

1966

Exile Vol. XI No. 2

Tom Getz

Denison University

Kathy Swiger

Denison University

Rick Kean

Denison University

Gretchen Schenk

Denison University

Jane Pearson

Denison University

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Getz, Tom; Swiger, Kathy; Kean, Rick; Schenk, Gretchen; Pearson, Jane; Combs, Karen; West, Bill C.; Nichols, Jim; Strange, Judy; and Bishop, Bonnie (1966) "Exile Vol. XI No. 2," *Exile*: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol11/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

Exile Vol. XI No. 2

Authors

Tom Getz, Kathy Swiger, Rick Kean, Gretchen Schenk, Jane Pearson, Karen Combs, Bill C. West, Jim Nichols, Judy Strange, and Bonnie Bishop



Exile

The
EXILE

SPRING 1966

Vol. 11

No. 2

Denison University
Granville, Ohio

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm
I have beaten out my exile.
—Ezra Pound

Contents

STAFF:

Editors: Jane Cogie
Lecia Harbison
Edward Brunner

Art Editors: Ramona Gibbs
Dave Goodwin
Bonnie Bishop

Staff: Tara Collins
Bonnie McCarthy
Gretchen Schenk
Judy Strange
Buck Niehoff
Cliff Vatter
Hugh Wilder

FICTION

Thomas Getz	Don't Break Bread with Strangers	5
Kathy Swiger	Story	17
Rick Kean	The Last of the Flag Pole Sitters	25

POETRY

Gretchen Schenk	Muttering: A Letter	14
Jane Pearson	Poem	20
Karen Combs	Marina in March	21
Bill C. West Jr.	of the pope too slow in recovery	22
Jim Nichols	Poem	23
Judy Strange	Poem	23
Bonnie Bishop	Haiku	29

ART

Dan Thaxton	Pen and Ink	4
Richard Machlan	Linocut	13
Lynne Wiley	Etching	16
Lela Giles	Woodcut	22
Carol Kubie	Charcoal	24

cover by Lynne Wiley



DON'T BREAK BREAD WITH STRANGERS

It was all the fault of timing, he thought; damned, poor timing. Most people didn't think about the side effects of being a Caesarean baby. He had thought about it: birth traumas, the whole bit. And for him it had been tragic. He was sure of it. He was working on a theory to prove his point: a fateful rip in the skin of the belly to let him out, because of which he had avoided, been forced to avoid, the conflict, the initial conflict, the conflict with birth itself. It had been an indication of things to come—the beginning of a dark, empty trend of avoidance. “. . . untimely ripped from his mother's womb.” And that was another thing; those crazy relationships he was always seeing. He was like a cosmic madman. Because of a little quirk built into it, his mind flashed from thing to image and from image to image like a satellite blinking through space. These relationships seemed useless, insane maybe. Of course they offered a means of escape. He was sure they fit into his theory of the Caesarean birth somewhere. Avoidance, escape . . .

John moved the back of his hand across the fuzzy nap of the blanket until his thumbnails clicked against the cinder-block wall. With thin fingers he pressed the cool, rough surface. A moist, mossy dungeon, he thought; *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He let himself be carried away by the fantasy: the hardship, the loneliness, a friend, escape to freedom . . . He slid his hand slowly up the wall until something tickled his

palm. Closing his fingers, he explored the piece of string that dangled from a bamboo curtain covering part of the wall—its nubby texture, the frayed end—cat's whiskers. A piece of string. *A Piece of String!* De Maupassant. Again the flash of the mind, and then the lazy pleasure of roaming without control.

"Escape!" As rapidly as the ether of the dream had numbed him, the depression returned. "Avoidance, escape, avoidance," the small cracked voice shouted in mockery from its hiding place. The echoing of the words was almost painful, like the familiar tune that can't be forgotten. A travel clock was within reach on the floor beside his bed. He tipped the illuminated face upward; two o'clock. John lay back. The pillow had slid off of the head of the bed. "Goddammit," he said quietly. The clock ticked in the still room.

At least he didn't avoid her. At the second meeting of English 215 he sat next to her. She was wearing a red sweater with bulky ribbing. Later he noticed that she wore sweaters most of the time. That afternoon he called her at her dorm. She said, "I think I know who you are. You're the boy with the blue eyes I was talking to today." And then she said yes, she'd love to go to the party and was looking forward to it. What crazy impulse led him to ask her? He hardly knew her really. Was it the sweater? or maybe the mouth? She had the mouth of the girl in the movie "Tom Jones" who slurped raw oysters from their shells and laughed as the juice spilled down between her breasts. Maybe it was the loose, swinging, confident walk, or the angle of the shin, or the expression in the eyes. It was all of these.

Didn't his aggression in asking her—and it had taken a good deal of aggression really—work against his theory of himself? No avoidance, no escape: had it been just some imp of the perverse?

At two-fifteen John slipped one leg over the edge of the bed, poked around with his foot until he found his slippers, and stood up. The bottoms of his pajamas were too loose, and he hitched them up above his waist. Still in the dark, he found a heavy wool shirt in the closet and then opened the drawer where he kept his socks. In the back of the drawer was a fifth of gin half full. As John crossed to the refrigerator, the heels of his slippers skudded across a braided rug. He opened the door, found a bottle of Squirt, and groped for the opener which should have been on the top shelf. Moving slowly to his desk, he switched the three-way lamp on low. He poured about half gin and half Squirt into a small glass and sat down.

Of course when he told some of his fraternity brothers who his date was, the comments were numerous and colorful. "What! You?" "Hey, that girl has definitely got the best bod in this school." "A good

dancer; she really knows how to move it." "Ask Jerry about her." John saw the quick glances that were exchanged. What they were all really thinking was that she wasn't his type. The news got around the fraternity house too quickly: it had the speed of a rumor. Of course she wasn't his type. He knew that when he asked her—even before.

By this time John had swallowed about half his drink. He put the glass down within the circle of light on the desk and pushed it along the curve until it stopped against the edge of a copy of *Atlantic*. His desk was neat: one lamp, one copy of *Atlantic*, one empty envelope, one mechanical pencil, and one pineapple. He began to page through the *Atlantic*, starting from the back as he always did when he looking at magazines. When two or three pages flipped over at once, he stopped to look at each one. Sometimes he read the advertisements under the colored pictures of foreign countries: England, Israel, Jordan. He half closed his eyes to make the colors blur and moved the page in and out of the circle of light from the lamp and held the page so that half of a person's face was in the circle of light and half was in the dimness outside of the circle. Every face has an evil side and a good side; the masks of comedy and tragedy.

John finished the drink and poured another. He didn't think he'd be able to go to sleep yet.

There was a poem about halfway through the magazine. He began to read it, but it didn't hold his interest, so he took the empty envelope and began to scribble a poem of his own.

Reading poetry in a circle of light—
Bright words under the dimness
Strike through blind eyes
And raise an image of fire
Burning, burning
Under the windows of the skull.

The mechanical pencil slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor. Before picking it up, John read what he had written. What good was it! It wasn't what he wanted to say. He tore the envelope in half and brushed it away. His elbow knocked the glass over but it was almost empty anyway. He drew the arm of his wool shirt over the wet spot and then put his arm to his face and smelled. Lawn mower, he thought. It smells like lawn mower. Pleased with this he thought about it. Grass, of course; fresh cut grass. Not dry hay grass, but wet Saturday morning grass. The kind of grass dogs eat when they want to be sick. John picked up the pencil and scribbled on the cover of the *Atlantic*.

Gin—lawn mover—fresh cut grass—taste, smell—
dog vomit.

He almost laughed out loud. Rubbing his index finger around the lip of the glass, he produced a high shrill whistling noise. It works better with a crystal champagne glass, he thought. Then it occurred to him that the sound might wake some of the other guys in the house, so he stopped. A high frequency dog whistle—and all the dogs asleep in their beds with visions of whores dancing in their heads.

The pineapple on the corner of the desk had turned a brownish-yellow. The leaves on the stalk looked very dry. Picking it up, John wondered if it was ripe yet.

There were two pineapples on their table at the party; there were also two coconuts. They both wanted a pineapple, so the second couple at the table settled for the coconuts. She sat close to him at the table, and they kept up a comfortable amount of conversation while they were eating the roast beef and lobster and potato salad and drinking the champagne. They teased each other a lot too. She pretended that he had dropped crumbs, or maybe it was dandruff, on his coat and brushed them off with her hand like a maid flicking dust from a table. She held his glass for him to drink from in a falsely romantic way. This embarrassed him, and he flushed; she leaned over and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, and didn't laugh but smiled.

The other couple at the table seemed somewhat out of place in the noisy room. The boy was John's roommate. He wore the kind of necktie that slips under the collar without having to be tied, and he pushed at it frequently to make sure it was still in place. When John offered him some of the champagne, he stuttered as he said, "No thank you." His date was very quiet—shy. She had large brown eyes and her face was almost pretty, but her mouth was crooked, and she should have had her teeth straightened when she was young. John tried to include the others in the conversation several times, but usually they just smiled in answer to his gambits.

It was pretty hard not to give all his attention to his own date. She had a way of resting her arm on his shoulder that made him pleasantly uncomfortable, but seemed quite natural to her. John knew that she was quite a good folksinger; he had heard that she had done some professional singing in nightclubs. And so when they finished their dinner and she rested her arm on his shoulder, he asked her to sing something for him. She didn't hesitate, but smiled, and edging herself closer to him sang softly. He looked down at his plate and felt her warm breath on the side of his face—

I'm a long way from home,
And I miss my baby so,
In the early morning rain
With no place to go.

Her voice was very low and throaty. She had had good training. John looked at her face and was fascinated by her mouth—wide and expressive and confident. She thoroughly enjoyed performing. Not that she was showing off, he thought; she was doing something she could do well. She had learned how to project herself through her voice, and she didn't seem to hold anything back.

John pushed his thumb at the bottom of the pineapple on his desk. It was soft. He was amused at himself and surprised at all the things he was able to remember about the party. It had been a week ago. He was also a little hesitant to try to remember any more. It was as if there was something dark lurking there that would suddenly spring out at him through the haze of gin and the ease of sitting alone late at night. He had this feeling many times. Usually, if he did go on remembering, some form of his "Caesarean" theory came to his mind, or else that little cracked voice began shouting about "avoidance" and "escape."

She was no Caesarean, he was dammed sure of that. That girl had beaten upon the inside of her mother's belly with her wet fists like an African beating on a hollow log. He could hear her baby voice screaming, "Let me at it, and the more it hurts us both the better."

While others kicked,

She sang.

A little Puck

Bringing

Joy to the midwife.

After dinner, they danced. They were high from the booze and the jungle music that the band was playing. She danced with the same easy motion with which she walked, swinging her arms up and down loosely in front of her body as if to keep him at a safe distance.

Her dress was not made for easy movement: black, tight, sequined, and floor length. Once when John went into the men's room, one of his friends said, "She looks like a nightclub singer in that dress." John found himself unable to really look at her dress. Of course he knew she didn't mind being looked at, and a lot of other people did look at her. He didn't. It was as though the glittering sequins hurt his eyes.

Later in the evening, the band began to play slow tunes. The lights were very low. Some of the couples retreated to the darkest corners of the room, and a few were exploring the private jungle gym of the fire escape.

As they danced close together, John decided that the dress was pretty, but that the sequins made it much too rough. After dancing for two or three numbers in a row, they sat at one of the tables. The empty dishes and napkins had been taken away, but the tablecloth

was still there and was spotted like the canvas covering painters use to catch the droppings from their brushes. Someone had left a bottle of vodka on the table. She slid it around a small chicken bone, and when it was almost in front of John, she tipped it and spilled some. The wet spot spread until it was about the size of an open hand. With a match she lit the spot and, fascinated, watched it burn quietly and smoothly. "Have you ever tried to hypnotize yourself by staring into a candle flame? I tried it, and it was working too. But then my mother stopped me. Matter of fact she slapped me and made me go to bed. That was back in Junior High School."

The expression on John's face must have been a mixture of interest and concern; she went on without waiting for him to say anything. "That was the last time my mother hit me." Her own face had a distant look on it; she was reexperiencing that slap—remembering how she had been crying as she turned away from her mother and went to her room. The tears hadn't been from pain or hurt pride; her mother had been drunk. "Now she's drunk by noon almost every day when I'm home for a vacation." She was in a kind of reverie; talking out loud but to no one in particular.

"John!" In a snap she realized where she was and what she had said. "Oh! I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm telling you this." Her voice softened. "You're easy to talk to: a good listener. And everybody has to tell somebody something." John put his arm around her shoulders and tried to give her a reassuring hug. Somehow it wasn't convincing. He had never been in a situation like that at home. Both his parents were school teachers and—he couldn't think of a better word for it—proper. They didn't drink anything but wine and hadn't hit him since he was a young child. He didn't tell her.

Sitting at his desk, John stared vacantly at his empty glass. He hadn't filled it for quite a while. His slippers had fallen from his feet. The floor was clammy under his toes from the perspiration. That was probably another reason for his trouble: no conflict at home; everything easy and respectable. What a stale idea, he thought. Yes, it fit the theory all right, but God it was stale.

She was saying that she was bored. "With Hill College—with being here and doing nothing."

"Well, you can always study."

"I'm tired of studying. I want to go places. Anywhere. Away. Meet people. Sing and laugh and drink and love and LIVE. I wanted to go to New York to school, but my mother wouldn't let me.

"John, how many girls have you made love to?" It was almost brutal

in its suddenness. The question was another of those things that seemed easy to her and made him feel uncomfortable.

"What do you mean, 'make love'?" he managed.

"Come on—make love to, sleep with. You know what I mean."

There was no answer for him to give, so he said nothing.

He knew he looked flushed.

"I didn't expect you to answer," she said.

"Can I ask you the same question?"

"O.K."

"Well?"

"In love once, in love with love once."

He was thinking that she had said that line before. He imagined her standing on a stage rehearsing it.

"In what order?" He wasn't willing to let it drop.

"First in love with love, then love."

John's forehead was wet near the hairline. He dabbed at it with his handkerchief. She sat quietly, taking a few sips from her drink. The little game was over. They both heard the music of the band again.

They left the party around midnight. John tried to balance his pineapple on his head, but it kept rolling off. He couldn't decide whether it was because he was drunk or because his head was bony. As they were driving up the hill to the college, he said, "What do you want to do?" The evening was very warm for April. It was the kind of false May weather when everyone went around in their shirtsleeves and found it hard to study. "Let's go for a walk," she said. "Under the stars with a loaf of bread and a jug of wine . . . and my pineapple! We'll take my pineapple along and eat it." She was on the edge of the seat and excited; pleased with her idea. "Let me put on some more comfortable clothes first."

John waited for her in the lounge of the dormitory. He sat down in an overstuffed chair, took off his tie, and put it carefully into a pocket of his suit. On the other side of the room was a baby grand piano and next to the piano, on the floor was a guitar. She had been playing the guitar when he came to pick her up early in the evening. John wished he could play it, but the only musical ability he had came from half a year of piano lessons in fifth grade.

Soon she came down the stairs wearing the same red ribbed sweater she had worn in Shakespeare class and a pair of tight blue jeans. A blanket was slung over her shoulder. In the blue jeans she looked thin, too thin. She jumped down the last two steps and tossed him a pocketknife. "To cut the pineapple with."

John felt completely relaxed as he walked with his arm around her. She seemed to have the knack for putting people at ease. It was pleasant to be on the hill away from the music and the noise of other people. They walked at an easy pace along the path that wound around the front of the chapel and led away from all the buildings of the campus. Here and there along the path were the kind of lamps that John connected with foggy London. "When you stand in the lamplight, you don't notice the darkness outside. But as you walk away from the light, the darkness slides over your head like a featherbed, and you wish you could take a giant step from one bright spot to another."

"Let's stay here," she said. They had come to a grassy spot near the edge of the hill where there were no more lamps. They could see the small town below them. She spread the blanket and said, "It's hard not to think of it as a Christmas village. No snow though, and no train. And it's much too warm, not Christmasy." John saw no Christmas village, only a few lights on street corners, clean and distant in the night. "The traffic light—see how it stands apart; still changing color, but no cars. A thrice blinking eye ordering cars that aren't there and people who don't care. But to us on a cloud above: red for a sleeping fire, yellow for a drowsy urge, green for the long dark gap of loneliness." He said this clearly but quietly, as if he were alone.

"You're strange," she laughed. "Let's cut the pineapple."

He held the fruit on the grass beside the blanket and cut it into slices. It was hard to cut; not ripe, he thought. And it wasn't really ripe; only the outside part of each section was good to eat. But they laughed and chewed it anyway, wiping their chins with John's handkerchief. After they chewed out all the juice, they took the pulp from their mouth with their fingers and tossed it away.

Sitting on the blanket, they talked and laughed for a while longer, and then they walked back towards the lamps of the chapel path. When they got to the dormitory, they both said, "Good night."

They had only said, "Good night." John looked across the room at the eerie, greenish-white dial of the travel clock. It was quarter after three. He slid the copy of *The Atlantic* to one corner of the desk and put the ripe pineapple and the mechanical pencil on top of it. He left the empty glass in the middle of the desk so that he'd remember to wash it in the morning, and walked to the window. Through the bare branches of a tree, John could see the lights on the steeple of the chapel. The rest of the campus was dark. He yawned.

—Thomas Getz



Muttering:
a letter

I know without wondering which times
I will stand with my hands at my sides
Muttering small sounds to an open door.
Last night I stood and thought that I might soon
Forget your smile and mild dark laugh;
And that I might grow tired watching leaves
Blow out of nowhere into lakes, or watching long
Green yarn wind up into magic shapes.
Someday I might decide that Ferris wheels
Are far too young; that spending hours
Waiting for you cannot be worth the time,
The waste of time that makes me need you now.
I might give up the hope that I will shake the world,

Or rub your back again to make you sleep
Or that in time I will bear princes at your touch,
And pain, and quiet nights again.
I might laugh at later mentions of these months
And shrug my head
And maybe walk away with other thoughts
Than these of you. I might dislike balloons
And grow to hate the thought of strawberries,
And give away a thousand thousand memories
Of us. Or, I might not care where you have been
And what it was you saw. I might do all these things.
Although we only laughed, and penny sheets call it
Loved; Although there were no moonlight promises
Or vows of constant, day-in day-out spring;
Although our taste leaned more toward circuses
Than hearths and stars, without you I am scared,
Again, watching the door. The rug is blurred
Here at my feet, and there around the couch
Where once you laid your irreligious head.
I held you then; I held you many times.
I do not know
But somehow while I wait again, I think
That had you stayed (or when you return)
I would have thrown off all my pretty ways
And looked at you with wide awakening eyes.
I think I would have slowly reached my hand
To touch your face in an awe-full way—
To smooth your hair again with brand-new quiet hands;
Bereft of pride, I would have lost all poise
And fabricated dreams aloud of us
Alone in worlds away from men.
I would have loved you in a day or so.

—Gretchen Schenck



STORY

The color of the red setter was so much cleaner than that of the dead oak leaves. I was mesmerized. So I trailed after him across the moss-loam until he jumped the low stone boundary wall. From there, my dream tailed further, but my feet lost the impetus. Aimlessly, I studied the compost heap, a low mound of mulsh where I had once poured a batch of fudge that wouldn't harden.

It isn't easy to squelch a sour mood on a winter-spring Saturday, but sometimes, if you'll lie on the floor and imagine people walking on the ceiling, or if you'll approach the house from the back and enter through the bulkhead door, you can get a whole new perspective on life. Well, that's how I started at the compost heap, with new eyes, and something stared back.

It was several seconds before my brain believed, before I became aware that something *mortal* watched me from its bower of decomposing leaves. If you can imagine a snake with big, brown eyes, that's what was inspecting me. Well, I don't like *any* kind of spiders *or* snakes much (my cousins used to call me *Petunia* because of that), so I ran for the house—to my habitual door; past the trash cans; around the corner; past the garage which contains a Dodge, a Volkswagon, skis, toboggan, golf carts, a power mower, a croquet set, a badminton set (without any birdies), oars, a 5 h.p. Evinrude motor, rakes, ladders, and the dog's brush; up

a step; across the stoop. I might not have gone so far as to slam, lock, and bolt the door if my cow-eyed friend hadn't arisen, scattering leaves, and loped along behind me like a puppy.

But he had. And I was hardly in a mood even to speculate upon his species. With my chest heaving and my heart thwacking, I quaked into the den and peeped over the sill. There he was, nosing around the welcome mat—a medium-gray, featherless mongoose with two little, extra mouse-hands, a kangaroo tail, and of course, the snake head with those ravishing eyes. For the wash of a wave, I was dead, but then a brilliant impulse compelled me to seek my camera.

Careening through the dark, narrow hall, I veered past the Pennsylvania-Dutch, gay kitchen, where my mother was entertaining an out-of-state guest, acknowledged at the living room's arched doorway a herd of my brother's sophisticated "dears," and charged up the time-marred stairs. It was the same path I had executed once when my father had spanked me, outside, right in front of company. Then I was indignant, but now I was so nervous, my feet wouldn't mind my head (I kept watching them go), and I began to fear falling.

In my room, cluttered by old corsages, ribbons, figurines, programs, perfumes, books, mostly articles my sister had cherished and abandoned, I wanted to stop for breath, but the pounding notion that I was racing in slow motion propelled me on. Luckily, my Brownie Camera sat on the dusty desk with three kodachrome shots left on a roll of blizzard-harbor pictures. But it took some rummaging through drawers before I pulled out a box of flash bulbs from a pile of old grandmother letters and scattered, pointless colored pencils. Fists full, I dashed into my brother's room because his windows look down over the back door. My *little monster* was sniffing the mint that grows beside the stoop.

Clomping down the steps, I licked the bases of the flash bulbs for better contact and pried at the camera's bulb mechanism. In the living room, they had updated a childhood car-game, traveling far in the overstuffed, Early American chairs.

"I spy a divine dustbin, a fearless fence, a Gargantuan garage . . ."

The girls were cooing, skinny and long in their black cocktail dresses, chortling at the bland jokes of the paunchy young men, while Ted, I am sure, probed their psyches with his deep, black eyes. He is pathetically unlike them, but he tries to put up a good show, the same way I decided I could be a model airplane addict like a boy.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Kleat was obviously doing the important talking. Mom looked faintly embarrassed.

"She was always the quiet one. Her behavior was awfully independent.

I could see it coming on. But you should have seen the way he played on her sympathies. She was just a baby. And *he* certainly knew enough not to get her pregnant. He talked her into all that secret business. But I could see a change in her. She was too afraid of him to tell us. She still says she's going to finish school, but it won't be with *our* money, and *he* certainly . . ."

I sometimes think that Mom is secretly glad none of her college friends live around here. It's amazing how *different* they are from her and her *bridge* friends, but they add sparkle to our staid, un-soapboxy lives. Usually Mom serves tea and apricot cookies or banana bread to her chums, but I noticed Mrs. Kleat was drinking sherry.

My beastie was practically posing outside the den window, but I was suddenly horrified by the sensation that I would do something mechanically wrong, that the bulbs wouldn't go off. It was so necessary that I preserve this apparition! I felt heavily, helplessly inadequate, so I jogged to the living room and signaled Ted with frustrated eyes.

I'm pretty sure that Ted's ESP receptor is always tuned in. I used to feel awkward, because he is so much older than I. When I was little, he teased terribly, and then for a while, I was the worse itch. But now that he is 25, a man, we've become friends, and I felt confident beside him. I might even have walked out on the stoop if he had suggested it. He said everything was fine if the batteries weren't run down, so I snapped the pictures.

Then, I put the camera down on Dad's filing cabinet, and the brown, masculine room became chilled. We watched transfixedly as the compost creature ate leaves off Mom's favorite rhododendron. Mrs. Kleat's phrases occasionally sounded through our reverie like the hollow reverberations of a fog horn.

"You know, last spring they actually built a trailer camp down on the river, but the town citizens got up an ordinance so it's *never* been used. I guess that shows we don't want that kind . . ."

Ted sighed.

"And by the time that committee got around to having a second meeting, after the bomb blast, enough of them had corrected their thinking so nothing ever . . ."

And laughter from the living room occasionally permeated our haze. Once a man's voice called to Ted.

"Hey, I spied a queasy quinquagenarian. It's your turn!"

Ted shifted thoughtfully and murmured, "I Spy." The hilarity resumed.

I knew Ted's thoughts paralled mine. Ceremoniously, he headed for the kitchen.

"I said 'know what you've done!' I wanted to finish college after Harry..."

Mrs. Kleat's teeth slapped shut when we entered, and she gaped with possessive preoccupation at the arrangement of Mom's neatly starched, printed-to-match-the-wallpaper curtains. Ted measured out of cupful of dog kibble into an earthenware dish, and I carefully added half a cup of vegetable soup which had been relegated to the refrigerator. We exited with sacerdotal pomp, bearing our sacrificial gift to the back door. Ted tapped on the den window while I opened the door and deposited the bowl on the mat.

We stood tall and serious. We were bound by a sense of importance and propriety. It had been dusky all day, but twilight made the sky more blue. We stood and watched. The rumble and whish of a motor preceded a suffused glow of headlights, and a decrepit ice-cream truck (at least it was white) settled to a stop at the bottom of our drive. Two men descended, one from either side. My panic returned.

They stood there gesticulating with foreign dramatic appeal. I could imagine the living room people clapping and cheering for such a performance, but it shattered my tranquillity. The warm-eyed creature ate our offering, as the men marched up the driveway.

One of them had bushy, black hair, a mottled complexion, and friendly eyes. He stooped over and kissed our petite monster on its smooth snake forehead. The other man was balding and nervous, but he gently grasped a mouse-hand and escorted the docile creature down to the truck. All three climbed into the cab, and the vehicle wheeze-jolted away.

A setter and a collie romped across the lawn.

Ted moved first, retrieving the dish. He clattered into the kitchen with it, ran the water for a while, and then slipped upstairs to read a book. I knew dinner would be served in an hour. I went up to my room to finish the CV-130E model I began last Saturday.

—Kathy Swiger

POEM

His wife died last fall.
One winter alone, old man.
And now you are dead.

—Jane Pearson

MARINA IN MARCH

Between thin air and viscous sea
the boats sailed in place
by a brown puzzle of piers;
a manacled armada
sprouting its forest of slender masts,
bare and unflagged,
while I, looking down, saw our two selves
swimming black in grey water
swelling from the shadow of the pier
silent in our very season.

—Karen Combs



"of the pope too slow in recovery"

stone pilgrims . . . puritans
 collars starched in marble
 perch on concrete pulpits
 near the pond
 where dunking boards once laughed
 and virgins ashes
 now form silt
 stone pilgrims
 frozen in the now
 can't break the collars
 binding them
 to the past
 and pigeons warm excretion
 splashed in white
 against them
 mildewed ancient specters
 cold pilgrims
 with pulpit-pupiled eyes
 holding marbled bibles
 start out
 over the park
 and must watch
 live pussied-puritans
 spread legged on memorial benches
 and at night
 stone cold . . .
 open ears
 crack with impotent age
 at what they hear
 of youth

—Bill C. West, Jr.

She came home tan and contented,
 The item well worth the money spent;
 Now, more than ever, she sensed
 That she was a certain kind of person.
 She ran to find her very best friend—
 The poor thing looked so pale and tired,
 But then she always worked so hard.
 "How's the weather been?" she smiled,
 Hoping that it had rained.

—Jim Nichols

WINTER

I knew it was winter today
 Because the little gardener
 Had worn his black and white wool hat.
 This American gothic,
 His face like the withered leaves he rakes,
 Whistles about his seasonal tasks
 And has four hats.

—Judy Strange



THE LAST OF THE FLAG POLE SITTERS

You know, Joe, with all this crap you've been handing me about the girls in the office, I think I get more action just sitting around the library all day.

Had a cute one across from me today. Dark brown hair, soft eyes not much make-up. You know the type. The kind that fits right into the woodwork: you almost don't know she's there until she stands up and stretches or something.

Long, brown hair. Well this chick really gave me a rough time. Couldn't stick with the econ at all. We'd read for ten minutes, then I'd look up, and she'd look up and catch me. She didn't mind catching me either, Joe.

This one was tricky to handle. Kid gloves, baby. Matter of fact, it looked pretty much like study and stares and that's all for a while, there.

Yeah. Like I started to tell you before, that's when we first heard the singing. Right through the window. All of a sudden this "White Christmas" comes bombing through the panes. Good, strong voice, Joe.

It wasn't any of that microphone crap. It sounded like some guy was painting the library right below the window and singing his guts out. You know, on one of those hanging ladder things.

Yeah, scaffolding.

That would've been something. The scene complete. All 42nd Street one big laugh. These jokers in the Santa suits waving their bells at the crowd and some cat on a scaffolding singing "White Christmas." Jesus Christ.

That singing broke her and I up. I mean I didn't get more than ten pages read the rest of the afternoon. I'll tell you something though, Joe. That girl was tough. I mean, she had it.

We started laughing and there wasn't anything could stop us. Finally this big fat guy in a grey flannel bounces over and politely asks us to keep it down to an uproar. We laughed right in his face. He turned red and slammed his stock quotation book and stamped out.

Couldn't help it, Joe. I mean I was really cracked. Hope the old goat didn't lose a million on the exchange because of us.

About five-fifteen she finally decides to call it a day. We're still smiling and I'm closing my books right behind her. I just about get to where I'm going to stop the revolving door on her when some clod knocks my books and I blow the whole bit.

Wasn't any use trying to catch her, Joe. You know me. Too many fish in the pond to chase one out to sea.

Yeah, that goes for Linda, too.

Well anyway, I'm heading for the 5th Avenue Subway when this voice just about knocks me off the sidewalk. I put on the brakes hard, baby, for this is the same voice that's been busting me up all day.

It's coming from over in the park by the library, so I cut across two old ladies and pull up by the newsstand to look through the fence.

It's this boon, Joe. A skinny little nigger, all lips and feet, belting 'em out in a little patch in the bushes.

You know what it's like out. Well, he's standing there singing in a thin raincoat with no gloves on. His hands are clasped just like on TV and he's working them shoulders up and down like, you know, those stove blowers, and he's bellowing so much his head's in a cloud of steam.

And this boy's involved. His eyes are closed and he's forcing all that action out one pipe and he comes up with "Silent Night" like you never heard. No southern accent, no foot stomping, no shaking it on out. Just pure music, baby.

He had to be involved, Joe. I mean I'm standing there holding on to the iron fence and my hands are numb right through my gloves. He's committed.

No, I didn't say he ought to be committed. Sure, at first I thought

he was nuts or on a fix or something, but that music he was making was too good.

You know, my old man used to tell me about those guys in the thirties, during the depression, who'd sit on flag poles. No kidding. They'd swing around up there playing a guitar or banjo until some filthy rich old bag came along and offered them a job. The way my old man told it, it always worked.

Well, I got it figured like this. This guy's the last of the flag pole sitters. Mark my words, Joe. This cat's gonna hit it big. Somebody's gonna discover him.

Hey, listen, Joe. I gotta get off up here at Wantaugh. Yeah. Linda's having me over to dinner with her folks. You know the routine: handshakes, steak, wine, grace, the whole bit. You taking the 5:45 tomorrow?

Good. See you then.

Hey. You going out to Vinny's tonight? If I get away in time I'll see you out there. Don't handle too many of those chickies until I'm there to back you up.

Don't worry. I'll be careful. No woman's gonna put blinders on The Kid. Not with steak and wine, anyway.

* * *

I told you he was going to make it, Joe. Here, move over so I can put my books on the seat.

Whattya mean how do I know. I was there, wasn't I? Let me tell it the way it was.

I hit the library about nine. Yeah, back to the econ reference room. The chick wasn't there. Didn't figure she would be.

Anyway, I had a lot of catching up to do. Started reading this thing by Keynes. You know, the cat who started all this econ stuff. Yeah, he was the one who got together with FDR and ended the depression.

Well, the classical economists said you had to save lots for investment to be high. Keynes comes along with this new deal, and says you have to spend a lot. He's got some diagrams in his book that make your CPA worksheet look like a kid's puzzle.

I've been sweating over this underconsumption crap all morning and all of a sudden I hear the voice again. Same guy, Joe.

This was around noon so I thought I'd go down to the 42nd Street Cafeteria for lunch. A friend of my old lady's works there.

I'm just about down the library steps when the singing stops. The little nigger's in the same place, but now there's a crowd standing around him. Reporters, Joe.

He was in good hands, so I walked on to the cafeteria. Could hardly

eat. This guy was making it big, and damned if I was going to miss it.

When I got back he was singing again. I couldn't figure it out. At first I thought he'd blown it with the press.

Then I heard that boy sing. He'd had his interview and was just finishing his show. This guy's cool, Joe.

You shoulda been there. It was like Carnegie Hall. Only close up.

He was singing this opera thing, you know, one of those arias. He really leaned into that song. His eyes were bugged out and he was singing so hard I thought his teeth were going to fly out. He's tight as a drum, baby, and he looks like he's trying to force his whole body out his throat.

And he's loud and clear, Joe. That's the first time I understood any of that opera crap. Really.

By this time a pretty good crowd had stopped, and he goes through the Christmas carol routine. You know, "White Christmas," "Joy to the World." He's even singing 'em in Jewish and German.

After he's finished, three old ladies walk up and slip bills in his coat pocket. He could've gotten a lot more if he'd played it right, Joe.

I'll tell you what, baby. You watch the morning papers. We've got a star on our hands.

Last night? I couldn't make it.

Oh, you know, had to be polite to Linda's parents. Her old man's quite a guy, Joe. He was a war hero. Got a silver star at Guadalcanal. He was telling me about the times they used to have on leave in Japan. Those GI's really knew how to live. When they wanted something, they took it.

After Linda and her old lady finished the dishes, we all played canasta for a while. Linda and I really cleaned up.

Then the old man gives me this wink and he and Ma head off to bed. Yeah! Well, there's a fire and all, so I just stuck around. This Linda's really something, Joe. Got home around three.

She cooked up one helluva meal.

How was Vinny's?

That right? I'll be there tonight for sure.

* * *

Hi, Joe. Here, I'll move my books. Boy, my head's still pounding from last night. That girl you left with wasn't bad. I remember . . .

Which guy, the boon? What about him? Hell, he's just a shit-faced nigger.

Yeah, I saw him. I was standing by the fence listening to him when

that girl I was telling you about Wednesday came up. Yeah. She was with some guy. A real slob.

I didn't like his looks so I started to walk away. Then the little nigger comes out with "Danny Boy." He wasn't too bad, either.

Then I hear the broad talking about how the little bastard's been singing there for years.

Yeah. She said he was a janitor at some theater.

I guess he picks up enough loot during Christmas to keep in booze for the rest of the year.

Jesus Christ.

Well, I got that damn paper done today, anyway. You know, Joe, I think I like economics better than accounting. I know you can't make as much dough right away, but . . .

Tonight? Naw, last night at Vinny's was enough: I can't handle those broads all the time.

Wantaugh's next, isn't it? Think I'll drop in on Linda.

—Rick Kean

HAIKU

Yes, we are winter
Trees, but when wind is blowing
Your branches touch mine.

Love, we have flower
Seeds to fling across fertile
Acres of dark time.

—Bonnie Bishop