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Exile Vol. XXXIII No. 2

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Exile Vol. XXXIII No. 2

Authors

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and Jeff Montgomery



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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

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

Ezra Pound

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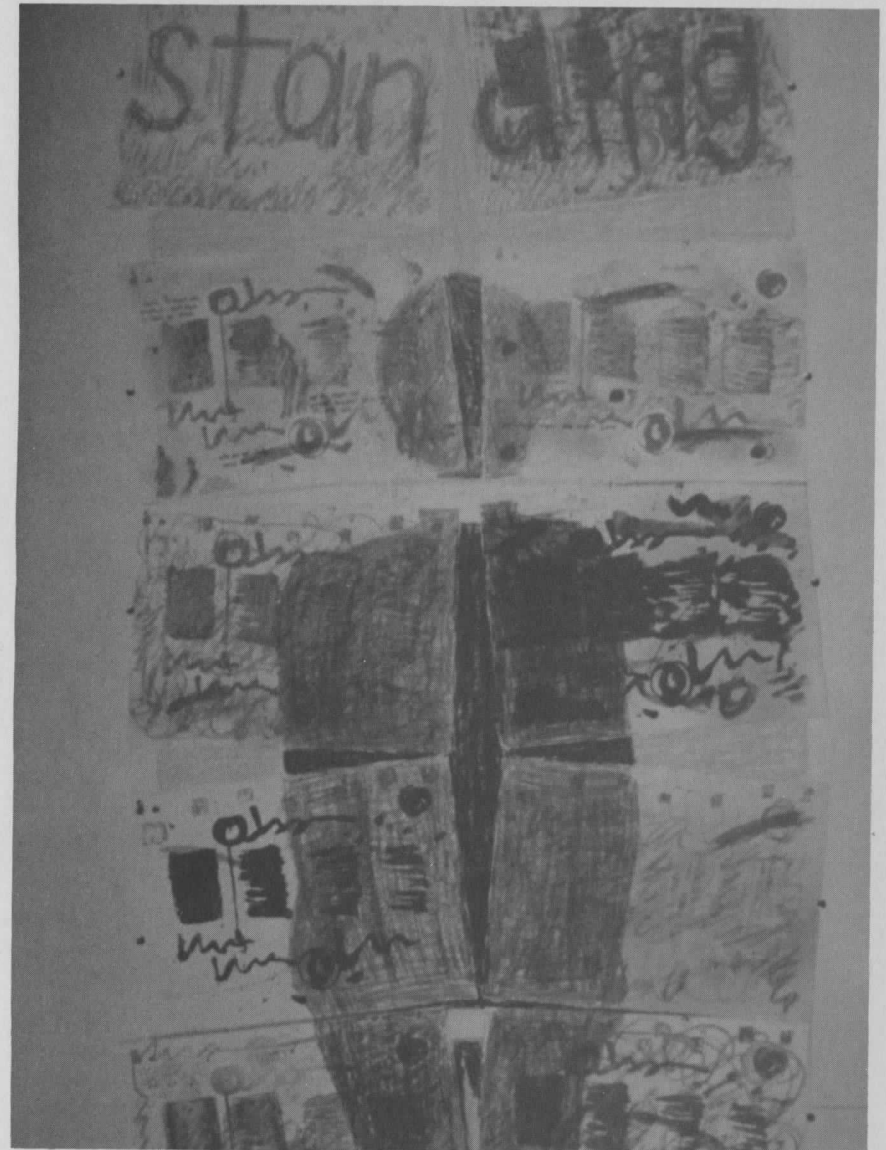


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Seams

Now, I begin to wake
 To the memory of my small, bare feet
 Running down many stony steps
 And across the hot, black driveway to your car.
 You parked it next to mother's, his and hers
 Parked left to right, under pines, and maples.
 You smelled of office smells,
 Of carbon, grease and dust, tobacco smoke, and trucks,
 Five o'clock stubble
 Itchy against a little girl's face.

I have missed those things.
 I did not mean to misplace you all this time,
 I had forgotten those years
 When I knew you, loved you.
 This year it will be ten years
 Since I last saw you, spoke with you.
 I was twelve; I kissed you goodnight
 One evening in late November.
 The next day, I woke up, but you did not.
 What a long time you've been sleeping.

Jennie Dawes

The Milky Blue Water

1. Outside the rain pours so hard
It hurts, and the winds gust
From the west. My feet are wet.
The shoes grind my ankles raw.

I got a letter last week saying
It's all coming back. All that's
Left of it anyway—the place where
I smoked Marlboros down to their

Filters way past midnight.
If my half-brother were here,
He could sit in his old Ford,
Up on blocks and rusting, until
His butt hurt.

2. Cold air stung the night they took
The reservation; steamy breath and a
Sky lonesome for its moon. My
Mother, placid and strong, polished

Silver until her fingers wrinkled
And cracked and oozed blood; all
The while muttering "It'll be Okay."
My half brother, once removed, sobbed,

His nose cemented to the bend in his arm,
His younger brother, eyes empty
As caves, was too young to understand.
He lined up whiskey bottles in the sight
Of his Red Ryder and didn't miss one.

3. I used to have a pony tail black as
Dirt. I cut it off and let it float
Down the river the day we moved to
Minneapolis. I had friends.

They told me to do it. My half-brother
Drank at night to put himself to sleep.
He said a plan to bring his Ford to the city
would come only in a dream. One night,

Probably half drunk on gin, half on
Adrenalin, he stumbled to the bus stop.
A man called my half brother Tonto
and put four holes in his back.

4. Outside it still rains hard. We sit
By a fire and try to keep warm.
I tell the boy it's a nice day to hunt
Ducks on our lake. I say his brother shot

A duck once and it sank
Like a stone into the milky blue water.
I say he dove in for it, but the boy
gazes into the fire for a moment,

Then runs out the door to the Ford,
And takes a seat on the hump.
He reaches in the glovebox and pulls
A bottle of whiskey, and says
It should be good now.

Mark Livengood

Patchwork

In my attic, under a box of red mirrored
Christmas ornaments, I find a quilt made
By a woman I once knew. I drag it, ragged,
Torn, behind me down worn hardwood steps.
My cigarette's glow spreads into the darkness,

The quilt is warm. Warm as the pies
That woman pulled from the oven
On Sundays—Pecan, peach, cherry—
All stamped with the feet of those porcelin
Crows sitting on the windowsill above the sink.

"Cataracts," my mother once said, "she has
Cataracts." She also had cats. Lots
Of them. More kinds than the 5 & 10
Had candies. Tigers, Siamese, Persians,
They dug huge holes in the front lawn.

Her husband once bought a new Buick
From Dick Wilson Motors. It had four doors,
Chrome all around. He left the window open
And a tiger clawed the stuffing out of the bucket
Seat. Red-faced, bubbling with sweat, he sped that car

So fast down Highway 33, himself fueled by Jim Beam,
That he missed a left hand curve and sailed
Into a crabapple tree. Leaving her
With a legion of feelings and a trunkful
Of clothes to quilt into blankets.

Mark Livengood



A Fostoria Tale

Marta Gardner doesn't know what she is doing with a five-year-old seated next to her, or rather, half-standing, waving to the driver of the car behind them. Christina's presence would seem perfectly logical to anyone who knows that Christina is her niece, her sister Mary's daughter. Heaven forbid if anyone thought she was Marta's daughter. Not that Marta cares that Christina is waving to the man or that she sung "Jesus loves me" at the top of her lungs the whole way to Fostoria until they were stalled in this line of cars. Marta just doesn't know what she, someone who isn't good with children, has never been good with children like her sister (Mary smiles and she has the kids begging her for hugs), is doing here with Christina.

Marta doesn't know what she is doing here in Fostoria, Ohio, period. It was a crazy idea of Mary's, to ask Marta to take Christina to see the Image, since she had suddenly decided to accompany her husband Sam on his business trip. Mary must know that Marta certainly isn't buying any of this Image stuff that's making headlines in the local papers. She agrees most with the Fostoria cop who, after spending an entire day directing traffic to the side road where Stryor Storage is located, was interviewed on Channel 8 saying, "It's nothing more than a light shining on the side of a rusted silo that some religious freak convinced another religious freak who convinced all these people is an image of Christ with His hand on a child's head." She can still see him wiping the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand as he said it. Mary had already been to see it, but she hadn't taken Christina.

"When are we gonna get to see Jesus?" Marta has to grab Christina's hand to keep her away from the gearshift.

"I'm the one who's driving here, if you want to get there. We're not going to see Jesus; we're going to see a picture people think is of Jesus."

"Mommy said Jesus is on the silo." Christina looks out the window. "He's out today, isn't He?"

"What do you mean?"

"The sun is shining. You know, Father, Son, and 'Oly Ghost." Christina smiles at Marta, then frowns, creasing her forehead. "Why does the Ghost have holes, Aunt Mart?"

"I'm afraid I don't know the answer to that, Christina." Marta smiles in spite of herself.

"Mommy won't tell you either? She always says I musn't ask anyone that question, especially Father John. I think she wants to be the only one who knows the answer." Christina turns around to wave again. Marta glances in her rear-view mirror. This time the man waves back. "Aren't you going to wave to the nice man behind us?"

Marta takes her foot off the brake, lets the car creep forward. She isn't about to wave to this guy or to give a five-year-old any explanations. She's already given Mary enough. The fact that she decided to come stay with Mary for awhile doesn't have anything to do with a man, or her lack of one. She needed a place to live while she looked for a new job. She had been laid off from her managerial consultant position at the fiberglass plant where she had worked for two years after getting out of college. For some reason, Mary couldn't get the idea into her head that Marta could be happy without a husband, that Marta wasn't hiding some nasty breakup or waiting for the right moment to pour out to her sister her sadness at not having had a date in six months or however long Mary guessed it had been. Sometimes Marta isn't so sure herself that she will be happy if she never marries, but Mary should know having Marta watch *her* marital bliss isn't any way to get over it. Or rather, and she could never ever tell Mary this, it's more a way to get over it than to be convinced she should get married to a Sam who would gladly let her do all the housework and have a Christina to chauffeur.

They were finally on the side road. "We're almost there, Christina." Christina takes this as an invitation to start singing again, this time, "This little light of mine."

Marta finds side roads a lot. She hates getting stuck in traffic like this, but she is trying to consider it as just one more part of the favor she is doing Mary. Marta really does owe Mary something for taking her in, even under the false pretenses that she is to save her from emotional breakdown. Marta has never wanted to be one of those sugar beets heaped high in a dump truck with all the others, even if sugar beets know where they are going, to the refinery. The only other time Marta has ever followed a crowd was the time she had to stop for a funeral procession going across the highway; since it's not every day one sees hearses on major roads, she turned left and followed the procession to the cemetery. But that too, was a side road for her.

Marta pulls the car over to the side of the road like everyone else. Through the dusk she can just read a sign on an aluminum building, "Stryor Storage." There are a few silos near the building

and more farther away. People are getting out of their cars, some standing near them and others walking over the grass toward the building. Christina shouts, "Hide it under a bushel? No!! I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine" one last time.

Marta hears a tapping on her car window. Christina is waving wildly at whoever is doing the tapping. Marta turns to find the man who had been driving the car behind them. He is holding a clipboard and gesturing for Marta to roll down her window. "We're collecting signatures to save Jesus."

"Tell me what you're collecting signatures for again?"

"Are you gonna sign, Aunt Mart, are you gonna sign?"

"I'm sorry, let me introduce myself. I'm Matt Darrow. A group of us are trying to get enough names to save the Image. Stryor put up the light so their men could work at night. They scraped off the old paint and rust, and one of them noticed that there was an Image of Christ and a child—some say a girl, some say a boy—on the side of one of the—"

"I've read the papers."

"Well, then you know Stryor wants to repaint those silos, and if you sign this you can help make sure they don't paint over the Image."

Marta doesn't think she is obligated to sign any such thing simply because she is there. "How many signatures do you need?"

"I don't know. As many as it takes for them to listen. Probably at least 500. We've got 175 so far."

"Well, we haven't even seen it yet, so I'm not sure I want to be number 176. I'm sure Christina's mother, my sister Mary, has signed it."

"Oh, yes, Mary Verland, right? She's a member of my church, St. Anne's Catholic. Are you visiting her?"

"Yes, I'm Marta Gardner. Christina here is very eager to see the Image." Christina has been tugging on Marta's arm.

"I don't know if you noticed, but we've already kind of made each other's acquaintance, right Christina?"

Christina smiles at Matt, wriggling her tongue in the hole left by her missing front tooth. "Are you gonna show us the way?"

Marta and Christina walk with Matt (actually Christina runs a little ahead and then runs back, always waving to them when she turns around) across the field toward the silos. "I don't know how long you've been here, but this has been going on for three weeks already. More people keep finding out about it. It's pretty special. It's like a sign from Him. The first night I saw the Image was on the one-year anniversary of my divorce. He was telling

me that, contrary to my mother's opinion, it's O.K. for me to be a bachelor again. A woman I know saw the image and decided which of two men she wants to marry. A neighbor of mine, an 80-year-old man, insists that he hasn't had an arthritis attack since he saw the Image. How is He going to help you?"

Marta is comfortable watching Matt move his hands in circles, throwing one hand out in an angular gesture as he uses the other to brush back his dark hair, wondering why he needs Jesus to tell him he can be a bachelor when any other man or any woman besides his mother would see nothing wrong with a man in that state. In fact, the longer he stayed a bachelor, the more interest in him they would be. Marta stops thinking about men and bachelorhood when he asks her about help. She doesn't want to tell him she's an atheist. She's not, really, but that's what he would think. Mary thinks the same thing. "Self-designed," she calls Marta's religion. Except when she's in church, which isn't that regularly, and except for occasional pleas when she's in trouble, she doesn't think about God all that much. The idea that He could have some special plan for her involving the Image just doesn't fit into her list of the Ten Commandments. She's never found any evidence of Him giving advice to women like her in spite of the fact that, according to Mary and Matt, He gives advice to married women and divorcees returning to bachelorhood. "I'm not here for help. I'm just here because Mary wanted me to take my niece to see the Image."

"You'll see. A lot of people have come for reasons other than the one He has for them."

Christina catches Marta's hand. "Aunt Mart, are you going to marry Mr. Matt?"

"Hush, Christina. What has Mary been telling you?" Marta smooths Christina's hair. Out of the corner of her eye she can see Matt looking at her, wondering what she means by her words and the blush she can feel in her cheeks in spite of herself.

Just as they get to the first silo, a boy comes toward them with a box strapped to his shoulders. Marta thinks he looks like the guys who hock potato chips at ball games. Christina lets go of her hand and runs forward to look in the box. Then she runs back holding a pillow. "Aunt Mart, can I get this and a sticker?"

The boy is now standing beside them. He has mugs, bumper stickers and small pillows for sale, all saying some variation of "I saw the Image at Fostoria, Ohio." "No, dear, put it back." Marta turns to Matt, shaking her head.

"She seems excited. It's just up ahead, on the second silo." Christina takes Matt's hand.

"They put sugar beets in these silos, don't they?"

"Yes, they do." Matt looks at Marta as if to say, why on earth do you ask.

"I wondered since we saw so many sugar beet trucks on the road."

They round the first silo. Marta can see a light mounted on a pole. All the mosquitos still alive in September must be swarming about that light bulb. The light shines on the side of the second silo, which is on the other side of a small ditch, illuminating an outline of something in rust. An old woman is kneeling on the ground next to Marta, crossing herself. The light puts reddish glints into the old woman's hair. Marta rests her hand on Christina's shoulder, her eyes on the silo.

Marta stares at the outline. At first she thinks it's nothing more than rust on the outside of a silo, but then it starts to take on human form.

"It's not Christ; it's my grandfather," a man a few yards away says. "You can see his beard."

Out of the corner of her eye she sees a news reporter holding a microphone in front of a woman. When he asks her, "What do YOU see when you look at the Image?", she says, "Oh, you can't see Christ on the side of a silo. You can only see him in your heart."

Marta keeps her eyes on the outline. It blurs, and she can see Matt's hands. But the outline of the face seems more like Mary. She can almost hear her words, "I hope you're going to be happy borrowing other people's children for the rest of your life. Oh, that's right, you still don't like kids or baking cakes or candlelight dinners or listening to anyone else for a change!" She can see Mary's anger, her own anger, in the rust of the Image. She wonders if the Image is really nothing more than a picture of everyone who has seen it. When she finally sees the angles of the body and the length of the hair, she sees her own lean form and Mary's long hair merging, strong, female. The face now seems to smile upon a child, the arm now seems to be around that same child, to smile upon Marta, to want to reach toward her, to take something from her or to give her something. Not the Virgin Mary, not with that anger, but still more than a saint, more than human, perhaps . . .

Marta realizes that her hand is resting on air, palm up to the sky. "Christina!"

Christina is scrambling up the other side of the ditch. She puts her hands against the silo, singing, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus when the sun goes down."

Marta starts down the side of the ditch, but she stumbles. Matt reaches out for her, lifting her back up on their side of the ditch. "I'll get her," he says.

Matt starts picking his way, but Marta follows. "Thanks, but she's my niece. I don't want you to go to any trouble."

They're both at the bottom. "I'll lift her down to you." He walks up the other side without using both hands and feet like Christina. He doesn't seem to hear Marta's protests against his aid, so she climbs up the other side without speaking. Christina is rubbing her hands against the silo, saying, "I'm taking Him down. They look so sad up there" over and over.

Matt says, "No, no, you don't want to take Him down. Let Matt take you back to the other side like a good little girl."

Matt puts his arms around Christina's waist. She punches him in the eye. He puts her down to rub his eye, and she throws herself against Marta, crying, "Aunt Mart, if I can't stay with them or take them with us, I want to be with you. I want you to take me home." Marta bends to lift her, and she digs her knees into Marta's sides, clings to her neck.

"That's one feisty one you have there," the man who said the Image was his grandfather declares.

Christina keeps her eyes on Marta's face while they are going down and up the sides of the ditch and all the way to the car. As Marta looks into her eyes, she can see the reddish glints the light makes in Christina's hair.

Debra Benko



Belle Époque

[The writers mentioned, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, and Radclyffe Hall (John), are women I have spent much time with.]

Natalie comes to me through interlibrary loan
from Birmingham, Alabama no less,
and John comes from a small college
nestled in the hills of New York,
and Gertrude from somewhere in Minnesota.
They have spread you apart,
like noisy school girls
who disrupt lessons,
trying to diffuse your energy.
You who struggled alone
to read Sappho in the original Greek
before the hands of translators
could turn it into lies;
You who worked
to rebuild Lesbos in Paris,
who held gatherings of women
in your secret garden;
You who loved whomever you wished
and were silent about nothing;
Yes, they have tried to hide you.
On dusty shelves in libraries
around their world
they lose your filing card
or lock you in closed tiers
for "rare" books.
But one by one I will steal you away,
I will bring you together again
so that this time,
alone in my study,
I too can be a part of your world.

Karen J. Hall

Ballad

The armies crested barren hills,
the wind lashed granite faces.
Grumbling thunder forbode ill,
the horses grew impatient.

Upon starkly, jagged, slippery stone
loomed a hideous creation.
Faces gaunt and white as bone:
chaos as a nation.

They were numbered to eternity
and possessed of malevolence,
armored in obsidian,
lovers of violence.

Opposing them, across the hill,
an equal army braced
ordered and adorned in steel
patiently blank-faced.

The forces remained staid and still
till lightning stabbed the sky
then they heavily streamed down the hill
prepared to kill and die.

They collided in redundant waves
like a stormy, boiling ocean:
cavalry and infantry
logic and emotion.

Sword met steel and skin and sword
with shrilly shrieking screams
the metallic scent of blood
rising from red streams.

Neither side captured ground
the dead piled higher, higher.
They fought upon this bloodied mound
water battling fire.

Blackened skies flashed lightning white,
rain rained on and on,
but they fought through day and night.
No thoughts of concession.

Days became uncounted hours,
years forgotten days
and corpses formed a mangled floor
where still, they fight in vain.

Anonymous

My Grandmother's House

"I couldn't find walnuts in the shell anywhere,"
are her first words to me.
My husband cannot understand the tragedy
of my grandmother's greeting.
He cannot see the fat little girl
run into the house
and go straight to the pewter dish
with the little squirrel sitting on the edge
greedily filling its cheeks with the nut's meat.
He cannot see the fat little girl
sitting on the floor cracking walnuts
as the conversation of adults floats above her.
He would rather not be bothered with nutcrackers.
He prefers to eat the meats by the handful.
He does not understand the challenge
of getting the meat out unbroken,
of placing the perfect halves in lines
or the pleasure of distributing
them to uncles and aunts and grandparents.

At night when I cannot sleep I leave
his snoring and go down to the silence
of my grandmother's livingroom.
There on the table next to my wedding picture
sits the dish and the squirrel
still eating the same nut.
Holding a broken walnut meat in my hand
in the semi-darkness I am unsure
whether I should laugh or cry.

Karen J. Hall



Ghost

While driving across the Fort Henry Bridge,
The late night orange of the Wheeling skyline
Bathed me in memory. I continued home.
Coming into town, I could only imagine
Mid-Ohio, with you in it, waiting.
As I drove along Route 2, the river
Watched me seeking out our hiding spots
Along its other shore: down a dusty road,
Past other younger lovers, across the tracks,
Over a hill, beyond a wooden shed,
And into Ohio's sandy, weedy belly at water's edge.
We hoped the roaming searchlights of passing boats
Would not catch us loving in their sweep.

Was that where new life began,
Or was it in your room, while our cookies
Burned in the kitchen beneath us?
We were not careful enough.
Later that summer you called from across the river,
The pain of your labor shook and cracked your voice
As it tried to reach me along the wires.
You had lost something from inside you.
I did not want to believe you,
Or offer you comfort as you mourned.
Now her ghost does not allow me to sleep at night.
She vacillates between us like a thread
Floating on her parents' breath,
The last evidence of our lost days and nights
Here, in the river towns you've left behind.

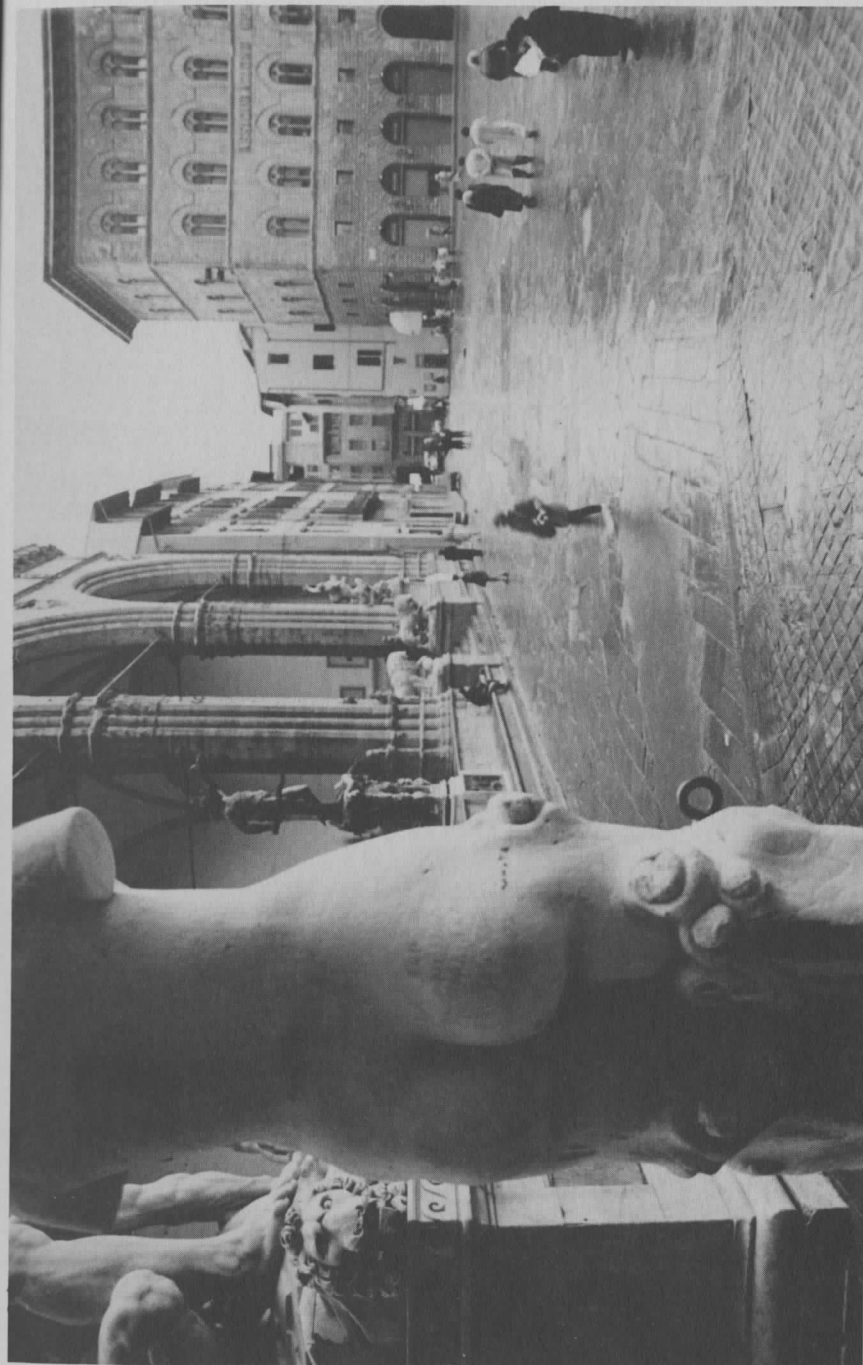
Jennie Dawes

What's for Dessert?

You asked me to sleep with you
Last Thursday, at lunch
And you gave me reasons,
Six reasons,
Six reasons why I should sleep with you
Or why you would
Sleep with me
Or why we should
Sleep together
At lunch
Last Thursday—

They were good,
The reasons,
And I was almost convinced
But I grew self-conscious of
My fat,
My breath,
And my Carter's cotton briefs.

Jennifer H. Miller



Dreams

One little boy trapped in his room
closes his eyes and slips away
into a technicolor tempest his heart spits onto the floor.

With heavy feet he trods
sodden beaches of a vanishing world
then he kicks off his shoes and runs, laughing in the sea.

Little boys shouldn't talk to monsters!
Little boys shouldn't play in their dreams.
Little boys shouldn't hide in strange shadows!
Little boys shouldn't play in their dreams.

His mother's voice comes like a slap
and he turns to see her at the door
but he won't go back—he can't go back, and he swims
a little further from the shore.

Kent Lambert

Postmarked Fort Hill

I will not forget the front seat
Of your baby blue Malibu classic
And the summer we spent on Mt. Davis
Drinking cold beer
On cold nights
From clay mugs
Until we peed in the woods holding onto trees for balance.

I will not forget the lessons you gave me
In tennis
And life
Or the way you got angry when I wouldn't play.

You gave me tee-shirts that had grown
Too small
And maturity
And kisses
But mostly, you showed me
To love
And it hurt,
And it does.

Jennifer H. Miller



The Pile

Gravel popped under Clancey's tires as he pulled up outside the main office of Usher's Salvage Yard. At least it appeared to be the main office. It sat in the middle of a series of tumbled down buildings that occupied the yard, huddled like wagons circled to ward off an attack of rusted out cars, trucks, and refrigerators. A faded yellow sign hung at an angle above the front door. Bobby Usher's Salvage Yard. Open 9 to 6. Clancey climbed out of his car, checked his watch, and pushed his golden wirerim glasses back up on the bridge of his nose. They instantly slid down again.

The slam of the car door brought the sound of barking from the interior of the little building. As Clancey climbed the creaking steps onto the landing, an old black man appeared in the doorway. He was gray and bent with a smoking pipe clenched between his yellow teeth. The source of the barking stood between his legs.

"Hush, Phillip," the old man grumbled as he pushed the dog behind him with one booted foot. He looked down at Clancey "What can I do for you?"

Clancey stood frozen on the steps. "Does he bite?"

"Who?"

"Your dog. Does he bite?"

The old man started to laugh, then removed his pipe as he was racked with a fit of coughing. Clancey waited while the old man fought to regain his breathing. Finally he straightened himself, one hand on either side of the door well. His eyes were watery. "Well now," he said through a smile, "I wouldn't be in business for long with a dog chasin' off all my customers, now would I?" The dog had already lost interest and was now walking back through the open doorway. The old man turned to follow. "No, no." he called over his shoulder, "Phillip won't bite. Don't have no teeth no more."

Clancey finished mounting the steps and followed the little processional back into the building. "I need a dryer belt," he said to the old man's back.

Phillip threw himself straddle-legged in the middle of the room and the old man stepped over him. "Wife sent you out there for a dryer belt, eh?"

Clancey looked up sharply, catching his glasses with his index finger. "No. Well, yes. You see, money's short and what with our vacation coming up and looking at . . ."

The man walked on through the room and pushed out the rear screen door. "Man's got better things to do than be out scroungin' for no dryer belt 'lessin his wife done beat him out lookin' for it."

Clancey stepped gingerly over the now seemingly unconscious dog and followed the old man out the back. They went down the rear steps and crossed a dusty lot that was vacant except for a large pile of junk that stood like a tree stump someone had forgotten to remove.

"My wife, she sent me out for any dryer belt I'd say, 'Woman you's the one wants the clothes dry, you go get it.' I got no better to fixin' the damn thing, but after's hard days work, I got better things to do than go trampsin' all over God-knows where lookin' for no damn dryer belt."

So saying, they came to a tumbled down shack that stood opposite the office building and went inside. The interior was like a miniature of the yard as a whole. Hundreds of odd parts littered the place, spilling out of drawers, milk cartons, crates, coffee cans, running off of shelves, filling corners. Clancey could see belts hung on pegs behind the old man's head. He flipped one, a dusty, naked lightbulb that hung from the ceiling and turned around. "Now, what's the year and make on this broken dryer of yours."

"Ah, let's see." Clancey looked around for rats. "It's a Maytag I think. We got it when we moved into the new house. That was in . . . Let's see. That was in seventy-three, so that would be one, two, three . . ." Clancey started counting on his fingers. The old man turned and rummaged through the belts.

" . . . four, five, six . . ." He selected a belt and hung it over Clancey's extended fingers. "That'll work," he mumbled as he passed Clancey and walked out the door. Clancey stared at the belt swinging from his fingers, grabbed it with his other hand and turned to follow.

Outside, Clancey almost ran into the old man, who stood staring at the mound of junk they had passed before. Clancey walked around to face the man. "Are you sure this is the proper . . ." He was cut off with a wave of the hand. The old man was standing almost as if in a trance, his eyes gliding back and forth across the pile. With utter slowness, he walked forward and pulled out a headlight, moving it several feet higher on the stack. Retracing his steps, he walked backwards until he once again stood beside Clancey.

"Better," he said and then started back across the yard. Clancey hesitated for a moment and then hurried to catch the man.

"Excuse me," he said as he caught the man on the back steps. "Excuse me."

The old man stopped and looked at Clancey.

"Excuse me, but what did you just do?"

"Oh that." He looked across to the pile. He then turned and walked on into the office. "Just needed to be moved, that's all."

Clancey ran on up the steps and inside. "No," he said. "I mean what's that whole pile of junk doing there?"

The old man seated himself at a little cluttered table, reached over and started to write Clancey out a bill. "There ain't no junk out there son."

Clancey pulled out a chair and sat opposite the man. "Sure there is. We just walked by a big pile of it."

"That ain't junk son. That's been salvaged. Ain't junk no more once it's been salvaged."

Clancey wasn't interested in junkyard philosophy. Something had happened between that old man and that pile, something that interested Clancey, though he didn't know why. "O.k., o.k., that makes sense I guess. Are you building something?"

"Yea, I guess you could say that."

"What?"

"Buildin' a statue," the old man said without looking up.

Clancey started to laugh, but something in the old man's manner prevented him. He coughed instead. "What's it a statue of," he asked after an awkward silence.

"Ain't a statue of anything." The old man looked up. "Folks always thinkin' a statue got to be of something. I just put the pieces where they want to go." He ripped off the top page of the pad he had written on and handed it to Clancey. "That be two ninety-five."

Clancey leaned across the table. "You put the pieces where they want to go?"

"That's right. Otherwise, it don't look right. Like that headlight," he tipped his head toward the back lot, "it was where it was. It wasn't where it wanted to be. So I put it there."

"Where it wanted to be?"

"Where it wanted to be."

Clancey counted out the money and placed it on the table. The old man picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"How do you know where it wants to be?" Clancey asked.

The old man sat back in his chair. "It tells me," he said.

"What does?"

"Whatever I'm listnin' to."

Clancey shook his head. "You mean you listen to pieces of junk and they talk to you?"

"Yea."

"That's crazy."

"Crazy!" The old man sat up in his seat. "You call me crazy?"

Clancey glanced down at his shoes. "Well, not crazy exactly."

The old man sat back in his seat, not really listening. "Maybe I am crazy. Maybe I am. Or maybe you are. All I know is they talk to me and I listen. I have to listen. They talkin' to you too. You just don't bother to listen."

Clancey walked to the door, absently stepping over Phillip, who still occupied his place on the floor. He shoved the dryer belt into his coat pocket. At the doorway he paused. "Then that's art out back."

"I'd reckon," the old man smiled, "I's an artist."

Clancey laughed. "You're Bobby Usher, right."

"Always have been," Bobby said.

Clancey walked back and took his hand. "My name's Clancey Fierman. Would you mind if I came back and visited sometime?"

"Visit a crazy old man like me?"

Clancey nodded.

"Never could refuse company."

"Great. Well, got to go now. See you later, Bobby. Do you mind if I call you Bobby?"

Bobby shook his head.

"Great. See you later, Bobby." He spun with his index finger on his glasses and ran out the door.

"Strange little man, isn't he Phillip," Bobby said to the inert form on the floor as he watched Clancey's car roll out onto Route 42.

The sound of Clancey mounting the steps to Bobby's office brought Phillip to the front door with a few perfunctory barks. Upon seeing Clancey, the dog sat back on its haunches and set its tail into motion, tongue lolling out in a gesture of familiarity.

"Where is he boy?" Clancey said as he stopped to scratch the old dog between the ears. Phillip stretched up into his hand. "He around?" He remained scratching the dog for a few minutes, then stood and thrust his head inside. "Anybody home."

Clancey looked around the little office. It was deserted. A noise from out back attracted his attention, and he passed on through the office out onto the back lot.

Bobby was perched on a stepladder with his back toward Clancey. He was in the process of placing a chrome hubcap on his pile, and for all Bobby's talk it appeared that the hubcap would rather be on the ground than where he was trying to place it. It slithered and scraped and rocked, and would not rest under his fingers.

"When's that thing going to be done, Bob?" Clancey said as he approached. The sculpture had grown and changed many times since Clancey had first seen it, and it now stood some twelve feet high and close to eight feet across.

Bobby jumped at the sound of Clancey's voice and nearly fell. The ladder rocked back and forth and the hubcap went crashing down the statue to spin to a stop in the dust. He turned and sat on the second step, one hand covering his heart as the other pulled on his whiskered cheeks. He looked down at Clancey.

"You tryin' to finish me off boy? Sneakin' up on an old fool like that. I damn near saw Jesus!" Clancey flinched at the old man's scolding and looked at his shoes. He tried hard to hide the half smile that crept over his lips. "Sorry Bob. I didn't mean to . . ."

The old man, having recovered his breath, started down the ladder. "Well don't be," he said as he reached the bottom, "your always sorry 'bout somethin. You apologize more than . . . more than . . ." Bobby shook his head as if to dismiss some phrase that didn't quite fit. He threw up his hands. ". . . more than I don't know what. Reckon you's the apologisinst thing I ever run across."

"Sorry." Clancey slapped his hand across his mouth. It was Bobby's turn to hide a smile. He walked over to where the hubcap had finally rested, picked it up, and brushed the dust off the shiny surface with the palm of his left hand. "Don't know when," he said as he turned back toward Clancey.

"What?" Clancey was confused.

"I don't know when this thing's going to be done." He walked past Clancey and sat down on the back steps facing his artwork, placing the hubcap on the step beside him. Clancey walked over and sat on the other side. They both regarded the pile.

"Looks good to me Bob," Clancey said after a while.

Bob seemed to expand for a minute. He smiled. "Does look good, don't it." After a slight hesitation he added, "But it's not done yet."

Clancey turned and looked at the old man. He seemed far

away, absorbed by the pile of wood and metal that stood across from them. Clancey followed the old man's gaze out into the yard, hoping to see as Bobby did. It all looked the same. "When will it be done?" he asked, more to hide his own disappointment than to know the answer. He only half heard Bobby's reply.

"What?" he said absently.

Bobby repeated himself. "I said I don't know. This thing's goin' somewhere. When it gets there it be done." Bobby seemed pleased with this answer.

The two sat there for some time. Phillip walked down the back steps and squeezed in between the two men, thrusting his muzzle under one of the old man's gnarled hands. Bobby began to scratch unconsciously.

"I'm thinking of tearing it down," he said more to himself than to anyone else.

"Really?" Clancey said absently. Then the import of the old man's words snapped into focus, calling him back from wherever he had been.

Clancey stood and turned to Bobby. "Tear it down! Tear it down!" He was practically yelling, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. "How can you tear it down, something you worked so long to create?"

The old man chuckled and stared up at Clancey. "Hell boy, I've torn it down thirty-two times."

Clancey stood with his mouth open. He turned to look at the statue, pointed to it, then turned back to the old man, his hand pointing out behind him, forgotten.

"You've built thirty-two of these?"

"Nope, haven't built one yet."

Clancey's eyes clouded over. "But you just said . . ."

"I tore it down thirty-two times," Bob said, "that's true. But it's always been the same statue. It just wasn't right, so I changed it."

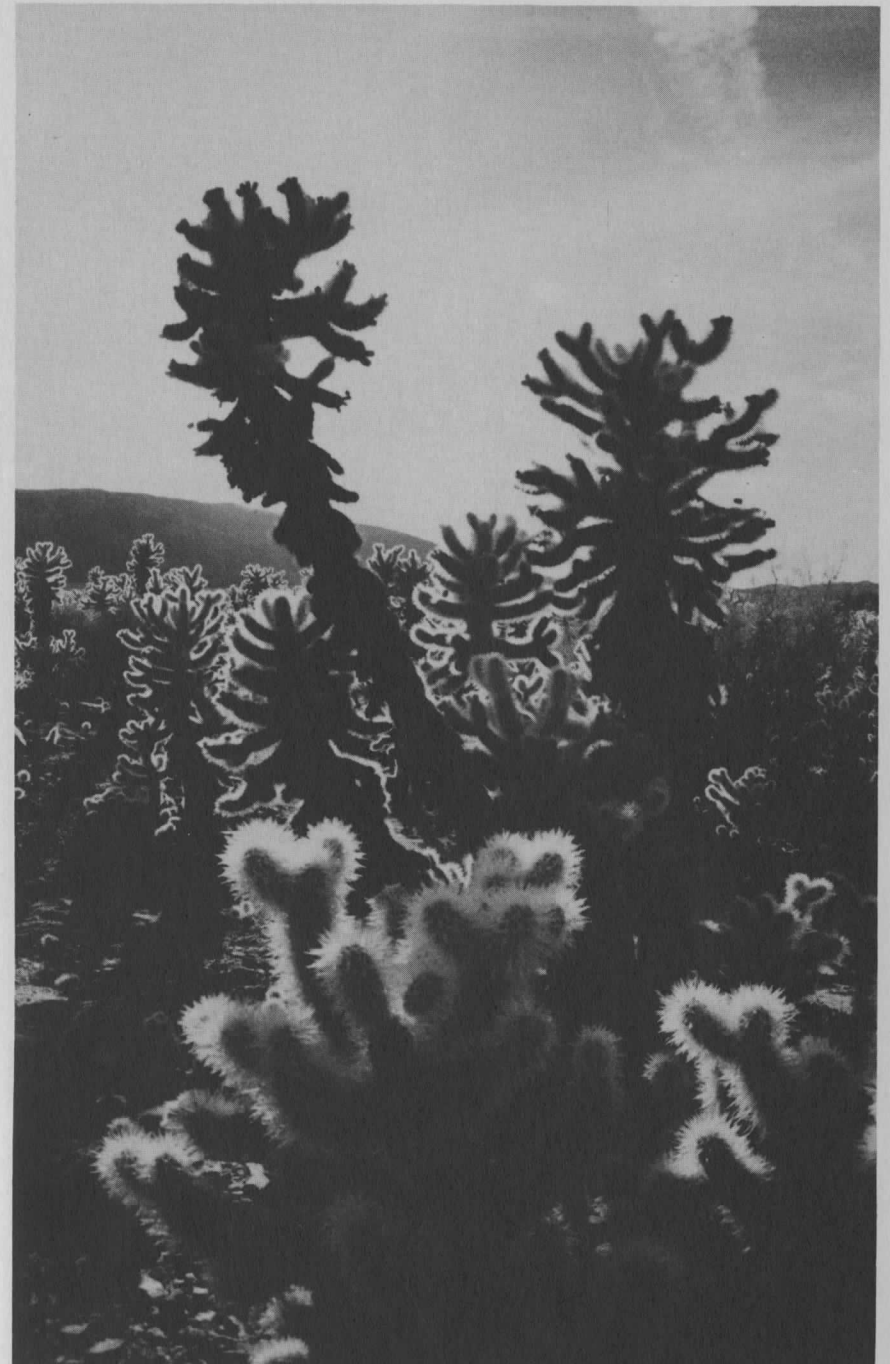
"Thirty-two times?"

Thirty-one, thirty-two, something like that."

Clancey dropped his arm and slowly took his seat. When he spoke again his voice was very slow. He spoke as if in a church. "How long have you been working on this thing?"

The old man looked out over the yard, gone again. But his voice came back. "Been workin' on it most my life."

Clancey sat back and rested his elbows on the step above him. The old man's fingers made little scratching noises on Phillip's head. A slight breeze had come up, and little motes of dust were playing across the lot. Bob looked down at Phillip, then over to Clancey. With a wink he added, "But this one has promise."



Contributors Notes

Welcome to Debra Benko's fiction debut!

David Bloch loves to touch and to be touched.

Eliza Brown is a history major with an interest in photography.

Jennie Dawes can hardly wait to have healthy, bright, happy children. It's a Dawes family tradition.

Karen J. Hall is waiting.

Dan Kirk is going to name his next dog Ebenezer.

Lauren Kronish is a sophomore art history major headed for Florence.

Kent Lambert's favorite song is Dazed and Confused.

Mark Livengood wishes he could pitch in the A.L. East, but will settle for drinking Stros in dark bars.

Sue McLain is looking forward to Kenya.

Jennifer Miller wears "Jockey for her"—not "Carter's".

Jeff Montgomery is a senior English major from Washington C.H., Ohio. Interests vary. Future's hazy.

Zachary Smith is a freshman from Bowling Green, Ohio.

Heidi Rubin will always be older than 12 and younger than 30, and always love the color pink.

Woody Woodroof is not an Econ major and no longer participates in campus politics.

