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Exile Vol. X No. 2

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Exile Vol. X No. 2

Authors

Susan Brady, Ed Brunner, Sharon Haddock, Robert Hoyt, Jerry Bryce, Peggy Schmidt, Robert Chester, and Jane Cogie



EXILE

The
EXILE

SPRING 1965

Vol. 10

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Denison University
Granville, Ohio

Take thought:

I have weathered the storm
I have beaten out my exile.

—Ezra Pound

Contributors

SUSAN BRADY, sophomore English major, won the Ray Sanford Stout English prize for her story, "The Fragile Colour of Eyes." ED BRUNNER, editor of *Exile*, also helps edit *The Gadfly*, an independent publication of campus opinion; Ed is a sophomore and is majoring in English. Sophomore history major SHARON HADDOCK is contributing both a story and a poem to this issue.

Senior ROBERT HOYT, poetry editor of *Exile* for the past two years, will go on to graduate study at the State University of Iowa. Winner of the Annie Mary MacNeill Poetry Contest this year, he has recently completed an Honors Project on Jon Silkin, Stanley Kunitz, and other contemporary poets. JERRY BRYCE won second place in the Annie Mary MacNeill competition; a sophomore, he is majoring in mathematics. PEGGY SCHMIDT, another sophomore, has been a steady contributor to *The Denisonian*. ROBERT CHESTER, a junior pre-medical student, returned from a semester in Australia to win third prize in the poetry reading contest this year. JANE COGIE is an editor of *Exile* and a sophomore English major.

Art major KATHY KNAPP, a Junior Adviser this past year and co-president of Women's Council, was recently tapped by Mortar Board, senior women's leadership honorary. KAREN GERNENZ has combined her interest in art with a biology major and co-chairmanship of the Cultural Committee. Senior art major DORIS FARRINGTON plans to work in New York City next year in art. PARKER WAITE, another art major, has recently been elected president of the senior class and member of Omicron Delta Kappa, senior men's leadership honorary. Sophomore CAROL KUBIE plans to enrich her art major by studying in Mexico this summer, while KATHY KOENIG will teach sculpture in Saint Louis before returning next fall to complete her art major.

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Contents

FICTION

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|----|
| Susan Brady | The Fragile Colour of Eyes | 5 |
| Ed Brunner | The Trickster | 18 |
| Sharon Haddock | On Passing | 31 |

POETRY

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|----|
| Robert Hoyt | Fishing with Light Tackle | 17 |
| Sharon Haddock | Poem | 26 |
| Robert Hoyt | On Insects | 27 |
| Jerry Bryce | A Chopper of Trees | 28 |
| Peggy Schmidt | Nefertiti | 30 |
| Robert Chester | The Gambler and the Corinthian | 41 |
| Jane Cogie | Shades of Spring | 42 |

GRAPHICS

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|----|
| Carol Kubie | Monocut | 4 |
| Parker Waite | Monocut | 17 |
| Doris Farrington | Monocut | 26 |
| Kathy Koenig | Watercolor | 30 |
| Karen Gernenz | Pen and Ink | 42 |

Any student of Denison may submit manuscripts of poems, stories and essays to the editors or deposit them in the EXILE box in Slayter Hall.



THE FRAGILE COLOR OF EYES

by Susan Brady

I

She turned out the light and drew up the quilt. Her eyes were attracted to the reflections of windowpanes on the wall across the room. Funny how there was darkness unless a light showed itself; but even if the light had been there, unless she let it show itself to her, it wouldn't have made any difference. She guessed it was the same with her father. When she wasn't there to see him, the dilemma seemed a ridiculous fancy. It was like shutting her eyes and believing that the colors on the wall were blue and green; but then, upon opening her eyes, they were inescapable white. And just as she was ready to face the glaring whiteness, her eyes would close and there would be no bright cold wall, but only the soft green and deep blue of the inside of her eyes.

It made her think of the rose window in the church at home. The day of her confirmation she had stared at it, feeling the depth and intensity of the brilliant colors. And she had clenched her teeth and melted into the colors so as not to cry. It was to be the final and public affirmation of their faith. The decision rested inside each one of them. For her there had been no decision. She had been confirmed long before, late at night, when she refused to tell her Mother why she was crying. After her mother left the room, she had heard loud voices downstairs. She shook, and with her fingernails scratched over and over the letters W-H-Y into the wallpaper next to her bed.

Then she had prayed to God that she could love, and do His will. That morning at church was a show; for her, a torturing display of that which was already very personally hers. Meaning and emotion seemed to overflow from the scroll-script words of the minister as he looked into each one of them. And the pimple-faced boy who wondered if the aborigines didn't have quite as demanding a god as theirs, and could they be sinners for that? She had wondered what he was thinking.

BRADY

And then standing there in the pew next to her father as they shared a hymnal. She had dreaded his coming, like she had dreaded the whole thing. He hadn't been to church in many years. It would have been much easier if she wouldn't have had to see him there and know that he cared. He was so out of place in that world of hers. Did he know that she had prayed for him to change, for God to let her understand, and sometimes for her own death?

When she went away to school the inspiration for her religious vigor remained behind. She began to realize that it had never been God at all, but her own self which she had had to deal with so intensely in the face of the overpowering reality of her Father. It had gnawed and torn at her, threatening. It seemed to rip her apart, leaving her as sensitive and defensive as an open wound. Efforts to heal in understanding were futile. Even the scabs of rationalization or pretending would crack and break, unlike her Mother's shiny surface; you could hardly tell it was a scab, despite the unimaginable infection underneath. Yet, at school it was like closing her eyes, and then opening them again to a different reality where she could stand freely. The thought of the miserable fall that would again be hers in a few days was heavy. She could envision home and Christmas vacation and feel the disillusionment, except for the cynicism that distance permitted. She could almost laugh, falling imperceptibly into the soft green and deep blue of sleep.

II

Last minute shopping, wrapping presents, and delivering coffee cakes demanded my attention. I knew that Mother depended on me. All of us children learned early that she was a wonderful person, always doing things for people; but I would have been much more agreeable had she been capable of accepting the fact that I, too, had some things I wanted to get done. She couldn't do that. And frustrated, I quarreled constantly with her. She had no conception of me on the inside, or else never the time or frankness to let me know. She was so unselfish that she didn't even realize that she had very special parts of herself to share with us children. She didn't mean to, but she forgot about that. Unless, perhaps the deepest parts of her were filled with confused agony for Father, which she thought would hurt us too much. And God knows what she shared with Father, now that they were through having children.

"Get going now, Sara, I expect you to be home in plenty of time to help me in the kitchen." And so I cooperate and call it duty.

Driving along the country road to take a cake to my cousin's family, I thought more about Mother. No one ever saw anything but the clean, almost too white, smiling face with conservative glasses and a stiff frame of healthy, grey-brown hair. She was tall, almost taller than Father, and relatively slender for her age and four children. She had very good taste in clothes and that was her only extravagance. She talked loud on the telephone, a habit which used to greatly embarrass me. Sometimes Father and I winked about it. Father and I winked about lots of things she did which were usually lingering sources of frustration to me regardless. It's one of those little games you play to exist. And I would notice a slight tightening of his jaw. Why did we have to bother with the game? It taunted and deceived, like reflections.

Well, anyway, Mother was immaculate. There was never a speck of dust on the surface of anything in our house, except in my room, about which she perpetually nagged. She tried to keep each one of us fairly well dusted. Remarkable woman; and I hated all that about her. She was cheating me. She was cheating all of us. She kept waxing the dustfree surface, almost successfully disguising the human imperfections. Didn't she ever wonder whether the wood might be rotting underneath? Maybe she couldn't even see through the wax anymore. God! I was twenty miles over the speed limit and probably went right past the damn house.

A large, old house, it had an exquisite antique-gold Christmas decoration on the front door. Opening the door, I gave one regretful thought of the run in my stocking, and plunged into the warm hallway. Aunt Win, Father's sister, was a nervous woman who had almost died of alcoholism the year before, and she was always cold. So the thermostat was fixed at 81. I carefully removed my wet shoes, hesitating as I remembered that my uncle became very agitated at the sight of unshoed feet. And I smiled, hearing again Mother telling me one summer as I was leaving to visit my cousin that I should for-Lord's-sake-keep-my-shoes-on-and-remember-their-summer-home-wasn't-quite-as-woody-as-ours! I decided that my uncle might not be home. No one was in the library or the living room. I followed a sound of voices into the kitchen, through the silken-walled rooms and under the crystal chandeliers, to find Christine and her mother sitting at the kitchen table, apparently chatting. Christine offered me a beer. Her mother was of course drinking milk. Mumbling something about the cake, I set it down on the counter and got myself a beer. Cigarettes and beer were expressions of their world. They were Father's world too. And I had accepted them enthusiastically,

almost consciously . . .

"My goodness!" Aunt Win was looking around the kitchen, her cigarette poised in the air, and her other hand adjusting the waistband of her dress over the tuberos layers of blocked fluid, the result of liver sclerosis. She was a rather intelligent woman, and had been strikingly attractive when younger. Just a few years older than Father, she had gone through so much. But instead of feeling sorry for her, I rather disliked her. She was the epitome of what I hated and sought so desperately to come to terms with. You'd think she adored me. I couldn't quite pull off that game either. I knew she was just putting up with me, and I knew that I had to keep fighting her. It was the principle of the thing.

"I never did understand why your Mother kept her on, Sara." Aunt Win continued. "She worked with us for a while, but I just couldn't stand it. She never would answer the telephone. Just refused. She could be dusting the thing itself, and I'd be up in bed reading, and she wouldn't pick it up. Well, it was unbearable. Just simply rare . . ."

They laughed and I looked at Aunt Win, into her eyes, which never met mine. She was so much better than I'd ever seen her before. You never used to be able to talk with her coherently. Not that she was perpetually dead drunk, but that she was high enough most of the time to be generally irrational at any time. Life had become mechanical, that is, the parts of life you were forced to deal with, like people. All the rest was bitterly smooth and thickly dull as her blood had begun to turn to pure alcohol.

But now that Aunt Win was all better, it felt sort of warm sitting at that table, thinking how much it must have meant to Cathy to be able to communicate with her mother. Christine and I had always been together a lot—even when she went away to prep school. So many times I had eaten with them when her mother couldn't get the food to her mouth. And we pretended not to notice and never mentioned it between ourselves. I don't remember whatever we did with all those hours. And then coming home from college there seemed a gap like never before. I was frustrated and confused. Had it always been there, but just not the color of my eyes? And I wanted to reach out to her. Maybe she didn't need me now that her mother and she talked freely about boys and friends and summer plans.

Next summer Christine would work at a fashionable shop on the peninsula. The artistic woman who owned it was a friend of the family. I had asked for a job too, and was disappointed when I didn't get it. Father had said he wouldn't have let me stay with my

cousins all summer anyway. He said it would be a strain on Aunt Win and never verbalized the other reasons. I know I wouldn't have listened. Maybe I wouldn't have understood either. I wanted so much to work someplace away. I wanted to be able to meet new people on my own terms.

"I can't understand your parents acting this way," said Aunt Win.

"God, Sara, you've been to Europe and everything. I guess you can handle yourself," reinforced Christine.

"Oh, I know. It's impossible. The trouble is, they just can't face the fact that their little daughter is grown up. The world is so big and ugly you know. They forget I've been in it for eighteen years." Strange, it was so easy to say that. . . .

"Well, I saw your Mother for a minute at the beauty parlor yesterday. I said something about Christine's job, and asked if you'd heard yet. She said, 'Oh, no,' but that they were so happy that you'd be spending the summer with them up north. I thought 'Oh my, I bet Sara isn't all that happy about it,'" offered Aunt Win, laughing understandingly. Very chummy. I wanted to run.

"I s'pose she'd be mortified if she knew we were serving you beer in the afternoon. Does she know that you smoke?" Christine asked.

"Oh, she knows," I said coolly, "but it's like she doesn't dare say anything to me."

"Well, and with your Father smoking the way he does . . ." added Aunt Win.

"Exactly; and I can imagine the horrendous things that go through her mind when one thinks about me at school, 800 miles away!" They laughed. I felt like a traitor, working the black market madly, passionately, craving a profit that might be my own foolish ruin.

"My land, yes. She'd be horrified!" exclaimed Aunt Win. She liked that phrase, MY LAND, and drawled away on it, her nose and her cigarette at the same altitude.

"I better get going. Mom has things for me to do. I should be at chauffeur's school instead of a liberal arts college. Well, I guess we'll see you tonight. What time are you coming?"

"That's cuz," teased Christine, "doesn't even know the time of her own Christmas party!"

"Just hang on, Mahilda. I'll get organized. Just you wait!" Laughing, I thanked them for the beer and cigarettes and backed out of the door into a clear, cold Christmas evening.

III

When I slammed the back door of home I could feel a current, as of a huge machine in motion, warming up, maybe. I leaned against the door and closed my eyes. That current used to be sustained by hushed giggling and twinkling secrets, generally regarding who's going to get what from Santa. The excitement was new each year. The children would be all dressed and poking at curious packages under the tree before the relatives arrived. Soon everyone would appear, fourteen in all, seat themselves comfortably, and, cocktails in hand, begin to catch up on family news. There would be a faint jingling of bells and Santa's round, jolly voice would be heard from the front porch. Although the children were quiet, their pink cheeks and sparkling eyes betrayed them. Almost as if they couldn't possibly concentrate on anything else, they had to sit still and wait. And especially when they were very young, their expectation would so overwhelm them that when the big bearded man came, they grew even more silent, melted into Mother's skirts, and were apprehensive of the whole spectacle.

At age five, my brother pointed out Santa's black, rubber FIRE-MAN'S BOOTS. And after a few years they knew too much to even question the logic of a sleigh in the air, or reindeer on the boulevard, or even the ruddy man with a beard that looked more limp and yellow than thick and white. That's when the machine began to burn tension rather than natural excitement. And the gentle current changed to a kind of piercing static . . .

"Yes? Who's there? Sara, is that you? Why, my gracious, I thought you'd never get back! Get going now so you can greet Grandma."

"Yes, Mother." I made a face on the stairway.

"I mean it. I want you to be ready this time." In their room upstairs, Mother was getting into her annual green Christmas dress, and at the same time reminding my youngest sister to be sure to comb her hair and PUT IN A BOBBY-PIN.

Father emerged from the bathroom in his new once-a-year-day hollyberry shorts. They looked more like ants-in-the-pants to me. He sat down on the bed, sipped his drink, and asked mother where in the Hell his navy blue socks were. For the one-hundredth time she'd never seen a pair in his possession. He was sure she was just hiding them to frustrate him to the utmost. He wondered if black would get him over Emily's proverbial fence or around the post or something.

He can be very humorous.

"And get the hair out of your face so we know you have eyes!" he hollered after me, as I ascended to my attic chamber.

Things weren't so bad. And I was eager to talk with Grandma. She was so alive at eighty-three. Actually she doesn't even know exactly how old she is—something got lost. She loved gardening and bird feeding and driving along the lakeshore in her car with the heater that was toasty-in-no-time. When I was little I used to count pennies in a tiny old fry pan over at her house. And we went to the bakery early in the morning to get the best sweet rolls. Then at evening we'd sit out on the porch in large old wicker rockers and watch the sun set. Sometimes, after the street lights went on, we'd walk to the corner drug store to get a soda.

I asked her about her Life and about great-grandfather. He had come over from Germany and started the first factory in our town in a little shack by the river that blew down three times before they ever got any reward out of it. Now she had fine tailored suits of navy blue and dark green and many antique jewels. She would tell me then about how her father was so conservative and embarrassed for her avant-garde style. And how he made her take off her hat before they met the relatives on the first trip back to the old country. I'd heard a million times about the jeweled stick pin for the napkin to protect the front of her dress at dinner parties. She said that people thought she was a fool, but she didn't bother; she had learned it from her mother, and besides, she wasn't vain. And I remember her telling Mother when I got contact lenses how wasn't that terribly vain? I'd been trying to make up for it since. The doorbell rang.

My hair finally on top of my head in a secure fashion, I dashed downstairs to open the door. There she was, a thin, puckered smile from out her tan and finely wrinkled face. Her cheeks were bright and her eyes glistened from the cold. She had a big pan of cookies which were transferred to me as she shuffled in, huffing and puffing.

"My! It's getting colder and colder. If I ever fell now I'd surely just crack into a million crispy chips on the pavement. You must tell your Father to put out some gravel."

"Gram, that's silly. You're too agile to fall!"

"Cheer up. You wouldn't have to get me any eight foot coffin then!" She laughed, squeezed my hand, and took the cookies to deliver them personally to her daughter in the kitchen.

"It's so nice that you're home, Sara. You can be a big help to your Mother. She has so much to do. The church and taking Mary out to

her horse and meals and all." There seemed to be very much in her eyes that she didn't say.

"I know, Gram. She's going all the time—almost as busy as you." "She really ought to have a little rest sometime. Say, your hair looks pretty murtsy up like that." That was her special etymological creation. And like a small child, she used it often with new excitement every time. She would giggle and hold my arm and then repeat it several times.

"I hoped you would like it, Gram," and she had disappeared into the kitchen.

When the group had assembled, drinks were served. I looked around the room. There were only two men and my little brother and all those women. Mother had invited a widow friend of the family and Father's cousin, Aunt Marcella, came again from Willow Falls. Grandma was radiating her usual warmth and humor. Even Aunt Win thought she was the most wonderful woman. "It just tickles me," she had said once, "How your grandmother always has such delightful things to say." It was actually a good way to get to the subject of how deplorably boring her own cousin, Aunt Marcella, was. So Aunt Win had proceeded to draw derogatory parallels.

But it was really true. Aunt Marcella had just come back from a tour of Europe, and still couldn't say anything but yes or no. Poor Marcella, she had had one true love who died in the war. After that she began to shrink, until now she was like a little white mouse with an eternal trap complex. She was afraid of the dog. It wasn't that she didn't mean well. She meant it so much that all she could do was smile and grip the arm of the sofa whenever she was addressed.

The children bounced in and out, fidgeting impatiently for the time when the word would be given for the Santa Claus presents to appear. The conversation drifted to past Christmases . . .

"Remember the year Christine and I watched at the window and saw Santa emerge from an old black Ford parked next door?"

"And that time when Santa brought the old sled in from the front porch along with the presents!"

"And the year he literally floated in on the breath of hot buttered rum?"

"We changed brands the next year, didn't we?"

"Sure, that was old Fireman LaPlant. He never felt quite merry enough for the job, I guess."

And this year there would be no Santa. The laughter died and a curious tension invaded with the third round of cocktails. The big

presents had been brought in, and wrapping paper was already in the fireplace. The children played at the new game and pestered about dinner. The widow guest stayed rigid. Aunt Marcella smiled, still. Aunt Win nervously offered Christine another cigarette. Even Grandma looked somehow tired. It was clearly dinner time. Mother called Father into the kitchen and I followed him.

In the kitchen Mother was busy arranging the Christmas cookies on a plate. Without looking up she told Father to see if the knives were sharp enough. Suddenly she became agitated and stood counting her fingers. There would be thirteen at the table! Oh, how could she have made such a mistake? It was a traditional bad omen at Christmas time, and we couldn't remind anyone, especially Grandma.

"For Christ's sake, what's the difference, Georgia?" Father was disgusted, but his eyes looked very weak and distant. He looked at the knives.

"I'm fed up with this! Every time I get ready to carve it's the same thing."

Mother turned sharply at this outburst, tears of anger and frustration in her eyes. I saw that for her too it was the same old thing, and guests waiting to be served.

"Honey, I told you about it yesterday and you didn't say anything. I just took it for granted . . . I thought maybe you'd taken care of it . . ."

"Well you know as well as I do these knives are lousy."

"Deary, that's a new one, and why don't you try the sharpener?"

"That thing isn't worth a damn!"

"Well then, I'm sorry. It's too late now. You'll just have to do your best."

"Oh, for God's sake cut out the sorry bit. Jesus."

"Would you rather have me slice the roast out here? That might be just as easy . . ."

"Don't be foolish. I'll do the carving."

Mother sighed as she bent down to get out the electric knife sharpener. Father watched her lazily. My empty stomach felt heavy, and I left to invite the assembly to be seated.

We skipped grace. Mother reminded Father laughingly that he'd have to get right to work, because there were so many hungry people waiting, and would he make sure to serve the children last otherwise they'd be done before anyone else began. She had the right idea, but she had ignored the man picking up the knife. Carving was tedious: Father sawed and hacked with sluggish hands while Mother

juggled bits of conversation with suggestions to him through the centerpiece. He clenched his jaw and breathed heavily. Plateful after plateful was produced, to bobble and jiggle its way down the assembly line to a particular person. The process was dirgelike and endless.

The cocktails hadn't served to mellow. They seemed just one of the desperate technicalities of creating one more Christmas. People watched in silence. All except for Mother; she never changed. She kept on trying to hold things together. The guests listened to her, apathetically at first. Then they tried to join her, but the result was a rather hollow garrulity. Here it was, the time for which I had rushed around all day, pushing away a curious expectation with motion. Or maybe it was that I had known all along that Christmas would be a weird failure. And why not fool yourself as long as you can? I might have gotten by the whole way, but the glaring tone of this scene was piercing my eyes, beginning to cut the underneath. The intricate machine was bearing its end product, which broke apart as it hit the ground, despite the clapping, wagging, blubbering audience. And I wanted to be in another place and time. "For unto you this night . . ."

IV

There was some part deep inside of her that didn't change color according to her eyes. It didn't change when they were closed, or even when she winked. Sometimes that part was gigantic and swallowed her into its silent depths of perfect tension. Then she would look out at people, like tonight, through eyes like suns, piercing and repelling. "Look at yourself, Father. Can't you see that I love you?" they would burn. And he would turn and maybe wonder at the tears in the corners of her eyes. But he never answered, for the words had dissolved as the salt in her tears. They dried fast and she would wash them from the back of her hand later, up in her room, alone.

Christine had noticed her sudden departure, and followed on the frantic flight upstairs. She had thrown herself down on the bed, her lips quivering and her abdomen cramped with anxiety. Christine came into the room and flicked on the light.

"No. Don't. Turn it off!" Sara snapped.

Christine turned out the light and offered her a cigarette. They sat there, two orange embers in the darkness.

"Christine, I'm going insane. Honest to God, I'm going out of my mind. How can those people sit down there? . . . How can they watch? Or am I imagining things? Isn't it all there? Please, isn't it all there? Maybe it is just a dream that I am so hideously trapped

in . . . and I want to scream and tear out my eyes. For what . . . what . . . what . . . why?

"Do you know what I'm feeling? Do you know how I'm watching him kill himself and I can't bear it any longer? Do you know how it is ripping me into shreds? What do I tell myself? I've run out of words . . . I've run out of answers . . . I've even run out of questions . . ."

"What did you do, Christine, what did you do? You went through it . . . Did you see Father's face when he carried your mother, yellow and red and bloated, out to the ambulance? What did it say? What did it say? Did you see why he's doing the same thing . . .? Did she hold to his arm too tightly . . . or did she turn away from him?"

"Christine, can you see how I'm shaking? Do you see how I can live here anymore? Do you see how what I am is not a person anymore? Where do I go? . . . God . . . God . . ." She sobbed uncontrollably. Words weren't enough and they were too much.

"I know you must feel horrible. I felt that way sometimes too. It's not so awful downstairs. Everyone's opening presents. And anyway, you're just upset, but you'll be OK. Go . . ."

"Well what did you do? . . . what did you do? Tell me, please tell me how you lived . . ."

"There's nothing you can do right now, Sara. Just go wash your face, and come back downstairs. They'll be wondering where you are and then the kids will come tramping up here. That wouldn't be so great." Christine walked toward the door.

"Oh, Christine, I can't go down. I can't do it. I can't even look at anyone anymore. I've seen it. I've seen it all. I'd like to rot up here in my own private Hell. Christine, please sit here for a while. Can you see how I have to pour this out, how I am splitting into a million pieces? Please, just listen . . . oh this must be terrible for you . . . just pick up the pieces so no one else has to fall on them . . . throw them away . . . please stay, Christine."

"I know it's hard. I'd like to stay, but there's really nothing I can do. And anyway, my parents expect me home with them to have our family Christmas, open the presents we left at home, and stuff."

"I don't know what I'll do . . . all right. Go if you want . . ."

"Aren't you coming down? People will be leaving soon."

"No, I can't come now, maybe later . . . maybe . . . see you."

"Bye, Sara."

Now they weren't even sobs, just violent heaving of her whole

body. She could hardly breathe. She paced back and forth in the small room.

"God, I'll destroy it. I'll go mad. And it would just be another game. Why can't I just play along? Instead I dangle, choking, but breathing; dying, but living . . . and I'm too weak to cut the thread . . . too weak . . . with words and hollow cries . . ."

Finally, silenced, she sat down on the bed, turned on a small light, and lit a cigarette. The minutes were so quiet. And she sat still there, in a void, a luxurious nothingness that surrounded her and seemed to wash back and forth through her. Everything had dissolved or been burned or been crushed in her. And there at the bottom was paralyzing monotony. She sighed and got up, walking toward the front window.

Doors slammed from somewhere below. They would be leaving now. She walked toward the window, fascinated by the image of herself manifest there. With each step the shape seemed to lurch at her. It was such a solid image, crude, but becoming more distinct. The eyes were black holes. She could not see the sparkle that people sometimes told her was there. Hair straggled down from atop her head. There was a darkness where her mouth would be. Each feature of the image presented itself with damning insistence. She wanted to turn away. She would have to turn before she broke the window. She hesitated, drew in on the cigarette, and dug her fingernails into the palm of her other hand, as she stared at the portrait in glass relief. She was close now. The reflection jeered and nagged, daring her. She took an almost imperceptible step, perhaps only a forward pull of her body from her eyes down. As her face came in contact with the cold, wintry window-pane, the reflection disappeared, as if it had been breathed in by her.

And outside the trees showed black wrought iron fingers against the deep blue of the night sky. She could see the forms of Aunt Win and Christine walking down the steps. When she could no longer see them she turned toward the stairs.

*Awarded the semi-annual
Exile-Denison Bookstore Writing Prize*

* * * *



FISHING WITH LIGHT TACKLE

Robert Hoyt

Each time I cast my lure disturbs
Your pool, and you only
Watch the waves usher their weight
To the shore, and when I

Tease your mouth to commune on prayer
Thin line, you suspend your
Silver move in quivering shadow.
In hunger's ritual, I

Stalk and read the shallows. The wind
V's the fervent stream's
Still side, and I forget the vision
Of you flashing in your quarried

Pride. A dark thrust-swirl. The line sings
Colours of our separate worlds.

THE TRICKSTER

by Ed Brunner

I

I didn't know that Bruce Miller was dead until Dean Holmes called me one night. I remember our connection was faulty and the lines between us crackled and buzzed so that Dean seemed as if he were speaking from miles underground instead of just from New York City. After complaining about how hard I was to reach, how no one knew where the hell I had buried myself, he told me that Bruce Miller was dead. Hurricane Esther, crossing Martha's Vineyard, had caused tidal waves along South Beach, and Bruce, who lived year-round outside Menemsha, was nowhere to be found. Everyone assumed that Bruce had gone for a walk in the height of the storm and had been caught in an undertow when the wave came in.

That was all. I hung up and I remember walking into my library and pulling Bruce's three books out of a shelf; altogether they were thin enough to hold in the one hand. I wanted to call Dean back and talk longer; for the first time in years, I regretted that I was living alone. But I didn't know Dean's telephone number, and if I called the operator I would have to go through all sorts of problems, so I just forgot the whole thing. I went into the kitchen and prepared an elaborate meal with soup and salad and dessert; that was all I could do.

Bruce and I had grown up together, gone to the same schools, fallen in love with the same girls. At one time, we had been inseparable, talking everything over together, confiding all sorts of secrets. When his novel was published, my book of short stories came out; only after that did we see each other occasionally—by accident, really. Now I thought of those other writers who had died young, died with their best work yet to be started—Thomas, Keats, Camus—and I thought of Rimbaud, who had always been Bruce's idol. Death brought them fame, but what good did it do any of them? What is death anyway? It is a harsh and finally a cold thing; how representative can a skull and crossbones be? We need a cold and impersonal symbol of death, something like a gigantic and terrifying machine, a mass of cogs and gears that devour. And as I sat in my chair, the darkness gathered itself outside; I heard the wind starting to move the dry leaves, the

leaves came tapping at my door, and it seemed as if Bruce himself might appear outside at any minute. I rushed through the house turning on every light. And when I saw what I had done, I ran outside into the gale and looked at the house, its black skeleton outlined by the lights shining through the windows. None of it made any sense to me, but I stood there in the wind as it grew and looked at the house and the lights and the leaves and tried to make some sense of it all, tried to make myself believe in death.

Later that night, lying in my bed, I knew I must go to Martha's Vineyard, taking the train to Woods Hole and the ferry to Vineyard Haven. On the weekend, the train will be crowded; perhaps, I thought, I should wait a bit longer, stay away from the last of the tourists . . .

It really all began to come clear when I thought of Lynn Macner. Lynn was the girl Bruce first fell in love with; she couldn't stand Bruce, though it was plain to everyone else that Bruce would do anything for her. She was beautiful and she knew it; Bruce was not handsome, not muscular, not tall and dark-haired, but he acted as if he didn't know any of these infirmities. The affair, I remember, continued for months and months. Bruce believed that things might change at any moment, that if he lived an honest life, a passionate and true existence, she might suddenly love him someday as deeply as he loved her. I was mediator between Bruce and Lynn. Lynn would tell me, "I don't hate him, but he has such a bad reputation with the teachers. He's so arrogant in class and all, if I'm seen near him it'll damage *my* reputation." Lynn was right, and it was my problem to tell Bruce what Lynn had told me, only to couch her statements in the easiest phrases; I often thought that's where I first learned about writing.

The Bruce-Lynn Affair finally exploded one day. I was sitting in my room with Bruce, trying to do some homework for a change. Bruce, as usual, was reading a book. We heard voices on the steps of the stairs and Lynn and Mike Hampton burst in the door; Lynn's hair was sopping wet and Mike was reeling. Both were drunk, but Lynn was sober enough to recoil a bit when she saw Bruce. Bruce, however, kept his head buried in his book. Mike sat down and told us—or rather, me—how he had poured wine in Lynn's hair; Lynn kept standing, and five minutes later, they left together, Mike screeching out of my driveway in his car.

Bruce got up out of his chair and went out on the porch outside my room. I followed him out. The air still smelled of burning rubber. "God," I said. "It stinks out here." Bruce turned and looked

at me. "If the Marquis de Sade was a woman, I know what she'd look like," he said. Then he began to cry, and I left him alone on the porch, for what can two boys do when one of them is crying?

Bruce began seriously to write stories after that. I suppose they were a way of forgetting, some sort of purgative. I was never sure and am not now. At any rate, the stories were good; I was surprised that he had given up satire and science-fiction to write realistic accounts that I could hardly understand, but six months later, I was immersed in the same style, trying to decipher the mysteries of my childhood, writing long autobiographies. But Bruce was ahead of me again. While I was in the midst of composing (at the age of sixteen) my autobiography, *Ashes Sweet*, a section of which appeared in my second book of short stories, Bruce was beginning a novel.

Then we separated: I went off to college and Bruce, who had thrown out his college applications by mistake when he threw out a bunch of early short stories, stayed home, writing and working in Hartford.

My own writing went along slowly, and occasionally I would turn out something that someone would understand and appreciate, but those stories were few and far between. Everyone knows the writer must isolate himself to write, and I took an apartment far away from school and tried to be more productive. I learned a few things about myself, living alone, but I got very little done.

After I graduated from school I received a note in the mail. It was postmarked San Francisco and when I opened it, this was inside:

Dear Jay—Sending my novel along in a few days.

I wondered who the devil had sent the note, but when I got the novel a few days later, I knew. It was Bruce's, and the novel was *Twelve Bar Blues*. The inscription on the inside read "Guess I beat you after all. Sorry about the dedication." I turned the page; it read: "To Lynn, with Love and Hate."

After that, I saw Bruce in New York for a few days. We ran into each other crossing Tompkins Square. I had been looking for Greenwich Village and somehow had gotten lost. That was while I was trying to live in New York, something that never quite worked out; New York and I never got along. We sat in a dingy cafe and drank foul coffee, talking about writing all the while. He was living around this district with some girl named Carmen. I never visited his place and he never visited mine (which was way uptown), but he took some of my short stories to his publisher. About two weeks later, I got a check for five hundred dollars in the mail and a contract

for my book. I always meant to thank Bruce, but he had left for San Francisco by the time I got around to it.

Then more time passed. I gave up on New York City and took a job teaching English in a Connecticut prep school. A few weeks later, Bruce's second novel came out; at almost the same time, he was on the second page of the *New York Times*. The clipping is still somewhere in my desk—"Writer Urges Students to Rebel, 'More Political Freedom,' Says Bruce Miller in Impromptu Speech." A few weeks later, Bruce was again in the papers, appearing at a Civil Rights function; the *New Yorker* published four essays on the situation in Mississippi that were written by him. Bruce was beginning a career of public prominence while I sat at a desk in Colchester, Connecticut, grinding away at short stories.

I saw Bruce for what I now know as the last time about two months ago. I quit teaching school and just took up writing. Bruce sold three of my stories to the *New Yorker* and together we went on a trip to Chicago to explore various aspects of the slums. We were working on another series of articles. At that time, I remember being impressed with how many people he knew in Chicago, how easily he could talk to the people in the slums. He had developed into a fast writer, the kind of person who sat down at a typewriter and turned out a finished story. He was totally at ease everywhere; once, two girls recognized him, and he signed autographs, something that amazed me. A reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* took his picture one day, and Bruce insisted I be included. From my picture along with Bruce's in the paper, I was invited to a half-dozen cocktail parties. Bruce went to all of them, but only stayed for a few minutes. "I hate the damn things," he told me. "I just go for a couple minutes so people can say, 'Hey, Bruce Miller was at our party last night.'" I went to one or two without him, but I just didn't get along; to be truthful, no one had read my books. "Who's he?" people asked of me behind my back, and the answer was invariably, "A friend of Bruce Miller's." And before we left Chicago, he did the one thing that surprised me most of all, it seemed so strangely unethical. He took our manuscript of the Chicago slums story and we went into the building where *Playboy* is published. I felt self-conscious in my cheap suit, but Bruce looked great in his worn corduroy coat—just the way a writer should look. He went to the publisher's office, threw our manuscript on the desk and said, "The *New Yorker* promised me two thousand dollars for this. What'll you give me?" When the fellow said, "Three," Bruce shook his hand.

We took a jet to New York City, had a drink at the airport

together, and I took a train the rest of the way home. A week later, I received a check for fifteen hundred dollars in the mail, and that was my last contact with Bruce.

II

Dean Holmes called me three more times before I finally decided to go to the Vineyard. Each time he pressed me a bit harder, until he said, "They're about ready to call off all the search parties; if you were there . . ." He was right, I decided, but there was more. On the front page of the *Sunday Herald Tribune Book Review* was a full-length essay evaluating Bruce's three novels. It was Monday now, and there would be less people to annoy me on the trains. That morning, I drove down to the station in New London.

As I drove down, a strange idea possessed me, and I couldn't shake it. All morning long, I had been on edge, and I had drunk too much coffee and was feeling nauseous. On top of that came Dean's phone call and my decision, which I was not even really aware of yet. But anyway, this odd notion came over me as I was riding toward the city, and it seemed terribly strange and unusual at first, but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. It was this:

The real truth about Bruce Miller was that he was still alive. He was not dead, but simply hiding! The whole idea was perfect. When a writer dies, his work becomes re-evaluated, and everyone feels terrible because he had been slighted so much in his own lifetime. Already literary vultures were picking at his bones; Lynn Macner herself might eventually come around. I could see her essay in the *Atlantic* now, "Recollections of Bruce Miller"; she would finally fall in love with him, or rather, his myth. It wouldn't be hard for Bruce to bury himself for five years—God knows I had done it—and then "come alive" again, reveal the biggest literary hoax of all time. My whole theory was perfect; it fit in with Bruce's desire to be accepted publicly as a great writer. What had started as a vague idea became a truth, and my whole notion worked, it was obvious! Bruce Miller was still alive, but where would he be? Where would I go if I had "died"? I wouldn't go anywhere; I would hang around Menemsha and laugh my head off while everyone looked for me.

By now I was at the railroad station. I went inside and bought a ticket. I sat for a while, wondering whom I could confide in. There was no one I knew, so I just kept things to myself, sitting in a corner of the train station. I thought to myself as I watched passenger cars stop in the terminal, disgorge people and move on. There was some-

thing that frightened me about this station. It not only smelled of decay and must, but of people; its very vastness was alarming. It was an ugly place, but then most of New London is an ugly place, so there was nowhere else for me to be except here, and I tried to make the best of it.

I decided to try and figure out why I had waited so long to go to the Vineyard. If I had only realized earlier that Bruce had been bluffing from the start! Why did I wait? The week-end trains were crowded, yes, but this delay was more: it was part of my character. I am a terrible procrastinator; I have always been. I suddenly recalled one time at college when Bruce had been visiting me. There was a girl involved, a girl we both liked. One day she visited us in my dormitory. After we talked for a while, she left us to go to the music conservatory to practice piano, and Bruce lay down to sleep. I started to study but soon became drowsy and walked out of the room, across the grass to the lawn of the conservatory. It was a warm day, late in September, and I propped myself up against a tree and tried to read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I could hear her practicing, and I put down the book and listened. I wanted to talk to her, but how could I interrupt the music? It was a simple thing she was playing, some silly exercise, and she went back and forth over it, drilling it into her hands. I gradually got sleepier, stretched out on the grass and the music became blurred. From time to time, just as I was about to fall asleep, she stopped playing and I woke up. Everytime I woke, I thought I should get up and talk to her, but as I was about to, she began playing again, and I finally fell asleep and slept for two or three hours. When I woke up, the place was silent.

With a great clanging and roaring, the train to Woods Hole pulled in. I got up and walked out to the tracks, climbed aboard, and sat down.

I got off the train at Woods Hole and bought a ticket on the ferry. I took a quick look around the town, since I had never seen Woods Hole in the fall. In the summer, it is filled with tall boys and long-haired girls dressed in impeccable sloppiness. Now there were old men on the streets. A few fishing boats sat in the harbour; all the yachts were gone.

When the ferry to Vineyard Haven docked, I went to the upper deck to get a better look at the town. The land was beginning to turn grey as the leaves fell and the branches began to show. I only stayed up top for a few minutes, then I went in the cabin and sat there drinking coffee for the rest of the trip. I decided I didn't like Woods Hole in the fall.

I sat in the cabin and smiled secretly at all the people around me, the crew members and the islanders and the one or two tourists. "Some artists outlive their works," I thought to myself, leaning back and sipping my coffee. It might make a good introduction to an essay. In my earlier days, when I was in eighth grade, my favorite writer was H. P. Lovecraft. He was a recluse who died in Providence in 1937; in his short life, he had written weird tales for pulp magazines, and his titles always seemed wonderfully pregnant with horror: "At the Mountains of Madness," "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath," "The Whisperer in Darkness." All his stories are lost to me now, but I can never forget the way he looked in pictures, a pale, lantern-jawed young man with rimless spectacles. He lived with his two aunts, kept fires constantly roaring as he hated the cold, and slept all day, wrote all night. He refused to read any book published before 1850.

When we docked in Vineyard Haven, the town looked less inviting than Woods Hole. But as I walked up Main Street, I was excited. I took close looks at those walking by me, wondering how Bruce would've disguised himself. Would he grow a beard, buy glasses, cut his hair short? I walked all the way to the Vineyard Haven bus station, staring at people.

No busses run to Menemsha after September fifteenth, so I had to hitch-hike. In a few minutes, I got a ride with an islander. All the way down the coast I told him about Bruce and my theory. He said he remembered a lot of people coming to see the beach after the hurricane, but he didn't recognize anyone that was like my description of Bruce. We were almost in Menemsha, and in nervousness, I dropped a lighted cigarette in the fellow's car. For some reason, I envisioned reporters in Menemsha, and I wondered how I would react to them. Could I keep from giving away my theory? I had to, for Bruce's hoax depended on my silence.

Once we were in Menemsha, I was surprised to see everything looking the same. The streets were deserted, the houses were unpainted, and only the diner on the corner was open. Thanking my friend for the ride, I walked down the empty street to the diner. There was no one inside except a counterman. I sat down and ordered coffee. "Heard anything about Bruce Miller?" I asked.

"The guy that drowned?" he said. "I was in the search party. We gave up. We figure he was walking in the eye of the hurricane, and he just got caught, y'know?"

I nodded sagely. Another idea had just hit me, and I asked if he had a phone here. I went to it and dialed the telephone company

in Norwich, Connecticut, and asked if I had had any long distance calls.

"One," the operator said.

"From whom, from whom?"

"The party has tried to call you several times, sir."

"Did he leave a name?" I asked.

"I'm looking it up. Here we are. A Lynn Macner has been trying to reach you."

I hung up, excited. Bruce's plan was working, and I could hardly wait to tell him! He would be impossibly excited. Already Lynn was worrying about his death! I paid for my coffee and ran out of the diner. I had to find Bruce.

The streets were empty, smooth and straight and heading towards Bruce's cottage. Outside of town, I had to slow down; the roads were cluttered with fallen branches and trees, and I couldn't jump them all. I had to go around some and finally I slowed to a walk as I went up the hill leading to South Beach.

Over the top, the long stretch of South Beach was suddenly in front of me. I was out of breath, exhausted, and it was starting to drizzle. In the asphalt road, I was aware of my reflection looking up at me, and I remembered: Where was Bruce? Where was his cottage?

It was farther than I had expected and when I reached the cottage, I realized the wave had moved it off its foundation. The door to it was wide open, and all the windows were cracked or broken. Inside, furniture was toppled over, a bed was overturned; papers lay all over the floor, covered with mud, shriveled from seawater. When I stepped inside the whole place had a rotted smell to it, and the air was damp, as if the door had just been opened. There was broken glass on the floor; a typewriter lay upside down. I reached down and pushed a key. The hammers had rusted together, and the machine was useless. The papers on the floor looked like narrative, and I picked one up. The ink had blurred and run down the page, and I couldn't read a word for whole paragraphs. I sat in a damp chair and immediately got up. I walked into the kitchen where a puddle of sea water sat in the kitchen sink. Then I walked outside.

The rain was coming down harder now, and the scraps on the beach—the driftwood, the seaweed, the paper and cloth—were hardly recognizable. I kept stubbing my toes on the wreckage around me, all the way to the edge of the sea.

I stood there, where the sea came up to the land, and with the rain coming down, it was a long time before I realized I was crying.

POEM

Sharon Haddock

When I crossed that line
 They said, "What the hell do you think you are doing?
 Get the hell back over that line.
 You can read it but you can't live it."
 It made my mouth fly like everybody else's
 And me run around staring at their faces,
 Asking them if their mothers loved them.
 They said, "No,"
 Which was a lie I could tell
 By their scrubbed faces,
 Sun brown at Nassau at spring.



ON INSECTS

by Robert Hoyt

I For the Unpublished

There is something
Envious in
The public way
A winter fly
Dies, spinning out
His blinded pain
Around the light.
His rattle collects
Revulsion—scorn
(We roll our paper
Tight.) This is an
Alarm of death
Overdue, and a
Reminder of
A fate. Another
Will only die
Today, and get
Himself in print.

II On Writing

I was up late
At night writing,
When I found a
Moth stranded in
The sink. To free
Himself from the
Heavy beads, he
Left a trail of
Gold. A kind of
Painting. A terrible
Language.

A CHOPPER OF TREES

by Robert Chester

Alone he walks back home from school. He thinks
Of what he has been told to memorize:
Would it have been worthwhile
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

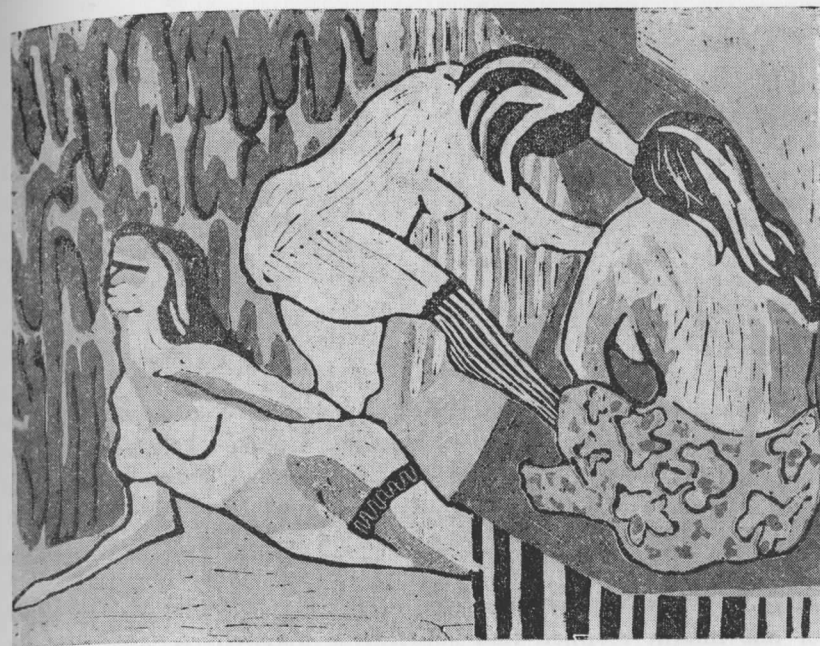
He pushes through brown fallen leaves, whose rustling
Makes strange music with the gray November
Stillness. "Born to see your father die,
To try to find some work not valueless,
To wrestle with immobile mysteries,
To watch yourself become a father. Brighten
Up your thoughts, you imbecile. You're home now."
"Anybody home?" he calls. No answer.
Tired, he walks up to his room, then lies
Down on his bed and tries to sleep. His eyes,
Though shut, see city streets and classrooms, people
Scurrying and talking, talking, babbling.
Hard his heart beats on his throbbing brain.
He gets up, wraps himself in hooded clothes,
Then runs to get the axe, to half-dead forest
Full of elms diseased, so thick they blot
The sun. With heavy clothes on muscled back
He chops, A tree falls, fractured through by rigid
Blade. He fells another elm. His body
Tires and heats. Some passion makes his hands
Strip from his burdened body all the clothes.
Unhampered now he chops a great-girthed elm,

A skeleton, its upper branches snapped
 And slammed down to the ground by winds. It falls
 Upon its limbs. He notches one more elm.
 His chopping almost deafening now brings all
 The trees a wondrous sight, a naked pure
 Well-muscled creature proving to himself
 That something can be done . . . one tree and then
 Another down, hard crashing to the ground,
 Wrenched, sundered into pieces bare of bark,
 Bleached, lifeless, brittle elmwood fragments, dried,
 Well toward decaying smothered by the fungus.
 All these trees cut down! And more to cut.
 But blisters on his hands have opened. All
 His muscles ache. His heart's a rabbit's heart.
 He has to stop his chopping.

Suddenly

It's quiet—axe is still—the only noise,
 His hard but certain breathing. Flushed, his body
 Shines in sweat except where it is black
 From scraping old dead bark. Surrounded by
 His rubble pile of elms, he looks at all
 He's done, with everything around him silent.
 Trees begin to whisper. He remembers
 That he's naked, quickly turns around,
 And sees a neighbor girl staring at him
 From behind a tree. She sees that he
 Sees her. She has been told about perversions.
 How he frightens her! She runs. He stands.
 "Just what will people think?" he asks himself.
 The dormant branches whisper. Something in him
 Answers "Does it matter? You know what
 You've done."

He walks to where he laid his clothes,
 Then dresses. Slowly he goes home. He puts
 The sharpened axe back in its cobwebbed place
 In the garage. He walks into the house,
 And walks up to his room, and lies down.



NEFERTITI

by Peggy Schmidt

Did you tell me not to change?
 Do you know that the Egyptians
 rinsed out the bodies of their dead with spices
 after cutting out the heart and brain,
 bound their limbs
 in coarse linen,
 and sealed them in dry, airless cases
 perfectly preserved?

ON PASSING

by Sharon Haddock

I was completely sick and tired. Things were so cold and there was no place to move to. Everything had been packed so hurriedly and so tightly—literally thrown in. Linda was, I suddenly thought, getting to be a real fat ass. I was stuck next to the door and she allowed me little room. My feet were on top of two brown boxes, so my knees practically reached the dashboard. And then Mom. I could have taken it all, even considering my mood, if she had just for one minute stopped that superfluous blabber. It was one big bitch after another. Times like this killed me. Because I, after all, wanted to be so mature at eighteen, the hatred I felt was doomed to settle to the bottom of me until it could be forgotten. It just took so long to get to the bottom. We pulled into a gasoline station about five miles out of town.

“For God’s sake, Mom,” I said for the fourth time since we had left home, “why don’t you let me drive?” Anything, after all, would have been better than having to worry about whether or not she was going to fly off the road in the middle of one of her detailed emotional tirades. I had brought Linda along because, among other things, she could help absorb the words that my mother so violently threw around. That meant I could fall asleep if I wanted. But on the other hand, I thought now that it might have been better if Linda hadn’t come. An extra listener in the group just helped to encourage Mom. Linda knew that she wasn’t, to my parents, the most acceptable of my friends. It was as if the family tolerated her instead of liking her, and she always took advantage of any situation through which she might further her purposes with the family. One of her goddamnest faults was, I thought as I stuck my leg up on the dashboard—I remember that that was when I thought it because I knocked Linda’s cigarette out of her hand and it burned the hell out of my leg and interrupted the thought, but later I remember thinking back over

HADDOCK

the trip and remembering—that she made herself almost unbearably repulsive by the way she tried to get my family to like her. Take my old dad for example. My dad was a lost cause as far as getting him to like her was concerned because he hated her for having a thirty-seven inch bust line, even though there was hardly anything she could do about it. She didn’t realize he was a lost cause (unaware as she was of her attribute), so she kept trying. Thoroughly amazing. She was oblivious to her physical appearance until about two years later when somebody must have pinched her in the right place and made her suddenly aware of what she had. She changed, or rather her walk changed, and then she lost any tiny bit of headway she might have made with my father all those years when she was totally unaware of her breasts. God, he hated her. With Mom at least her chances were better. She could, after all, serve as a scratching post for all Mom’s itchy gripes and complaints.

Mom was shaking like mad by the time we stopped in the gasoline station. The shaking started in her hands, and what appeared to be little beads of glass popped out around her eyes and mouth. I was furious. “Now you’ve done it. You’re upsetting yourself. Now just stop it. Get out and I’ll drive.”

“Margie,” she said. I noticed a sort of pitiful plea underneath the tone she expected me to accept as wrathful. “You really scare the hell out of me. I’d be worse.” She meant, of course, that I really scared the hell out of her when I drove. She was an absolute neurotic about it. God, I could threaten suicide and I couldn’t scare her. I knew that from experience. But let me talk about driving a car, and I really could get a rise out of her. Even now, when she was, to the trained observer (which I was), on the verge of a diabetic coma, she would not hand over the car. She ordered gasoline from the attendant whom I viewed casually with one eye closed. He was too ugly to bear, and so I closed both eyes. What the hell, I thought.

“I mean why, dear girl, do you think I came along in the first place?” she answered me, lighting a cigarette and trying to convince me that she was getting over her little attack. She took a couple of long breaths. I still had my eyes closed, but I could tell by the change in her voice that she had stopped shaking. “Don’t think that I can just let you go running off sixty miles in the middle of the night to God knows where . . .”

“No, Mother,” I interrupted, “not to God knows where. No, Mother. No. To Jim Swan’s. Swan, Mother. Remember? Dear, sweet, lovely Mother, remember for the forty-five thousandth time?”

To Jim Swan's. To be with Chuck, Mother. Remember Chuck Lynch?"

"I'm not," she said, pursing her lips in a very hurt manner, "going to send you off sixty miles by yourself to be with Chuck Lynch or anybody else. It is not done, you know. Nice people . . ."

"And we are, of course, 'nice people.'" The effect was perfect; she shut her mouth for all of six seconds.

"I can't even talk to you anymore. I swear to God I don't know what I have done wrong." She pushed a credit card through the window to a waiting hand. "Where on this earth have you gotten the idea you know everything there is to know! You do not. If you had any idea how you hurt me. What would those people think if I let you go running up there alone, with nobody but the two of you? People care about you. I guess you have forgotten that I am not going to let you go up there to God knows where to do God knows what and . . ."

"Mother, Mother, Mother!" I said (or rather screamed. The last "Mother" was two falsetto notes that I'm sure must have sounded siren-like to anyone within twenty yards.) "For the . . . look . . . we stay at Gram's. We stay at Gram's. It's that simple. You don't have to go chaperoning us around. We stay at Gram's." I wanted to say "Jesus" at the end of all that, but I didn't.

"It doesn't matter," Mom answered, starting the engine. "Why can't I go to see my own parents when I want to? There's no reason why I shouldn't. I don't see why you become so upset over my wanting to go along to see my own parents. It's been two months since I've even heard from them. Everything seems to me to work out fine. Everything. You can't very well call me a spy under these circumstances."

Linda just sat there. She had just sat there ever since we had pulled into the gasoline station, and she had said nothing. Blimp, I thought. She turned to me then slowly, making sure that my mother's attention was focused on the road. "Spy," she whispered to me softly.

When we drove into the city on the expressway, I could tell we were almost there when I looked up fifty feet or so and saw a grey crooked box sitting there with my grandparents inside. It seemed, from below, as if the two people in that box must be just sitting up there waiting to fall off. Somewhere along the road we made a right turn and then another right turn, and then we were in front of the box that was my grandparents' home. The box was very grey. My legs felt so much better once I was out of the front seat of the car. I ran into the house and I could see Grandpa. He was in the dining

room, smoking a pipe in a high-backed armchair. For the last couple times I had been here, I had only seen him sitting in that high-backed chair. He never walked anymore. "Goddamned, son-of-a-bitchin' arthritis," he always said. He looked around at me. "Well, well, well, Margie. How are you, Margie?" He cackled softly.

"Oh, I'm just fine. I'm great." I threw my arms around him. He had lost weight, and he hadn't shaved for a day or two. He smelled like a pipe. "How are you, Grandpa? Really, I worry about you so. Really, are you all right? You look so good. You look so good. Where is Grandma? Oh, Grandpa, you just look so good. Oh, Grandpa, you don't know Linda. Linda, this is my grandfather, Mr. MacArthur. Grandpa, this is Linda. You know Linda. Marty's girl."

He knew Linda, he said. He smiled. He cackled again and took my hand. I loved him, but he was so old. Linda laughed, and she sat down in a chair next to his at the table. She put one arm on the oil cloth table cover and pushed aside the numerous bottles and two or three empty glasses that were in the way, and then put her purse on the table. "Well," she said, "we have just had quite a trip, sir." He sort of smiled and shook his head. I knew he hadn't heard her.

"Yes sir, that was quite a trip," I said.

"Was it?" he commented. He clicked his tongue and shook his head again. Linda lighted a cigarette and sat back. "Well, how has the weather been here, Mr. MacArthur? Boy, it snowed like mad at home. Christmas we couldn't go anywhere."

"Rained like hell. God damned weather. I can't go out anyway." He laughed again and looked at me. "How are you doing, Baby? How is Sandy and Robert? Are you eating enough?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm great. Really, I'm just great. I'm a cheerleader now. I run around all the time and jump around and stuff and I just eat all the time."

"Well, I bought you some bananas. You still like bananas? I bought you some. They're in the kitchen."

"Yeah, thanks a lot. I just love them. You know I do. Grandpa makes the best pickles, Linda. You have to eat some of his pickles. I told her all about you, Grandpa. She wants some of those pickles."

"I'll have to go downstairs and get them. I got a couple jars. I'll go down and get them."

"No," I said, "we'll go. We can just run right down and get them. Where's the flashlight? We can get them later." I looked around. The room was a mess. No one had washed a dish for a long time. All the ashtrays were full. I looked around, "Where's Grandma?"

"Hell," he answered, "God damned bitch spits blood for four

days and won't even go to the God damned doctor." He clicked his tongue and shook his head. Linda seemed a little startled. Well, I looked at her and thought, he is something we all get used to.

"They're in the bedroom, Margie," Linda said. She had obviously been paying more attention than I to what was going on. I hadn't even noticed that Mom had not come into the dining room.

"I'll get Mom for you, Grandpa," I said.

"Yeah," he said, as if in answer to a question, "God damned bitch won't even go to a doctor. Jesus Christ if I know. She's going to die right here any minute. God damn, won't even go to a God damned doctor."

The lights were out in the bedroom. There was a sobbing. Grandma was sitting on the bed and Mom was next to her. I couldn't tell if the sobbing noise was Grandma or Mom until I heard Mom say something about how she was mad at Grandma for not telling her she was sick. "Oh, Margie," Mom said, almost in tears, "she's sick."

I couldn't see Grandma's face. "Honey," I said, sitting myself on the bed and taking her hand, "what's wrong?" She just kept moaning and sort of sobbing and rocking back and forth, her face down and covered with her free hand.

"Margie," Mom said again, "she's very sick."

"Grammy, it's Margie," I said. "For heaven's sake, Gram, it's me. Aren't you going to kiss me?"

She looked up at me for the first time with a kind of glassy film over her eyes. She was hideous. She had always before looked so dignified with that strong jaw line of hers. Even when she had started to get old she looked like a mean, determined woman. But now that was all gone. I could see she had been in agony for days. Nothing else had changed about her face except for the eyes and the jaw-line. The effect was horrifying. She smiled at me. "Margie," she said.

"You are going to the hospital right now," Mom told her.

"No, no, Janny. I can't go. I'm all right."

"I can't stand this," Mom said. "You didn't even call me."

"I didn't want to worry you." She put her face back into her hands. "I'm all right." She slumped down a little. Mom told me to go out and talk to Grandpa.

I went. Linda had brought up a jar of pickles and she was eating them when I walked into the room. "How long has she been like this, Grandpa?" I asked.

"Five, six days. God damn, she wouldn't call anybody."

"What's wrong, Margie?" Linda asked, popping the end of a pickle into her fat little mouth.

"Hurtin'," I said, 'very bad hurtin.' Grandpa, I need a telephone book."

"On the bureau."

I called two wrong numbers. There were three George Swans. Once I got the right number it took three minutes to get Chuck to the phone. He said he and the Swan boy would be by in half an hour. I turned around. "We'll just go for a little while, Linda," I said as I replaced the receiver. "Mom will want us back here."

"Well, Marge," she answered, still stuffing pickles down her throat, "maybe we shouldn't go at all. I mean if she really is sick we ought to stay."

"I don't know," I said. "She won't go to the hospital. I mean we did come here to see Chuck. And they'll be here in half an hour."

"Well, how bad is she?" she asked

"Pretty bad."

"Well, you say 'bad' or you say 'hurtin' or 'awful,' but what does that mean?" She was a little angry.

"She's sick. I don't know."

"Well, 'sick,' Margie? 'Sick?' What does that mean?" She had stopped eating pickles now.

"I don't know. They didn't tell me anything. She looks awful. She spits up blood."

"We shouldn't go, for God's sake," she announced.

"And why not, 'for God's sake,'" I mimicked.

"Go ahead and go," Grandpa said. Linda got up and walked into the bedroom where Mom and Grandma were.

I sat down at the table and sort of ached inside. God damn, I thought, as I started chomping on a pickle. Just hell. We had come to see Chuck. I had been dying to see him since Christmas vacation started, and then I get here, and just look at the mess. One day. One chance and it has to be ruined. The house was terribly oppressing. It was so messy. I got up and started picking up papers that had been left on the floor and cleaning some dishes from the table. The place was so old. I was suddenly aware that the reason I hated the house was that it was so old and that the people in it were so old. I couldn't tolerate oldness. It was dead. The walls were dull and sort of dirty gray around the ceiling. The linoleum was worn through in spots. The table, the chairs all stood waiting to rot away. I was tired. I had the feeling that there was something coming that I didn't want to come, something that I was going to have to

put up with, to tolerate, something that was the product of all this oldness and of these four rooms which sat high on a ledge above an expressway. Everything was dead here. I rolled up my sleeves and washed the dishes.

At three o'clock that morning all I could think about was how late it was (and what my mother's reaction might be to my return at that hour) and, also, the fact that my makeup had been kissed away during the evening and that I had nothing with me with which to remake a suitable face (and what my mother's reaction to that might be). Linda and I stepped back into the house. Nobody was in bed I could tell because the lights were all still on. I walked through the living room, which was now filled with the roll-away bed which had been brought out for Linda and me to sleep on. I knew Grandpa had not moved from his chair all night. Mom and Grandma were sitting at the table: Grandma with her head down and her face in her hands, and Mom with her shoes off and a bottle of beer in front of her. Linda immediately went into the bedroom to change into her pajamas. I sat down in the chair next to Grandpa and started throwing a lighter into the air and catching it. None of the three of them noticed me at all. Mother kept pursuing my grandmother with her low, tired voice. I knew by then the old woman must surely want to be left alone. Mom was leaning close to Gram. I couldn't hear much of what she was saying. We must have gone on like this for five minutes—me throwing the lighter up in the air and Mom sympathetically raving. Suddenly, Mom looked at me seriously and said, "I can't get a doctor at all because it's New Year's day."

"We better take her then," I answered, taking a look around the room.

Grandma looked at me again and started to say something, but she began coughing and couldn't talk.

"She won't go," Mom said.

Linda stepped into the room, tying the ends of her robe belt around her waist. "Who won't go where?" she asked. Mom told her that Gram wouldn't go to the hospital. "Well, Mrs. MacArther, are you sure you don't want us to take you?" Grandma answered no. I felt like answering "no" too. After all, the hospital was on the other side of town. It would take us about an hour to get there, I figured, even at three in the morning. I was tired and all I wanted to do was just melt into a comfortable position in that chair. So I just kept flipping up the lighter to keep myself awake.

There was a little place inside of me that was mad at Linda. She had made such an ass of herself that night. At Swan's they had

asked us if we wanted a drink. One, I had thought, was certainly enough, but Linda had to have three or it might even have been four since it wouldn't have been beyond her to sneak one even though she knew I disapproved. Mom was a hawk-eye. It was risky to come in late and with no makeup on, but if she had known Linda had been drinking she most certainly would have screamed the house down. Right then I was glad I had had that one drink. The alcohol—I think it had been vodka—and my sleepiness wrapped me up in a warm shell. As I flipped the lighter up, I occasionally looked at Grandpa, and a couple of times I wanted to chuckle because he was almost cute. His wife was sitting next to him at the table, and periodically having little coughing fits, and he was just sitting there the whole time gazing into space as if the world were somewhere else and he were thinking about some way to get to it. He was the only one I really paid any attention to. I was so tired and I couldn't bring myself to really look at Grandma, not after what she had said to me earlier.

Mom sighed. "Margie, for God's sake, will you stop that?" I let the lighter fall to the table and didn't pick it up again. Everything was quiet. Mom had stopped her sympathetic raving and was looking at me. "Bitch," I wanted to say, but didn't. Then Grandpa belched a long rolling sound.

Linda came over to Grandma and put her arms around the old woman. "I'm going to bed now, and if you want anything, call me. If you decide to go to the hospital, wake me up." She looked at Mom, and hugged Grandma and said something about loving her and for her to be careful. The old woman patted her on the arm, and Linda walked into the living room and went to bed.

I followed her out of the dining room, threw my clothes off in the bedroom, pushed a gown over my head, and crawled into bed. I must have left my clothes on the bedroom floor. I didn't really care. For a while I could hear the buzz of Mom's voice as she talked to Grandma. It was that same low sympathetic raving. Then I could hear Mom get up and light a cigarette. Her voice became louder. ". . . if there is any way to get around doing that, then we have to go ahead. Well, I don't know." Her voice was shaking again. I was just a little worried. It made me wake up a bit. If Mom were to go into a coma (they always began with a shaky voice), then we would really have problems: New Year's day and no doctor and not even knowing how the hell to get to the hospital. So I woke up at that thought. I punched Linda. She sort of jumped and turned over and looked at me.

"What do you want?"

"Hell, I don't know," I whispered. "I just know Mom is going to get sick."

I thought Linda would probably turn back over and go to sleep. But no, all one hundred and forty pounds of her classically-formed body immediately jumped out of bed. "Now listen," she announced, "we are all going to the hospital right now."

And we did too. We all packed ourselves into the car, except for Grandpa. We pulled away from the box and, after two turns at the right corners, we were back on the expressway. Linda sat in the back seat with Grandma and had her arms around her, trying, I suppose, to keep her warm. It was very cold outside. I was sleepy again. I lighted a cigarette. Mom called me everything she could think of to make me feel ashamed. When she pulled the words "juvenile delinquent" out of her repertoire, she liked the expression so much she said it twelve times. I counted. All the while she was giving me hell for smoking she was dragging away on a cigarette herself and was watching the road ahead. She drove so intently and cautiously that I almost laughed: it looked as if she thought she was pushing her way through a traffic jam. I didn't put out the cigarette and she didn't quit bitching.

The hospital was quiet. The girl in the emergency admittance office had a lisp, and she told us to sit down in this teensy cubbyhole of a room across the hall and to wait there until a doctor came. There were only three chairs in the cubbyhole so I stood up. For a change nobody talked. I wanted another cigarette, but I didn't have the guts to try it again. I wanted to think of something that would take my mind off cigarettes and tiredness. I thought about Grandma, who was slumped down in her chair with a blue blanket around her. It was a wool and cashmere blanket, like the one she had given me for my birthday, and it was dirty around the bottom from having been dragged along the floors of the hospital hall. She had moved so slowly. I had thought we would never get her in here. She was being very still and quiet. All I could think was that she was being so quiet. Then I thought maybe she was dead, since she was all slumped over like that and so quiet and all. Mom had her arms around the old woman, and she was sitting very still also and was looking up at the not-very-distant wall on the other side of the cubby. I thought that Mom wouldn't even know if Grandma died right there in her arms. Maybe she was already dead and none of us knew it. Wouldn't it kill Mom to think that Grandma had died right there in her arms, and she hadn't even known the old woman was gone?

Mom became impatient. She let me sit down with Gram, and she went back into the office where the girl with the lisp was. Mom screamed at the girl for being so inefficient and for not doing anything about this poor sick woman. The girl got on the ball right away, and she called some doctor again and said to Mom that things would be all right soon. Mom was mad because the girl with the lisp wouldn't even give Grandma a place to lie down. Mom kept saying, "What kind of a hospital is this?" Grandma was moving a little. I could feel her warm shoulders with my arms. She wasn't dead anyway.

When a man came into the room I helped Grandma get up, and we walked into a third room which was bigger than the cubbyhole and had a long table in the middle of it. I didn't know whether the man was a doctor or not, but I figured he must know what to do. So when he told me to help Grandma up onto the table, I did. At last she could lie down. The blanket fell on the floor, and I picked it up. Grandma just kind of flopped over on her side and didn't know, I'm sure, that I was there. I just watched her until the man told me I would have to leave. Then Mom came into the room and started crying. I didn't blame her. Seeing Grandma helpless and unaware and breathing so heavily would have made me cry if I had been the crying kind. I couldn't stand to see Mom blubbering, though, and I left the room.

Linda and I went downstairs to a room filled with food machines and tables. We spent two quarters on two green apples. I took a cigarette from her and we sat down. We puffed away on cigarettes and ate the apples. Linda was very nervous and was tapping her foot up and down on the floor. I looked at her face and saw no sign of the fatigue that was eating away at me. Remarkable, I thought, really remarkable. And then I took another bite of my apple. Linda turned around and looked at all the sandwich machines and the milk machines and the pie machines, and she said very slowly, "Margie, you are a misanthropic bitch." She sounded as if she didn't know whether she really meant it or not.

"Misanthropic, huh. The correct word." I sat with the half-eaten apple, which I had been gnawing on ravenously before, in my hand, turning it over and over and looking at it. I would be damned if I would answer her. I didn't even really know what she had meant. I was too tired to even pursue the subject of whether or not I was a bitch and just exactly what the implications of the statement were supposed to be. The comment, however, had made me feel a little dead inside, somewhere around the lungs. My body sort of tightened

up, the way it had done when Grandma had said what she had right before I had left the house with Chuck. "You didn't come to see me, Margie," she had said. "You came to see Chuck." I couldn't answer her when she said that, the same way I couldn't answer Linda now. Sometimes there is just no answering.

I had given up trying to explain myself the day Mom started crying when we discussed *Catcher in the Rye*. Of all the dumb things, she had persisted, also, in calling me misanthropic. (I figured now that Linda must have gotten the word from Mom.) So I stopped trying to explain. What the hell, I thought, there is no answering and there is no explaining. I suppose I should have felt something for grandmother, mother, flesh, blood—ties that strangled me. She was there and I was here and she was old and I was new and somehow or other there was a bond between us. What was it? Family. Oh, yes, family. Could it be that my having given up trying to explain myself also had meant that from that time on I would be limited in my ability to understand? It could be, I thought. Gram, Gram, Gram, I thought.

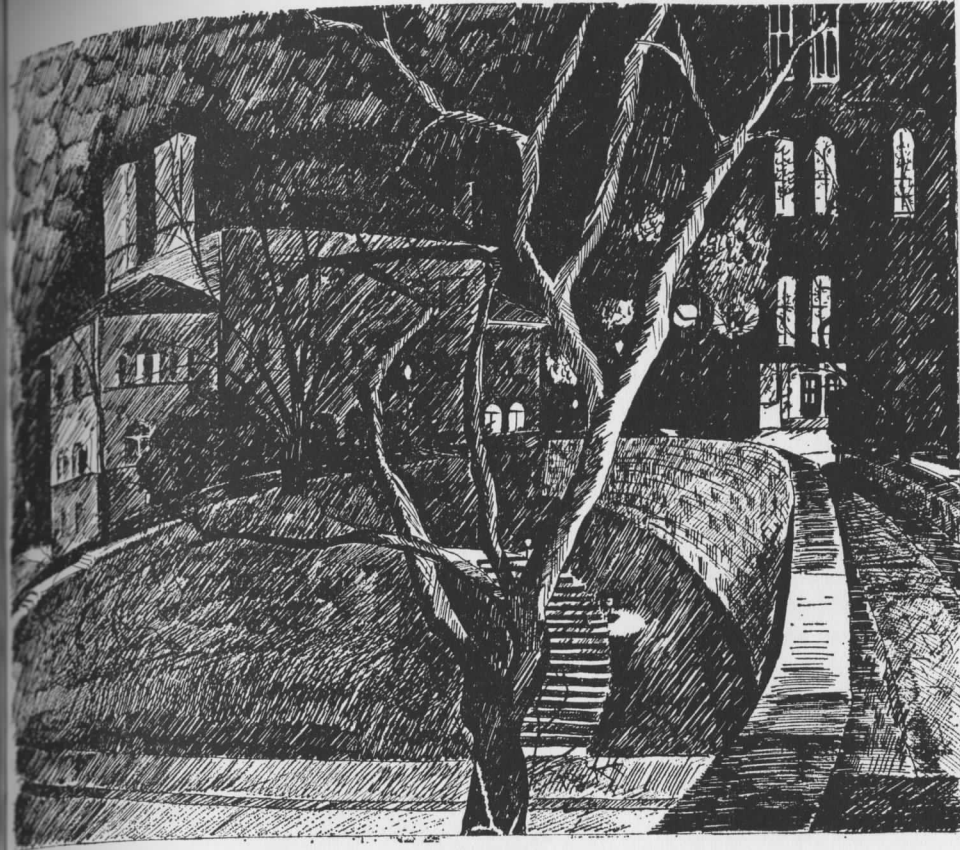
I was so much in the room with the machines, so much in it and so much a part of it that all the walls seemed to start waving and moving closer to me. I was so tired. I was unable to understand and could not be understood. Things would just have to wait, I thought, because I was going to change. They would just have to wait. Then I realized that things weren't going to wait, that Gram was going to die without knowing I would change. I didn't want that to happen. I was suddenly angry because things weren't going to wait. I was so angry I almost could have cried. But I didn't cry. I just sat in that old machine room and waited for things to change, for change they would. I waited. It was so cold, being New Year's day and all.

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THE GAMBLER AND THE CORINTHIAN

And if He let me play That game
in the Light of face to face
would not I with darkest sleeve
hold fast the darkest ace?

by Robert Chester



SHADES OF SPRING

by Jane Cogie

Yellow evening came, heavy
From the grey before with the rain,
From the wind that had left behind yellow.
A boy walked with long legs and large feet,
Dampness in the earth, round beneath him,
In the sky, full with the earth.
On either side trees, swollen with milkwhite thoughts,
Showed the boy their summer grapes,
And under the weight of his dilated head,
His white eye, reflecting premature purple,
Closed to the yellow evening.
He walked now with long legs and large feet;
He laughed now a stark white laugh.