

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1992

Taxidermy of sexual headhunters

Marion Niedringhaus

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

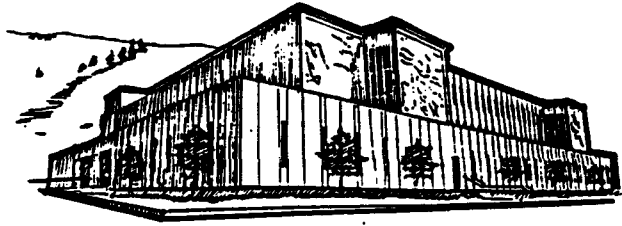
Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Niedringhaus, Marion, "Taxidermy of sexual headhunters" (1992). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3841.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3841>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY

Copying allowed as provided under provisions
of the Fair Use Section of the U.S.
COPYRIGHT LAW, 1976.

Any copying for commercial purposes
or financial gain may be undertaken only
with the author's written consent.

University of
Montana

The Taxidermy of Sexual Headhunters

by

Marion Niedringhaus

B.A., Montana State University, 1984

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

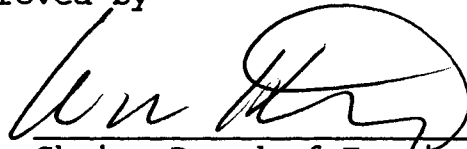
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1992

Approved by



Chair, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School

June 1, 1992
Date

UMI Number: EP36515

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP36515

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

6-26-92

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	The Taxidermy of Sexual Headhunters	1
2.	Don Quixote	13
3.	Perfect Birds	30
4.	Crawl	46
5.	Art of Flying	56
6.	Mutton	77
7.	The Dik Dik of Kilimanjaro	79
8.	Dui	90
9.	Bibliography	117

THE TAXIDERMY OF SEXUAL HEADHUNTERS

I guess I've always liked seducing falconers. Well, I didn't succeed in seducing all of them, but the ones I really wanted were the ones I ended up getting. I suppose they're other women who get fetishes on maybe busboys, longshoremen, even proctologists, but it's always been falconers for me.

They're certain things I've learned over the years, about falconers, about seducing. You have to move slow with them, so they don't quite know what hit them, because all they really think about is their birds. There's not much room there for error, because they really could care less if you're there or not; they'd rather be out flying, catching grouse and ducks. When you walk into their houses you don't see calendars with half-naked women on them. All you see is falcon art all over the walls--falcons diving at swifts, falcons sitting on fists, falcons nesting on cliffs.

I sit in the grain stubble, hugging my knees and not saying much at all. I think it's best to be quiet. The falconer, my first, just sits there, chewing on a piece of dead grass watching his bird. It's a big white bird, with

huge round black eyes. She's standing over a dead grouse, her wings spread out wide--she thinks she's hiding it that way--and pulls out grouse feathers, shaking her beak and sending little pieces of down floating through the air.

I love all the stuff that goes into this sport. They're leather hoods with fancy feather plumes for topknots, and things with names that I want to know all about: jesses, swivels, transmitters, lures, and words like "tiercel," "eyass," "passenger," "haggard," "rouse" and "waiting on".

He still has on that leather glove, an elk skin bull riders glove. It was once soft but now it's crusted with dried blood and bits of feathers. He looks totally comfortable wearing it. I want to reach over and touch it, but I don't dare. I just sit and watch.

I'm sitting in the kitchen talking to my mother. I think I'm in the seventh or eight grade at the time. I've been crying for two days because Ronnie Stevenson told me after the 4-H meeting he didn't want to "go with" me any more.

"He said it was because I want to kiss him and tell him I love him and junk like that."

"See. That's what I mean," said my mother. "Don't let them know you like them. Besides, isn't he a sixth grader?"

"Fifth," I said. I have discovered the pains and joys of the younger man way early.

"Jesus. Well it helps to find someone who likes girls and isn't into chasing frogs still." She shuffles the dishes around in the sink. I stare out the window watching two tom turkeys chase each other around in circles. Another stands strutting, his whole body vibrating when he walked stiff-legged and rattling his tail fan. The females are off pecking and scratching under the ponderosas.

"It's not really honest, is it? I mean, not letting them know you like them. Why not just tell they?"

"Because it doesn't work that way."

"Maybe it was that way when you were growing up, but things are different now."

"No. Men have always been the same." Mom's green parrot waddled around the kitchen table, pulling pencils out of the holder and snapping them in half.

"Let Benny have some of your applesauce. It's good for him," she said. I pushed the bowl over to him where he stared at it warily for a moment, bouncing his pupils, making them tiny then big then tiny again. Neat trick, I thought. He stepped onto the edge of the bowl and dipped his whole body in. He came up with a beakful and shook the excess off, sending little bits of applesauce flying around the table. One hit my cheek.

My mother put Benny on her shoulder. He sat on a dish rag she wears there, pulling on an earring. His next move would be to go climb around on her long braid of hair. My mother was a beautiful woman, black Irish--black hair, black eyes and perfect ivory skin. I have an old photograph of her looking up at my father. A forties kind of photo, right after the war. My father, looking suave in his Navy uniform, is leaning over her, a hand on each side of the armchair she's in, smoke curling up from a cigarette held between his fingers. She was stunning. She looked like Vivian Leigh. No wonder he married her. Didn't seem to bother either of them that they were stepbrother and sister. But they were in their twenties when Dad's dad married Mom's mom. She once said she only slept with him twice; once when I was conceived and once again to get my sister. It was always a good joke, but then, there were fifteen years between the two of us.

"So, how close did you and Dad ever come to getting divorced?" I asked her. It was that kind of day. Benny climbed down her arm, slowly and methodically like an old man coming down some stairs. She turned the faucet sprayer on and Benny bailed off her arm into the stream of water.

"Neither of us had the guts," she said. "But I do remember saying to him once, "If it's not going to work, please let me go now, while I'm still attractive." I thought about that while I watched Benny, soaking wet and

sneezing water out of his nose, climb out of the sink on his little wooden ladder to preen.

You have to be in control the whole time during the whole seducing business. I learned that. Not in a bitchy Joan Collins way, but you have to be aware of everything you do, all the time. You have to know how you look, how you're coming across and you learn to watch yourself as they're watching you. You can't have a dumb expression on your face, or be caught off guard. Because there'll always be other girls who are better looking with natural talents that you don't have. There's a sleight-of-hand technique that works. Take their attention away from whatever it is you don't want them to notice, and keep it there. It works for personality things, too. Keep them just a little bit on the defensive. Make them think about themselves so they don't have time to think about what they think about you. At least not yet.

It's almost dark and we're still out looking for his bird. He can't pick up a signal on the telemetry, so it must not be working, the transmitter fell off her leg or something. He has an easy, relaxed walk. A leather bag is slung over his shoulder, and I know it has a warm pigeon sitting on the bottom. The pigeon just sits there, all night, not making a sound.

"Can the pigeon breathe down there?"

"I guess. It's still alive."

"Why do you bring it along?" I ask.

"In case my bird doesn't get a good flight at something. I'll toss out the pigeon to give her something to chase. Mostly for training, really. It keeps their confidence up."

"Won't she kill it?" I ask.

"No. This pigeon's been down this road before. They're faster than shit. It'll just fly right back to the coop." I borrow his flashlight and shine it into the bag. I see red eyes staring up at me, unblinking. He takes a chicken leg out of the leather bag and waves it in the night air. It's a real chicken leg, with the white feather still on it, the yellow foot kind of limp, like an old woman's hand.

"She won't see that, will she?" He smiles again.

"Of course she'll see it. She's a falcon. They're not like you and me." He holds his flashlight above with his left and shines it down onto the hand with the chicken leg. I hear a strange whooshing noise in the dark and like a dancer coming in to the spotlight of a stage, the white bird appears, landing on his fist.

No matter what my mother thinks, if you play your cards right once you have them in bed, you have it made. At least

it helps. I don't see the point of playing hard to get if you can make them happy instead. The sleight-of-hand technique is crucial here. If there were some way you could do this whole thing without having to take your clothes off and bare yourself, it'd be a lot less stressful. But I've discovered another truth. Although it seems to go against my logic, maybe looks aren't as important as attitude here. I know a guy who told me he slept with this gorgeous girl who had perfect breasts and she just laid there, so it wasn't much fun after all. That was comfort. Even if it was just one guy. I always figured if you had perfect tits it didn't matter what you did or what you said. You were in. If I had perfect ones you can bet I wouldn't just lie there. If you have that advantage, go for all you can get. Guys notice these things. They're going to notice your flaws. But you can be good at it and not be perfect. The key is really enjoying yourself. Guys love it when you are just having such a great time you don't care about anything else. The problem is that it's really hard to enjoy yourself when you have this voice constantly saying to you, "You aren't good enough."

We're sitting on his bed cross-legged watching shaky black and white home videos of him scaling trees in the jungle. He's being paid to find Harpy eagle nests and take the young for captive breeding. Harpy eagles are big enough

to carry off a small child. They're huge. Their talons could go right through your whole hand. They could crush it like a ping pong ball.

"You like all this hawking stuff, don't you?" He asks.

"I love it. I love all of it."

"A lot of girls don't. It's bloody. They think it's cruel."

"No it isn't. It goes on in nature all the time." He looks at me and smiles. That was probably a good thing to say.

"That's what I keep telling them." His falcon is down on the floor, gallumphing around, bobbing her head at us when we move. He throws her a rolled up sock. She leaps over to it, wings flapping. She picks up the sock with one foot and hops over behind a stack of records.

"They're big gentle bastards," he says. Above the bed is a framed photograph of a dark grey falcon with a bloody beak sitting on a dead canvasback.

"Who's this?" I ask.

"A passage gyr I once had."

"What's a 'passage' mean?"

"I took her from the wild. Trapped her when she was young."

"And you flew her?" I watched his eye lashes while he talked. He had long, dark lashes.

"Yea. I flew her."

"And she caught game and would come back to you. And you could walk up to her?"

"Basically, yea. I mean they aren't like this one here who would rather be with people than other birds. I raised this one since she first came out of the egg. She thinks she's human. The best you can hope for with a passage bird is that they'll learn to tolerate you. You don't want them to buddy up too much."

"Why not?"

"So they won't get to liking people too much and lose all their fear. So they don't land on some farmer's barn looking for goodies and then get shot because the farmer thinks it's a chicken hawk out to get his chickens."

"So this bird was born in the wild, knew how to take care of herself, and each time you flew her she could just say, "to hell with this" and fly off and be perfectly happy."

"Right."

"And she never did that?" I asked.

"No." I thought about that for a minute.

"I don't get it."

"Neither do I, sometimes." We were quiet for a minute.

"Whatever happened to her?"

"I let her go."

"You mean you just turned her back to the wild?" He nodded.

"I fed her up, let her loose and turned and walked away."

"I could never do that. Not with anything I was attached to." He shrugged and said, "Well, I guess that's the difference between you and me."

I'd learned from experience that the pivotal moment arrived when I offered a backrub. It worked every time. Rarely did anyone refuse.

"You can leave you shirt on or not. Whatever," I said. Always leave them an out. He smiled and reached behind his head and pulled the blue t-shirt off. If nothing happened at least maybe I could take it home and sleep with it, the smell of him bunched right up next to my pillow. I heard the bed squeak as he flopped right down onto an old brown sleeping bag. Naturally he was tan. His arms were folded under his chin and I could see a small scar near his waist. I could see just the tops of the plaid elastic waist band of his underwear. He wore boxer shorts, a plus.

"I think there's some lotion left up there," he said, craning his neck up and looking up at his headboard. I reached up and got the bottle. It said Peach/Vanilla on the worn label. I shook it and squirted some into my hand and

rubbed my hands together to warm it up. He had a great back.

"Smells like real sweet pipe tobacco," I said. I heard him sniff for a second.

"Yea. You're right. It does kinda. Not my stuff, thought. I think someone left it there."

"Huh, I said. Some other girl, he meant. It's a territorial thing with people. Men tend to piss in your toilet the first thing when they come into your house. Women strategically leave their crap all over--hair things, lotion bottles, panties if they're real brazen. The taxidermy of sexual headhunters. She probably tried the same technique. No doubt she was better at it than I with perfect breasts to boot. I might have to compensate in other exotic ways.

"So you got a girlfriend?" I asked.

"No, not really." Which translates to "Yes, I'm screwing someone but I'm not wild enough about her to make it a steady thing." I wondered if he took her out hawking. She would have gotten to see him lean over and take the bird's hood off with his tongue curled around the leather straps. It looked like a man kissing a woman and always gave me a thrill.

"This is great," he said, stretching his arms over his head and putting them back along his sides. I felt one touch my thigh. I lightly ran my fingernails up and down

his back and felt the goosebumps rise. He squeezed my calf.

I was in.

He rolled over on his back, his arms under his head.

"So, what do you want? What would you like me to do, here," he asked.

"I don't know," I said. I was starting to wish I were very far away. I sat on my knees on his bed, rolling the bottle of lotion in my hands and looking away at the bird on the perch with its head tucked underneath a wing. I felt a hand pull my shirt out of pants, then warm breath and smooth wetness of a tongue on the small of my back. I closed my eyes and heard the falcon rouse himself, fluffing his body and shaking, then letting the feathers settle back down into a tight perfect formation. The high pitched ring of silver bells rang of the walls. He must have had an itch, I thought, in my mind seeing a talon scratch his head, his eyelid closing from the bottom, yellow foot poised in midair.

The hands slid around my stomach, slowly moving up my chest. I tensed my body, held my breath. I imagined what he felt in his hand and saw through his eyes, and felt a familiar shame. I stared at the ceiling and pretended I was all that he had imagined, and with closed eyes played the scene out, wondering if the surrender would ever come.

DON QUIXOTE:

A RABELAISIAN RE-WRITE

PREFACE

This edition was discovered in 1935 by the estimable S. Morgenstein (1926-1936) while on vacation with his wife and children in France, near the base of the Pyrenees mountains. S. Morgenstein was a child genius of the late M. Morgenstein who was famous for his translations of Amadis de Gaul into Swahili and the native tongues of Greenland, Ellesmere Island and Western Bahrain. His real interests were origami, badminton, flower arranging and bird watching.

It has been a task both rewarding and puzzling to find a book apparently written by Rabelais when this simply isn't physically possible. The original Don Quixote was published in 1605, some 50 years after the death of Rabelais. Several possibilities spring to mind: 1) Time travel was possible and was attained by Rabelais, but if so, why did he remain so quiet about it? 2) Some part of Rabelais' soul infused itself into Cervantes, 3) Somebody is pulling our leg. We shall step aside and let the reader decide.

Marion Neidringhaus

CHAPTER 1

Which Treats of the Propensities and Obsessions of the
Famous Gentleman Don Quixote De La Mancha.

In a village of La Mancha, which is best left un-named, there lived not long ago one of those gentlemen that keep an ever watchful eye on his bowel movements, a proper latrine, a cupboard full of spirits, a fat hack, and a ewe for molesting.

You must know that the above-named gentleman devoted his leisure (which was generally each day and especially the nights) to reading books of pornography--and with such esprit d'corps and titillation that he almost entirely abandoned the chase and even the management of his property. To such a pitch did his eagerness and infatuation rise (to say nothing of his oft-engorged manhood) that he sold several daughters and once a son to an insistent goatherd named Luigi, in order to procure all the books of pornography he could cart home, which amounted to 1,003,987 volumes all told.¹

¹No small feat, since said pornography was roundly frowned upon during this period of history. During the famous Pornographic Inquisition such authors were exterminated and books burned. Few historians are cognizant of such happenings

CHAPTER VI

Of the Diverting and Important Scrutiny Which the Priest and the Barber Made in the Library of Our Libidinous Gentleman.

He was still sleeping, so the priest asked the niece for the keys of the room containing the books that were the perpetrators of all this nonsense, and very reluctantly she gave them (if truth be told she had ripped a few pages out herself on a few prurient and frustrated occasions).

The first that Master Huevosrancheros put into his hand was The Four Books of Entertaining Oneself with Wine, Women and Rambouillet Lambs. "How queer," said the priest, "for, as I have heard rumored, this was the precursor of the first books of filth and depravity, and from this all others derive their birth from a most smegma-clogged and foul-ordered birthing canal of Literature."

"Bueno, " said the Barber, "open the window and cast this most offensive material into the courtyard. It shall be shredded and used for chicken house bedding or for the convenience of wiping our arses after an especially gratifying bowel movement."

"Good thinking. Proceed." Said the priest, thumbing through a volume rife with illustrations.

"Good God Almighty in Heaven above!" The barber exclaimed, dropping a volume onto the floor like a hot potato.² The barber sat down quickly, dabbing at his forehead with the back of his trembling hand.

"What, pray tell, did you unearth?" The Priest inquired.

"Your divinity should not be soiled with the knowledge that such disgusting printed material exists. I shall spew out the window these unspeakable tomes before your unscathed eyes behold them." The barber rose and gingerly began picking up volumes, holding them at arm's length.

"You will do nothing of the kind. Hand over those volumes. Immediately!" The Priest demanded. The barber, never having heard such fervent declarations from his friend's mouth, was so taken aback that he was left speechless and commenced handing the somewhat soiled and sticky books over to the Priest.

The Priest paled and crossed himself frantically several times before he was able to pronounce the titles he held in his most holy hands: Maria Does the Inquisitors, Part I, Auto da fe With Cat'O Nine Tails, Wineskins as Artificial Vaginas and one slim volume entitled Dromedary Birth Control Using Apricot Pits.

²The Spanish phrase "echar una berengena" actually translates as "to throw an eggplant." For 20th century readers this editor felt the potato phrase, albeit cliched, is less confusing.

"Give me that one on the apricot pits. I may be able to use it with that cursed dog of mine that's always running around sniffing after socialites," said the barer with more composure that he had displayed in a half hour.

"Very well. Let us rid ourselves of this literary cesspool. Except maybe a chapter in that Paco Penemaravilloso book, El Pecho Magnifico de Isabel.

And so on and on our two friends examined and exterminated with extreme prejudice the manuals and yarns of physical debauchery that had accumulated over the decades.

CHAPTER X

Of the Pleasant Discourse that Passed Between Don Quixote and His Squire Sancho Panza.

At this point in our history we find the two infamous men on their way seeking adventures of the lesser known bodily functions. The day had dawned and found Don Quixote in particularly good humor, feeling quite at ease with his new man Friday,³ Sancho Panza, a farmer of inscrutable moral character and butt cheeks as wide as the Sierra Morena. Don Quixote had engaged in a rather one-sided conversation extolling the various vineyards across Spain.

"But of course the wines of the vineyard Ernesto and Julio Papagallo are unparalleled for their unswaggering ability to make one puke like a porked pig--Good Lord, Sancho, what is that fetid smell wafting up my way?" Don Quixote inquired.

"I'm terribly sorry your worship, but I fear my beloved Dapple has gotten into the green fields and is now feeling the consequences."

³The custom of a man Friday was already in full swing in Spain long before the term came into popular use in the 1700's. In the original Spanish the men were called "Hombres del Viernes," or "Men of Friday."

"Well, I won't have it. Put a cork in it, do something, it's an offense to my sensitive olfactory passages."

"You know, Sir, that 'tis better to burp and bear the shame than not to burp and bear the pain. And he who farts in church sits in his own pew. 'Tis better to have loved a short man than never to have loved a tall."

"Stop this proverbial nonsense at once, Sancho. You are providing to be simpler in mind than I had originally thought," admonished Don Quixote. It was at this moment in their discourse when Rocinante planted his front feet so suddenly that Don Quixote nearly smacked his genitalia on the front of his saddle. Rocinante lifted his head a hitherto unknown elevation of several feet above the ground and blew through his nostrils. His ears pricked almost straight up.

"Look!" exclaimed Don Quixote, "Our very first and perhaps very finest adventure awaits us just ahead. Yes, it is what I had suspected, the famous itinerant travelling salesman of marital aids."⁴

⁴Marital aids, like Medieval pornography, were short lived due to the ravages of the Inquisitors. They did however exist, and were quite popular among the upper classes. Makeshift birth control was also used by those who felt the burden after twelve or more children darkened their reproductive tracts.

"Sir?" inquired Pancho rather confusedly. "All I see, your worship, is a country rubbish worker and his cart full of just that, rubbish."

"Rubbish! Sancho do you have your head thoroughly buried up your rectum? That is in fact the cart of joyful necessities. And I believe, yes it is, it's the famous Mambrino's Condom⁵ he has in his shop of wares!"

"Mambrino's Condom, Sir? That is not possible. The king himself had the condom confiscated over three years ago. No sir, I believe that is one of the ill-fated Fuggers⁶ who lost their fortune during the flood of '32 and is now a modest rubbish handler."

"Fugger, you say? Well, perhaps, but he now makes his livelihood selling just what I desire. Sancho, go at once and get that Fugger over here. Now."

The man with the cart, seeing the two ungainly figures approaching, with one wielding a lance and had what appeared to be a makeshift suit of armor, braced himself and hid behind his cart of rubbish. Sancho spurred Dapple in a slow jog and approached the cart.

⁵Mambrino's Condom was allegedly used by a man having a most enormous penis, or so the legend goes. The condom was never actually seen and was believed to be held by the High Priests after its confiscation.

⁶The Fuggers were a wealthy banking family in northern Germany.

"Sir, sorry to disturb your travels, but the Knight of Woeful Imbalances wishes to speak with you concerning your wares," said Sancho to the man, who cringed behind his cart.

"There it is, Sancho, about to roll off the cart, the famous Mambrino's Condom. Grab it so I can rightfully take it to its proper owner," Don Quixote shouted.

"But Sir, all I see is an empty melon shell. There is no such thing even resembling a condom, and this melon shell, if it were a condom, but I can tell you that is not, is far too big for either yourself or even the legendary Mambrino," responded Sancho.

"Then I shall have to do my own work, you worthless pus-brained example of a squire, stand back and let me advance." And with that, Don Quixote charged, lance raised, Rocinante ambling along at a pace faster than he had exhibited in years. The rubbish collector, frightened out of his wits, picked up a stone and hurled it at Don Quixote, hitting the knight above the left eye, toppling him from his mount. Don Quixote gathered himself into a sitting position and rubbed his head. "Sancho," he shouted, "The Fugger hit me. He is most certainly a thieving Fugger. I shall rise and recoup this injustice." And so Don Quixote rose and mounted Rocinante who was lifting his tail and about to relieve his bowels upon the felled sword of the knight. Don Quixote made chase after the terrified rubbish collector and both disappeared over the hill.

It is not known what became of the cart or in fact how big Mambrino's pudsticker really was.⁷

⁷Probably an attempt to parody the suspense of other novels of this sort. The fact is, Mambrino's pudsticker was a household word. Its length was reputedly 3½ feet.

CHAPTER XIII

In Which Is Ended this Translation of Rabelais' Version of Don Quixote Wherein the Fate of Marcela the Shepherdess Is Revealed, Along With Other Notable Occurrences

"Ah beloved Dulcinea, how the maidens of this earthly Paradise pale before your most incomparable beauty, your thrusting, most certainly pouting, upturned breasts strain as your golden threads bind you most virtuous body," crooned the knight.

"Your worship, I do wish you'd stop talking this drivel about this Dulcinea, otherwise known as Aldonza the Magically Talented."

"Magically talented? What have you heard about my peerless Dulcinea?"

"Well, your worship, it has been spoken that your Aldonza has many talents, of which many are envious. It is said she can swill spirits with the best of them, guzzling down wineskin after wineskin until she pisses red like the sea. and that she won a flatulence contest where she blew down five rows of pine trees with such a ferocious wind from her bunghole. They say she can create more ecstasy with her tongue in five minutes than Lope De Vega can in five volumes of poetry."

"Ah yes, the very same Dulcinea that I know and love," Don Quixote said wistfully.

Just then another young man approached. "Do you know what is happening in the village?" He asked.

"Of course not, do we look psychic?" Retorted Don Quixote in a rare display of sarcasm.

"Well, I must relate the sad story of Grisostomo. It is said he hung himself with sheep entrails after the pig-headed Marcela shunned his advances."

"Are you talking about Marcela?" Sancho Panza asked.

"Isn't that just what I said, you lug-head?" Answered the young man. "Now let me finish. It is said that in his will Grisostomo wished to be buried next to a pile of cowchips, where he first set eyes upon her evil form."

"Certainly it is our duty to help with this honorable burial," said Don Quixote. "But first and foremost is that we seek out and avenge this grievous wrong-going," the knight continued, feeling confident he was about to embark on a most noble cause. "Are you prepared, young man, bearer of bad news, to accompany my squire and myself to the scene of this heinous crime and do what is necessary to right this wrong?"

"I am, your worship, sir," the young man replied.

And so the three set out to have what must be their most famous adventure yet.

CHAPTER XIV

Of the Other Notable Occurrences That Were Mentioned in the Misleading Previous Chapter Heading.

On the summit of the rock where they were digging the grave there appeared the shepherdess Marcela, so beautiful that her beauty exceeded its reputation. Don Quixote, his man Friday Sancho and the Bearer of Bad News dropped their digging implements to hear her most dulcet tones.

"Hah, fools that you are, digging a hole and spilling your filthy, wasted sweat upon this land of mine. And all for a horny little swineherd who couldn't bear the fact that he couldn't stick his impish little pudsticker into any woman he chooses. Oh yes, handsome he was but well hung he wasn't. Oh, you men and your peckers, who believe the world revolves around your precious tool and that we, the weaker sex, are here but to serve your most basic needs without a thought to our sense of taste or morality. Just because I am beautiful doesn't mean I have to lie down with the likes of Grisostomo. Or any man for that matter. You who give not a second thought to your philanderings, but will kill your wife for the crime of damaging your most valued and hollow honor. I have no sympathy for the childish drama

enacted by a self-righteous goatherd who ended his own worthless life in a laughable temper tantrum. Go, all of you, and leave me to my peace. You and your entire sex foul the very air I breathe."

"What a bitch," said Sancho. "But you know, she's got a point."

Hearing that, Don Quixote smacked Sancho over the head with such a force as to render him unconscious. Bellowing at the felled squire he spewed forth vitriolic exasperations, "Has a point! Are you out of you mind? Did you hear what that heretic said? Did you listen, or were your ears plugged with horseshit? I have never heard the likes of it in all my life. A woman having the nerve to speak such profanities against men, we who fought wars to defend their homeland, stab dragons to save their lives, defend their honor with swords. And a little physical gratitude is all we ask. All they have to do is lie there, and she complains, this foul-mouthed she-bitch. Justice will be done. I here call upon the powers of the Necromancers.⁸

"Necromancers!" Gaspd the Bearer of Bad Tiding, "Oh please sir, do show some mercy."

⁸Not to be underestimated, the necromancers were twice as powerful as the Enchanters, and much more sinister in their results. Few masters of Necromancy existed at this time. Don Quixote was obviously one.

"Mercy my left testicle! Hell hath no fury like that of a knight offended." And with that pronouncement, Don Quixote dropped to his knees and began to chant to the Necromancers (which sounded like a Galician-Moorish dialect spoken backwards and impossible to transcribe). Just as Sancho was recovering from his stupor inflicted by our Knight, the clouds in the sky gathered and darkened with such a force as to render the earth without light, the air again filled the sky, Don Quixote bowed deeply toward the east and faced the hill where Marcela had stood.

There on the hill stood not the fair Marcela but a herd of goats pleasantly grazing the spring grass. In the middle of the herd was a large billy goat frantically mounting a nanny. The nanny kicked the billy goat in the stomach and moved off, resuming her grazing. This time the billy goat thrust with more fervor, and to the shock of Sancho and the Bearer of Bad Tidings, when the goat ejaculated, its seed spewed not into the nanny but out its ass.

"Good lord, my master, you've turned Marcela into a Gomez."⁹ Sancho cried. "What a terrible fate, to try to sow one's oats and not be able to get the drill to work."

"Ah yes," replied a satisfied Don Quixote, "Always in heat, and never able to satisfy. Justice has been served."

And so Marcela lived being cursed with perpetual arousal only to have the humiliation of reflecting nannies and a penis that protruded out the ass.

⁹From which the present day ranching term "gomer" originated. The practice is used to help tell which cows are in heat, without the danger of impregnating a cow with an inferior bull. Thus a Gomer was a lesser quality bull who has been surgically altered such that his penis is re-routed out his anus - thus keeping his urges intact but semen well out of harm's way. A steer, of course, would have no such desires and would be useless as a Gomer. Lesbian cows, called "crazy cows" are also used but lesser known. This practice is most common among artificial inseminators.

PERFECT BIRDS

I grew up around bird lovers. I never was a bird person myself, but I found myself ending up pursuing, dating, and befriending falconers, and, consequently, spending an awful lot of time wondering what their attraction to birds was, and my attraction, in turn, to these men.

When I was growing up, many times I would find my father sitting on a deck chair on the dock, reading a war novel and looking up every few pages to watch his birds. A red and tan duck would paddle by.

"OK, Pointed head," he'd fire at me, "What's that one? And don't disappoint me."

"Well, let me think--"

"First ask yourself, is it a dabbler or a diver?"

The terminology terrified me. I watched for a dabble or a dive and saw neither.

"Don't tell me you don't even know the difference between a diver and a dabbler for Christ's sake."

"Sorry."

"Don't even bother applying to Yale."

"Don't worry," I said.

"It's either a redhead or a canvasback," he said, chewing on a fried pork rind. "Look at the build, the feet. How are they set, far back? How would it fly? How would it eat? What is it, a dabbler or a diver?"

A wrong guess would be worse than not knowing, and I knew I lacked the guts and luck to pull off an enthusiastically correct guess.

"Just tell me what the damned bird is and I'll promise I'll know it next time."

I think he liked knowing more than whomever he was grilling, and the fact that he was always more than willing to spout off the bird's Latin and common name gave him a pleasure that overcame his disappointment with me. Rarely did anyone bother questioning him.

We'd sit, my father and I, in the middle of January and often, after a satisfactory bird quiz, watch his trumpeter swan bathe, submerging its entire front half in the frigid water, then bobbing back up again, letting the droplets run down its back. The swan would curl its neck over the white back and, with eyes closed in seeming rapture, methodically preen each feather. My father would slingshot them handfuls of corn he kept in a fifty-gallon barrel, and the swans and geese would all charge to the edge and maneuver their heavy bodies up onto the ice. They craned their necks over the snow banks as their wings beat against the brittle ice along the edge. They'd manage somehow, shake their tails and

awkwardly waddle off, hissing at one another and snaking their necks into the powdery snow to retrieve the corn. They'd settle down then, kicking snow from under their bodies, making a nest for the night. In the morning I knew they'd be in the same spot, their backs sometimes covered in light snow, their heads tucked beneath a wing.

My mother, on the other hand, is a parrot person. Her six-inch green parrot rides herd on the kitchen, leaping off the edge of the table and glomming onto the nearest passer-by's shirt. The parrot can, with cautious planning and few false moves, pull himself up the non-suspecting person's shirt a step at a time, like a climber ascending El Capitan, until he reaches a shoulder. He seems quite happy to ride there all day, crapping and pulling on earrings and emitting that musky parrot smell.

My father never really learned to get on well with the parrots, always popping them a grape and then deftly snatching his fingers back before they could grab him.

"What's wrong with this evil bird? It hates me. I'm not used to animals hating me," he'd say, glaring at an African Grey parrot who narrowed its pupils and raised its neck feathers every time he passed by.

"She doesn't hate you. She's fearful. It helps not making eye contact. Just look away and put your hand right

up there. Don't act afraid and yank your hand away or you will get bit. She won't do a thing."

"Like hell. I know this evil beast." And my father would tentatively stick his hand out and the parrot would waddle across the top of its cage, beak open, and hackles raised.

My mother, conversely, never really took to my father's swan, who, after biting my brother-in-law in the genitals, galloped across the lawn and knocked her down, sending the small terrier she was carrying yelping into the cabin.

"Jesus Christ, dear," Mom shouted while picking herself up, the swan standing nearby, wings spread and hissing warm, humid fish breath at her. "Get rid of that goddamn swan. See, this is what happens when you try to make a pet out of a wild animal. It's dangerous. And it's unnatural."

"Now see, there you go, overreacting again. Jesus, dear, he's not after you; he's after that wretched terrier you've got. He's a little confused, you know, an imprint. He's just protecting me."

"Bullshit." Try getting him a mate. Or better, get rid of the sonovabitch before he gelds our son-in-law. or kills a dog."

But I couldn't imagine either of them without birds.

I have never completely understood the hold birds have on the select few who make them a lifelong obsession. But I think it's something positive, as opposed to, well, other compulsions like gambling or flashing. Whether I became fascinated by falconers because I had been raised by bird lovers and felt a comforting familiarity or because I recognized some special quality that only bird people share, I don't know. But I found myself as enraptured with falconers as the falconers were themselves enraptured with their falcons.

I met my first falconer on the way to the bus stop one day. A new neighbor, another rancher, drove up beside my father and me while we sat waiting for the bus. Why he drove up just then I don't know, but it doesn't seem to matter now. What did matter was that he had these enormous birds perched on his back seat. Big, dark, hooded things. I watched through the glass as they scratched at their hoods, the bells around their legs ringing off the walls. Brittany spaniels jumped around on the back seat, panting and fogging up the windows with their excited breath. I was ignored like most kids are in adult conversations, but I was happy just to look at the dark birds inside the car. My father, of course, was invited to go out and "fly" with the falconer that night. I do remember my father saying, after the falconer had driven off:

"There by God, that's the man you should marry. We'll tie up this whole damned valley." I was fourteen years old at the time. I didn't marry him, but my older sister did some years later.

I found my very own falconer on the municipal golf course several years later while I was out riding. On the putting green was an older man hovering over his golf ball, gripping and regripping his putter, shifting his weight and making dry run swings, all those golfing rituals that only golfers fully understand. Just as his club was nearing the high point of his backswing, a large, grey bird dropped out of nowhere, seemed to hover midair above the golfer for a second, then deftly swooped down, grabbed the ball in its talons and flew off.

I saw some activity in the corner of my eye, and on the hill stood a man who was following the bird with his binoculars. It just so happened that I had a pair myself, always carrying them in the saddle bags for just this sort of occasion. I frantically dug them out, wiping the dust and pieces of hay off the lenses with my shirt. First I scanned the golfer who flung his putter onto the green and then bellowed up at the man on the hill.

"Either you get that goddamned thing outa here or I'm going to shoot the sonovabitch! That's the third ball I've lost." I panned back over to the man, who looked like he

was smiling. He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled back.

"Sorry about that. I'll get him back in a minute." There was a pause. "Did you happen to see which way he flew?" The golfer gave the man the finger and strode off toward his golf cart.

Back on the hill the man began swinging above his head a rope that had what appeared to be a dead chicken on the end. I fine-tuned the focus. It was in fact a dead chicken swinging above the man's head. The man let the chicken fall to the ground in front of him. A second later, again from nowhere, a large bird set its wings and came in for a long, slow descent. It landed on the dead chicken and spread its wings over it. It screamed and the man knelt down and picked up the chicken, and the bird stepped onto his fist. Seeing that the golfer was gone, I galloped across the green toward the bird and man, leaving a wake of divots behind me.

I had entered a whole new world. His falcon was a gyr named Louise, a large gentle bird who galloped around the living room chasing small, stuffed animals tossed across the floor. The walls were covered with falcon art. Falcons, falcons and dogs, falcons and dogs and grouse. Where there weren't paintings there was taxidermy, flying wood ducks, ruffed grouse stepping over miniature logs, and a couple of Hungarian partridge mounts in progress laid out on the

kitchen table, wires protruding out the heads and bags of stuffing sitting on a chair. A little plastic bag of glass bird eyes sat next to a half-empty can of beer.

At night Louise slept perched on the beam in the bedroom. In the morning I'd wake to the sounds of falcon shit splattering on newspaper. A Peregrine Fund baseball cap hung on a hook next to the bed. It was the first thing the falconer put on in the morning. Naked, except for the hat and leather glove, the falconer arose and walked out into the morning air, the falcon on his fist.

I was in love for the very first time. Our dates were spent hawking, as he called it, and if we weren't doing that, we sat on his bed and looked at photo albums (one per hunting season) and scrapbooks full of falcon memorabilia, grouse feathers placed strategically next to a photo of the bird and its kill. There were photos of kestrels sitting on backpacks, falcons standing on canvasbacks, beaks bloody and little pieces of down floating down into the grain stubble below.

And so I passed quite a few years of my young adulthood this way, ferreting out falconers who frequented my brother-in-law's breeding project.

With spring comes the time for hatching and artificial insemination over at the hawk barns. I sit in the gravel in the hallway while a male peregrine sits atop my brother-in-

law's head, happily ejaculating onto an L.L. Bean canvas hat.

"You just can't beat these hats for collecting semen," he says while his bird, a "sexual tyrannosaurus" named Willis, hops around flapping his wings, clinging to the hat brim. The semen is immediately sucked into a tiny pipette and will be planted in a female who has eyes for only one man.

The falconer enters her chamber and nods approvingly at her scrape.

"She's turned on all right."

He chupps to her and she answers, her head down and tail raised provocatively in the air.

In a few weeks there'll be buyers sitting around the backyard porch sipping rum and cokes while young, downy-speckled falcons are hacked out on rooftops and circle playfully over cowboys and nervous horses trying to bring in cows below in the hay meadows.

For nine months out of the year, my father spends untold hundreds of dollars feeding the wild turkeys. The turkeys, joined by a half dozen peahens, roost in the ponderosas behind our log house at the base of Big Goose Canyon. The turkeys gather on the lawn each afternoon, scuffling and squabbling among themselves, strutting and scratching at the gravel on the driveway. Then one by one,

when the sun begins to slip behind the Big Horns, they methodically strut and pick their way up a brushy, rocky hill just adjacent to our house, where I can see them from my window. Immediately after any loud sudden noise, like a dog barking, or if you call to someone across the field, the turkeys will all, in unison, gobble back for a second. The gobbling ends as abruptly as it begins, like the applause at a golf tournament. It's just one more strange thing about turkeys no one understands or worries about. They'll do it only at this time of day. Once they reach about halfway up the hill, they can then light off and fly directly into the pines without having to gain so much altitude. It's a testament to turkey intelligence that they've figured this out. They light off in pairs or singly, aiming, I assume, for strategic branches. I watch the creaking limbs dip and sway as each bird lands, then tip back and forth getting its balance and sending snow billowing to the ground below. There's always fighting going on over the best branches, and a turkey will crash down through the trees, snapping twigs all the way down. Watching a turkey fly is a marvelous thing, maybe because it seems so improbably, but seeing two hundred turkeys gliding overhead in the morning, wings set, their huge bodies right over the roof, is an amazing sight; they look like a squadron of B-52's.

I've gotten a lot better at my bird ID's since I've spent so much time with falconers. They expect you to know

the birds better than your average Joe, but never as well as, and certainly never better than, the falconer himself. The only ones that could trip up a falconer would be the LBJ's, Little Brown Jobs. Tweeties. A favorite game is to whip out a Peterson's field guide and cover the bird's name and have them make the identification. "Don't even bother," they'd wave me off smugly, a rum and coke tinkling in their hand. "I know them all." They're rarely wrong, and if they were you'd never know it because they could easily bluff their way out.

My brother-in-law pimps my father from time to time. Competition among birders runs high.

"I bet you don't know what that one is," my father challenges from the living room window overlooking his trout pond. My brother-in-law rises to the challenge and takes the binos.

"Careful, careful now. It's a tricky one," Dad says. My brother-in-law crunches on some ice and focuses the binos.

"No problem." He sets the binos down next to the mounted least weasel. "It's a *Dendropicos serindipidus*," he says, telling me later he's pulled the name completely out of thin air. He managed, somehow, to keep a straight face.

"Very good. That's exactly what it is. I'm surprised you got the genus correct as well. You're becoming a more satisfactory son-in-law all the time," Dad says approvingly.

I ask Dad how he knows all these birds, and from such a distance.

"Because I'm a goddamned naturalist, that's why."

A man I've just met at a wedding reception is a little puzzled about the whole falconry business. After so many toasts to the bride and groom, I don't recall how we got on the subject. "How can they keep such a proud bird like that in captivity?" he asks. And it's a sincere question. I fix my gaze on the carnation adorning his tuxedo and try to gather my wits. I find myself, once again, in the awkward position of defending this sport.

I've never flown a falcon, or had the least desire to be a falconer. But I have thought a lot about the sport, and the art of falconry--usually while trudging over hills, carrying the extra bird on my arm, or sitting patiently in the truck while the falconer braves -30 degree weather to track down his bird with telemetry. And somewhere in my weak defense I am reminded of a conversation I once had with a falconer I admire very much.

In the living room was a framed photograph of a dark grey falcon with a bloody beak sitting on a dead canvasback.

"Who's this?" I had asked.

"A passage gyr I once had."

"What's passage mean?"

"I took her from the wild. Trapped her when she was young."

"And you flew her?" He had nice hands. I remember noticing them while he spoke.

"Yeah. I flew her. At first all I wanted to do was stare at her, all day long. I must have taken a million pictures."

"And she caught game and would come back to you. and you could walk up to her?" I asked.

"Basically, yea. I mean they aren't like this imprint gyr here who would rather be with people than with other birds. The best you can hope for with a passage bird is that they'll learn to tolerate you. You don't want them to buddy up too much."

"Why not?" I must have sounded like a six-year-old. I should have just surrendered to my childish curiosity and asked, like I used to then, "How come for?"

"Well, so they won't get to liking people so much that they lose all fear. So they don't land on some farmer's barn looking for goodies and then get shot because the farmer thinks it's a chicken hawk out to get his chickens. Happens enough as it is."

"So this bird was born in the wild, knew how to take care of itself, and each time you flew her she could just say, 'to hell with this' and fly off and be perfectly happy."

"Right."

"And she never did that?" I asked.

"No."

I thought about that for a moment.

"I don't get it."

"Neither do I, sometimes."

We were quiet for a minute.

"What ever happened to her?"

"I let her go."

"You mean you just turned her back to the wild?" He nodded.

"I fed her up, let her loose and turned and walked away."

"I could never do that. Not with anything I was attached to."

He shrugged and said, "Well, I guess that's the difference between you and me."

I found something very erotic about the whole falconry business. Maybe it was as simple as the smell of leather or being in the fall in the evening light. Maybe it was the grace of a falcon or the eery sound of the wind rushing over the wings of a peregrine traveling at a hundred and some miles an hour and landing on a man's outstretched fist. I don't know; maybe it was just my hormones acting up. But I do know I have never failed to feel a chill up my spine when

I see a falcon pull into a teardrop shape and fall to the earth. It's a sight I don't believe anyone would forget.

The other day I found a falconer sitting at his taxidermy table. He was stitching up a neck of a cock pheasant. I had forgotten how beautiful a bird they are, the feathers with their bronzes, golds, greens and blacks. Truly a spectacular animal. It was only when I stopped to touch the shimmering neck feathers that I realized the bird was still alive. I looked at the falconer, aghast. He shrugged.

"My falcon caught it today. She didn't kill it, and it just had this tear on its neck, so I thought I'd sew it up." He carried the bird to the front door and smoothed the feathers on its back.

"Pretty little birds, aren't they?" he said. He placed the bird on the lawn and we watched while the pheasant trotted across the grass and disappeared into the timothy of the hay meadow.

"That's what I like about this sport," he said, "you can recycle your game."

Above our porch at the back door is a rotting log that protrudes a foot or more from the rest of the house. The log continues to rot, and according to several who know about this sort of thing, will rot right into the house and cause problems down the road. We have refused to saw it off

because, for five years now, my father's peacock roosts there every night. His hens rejected him for the company of the wild turkeys, so he sleeps alone above our heads as we walk through the door. At night, on a full moon, after a light snow, I can look out the window and see his blue and green iridescent tail gracefully hanging down and a blanket of powdery snow sticking to his back and tail. Over the years I have tried to imitate the sad, mournful call of the peacock, and from inside the house I call to him. I see his tail shift as he rises, the snow falling away, and he answers. Whether he yearns for his hens who roost with the turkeys or just finds the sound of his own species comforting to him, I don't know.

CRAWL

He never saw the beach during the day. And after his first few years he never wanted to. The night and its shadows held a mystery, and uncertainty, that the sun's glare washed away. He felt, somehow, if it were seen by day the mysteries would be exposed.

He walked the entire beach each night, his feet growing heavier with the accumulation of sand rubbing against his ankles and toes, his calves sore and tired from being pulled by the coarse white sand. He tried easily. And when he was about to give up he would sit for a long time staring at the sky and trying to remember the constellations. He would often think he saw a turtle bumping slowly in the surf and he would feel a rush of excitement and anticipation. But he never saw her come ashore; it would only be a tangled ball of seaweed, or a torn net from a fishermen's boat. And he would walk on, waiting and looking for her.

He would remember his first night as a young boy when he discovered the beach. A piece of plywood with scrawled, childish lettering was nailed to a tree. Red paint had dripped from the bottoms of the letters that read: "Nesting area. No vehicles past this point." He climbed under the

rope tied between the bushes to ward off trucks. The air was warm and moist and the sand felt like snow as his feet sunk with each step. At first he had not known what to look for. Out of the dark he would hear a deep voice with a friendly musical Caribbean accent.

"You be careful out t'ere boy. T'ose turtles, t'ey big enough to eat you." He would see a bright beam from a flashlight, hear a low laugh, and he would then be alone again.

He began to think of these creatures as ghosts from the sea, never seen by man. But the next night he would find a wide, dark strip of sand winding from the sea--a crawl from the night before. The boy would kneel beside the perfectly spaced chevrons, running his fingers gently inside each through left by her flippers and tail. He would even sometimes smell the ridges of her tracks, hoping to detect a turtle smell, any proof to him that she did exist. He imagined what she must have looked like, dragging herself up the beach with her front flippers, an inch at a time. He would follow the crawl to the spot she had chosen to lay her eggs.

Somewhere off the island coast in the night a lone female turtle swims toward shore. She is faintly aware of a pain in a front flipper, but is even more aware of an urgency deep within her, and urgency that she can't

understand or control, but that inevitably leads her to land. She glides gracefully with an ease and swiftness that has out-maneuvered the shark. Her senses guide her legendary navigation. She feels the sand bar beneath her and she rests. The surf gently carries her huge body farther onto the sand and a moment later the water and sand go rushing past her again, pulling her out to sea. She looks toward the dark coast and smells the air, her eyes blinking away the salt water. She senses no danger. This land feels familiar to her, and she begins her journey to the beach.

It is an especially dark night, and the man's eyes are slow in adjusting to the low light. The beach seems to go on forever, the bushes and trees blending with the black air and seeming to move like animals in the night's ocean breeze. A small brown dog trots ahead, zig zagging up and down the beach, the small head low, sniffing the ground. The man feels discouraged and his legs ache from walking in the heavy sand. It will soon be dawn and he has walked the length of the beach since dusk with no sign of a turtle. He squats down, scooping out a large dish in the sand to sit in. He takes his tennis shoes off and dumps the sand out of each. His shoes are stiff with wet sand and sea salt. Mosquitos swarm near his ears and he suddenly itches all over from imaginary bites. The insect repellent he carries

in his pocket smells of burnt rubber and he smears it over his arms and face. There are no stars or moon, only the white from the foam in the sea breaks the blackness around him. Lightning from dark heavy clouds lights the horizon for an instant and he smells a storm in the humid air. He puts his shoes on and stands, shaking the sand from his pants. Far up the beach he hears faint, excited barking from his dog. He walks quickly, close to the waterline, toward the sound.

The turtle allows herself to be washed onto the sand and as she leaves the sea for land, she feels her grace and weightlessness vanish into sudden heaviness and vulnerability. She throws her front flippers forward, pauses, and slowly, slowly she pulls her body forward several inches. She repeats this rhythm over and over until she is unable to continue and must stop. Sand is ground into her wound and she feels a flash of pain with each stroke. She lays her head on the sand and breathes heavily, trying to catch her breath.

He sees a small figure ahead. It is his dog crouched down on its elbows with rear end in the air, tail wagging frantically, barking at something too far away for the man to identify.

"Heel, Emma! Dammit, Heel! Come Here!" The dog turns toward him, flattens her ears in apology and trots to his side, water dripping from the long dark hairs from her stomach. Her nose is covered with sand. She sneezes and licks his hand.

"Now sit. Stay. Good girl."

The dog looks quickly from the large dark figure back to the man, her long shaggy tail sweeping an arc in the sand.

From where he stands he can see that she has returned. A long wide stretch of dark, wet sand winds up the berm for nearly fifty yards. As he nears he sees that her crawl is erratic, with several turns leading back toward the sea. Perhaps she had been confused by distant lights of frightened by unfamiliar noise. The man stops to catch his breath and hears her labored breathing. She lies before him, apparently oblivious to his presence. She is remarkably huge, resembling, in a comic way, a beached volkswagen. As she rests he kneels beside her. Her flipper span would be close to eight feet, her length nearly six. He had forgotten the awe he had first experienced when he had seen his first sea turtles, the sheer size and presence overwhelming him. He ran his hand along her carapace, feeling the sand and barnacles on the smooth black leathery surface. Between the raised keels running down her back were several scratches and scars. He moved towards her

head, careful not to alarm her. Her eyes and nose were caked with sand and mucous streamed from large, dark eyes. her face looked at once very old, very sad and at the same time, curiously prehistoric. On the leading edge of her left flipper was a deep gash several inches long. Blood and sand were mixed with torn flesh. The muscles in her shoulders were warm and hard, (and the man carefully avoided getting in her way, fearing a broken leg from her powerful strokes). She would soon dig her nest hole, and he sat near her to watch as she began.

She clears away the last of the sand around her, making a pit, and arranges her body so that it feels right. With her back flippers she begins to carve a hole beneath her tail. She is methodical and precise in her movements, delicately feeling the sides of the hole with almost handlike flippers, constantly judging its width and depth. She scoops out a small amount of sand at a time, throwing it up onto a shelf she has created. For more than ten minutes she works on her hole, scooping and tamping and scooping. It must feel perfect to her before she'll lay. Her flippers grow tired from reaching so far in and she begins to lose effectiveness.

The man lies on his stomach behind her and shines a penlight into her hole. It is over three feet deep and

honed smoothly and evenly. It looks, to him, just right, but still she stretches downward with her flippers digging, not yet to her satisfaction. As she takes another scoop the sides collapse, filling her hole more than halfway. The man feels for her, and moves back to give her room and to see what she will do.

She suddenly feels a weight on her flippers. Something is very wrong now, and she is confused with not being able to see in back of her. She pulls her flippers out of the fallen sand, knowing she won't be able to lay here. She begins to pull herself forward to find a new spot.

The man follows close behind as she drags herself along the sand. After several yards she once again thrashes both flippers around, clearing away a pit for her body. She repositions herself and begins to carve a new hold. She seems frantic, and stops several times to lay her head down and rest.

The pain in her shoulder grows worse and although she rests frequently her flippers seem to have lost their flexibility and sense of touch. She gropes near the bottom of the hole, feeling its sides, and once again a sudden startling weight falls on her flippers. A sense of urgency

and desperation come over her. She hasn't the strength to go any farther. She must lay here.

The man can't stand much more of this disappointment, and he pulls himself forward on his stomach to see if he can help her in anyway. He holds the penlight in his teeth and begins to scoop out the sand that has fallen into her hole. His hands often bump into her flippers as she digs with him, and she doesn't seem to be aware of his presence. He copies the delicate movements of her flippers, trying to anticipate what she would want. He finds the work surprisingly difficult and his arms tire quickly from reaching in until his shoulders can go no farther. The night air is sticky and sweat starts to run into his eyes and the insect repellent burns his skin. He can feel sand on his face and between his teeth. She stops digging, and he tamps the sides hoping they don't cave in again. He pulls back away from her and wipes the sweat and sand from his forehead.

She is at last satisfied. She brings up one flipper and instinctively covers the opening as best she can, hiding her nest from predators. She lifts her tail slightly and begins to feel a sense of relief.

One...one two...one two three...one...one two...one two three four, the eggs come dropping down into the hole,

plopping gently on the top of the pile and rolling down. The man counts eighty five eggs, although towards the end they came so fast it became nearly impossible to get an accurate count. He smells the musky, fishy turtle odor and gently touches an egg, moist and warm and as white and round as a pool ball. She finishes and begins to scoop the sand back onto the eggs, periodically tamping down the sand. The man then watches a remarkable act of camouflage. When she completely fills her nest she goes into a frenzied motion, all four flippers thrashing about at once. She moves several feet and threshes some more, continuing this until about a fifty foot square area, resembling a blasting zone, is so torn that it completely obscures her nest site. Neither man nor any predator can tell the exact spot where she has laid her eggs. The man sits down for a long time, his dog lying close to his side, watching her slowly make her way back to the sea.

She feels the water wash over her, and her sense of helplessness begins to fade. She pulls herself one last time and lets the water carry her away from the land. She rests for a minute, her body rising and falling gently with the surf. She once again feels weightless and free and strong. She raises her flippers far above her back and pushes down, diving far into the dark world she knows so well.

The man follows her crawl to the waterline, where the waves have begun to erase the chevrons from the sand. He looks up to see her head above the water. He hears her blow through her nostrils and sees her eyes blink as she looks out to sea. Then she is gone. The man has no idea where she will go, or what she must feel. He only knows that she will someday return, as she and her ancestors have done for so many millions of years. He turns and walks towards the bright lights of the city, the cruise ships in the harbor all lit up like Christmas trees.

THE ART OF FLYING

Flying terrifies me, always has, which probably explains why I made such a shitty pilot.

I was walking through the bathroom on the way to the TV room when it all started. My father was in the tub, reading a war novel.

"Say, kid," he said, the bubbles clinging to his sides. I tried not to look through the water at whatever else the bubbles were clinging to. I sat on the toilet seat while he put his novel on a towel next to the tub. His glasses had slid to the end of his nose and I could see where he'd been twirling his hair again, a twisted spike of it sticking straight up in the air.

"Ever given any thought to learning to fly, like your old man?"

"Never." He looked at me a minute. I felt bad for disappointing him. I tried fishing and it bored the hell out of me. I did make an effort, though. I went to the Keys once with him and stood on the bow of a tiny boat that rocked back and forth in three feet of water. The day was spent staring into the salt flats for signs of bonefish.

"Boy, isn't this great?" Dad had said, brimming with enthusiasm, the wind blowing his khaki hat brim into a curl above his head. There had been a spot of sunscreen not quite rubbed in on his chin.

"Riveting," I had said.

So now he wanted me to learn to fly.

"Well," he said, swishing his glasses in the water and rubbing them on a towel, "if you ever decide to take lessons, I'll pop for it. Consider it a graduation present."

"Thank you. That's very generous. Really. I'll think about it, Dad."

"Great, sport." We looked at each other for a moment. "Sure wish I could have turned you into an angler." He smiled.

"You did your best. I guess I just like horses better. Sorry." The subject never came up again.

I was driving into town one afternoon and a shadow passed over my pickup. I looked up to see a small plane pass overhead and disappear over the hill to the airport. It occurred to me how dull my life was. I decided this was the moment to begin my flight training. I managed to repress the opinion I'd always had that flying was thoroughly unnatural and that something as large as a 747 couldn't possibly get airborne with the tonnage of fat asses, fuel, luggage, seats and food trays all packed into

it. Man figured he had a right t the skies and forced his way up. Someday I knew that privilege would be revoked and all those planes would simultaneously come down like rocks.

I moved to Miami, took a job as a tour guide in a zoo, and took ground school and flight lessons on my off days when I wasn't making up stories to fifth graders about the length of an elephant's penis.

"Tamiami ground, 4644 Bravo is ready for departure." I say. I sound like Captain Holbrook, so calm, so cool. It's easy on the radio, everyone sounds intelligent, efficient. Pilots are like doctors writing prescriptions; the more indecipherable the message the better. Only the chosen speak the language. My leg's shaking on the rudder. It's hot and my shirt's already sticking to the back of the seat. My legs are jammed up against the instructor's. This plane's tiny and there's no air conditioning. I turn around and see nothing but a tire that takes up the whole window. A 737 is right behind me.

"Come on, babe. No time to put your make-up on. Get your ass up in the air." Mike sits in the right seat, tennis shoes tossed behind in the back, one foot propped up on the control panel, the other sticking out the side window. He's tapping his foot, but I don't know what to. He's wearing mirror sunglasses and chewing gum. I get wafts of cinnamon every now and then.

"Right rudder, dammit. Stay on the center line, girl."
I shove in the rudder and feel the plane lurch sideways.

Florida's flat and homely from the air, not much different from on the ground, I was disappointed to find out. After an hour of doing lazy eights over the Everglades, Mike announces he's bored and suggests doing turns above a point over Stiltsville. I bank and head for the shore. We do 360's two hundred feet over someone's house. I can see a cat sitting on the railing staring up at me. My eyes move from the altimeter to the artificial horizon to my airspeed, back to the cat circling beneath me. My turns are perfect. Mike doesn't seem to notice. He's popping his gum and looking out his side window at the Miami shoreline. We fly until dark. The city looks beautiful. I can see the moon coming up over the ocean and the air is cool and calm. I want to stay up here forever. Mike looks at me and smiles.

"Doin' good, kiddo." Then he starts to rub the back of my neck. He could have been a professional baseball player, he says. But now he models for Ralph Lauren and teaches flying.

On final approach he starts kissing the back of my neck. He says I look like Lyndsay Wagner. Two days ago one of his Puerto Rican students said I was Gilda Radner's twin.

Not being easily distracted is one of those things instructors like to test you on. They'll start rifling

around for a lost pen or ask stupid questions or even force open their door, the prop blast blowing crap all over the cockpit, trying to get you to lose concentration. I learned the hard way with a warm hand unbuttoning my shirt while I coasted in over the threshold.

My father had a Piper cub. He'd mix a scotch and water in a dixie cup and say, "Sport, by God, let's go circle over the spread a time or two," and we'd buffet along the Missions, circling the ranch and looking for elk. I was four then and the only one who'd get in the plane with him. He'd have to sneak me off when my mother wasn't around. I didn't know any better. I was content to sit behind him and suck on a pacifier. It was one of the times I was trying to switch that habit over to lemon drops that I choked on one and my father made a panicked landing in the horse pasture. He ended up nosing it in on an irrigation ditch. I remember snorting Appaloosas blowing fogged breath and prancing around us while my father bashed between my shoulder blades trying to get me to cough it up.

My father, after seeing where I had scribbled Mike's name in big fat letters all over in my logbook, insisted I take a more mature approach to flying, and when I came back from Florida he sent me to Dale Klevgard, my second instructor.

Dale wore a suit and tie. He rushed over to open airplane doors for me. "I pride myself on being one of the last remaining gentlemen," he'd quip. I was not allowed to deplane without him galloping around the front of the plane, the prop-wind whipping his tie across his face, to get my door. Dale took exquisite care of the airplanes. Each morning when the temperature was below 30 degrees, I'd find him, shivering in his blue nylon Flacon Flight jacket, towing the little brown and white plane into the hangar, where he'd hook up the engine to an enormous blow dryer to warm it up. I'd wait nearby, running my hands over the smooth sides of a Leer and imagine Mike flying it while Dale carefully draped an old grease-stained packing quilt over the cowling to keep it warm while we had coffee.

My flying progressed under Dale's tutelage. Forced landings in Reynolds' pasture no longer unnerved me or Reynolds' replacement heifers. I got to where the stall horn would come on at precisely the moment the rear wheels squeaked onto the runway. Dale no longer had to tap his ball point pen on my air speed indicator and raise his eyebrows at me during final approach. I had amassed 100 hours in dual instruction. I was looking forward to soloing. Other students who had begun when I did were now completing their instrument rating. Some were probably flying for TWA. But that didn't discourage me. I pressed on. I even learned to control my foul mouth, at least in

the cockpit. I started to expect all men to open doors for me.

But I still needed a Valium every time I got in a commercial jet. I discovered that the theory of knowing how to fly erases the fear you feel in commercial jets is total horseshit. It makes it worse when you know you're barreling down the runway with a tailwind instead of a headwind and the plane can't get airborne, and you can count off the threshold markers every thousand feet until you know you only have 500 feet left of runway. Everyone else is oblivious and too busy adjusting their seat belts and headphones. But I loved the small planes, the comforting sound of the engine, the feel of the cool smooth metal and their grace in the air. I was starting to really like flying.

Then my father invited Dale and his wife over for dinner.

"So, Dale, when are you going to get the Pointed Head to solo? Isn't 100 hours a little ridiculous?" My father shouted from the kitchen. Dale was busy looking at the semi automatic rifles hanging up on the wall. Nancy, his wife, flipped through a Fly Fisherman magazine.

"Well, sir . . ."

"Lambert, please. I haven't heard 'sir' since my old Navy days." I glared at Dad to let him know not to start

reminiscing about his Navy days when he thought he was being brave by being the first to dive off his ship during a typhoon. He landed head first in mud and was court marshaled for abandoning ship.

"Well, Lambert, each student is an individual. Some need more time to get the basics down. Some, like your daughter here, fly perfectly well; they just need the confidence. We wouldn't want to push premature soloing."

"Well, maybe it was because I was a man and all, but hell, I soloed in less than eight hours. Eight." I saw that Dad had strategically left his logbook lying on the coffee table next to the fishing magazines.

"Right," I said. He failed to point out that during his first cross-country he dropped his cigarette between the seats and caught the cockpit on fire. He didn't fly again for ten years.

"You know my sister, the Pointed Head's namesake, died while flying. Tragic thing, really," Dad said. Dale looked uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Well, it was one of those freak things that, in a car, you can get away with. She went to light up during her takeoff and instead of pulling the cigarette lighter, she pulled the fuel mixture knob. The engine, of course, petered to a standstill and she crashed right there on the

runway." I heard him shut the door to the microwave oven. "She wanted to be a helicopter pilot. Never made it."

There was silence in the room. He sounded pretty cavalier about the whole thing, but hen I guess he was only five when it happened.

"Gee. Kind of makes you want to stop smoking, doesn't it?" said Dale. He picked up the drink Dad had mixed him, sniffed it, winced, and put it down. Nancy whispered something to Dale. Dale cleared his throat and smiled nervously.

"Say, why don't you turn on the TV while I fix the Caesar salad, kid?" Dad shouted over the oven timer going off.

The trouble was, Dad had left the satellite dish tuned to the Ecstasy Channel. He even had a little post-it note with "G-19" stuck to his remote control box. The image came on of a nun hurling her habit across a row of pews and kneeling before a priest. Dale was aghast. Nancy turned white and excused herself to the restroom. A rapid switch over to CNN proved a little late in the day. Dale and Nancy excused themselves and left without further ado, leaving Dad in the kitchen holding a dish of steaming baby green peas in his hands.

That ended my instruction under Dale. The next day I found a note flapping in the wind and taped to the windshield of 4984 Papa.

"I have always viewed the nude female body as a thing to be revered. A gift from God. Each time I look at my wife, laying next to me naked, I never cease to be amazed at His creation. Seeing that on the TV last night has disturbed me greatly, as it has my wife, as you can imagine. We would both feel better if I recommended you to another instructor. Keep up the good work and, of course, watch your airspeed."

Dale

Shortly after I found Dawn, my third instructor. A female, this time. It was odd, being in a plane with another woman. It shouldn't be, of course, but it was. For one thing, she continually told me things I already knew.

"Remember, when you take off the plane will pull to the left and you'll have to keep right rudder on to compensate."

"I know that," I snapped. How stupid did she think I was. After 100 hours you'd think she'd assume I'd figured that out.

"Rotate when you reach fifty knots," she said. It's hard to impress someone with your wealth of accumulated skill when they're constantly telling you to do something right before you are intending to do it. I kept telling myself she was just trying to be professional. I tried to control my irritation after we had leveled out and there wasn't anything for her to remind me about.

"How are you getting along with the other students?" I shouted over the engine nose.

"Older men don't take to the idea of a woman young enough to be their daughter telling them they're screwing

up. Doctors are the worst. Can't tell the bastards anything," she shouted back. I was beginning to like her.

"You up for buzzing my house?" I asked.

"Sure," she smiled. "I get tired of being the stuffy teacher. I miss screwing around."

"Great. It's what I'm good at." We circled the hay meadow and my bald-faced horse looked up at me. I could see a blue eye as he held his head sideways, then bucked and ran off into the cottonwoods.

Dawn and I flew three times a week and on her off days we took my horses along the face of the mountains or went to movies.

I was working up the nerve to solo. My landings were consistently good. I had memorized the checklist. Crosswinds were a snap. Even when Dawn made me cover my eyes while she purposely botched an approach and gave me the controls at the last second, I was able to make those split-second, Captain Holbrook decisions. The possibility of actually getting my license was a possibility.

Then Dad had me ask Dawn over to dinner.

We fed the fish in the pond while Dad mixed drinks. My boyfriend Trevor talked to Dawn about flying helicopters. I dropped pieces of raw hamburger down to a turtle floating on the surface. Trevor picked up a sling shot and winged a

handful of Purina Dog Chow across the pond. A couple of wing-clipped Canada geese turned and paddles back to the food. We waited for the five-second lull before the water boiled with hundreds of bloated, hand-fed trout.

Dad walked down the flagstone steps to the dock, tame Canada geese waddling out of his way, rum and cokes sloshing onto his madras shirt. I could hear the timer going off from inside the cabin and two seconds later the tier that hung around his neck went off. It looked like he was wearing a soap-on-a-rope.

"Well, boys, dinner's on," Dad said.

"Here's our show," Dad announced later, looking at the TV just as we were eating our dessert of frozen brownies. Trevor had already finished his and was tapping his finger on the aquarium full of baby Norther pike.

"Now dammit, quit harassing my pike," Dad snapped. Dawn got up to look and watched the six-inch, bottle-nosed fish dart around plastic logs and rocks. One remaining goldfish was hiding in some fake seaweed.

"How'd you get pike? Isn't that illegal?" Dawn asked. She hadn't noticed the goldfish fearing for its life.

"If I want pike I'll damn well have pike. Screw the Game and Fish. I feed their frigging elk all winter." He turned the TV up and shut off the easy listening station. The movie was "Little Big Man."

During the final Indian slaughter scene, Trevor went outside to take a leak. He came in buttoning his jeans and said, "Here's a hooter out there, Lambert."

"What?" Dad shouted, shooting out of his chair. "Goddamned owls, eating all my goslings." Dad bounded for the door, reached up and grabbed his twenty gauge on the way out. It was the one with the engrave ducks on it.

We all sat and tried to listen to what was going on outside, but couldn't hear much with the Indian whopping and gun shots going on in the movie. Dawn was looking down at her drink, swirling the melting ice cubes around in her glass. Trevor and I looked at each other.

"Don't worry, he won't hit anything. It's dark," Trevor said.

"You could have kept your mouth shut, you know." I said to Trevor just as we heard one shot, then another.

"He missed, I'm sure." I heard the brass door bells chime when Dad walked in through the door. He appeared in the doorway, holding a great horned owl by a wing, blood dripping on the indoor-outdoor carpet. I saw Dad look up at the TV then back over at us.

"I counted coup, by God," he said.

And that pretty much took care of my flying with Dawn.

Several months later I went down to get the mail and found a black and white Cessna 152 sitting near the calving

shed. A red ribbon flapped from a wing strut. From a distance it looked like a huge magpie. The cows surrounded the plane, stretching their necks out and noses up sniffing the air. My father was trying futilely to push it back under the shed.

"Good God, what are you doing?" He saw me and beamed. He was out of breath and sat down on the feed trough.

"Well, Sport, it's for you." He wiped the sweat away from his forehead with a handkerchief and stuck his hand out to a sniffing black heifer. The heifer lurched and swung away, tail stuck in the air. He smiled. "Friendly fellas, aren't they?" I just looked at him. He got up and ran his hand along the leading edge of a wing and tapped the cylindrical metal tube that stuck out.

"Pitot tube. Yes sir." Dad eyed the pitot tube fondly. "You know what that is for, certainly?"

"I think so."

"You think so? You better damn well know."

"I was kidding." He just looked at me.

"I know it's used, got several thousand hours on it, but it flies and it's just like the one you're used to." I had no idea what to say.

"How'd you get it here?"

"That was the trick of the week, I'll tell you. Hell, I would have flown the damn thing myself, but well, it's been twenty years and I'm used to tail draggers, you know."

That was the least of his problems. "So I hired some pilot to fly it out here. Had to put it down in the meadow. Tricky landing. They just don't make them like those Cubs anymore." I looked around for the pilot.

"Where is the poor bastard, you make him walk back to town?" I asked.

"Of course not. I just drove back from dropping him off." He paused a moment. I could just make out the faint smell of Listerine on his breath. He's been on the wagon for several years, but he sure seemed to go through the mouthwash.

"Hell of a nice guy. Made a great landing here. Tipped him a hundred bucks." I looked inside the cockpit. The plane had brand new radios but the seats' upholstery was worn. It smelled like an old plane, a mixture of kerosene and oil and plastic.

"Well, Dad, this is great. I don't know what to say." The pressure would be on to get my license, I could see that.

"So, let's take it up for a spin. I figure we can push it over to the county road and take off there. It's straight, no telephone lines to bugger us up."

"You have to be kidding. I can't do that. I don't have my license yet. It's highly, highly illegal." He looked at me.

"Oh, for Christ's sake. Who'll know? It's my goddamned plane and my goddamned ranch, and if I want to go flying with my daughter, I will. How many hours do you have anyway? Give me a rough estimate."

"A rough estimate?" I thought about it. I debated lying but thought the truth would get a better response.

"Somewhere around 125."

"Christ Almighty. You only need 40 to get your license. What have you been doing all this time? An urangatang could get his license in that amount of time. Can you at least do a short field take off?"

"Yes."

"Ever done a soft field landing?"

"Dozens of times."

"Do your instructors ever even touch the damned controls when you're at the wheel?"

"Never. But the point is, I know they're there."

"So, basically, then you could fly all by yourself with no trouble?"

"Right."

"So let's do it. Hell, I still have my license, you know. Just like getting on a bicycle. We're in good shape."

"Not quite." I looked at Dad all happy in his new aviator scarf he must just have bought. I looked at the

road, recently graded. The winds were calm. The airport and authorities were twenty miles off.

Taxiing down the gravel road was interesting. We bounded along, hearing the gravel ping against the sides of the plane. Dad patted me on the shoulder.

"This is great. What fun. God, how I've missed my flying days. Watch it, right rudder, there."

"I know." I pulled back on the control wheel and we lifted off gently. It was strange seeing a road underneath me instead of a runway. It was a perfect evening for flying. The sun had gone behind the mountains and the land had taken on a yellow glow that reminded me of fall. I wasn't nervous, maybe because Dad seemed to be so into looking around that he wasn't even noticing my flying.

"Let's go buzz the cabin," Dad yelled at me over the engine. I nodded.

"Want to check the place for owls?" I asked him. He pointed to his ear and shook his head.

"Forget it," I said.

"What?" he said again, frowning and pointing at his ear again.

"Forget it!" I bellowed. He nodded and pointed down at something on the ground and smiled. I made a professional bank and came around to get the view from my side.

It was a coyote galloping through the sage, its head angled up at us. We circled the cabin several times, Dad looking out his window and tapping on the glass every now and then, looking at me and smiling. My flying was smooth and I was feeling pretty accomplished. After we circled a few more times, Dad pointed to his watch and tapped on the window toward home. I nodded and turned back. I wanted to be Captain Holbrook forever, just like this.

I had no idea what it would be like landing. I hadn't realized the hills were so close to the road and would screw up my pattern. I'd done a pattern a hundred times, the same runway, the same landmarks, distance, every time. And now everything looked foreign and very menacing. I'd have to circle to the right instead of the left this time and I struggled to figure out how to position myself so I could enter the rectangular pattern at a forty-five degree angle. I got to where I was lined up above the road and looked at Dad. He was now watching me. "Interesting approach," he mouthed. I looked down and knew I was way too high. I tried to remember that a narrower runway will look farther away than it really is. I looked at the altimeter and was horrified to realize I hadn't set it before I took off. I'd have to go around. If I tried it here I'd hit the cattle guard.

I hadn't done a go around for more than a year. My approaches were always so perfect I never needed to. I

could feel my hands shaking on the control wheel. I tapped Dad and mouthed the words "go around." He looked a little puzzled. I tried not to look at him any longer. I pushed in full throttle and pulled up the nose to get back some altitude. And then everything went blank. It was if I had for years, been hypnotized into believing that I could fly, and then suddenly the hypnotist snaps his fingers and I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. It was like a nightmare where you find yourself alone in a plane and no one to fly it. I saw myself and my father and a smashed 152 on the gravel road. I saw my picture on the nightly news. The thought occurred to me that I had absolutely no business in the air. And never did. And I had no clue as to how to get back on the ground. I would have done anything to be able to pull over and get out. I felt my dad shaking my arm.

"What the hell are you doing?" he bellowed. I forced myself to look out. I could see the hay meadow and a couple of cows slowly circling below me. I remembered somehow to look at my instruments. My airspeed was in the red zone and I was in a steep dive to the left. Graveyard spiral, they call it, when pilots panic in the clouds. And this was it. I could feel the control wheel moving and knew Dad was trying to take over. I looked at him. I had never seen him afraid before. This is what terror looked like.

"No." I screamed and slapped his hand as hard as I could to get him to let go of the control wheel.

"Then do something or you'll kill both of us!" he bellowed. I thought for sure we were going to die.

I don't know how I knew, because I was never taught how to get out of what they call an "unusual attitude" in a plane, but I found myself pulling the power all the way off, leveling the wings and gradually pulling the nose up while slowly increasing the power. I could feel the G forces shove me into my seat and it took all my strength to pull the control wheel back. Both legs were shaking. But I made it and managed to get back lined up above the road, and not too high this time. Dad, I'm sure, was still bug-eyed and quite sobered up. I couldn't look at him and didn't until I was on the ground and had taxied over to the calving shed. I killed the engine and we both just sat there staring out the window watching the propellers slowly swing to a stop.

"What happened up there?" he finally asked. We were still looking straight ahead.

"I don't know. God, I'm sorry. I can't do it. I tried telling myself I could but I never should have done such a stupid thing. I'm not a pilot. I'm a chicken shit. I've never been so scared in my life. And I've let you down."

I wanted to cry but couldn't. My body was humming and I felt numb and drained. We must have sat here for a half hour, not saying anything, not getting out even. We just

sat there. I do remember it was the only time my father
ever held me. And I never flew again.

MUTTON

Come live with me, and be my sheep,
And we will some new pleasures reap,
Of silken fleece, and fuzzy cheeks,
With pudgy hams that Bo Peep seeks.

There lustily I peruse lambing pens of lactating ewes,
Cheered by spurned wethers¹⁰, eyes, more that a few.
And there the comingling sheep will stay,
Bleating themselves they may betray.

When thou wilt graze in that dense field,
Each lamb, which every meadow's grass thus conceals,
Will nervously to thee lope¹¹,
Cheerier to hold thee than thou hope.

If, perhaps, thou should be sheared, and spread,
Best love by Cheeze Whiz, Velveta, below and above,
And if myself have need to eat - no - oh me,
I need no such added fat; relishing bare meat of thee.

Your brown eyes flash, with lashes batting,
My they're long.
Your heart beats quick; those thighs part,
quivering and strong.
My fingers stroll through pure white wool,
No hair spray, rollers, make up; perfection's wonderful.

Let others romp with human prey,
And cut their hearts on girlish, foolish ways.
Or dangerously play with STD's¹²,
Lies off fickle tongues roll with ease.

¹⁰One of many replies to Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love."

¹¹Castrated ram, possible pun on "whether." Hard to say.

¹²Canter, gallop, gallumph, amble, sashay

Hip-waders, your hocks I place in each,
Velcro, too, my dear.¹³

Those panting, lusting ewes cry from barns, so near.
And jealous comely rams, those large-balled boys,
Are soon befuddled by my poor mutton's libidinous ploys.

For thee, thou needst no other cover,
For thou thyself are mine own perfect lover,
You, my sheep, are not human; I cannot lie,
But alas, are woolier far than I.

¹³A tried and tested method of minimizing escaping and thrashing about by reluctant sheep. Discovered first by fly fishermen in 16th Century Scotland, it was found that hip waders, although primitive in comparison with today's models, allowed for enough extra room, and convenient height, above ground, to accommodate both a man's legs as well as a leg of lamb. Originally, burdock (or cocklebur) was found to be practically impossible to extract from sheep wool and was discovered to be an excellent way to attach said sheep to human paramour. A belt made of burdock was designed, allowing the natural enmeshing ability of the weed to keep the sheep from escaping. Only after severe genital and skin irritations, to say nothing of trying to extract errant burdock from one's pubic hair, Velcro was invented to emulate burdock's natural adhesion, but without the plant's irritants.

THE DIK DIK OF KILIMANJARO

or

JAMBO COMES TOO DAMNED EARLY

(with apologies to Ernest)

The Mara River is a shallow, muddy river that forms the border between the Maasai Mara game preserve in Kenya in the northern border of the Great Serengeti in Tanzania. Close to the southern most bend there is a dried and frozen carcass of a pronghorn antelope. No one has explained what the antelope was seeking in Africa. Or why it was frozen.

"The wonderful thing about it is that you lose weight," he said. "That's how you know when it really has you by the short hairs."

"Really?"

"Quite certain. Sorry about the smell though. That must not be too fun." His wife stood near him. He didn't look at her face but at her necklace of tiny wooden lions and elephants. He looked away.

"Look at them," he said. "Is it the smell that brings them like that, or an entomological sixth sense?"

The man lay on a khaki green cot in the shade of his yellow nylon tent and as he peered out past the shade onto the shimmering heat waves that danced upon the plains, three horned beetles crawled toward his cot, steadfastly, silently, while in the sky outside lilac-breasted rollers dove and spun, searching for small flying insects in the afternoon heat.

"Is there anything I can do for you? I want to help."

"You can radio the Governor's Camp and send for some more toilet paper and a refill on my Lomotil prescription. Or you could shoot me. You're a good shot now. The White Hunter taught you well, didn't he? As well as a few other things, too, I imagine."

"Don't talk ugly to me. You know how I hate it when you do. But let's not quarrel. Not now, anyway. Perhaps I should read to you. We still have West With the Night, The Flame Trees of Thika, and Out of Africa, the screenplay as well as a first edition--"

"Please, no more. I can't take any more African hyperbole."

"Don't be such a shit."

"Why can't you let me die peacefully without insulting me."

"Dying is a bit of an exaggeration, don't you think?"

"You wait 'til you get this, then you'll know. Look at those bastards, they know it well." He looked down to a leg of his cot where a shiny black beetle was making its way up the wooden support, like a telephone repairman scaling a pole.

"Maselea!" He shouted. His personal boy came running.

"Yes, Bwana Kuebwa."

"Bring Fanta, the orange kind. And a jigger of Tanqueray."

"You know that's not a good combination." The woman said.

"I don't care anymore."

Damn, he thought. Now he'd never get a chance to write all that he'd seen, smelled, felt and heard. And all because he drank the wrong water at the wrong time. Since

the diarrhea started he felt no real pain just anger and disgust and an overwhelming sadness and this was how it was all going to end and it wasn't fair. He had saved these things to write, when he knew he could write them and knew he could use the second disk drive he had saved up to buy so he could write these things that he had waited to write until he understood, had waited until he could see with clarity and wisdom. But that was all changed now.

In his mind he saw the African Plains stretching out before him and he was mounted on the best Somali pony and they were chasing zebra, running in among the herd, so close he could almost reach out and touch their strong wide backs, their stiff black manes. The hoofbeats sounded like a hundred drums upon the earth. That was one of the things he had saved to write, when he was racing with the zebras and he could see, far ahead of them all, in the lead, and shrouded by dust that boiled off the plains, the Great White Hunter aboard his white steed. Toilet paper flapped out of his saddle bags, three, maybe more feet of it trailed behind, blending with his stallion's white tail. The White Hunter leaned forward far up on the horse's neck. He wore orange flip flops on his feet, letting the cool morning air heal the festering herpes-like sore on his ankle. His olive oilskin coat fluttered in back of him and the man thought he heard the faint jingling of the gin bottle rattling in the

White Hunter's pocket against the glass tumblers that would hold their afternoon cocktails.

But he had never written a word of it, nor of the midnight game drives in the black and white striped landrover, the dash board buried in dusty dogeared copies of the Field Guide to East African Birds, binoculars, cassette tapes, and ill-folded maps. Poking up through the hole in the roof stood his wife, holding the halogen spot light sending brilliant white light out into the night, scanning back and forth in the darkness like a pendulum. He listened to the tall grass swishing against the front grill as his eyes followed the spot light. A hippo suddenly appeared in the light, turned and fled, running zig zag, it's short porcine tail held straight up, the huge black bulbous buttocks jiggling through the tall grass.

But now it was early morning and through the tent flap he could see his personal boy coming to awaken him, the lantern swinging rhythmically in the fog.

"Jambo, Bwana. Good morning. Time to wake. Memsahib's gone on a ride," the boy said. "Does Bwana want?"

"No. Nothing. Nada. Niente."

She had gone with the Great White Hunter, he knew, and he knew they'd be sitting in the cool shade at the Governor's Camp sipping a Pimm's, with the little slices of

cucumber floating on top of the fruit drink. She'd have bought a stack of postcards at the tourist shop, and while the Great White Hunter leaned against the bar telling of his latest adventure, she'd fill out the cards. Sending them off to her vapid, jeweled friends saying how lovely it all is and that there is nowhere like Africa. She'd tell them that they'd camped where Robert Redford was buried in the movie and that she'd like to live here someday, right at the foot of Kilimanjaro.

But he had nothing against her, really. How could she have known the truth amid all the lies of the many times he had told her he loved her, knowing and caring only that she was wealthy and that's all that ever mattered. But you kept from thinking about it and it was all wonderful.

He could hear her coming.

"I counted coup today. I got a dik-dik ram," she told him. "He'll look lovely mounted in the den, don't you think?" She held up the tiny antelope by the hind legs, blood dripping out of its nose onto the floor of the tent. It took an excellent shot to hit such a small elusive game. The White Hunter had taught her well.

"Where is he now?" The man asked.

"He's having your shower filled with hot water. Perhaps you should bathe. It might improve your disposition."

"My disposition's fine, goddamit. And you shouldn't have bothered about the shower, it's all muddy river water anyway and reeks of hippo shit."

"Fine. Suit yourself. You know, he's really not all that bad. After all, he was a Captain in the British Cavalry. He's really quite an interesting fellow." The man grunted and imagined the White Hunter aboard his prancing black steed, wearing the ridiculous tin hat with plumes and sporting a sword which lay against black polished boots, barking orders in his arrogant British fashion.

"Dinner's already," she said. "I'll have the Masalea bring you some soup, if you'd like."

"You can be so kind at times. And yet you can be such a bitch."

She left and he lay in his bed where he could see the two of them later as they ate. It was very dark and still that night, he could hear the hyrax shrieking in the distance and the playful call of the Colombus monkeys that swung above in the trees. From his tent he watched them at their candlelit table and he listened while the Great White Hunter quietly in his soft British accent recited "The Man From Snowy River" to the woman, who sat across from him, the soft curls hiding her facial expression. But the man knew the look she was giving him, the misty-eyed, dark, exotic look he'd known years before that had made him think he might

have loved her. And now the White Hunter was enjoying that same look. The poem was finished and the two were quiet for a moment. The White Hunter blew out the candle and the man watched as they walked away from the table, toward the Great White Hunter's tent. The man struggled to his feet, and feeling faint, lunged forward and clutched onto the front tent. The man felt a familiar rumbling in his lower stomach and not having time to grope for his flashlight, dashed to the latrine, a tiny canvas tent with a hole dug in the middle. In the dark he tripped over the guyline, sending him reeling down the bank of the Maria River before he could get himself stopped. It took nearly an hour for him to re-orient himself and grope his way back to his tent. To his relieve the lovers' tent was dark and quiet. At last the man slept.

It was morning again and he had lain awake for some time.

"How are you feeling?" His wife asked, pulling his tent flap aside. God she was beautiful.

"Like shit, literally." He felt Death crawling up to legs of his cot, just like the beetles that lined up at the foot of his cot, a phalanx of them, waiting.

"We got a call on the radio, the landrover should be here by now. We'll be able to get you out of here."

His wife turned. The White Hunter appeared at her side, his blue eyes flashing against his tan, handsome face. He was wearing the oilskin cot, orange flip flops and a felt Australian jackaroo hat. The sight made him feel suddenly ill.

"So how goes it? Sorting out the old diarrhea, are we?" The man ignored him and turned on his side away from them.

"We'll have you out of here in just a jiffy. The lorry's waiting on you. Sorry, but we'll have to leave the Memsahib here for a bit thought, there's only room for you and the gear." The man grunted an acknowledgement. "I've had the shower filled, in case you might want to fluff up before leaving."

The man rose and made his trip to the latrine, and after he had found relief he reached for the wooden spoon and a can of Glade air spray they were to use to keep hygienic conditions. He scratched at the red earth, trying to dig up more soil to throw into his quickly filling hole. He felt like a cat in a litterbox. There wasn't enough loose soil left for him to scavenge.

"You should have been more judicious with the dirt," he heard his wife call from somewhere outside. God, how he hated her.

He remembered being lifted from his cot and taken to the landrover and he could hear the White Hunter shouting

orders in Swahili tainted with his irritating British accent. He sat up long enough to wave to his wife, then lay back on the seat, exhausted, feeling the landrover slide in and out of the ruts in the road. Outside, he knew, thousands of Thompson's gazelles would be grazing, their heads quickly shooting up. Looking quickly, then returning to eat, tails swishing back and forth. Tall graceful Maasai warriors all dressed in red would slowly stroll behind thin, fly-bitten cattle.

The landrover stopped and the man pulled himself up and looked in the direction of where the driver's eyes were fixed.

"Leopard, Bwana. Rare sighting here."

"How do you know it's a leopard?" The man asked, seeing nothing but several vehicles.

"The circle of landrovers." And then he understood. He looked at the tight circle of landrovers, all painted in black and white stripes like zebras, with the words "Hemingway Safaris Ltd." printed in italic on the sides. The driver edged closer to get a view. In the middle of the circle was a leopard, crouching, the tip of his speckled tail moving ever so slightly, golden eyes wide and unblinking. A small flock of guinea fowl scratched and pecked at the earth just yards away. Tourists, all in khaki, popped out of the tops of their landrovers, frantically focusing binoculars and cameras with foot long

lenses. He could hear shutters clicking and several people shushing others. The leopard appeared ready to pounce. A woman suddenly shoved another in front of her. "Hey, move goddamit, you're ruining a great shot!" The leopard looked quickly at the landrover and the guinea fowl flushed. The leopard looked back at his prey and spring, but too late, the birds had filled the air with flapping wings and were gone. The man, depressed, sank back into his seat and tried to sleep.

From his viewpoint he could see just the rugged tip of Mount Kenya, heavy dark clouds hung lazily just beneath its summit. The snow had come early that year. The African plains lay below, wide and flat and empty and full at the same time. And he knew that was where he would want to go.

At that moment, the hyrax stopped shrieking in the night and made a sad, almost human cry. The woman heard it and rolled over in her cot, listening. She uncurled herself from the White Hunter's arms and made her way to his tent.

"Masalea," she called, "Masalea, come quick." There was not a stir and she could not hear him breathing. In his hand was clutched a roll of toilet paper. Outside his tent the hyrax made the same eery noise that had wakened her. But she did not hear him for the beating of her heart.

DUI

I grew up on what my family liked to call a cattle ranch, but what was actually more like a house with a five-thousand acre lawn. The "vast holdings," as my father called them, lay against the foot of the Big Horns. With what had been left of the family Listerine fortune, my father left the security of the St. Louis Country Club, piled myself, my sister, and my mother on a train and headed west to become The Cattle Baron. I was three years old at the time. My sister was eighteen and already had a normal life of her own on Wall Street answering phones. That's all I was told and needed to know about her life. It was during this time when we were all collectively learning about the West and the ranching business that I began to learn the real importance of cows and birds and men.

By the time I turned sixteen I was giddy with estrogen, and my mother took the opportunity to cast a few pearls of wisdom my way. This particular morning was Nathan Kane's first day as the new hand, and my mother was in the kitchen busy cleaning parrot cages.

We lived like bats. My mother hated light and would have used fifteen watt bulbs if she could. She wore dark glasses of varying shades of black throughout the day, and I

grew up peering into obscure lenses wondering which eye to focus on, wondering if she was even looking at me at all.

She stood at the sink, wearing her white, cage-cleaning tunic, rummaging through each of the velcroed pockets on the front. Perch, my mother's squat, green parrot sat on her shoulder, happily crapping and holding a bottle of nose drops with its foot and chewing on the blue plastic cap.

"The bird has them," I said, knowing what she was looking for. She pried the punctured bottle away from the claw-like foot and shook it. Empty.

"Son of a bitch." She walked past me on the way to the crock on top of the fridge that held our supply of nose drops. We were both addicts, varying only in the brand and length of tie we could inhale a bottle. I could hear her ripping the plastic seal off a new box and the parrot trying to squawk out some new word she had been trying to teach him.

"Now let me get this pearl out before you go." I waited for the pearl of wisdom while standing in the open door. I heard bawling cows and calves in the distance.

"Men," she said between squirting up each nostril, two squirts each, both sides. "Every last goddamned one of them, from Alpha to Omega, all have one thing on their minds--their peckers. Remember that." I watched Perch dilate and constrict his pupils. I thought about men and their peckers. I hadn't actually ever seen one, but

according to Mom, they were pretty disgusting, and, interestingly enough, the shorter the man, the bigger the penis.

"Short men have huge shlongs," she had told me during an episode of Fantasy Island. "Look at Herve Villachaise. Huge dick. I guarantee it. Revolting."

But this morning I was immediately out the door and on my way to see what had caused her anxiety.

Nate's first day happened to be weaning and vaccination day, a good litmus test.

Case Olphartz, our foreman, leaned against the corral watching the goings on for something to comment on. After hours of careful study, what came out of an Olphartz mouth was rarely positive. After having gone through a bevy of hired hands, we came to realize we could hire Jesus and Case would still find something to bitch about. We told ourselves it probably stemmed from a deep fear of not being indispensable and no that he hated us. Probably, he hated us. Or maybe the Olphartz disposition stemmed from the curse of his name itself. After so many years of Olphartz jokes, mostly from well meaning tourists on their way to Yellowstone, it would make a crab out of anyone. As Case tells it, the Olphartzs came over on a boat when Franco booted them out of northern Spain during the Civil War. Some German soldiers had said the hell with the Cause and

holed up with some stout Basque women. The Olphartzs were the result. Case said it made for superior breeding, the Basque having a constitution that was "harder than the back of God's head" and the Germans being "meaner than a mink in a cage." The boat load scattered like quail when they hit the coast of what is now Oregon. They quickly realized they had taken the long way around when they found out no one had heard of Plymouth Rock or Jamestown. Having been sick of the ocean for a year and a half, and plagued by nightmares of Guardia Civil in stupid-looking hats, they set out to get as far away from any civilization as they could. The homelier the country, the better. The Mormons were already mantling over Salt Lake City like a hawk over its prey, so the Olphartz trudged on and settled around the Big Horns, becoming shrewd sheep ranchers, accountants and, later, oil field workers. They got used to the spectacular scenery and were the founding fathers of modern day Doodah, Wyoming and the proprietors of, among other establishments, the Olphartz Feed and Grain, Olphartz Gas, and Olphartz Ophthalmology Center for Better Vision.

"So, waddya think?" I asked Case, trying to get a look between the corral posts, and seeing only smoke and the bottom halves of a milling cow herd. We only had six cows, but in a small corral, it looked like a lot more.

"Can't ride for sour owl shit. We have established that fact already." Case scratched the stub of his right index finger. Over the years I think I asked him fifty times what happened to that finger, and I still can't remember what it was, either he dallied it off along with his rope, or a cornhusker machine got a hold of it.

"Says he's worked ranches since he was a kid. He says this here's where he's been wantin' to work for some time now," Case said.

"Why's that?"

"He said, 'The grouse was good.'"

"Yep."

"I don't get it."

"Must be one of them fuckin' chicken hawkers. I seen one of them chicken hawks in his truck, and a turd hound. Just what we fuckin' need. Another goddamn turd hound to chase the stock and deer. Everyone has to have a goddamn dog yappin' in the back of their truck."

There existed only one species of bird of prey for Case; they were all chicken hawks. I have an image of Case in a previous incarnation, aboard the S.S. Beagle with a frenzied, note-taking Darwin, and Case would be rolling a toothpick around in his mouth, sucking on his teeth and saying, "Nope, I don't understand it, just another fuckin' finch." Whereupon Darwin shoots him.

Case's biggest fears were the takeover of leafy spurge, or worse, the Mormon cricket. One of the neighbors, Abe Lipshitz, another Basque, tells the story where he spotted a cricket and asked Case if it was a Mormon cricket, and Case had insisted they were Jiminy's, not Mormons. We think he was serious, but we're still not sure.

The back of Nate's Bronco had a rolled down window, and I looked around making sure everyone else was too busy to notice before I started snooping around. Sitting on what looked like a portable perch wrapped in Astroturf was an enormous, hooded, white bird. Only the tips of its wings were black. The bird furiously shook its head, and the leather tie straps slapped against the sides of the hood, sounding like those tiny drums with a ball and string attached that you roll between your hands. A small feminine head of a black and white English setter, who seemed to smile at me between pants, stood up in the back seat and stretched. A feathered white tail thumped against the back of the seat. There was a box full of books, ones with "falconry" somewhere in all the titles. On top lay a spiral notebook with "June" written in fat letters. I listened to the coos coming from a cageful of fussing pigeons, peering at me through wooden slats. But it was this white bird on the perch I couldn't stop staring at. It raised a yellowish, almost scaled, foot, lowered its head and made

rapid fire scratches at the hood, its silver bell ringing off the walls of the Bronco. It shook its head once more; the hood flew off onto the floor, and I looked into the eyes of a falcon. I felt that "wow" feeling like a little kid at a zoo, and I knew again what it was like to be in awe. I had never seen such eyes, huge round eyes, black and fearless.

Nate was into the swing of things almost immediately. He sat in the middle of our round corral, holding down a thrashing black-baldy calf. He had a dusty cowboy boot braced on one of the calf's hind legs, his hand holding the other hoof. He didn't have a shirt on, which in itself was a little thrill for me, and when the calf struggled, I could see the force of the kicks travel like a wave through his arms. His face, what I could see of it, was shrouded in smoke that curled up from the branding iron held to the calf's side. I just stood and stared. I had no idea what I'd do with him if I had him, like the dog who chases the car, but that thought didn't occur to me. Consequences didn't interest me then, and didn't for years. I knew I wanted him, wanted him that instant, and on top of that, I wanted the calf he sat on. I was already fast forwarding a joyous 4-H year ahead filled with visions of flirtatious moments in the barnyard, pastoral days with me, my cow, Nate, his bird. I couldn't wait. Sweat ran down the middle of his chest and he was splattered with cow manure, dirt,

and dried blood. He looked at me and smiled. Pale blue eyes and long dark lashes that I wished I had.

Then he dodged a kick and his "Peregrine Fund" baseball cap flew off. The vision was suddenly skewed. It wasn't that he had a pointed head or anything; he just looked better with a hat. Without it, something wasn't quite right. There he was before me, hatless, his hair matted into a ring around his head where the hat was and winging out above his ears. He looked vulnerable and self-conscious, and I like it. He must have sensed this hatless problem, because I can't remember a time when we were together that he didn't have it on. Years later, when he took my virginity in the hayloft, I asked him to keep it on. And he did.

"This one. This is the one I want, right here." I announced. Nate looked up at me, one eye slightly squinted. He released the calf, who jumped to her feet, the black tail swinging madly, the muscles around her brand twitching.

"You sure? There bigger ones in here." He had a good voice, no 'yup, shucks' tone. Encouraged, I pressed on.

"Bigger isn't always better," I challenged. I watched for a response. I thought I saw a slight rise of his eyebrows. "I've had my eye on this one since she was born. Her mother's one of the best on the herd." I had no idea what I was talking about, but at the time I thought it

sounded good. "This'll be the one. And I'm going to call her Dui."

"Dooey! A name for a cow?" I learned at an early age, with men, that if you can throw them off guard, make them worry, if just for a second even, that they're dimwitted or confused or maybe a little stupid, that they'd be too self-conscious to notice those exact things about myself.

"And what name might you suggest?" I asked, seeing my chance for power positioning. "'Boss', perhaps? Or maybe 'Blackie'?" He pulled a round can of chewing tobacco from his hip pocket and tapped the like slowly, his eyes narrowing as he stared at me. He wore a big silver belt buckle with what looked like an eagle or hawk's head on it. I knew he wanted badly to put his hat back on, but probably didn't want to look too obvious in his discomfort.

"You can be a pain in the ass, can't you?" he said. He smiled and put a pinch of chew behind his lower lip. Spearmint flavor; I could smell it. He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, picked up his hat and slowly placed it on his head.

"That's a nasty habit you got there," I said to his back, self righteously realizing my nose drops were never more than fifty yards away from me at all times. He turned and smiled.

"You ought to try a pinch. It'll set you free," he said, and strode after another new calf to brand. I stood

and watched the faded circle of his hip pockets where the tobacco can lived.

I heard a familiar horn and knew my father was rounding Blow Horn Corner, a deadly hairpin turn that did in the mailman, and we realized that by the time both parties blew their horn and responded it would be too late. We installed a huge fish-eyed mirror, which spooked the horses, seeing this bulged view of themselves and their equally bloated riders, but probably saved lives.

The white Subaru appeared, dust boiling behind, and skidded to a stop on the dirt road. I could see my father, looking cheery and wearing his Yale baseball cap. He leaned across the seat and rolled the window down. Frank Sinatra's "Strangers in the Night" wafted over the brawls of the cattle. My father waved and bellowed above the stereo.

"Come on up and I'll build you one later." Not waiting or a reply, my father waved again, rolled up the window, cutting off the opening bars of "When I Was Seventeen," and sped off, clanking over the cattle guard.

"Build me what?" Nate asked.

"A drink."

It was an event I was looking forward to. I avoided having people come to the house, always assuming they might never want to come back. Nate, if he were like all the others, would most likely stand in the front door and be

thinking he should take his hat off, reminding himself to be polite and checking his boots for mud and cow shit. But none of us could have cared less, and after seeing the parrot on the kitchen table waddle across Mom's fried eggs, and seeing her then offer the bird a bite from her fork, they usually gave up the worry. So while the guests' eyes were adjusting to the dark, and they tried not to crash into pots and pans that hung from hooks on the pegboard and suspended from the ceiling, my father mixed drinks. I would hear ice tinkling and my father would emerge from the bar, giving the guest a "light one," which was, without exception, a large tumbler of scotch and a splash of water. And while Nate, or whoever, was wandering around the living room bug-eyed looking at my father's collection of submachine guns and small cannons, my father would blast something out like, "You aren't a goddamn liberal are you?" and depending on what had inflamed him that day in the news, he'd start in on one of several subjects he ranted about, usually ill-informed, but sufficiently intimidating enough to scare off any cross checking. Indians were one of his favorites.

"They lost the goddamned war," he'd bellow. "They have no right to bitch." I usually left the room at this point, depending on how interesting or ballsy a response the guest had. I'd sit in the kitchen and eavesdrop with my mother while she smoked a cigarette.

"You married him. I have no sympathy," I'd say.

"We all make mistakes. Remember the White Tomato?" I chose to ignore the slam on my eighth grade graduation dance partner, Al, who resembled the albino vegetable she mentioned.

"You should have married Charlie Allen."

"No, he had curly, kinky hair. You would have looked like a brillo pad."

"Instead I have a great grandfather who worked on mouthwash formulas."

"Necessity is the mother of invention," she said. I thought about that for a minute.

"I wonder if he had bad breath?" I mused while handing a cough drop for the parrot to chew.

I could hear my father's voice booming from the living room.

"We are surrounded by assholes." I was hoping like hell Nate didn't use too many double negatives, or put the accent on the wrong syllable if he said insurance, and when they inevitably got around to talking about fly fishing, Nate would say "rod" and not "pole." But then I kind of hoped he would. I could tell he liked Nate when I came into the conversation.

"You should try to talk the Pointed Head into applying to Yale. Straight "A" student. God knows she didn't get her brains from her mother. But dammit, I wish she'd apply

to my alma mater." We'd been through this one before. I told him even if I wanted to, which I didn't, that I wouldn't get in. They'd discover, somehow, in a battery of interviews or a test, that for years I thought Tel Aviv was a TV station in New York. It was a sobering moment when I got that one straightened out. I imagined my father's horror if he found out I once had confused Fidel Castro with Vidal Sassoon. I wondered what a hairdresser was doing with such political concerns. It was bad enough when I mispronounced a word, or used "done" instead of "finished." The curse of a public education, he'd say. No, Yale wasn't for me.

"You're the daughter of an alum, for Christ's sake."

"Doesn't matter," I'd say, "I'm not Yale material."

"Then I'll build the bastards a wing." And if he had the money, I'm sure he would.

My mother in one of her more comforting moments, once told me, "Just remember, Yale has produced, per capita, more assholes than any other institution."

Dad had gotten off the subject of my future and was telling Nate about his inherited gun collection from his drunken Uncle Casey, when I came into the living room.

"So what are you guys talking about? Anything interesting?"

"Ballistics. Which you know nothing about," my father said. We were silent for a moment, except for the ice

rattling in the glasses. I could always tell if it were a "drink" or if it was just a tonic or soda. Alcohol and ice had a sound all its own. I could sense all of us trying to come up with a topic of conversation. I hoped whatever it was it wouldn't offend Nate, embarrass me, or disappoint my father.

"Nice watercolors of the goldeneyes," Nate commented, swirling his drink and taking a closer look at the painting. I saw he had found refuge in his own element.

"Yes, but what kind of goldeneye?" My father lobbed over, looking smug.

"Barrows, of course."

"No, no, no, common," said Dad, smugly.

"Barrows." Nate stood his ground.

"Now listen goddamnit. I've been around waterfowl my whole goddamn life. Don't tell your grandmother how to suck eggs."

"Barrows." At this point I decided to step in before Dad went for the Peterson's Field Guide.

"Dad, Nate has a falcon."

"Oh?" Dad brightened up. "Now then. Now there's something I know something about." He paused, gathering steam. "I was one of the first, I'll have you know, the first members of the American Falconry Association. Long before you were ever born." Whey he was a member when he never owned, nor, to my knowledge, had anything to do with

the birds was never brought up. Nate stood there, poking his ice cubes down into his drink and looking at my father.

"What do you fly? Not one of those evil accipiters, I hope." My father put a lot of stock into his specialized form of word name-dropping. It was irritating and painful to watch only because of my own profound insecurity seducing me into doing the same thing, and I felt bad for both of us always having to try so hard.

"No. I did fly a goshawk once. Now I have a gyrfalcon."

"A gyr, by God." I could see my father was impressed, which made Nate even more worthy.

But I loved the summers most of all. When Dui wasn't turned out with the rest of the herd to enjoy being a normal cow and graze among the antelope and sage brush, I spent my time preparing her for the local 4-H fair. Nate would finish with the day's haying or irrigating and would tutor me on making the most of a show cow's looks. I shampooed Dui weekly, with a hose and a bucket of soapy water. She'd stand, shaking her head and blowing through her nose, her red ears dripping water and suds. Streams of frothy water ran down the gravel road. Following Nate's example, I teased her tail tassel into a round ball, so it looked like a cheerleader's pom-pom.

"To make their butt look bigger," he said, leaning across a big black steer tied to a fence. "It's all illusion. You take a look at Mongo. Absolutely state of the art." Now this is what your beef judge is looking for. Big ass, but not over finished, long straight back, good leg under him." Mongo stood, eyes closed, chewing his cud, burping lightly when a wad of semi-digested grass belched back up his throat to be gummed. "Of course, if he were a bull, which he ain't, we'd be looking at his testicular dimension as well," Nate added, probably just so he could say the words "testicular dimension." Mongo woke for a second to clear the flies off his back, throwing his head around over his back, the long black tongue out, sending fine spider web strands of saliva floating in the sunlight. Nate brushed and shaped Mongo's fine black hair into long horizontal rows. "Gives the illusion of length," he said. He took a spray bottle and squirted the steer all over. Mongo's mouth closed in mid-chew, his eyes flew open and he pulled back on his halter. I thought I smelled men's after shave.

"Bay rum and olive oil. Makes the coat shine."

"Looks like he's been shellacked."

"Supposed to," Nate said.

That summer Dui took second at the county fair, Mongo took Best of Show at the state fair, and Nate would place

another trophy on the shelf above his bed, adding to the chorus line of other dust covered, fat golden steers mounted on wooden platforms. And I'd look around his room, strewn with Western Horsemen and piles of dirty socks and blue jeans and I could, with very little effort, see myself lying on his bed, the sheets tangled around us, his body lying on top of me, my hands around his neck, his fingers through my hair, C & W lyrics wafting softly from the radio. But I knew if I were to lie on his pillow, I'd smell not only Nate but someone else as well. Probably Wanda, the barrel racer he'd brought out to the ranch a couple of times. She probably rode thick-necked quarter horses with names like Queen Bee's Triple Jet Bar. He never mentioned her name, but I found Triple Jet Bar's name-plated halter in Nate's pickup, along with a rodeo registration form. I could just see her, all dressed in her purple outfit that sparkled under the rodeo spot lights as she's racing toward the finish line, the crowd yelling, "Come on, Wanda!" And there she is, her purple hat flying off somewhere after the last barrel and she gives her thick-necked horse a final whack on the rear before sticking the whip back between her teeth, the crowd still rooting her on.

And I'll be damned if she didn't have him. She knew what he smelled like and knew how he felt and how his hands moved across her body. And I'd ask him why he and I couldn't get together and all he'd say is that "Now, Joanne,

you know that wouldn't be a good idea," and I'd say "No, I don't know that, and it isn't fair, goddamnit." And I'd wonder what it was that she had that I didn't, but all the time knowing. It was the same reason none of the boys in school asked me out. Once they found out who I was, who my father was and where and how we lived, they never looked at me the same and even though I tried to hide it, tried to be just like everyone else, I couldn't be and I hated that. But I suppose there was something nice about the longing that almost grew addictive and was safe and comfortable. I had Dui and long summers to spend with Nate, and I told myself that was good enough for the time being.

It was the winter of my senior year during Christmas break in high school that Dui died. Nate and I had gone out to feed that morning and we found Dui in the snow. She was still warm, laid out on her side in the snow. Steam rose from the shiny calf that stuck halfway out of her, the eyes open and glassy. Nate was leaning against the tailgate of the pickup, fiddling with a piece of baling twine. I stood over her dead body. Light snow fell in fat flakes and melted as it landed on her damp red coat. The herd gathered into a circle around us, their noses tilted up sniffing the air and watching us. Hip lock, I heard Nate say. The calf was too big for her. I know, I can see that, I said, not looking at him. I didn't want to see his face just then.

I'm sorry, I heard him say. But that day I had just stood there staring at Dui, not believing it. I remember standing there, listening to the cows breathe, their breath fogging the air, their frost-covered whiskers looking like white porcupine quills against the black faces. I touched the dead calf's face. It was big, masculine. The eyes were open and the white lashes were long and curled at the ends. The tip of a pink tongue stuck out of the mouth.

"I'll take care of this. I'll take you back to the house and I'll bury her," Nate said. I didn't answer him; I was kneeling at Dui's head running my fingers through the curls on her forehead. I felt his hand on my shoulder.

"I'm so sorry," he said again. And I can still hear those words and his voice, and although it was little comfort to me then, it is now.

In the pickup I lay on the seat with my head on his lap, feeling his hand rub my arm between shifting, and hoping the hot, dry air from the heater would keep my eyes dry.

But I didn't let Nate take Dui away that day. Instead I asked him to put her in a meat locker, just for a couple days, I told him, until I could get used to the idea. And he had done it and not made a big issue of it. He lay her on the floor under the elk and deer carcasses that hung from hooks. The room smelled like frozen blood, but at least she was there and I could still see her.

I stayed up in my room for those few days, not wanting anyone near me. I spent the time being either pissed or feeling stupid and childish one moment then sniffing and looking through old photographs of Dui the next. Through the floor I could hear voices and the parrot squawking and occasionally I'd hear Nate's voice, knowing he had come by to ask how I was doing. And I'd hear him saying how it makes no difference if it's your pet dog you've had for ten years, or a gerbil; it's all the same, and that Dui was like a real pet. And they'd be quiet and I could hear my mother start to laugh about how I once saddled Dui and rode her across the porch in the middle of a party and how she must have known my voice and always raised her head when I called her name.

I remember going to tell my father about Dui. He was in his bathtub, reading. The heater was roaring, and his glasses were sitting on the end of his nose. I sat on the toilet and told him Dui was dead. He looked at me and I waited for him to make me feel better, although I don't know what that could have been. He said, "That's a real shame. I liked ol' Dui." And that was all he could say. And I know he must have felt inadequate just then, and I didn't have the courage to make the distance between us any less, and I suppose neither did he. I just sat on the toilet seat and watched the bubbles cling to his skin, and he finally looked back at his book. I went back to my room and thought

about my father and how we just sat, neither of us being able to help the other and a sadness came over me that stayed with me for many years.

It was only a few more days in my room that an idea came to me, an idea that suddenly made life bearable again. I could have Dui stuffed. It seemed perfectly logical. And as I think about it, and wonder what could have gotten into me to do such a thing, I remember having gone to visit a friend of Nate, Smitty something, who stuffed things for a living. He had everything: stuffed turtles, stuffed fish, stuffed chipmunks and skunks, beavers and deer. He said it's the eyes that make them look so real. That's what makes a good job. He said he orders them through the mail, pheasant eyes, grouse eyes, duck eyes, whatever. I asked him then if he ever did big animals, like cows, and he said, cow elk, but why bother mounting a cow elk unless she's one big sonovabitch, and I said no, just a regular cow, you know, a beef cow. The whole cow, not just the head, I told him. He said he'd never heard of anyone stuffing a whole cow before, but he supposed a guy could do it. It wouldn't be cheap. But he wondered if he could get the right kind of eyes. And I said I was just curious and had forgotten about it.

But now, it seemed like a good idea. I went into the kitchen and found Nate and my mother drinking coffee and

trying to teach the parrot to say "Stand back--I'm an eagle!" They turned and looked at me.

"You look like you're feeling better," my mother said.

"I am."

"You aren't going to let poor old Dui just sit down in the meat locker are you?" she asked.

"No. I'm going to have her stuffed." My mother and Nate looked at each other. There was a long pause.

"What would you do with her?" my mother asked.

"I don't know. Just have her around. Put her in my room, look at her. I just know this is what I want to do." My mother looked at Nate again, who said nothing and looked like he felt a little sorry for me.

"Well, if that's what you really want, she's your cow, and you can do with her whatever you want." I was waiting for someone to try to lighten the moment and say, well why not invite the neighbors and have a big barbecue, you know, shish kabob her. But no one did. I was simply allowed to do what I wanted to do.

So I stuffed Dui.

It was a long process. As it turned out, her eyes were a bit of a problem. No one had made a request for cow eyes in some time. She ended up with elk eyes, which gave her an odd, almost goat-like look. But I had decided that deer eyes wouldn't do, that they'd be too small, making her look

like a pig, and that horse eyes just wouldn't do at all. So elk eyes she had.

Smitty had a hard time getting the mold just the right size for her head, so that when time came to stretch the hide over it, the head was a bit too big for the hide and the stretching made Dui take on a slightly pinched, oriental look. Like a dog that has its head out of the window of a speeding car. At my request Smitty outfitted her with pool ball-sized ball bearings for her feet, so I could roll her around if I wanted. Smitty was proud of his work and took several photographs of her for his portfolio. A five by seven of her ended up on the same page along with photos of a mounted Least Weasel under a glass bell jar and a Black-footed ferret that some rancher's dog had killed.

Dui came to live in my bedroom. It took the better part of the day for Nate and me to roll her out of the horse trailer, through the kitchen, and to the foot of the stairs. From there we had to assemble a sort of block and tackle with ropes and pulleys to hoist her the rest of the way. But it all seemed worth it. Neighbor kids came by to play with her, armed with halters, brushes and miniature bucking rigs they had made from scrap leather. Her coat began to wear thin from where they sat on her and petted her, rubbing away the hair, and her teats had been practically pulled off from them practicing milking techniques. The blue shag

carpet was amaze of wheel tracks where they had roped, then dragged her to some imaginary corral across the room. But when I was there, alone, she remained in her special corner, where I could see her from where I lay in bed. At times when I couldn't sleep, I'd take a book and sit on the floor, leaning against her, as I had done before when she was close to calving. I sat in my room, imagining the soothing sounds of her chewing her cud and remembering how I'd put my ear up to her stomach, listening to the rumblings, and wondering if I was hearing the heartbeat of her unborn calf, or if it was just hers.

It was a hot day in July, just after I'd come back from the All American Indian Day Parade (and my father had conveniently left for a weekend fishing trip) that Dui died for the second time.

From across the lawn I heard dogs barking, the Early Warning fire alarm blaring, and children crying. As I got closer I saw the front picture window was shattered Lying on top of the broken glass was Dui, on her side, dark smoke spiraling upward, the air smelling like singed hair and burnt plastic. Mrs. Macguire, whose husband owned a small dairy farm down the road, stood over the smoldering carcass trying to calm her two boys who clung to the back of her skirt, sniffing and mumbling to each other that the other was at fault. Mrs. Macguire held an electric branding iron

in her right hand. It seemed, she told me, that the boys had found the branding iron in the tack room and, upon branding Dui, had set her afire. When, in a panic state, they had tried dragging her into the bathroom to douse her with water, they had missed the corner and the cow had gone piling off down the stairs, end over end, right on through the picture window, flames and all. It was a miracle the whole place didn't go up in smoke, Mrs. Macguire said, bringing her account of the whole ordeal to a close.

I pulled a piece of glass out of Dui's face, which was more than half burned away, the plastic mold already starting to melt and curl into a bizarre, twisted shape. One ear had been torn off, probably when she knocked against one of the banisters on her way down the stairs. And it probably wasn't until just then that I realized she wasn't Dui any longer, and hadn't been for some time, and I wondered what it had been that I was holding onto so much. I called Nate and asked if he would please bury her where our other favorite animals were buried, in a spot by the creek, between the escaped grizzly from Yellowstone and my mother's favorite cutting mare, Jenny Jo Bailey. I sat and watched Nate dig the hole, the backhoe's teeth scraping against the granite rocks, like fingernails on a blackboard. I don't know why, but I hoped he'd put her in so her good side would be showing, where she didn't get burned so much. And as I sat there, I wondered if I were to sit here many

years later, and think back on the girl who was burying a charred, stuffed cow, if that older woman would be any wiser, or would she be amused, or crying, and if she would have done anything differently, if she could. And maybe she could have told me something that would have been a comfort, and that someday it would all be worthwhile.

But the summer ended and the rest of the cows were sold. Nate decided to take a new job somewhere in Alaska, and I was to go to college that fall. We wrote each other for a year or so, and then I suppose our own lives had grown so different and far apart that what we had in common so many years ago had faded, and no longer seemed to tie us together. As the years passed I came back to the ranch less and less. I would call my mother and ask how my father was and she'd say he'd still be the same, still bitching about the Indians, and I'd smile when I thought of him. The ranch was eventually sold and my parents are now gone. But I still keep a little bundle of Dui's hair just for the times when I need to feel something familiar and soothing. And every so often, every few years, I find myself here again, on a rock near where Dui was buried, and I can close my eyes and see a girl with the cow, and it is once again the fall night when I found Nate in the barn, loading his saddle and bridles for his trip to Alaska, and I asked for what I had wanted for so long. And he had smiled and taken my hand, and as we lay on the loose hay, I knew I'd be finding little

bits of straw in my hair and clothes later, and I wondered what my father would be thinking if he knew. But that didn't seem to matter just then. And although I didn't know it then, it was probably as much of letting it all go as it was finally having it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bocagrande, Jose. (1886). Los Cojones de Don Quixote.
Salamanca: Universidad de Salmance.
- Casabonita, Manuel Pedro Gonzales. (1910). Birth Control
and the Catholic Conscience. Granada: The Alhambra
Press.
- Delatorre, Raphael. How to Make a Fortune Writing
Pornography.
- Oviedo: Universidad del Cuerpo Sucio, 1488. (1981).
Manishevitz, Sam. Fuggers: The Rise and Fall of a
Great Banking Legend. Pierre: University of South
Dakota Press.
- Shmuck, Buck. (1972). Artificial Insemination the Easy
Way. Baggs: Small Outfit Press.
- Shmuck, Buck. (1971). Crazy Cows: Management and
Marketing. Baggs: Small Outfit Press.
- Zargoz, Emilio. (1965). Necromancia: el Bueno, el Malo y
el Feo. Madrid: Black Magic Press.