



EXILE

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Exile Denison University's Literary Magazine

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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can not know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

Ezra Pound

Jeff Masten

Dénouement

I

I speak softly of things to come,
And deft words hitch their rides
On your frozen breath.
Once we spoke lungless;
Now we breathe deeply,
Aiming tongues where we
Cannot look for fear of feeling.

II

Crack me like a book
And rip out the cautious page
You wrote yourself. Leave me
Now with jagged edge,
A pageless number to think by,
And let my reader wonder,
Skipping from eighteen to
Twenty-one without a clue.

III

When freshness was all
I had, you took a bite
Out of me and I from you;
I swallowed hard, but
Now you spit me out
Unchewed.

Amy Becker

The Ballad of Old Bill Brown

Old Bill Brown
Hangs around town
In one hand a bottle
The other a frown
He'll carry 'em both till the day he drops down
And nobody pities
Old Bill Brown

Xavier Carm
Is missing an arm
He hires poor boys
To work on his farm
The ones who are lazy, he beats in the barn
Boys walk in terror
Of Xavier Carm

Young Bob Gray
Puttin' in hay
Thinks he can leave,
Call it quits for the day
When no one was lookin, the kid slipped away
Mistake number one
For young Bob Gray

Lookin for brew
(Just a bottle or two)
He runs into Bill
Takes a coin from his shoe
"Hey Mister, there's something I'd like you to do"
This is where Bob makes
Mistake number two

Bill looks down
Takes his hand from his frown
Picks up Bob's coin
And turns slowly around
He enters the place on the corner of town
Where a sign flickers nervously:
"Drink 'til you drown"

For what seems like years
Bobby waits for his beers
His employer steps up:
"What are you doing here?"
The whipping I'll give you will bring you to tears!"
Bob plays opossum
As Xavier sneers

Meanwhile, Bill
Upon sight of his kill
Chuckles and orders
Another gin swill
He toasts to the telephone, drinking until
He falls on his face,
Becomes violently ill

Ann Townsend

Elegy

Richard, you are sinking faster than I ever imagined.
You have slipped into the river without words or regret,
water fills your open mouth as you glide into the current.
Your slow-moving hands, still smudged with nicotine,
divide the blackening water, the water dark with silt,
the water that seals itself over your old head as I watch.
The new moon has gone away to sleep, leaving the empty birches.
The bitter mist has risen over the water,
and you will not come back to me, I know.

This silent end is such a surprise.
You used to flirt with disaster, skiing through the heavy snow
that lay above the timberline, in weathers worse than this.
Now you can no longer see your legs.
There are no trails and who knows where this water begins.
As you drift farther from the riverbank, farther from pain,
I think your hands, old fading fists
closed against tenderness, must drift like blossoms
floating in the gathering dark.

I stand here drenched with mist, repeating what you have told me:
forgiveness, your best word.
And the river at my feet is hushed and broken.
I'd like to lift you out of there,
find your pale lips, your clenched teeth,
and ease you back into your life,
but I cannot. I cannot reach you in this determined dark,
this raw wall of water that divides
your lovely face from mine.



Dénouement

She was summoned to a court of soothsayers instructed to tell her the Bad News. The man whose egg cracked first was the man to let her know. A large robed official gave the silent command to begin, and nervously the first young soothsayer stepped forward. He extended his arm, opened his fingers, then watched gravity snatch the egg down. Of course it broke — yellow mucus on stone — and the young man looked at her like God I'm sorry.

Guess, she was told. She held a rigid posture and pronounced quietly: Dad's dead. The young soothsayer hung his head. She was wrong. Sharp edged shell in either hand, he looked at her again, pityingly, and began to speak. Then she woke up.

The room was Saturday bright. She lay there, half relieved, half mad that the dream had ended so abruptly. Instead of stretching, she curled around the slumbering Siamese — cats never actually sleep — which began purring and warming her neck and chest. Sunlight bars striped the bed with shadow; she measured them against the edge of the mattress. Beyond that, the window framed the grey garage roof, arthritic branches scraping against it.

She had heard the car pull out hours before, when she refused to acknowledge awareness. She knew she was then sleeping, and that meant not thinking, for once. But she had heard it. Now she listened to the emptiness of the house. It stroked her like she stroked the cat; too hard, but comfortingly.

A whole day without school, she thought. Without teachers spewing irrelevant names and dates and handing back red-Xed quizzes. Not even a bus ride today. In January that one bus spit her out and into her mother's arms. He was alive. All day she had been counting hours "on the table." With wet fingers she had dropped a coin in the telephone between classes. After French it was only two hours; by World Regions he had been "under the knife" six. But that was months ago, she noticed. The windows were the same. The garage roof was the same shade of grey: kind of blue. The same sun poured in this morning as it had for years of Saturday mornings. Things weren't that different, not compared to what it would have been like . . .

She threw off her covers high across the bed, shading the cat in a slow arch. Heading toward the shower, she shed her gown and began to rationalize. They were tired. They were all tired, sure. Living with it,

with him, like that, for so long. Every day. Every night, at dinner, trying to ignore the obvious slip-ups. The coughing, the gagging, but worst of all, the silence. He, so quiet, would try to work down applesauce, his bald, scarred head bowed. Being quiet so as not to disturb the meal. They all were expected to continue, not looking up from their plates. He was dying, was what Sandy figured. But the doctors had said no. It's all in his mind, they had told the family. There was no more cancer. He just has to decide he's going to eat again and gain weight.

It had been long and tough. But not too tough, she guessed. It could be worse, she thought under hot water, remembering it was April, not January. He is alive, she told herself.

Eyes closed, smelling soap and shampoo, she scrubbed away bad thoughts, replacing them with a film of perfumed memories.

They were walking somewhere, some field in her childhood, up along the railroad tracks. The rusty brown and silver rails smelled oily, winding back into the woods from a field of golden rod and Queen Anne's lace, if she was remembering right. Clouds marbled the sky, their fibers silently breaking away, thread fingers reaching out, she was thinking.

Her father was ahead of her, balancing on the rails, looking very much like a kid himself, much like his free daughter squatted over, examining slugs or ants or, no — it must have been something more like a lady bug. Round polka-dotted button on her finger, that's what it must've been, she was thinking. But the bug held her attention only until her father called to her, pointing out something much more rare, exciting.

"Look at this, Sandy," he pointed down, at the ties. Her little body jogged up to him, then mimicked her father's stance: hands on knees, bent over, butt high.

"Oo. What is it, Dad?"

"It's a mantis."

"A what?"

"A mantis, Sandy, see? You don't find these around too often. Lookit." He picked up a twig and gently pulled the insect's claws out. The eyeball head slowly cocked to the left. "See, it's praying. A praying mantis."

"What's it eat?" Sandy looked worried. "Lady bugs?"

"I wouldn't doubt it. You want to pick it up?" The girl stepped back.

"Uh uh," she said from behind his leg. Her father straightened up and dropped the stick.

"Well maybe we'll let him go on this time," he said with his hand on her head. She looked up and smiled.

"Okay." They started walking.

"Now what was its name?" he quizzed her.

"Prain mantis," she proudly proclaimed.

"Good!" He pulled her up onto his shoulders. "Hold my hands," he instructed. So there they were, the perfect father and daughter, she was thinking, reaching for a towel. They balanced on the rails of a track that went on further than they could see.

"Dad? How do you do this?" She asked looking down on his head, over his nose and her own stuck-out shoes.

"Do what?"

"You don't fall on here." She pointed to the rail.

"You mean balance?"

"Yeah," Sandy affirmed, "balance."

"Well, you can do that," he said. "Look. Lock your elbows." He hoisted her down and lined the little feet in front of his on the track. "Just one foot in front of the other and stretch out your arms. Like this." So they walked a few steps together. "There you go." He released her arms and stopped. Sandy immediately tottered then jumped off the railing. She looked at her father who stood silent while she mounted the iron bar again. This time she succeeded in walking about a foot until her outstretched arms swept the air and she again was forced to the gravel.

"How do you keep from falling?" she wanted to know. Her father looked into the sky before posing the question.

"What do you do when you think you're going to fall?" he asked, hands on hips.

Sandy held the sides of her tummy, puckered her face in thought. She looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"What do you do," her father repeated, "when you think you're going to fall?" The girl retained her pondering stance. "Try it," he suggested. "Get on the rail . . ." she did, ". . ." and tell me when you think you're going to fall."

Sandy held her fingers out ballet style and began to walk. On the third step she stopped, her arms teetering. "NOW," she yelled just before hitting the ground.

"Okay," her dad said, satisfied.

Sandy stood up. "What?"

"What happened when you felt like you were going to fall?" he coached.

"I fell," was her answer.

"That's right." He scooped her up again and continued on their way, whistling to a whippoorwill.

She rubbed the towel in her hair until it was only damp, echoing the whistle she imagined her father making. It was Saturday, it was new. It was new and equally the same to her. "Kitty," she called through the door, "let's do something today, okay?" The Siamese yawned and extended his paws, then claws, then moistened his padded feet to smooth over his coat as Sandy dabbed her body dry.

Downstairs was cold. The kitchen — a mess. Mrs. Gumble's chicken soup was on the stove; a scab had grown there overnight. Tin foil and wax paper were everywhere: by the salad from Janis, meatloaf of Lin's. Some godawful casserole of corn and beans and peppers was never put up either. The cat had gotten into the empty ice cream carton, had torn it all up. She did not feed him yesterday, and couldn't remember about the day before. Burger King remains in the sink.

Out of habit, she looked for a Note. There was always a note. He liked to write them, thought it made everyone feel safer that he was in charge and wasn't just being taken for rides simply because he never drove any more. Sandy found it attached to the refrigerator. "At Memorial," it said in scrawled ballpoint, "for tests 8 am Dad." That told her little; he took more tests than she did, she thought.

She thought of the best note, which was in March when They, the authorities, suspected they'd better go back in him since he couldn't walk. They were brilliant doctors, the best in the country. The night before, he told Sandy to pray for him, but she forgot, having had a report due the next day. After the report had been given, after lunch in the cafeteria, after calisthenics in P.E. class, Sandy was at the mercy of the eventual yellow bus ride. She had been eager, then reluctant to round the corner and bring her undeniably brick home into view. The bus threw her out in front of the house, which was looming up, holding in a note what the next course of action — or inaction — was. It said: "Sandy the prayer didn't work this time. Surgery scheduled for Monday 7 am Dad." That was the best note, she thought, scanning the sloppy counters. That was the best and worst and it was not now.

Instead of pouring from the cereal box, she crumpled the wax lining down inside and slammed it in the cupboard. All of it, she thought, grabbing other boxes and bags, carrying the skillet and loaf pan to the sink, where she squeezed thin streams of translucent white from the Ivory bottle. She snatched up hamburger wrappings, clotted and torn ketchup packets, kleenex and paper towels, empty coke bottles. Dish-rag in hand, she wiped the counters and the stove top, scraping off dried blobs with her fingernail.

They'd be home in about two hours, she guessed. The kitchen would be sparkling clean, the refrigerator cleared out and orderly. Her mother would be so pleased she had cleaned up. He'd be tired and quiet and maybe even hungry. They'd sit down and she'd have lunch ready: a grilled cheese for Mom, and for Dad, a milkshake, she guessed.

He could keep down milkshakes. They used to sneak in an egg before discovering some high protein extra nutritious liquid baby formula sauce. Those shakes were thick and cold and gold and sometimes the only thing he'd down. That and little crackers, or sometimes, she realized, cookies. Yes, that's the way it would go, she decided, getting out a stainless steel bowl. They'd come in and sit down and their daughter would serve Mom a sandwich and Dad a marvelous milkshake and some wonderful cookies, for a change. And maybe, she thought, they'd tell her a funny story about . . . about something.

So she started a big batch of cookies. The whole works: chocolate chips, pecans, brown sugar, oatmeal. Hearty, but soft, not heavy. Loaded with calories. The dough whipped around in the mixer bowl; butter, sugar, all creamy. She dropped in two eggs, watching the yellow being drawn in to the beaters, thick as oil, saturating sugar, the whites oozing in and out. It was a turbulent, creamy world around those beaters, Sandy saw. The turning metal walls shined when the rubber spatula scraped them, pushing down, smoothing out. Smooth, smooth, got to be smooth. In went the flour, soft and white, poofing up, mixing right. Gotta get it smooth, smooth.

The cat interrupted her mental chant, meowing only as a Siamese can. His big purple-blue eyes looked up wild and hungry. She swept him up, into her face. "Gotta get it smooth, smooth." Then she kissed him and perched him on her shoulders, carrying him to the refrigerator. He knew to step down when she leaned over, scooping out Little Friskies into his bowl. Hands washed, she went back to work.

The kitchen filled with the sounds of crunching cat food and chopping nuts and Sandy's chant which grew into a song:

Gonna put some nuts in, yeah yeah. Gonna make it lumpy but good. Gonna put some chips in, yeah yeah. Oh I'm in such a good good mood! That just doesn't rhyme — oh no! But do I really care? No, I'm just baking up some coo-kies. And they're gonna be so good; Gonna be so smooth; Gonna be so lumpy; Gonna be so — GOOD! Yeah, yeah. OOooo, Yeah. Hee hee hee hee!

She was dropping the dough onto the baking sheets "by rounded teaspoonfuls" as the last line of her song broke into laughter. "Kitty, you didn't know I could sing, huh?" Batch after batch, those cookies went in and came out of the oven. Smelled so good, she thought.

Chocolate melting into butter melting over pecan all sinking into dough rising up, growing out like a proud man's chest, tan and firm.

Her timing was almost perfect. The car rolled in just as she was putting the last dish in the sink to soak. The tidy white and yellow kitchen gleamed.

"Hi, Sandy." Her mother entered from the utility room, shaking herself off. Muddy droplets fell onto the floor, smeared by her shoes. She went out to hang up her coat. Sandy hadn't noticed it was raining.

Her father appeared, overcoated as well. "What are you making?" he asked, struggling with his gloves. His wife returned to help him. The trail of dirty water increased.

"Hey!" she exclaimed. "This place is beautiful!" She trotted off again.

Sandy smiled. "I'm making cookies, Dad. They're gonna be great. I've got chocolate chips in 'em and brown sugar, and nuts, and oatmeal and all that other good stuff. It's Aunt Selina's famous recipe. But you won't like them or anything," she teased. "Wanna taste anyway?" Sandy offered the shallow bowl of a wooden spoon.

"Look," he began. So she did. Her mother had taken his coat and hat. His scars were clean and shiny. "I'm not going to take this any more." He knocked the spoon from Sandy's outstretched arm. Batter hit the floor. "You better shape up or I'll smack the snot out of you!" He was a plastic head with a white face, she thought. A hard, gnarled ant threatening her. His eyes were wild like the cat's, his hand cocked back like a ping pong paddle ready to serve. It flashed through her mind: We used to play games. He yelled again, "I'll smack you across this room!"

Sandy stood still and stiff and said, "Who are you?"

Her mother stepped between them, horrified. Her hands moved from her mouth to her cheeks but Sandy left the room before they reached her mother's swelling eyes. She stood just by the doorway, out of sight. She heard her father's hand drop, then his heavy steps across the floor. She heard her mother help him along, out of the kitchen to the banister. She heard them climb the stairs, she heard the sheets being folded down. She heard her mother ask if he would like anything. Later, he said. She heard her father lying heavily on the mattress, and the radio being turned on. Then she entered the kitchen where the counters sparkled, the refrigerator shined, and a few wisps of steam floated up from a fresh pile of cookies. Sandy picked up the wooden spoon from the floor.



David Zivan

A lot in common we two —

Cathedrals and music and
Old Movies and Donne and
waiting for something new from Salinger —
and Rachmaninoff.

Fuel enough for more than a few years
those loves were, despite an occasional
dousing.

Sergei told our rhapsody with
passion and beauty in the old order —
very little panic and emptiness.
His right hand the laughs and
his left hand the drama
an occasional saracastic minor
but mostly
very hummable indeed.

Sometimes he would weep with us —
he never cried but he wept
hard — like an Arthur over a Guinevere.
Damn that Lancelot. He must have been a hell
of a knight because after him it was over.
She told me over blood red wine
with Rachmaninoff weeping his best
and me crying in the background.

It made no difference
the record player simply
reached the end
and skipped

Kate Anthony

The Sidewalk Taken

Two sidewalks separated on a gray corner
And apologetically, I could not travel both.
Being indecisive and alone, I stood awhile
Looking down one as far as I could
Until a building blocked my view.

I took the other of a darker shade
Claiming to have guided more travelers
Showing pieces of discarded objects
And a worn down look of dignity.

I kept my choice for at least a day
But somewhat discontent
And knowing how roads lead on to roads
I decided I should turn back.

When back at the corner, I sighed
And decided I should try the other
Which was just as far and wanted wear
But it didn't seem to make a difference.

Karen J. Hall

Upon Hearing Two Male Poets Read

Do we bore you with our vaginas
And our stories of daughters and mothers?
I know there will be many who shout
Man Hater
But, in truth, I grow very tired
of your loins
and your sons
and your fathers
and your sperm
and your naked lovers.
Surely there is something
The sexes can share
Beyond our bodies or
The products thereof.
But, alas, everywhere I look
I see a mother
And you —
A father.

Amy Becker

Leaves

We swung among the shelter of these branches often.
I recall us soaking in some sap of life
One sunny summer morning after the rain.
After the rain we hung together,
When the wind was willing.

Our colors changed with autumn,
Twigs cracked, exposing their
Crazy frayed edges.
Shells cracked, tender nut's
Sweet meat lay broken in the dirt.

Together we gathered leaves,
Piled them thick upon the stubborn roots.
Together we leapt into the leaves.
Some leaves crushed,
Ground deep into the soil.
Some leaves tumbled away with the wind
Past other yards.

Light falls in crystals,
Like stars in a mind-twisting sky,
Or rain. We have our own ways,
Guiding us to separate seasons.
We fall away like leaves,
Kicking and fluttering,
These branches cannot hold
Everything.



Attie Mae

"You got enough sugar in your tea Lucy?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Did I ever tell ya 'bout Eddy?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Eddy Butler, Lord he was sharp in his day. Not like these here plastic lookin' boys y'all be pantin' after. Got their processed hair hangin' all down around their shoulders and the way they prance around the streets, wearin' them tight jeans and high heel boots, Lord Jesus, it's a sin and a shame! Now Eddy, he was a man that had deep down beauty, the kind of beauty that stays with a man for a lifetime. Even when he was layin' in that silk lined casket he still looked good, though it was a little hard to tell with the side of his face being gone and all. Everything Eddy wore clung tight to his body. He was a big man with huge broad shoulders. He got them shoulders unloadin' beer kegs down at Harold's pool hall. All his clothes were hand-me-downs donated by rich white folks to the Holy Lambs of God Missionary Baptist Church but whenever he went out he'd be dressed to kill! Pass that cake over here will ya? Want some? It's choc'late."

"No ma'am. Chocolate breaks out my skin."

"Eddy had a beautiful complexion. Ya know how lots of men be havin' them razor bumps spread out all over their face, not Eddy, his skin was smooth as butter. He was the color of dark maple syrup. His eyes were black as tar and his lashes fanned out, thick and curly across his eyelids. His lips, oh mercy me, it gives this old heart a start when I think about Eddy's lips. They were a deep shade of russet and I swear to ya Lucy to this very day I can still recall the feel of Eddy's lips, firm, thick and sensuous. Eddy had a way of grabbin' people's attention when he walked in a room, ya know, a presence, whatcha call it, a 'ora'?"

"Aura"

"Yea, that's right, Eddy had an aura 'bout himself. I think it had something to do with the way he talked, kind of mesmerizin'—like. Mesmerizin', I like that word. Picked it up watchin' Phil Donahue don'tcha know. Eddy talked real deep down in his throat, sounded sort of like thunder rumblin'. He spoke slow and easy, drawin' every word out to get the best effect. I'll tell ya, I don't think there's a woman alive that could love a man as strong and hard as I loved Eddy Butler. Ya ever been in love, Lucy?"

"Well, yes ma'am, once."

"Eddy loved me too. I member just like it was yesterday, walkin' down Jay Street, hangin' on Eddy's arm. We'd be on our way to the matinee or the bowlin' alley or the skatin' rink, didn't really matter as long as I was with Eddy. We used to take long drives in his daddy's Ford. Those were the days. It was in the backseat of that very same car that I gave Eddy my virginity. Ya still a virgin Lucy?"

"Uhm, well a . . ."

"Oh buddy, Eddy was some kind of lover. I tell ya, he could light a spark in the coldest woman. I should know, when I first met Eddy I was a bonafide iceberg. Eddy was sharp. Did I tell ya that? Yes lord, and we was so in love. Whenever we'd walk by people would glance over our way and throw us one of those ain't-that-cute kind of smiles. I member every mornin', after bein' out with Eddy all night, I'd come sneakin' in the back door and mama be standin' right there, her hands planted on her wide hips and her foot just a tap tap tappin' on the linoleum. She'd say, 'Where ya been girl' askin' me like she didn't already know. I knew she knew cause all the time she was talkin' to me she had this sideways grin on her face. Then she'd tell me, 'Girl, ya best be wipin' some of that glow off your cheeks 'fore your daddy get down here demandin' his breakfast. Eddy and me was always discussin' marriage. I member we used to sit out behind Bartholomew Brown's dairy, ya know, up on that big old hill he got back there. Yes Lord, we'd be back there for hours swattin' flies and buildin' dreams. He was forever tellin' me 'bout this little yellow house we was goin' to have, 'Attie,' he'd say, 'right out back our house ya gonna have the biggest, best, garden of tomatoes and greens ya ever seen in your life.' All we were waitin' for was that golden eagle to swoop down and drop off our bundle of money. We had to wait on the eagle cause Eddy could never seem to keep a job. He'd work for a few days and then decide that workin' was snuffin' out his creative flame. He was an artist, a musician to be particular. Did I tell ya that before?"

"Yes ma'am many t . . ."

"Yea, Eddy was a drummer. He was good to. He played in this little band called "The Billy Blue Notes." They was called this on account of Billy Thomas bought the costumes. They played in little clubs around town. Never nothin' big, but Eddy was happy. Course the war changed all that. I member when the letter came, Eddy and the boys were so excited. Ya should have seen 'em all bug eyed and proud. They kept spoutin off bout how their Uncle Sam needed them for the protectin' of his country. All I wanted to know was, who the hell was Uncle Sam and why did he want to put my Eddy in the war to get his butt shot off.

To me it seemed like if old Sam was bad enough to get himself into trouble he ought to be bad enough to get himself out of trouble. I asked Eddy bout this. He just took my chin in his big hand, his thumb strokin' my cheek, looked me hard in the eye and said 'Attie, baby, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.' The night Eddy and the boys left to go to war, our church, The Holy Lambs of God Missionary Baptist Church, got together and held a goin'-off-to-war-prayer service. Ya go to church Lucy?"

"Sometimes ma'am."

Lord ya should have heard the moanin', groanin' and amenin' goin' on in the church that night. I member the funniest thing happened on that particular night. We had all been harmonizin' on "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross" while Rev. Jasper was askin' the Lord to keep his unblinking eye on those young, brave, fightin' boys of the congregation while they were out protectin' Uncle Sam's country. All of a sudden Sister Ella Rose, you member her don'tcha? She was the one who got blown up when they threw that bomb in the Southside Baptist Church. Lord have mercy on all those dead children. Well anyway Sister Ella got so filled up with the Holy Spirit, she jumped up out of her seat and started swayin' back and forth flappin' her arms and shoutin' 'Thank ya Jesus.' Then I guess her feet got happy cause she started to run down the center aisle. I swear if I live to be 120 I don't think I'll ever see anything funnier than this 200 pound old woman wearin' a pink flowered house dress and baggy support hose runnin' around the sanctuary flappin her arms. She looked just like an oversized pink and brown canary with braids. Deacon Percy tried to stop her by jumpin' out in front of her. That was a big mistake! Sister Ella Rose never stopped. She never even slowed down. Next thing we knew, Deacon Percy was laid out spread eagle in the middle of the floor. It must have took em a half an hour to wake him up again. When they finally got Sister Ella Rose pinned down she was sweatin' so hard that the fine baby hairs around her forehead had curled up into little tight knots. She was pantin so fast the poor woman pretty near gave herself a heart attack. The rest of the service went on pretty smooth. After we sang a little more and prayed a little more I woke Eddy up and we went home. More tea, Lucy?"

"No ma'am I'm fine."

"Pour me a little more, put some sugar in there too, little more, that's fine. Ain't nothin' like a good cup of hot tea to pick ya spirits up. I ain't been feelin' quite up to snuff lately. Woke up this mornin' with pains in my feet. Yes Lord, won't be long till I'm walkin' them streets of gold and singin' with the, with the . . . uhm where was I? Oh yea, Eddy done gone off to war.

Oh Henry

"Okay, Hen, let's go with the one about the kid that gets locked in the elevator who eats his foot. And then we still need one more. What else have you got?"

"I guess the one about the garbage disposal isn't going to work. So how about the fallout skiers?"

"I haven't seen that one."

"It's about this group of guys in Utah who are gearing up to go skiing when the big balloon goes up. They figure that since fallout ash is close to the texture of fresh powder, and since Utah has a high concentration of missile silos, the skiing during a nuclear exchange should be about the best in the country. So they've got a shelter with gas masks and lead suits and they plan to get in as many runs as they can before the skin falls off the lift operators. I guess I started to think it made a lot of sense so I've been sitting on it."

"Sounds fine to me. Let's go with it. Send it to the desk and go home. It'll be a good issue. Have a nice weekend. And do everything I wouldn't do."

"I'll do the best I can, but with Beth gone it promises to be pretty dull." Phil grinned as he left. With a couple of practiced taps on his keyboard, Henry called up the story he had headed "Ash Wipe," and zapped it over the wires to Arnie at the copy desk. Henry looked across the newsroom at Arnie whose terminal flashed and beeped, indicating he'd been sent a story to edit. He watched as Arnie called up the story. When Arnie smirked, rolled his eyes and shook his head in disbelief, Henry knew he'd read his title. He was a bit surprised by the smirk; most of what he wrote was met with a frown of disdain. Arnie hated Henry's stories, especially his titles. The old man must be coming around, Henry thought, loosening up a bit; he'd finally gotten to him. But Henry knew he wouldn't use the title. Arnie hadn't used one of his titles in going on over a year. Of course Henry hadn't been giving him much to work with since their feud began.

It all started when Arnie had watered down one of Henry's favorite titles. On a story about a woman candy factory worker who had a couple of fingers accidentally sliced off, dipped in chocolate, wrapped in colored foil and shipped out before anyone could stop them, Henry's title had been "Ladyfingers Lost By Careless Fudgepacker." But when Henry came in the following Monday the headline read "Woman Loses Fingers in Factory Mishap."

Henry was furious with Arnie. He screamed across the newsroom at him; Arnie screamed right back. They stood toe-to-toe and spat invective at each other for several minutes, but when Henry hurled Emily-The-Name-Checker's Exec-U-Mag paper clip dispenser at Arnie's feet, Phil hauled them both in his office and laid down the law. "Now listen here you clowns. We've got a paper to get out here, and the last thing we need is you two jokers ego-jockeying in the newsroom and disturbing everyone. Arnie, you're not at goddamned *U.S. News and World Report* anymore so lighten up."

"Yeh!"

"Shut up, Henry! We aren't the *Lampoon* either."

"Yeh!"

"Shut up, Arnie. Now you two fly straight. Henry, you know Arnie has the last say on what gets said around here — next to me — so keep them simple and clean. And for chrissake, Henry, this is the eighties; even old Arnie here knows fudgepacker has two meanings."

"It does?"

"Arnie! Now keep it clean, Henry, and if you get edited, suck it up and keep writing. Those are the rules."

From then on every title Henry used was a subtle, or not so subtle, cut on Arnie. He figured if the old geezer was going to edit his best stuff he might as well have some fun. So the story about the woman giving birth to the amphibian baby was headed "Arnie is Born," and the story about the ape woman in a coma read "Bedtime For Arnie's Mom." It gave him something to do; it kept Arnie pissed off; and it tickled him that Gary-The-Sports-Writer, who he otherwise despised, kept a running list and posted them on the staff-board at the end of every month. It was a little cruel. But Henry figured it served the old codger right for being such a humorless grump.

So, with "Ash Wipe" sent and acknowledged, Henry packed up his backpack, donned his L.L. Bean Baxter State Parka, retracted the lead in his Berol Cassette CA5 .5mm mechanical pencil and stuck it neatly into his red plastic pencil holder with the sliding metric conversion rings on the side. He reached behind his VDT screen and flicked it off, watching the green letters "File Sent" break into crosshairs for a split second before crashing into a bright, centered pinspot and shrinking into blankness. Almost forgetting, he kicked off his loafers, slid into his Stan Smith tennis shoes and backed out the door, closing it behind him. "Good night, gang."

"Good night, Henry," mumbled a scattered few of the less preoccupied desk editors. Waiting for the elevator, he fished half of a crumpled movie ticket and a lint-covered lemonhead out of his pocket and casually dropped them inside a ceramic vase sitting on a pedestal in the tiny alcove opposite the elevator. It was new. He recalled an inter-office memo he'd seen which explained how someone from Customer Services had won an "Innovator of the Month" award for having recommended the installation of these pedestals, on which sculptures and artifacts would be displayed on a rotating basis. He hated the clay cluster in the main lobby that reminded him of a crippled ironing board; but this vase wasn't bad, and besides, it was functional.

A tone sounded. A green arrow lit up and the elevator doors hissed open. Instinctively, Henry walked to the back of the empty elevator and turned around to face the front. He saw his reflection in the polished chrome of the elevator doors and automatically ran his fingers through his unkept curls. He grinned at his own vanity. Much better, he thought sarcastically as it sprang back to its pre-programmed form. When he started working for the *Gazette* they were still in their old building across the street and the elevators broke down so frequently that no one used them unless they absolutely had to. He personally stopped the day the elevator jammed and he was forced to spend twenty minutes listening to three-hundred pound Vera-The-Customer-Services-Operator recite the life histories of all fifteen of her grandchildren, all the while reeking like she had just been rolling around on the Cosmetics and Beauty Aids counter at Garfinkle's.

The doors on these new elevators had presented their own problems. For some reason, the architect had chosen reflective chrome instead of the usual brushed steel for the insides of the elevator doors. People didn't quite know what to make of the floor-length mirrors they formed. Years of social conditioning had taught them to walk in and turn around to face the front. And now, when they did, their own image stared back, or worse yet, someone else's. Consequently, the tops of their shoes suddenly became incredibly fascinating. Henry loved it. Big City people were supposed to be able to handle anything. They were supposed to be unflappable, sophisticated and able to adapt to new situations. But the fact was, if you threw them a little curve, like putting a mirror in the front of their elevator, they'll just stare at the tops of their shoes like everybody else.

At the metro stop he inserted his fare card in a slot in one of the automatic gates. The card was sucked from his grasp; the gate hesitated for a moment pondering the card's validity and then stuck half

of it out of a second slot on the top of the gate along with the green letters "Please Take Card." When Henry pulled out the card the gate opened and he passed through. It was always a smooth, effortless transaction, no fumbling for coins or busting a nut on a stubborn turnstyle. As he escalated down to platform B he wondered at the station's sterility. The vaulted ceilings and walls were completely free of graffiti and the floors were immaculate. He'd only heard of one mugging in the subway in all the time he'd been in the city — and even that one had occurred down in the South East quadrant late at night, outside the station.

An authoritative yet mild voice came over the loudspeaker, "Smoking is not permitted in the metro station." The young woman in a navy-blue wool overcoat, for whom the announcement was intended, dropped her freshly lit Merit Light to the ground, casually scrunched on it with the toe of her right Tretorn, flipped her middle finger in the direction of the glass booth where her tormentor sat, and angrily threw her lighter and cigarette pack into her hemp shoulder bag. Henry thought he heard her mumble something about Big Brother. He'd seen her quite a few times in the metro. She always took the train going the other way. "Glad you gave that guy the finger," he offered.

"Yeh, why? He's just doing his job."

"Well, you know, these stations are spotless. One cigarette here or there isn't going to hurt anything."

"It all adds up. He was right; I shouldn't have done it. I know better. It's just that I had a bad day. I couldn't help myself."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that . . . That you had a bad day I mean." He was floundering miserably and he knew it. Just his luck picking a liberated bitch with a social conscience. Why had he even tried? He should have minded his own business.

"Thanks for the concern, but it's really none of your business." She turned around at the screeching approach of her train sparing Henry a reply. He flipped her the bird as she stepped aboard. She never turned around.

What a bore. They do a lot of things right around here. It's clean. There isn't much crime. But the people are not to be believed. I should have stayed in Akron; at least we have Devo and the soapbox derby championship. I came here for a little excitement — something different. Why couldn't some young, neglected senator's wife who's heavily into mink whips and vats of oatmeal pick me up, take me back to her palacial estate and have wild sex with me all weekend? His fantasy was interrupted by the din of his train pulling into the station. A tone sounded, the doors opened and he walked and took a seat. "Red Line to Silver Spring," said the P.A. system in a muffle that only a trained ear could decipher.

Henry had been in the city long enough to have it pretty well figured out. The newness had worn off and he felt like he was on top of the game. He thought he was ready for something new. He had a hankering for some excitement. Maybe this would be the weekend the FBI would come busting into his apartment and take him in for questioning on fluorescent sock smuggling charges. Or maybe someone's pet boa constrictor would swallow Mrs. Warner down the hall so he wouldn't have to take out her trash all the time. All day he wrote about the wildest things happening to people, but the craziest thing he'd ever seen was "Bucket-Head" Binkowski smashing bottles over his head at college fraternity parties.

The train pulled into station "Fargutt North." Henry got off the train and escalated up to street level. He walked two blocks of well-lit city street and waited for an S2 bus to take him up 16th to the Woodley apartments. The bus let him off right outside the huge apartment complex. He opened the main security door with his room key and walked past Leon-The-Security-Guard, asleep as usual behind a row of panning television monitors. There were three letters in his box: "Henry Jacobs, You may already have won \$500,000," "Are **you** tough enough for the Marines?" and a bill from Pepe's Drycleaning.

He walked past the soaped windows of the "Under Construction Drugstore/Newsstand," then the Grocery Nook. The Rocker was in his usual spot on a cement bench between two scraggly palm-like plants in the lobby, head bobbing up and down like one of those glass birds with colored liquid in its neck. And just before the elevator, the Now Open Anatonni's Italian Ristorante. It occurred to Henry that he should eat there tonight. Beth, his girlfriend, left for Atlanta that morning to visit her parents, and besides, he had to use up that introductory offer coupon. The Woodley had seen better days. Entrophy was way ahead of the restoration effort. The plaster walls were buckling and falling on the carpet in the hallways. The trash chute on his floor was nothing more than a bunch of bricks smashed out of a wall inside a tiny room. Evidently, the chute door had pulled loose and fallen down with the trash, leaving a hole big enough for Henry to step inside if he wanted. He liked to tell his friends that Jimmy Hoffa had been thrown down his chute. A sign above the hole read, "Items which cannot fit in the chute go in the container." Only a mid-sized station wagon would be too large for that chute.

At his door, Henry kicked off one of his sneakers and grasped it firmly around the heel with his right hand. With his left hand he quietly unlocked his door. Next, with the practiced prowess and lightning speed of a panther, he opened the door, flicked on the light, and lunged at

the sink, bringing his sneaker down with a mighty crash on the chopping board. "Finally got you — you bastard!" With the sadistic grin of a killer, he lifted his shoe, revealing the pureed remains of a cockroach.

His next door neighbor, Bill, heard the crash and poked his head in the door, "Hey, big white hunter, how many did ya get tonight?"

"Hi, Bill. Just one this time. But I've been gunning for this one for almost a week now. Look at the size of that mush."

"And all over the walls too — must have been a real monster."

"You know it. Fast as a cheetah, too." Bill was a Capitol Hill security officer. "Listen, Bill, I was wondering . . . You've lived in this city for a long time haven't you?"

"Thirty-three years last August."

"And you've been working on the Hill that long?"

"Got a gold watch to prove it."

"I guess in all those years you must have seen some pretty incredible things — haven't you?"

"Yeh, you could say that."

"Well, like what? What were a few of the highlights?"

"Oh, let's see . . . I suppose when that guy King spoke and there were over a million nuts on the Mall — that was something else. Or when those farmers drove their tractors all over the place and stopped traffic for a couple of days . . . ?"

"No, I mean something really amazing. Have you ever seen somebody jump off the Washington monument, have his fall broken by hitting the umbrella of a hotdog vendor and survive — or something like that?"

"Hey, if you're looking for stories for that column of yours forget it. I've never seen any little green men; I've never seen any ghosts, or women lifting cars off their babies — or anything like that. Aside from clubbing a few out-of-control hippies, yuppies, yuppies — or whatever kind of yahoos are protesting at the time — my life's been pretty ordinary. Does that stuff you write about really happen? I thought you guys just made it up."

"Yeh, it happens, I guess — just not around here. Mostly in places like New Jersey and Shanghai."

"You and Beth going out tonight?"

"Naw, she's down visiting her parents for the weekend. I'm afraid I'm alone for a few days."

"Join the club. Actually, make it fifteen years — then join the club. Well you take it easy this weekend you hear."

"Yeh, thanks, Bill, you too. See you around." Henry closed the door, dampened a sponge and wiped cockroach guts off the walls. Then he hung up his parka and exchanged his tennis shoes for a pair of dirty

bucks. He never wore socks — a habit he picked up in prepschool. He pulled his Anatonis 35% Off Introductory Offer Coupon out from under the rubber Snickers magnet on his refrigerator and went down the elevator to the ground floor.

"How many tonight, Sir?"

"Solo tonight."

"All right, fine, please follow me." Long black hair and plump red lips led him to a far corner. The ristorante was lit only by the light coming from candles in red glass globes covered with white plastic netting that were on every table. "Would you care for anything from our bar?"

"Yeh, I'd like a Heineken please."

"Light or dark?"

"Regular."

"You mean **light**."

"No, I mean **regular**; Heineken doesn't make a light beer."

"Fine. Regular it is. Your waitress will be with you in a minute."

"Thank you." He knew when she said "light" she only meant "as opposed to dark," but he loved trapping people in little technicalities like that.

A teenage boy sporting a dark virgin mustache poured water in his orange, lump-textured glass. Henry watched as an ice cube caught in the pitcher's spout and hung there precariously as water and more ice backed up behind it. Just as the water reached the top of his glass, the suspended cube broke free and fell into the glass, followed by tons of crushed ice and water. Ken stood up just in time to escape a slush waterfall as it gushed off the table onto his red vinyl seat cushion. The startled busboy whipped a towel out of his back pocket and lunged across the table to stop the water, but in his haste he knocked over the full glass with his sleeve, sending even more water cascading over the table. Flustered, he threw up his hands and ran for more towels.

Meanwhile, Hair & Lips, who had seen the trouble, moved Henry over to the next table and filled another glass with water. "I am awfully sorry, Sir, we've only been open for a little over a week now and everyone is still a little jumpy."

"No sweat; I enjoy living on the cutting edge. It's good for the reflexes. The walls were painted with water-color murals of Venice. Drips from a sweaty overhead pipe made the colors run together in long streaks through a gondola on the panel directly behind him.

"Good evening, Sir, are you ready to order now?" inquired a beefy woman with hair about like his and at least as many male hormones.

"Serious acid rain problem here, huh?" said Henry, pointing to the mural. She flashed him a courtesy smile and rolled her eyes.

"Our special tonight is tongue with a thick brown mushroom sauce. The veal parmesean is also very good — with plenty of stringy mozerella."

"I think I'll just have a small pepperoni pizza, please."

"Okay, fine, would you like that sliced in four pieces or eight?"

"Oh, better make that eight — I'm really hungry." This time she just rolled her eyes, spun on her heel and left. As he panned the dark room, he imagined the setting for a story he worked on earlier that week in which one side of a set of Siamese twins shot and killed a man in a restaurant. It seemed the other twin had tried but failed to prevent the murder, and despite his protests, the murdering twin was sentenced to death. And neither of them survived the firing squad. It happened in Punjab, India or someplace like that. The prosecuting attorney must have had a field day in court. "Your Honor, distinguished members of the jury, I submit to you that this man is a schizophrenic, two-faced liar." The possibilities were endless. The pizza finally came. "Ah, excuse me, Miss. I ordered pepperonis — these are peppers."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry; I must have grabbed the other waitress's pizza by mistake. I'll go get yours."

Five minutes later, the waitress returned with his pizza. It was the same one; he knew it would be. He was the only person in the restaurant who hadn't been served. Just to be sure, he lifted an uncooked pepperoni, and there, just as he suspected, was a green pepper fragment. He ate the pizza anyway, failing to see the use in prolonging his agony by sticking around any longer.

"You can't eat anymore? Was there something wrong?" asked the waitress when he signaled for her to bring the check.

"Frankly, I didn't like it at all. The pepperonis weren't cooked, there was no cheese, and the crust was too doughy."

"Well, the cheese goes on right next to the dough to form a kind of seal and the sauce goes on top. That's why you don't see any cheese — it's in there. Obviously you don't appreciate real Italian-style pizza."

"Obviously." Henry paid his bill and drifted back to his room, depressed. He thought, I'll have to recommend that restaurant to Arnie. He deserves to be served there. That damned restaurant is just like the rest of this roach motel. I've got to get out of this hole. This was supposed to be temporary — until I found something better. It's time to get the hell out. Next month I'm going to start getting serious about looking for an apartment.

Weary and troubled by another busy, but rather ordinary day, unable to turn to his girlfriend for consolation, Henry went to the fridge and popped a couple of slimy smoked clams in his mouth. He didn't care much for the taste, but there was something about the oil and salt and the way they slid down the ol' gullet without putting up a fight that appealed to him. Plus they grossed out Beth; he liked to do that now and then. He needed a swig of something to wash them down so he grabbed a two-liter bottle of Pepsi out of the fridge. The gas hissed out when he twisted off the cap, causing the plastic bottle to buckle under the unequal pressure of his hand. The bottle slipped from his oily grasp and dropped to the floor, sending a plume of fizzing soda straight up into his face. He blindly grabbed for the sponge in the sink and wiped his face. But only when he saw the lumpy brown smear appear when he wiped the door of the refridgerator, did he realize that he had neglected to rinse the cockroach out of the sponge. He fired the sponge into the sink, smashing a still-dirty wine glass, and wiped furiously at the Pepsi and cockroach on his face with the sleeve of his blazer, all the while spitting madly into the sink in revulsion.

He stripped off his sticky coat and shirt and hurled them into his laundry basket on the floor of his bedroom closet. His pants came off and were draped neatly over a chair so they could be worn again. Stripped to his boxers, Henry resignedly crawled into bed with his trusty 60-channel remote-control television clicker. He wasn't in the mood for the National Symphony Orchestra. Naturally anything in black and white was out. He'd seen *The Big Chill* seven times, and *Amityville—The Demon* was a definite click. He couldn't even identify the two NBA teams that were playing; and all country and western songs sounded alike to him, so the Nashville Network's offering was out. He didn't think Billy was much of an Idol, so MTV was history. And he grew up knowing that Larry Hagman was a bungling astronaut who kept a genie in a fancy bottle full of modular furniture, so he never bought his bad-guy image on *Dallas*. Son of Flubber was a contender of a while, but in the end, Regis Philbin's *Lifestyles* won out. Within only an hour, he saw Hugh Downs discuss how to cope with stress; Alan Birnbaum explain how he lost 300 pounds; a man balance a bicycle-built-for-two, a step ladder, and a french horn on his nose; and hand model Pat Tilly show how to care for hands. At eleven-thirty he switched over to ESPN. After watching only ten minutes of full-contact karate he gave up on Friday night television and with a commanding click of his remote control, silenced the cheering ringside fans, rolled over and attempted to fall asleep.

The apartment walls were paper thin. In the quiet of his bedroom he heard the door to Mrs. Warner's apartment open, and then what

sounded like someone dragging something heavy down the hall. Next, he heard the thick door of the trash room open and slam shut. A minute later he heard the same series of noises. And then again. And again. Five times in all, someone dragged something heavy from Mrs. Warner's apartment to the trash room. And then silence. Must be all the trash from her party last night, thought Henry. Wouldn't you know, the one time she decides to take out her own trash she wakes me up anyway.

Just as he was about to doze off, the heat went on. **Bang! Bang!** He counted to himself . . . 1-2-3-4-**Bang!** 1-2-3-4-**Bang!** 1-2-3-4-(wince) 5-6-7-(relax)-8-9-**Bang!** Old steam radiators. The guy who engineered the annoyance factor into steam heating was a genius. The banging was brilliant — a coup in itself — but the unpredictable intervals made it the ultimate in unnerving noise. Only when the pipes ceased banging around 3 A.M. did Henry finally fall asleep. He woke up late that morning — ten-ish. Usually when he woke up he was sprawled out on his stomach, covers barely on his body. This morning he was in a tight, fetal position clinging firmly to his blankets. He exhaled through his mouth. His breath formed a cloud in the frigid air. The heat had shut off completely.

He remembered a story he'd done when he first arrived about an elderly couple up in New Hampshire who had frozen to death when their furnace ran out of oil. By the time the neighbors suspected something was wrong and called the police, their seven cats had almost completely devoured their bodies. Henry threw off his blankets, jumped out of bed, showered, and dressed.

I've got to get out of here. This place will be the end of me. Everybody who lives here either belongs to the Geritol generation or the gene defect team. Oh this is rich. Listen to me. Every month or so something gets me all worked up for a few hours. I make a whole bunch of pledges about how I'm going to move out, and then I go to bed, wake up in the morning, and forget it ever happened. Well, not this time, dammit. I'm getting out of here once and for all.

So he called up a real estate guy he'd met while networking at a bar on the Hill. The guy said he was going to show a couple of people a few places in Georgetown and that Henry was welcome to join them. Henry arranged to meet them at the first apartment. As he was putting on his coat, he heard a familiar knocking at his door, very faint, hardly perceptible, accompanied by an even softer, "Henry. Henry." What does she want now? He opened the door.

"Hi, Mrs. Warner, what's news?"

"Oh, Henry, would you be a sweetheart and help me with a couple of bags of trash?"

"But Mrs. Warner, I heard you take down five bags by yourself last night. Do you have **more** trash?"

"No, dear, it's those same bags. I couldn't lift them into the chute, don't-cha-know. Would you be so kind as to help an old lady almost a hundred?"

"Sure, where are they, down here?"

"Yes, yes right down there in the trash room. Just throw them down for me would you, dear." Inside the trash room were five large Hefty Cinch Sacs. He grabbed the handle on the first sack and when he lifted, the plastic gave way in his hand. He bent down with both hands and lifted the bag over the lip of the trash hole and listened to it thud against the sides of the chute on the way down. The others were equally heavy and their contents gushed around in the bag and felt weird against his body.

"Mrs. Warner, those bags weighed a ton. How in the world did you carry them down the hall?"

"Oh, I didn't; I dragged them."

"What's in them?"

"Well, I had a little socializer in my apartment Thursday night, don't-cha-know. It's just trash from my party and some old things that have been around too long. You look like you're dressed to go out; where are you going?"

"I'm going to look at apartments. I'm planning on moving out soon."

"Oh dear, that is too bad. You're such a big help to me."

"Listen, anyone who can drag bags like those down the hall by herself can manage just fine without me around. Bye, Mrs. Warner."

"Bye, Henry, dear."

Henry spent the afternoon storming through Georgetown townhouses with twenty-eight other people and the real estate guy. It was as if they were buying new cars, only instead of slamming the doors and kicking the tires, they pounded on walls and stomped on floors; they flicked on lights and they flushed toilets; they opened curtains, smelled carpeting, and measured closets. By the end of the day twelve apartments had weathered inspections that would have made the Gestapo proud. And Henry closed a deal on a small efficiency that needed a lot of work. He spent Sunday packing. On Monday he went to work with more of a bounce in his step than usual. Beth was coming back that afternoon, and with his new apartment all ready to go he was confident that his life would begin to pick up.

As usual, the elevator was crowded with people all staring at their shoes. Henry caught Gary-the-sports-writer looking at his own reflection in the door and said, "Excuse me, Gary, I couldn't help noticing you have a piece of orange Froot Loop stuck between your teeth." Gary blushed and nervously picked and sucked at his teeth. The rest of the people were still laughing as they exited the elevator.

When the doors opened on his floor Henry pulled a gum wrapper out of his coat pocket, crumpled it up, and as he tried to nonchalantly drop it into the vase on the pedestal without looking, he smashed his hand on a Lucite cube covering the vase. Another "Innovator of the Month", no doubt, he thought.

He barely had time to hang up his coat before Phil and Arnie came charging into his office looking very excited. "Big weekend at the Woodley, huh?"

"Tell us about it."

"What was she like?"

"Did you know her?"

"Did you see her do it?"

"Whoa, hold it. One at a time, what the hell are you two babbling about?"

"You don't know about the big bust on Saturday?"

"You dog, you."

"Trying to keep the story for yourself, huh?"

"Don't play dumb with us, Henry."

"C'mon, you can tell us."

"No, really; What are you guys talking about? I was out most of the day Saturday."

"It's right here on this UPI wire," explained Phil. "The cops think some old lady that lives in the Woodley poisoned five of her old friends after inviting them over to a party. Then she posed as a gourmet food salesperson and sold her victims' tongues to some restaurant downstairs. Anatoli, or whatever thought he was getting a good deal on lamb tongue. They never would have suspected anything if it wasn't for an oral surgeon who identified the tongue his wife ordered as human. They fit the Missing Persons reports filed on behalf of the five party guests with the description of the woman who sold the tongues to the restaurant and arrested a Mrs. Warner on suspicion of murder. But they still can't find the bodies. They suspect she may have had a accomplice — since she's far too frail to have carried them out herself. The police made the bust on Saturday afternoon. You must have been out."

Arnie added, "A Mr. LaChance from homicide has been trying to reach you. He says he wants to ask you a few questions. Here's his number. You'd better get right on it." They both left.

Henry wanted to say, "No, it can't be." But he had done enough bizarre stories to know that it **could** be. And **he** was the accomplice they were looking for. He was paralyzed. For an hour he couldn't move. He reviewed the events over and over again in his mind: the weight of those five bags and the odd feeling of their contents, the "tongue special" at Anaton's, and Mrs. Warner saying, "Just some old things that have been around too long." He could explain to officer LaChance that he didn't know what was in the bags... but he would never believe him. Why had this happened to him?

Just then, his terminal flashed and beeped, indicating he'd been sent a message. He typed "R-E-A-D." The screen rolled up and he read:

Dear Henry,

GOTCHA!

Arnie Simpson (With a little help from Phil and my sister Margery Simpson Warner.)

P.S.: I owed you one.



Karen Kearney

In Edgartown, Drunk, Stranded in the A.M.

The sun rose early on those summer mornings in June,
slowly eating away the mist that clutched
Chappaquiddick, as we lay under cotton,
huddled in sleep.
Tenants in an A-frame absent of heat,
we would lumber from white rest,
breathing in the final remnants of the liquored night.

I suppose we never minded the fact that we drank too
much too often and too long into the night,
making a habit of missing the Edgartown ferry
that would take us across the inlet
to our cold, unfurnished home.
Navigating a stolen rowboat to a shore barely seen,
we'd carve ripples from blackness —
our faces reaching upwards to touch the haze
of a starless and obsidian sky.
Falling onto tender sands,
forgetting the rowboat or its possible owner,
we'd pierce the onyx air with our laughter —
desiring stars,
another beer,
and some slight bit of passion to write home about.

Catherine J. DuBois

Pink Feet

I stare at the ceiling,
My breasts are heavy,
heaving apart like
water balloons.
The fan whirrs, washing
cool air over my thighs.

My foot twitches.
I can see my toes over
my bloated belly.
Spreading my toes apart,
I try to feel the little one.
My swollen ankles throb.

I hope the baby has strong legs
with delicate pink feet,
soft and sweet.
I rub my palm over my belly.
Delicious.
The fan whirrs.

Betsy Oster

Ensign in the Naval Corps of Engineers

The polished stare,
Shaded by stern salute,
Camouflages the unscheduled wonder
of your first Erector Set.
Respect for a \$28,000 paycheck and
Officers of the military-industrial complex
Suspends your stiffened hand.

Wash and wear white shell conceals
The frightened embryo that will ooze
When grenades shatter the grin of imperialism.

Your innocence registered,
The exact dimensions of your dreams determined and
assigned to microfiche,
Who now will defend my sandcastles from the MX missile,
big brother?

Morning Haze

Silence nests like fog:
we mix together vaguely, boundaries undeclared;
my eyes mingle with your neck:
strong, turned to side
twisting trunk of smooth barked tree
branching into shoulders,
leaning forward.

Before you — I climbed trees,
made them bright houses,
great ships with green sequined sails,
limbs crooked around me;
I knew them from inside.

The planes of your face tilt up, out of your body,
hinged in high cheeks,
held by box jaw where stubble breaks,
a strange braille rising to a mouth —
pink like

peonies.
I dusted stones with their feathery heads,
perfumed tunnels;
I put my nose in one:
ants — millions — spilled from deep inside;
I wasn't scared, I knew if I wanted
it was only Juice — blackberry,
running from the tremble-mouths of peony.

That pink
plays on your lip, ripens inward,
a shell's pale rim curling rosy, flesh red;
You are a secret tightly scrolled,
I want to snail inside and read you,
trace the curvings, the pocks of your life,
learn, like the ant in the lips of the flower,
to creep where your voice hushes black red,
learn to know your muteness
like my own pockets, my own skin.

I bathe in your warm silence;
let things remain unspoken,
subtle as liquid that cups its arms around my body;
I will not ask how you see me.
Without directions or names,
without a voice designing this relation,
things are as I find them;
and I can trickle in,
crawl through you like sap,
and shape you — your reliance on me —
like the hand molds the pocket,
like bones hold the flesh of your face.

"Just Thought You'd Like to Know"

Okay Mitchell, so I've been sitting here dressed and ready to go for close to forty-six minutes. I've been reading the same three pages of today's, February the second, the thirty-third day of the nineteen hundred and eighty-fifth year of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sunny but temperatures in the twenties tomorrow *Milwaukee Sentinel* for pretty close to forty-three of those forty-six minutes. Give me ten or fifteen more and I'll have them memorized. The other pages, which would make this a complete newspaper, one which contains sports, local news, the grand news of the national, comics, obituaries — everything a person needs to know for day to day existence — already have been confiscated by Julie.

Julie, my sister, you certainly remember her Mitchell? Fascinating, isn't she?

She used the pages earlier this afternoon to soak up the ironed wax from her latest batik, a purple and blue conglomeration that looks rather like a bruise or one of those rags gas station attendants use to clean your windshield. But don't tell her that. She calls it "Union."

"Union?" you ask.

I was afraid to, believe me. She is quite sensitive about her art. You might want to ask her about it though. When you get here. She likes you Mitchell. You are a charmer, a challenge.

For forty-seven soon to be forty-eight minutes, count them, the clock's in the kitchen, I've been waiting for you. Not a terribly long period of time to wait, mind you. We all do our fair share of waiting (at the gas station, the bank, the grocery, restaurants, innumerable places). This is not an abnormal, bizarre or even mildly odd thing I am doing. Quite normal, I believe. Yes, exceedingly normal. A propos, if you will. I do not think my waiting for you, Mitchell, is based on gender differences. I do not think my waiting is due to the patriarchal nature of our society. I do not think you are sexist. Julie, my older sister by seventeen months and roommate for the past seven, as you well know, however, thinks differently. She is not pleased with my situation here.

A ce moment, she is in the kitchen making a lemon cake — from scratch — to celebrate the one hundred eleventh anniversary of Gertrude Stein's birth. She is going to a party tomorrow at Susan's. She will borrow my car and just drive right over there. She has done enough waiting in her time, she says, for members of the opposite sex. She goes to a lot of parties like the one tomorrow. Cause parties, they are. But

don't tell her that. She loves them. And she will have a good time. I will hear all about it. They will probably play guitar, sing for a while, maybe dance. Get drunk, they will. They will talk about the hell men have made of this world and the worsening situation in Nicaragua. Don't take it personally, Mitchell. Not you specifically, men in general. And, at the party, they will fantasize.

About what? you ask.

They will fantasize about revolution, Mitchell. They will fantasize about a revolution — en masse — which will begin with the entire Republican party drowning when the yacht on which they are celebrating Nancy's adoption of a seven year old Ethiopian boy through the C.A.R.E. program sinks off the coast of California. The entire event, they will fantasize, will be filmed by a totally female film collective. The film collective will just happen to be hovering above the area in a helicopter at that particular time. Their footage of the disaster will be shown on national television. The female filmmakers will receive such acclaim for their poignant portrayal of such a tragedy that they will receive jobs with all three major news networks. Their feminist insight will revolutionize both the film and television worlds, and life will get brighter for all of us. Fact is, Mitchell, I could really care less about what Julie will be doing tomorrow. I've got my own life to lead. My own seeds to sow. I thought you might be interested though. She's unbelievable, isn't she? Just out of this world. And her cake, her cake. Her cake will be wonderful. Look, taste, smell, feel, even *sound* wonderful. Everyone will enjoy it, Mitchell. She may save you a piece if you ask her. She is an excellent cook, I must give her credit there. Just ask her for a piece. It's worth a shot.

I want you to know, Mitchell, that I am not offended in the least, now, that I've been sitting here. I could be doing something else, of course. I don't know, laundry or Jane Fonda maybe. But I'm really enjoying just relaxing here. I feel as if I'm enjoying my *self*. It's like the way you say you feel when you are on the golf course. I'm very content. Mellow. I'm achieving harmony with my inner self. And that is important. Just clearing the air here. Julie, however, is, let me see, not exactly pissed off, to be crude, just a little bit irritated though. I can tell by the rising shrillness of her voice.

"Women have been waiting on men for centuries. Veritable centuries. Hundreds and hundreds of years. Literally hundreds. Denying their own unique, feminine potential. Sacrificing themselves. A gradual suicide." That's Julie. She's spacing the closing and opening of the refrigerator and cabinet doors like that to give what she is saying a musical quality. She's artsy like that with everything. Brilliant, isn't she?

Sounds like there are three or four people in there. Three radio stations going at the same time. She can do that with her voice.

"Purposely floundering in quick sand as they anxiously wait for those men. For what? A movie. A drink. Marriage. Matrimonial Bliss. Paradise. Will it work for you?" (She is probably pointing with a wooden spoon out the window at this point) "That life happily ever after. Depressing."

You see Mitchell, Julie is at her finest tonight. You are giving her a controversy — yes, I think she considers this quite the controversy — to throw her entire self into. She is mourning the terrible, treacherous thing I am doing. Waiting for you to show, of course. She mourns out loud. "Articulation of thoughts occurs at a certain level of awareness," Julie says. "Oh the connections one can make by expressing, in a vocal fashion, what he-slash-she is thinking." Julie has that particular phrase posted in the bathroom above her toothbrush holder. This sign embarrasses me. Few people, few of my friends — those up and coming — use our bathroom, however. I like to get out of here whenever Julie is home (which is quite often). Now don't, do not get me wrong here. I am not trying to rush you. Take your time. I'm just talking about the way most of my friends perceive Julie. I am afraid, possibly partially paranoid of what she could/would/will say to my guests. My guests do not enjoy feminist analysis. Except for you, Mitchell. You seem rather interested in concepts of that sort. I'll show you the bathroom when you get here. Intriguing, isn't she?

"To wait is to deny. To deny is to wait. We must re-member ourselves . . ." Here she goes again.

She is as consistent as a Fisher Price talking toy, Mitchell. Instead of the animal sounds talking farmer toy, feminist mothers could give their children a toy something like, "Julie Speaks." This toy would have a small plastic version of Julie in the center and various situations and ideas — waiting on a man, self-defense for women, the feminist utopia — spaced in a circle around her. Point the plastic Julie to a particular space, pull the string and presto! a feminist perspective for free and healthy children. I just might mention this idea to Julie. Another project. Or maybe you can suggest it? She likes your humor, Mitchell, if you're interested.

"One must not forget that a certain fifty-two percent of the U.S. population is of one gender and a certain forty-eight percent of the population is of another. Who does the waiting?" Notice the emphasis she places on the word "who."

That woman, my older sister by seventeen months, thinks too much. And now, to be perfectly honest with you (honesty is important in a

developing relationship) since I have shared this apartment, the utilities, food, even my car with her for the last seven months, she has me thinking. Now I am not being accusatory. I'm just relating what has transpired in my recent life. Chit-chat, if you will. I am not thinking out loud yet (because I have not reached that particular level of awareness, Julie says). I might whisper sometimes, but I have not gone off the deep end. I've never screamed anything from the shower or the elevator or while watching television. Just thought you might like to know that. Julie screams things like, "Of course, Ronnie's polishing the guns for four more years! Tit for Tat!" or "Re-semble ourselves!" And, of course, her commentary a ce moment.

"What are you waiting for? Waiting. Watching our weight. Diet colas for breakfast. We will break fast. Damn!"

Julie does not curse often. Shows lack of intellect. I do not that often either. I am quite reasonable. I bet she has stumbled into one of the eight boxes she has placed strategically around the kitchen (like port-johns at a golf tournament, if you will) for recycling. Glass breaking, like little bells. Bingo, she has stumbled into a box. At times she speaks with her eyes closed. She says that she can actually see what she is saying — beautiful colors — when her eyes are closed. She's unique. One in a million, isn't she?

People usually ask us if we are moving when they see the kitchen and the boxes for the first time. I would not be offended in the least if you said something like, "Moving out?" or "Going places?" when you see the kitchen. Julie, though, would be. Offended, that is. She would say something to you like, "Plastic is forever," or "capitalist." She just spits phrases like this out. So don't mind her. It is really nothing personal. She reacts poorly to anything — which could be anything — she might consider criticism.

You can imagine this, I'm sure. Of course, you've experienced Julie only once. That was the first time we went out, right? You seemed to enjoy what she had to say. Yes, you liked her. You did not hide your admiration well, Mitchell. But I am used to your straightforwardness. Julie has been straightforward as far back as I can remember. Let's say, it's something I've come to expect in my life. I did not, however, expect Julie to greet you the way she did.

"Roosters are by their very nature rapists," she said the second she answered the door. Not a hello or good evening or welcome. I was on the verge of tears when I heard her say that, but I controlled. I was in the bathroom, if you remember. You were about twelve minutes early.

You laughed your casual, cocktail laugh, if I remember correctly

(I was in a mild state of shock — trying to control my tears and think of a greeting). You said, "Stephanie told me you like to henpeck." Now, I know and you know I never said anything about Julie liking to henpeck, but I must admit that that was an excellent answer. You're bright, Mitchell. Very impressive. You impressed Julie, too, if you'd care to know.

Julie impressed you, didn't she? She impresses a lot of people. Like I said before, though, you did not hide your admiration well. It was quite evident, your admiration of course, when you had me give you her basics, her vital statistics, if you will, throughout the entire dinner. Radical feminist, would be a separatist and move to Oregon, but feels a calling to stay here in Milwaukee. Been this way for going on three years. Works at a rape crisis center and would not survive except for a monthly allowance she receives from my father. Dropped out of college second semester of her Senior year because a diploma is a senseless piece of toilet paper (her words). Was an English Lit. major. Was perfectly normal until she read Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* her first semester at school.

"Fantastic," you said, breathlessly. Yes, you were breathless. "Does she like Rickie Lee Jones?"

I admit that this was a frustrating first date for me. It was my date, and in fashion, I thought the conversation would center around me. My life. Julie stole the show. She was not even there. She has a way of doing this. Always has. Just clearing the air here. Blowing off steam.

"Women are like Barbie dolls. They've trained us so well. Patience is a virtue. Don't question. Just wait. Wait and stay slim."

She really is creative, Mitchell. Personally, I think she would make an excellent actress. Let me tell you something about her stealing shows. I do not think she tries. The thefts just come natural to her. Take this for example. In seventh grade I had my first violin recital. It was a small gathering, maybe fifteen or sixteen people in the audience. Julie came with my mother to watch me. She was in the ninth grade. Two people were to play ahead of me, I was the third. During the second person's (it was Margaret Hamilton) piece, Julie got up to go for water. A rude move, yes, though Julie has been hyperactive in a way since she was a very young child. She was positioned in the middle of a row of metal chairs, our mother on her left, an elderly woman on her right. As she rose to exit, she stumbled and fell on our mother. Our mother's engagement ring caught her right above her left eyebrow and hit a bleeder. Blood shot all over my mother. Julie turned and blood shot all over the elderly woman. The elderly woman started screaming for Julie to get away, her heart, her heart. She was hysterical. Julie could not stop laughing. Chaos. Anyways, the rest of the recital was insignificant. My

piece was insignificant. It was my show. All of that is passé now, of course. Julie just has a way of stealing things. Always has.

I must admit also that these entire seven months with Julie, not to mention the most recent fifty-eight minutes, have been frustrating. From day one. Yes, from the beginning, this living arrangement has been awkward. A bad bluff. You play poker, don't you? Even Julie will admit that a certain clumsiness has prevailed, I think. If she doesn't take it as a form of criticism that is. A square (that's me) and a circle (Julie — the ultra-aware, forever-growing) do not make a pretty picture when you're talking tiny, two bedroom apartment for seven months.

And, in retrospect, I cannot say that I was not warned. I was. But let me tell you, I thought living with Julie would be the lesser of two evils. A dilemma. Here's the situation, go back seven months with me, if you will. I've just graduated from college with a degree in political science. I am not prepared for a real job yet. No resumes. Nothing. I am waking up from a spaced year of my life. Dorothy in the Land of Oz. I am broke. Negligent, I admit that. I can live with my father and Gloria, his twenty-seven year old, brunette live-in, or I can live with Julie. I'm confused. I've spent several months trying to get in touch with our mother. No luck. A little bit of advice Mitchell, do not mention our mother to Julie. I know this will be only our second date, and I'm dragging skeletons out of the closet already. But I just thought you ought to know, for dealing with Julie.

I am going to side step here. Our mother took off six years ago — out of the blue — for Texas or Alaska. She was not specific. She did not leave so much as a forwarding address or hint at any pit stops along her way. Julie was a Senior in high school at the time. I was a Sophomore. She's seventeen months older. Julie came home from school early one day because she got kicked out of her Logic class for saying "bullshit" to her teacher and she found a note. It said — "I've just about lost me and myself. That's two strikes. One more and I'm out. Me's the only one I got. I'm in Alaska or Texas. I love you all." We will never forget that note. It was written in orange crayon on the kitchen wall. Julie just about lost it. She and our mother were really close. Like sisters. She ran into the den to call our father in Chicago (he was away on business) and in red crayon, she saw "Don't take any wooden nickels. Adieu." That was the second part of the note. It was written on the wall of the den. I got home from school and Julie was a mess. It happens, I figured. After a while things calmed down. Julie went to college. I went to college. But we still have not heard a word from our mother since. We're

pretty sure she is still alive. Julie says that she knows she is, but don't mention her. At least not this early in the relationship. But honesty is important in a developing relationship, right?

Back to my dilemma. I talk to our father on the phone after the graduation ceremony (he could not make it — business) and the entire time I hear Gloria sputtering like a bird, a parrot, in the background, "Tell her to read her cards. Read her cards . . ." I tell our dad about possibly living with Julie and he says, "It's your life, babe." I look over at Julie who is smoking a cigarette and trying to pretend like she is not listening. She's made it to the graduation ceremony to watch her only sister conform to the ways of patriarchal society (her words) and it is her idea to live together. I don't mean to analyze or anything, but I think she wanted to help me see the light, if you will. Standing there, she looked a lot like our mother did. Brown, shoulder-length hair, five foot seven. A natural looking woman. Attractive. Just then I got this vision of our mother huddled in an igloo in Alaska, knawing on a piece of whale blubber, and there was no way I could have lived in our father's house with Gloria. "The cards do not lie. The cards do not lie," Gloria is sputtering as I hang up the phone. And, at the time I am thrilled with my decision to live with Julie. Looking back, I should not have let Gloria influence my decision. I know it. But things like that happen all the time. To err is human. For example, keeping another person waiting. Don't get me wrong, Mitchell. I'm not talking about you in particular. I'm talking about humans on the grand scale.

"We are nothing more than plebians in the eyes of their society." Notice the rising inflection of her voice now. The shrillness.

Now I love Julie dearly, Mitchell, but I cannot take much more of her mourning, her thinking out loud. I want her cake to burn, a ce moment. I envision it looking like a hockey puck — hard, flat and black — when she opens that oven door. If I wait much longer and listen to her much longer, something will happen. I am not trying to pressure you Mitchell, but Julie's working herself into a frenzy, and she does not need this much stress right now.

I give myself ten, maybe twelve more minutes, and then I will scream. I will be forced (I must emphasize "forced") to do this, Mitchell. I am a practicing pacifist, as you well know. And I will scream, "Enough Julie. You say one more goddamned word and your face will be made-up," (I must emphasize "made-up") "with that lemon cake you are making — from scratch," (once again, I must emphasize those last two words).

And Julie will come running from the kitchen, screaming, "Talk to

me babe, talk to me. Articulate those thoughts," something of that nature. I will scream at her again. And she will say, "Get it out! I'm with you!" Just about this time, Mitchell, you will show up. You will look casual, maybe your hair will be wet in back. Julie will knock you out with some phrase at the door. I will be crying probably. From embarrassment, mind you. And we will have a terrible time together because I will be distraught throughout the entire evening. When I return to this apartment, Julie will say matter of factly, "I told you so." And she will invite me to Susan's tomorrow. She's perceptive, isn't she? Just thought you'd like to know, Mitchell. Just thought you'd like to know.

Contributor Notes

Kate Anthony is a junior English major, education minor who wants to teach in elementary school.

Stephanie Athey is a senior English major, currently working on a research project in fiction and poetry.

Amy Susan Becker is influenced by shadows, trees, Buzzard's Roost, and her little cat, Happy.

Margie Boll is a senior with a major in Art History and a minor in French. She spent her junior year studying in Paris where she went wild with a camera and managed to take over 40 rolls of photographs.

Carol Contiguglia is a Studio Art major. Living at the Homestead has had a great effect on her work and ideas.

Theresa Copeland is an English/Writing major. Her story, "Attie Mae," won second place in the Danner Lee Mahood Awards for Fiction.

Catherine DuBois hates being called Cathy, and hates being asked how tall she is.

Thomas Sherman Elliott writes a lot of bull.

Karen J. Hall wants more than anything to have something (of worth) to say to others.

Carrie H. Jordan has her moments in art and english. If she had to do it over again, she'd have more of them, just moments, one after another.

Karen E. Kearney is a junior Psychology major.

Karen J. Koch has said enough on page 7.

Carol A. Mason is a thinking woman.

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