolic gray blur leaping
up into her arms.

She is standing
cradling the shivering rat.
She is smiling sheepishly.
And we, standing in our amazed
and irregular circle,
applaud.

Picking Madison Avenue's Brain

Can writers learn anything from advertising?

Diane Lefer

Last summer, the poet Pattiann Rogers was talking to me about commercials: "If the 'poets' of Madison Avenue have the audience, if they are writing the words that people chant to themselves, if they are providing the images that constitute the way people see their lives, then are we really the poets of our age?" She was concerned that advertising had become so creative in its use of image, rhythm, irony, metaphor, and all the rest, that the language and techniques of literature have been taken right out of our hands. Her argument reminded me of one of Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe's theses in *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic*, that magic steals its effects from religion. But O'Keefe also suggests ways in which religion is then renewed by its struggle against magic. We wondered then, can literature, too, be revitalized if, instead of simply averting our eyes, we take a good look at advertising and its achievements?

As a fiction writer and teacher of creative writing, I was skeptical. We and They (yes, I'm admittedly adversarial about this) both make use of the secrets of rhetoric and psychology. But their psychology is drawn from the behaviorist school which seeks only to modify behavior, not to understand it; whereas ours is learned from observation and reflection on the human heart. Like other forms of propaganda, advertising seeks to stimulate action, while literature has always stimulated reflection and thought.

The behaviorist orientation in advertising is seen most clearly in response television (you know, where a shrill hawker demonstrates a salad shredder that can be ordered by dialing an 800 number). In *Response Television: Combat Advertising for the 1980s*, John Witek characterizes the contemporary scene in a way worthy of J. M. Coetzee or Paul Auster: most people work too hard and find their money covers less and less; the streets are too dangerous to go out in; the world situation is dangerous; people live under a constant threat; they huddle around the television set for warmth and comfort.



Originally from Cleveland, Diane Lefer now lives in New York City where she works as a writer, a teacher of creative writing, a puppeteer, and part-time worker at an AIDS education and prevention project. She became interested in the influence of advertising on language and metaphor when she was introduced to George Steiner's work. "When I began to teach in the M.F.A. in Writing program at Vermont College, I knew I wanted to make my students think about the difference between ambiguity and imprecision, resonance and meaninglessness." Lefer has published more than two dozen short stories in magazines ranging from The Agni Review and Z to Redbook and Playgirl. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Photo: Eyely Photo

Instead of being depressed at this state of affairs, Witek suggests that we should rejoice and recognize what a fertile ground it makes for direct-response advertising. Why? Because the ad stimulates not thought but action. It "must engage the imagination to produce simple behavior shifts, such as getting up from the chair to dial a telephone," and "acting gives the *impression* [his word, my emphasis] of being in control." Witek doesn't dispute that television is addictive; he takes it for granted. But he points out that a study in Columbus, Ohio, suggested that about 50% of the audience that was hooked on the tube also suffered from some "darker addiction." The author's conclusion? That direct marketers be "aware of the pathology of addiction in order to reach more viewers and reach them effectively."

The advertiser takes reality as a given and seeks to manipulate the people inside of it in order to achieve specified marketing goals. The writer—I hope—takes the same grim situation and tries to point beyond it.

The advertiser operates in a closed universe, like the so-called "primitive" that Lévi-Strauss wrote about in *The Savage Mind*. Lévi-Strauss describes the tribal, mythic thought process as a kind of *bricolage*—a making do with whatever materials are already at hand. He contrasts this way of thinking with that of the scientist or engineer: "the engineer questions the universe while the bricoleur addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human culture . . ." The engineer is also restricted, but at least he "is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization, while the bricoleur by inclination or necessity always remains within them."

Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage* came to my mind when I saw a recent TV commercial for McDonald's. An animated crescent moon in sunglasses, made to look like Ray Charles, sits playing the piano and skitters across the screen singing about "McNight" to the tune of "Mack the Knife." The singing voice sounds like Bobby Darin's version, though I immediately thought of Louis Armstrong's popular version. What we have here is a collection of sounds and images from our cultural storehouse thrown together in order to evoke a predictable response and sell hamburgers.

I imagine the advertising mind saw this as a bright little cartoon based on a song and three singers—all immensely popular. So the ad was supposed (I presume) to transmit a feeling of popularity, well-being, and success that the viewer would associate with McDonald's. As a writer, though, I wonder why a song about a killer-pimp should make anyone want to eat a burger. The use of a tune from *Threepenny Opera* I interpret as an invitation to prosperous people to go slumming at McDonald's. The white voice behind Ray Charles I read as a promise to black consumers that eating at McDonald's is so upbeat and American it will practically make them white. And the ad writer probably did not imagine that for me the tune "Mack the Knife" is a reminder that what's really going on is that your money's gonna be taken.

Tom Englehardt has shown how "Our mythocultural past is ransacked to concoct a tiny, preset group of images" for children's television programming. Worn-out Disney characters, the Trojan Horse, frog princes, witches, and Star Wars' special effects provide backdrops and plot devices for what amount to extended commercials in which products—Care Bears, Smurfs, and the like—are seen "elbowing each other off the screen every half hour or so to demonstrate their unique buyability" ("The Shortcake Strategy," in *Watching Television: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture*, ed. Todd Gitlin).

The French writer Jacques Ellul notes that the modern regime doesn't seek to impose orthodoxy ("right" opinion) but orthopraxy ("right" conduct). The difference is like that between the Federalist Papers, which sought to engage the whole nation in constitutional debate, and modern campaign advertising, which only aims to make you pull the "right" lever on Election Day. Unlike TV ads, literature uses words and verbal images so that they carry history, demand interpretation; understanding crystallizes only through reflection and thought. But if you stop to think about an ad, it's not going to be effective. Recent Honda commercials are terrific, until you wonder why "the car that sells itself" requires a major ad campaign. But not to worry. According to *Effective Television Advertising* by Stewart Furse, "a study of cognitive responses to broadcast ads suggests that thought output may actually approach zero." Curiously, people by and large simply dismiss the verbal content of commercials. On one level, they know the claims—use this shampoo and you'll find a new lover—aren't true. But it doesn't matter whether or not they believe; it matters only that they buy. And they do.

But granting all this, advertising does combine words, pictures, and music to produce an overwhelming spontaneous, instinctive response. Aren't these combinations brilliant? Don't they make language more expressive, richer? And—to return to my original question—can't serious writers adopt the devices of the ads, so that they, too, can seduce the audience?

I don't think so. To use the words as they have been degraded in modern society, and particularly in advertising, is to defeat the purpose of literature. George Steiner in *Language and Silence* documents our civilization's retreat from the word: abstract art that cannot be translated into verbal equivalents; the symbolic language of mathematics that is now used to express untranslatable concepts not only in physics and math, but in economics and the humanistic sciences—sociology, anthropology, and linguistics; the stereo that has taken the place of the bookcase. Steiner finds this retreat dangerous. Yes, music is immediately understood and enjoyed. We participate in the sound and rhythm even if we can't "read" or "write" music. The musical language is in a way the most perfect language of all. But precisely because of its hypnotic effect and its immediacy, it calls for no mediation, no intellectual effort on the part of the listener. It elicits passion, not reason, and Steiner argues that the primacy of musical (rather than verbal) intelligence in Germany may have contributed to the Nazi rise to power. That, to him, is the danger of the decayed word.

Worn-out Disney characters, the Trojan Horse, frog princes, witches, and Star Wars' special effects provide backdrops and plot devices for what amount to extended commercials. . .

"Nonverbal therapies are in the ascendancy," writes Jungian analyst Russell A. Lockhart; "The slowness of the word and word therapies can now be avoided altogether." Similarly, the strongest, fastest growing religious movements are those that stress intuitive, regressive, mystical communion with the divine, and/or those that insist the Word be taken in its literal, rather than transcendent, meaning.

Jacques Ellul, whom I've already quoted, argues in *The Humiliation of the Word* that the word has been degraded in modern times by the flow of images. Images give a sense of immediacy, reality, the now—all of which writers are told to strive for. We do so, the mass of people grows accustomed to this emphasis, and the word begins to conform to the image. As a result, we have lost the distinction between "reality" in the sense of the material now, and "reality" in the sense of transcendent and ideal truth.

Though I would argue with much that Allan Bloom says in *The Closing of the American Mind*, I agree with his statement that "As it now stands, students have powerful images of what a perfect body is and pursue it incessantly. But deprived of literary guidance, they no longer have any image of a perfect soul, and hence do not long to have one." When we can no longer envision the Ideal, when we can no longer understand that words point beyond immediate reality, then everything around us—because it is understood only as appearance—becomes a lie.

So how can we escape being trapped in language and thought that is one-dimensional, superficial, concrete, and scientifically denotative? Prose fiction could be a potent antidote. It combines the printed linear form conducive to reasoning with the expression of intuitive knowledge pointing to the Ideal. Among its means for achieving this combination are metaphor, myth, and a poetic suggestiveness sometimes called "magic." Perhaps advertising, which is also said to use these resources effectively, can teach fiction writers something about them.

There is evidence that even among professionals whose stock-in-trade is words, the sensitivity to metaphor nowadays is weakening. A few years ago, a major national magazine got a new editor-in-chief; the fiction editor would seek approval to buy and publish stories, but these manuscripts began to come back with phrases circled and with comments such as *Impossible! What does this mean? This writer doesn't write in English! This writer doesn't know what she's talking about!* It soon became clear that this editor-in-chief did not know what a metaphor was.

Advertising uses metaphors. Commercials—with all their fantastical images—ought to be the ally of good imaginative prose for counteracting a literalist view of words such as this editor showed.

Another story: a few years ago, I had several hours to kill while changing buses in Chicago. Along with a young woman in the same situation, I wandered into the Art Institute of Chicago and into a hall of Hindu art. She was perplexed and upset by the statues until her eyes lit up and she pointed to a multi-armed goddess on a pedestal. "Look!" she said. "There's the deodorant commercial!"

There is evidence that, even among professionals whose stock-in-trade is words, the sensitivity to metaphor nowadays is weakening.

The power of metaphor in her was reduced and limited. *Many arms* could not provide any metaphysical meaning to this viewer. She could, however, understand *many arms* as an appropriate symbol for the efficacy of a consumer product. That made perfect sense.

In commercials, we see toilet bowls that line up and talk, clouds that ride buses, tuna fish who make wisecracks. But we know it's just a commercial. You don't have to believe, you just have to buy. We know that even though we're caught up in a flow of images—many of which give us the immediacy, the feeling of Being There—we are only seeing images. This is imagery, but not imagination.

So there are different grades of metaphor, and advertising uses Consumer Crude. It's the same with magic and myth. Magical language—*abracadabra*, *hocus pocus*—is stereotyped language. It's frozen form. Magic words must be spoken in exactly the same way each time or the effect may be lost. It's hardly original or creative. And it is authoritarian. It doesn't persuade, it compels. It's more like a jingle or slogan that an advertisement engraves in our memory so we will buy a particular brand. The real "magic" of literature is the suggestiveness that lets us leap beyond the verbal formula to a new perception.

Myth, too, can expand our sensibilities if we can use it without being trapped in it. But if we are closed within a mythic world, the myth is real. If the world is understood to rest on the back of a giant mudturtle, that turtle is not a metaphor. Today we know a good many facts about the universe—which help disguise the truth of how little we really know—and most of us don't believe in the mudturtle any more. But the mudturtle is still part of history—if not factual history, then the history of man's consciousness—and we lose a piece of our own past, our own minds and souls, when we forget or deny it. Mythic elements can resonate in the void spaces of modern thought and, by suggesting mystery, free us from the confines of limited materialistic thinking. Unfortunately the myths of TV—from the dancing toilet bowls to the Busch cowboys—do not have this liberating effect, but trap us in associations with a commercial product.

I have read that the average consumer is subjected to ten thousand commercials a year, and the average family is exposed to more than fifteen hundred ads per day. Where the word used to be sacred, now we say talk is cheap. Advertising alone is not to blame, of course. But fresh language quickly grows stale after it is broadcast or printed incessantly for a month, a week, or even a day or two. It's harder than ever to write without reverting to cliché. Where will our fresh imagery come from when words get used up so fast?

With our language going stale, what do we do? Lately, it seems, some contemporary fiction writers are being praised for inventiveness and exuberance when they write stuff like (and I'm making this up, but think it typical): "He sobbed like a crazed sparrow dancing in a chimney pipe while his eyebrows did the kind of two-step you'd expect of Attila the Hun." Such vivid figures of speech are not likely to grow stale because no one but the individual writer would ever use

them. They are unique only because they are all but senseless. They do not re-empower the word; by making the meaningless pass for creative and brilliant, they hasten its decay.

E. L. Doctorow, commenting in the *New York Times* on the 1987 stock market crash, concludes: "I have studied the language of the market and would characterize it as high-tech baroque, the kind of diction that is self-insulating and self-ennobling to its users, very often lyric and almost always metaphorical. It suggests something is there when in fact nothing is there at all." Which means to me that metaphor and ornament—when not related or tied to anything concrete, when they don't point beyond the immediate to the transcendent, when the purpose is to fabricate transcendence out of nothing—become no more than an exercise in deception.

In 1946 George Orwell, in his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," wrote "The English language. . . becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

Pattiann Rogers likes to quote Paul Valéry's ironic remark, "It's a hundred times easier to be profound than to be precise," to which she adds that true profundity grows out of precision. I agree. But does this mean I advocate aligning ourselves with the technocrats, with a machine-like, one-word-one-meaning philosophy of language? Of course not. We need ambiguity, which better shows the truth of most human feelings, exchanges, and the entire human condition. And this aim is not incompatible with precision.

Language is imprecise to begin with, and our task as writers is to keep the balance, to remember that language has multiple, shifting meanings. That's where the danger lies, but also the richness. Fiction isn't science, but neither should it be the ravings of a lunatic, or uninterrupted dream-speech. Literature is, or can and should be, a reconciliation of the different aspects of our being and consciousness, intuition and intellect, left and right side if you want to look at it that way, a halfway house between sight and vision, reality and truth.

But to get more precisely back to my original question: is there anything good we can learn from advertising?

We can surely let the admen do some research for us. The advertising industry is well financed and pays people to take the pulse of modern life. Note how advertising managed to snap up breakdancing and rap music and use them in adulterated form before they hit the mainstream. Maybe that's a hint to us to pay more attention to popular—as opposed to mass—culture. The publishing industry, on the other hand, also makes decisions based on "marketability," without, however, doing the market research or seeming to have any real notion of what makes a book sell. There are certain rules of thumb: epistolary novels don't sell (*The Color Purple*); novels in journal form will fail (*The Handmaid's Tale*); and I will always remember the editor who objected to my inclusion of a black police-woman in a nonfiction book (never completed) about female cops. "Get that black woman out of the book!" she demanded; "Black people don't read and white people won't read about black people." She added, "I am not a racist." All of this perfectly straightfaced at a time when *Roots* was on the bestseller list.

We can get some encouragement from advertising trends. I have complained that ads use metaphor in a limited, superficial way, but—yes—ordinary people do understand ad metaphors, which shows the conceptual ability is not entirely lost (even though it may have atrophied in some editors).

We are told to write about sympathetic, engaging characters that everyone can identify with, but advertising proves that viewers are often most engaged and entertained by unsympathetic or unattractive character actors. Perhaps advertising's unpretty people and flights of fancy can help us renew literature by reminding us that sweetness and light are not the only possible subjects, and in fact are not the only kind of material ordinary readers respond to.

The publishers warn us that people can't grasp irony any more; but irony is used effectively in TV commercials. I like the attention-grabbing Isuzu commercials, in which the actor tells lies that are contradicted by subtitles on the screen. The actor lies; the printed word tells the truth. And that's one of the most heartening indications I've picked up from modern advertising. The Word is still recognized as the repository of secret, true meaning.

We can learn from the tie-in. You know, the detergent box features a coupon or ad for floor wax. The message is, *You trusted us on this one and were satisfied. Here's another product we recommend.* Fiction carries allusions but these are usually unattributed and are missed entirely by those not already in the know. By contrast, non-fiction often lists sources and suggested further reading. Is there any comparable way by which fiction writers and poets can guide the audience? On the acknowledgment page of his collection of stories *I Looked Over Jordan*, Ernie Brill cites friends, but also the artists who inspired him: Leo Tolstoy, Damon Runyon, James Joyce, Chester Himes, Toni Cade Bambara, Vincent Van Gogh, Emil Nolde, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Vittorio De Sica, and many others. I was perplexed at first by what seemed to be a self-indulgent display of sensibility. Then I realized its value: Brill had provided a cultural bibliography, recommending further sources of truth for those who had found it in his book.

So yes, I think the writer can learn from advertising. But *not* the things we are told we *should* learn. Listed below are four goals that writers are often urged to emulate from advertising. I reject them all.

1. Brevity and fast pace

What's wrong with speed? Russell Lockhart writes: "Our speedy passage past words yields the illusion of understanding at the cost of connection with soul. Speed is ego's work. Ego is always in a hurry and never has enough time. It is said that the soul is never in a hurry because it has forever."

Let me quote Jimmy Breslin here. "Speed," he has said, "produces basic distrust." Asked for his insights into TV news (following a speech for the New York Public Library in December, 1987), Breslin insisted that people know they're being fast-talked and so they don't really pay attention. The media respond to this inattention by making news reports faster, less informative and even less worth listening to. In fact, Breslin argues, people do not have short attention spans.

The publishers warn us that people can't grasp irony any more; but irony is used effectively in TV commercials.

Breslin's thesis gets surprising confirmation from adman David Ogilvy, writing about print advertising. He cites the common belief that people won't read long copy, that a great ad should be little more than a picture and a slogan, that there's nothing more deadly than solid text. In fact, he writes, "Nothing could be further from the truth. . . long copy invariably outsells short." Attention spans become miraculously longer when words are interesting, informative, or useful.

In the meantime, writers are told that short stories—fast reads—are more appropriate to our fast life, to busy readers who don't have time for novels. Novels are getting shorter, too, even as the price on the jacket gets higher. We're told the average reader now prefers short fiction, and that's the reason for the boom in short story publishing.

I'm not condemning short fiction. For some of us, the structure and compression of the form is best suited to individual talents and vision, at least some of the time. But when I wonder why so many stories are being written and published today, the answer I see has nothing to do with contemporary lifestyles or "public" taste, but with three other phenomena. First, the proliferation of writing programs with the workshop method in which stories are generally easier to critique than novels-in-progress. Second, the reluctance of the mainstream commercial publishing industry to touch quality fiction so that serious writers turn to the quarterlies which are, again, better geared to short work. Third, the creation of a consumer market for short story collections because of the growing number of people involved in reasons one and two who have to keep up with what's happening and thus have made short fiction commercially viable. (Incidentally, this points to perhaps our only source of power: book writers are book consumers. What we buy and where we buy it—chain store or literary bookstore—can sometimes have an effect on what gets published and how.)

2. Presentations that are not solely verbal

Advertising successfully combines words with images, music, and action, leading many people to the conclusion that the word standing by itself is no longer expressive enough to engage the modern mind. And so we've seen the rise of new forms of mixed-media "fiction."

One of the most promising (at least in the eyes of publishers, who are busy contracting for them even as I type), is the graphic novel, or full-length, plot-oriented comic book for adults. The form began to look very good after the success of Art Spiegelman's chilling and idiosyncratic *Maus: a survivor's tale*—the Holocaust told as a cat-and-mouse cartoon. Now we see advertisers (such as Eurailpass) gambling on full-page comic strip ads. The form is gaining visibility and respectability: the cover of the March, 1988 *Radcliffe Quarterly* features a comic strip.

So is the graphic novel the wave of the future, or just another hyped fad? It's worth noting that *Maus*, as well as the widely successful comic books on Marx, Mao, and Christianity

We've seen the rise of new forms of mixed-media "fiction."

created in Mexico by Rius, have all been popular expositions of non-fiction themes. Besides which—and most important—Spiegelman is a cartoonist, not a traditional novelist. He told and illustrated *Maus* in the way best suited to his own vision and talents. His achievement is not a feat that can be duplicated by any poet or fiction writer who thinks text-and-graphics is a neat idea. And while there's a wide consensus that people today shrink from text devoid of visual aids, the advertising industry's research has shown again and again that while photos and text work well together, ads illustrated with drawings fail. It may be instructive to consider the experience of the adult comic books, such as *Heavy Metal* and *Raw Comics*, which have won only a cult—rather than mass—following.

The computer-interactive novel is a hybrid of fiction and video game, apparently based on the premise that people would rather look at a screen than a page and that they become engaged in an experience only when they can participate. In the interactive novel, the "reader" (I don't know if you "read" it or "play" it) makes choices for the characters at various stages of the action and so has some say in the plot and resolution. But if Marshall McLuhan is correct, the way the viewer "participates" in a TV image (which, like the text on a computer screen, is "a mosaic of dots") has nothing to do with content. In *Understanding Media*, he writes, "The TV image requires each instant that we 'close' the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile"—not, you'll note, cognitive.

Interactive fiction is also being written for the page, but space limitations and the effect of visual clutter make it difficult to present many well-developed alternate scenarios.

While interactive fiction may attract some members of literature's traditional audience—at least while it's still the new thing—it seems unlikely (or unable) to take over literature's traditional functions. If those functions are still valued, the traditional novel will not (yet) become obsolete.

3. Photographic realism

We are told our work is wonderfully contemporary when we reflect life by sticking to the surface, reading gesture and cultural artifacts (such as brand names) instead of probing interior life. Brett Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* is admired for capturing the emotional tone and pace of a music video. It's fast, repetitive, violent, numbing, affectless. But even if you, personally, like that sort of thing, the typewriter, pen, or word processor is not a camera. We cannot compete directly with it.

When I see a Woody Allen movie, I'm always struck by the brilliant casting. The actors always look so right for their parts. Their faces alone tell us about their lives and evoke worlds. I defy the greatest writer to achieve the same effect. Perhaps instead of cranking out simulated snapshots, we should leave photography to the media that do it best, and we should go back to exploring the complex inner dimension that the camera cannot reach.

4. Stimulation and immediacy

Yes, a wonderful challenge to the artist. As the Controller says in Huxley's *Brave New World*, it "requires the most enormous

ingenuity" to make "works of art out of practically nothing but pure sensation." That's the role of propaganda: make you feel it, rather than think it.

Writers of paperback romance novels are told to construct the love scenes in such a way that the reader will become aroused at the same pace as the heroine. That's participatory, that's immediate, but is it the goal of literature? Is it even necessary for enjoyment? *Gone With the Wind* is still popular and a lot of women readers still fall in love with Rhett *without* being swept away by Scarlett's perceptions. You may admire her vitality, her determination and strength, and hope that you would be able to, similarly, rise to the occasion, but at the same time, you can be frustrated by her pigheadedness, her bad taste, her ignorant opinions. You want to argue with Scarlett. You don't experience *with* her. Rather, you imagine yourself in her shoes even while maintaining a critical distance.

I remember how disturbed I was when—almost ten years ago—I first heard John Gardner call fiction a "vivid, continuous dream" and say it's necessary to rework or edit out anything that interrupts the dream, gives the reader pause, makes the reader turn back and go over a page again. Most contemporary American writers have probably heard this formulation and many of us repeat it. Surely, let's not irritate readers with sloppy writing and internal inconsistencies, but hasn't Gardner's dictum been applied with exaggerated zeal?

The novels and stories I've loved most haven't been the pageturners, but rather the books that have made me stop—out of my appreciation for the author's insights, my sheer enjoyment of the language, or my need to close the covers and my eyes for a moment and say, yes, that's the truth. When you read a really great book, you have to stop for air. You need to mull it over, savor, question, turn back and reread. That's how I felt about Sharon Sheehe Stark's recent novel, *A Wrestling Season*. Through her linguistic derring-do, profound understanding of the heart, and a deep yet quirky view of the spiritual life, Stark gives us a sad and funny novel about a family, a vision of ordinary life with cosmic implications. It's wonderful, but it's not a "fast read."

The vivid continuous dream is appropriate to a society that tells us not to think. Total immediacy leaves no room for the silent dialogue between writer and reader, the tension between reader and character. The reader is simply manipulated, acted upon.

The vivid continuous dream tells us to forget the unique role and power of literature. The printed word can open the door to reflection and critical thought. Fiction can involve you passionately, intimately, and still allow some distance. Distance is not a dirty word. There is no distance in advertising or propaganda. But literature can—if we will let it—present Truth in all its ambiguity, without ever violating the integrity and freedom of the reader. ■

For Henry A. Sauerwein, Jr., who will no doubt say it falls short, with thanks.




HERBERT ASCHERMAN JR.

Portrait Photographer

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