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Plant your feet among radishes

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PLANT YOUR FEET AMONG RADISHES

By

Linda Ann Kittell

B.A., University of Vermont, 1974

A Collection of Poetry and Prose Fiction

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

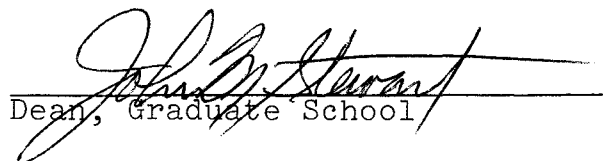
Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1976

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For Ron Goble who taught me how to plant my
feet among radishes.

For David Huddle who taught me how to say it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Some of the poems in this volume have been or will be published, some in earlier versions, in the following periodicals and anthologies:

Ariel

Cut Bank 4 and 5

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SECTION ONE: POEMS

" . . . What's good
about us has got to be spun off
apart from this flesh."

- D. Huddle

REVELATION
(for H.C.)

In a moment, you will be there,
through the back pasture and over
that last hill.

He will wait for you
on the front stoop, watch you
as he calls his pet goose,
breathes deep his Revelation tobacco.
Then, after a moment, he will grasp
the screen door handle, open it
slow and deliberate as the packing
of his pipe. He will offer you
a chair, one next to the fire,
the sharp crack of apple wood. And he
will take your poems one
by one, gather them like onions
his wife braids by the shed.
And in a moment, he will give
you coffee, a warm slice
of apple bread. You will know:
There is nothing to fear

from a man who drips butter, nothing
of those quiet rages with drink, or hard times
in Waterbury. Days aren't marked
like lines on a quick diminishing bottle. Writing,
he says, is just this cabin,
more tobacco in your pipe.

AGAINST SENTIMENT

Don't fear the loss of houses
and furniture. A piano
is an old and awkward piece.
Set your mind on the slow curve
of the Lamoille, a river walk
on thin morning frost. Remember
the smell of the LaHoullier farm, coffee
in your kitchen, mounds
of cucumber, the scent of apples
that near knocked you over.
Find your initials
on any bridge railing. Walk
the woods in winter and love someone new
in the still-warm imprint
of deer. And when you sleep, search out
the sheets' cold corners,
hunker down
into the night.

ANNIVERSARY WITH FIREFLIES
(for Cam and Herb)

First, dream of Greenwood, the dirt
road home through pinewoods,
the great cedars edging the dark.
This is not
such a long walk
in daylight, but at night
bats flutter overhead, crickets cry
at the edge of lawn. Take
your ground here and walk it over
until you are ready
to plant your feet among radishes.
Here, in this garden,
fireflies light on the edge
of a jar. They think they are ready
for capture. Don't be greedy, take
only the two that land near heather.
And when you are ready,
close the lid, take them to your house,
watch them flutter lightly
against the screen.

THE FOXES

--I saw the pair of them crouched
heads into the wind,
peer down from that ledge.
There was nothing I could do,
but grab cartridges and run.
The chickens were out
and I was alone.

Boots crackling in snow, I waited
eye to sight, until one appeared,
raced ahead of my rifle to grab
one snoutful of feather and run
tail bobbing over snow.

I aimed. Squeezing the trigger
my eyes squeezed black, a love
that throbbed so fast
I could not see.

Minutes after,

I loosed my clutch and looked
for the mound of fox.

It lay there, red on red, feathers flapping.

My bullet had entered the arse
and I found a hole where blood
trickled out the neck.

To laugh, to cry, to bury this thing and run,
I knew its five dollar worth, felt
my veins surge the blood of woman and man
hunter and fox,
this fox and hen.

FILES OF ROCK
(for Cam)

Cameron, I have a picture of us two,
small girls in seersucker, yellow and blue
like Vermont spring.

Remember
the rare east wind that rose,
spread across our western bay, the lake
turning grass green? We stood
on our rock isle till first waves
roiled at our ankles, then stepped
a higher ground.

Stone walls
our grandfathers built could not hold
the water. It splashed at us
on that granite knoll of Isle La Motte.

Here in Montana, winds are more
than common. Dust dry, the continual east
blows against me.

This morning

I woke with a hole in my belly
as if some great wind had bored me through.
No wonder they call this Hell's Gate. Here
there is no spring, no hills
of your favorite bluets. Here there are
wire fences to remind slatted ones,
the rabbit ruts we crawled, stolen
raspberries, the minister's wife
cutting asparagus.

If I stripped
these cedar fence posts, I would not find
a smooth and inner wood. Nothing
is old here. Rock piles
are just piles of rock.

THE DESIRE OF FISH

Morning puts you in hip boots.
It is trout season. The sap flows
and the rivers around our homes
swell. They rush by us at night;
churn up rocks, twigs, foam and trash.
You walk toward the brown of river;
there you cast your line and wait.

In the storm last night,
I stood before the mirror
and stripped myself. Out
into mud, rain, grass not yet green,
in circles, in great ellipses
I ran. Free in the rush of gutters,
I danced till morning.

I am not a fish
that wishes to lurk in the darkness
of river water. The spring of this year
does not hold for me the fear of being caught.
I want to find the coldest water, swim there and wait
for the scent of your bait. I want to leave the shadow

of river bank and surface into light.

Already I can feel the pull and lurch of line.

I will be caught

and slit down bare.

ORPHEUS

Your skin is the white
of old men, of every
vein visible. I am
dead with you. I take
the color of old sheets, cloth
worn at its center.

I am tired with you,
cold with blankets, tired
of kisses. The moons
of your nails spread
to a pale blue. I am tired
of the face.

Suppose we did bear
four more children, take them
each before the third month.
Then we could count the dyings,
mark them

on that frail flesh
which holds us.
Though I have no daughter,
I have a dog. He guards
this house. He too
is full up
with your honey cakes.

GOAT SONG
(for John Engels)

--Oh mama, I'll be home for dinner, he said
and waved me away with his arms.

It has been a week
maybe a few days more.

--Well don't expect we'll wait for you.
But he was on the mountain already
singing his goat songs
into the wind.

We did wait, his papa
and I making excuses, telling ourselves that a goat
like Yanniki's could wander miles. He would
sleep in the mountains
and be home for breakfast.

Yannis and I tossed through the night
hot then cold, caught in our blankets
like frenzied animals until we rose
before the first light.

I gave him coffee
sweet with honey, packed him bread and cheese,
water in a skin. He waited till dawn
to kiss me goodbye, then climbed the same mountain
father after son, more silent than I have seen him.
His eyebrows knotted.

My husband did not return for two days
and when he came down the mountain
he was alone still, brows knitted so
I could not find a forehead.

--And where is Yanniki, our little John?
Is he behind, teasing his poor Mama?

Yannis pulled open the goat pen
and chased kids from mothers, mothers from kids
until they raced in every direction.

He had found our Yanniki,
human limb under goat limb, goat on human
under piles of rock. Their entrails mixed
with sticks of pine.

--The village fathers think
we are cursed. They will drive us
from this village, from these hills of grapevine,
from these mountains of goatsongs.

SO YOU'RE HOME ODYSSEUS

My beaux bend for you, arch
their backs and shoot out. But I
have tired of waiting, of weaving.
I have chosen to voyage,
to push out in bluergreen
weed tides and sail.
I don't want your face
to smile the bed. I want salt
on my eyebrows, men who tell
winds by my tits.

Let us meet
in tavernas some time from now--
salt on both our heads. Then
let us talk of countless Kirkes,
of islands whose columns rise
from the sea. Right now
my arms will not open. I cannot dance
to your Kalypso time.

DOGBANE

Wolferson was two years old
when we found her lying by the road.
Her body was still warm
and when wind blew against her fur,
I almost believed
she was alive.

I touched my fingers to her head,
wondered if she felt the pain there.
When she didn't flinch, I dug
my fingers deep in until I felt
the fibered grey mass.

Now, when light streaks
through my window at night,
I kneel down under the sill
and put my arms
elbow to elbow. They struggle then
one hand in the other, wrestling.
One hand wishes to tear
my hair, my face,
my shoulders and stomach.
The other wants only to plough
through my brain, feel the grey in my skull
and erase what it can.

At eight, I stepped on a nail.
The board still attached, I walked
the dirt road home.
The clomp of the board
between road and sneaker,
took me someplace other than hurt.
Later, I had to pull the board off;
I had to see my sock.

When waked by a storm's rocking,
I went into my parents' room, found them
locked together, then withdrawn, embarrassed.
I didn't understand my father's kiss
until I was fifteen and now I cannot start
to touch him.

I dreamed of Brobdingnag at seventeen,
woke scared of limbs under the bed,
my closet filled with hands
on top of feet on top of thighs.
That day, reading Gulliver,
they carried me from the class,
but sent me back to deal with men
with swollen feet.

Razors never
touched my wrists, I broke three fingers
and my nose on the lacrosse field. Nothing
to send me home limping. Nothing like the nail.

I do not dream of the thump of wood
under my foot. I do not dream it,
but often I know the throbbing.

2

Sometimes I dream I am a Greek girl.
Married in the spring, we live in a cottage.
It is big enough and I do not want children.
So each day, my husband goes down to the shore,
down to the sea to fish barbounia
and squid, pound their greenblack bodies
against the dock
until squid cobweb the rocks there.

In June, I say:

"Mikhaelos, there are spiders.
They are in our bed.
They are in our food."
"Boil them for soup," he tells me.
"Spider soup." I think of adding

lentils, adding tomato and okra.

"Perhaps they are in the wood."

"Add some beams."

Soon he finds me outside under umbrella pine.

Like an old woman, I wear

jasmine bracelets, my hair braided with night flowers.

"Mikhaelos, they are everywhere.

They stay in our clothes now."

He tells me: "Let them weave together
fish nets or the holes in socks."

It is then a spider,

a delicate amber, ambles toward my wrist.

I wait, ready to slap it. But he sees it too,
spinning out a thread of web.

And just as if he were breaking off a jasmine flower,
he breaks the spider's string, lifts it away.

Then spiders become large enough

to spin a web to net us in. I dream

of pushing doors that will not open, windows

that will not lift. Spiders grab me

with one leg. I am naked and Mikhaelos

will not stop the dream.

Driving from Lincoln to Avon
you teach me French, show me mountains,
pines, the sagebrush I have never seen.
We get so drunk, we stop
by a range fence. A vulture there
is perched on a cow's womb, eating its way
through skin and bone. We watch
this bird and I rush out
towards it. The pasture
is dry with frost, yellow with fall
and you follow me there. We strip
each other and love then, side by side
to vulture and flesh. Still
the bird eats on.
It will snow soon.
I feel it.

At night I dream this vulture
sits on my shoulder. He tells me
I have lovely shoulders. Once he
walked the full length of my body
and halfway back. Now I am pregnant.

Still he comes each night; sometimes
he listens to the child inside me.
The child tells him I have lovely hips.
What else would a child think?
Then the bird is gone and I am in a hospital.
Bundled and booted, my father has taken me
to see a man. He lies on the table, head
blown off and spilled. But living still,
a bare breathing, the obstetrician
who had been mine, pulls his life in.
I find myself asking him: Do you know
the rest of my life? Should I cling
still longer to this blood?

Then I become the carrioned cow.
I am led down a passage with others like me.
Each has a stall.
We sit and are flushed clean.
Flushed clean, the life spills out
and down the sewer, down and out the pipes. I see
the vulture child reach the river
and flow down it. You have had two months of growing,
child. Disappear with this river.
When we drive by again, our eyes will avoid
the range fence, the river, this vulture.

DRY ROT

(for my brother, David)

Words of love curse

this house together, chase us back
like furies. Our house smells
of blistered wood, the musty scent
of a slow dry rot. Rafters bloat. Beams
collapse. We cut and carve
another winter's fiber.

Last week we chinked bits
of rock and ice, watched
the vestibule crumble. It is
no longer fun, this crazed carving,
patch of joist and plank. Our house
hollows itself out, gives up
fiber after fiber. Remember
the jaw bone you once pulled off
a pickerel, watched the maimed thing
struggle into water? This
is not much different, child.

Pack your things
in a cardboard box, wait
till the attic door crumbles,
then go. Outside only the leaves
will feel the trembling.

DANCE ME NO NIGHTMARES
(for my father)

His hold on me tight, just as drunk
my professor looked strangely, so much
like you, I thought
I'd been his daughter once, had been caught up
and courted, had danced
these galliards, this pavanne before.

Then a boy taught me to dance,
whirled me 'round light as ash
till I rode hard dreams
of you, rode with rumps
out, then in. His kisses
showed for weeks.

I will not dance to your forced rhythm
or tap my foot to your ghastly time.
Twice I was held as half a woman,
cradled by so many ghosts' of you.
I take these slippers to my circle of fire.
Look at me. I am dancing toward day.

THESE NIGHTMARES THESE NIGHTS

I ride on the backs of vultures, rise
and soar where my grandfather's ghost
and I walk a line of trees, draw their sap
and float

through memory of branch and bone
hanging our buckets on spigot limbs.

Snow heavy on every limb,
we catch syrup as it rises
up through tree bone.

Up like my grandfather's ghost
syrup floats
out into buckets. A trickle of sap,

such sweetness this sap
spills on my wrists, drips on a pant leg, the limb
underneath, till old dreams, nightmares float
back and I rise
and walk with the ghost
to a place of more bones.

Here a girl breaks bone
of an egg three days from hatching. The thin sap
of albumen strains through her fingers. The ghost
tells me I still have the bird I found. One limb
broken free, has risen
to the jar's top. There it floats.

I will always save the jar with the leg that floats,
save birds that come to pick my bones--
crows, jays, and vultures that rise
from trees; that drill me through, drain me of sap,
take sweetness from every limb.

My grandfather's ghost

ignores me. He hopes I will be both ghost
and granddaughter, that I too will float
with the bones in Biloxi, float with tree limbs,
tin cans, skeletons of houses, bones,--
everything making a river of sap,
of people who ask their dead to rise,

grab for them, take leg of ghost or great-aunt's bone
and float over rivers of sap
over land, cradling that limb, that preserver, and rise.

SECTION TWO: STORIES

"No pleasure but meanness."
from "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
- Flannery O'Connor

A FISH STORY

It was round about the middle of February so the lake was all froze over. His trailer was out in the middle of the lake, out from the five maples up past the Lockerby place. So I just walked right out there, right up to his door and I knocked, see? And I said: "Are you George Surprise?" He just hems and haws and so I said: "I know there's a lot of Surprises around here, but are you George?" Then he clears his throat and says: "Yes I am. What is it you want?"

Well, I just wanted to say: "George Surprise, you're gorgeous, just as gorgeous as can be." But I just said: "Mabel Holcomb and I come out here to see this trailer. There's been lots of talk that it ain't no normal rig." Well, George looked as pleased and plump as could be. He says: "Come in." Plain as day. So I walked in, stepping over them fish heads.

It was mighty warm in there. George had a potbelly stove up by the door. It was stoked up full and blazing. There was a gas stove too and a sink and cupboards painted yellow with bright red tulips decals on them. Some pictures on the walls, mostly of flowers. Blue flowered curtains too. There was a red bench at each end of the trailer. "My," I said to him real pleasant, "I never figured on a shanty being this cozy." George looked at me and said: "This place needs a lady's touch, that's all." I figured he was starting to like me some.

He told me to take a seat on the far bench and I sat down. On each side of me was a square hole cut right through the bottom of the trailer. I could see

clear through the ice to the water. Lines were hitched up all around and bells kept buzzing off. I up and asked him right out what all this business was about. "Fishlines," he says to me, "are hitched to buzzers that ring when there's a fish on the other end. I just sit back and listen for the bells." Then he waited a minute. "You want a drink Mabel honey?" Why it didn't seem right having a drink like that, early in the morning and all, but George didn't even wait for my answer. He just hands me a paper Coca Cola cup filled with whiskey and half-and-half.

Well, I imagine he'd been drinking all morning. His nose was lit up and it sure wasn't cold in that trailer shanty. George poured a drink for him and spilled some on the counter. The counter near the sink was piled with liquor bottles and there was a cooler full of ice cold beers. "You cook all your meals out here?" It seemed awful quiet.

"Yup."

"I bet you cook real well, huh?"

"Well, he begins, "I guess so. Last night

I fried up some perch." He nodded to the fry pan sitting on the stove. It still had some fish in it.

I was feeling a little nervous so I gulped my drink. As soon as I finished off that one, George pops right up and fixes me another, then comes back and sits down a little closer to me. "Do you sleep out here too, George?"

"I wish I could. I catch hell when I go home."

"You catch hell? What for George honey?"

Well George starts his hemming and hawing all over again and then says: "My old lady thinks I smell like a fish. She doesn't want anything to do with an old fish like me." Why then I felt bad for poor George. "She thinks you smell like an old fish? An old fish? And what's the matter with that? Seems to me it just shows you like your work. That's all." Why, I told him that. I can't see nothing wrong with a man bringing home a little of his job. Not to this day.

Then George pops up again and gets me another of them whiskey and half-and-halves. "What else do you do out here all day?" I asked once he sat down again. George smiled real big.

"I play my teeth."

"You do what?"

"I play my teeth. I could show you if you wanna listen."

Well, I never heard of a person playing his teeth so I nodded to him. Then George opened his mouth and began clicking his fingernails against his teeth and making notes. First he played "The Lone Ranger" and then "Hickory Dickory Dock." "Oh George," I told him when he stopped, "would you give me another concert?" Well then he started taking my requests right and left. He played "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" and "Jimmy Crack Corn" and even "I'm Just Wild About Harry." I was beginning to feel like a queen.

When George and me ran out of whiskey, he just says: "Sit tight, Mabel honey. I'll open this gin." Then George fixes me another drink and sits down almost on top of me. He reached around my back and starts unhooking my bra. I'm a four hooker. No cow mind you, just a four hooker. Well, George unhooked

that bra right through my blouse. Just as easy as pie.

Lord knows, he seemed crazy about me. Crazier than Herbert, my husband of some years back. He says: "Mabel, you're really something," just as he's putting a hand in my blouse. George buried his head in my bosom and kept nuzzling me while he's unzipping my pants. That's just about when the first bell begun to ring.

"George," I said, "there's a fish on your line." He already had his hand down my pants and was saying "Baby, baby" over and over. I ran my hand down the front of his pants. "My," I thought to myself, "he's certainly got a rise in his Levis." I don't know why that come to me right then. My sister and me had always said that when our step-brother Oscar was coming in from a date. Anyways, I'll tell you. George was one powerful man. And even when another bell started ringing, he just kept right at it. By the time he got around to putting it to me, every damn bell in the place was ringing. I tried to tell him: "George, you've got a fish on the line."

But finally, I just gave up completely.

Around three o'clock, I decided I better go. George seemed to want me to stay forever. But I had stuff to pick up in town before the store closed. I pulled on my pants and buttoned my blouse. "No George," I told him, "I really gotta go. Not that I want to. I just got work." George looked put out and then he says: "But Mabel honey, could you come to my party? I'm having a party Saturday night." Well now, I didn't see no harm in that, why, come to think of it, I like parties just as much as the next guy so I said, "Yes." And he told me to come out to the trailer around nine on Saturday. After I told him I was sorry about him not catching anything, I walked back to shore across the ice.

Friday I washed my turquoise dress I'd got up to Penney's and polished my shoes that matched. I would get to George's a little past nine on Saturday so I wouldn't be waiting for the party to start up. I wanted the party and George to wait for me.

Saturday morning I went over to Lillian's and had my hair dressed up in one of them French twists. It looked swell. I got all ready by eight thirty and went out to the car. It started up first crack. I let it warm up anyways, lit a cigarette and started listening to the radio. Along about ten to nine I pulled outa the drive and headed along the East Shore to the Lockerby place. I parked in front of the house there and walked out across the ice to George's trailer.

I could hear a tape of the Midnight Flowboys playing as I came up to that trailer shanty. George was sitting out front nipping with Emory DuBarry on one side of him. George looked like a million bucks sitting there. I was damn near crazy about him. He whistled when he saw me.

I sat right down next to him, sort of raising my skirt a little. He put his hand on my knee and passed me the bottle with his other hand. We was just starting to warm up to each other when this lady sticks her head out onto the steps where we were

sitting. She calls out: "George honey, will you come in here a minute?" So George gets himself up and walks in to see her. Well now, that didn't seem too polite to me. I waited a minute or three, and then stood up. Emory asks me what I'm doing. And I told him I was going in to check things out. He says to grab him another bottle and he'll wait for me.

Inside there were lots of people. Both red benches were full up and there wasn't hardly any room to stand either. George was over by the sink with that lady. She was giggling something silly about the fish someone must of put in the soup kettle where some punch was. I pushed through the crowd of Lockerbys--Earl and Lucerne and their oldest kids Peanuts, Petunia, and Harvey the Bastard. I slipped into the little room George had fixed up for a bathroom an old sheet on some two by fours. Inside was a box with a toilet seat perched on top. I peed and turned to look down the toilet hole. It was just another hole drilled through the trailer bottom and the ice down to the water. And down there sort of

half swimming, half dying was some sort of fish.
I didn't bother to study it.

As I walked out the door, I grabbed myself a bottle. My heart was near broke till I saw Emory sitting on the steps still. He hands me his liquor bottle and scoots on closer to me. He was drinking bourbon, I could tell. "Well," I says to Emory, "What's it you do for work?" And Emory says he works around the Shrine, cleaning. "It's a good job," he says, "especially after Bingo nights." Now working at the Shrine would just give me the heebie-jeebies. I said: "Don't it just give you the creeps, Emory honey? I mean, working around all them priest people?" He says it don't. They're pretty easy people. "They just figure nobody's perfect."

"How's that?" I asked him.

"Nobody's perfect. That's what the Father says to me. Nobody's perfect. He says to me: "Emory, just go out and be part perfect. Just keep five Commandments."

Then Emory pressed a little closer to me and put his arm around my ass and I just thought to myself:

"Gosh Almighty Emory DuBarry. You are as handsome as can be. Just as handsome as can be."

Well, I don't know why. But old Emory went the same way as old George and my husband Herbert of seven years. Herbert left as soon as we'd loved. He went into the bathroom, cleaned himself off with some toilet paper, peed and flushed the toilet. Our toilet, after seven perfect years of marriage, flushed just as perfect.

"Nothing is wrong," he'd said, "and that is why I'm leaving."

I asked about other ladies.

"No Mabel, nothing is wrong. And that's the reason. Nothing is wrong. Even our toilet flushes perfect."

I was telling old Emory that story. And I started to cry. And Emory just laughed out loud and then walked into the trailer. But it's true. Herbert left like that. Me sitting on the bed with his come dripping down me. And Emory just left me out there on the steps thinking. Only a woman knows what a man

leaves when he's gone out of her. Strange what a man'll leave a lady to clean up. I sat on George's steps for awhile, cried a little. Then I picked my way out of all those fish heads and made my way across the ice towards home.

A SCREW STORY

Nothing more or less unusual had started it. Nothing, in fact, other than a shower head, which (and she thought it unfortunate) was attached to a pipe. And so Lucerne had slipped her black and yellow bathing suit down over her hips. The suit coiled around her ankles as she stretched her arms up to reach the shower head and twist it loose. After wriggling the head out of its socket, she shook her suit off her feet, snatched it up, and tucked the

stolen head into the left bra cup. She wrapped a towel around herself and sneaked over to her locker.

She'd left it open; her clothes piled neatly on the floor. A pair of panties hung from one of the metal hooks. The shower head, even in its padded covering, landed with a thud on the locker bottom. She dressed quickly.

As she headed toward the door, the black woman at the exit grabbed the towel from her head. "The second stall on the left needs another bar of soap," Lucerne told her, and whizzed on out the door.

Since that day at the YW, Lucerne had made it her ambition to unscrew things. She had unscrewed screws all over the campus. From every bathroom stall door, every lock, every doorknob, and every light switch. Lucerne had even unscrewed the screws in her glasses. Her pockets bulged with screws. In her room, every container she owned was filled with screws--in all different sizes. There were long, skinny ones with sharp pointed ends. There were fat, flat-nosed screws and then there were her favorites--the itty bitty

screws from towel racks. Only the high school mug on her dresser wasn't filled with screws. That was filled with pennies. Because if Lucerne were to pick two things in this world, one thing that she hated most and one thing that she loved--they would be pennies and screws.

And today at lunch she had collected some more screws, at least a dozen. It was one of her greater joys to sit in the dining hall, watch people come in, sit down, and then fall flat on the floor when their chairs collapsed. While guys were watching the girl in the opposite dorm undress for a shower, Lucerne had unscrewed one leg from each of their empty chairs.

Now that her classes were over for the day, Lucerne had nothing to do until dinner. She was bored, so bored in fact, that she arranged her room forty-seven times and sent all but two of the plans home to her mother who was a widow. At least her mother claimed she was a widow, hoping that God had gotten retribution for her and had killed her husband on that same July twenty-third that he'd run away.

Time and time again Lucerne's mother had told her daughter, "Lucerne, I have left the revenge due me in the hands of the Almighty. If God sees fit to punish your father, he'll do it. Let's just hope he does it in a big way." The only person Lucerne really liked anymore was a teacher of hers--Peter Alden. He taught her favorite course--Modern Trends in Poetry, Braughtigan-Dylan.

Lucerne decided to play a record, but it skipped horribly. When she lifted the tone arm off, it fell on the table. Lucerne was pissed and kicked a coke can against her desk. Then she pulled a shopping bag out from behind her closet and began to throw all her cans into it. "Peace," she said to the bag of cans as she picked up her coat, "peace and you shall be redeemed."

She walked out into the rain pretending it was snow and that she had barefeet. The rain soaked through the shopping bag from the outside and the stale coke seeped out from the inside. All was wet.

But Lucerne liked the smell of the wet paper bag and the wet mohair of her sweater. She liked

Mr. Emory and his wife, the store owners, too.

"Wet out," he smiled.

Lucerne pushed her bangs out of her eyes.

"Looks like it might start to freeze."

Mr. Emory began to unload the cans from the soggy bag. "You been studying a lot, young lady?"

"Yeah. Lotsa work to do." Lucerne fingered the screws that edged the Formica check-out counter, while Mr. Emory counted out the change from her coke cans. He handed Lucerne seventy-five cents.

"Well, me and mother haven't had too much to do today. Have we, mother?" Mrs. Emory continued to stack cans of soup on a shelf. "Just as well I guess. The kids are coming over tonight."

"You have a big family then?"

"Big enough, I suppose," he told Lucerne, "we had ten kids--actually twelve, but some of them didn't give us too much diaper trouble." Mrs. Emory looked over at her husband.

Lucerne bought a pack of cigarettes with her change. And as she hurried out the door, she said good night.

Lucerne shoved her hands in her pockets. There was a crumpled envelope towards the bottom of one pocket. A letter from her grandmother, the same grandmother who always sent Lucerne a chartreuse mumu on her birthday, a Bible at Christmas, and paper toilet seat covers any time the family was planning a trip. Lucerne tried to remember what this particular letter said. "It could be the letter about traveling with a full bladder. She sends that one once a year. Or it could be the letter about Aunt Charlotte's silk-lined coffin, but it's probably the letter about Uncle Oscar." She pulled the letter out and smoothed it as she walked. ". . . I was so embarrassed when Effie told me about Oscar being an abortionist and all. My very own flesh and blood. Frankly, I denied it, but I know it's really true. Oscar has broken my heart. I won't have anything to do with him. Of course, I'll still love Milton and Sylvia. They, at least, have never done anything to break their poor grammie's heart. I'm so sorry you children have to know these things. Our Lord's powers are great and good, but the devil lurks everywhere,

waiting to steal the very souls of the weak in faith. I have found God's love and I hope my dear little cubbies will know His word also. I say my prayers for you every night." Lucerne stuffed the letter back in her pocket. "His kingdom come. I'm deaf and dumb. Please forward my mail to 777 Bradbury Avenue."

She'd left her door unlocked. She kicked it open, walked in, and kicked the door shut again behind her. Lucerne pulled out the pack of Kools and then a bag of dope. She sat down on the bed and began to pull the tobacco out of a cigarette with a pair of tweezers. Then she shook some of the dope down the empty cylinder of paper until she had made a filter-tipped, menthol joint. She shoved the joint back in the cigarette pack and grabbed some matches.

Lucerne could see that Mr. Alden was still in his office. His light was on and there was a shadow behind the curtains. The rain was beginning to sting as it hit her face. The wind had turned much colder.

"Hi. How's tricks?" Lucerne peeked into Alden's office. A jar of Sanka stood on his desk. He was drinking coffee from his old fraternity mug. "I brought you something." Lucerne pulled out the filter-tipped joint.

"What's this?" he demanded. Lucerne looked at him blankly. "What's this?" he repeated. "Is it Peruvian Red or home grown?"

Lucerne grinned and sat down. She pulled out a screwdriver and began to unscrew the arm of her chair. Alden lit the joint.

"So," he said, "who did you say that guy was who knocked you up last night?" Alden was wearing his tortoiseshell glasses low on the bridge of his nose. When he talked, he would either look over the tops of his glasses or take them off completely, waving them in the air to punctuate sentences. In class, if a student raised a question, Alden would push his glasses up on his forehead and begin to squint.

"Real hunk, she told him, "five four with one brown eye and one blue one." Lucerne sank down in her chair. "I've been watching the fish over in the science hall. They swim around their tank in neat little circles. Bump into each other." She slipped two screws into her pocket and began to work on the other arm. "The pickerel was just one big circle. Couldn't even stretch out. There were a mess of people watching them."

Alden laughed and stretched his feet out across his desk. Lucerne looked at his boots. "What I liked most about the army," he'd said once in class, "was polishing my boots." She'd scribbled that down in the balance section of her check-book. Alden leaned back further in his chair and slid his hands in back of his head. "You know Lucerne, sometime I'd like to take off all my clothes and run by Tiny Long's office singing "I just want a piece of you." He looked over at her. "What are you doing?" Lucerne was busy unscrewing the shelves of her teacher's bookcase.

She looked over at Alden. His fish net tee shirt showed through the blue of his shirt. "I'm just collecting those screws," she said calmly. "Would you like one?" Alden flushed when Lucerne handed him a skinny screw with a pointed end. "You know," she said, "I really hate the robe my grandmother sent me last week. It's an orange elephant print with a lace collar and it's got a queer-shaped pocket." Lucerne moved to another shelf. "She's upset cause her son's an abortionist who wanted to sell his story to Hollywood. Used to be a minister--Uncle Oscar. Didn't want to embarrass the family though. I'm sort of pleased with him, but grandma thinks he's the devil. 'Ignorance is not to see the devil; cowardice, of which I'm guilty, is not to name him.' You said that. And by the way, I really don't know what you meant by that. I don't think I ever will understand that or anything else for that matter. I just figure I gotta go around collecting these screws. Save every last one of them. At this point, I'd do anything for one.

Pretty soon, cars will just fall apart in the streets. And when there aren't any typewriters or doorknobs that work, when all the light bulbs are gone, and when you go downstairs to get a candy bar and find the machine's on the floor, then you can sit up and say something appropriate. I'm sure you'll find the right words." Lucerne paused a minute to move her chair into the center of the room. She climbed up on it and began to unscrew the overhead light. "See, it gets to the point where everything has to change and I really hate that. Like I saw this person I knew real well in high school. Real well. I thought she understood I was getting things altogether for myself. But after I got around to understanding more things, we weren't close anymore. Here would you hold this?" Lucerne handed Alden the light fixture. "Thanks. Anyway. All she said was hello and goodbye. The problem is, I don't want to walk in here in five years (maybe by then I'll be unscrewing less), but I don't want to find there's nothing to say. Do you

see? If you say to yourself: "Why I knew that girl when she was unscrewing things and now she's playing castanets in the Hawaiian Symphony; I've got nothing to say to her." I'll just die. On the other hand, I don't like this pickerel business either. It just seems," she continued, climbing down off the chair, "that people and things just fall apart all too easy."

Lucerne went over to Alden's desk and began to take out the books between the bookends. She turned them upside-down and replaced them. "The Short Stories of Hermann Hesse, Poems-Hermann Hesse, Lawrence-Sex, Literature, and Censorship, Tarantula." Alden scooted his desk chair over to Lucerne.

"Now what are you doing, Lucerne?"

"Straightening these books: Maiden, Gypsy Moth Circles the World, German-English, English-German Dictionary."

"My ass."

"Yeah Peter, (I've always wanted to get into your pants because) some men have slightly

round asses. You know, like they played soccer or something. And some just have asses that look like two grapefruit halves side by side. They're the football players. And you, you've got a flat spread out ass that'll be wearing stretch Levis in a few years." Alden had taken his glasses off completely and was standing up now, staring into Lucerne's face. She looked down at his tie--a light brown with white goats standing on their hindquarters embroidered on it. She began to unscrew his tie tack--a small silver tennis racket.

"Now stop this Lucerne." He was turning red in the face. The tips of his ears were the same bright color of his cheeks. "Bob Hagerman might go by here and think I was feeling you up or something." Lucerne reached over and shut the door.

"Damn it Lucerne. Just eat this out." He leaned over to reopen the door, but Lucerne pushed him away so hard that he fell against his desk. It collapsed under him so that he fell to the floor.

"That's right, Peter. Start the goddamned pickerel business again." She knelt down in front of him and began to unlace his army boots. She yanked them off his feet, then moved up, still on her knees, closer to him. She unbuttoned his shirt, pulled up his tee shirt and stuck her screwdriver into his navel. "Now take the tee shirt off. Slowly." He lifted his arms and pulled the shirt over his head. "Now the pants, Peter. Now the pants." He wasn't going to stop her. He unbuckled his belt, unzipped his pants and slid them down to his knees. With her free right hand, Lucerne pulled his pants off completely. Alden lay on the floor of his office dressed in only his green socks and a pair of tropical print bikini underpants. Lucerne stood up to inspect him. Alden tried to lift himself up off the floor. "Nope, Peter. Stay right there." She pressed the screwdriver back in his navel. "Right there." Lucerne started to leave.

"You're not going to leave me here with all this mess are you?" Lucerne didn't move. "Look at all this. My desk. My bookshelves. My books are

all over the floor here. I can't find my Sanka. I can't even find my coffee mug. It's probably broken. What am I going to do without it? Have you thought of that?" Lucerne slipped the screwdriver into her back pocket and gathered up all of Alden's clothes.

"Yes, I have," she said and walked on out the door and down the corridor.

SECTION THREE: TOWARD SOMETHING LONGER

"You don't cut off your toe
just 'cuz it's grown farther
away from you."

- Ron Goble

A PERFECT SLICE OF LEMON

My father left on Halloween. And my mother was left holding the bag. Daddy, a dentist, had always said:

"Candy is dandy
but liquor is . . ." and so he'd taken his Canadian whiskey, two shirts, and a change of underwear along with him.

He left in our robin's-egg blue Suburban wagon. We'd had a canary yellow Estate wagon until

mother found out that daddy'd been screwing his secretary on the back seat and had made him buy a new car. The change in colors, however, did not change my father's habits.

This is the second anniversary of his departure. I have remained intact, pretty much unaffected by my father's sudden exit--at least until last night. You see, last night I gave in to the Avon lady. She came, poor woman, in the middle of Medical Center and pregnant. So I really couldn't help but buy a few things. I could spare a couple of dollars. And besides, I thought that maybe a little perfume, some eye shadow, would help. Now I didn't rush into it either. I resisted for awhile. Passed up the elegant chrome, treasure chest, pill holding, pendant, the tiny glass iron filled with cologne, and some cute little perfumed poodle soaps. But I couldn't resist the Avon lady's pregnant smile or one small lilac sachet. And I thought, as I paid her the two dollars, that perhaps the perfume

would take away the feeling, that feeling that every man I pass on the street is barking at me, hinting for me to grovel at his feet, yelp, perhaps, for some Purina.

I also began to join clubs last night. You know, things like World of Beauty. Record Club of America, Literary Guild--all in the hope of regaining some sense of the future, of something to look forward to, even if it's only the mail. I have an overwhelming urge to send a copy of Amy Vanderbilt's Book of Etiquette to Ralph Nader, or to write extensive letters to old friends, begging their forgiveness for past actions and then include the wrong return address.

Finally a little rest. I am packing a birthday present for Carter's wife, Lola. It is a copper oat scoop. I am packing it in a box eight inches square, padding the inside--top, bottom, and all four sides--with Kotex. They are Lola's Kotex. I found them in the bathroom.

Actually, I rescued them. The bathroom was flooded by Lance and now Carter is cleaning the flood and plunging the toilet. The Kotex seems to me to be a good packing material, something Lola probably won't miss. Or maybe she will appreciate me saving a few of them from the three inches of water that cover the bathroom floor. Maybe Lola won't appreciate it at all. But I have used only six, maybe eight altogether, three sheets of crushed typing paper to protect the inside of the scoop, and a burnt pot holder to cover the handle. As I put the last two Kotex in, the two that will cover the scoop completely, I yell to Carter.

"This reminds me of Dorcas." He doesn't hear me. But this does remind me of my roommate at Northfield. Dorcas--who spent the entire winter term of our freshman year in the bathroom, trying to get a Tampax in place.

Carter walks out of the bathroom. I hear the squish of water as he strolls out into his living room, still holding the plunger in his hand.

"What?"

"Dorcas got a Tampax up her ass the night of the Hotchkiss dance."

Carter laughs and kisses me on the forehead. Sometimes he laughs just to make people feel better. He gets another beer and walks back into the bathroom.

I want Carter to stop his plunging, to come listen to me talk about the Hotchkiss dance, to picture me sitting in the corner of the recreation hall, picking the pimento out of my turkey a la king. But Carter does not like to hear about my prep school days, or my sneaking down to the stables to catch a quick cigarette. Carter would rather discuss the neuter s-stem noun, the superiority of the Greek genitive absolute over the Latin ablative absolute. Or he would rather play croquet.

I could not decline any neuter s-stem noun and Carter kept me after class. Now he will not let me forget it; he is constantly requesting me to decline πένθος for him, or his friends, especially Lance. Then Lance winks, says: "So this is the student you're tutoring." Then we all laugh,

have another beer, and go on to discuss the extinct digamma.

All I want is a quiet dinner with Carter. I want to pull into Carter's driveway one day and not find Lance drunk on the doorstep, blasting some record out the door at 78 rpm's. I don't like Lance in his stupid suede cowboy boots, pants, vest, shirt and hat, his flashing winks or his "Nice to have the old wiferooney out of town, eh Carter ole Buddy?" I just want steak and Scotch and sour cream mashed potatoes and real tears.

But the kitchen is a mess, the wine and Scotch are gone and Lola's harvest gold Tupperware spatula is melted on the rear burner of the stove.

It is good, at least, that Carter has a friend like Dick, a good friend who will stop by mid-fiasco, get us all outside to play croquet while his wine cools, and will let me hit Lance's queer colored ball to hell. Still, Dick hangs his empty wine glass upside down on the stinger post so that when Lance hits the post, the glass will shatter. And still, Dick cools his wine too long

in the freezer so we have to suck on Blue Nun popsicles. But Dick never gets so drunk that he pulls down his pants and drags us all into the bathroom to demonstrate the proper method of shitting, stoops with one foot on either side of the toilet seat top, slips and flushes a brush down the toilet. Carter only laughs, tells me Lance is having problems with his marriage. I wonder if Lance and Carter have the same problems. I wonder if I will ever get a quiet dinner. Not daddy in the living room rustling the newspaper, sipping his beer, and playing the radio. Mother calling: "Stew your lunch is getting cold. Should I put a hamburger on your plate? Daddy walking into the dining room, reaching over my back for a potato chip, then walking into the kitchen to pop open another beer.

"What's for lunch?" he would ask, bowed over the stove, picking bits of stray hamburger out of the fry pan and tossing them into his mouth.

"Stew, you're getting grease on your shirt."

"What?"

"I said, 'Can the kids start? Their lunch is already cold and I told Boder and Jenny they could go out fishing.'"

Daddy would stand behind mother's chair, rubbing her neck with his hands. He would bend over and kiss her. I want Carter to come kiss me now. I've cooked him dinner.

"Stew, would you sit down and eat with us?" Daddy would rub a hand along her backbone and walk back into the living room again. He would bring the radio, adjust the antenna until the music sounded clear and loud.

I would whisper to Pooh to pass the hamburgers. She'd take one for herself, then pass them across to me.

"Jenny, put a hamburger on Boder's plate too, then pass them to your father. Stew, would you like some tomato? Jello salad?"

Daddy would ask for some onions and mother would rise stiffly to get them.

"No, just the tomatoes then."

My sister would play with the radio until she'd found her favorite station.

"I don't know why," mother would say, "we have to listen to that noise while we're eating."

Daddy would look over the top of the catsup bottle he'd been hitting and mother would watch him pound the bottle top and sides.

"If you'd stick a knife in the bottle," she'd say, "the catsup would pour out easier."

"If you'd buy catsup more often . . ."

and daddy would continue to pound the catsup bottle for a few more minutes.

"Would you pass the mustard, Boder?" The mustard jar passed from hand to hand until it would finally reach my father. "When I was young," he'd begin, "my mother made us dress for lunch."

Lance had insisted on catsup for his steak. He and Carter insisting.

"Oh you must stay for dinner. There's plenty." And Lance not even stroking his moustache once before plopping down at the table and demanding

catsup for his steak. He had to shake the catsup bottle until the last tablespoon or two began to slow down the inside of the bottle, then splatter against his plate and up onto the white pompom fringe on Lola's window shades. At first I'd thought Carter's wife was from New Jersey because of the pompom fringe on her shades.

Lance never shut up at dinner, whether he was telling Carter not to have potatoes because he's telling one of his idiotic stories about llamas, or the people he saw crying real tears, or how he got his wife pregnant because she thought spermicidal jelly and raspberry jam were the same thing. Oh and tell us Lance about the sensual feeling you have when you forget your underwear. One way or another, nobody here notices. Carter never mentioned my red and white checked halter dress and matching Papagallo's. Carter wouldn't even notice if I'd worn the same outfit to class, had forgotten my underwear and had sat spread legged in front of his lecture stand.

Carter is squishing out of the bathroom again. He's putting on Creedence Clearwater Gold and coming into the kitchen for another beer. This time he pours one for me. He pours it into an initialed tumbler from his and Lola's wedding crystal. I feel as if he's my date at the Hotchkiss dance and we've been matched by height. No instant desire, only the need to stick the night out, not to be embarrassed by sitting in the corner crunching on the heels of my first pair of Capesios. Yes, Carter is like my date at that stupid dance, that stupid sit-down-next-to-your-date-turkey-a-la-king-dinner, followed by a brief, be-back-before-dark, nothing-in-the-bushes-because-the-bush-patrol-is-out, stroll around the track field. Carter, you should have been my date, should have been there when Dorcas got that first Tampax up her ass and we took the 'ch' out of the Hotchkiss banner to celebrate-- even if I had found her knocked out on the bathroom floor from trying so hard.

I should have Carter bring me home now, but he is still plunging and I'm tired. There is

wine on the living room rug from playing basketball with a marble, trying to get the marble into a cup on top of the bottle of Blue Nun. But Carter kicked the bottle over, showing us how he could jump flat-foot from the floor to the top of the coffee table. I wonder how Lola will feel when she sees the wine on her rug and the catsup on her pompom fringe. Maybe she would enjoy the story of jumping flat-foot. It was a good game to play for awhile and Lola is the activities director for a nursing home. Maybe we should have gone to the poetry reading Dick wanted us to go to. We wouldn't have messed up Lola's rug and we could have watched idiot poets recite their poems while Carter sneaks out with his gym bag to get another gallon of wine.

Carter will come into the living room again. I hear the less reluctant flush of the toilet, the familiar gurgle. He will spread a blanket on the floor and we will lie close and talk and rest finally. We have been through this a thousand times it seems. We will talk about my family and his family, his wife and daughter. He will wonder

why we are lying there on his living room rug and then he will draw me closer to him. I will tell him about my father again, about how I hate his touch and still, at twenty, wipe it away as if I were in the third grade playing 'Cooties.'

I have sat across from my father many times, as many times as I've lain like this with Carter. But I never talked with my father; I always listened. Listened to the words slide out on the tears in his eyes.

His eyes were always red, not so much from crying as from his Canadian Club. I was used to his smell. It only bothered me when he got so close. Sitting across from him made me fidget in my chair. Sometimes I'd bend down to collect rug lint. Anything to avoid his eyes. Why did he always have to touch me? Carter worries that someday he'll be just like my father, that he will have to sit across from his daughter and watch her try to wipe away the burn of his touch. It was something I had to do--to sit there and listen like that, take the time, sit there and nod and smile and hope he'd get tired and

finally let go. He always had to confide in me, but why did he have to stand in back of my chair, put his hands on my shoulders. Make yourself smaller, Jenny, make yourself so small he can't fit his hands on your shoulders. He shouldn't have touched me like he touched mother.

"Why don't you do that to your wife?"

And he would whisper that he loved me, that in his own special way he loved me. When would I begin to understand?

"Mother, tell him to stop it."

"Now Jenny, you stop it. He's only trying to show you he loves you." Mother's voice had been soft. It almost whispered.

Carter whispered now. I could tell he was serious; he whispered so I could barely hear, "I'll be just like your father, Jenny."

"Sure Carter. Only you'll fall for some kid who doesn't understand the past periphrastic."

Now we will begin to talk about the future, his future, my future, as if the future is something

easily defined, as cut and dry as the declension of a noun. He will cite the typical argument--history repeats itself, the circle. And I will argue the digamma.

In the morning, Carter will be embarrassed. He will rush into the bathroom and pretend he is brushing his teeth. When he comes out of the bathroom, he will take a minute to ask me why we spent the night like that, lying on his living room rug. There will be a lemon slice, dried out from the night before, on his coffee table and I will pick it up. There will be a milky white stain on the table. It is in the shape of this perfect slice of lemon.

On the way to the post office, I will tell Carter why we spent the night on his living room rug.

"Because there was no one better to spend it with, because you want to know what it'll be like when you're forty and madly in love with me and I don't care a bit, because you're a stupid chicken creep who goes toward life like my mother goes toward

a smorgasbord--with her pocketbook full of Baggies."

Then Carter will look hurt and I will laugh. Sometimes I laugh just to make people feel better, because sometimes I'll do anything just to avoid Carter's eyes. They can look that hurt.

Today is the anniversary. Outside, a storm has filled every bump of the road. Two little boys and their slightly chubby older sister are sweeping the rain water down the gutters. With push brooms, they are racing down the road. Water rushes with them; roils around their ankles and down under the one or two cars parked along the curb. First the girl shoves the mud water under a car then runs around it to force the water on further. They scream at one another.

Soon I will go to the post office. I'm going to mail in my membership fee for Book of the Month Club.

Your letter, Jenny, came as a surprise to me. I found it on my desk this morning when I came in to check on the new x-ray lab. (We'll soon have two machines to use in the clinic in addition to the new chairs we're having installed in November.) Mrs. Hazelton must have brought the letter in to me on Friday after I'd gone. Though I was glad to hear from you, I do wish you'd write me at home. That way I'll be sure to get your letters especially since I don't expect to be coming in to the college that often. I'll be teaching a course in molar construction on Monday nights though. By the way, have you had that tooth checked? There must be a dentist that some one of your friends could recommend to you. Just have the bill sent to me here and I'll take care of it. I'm short of money too, but I can afford the bill better than you probably.

But to your questions. Am I happy? Jenny, I honestly don't know how to answer you. You are now, at least, beginning to understand some of the difficulties your mother and I had. Maybe you are

even starting to understand why I left the way I did. It took me twenty-five years to figure out that much and I still don't understand it all. She's always had everything she wanted, everything she's asked for now she's got the house and the cottage for herself, but she'll never be happy. I am, at least, relieved to be out. But often I feel all too guilty about the situation I left your brother in. I don't worry about you girls. You'll do fine. I have faith in that. But Boder worries me. I'm glad that your mother will consent to letting him spend his summers up at the lake. Times pass when I imagine myself barely ten again, spending my summers at the lake.

I spent my tenth summer by myself mostly. There were no children my age and though this had been true in summers previous to my tenth, I think I felt my lack of companionship more deeply then. I only had that one morning chore--to take the two milk cans down to the Lockerby farm and have Earl fill them, the one with milk, the other with cream. I could have spent the whole day there, but after the tins

were filled and the cows were out to pasture, Earl'd shoo me on home, barefoot and dungareed. Ten cents a week for that milk and that included the extra pint of cream on Sundays! I walked slowly over the cool dirt road and through the pines, careful not to spill any of the precious white.

My mother always waited on the front porch for me. She sat, covered in her calico cobbler's apron, and watched me climb the hill in front of the cottage. Holding Boon at her side, she would rock slowly back and forth in the mission rocker. I remember so well the sound of Boon's tail as it swished against the rocker. Unless the English setter was held back, he would jump on me and send me tumbling. My mother seemed to be the only one who could control Boon. It was as if he too felt her sternness and understood too the awe I held for my mother.

Jenny, my mother was a hard working woman. She worked her tail off. We always dressed for lunch.

We could have never come running in with just our bathing suits on. Of course, we never had hamburgers for lunch either. Mother always made a big dinner at noon--beef or lamb, potatoes, salad, fresh berry pies and homemade rolls. I don't remember a time when your mother even baked a loaf of bread, a simple loaf of bread.

My father, too, had the respect of his children, his neighbors, and friends. Every man that talked to my father called him either Dr. Padelford or "the doctor." Even his closest friend, our next door neighbor, Reverend Hill.

Since my father was only up at the lake on weekends, I spent most of my afternoons with Mr. Hill. He was a rather large man with salt and pepper hair and silver wire glasses. When he worked in the shop, as he most always did, he usually wore a light wool shirt and blue gabardine trousers. He would answer patiently, almost painfully, my every question, explaining in detail as if he hoped another question wouldn't be necessary. I would sit cross-legged and anxious on the edge of the workbench as he would

sand down a decoy to prepare it for painting. When he wasn't explaining something about duck hunting, he would frequently explain the winds on the lake and I would listen. The lake still held its mystery for me then with its rolling south blows or the calmer ripple of the north wind. Mr. Hill would describe the greenish color that the lake took on at times and how clouds formed over the marsh until finally the rare east wind would sweep across the lake, bringing with it a fierce rain. Mr. Hill knew the lake better than anyone I've ever known.

Your brother isn't careful around the lake. He's got to learn some respect for water, to keep a distance. Last week when I was up at the house to see him, I saw him rush out across the highway, barely missed by the trucks and cars. I've told him time and time again to look, but he doesn't listen. Nobody listens, Jenny. Nobody. Mother, father, Mr. Hill all taught me respect. Respect for them and the lake and other peoples' property. I had Mrs. Hazelton xerox this letter that I once

got from Mr. Hill. I thought you might enjoy it. It was in with some old photographs your mother wanted me to take.

Dear Francis,

I take pleasure in giving to you this boat so that you can have one all your own, for rowing and fishing.

It is a Cape Cod Dory, and it is 10 feet long, 3 feet, 7 inches wide and 1 foot, 3-4 inches deep. It has been put in first class condition and has two coats of good paint.

It will teach you how to weather the storms and show you how to make a safe harbour. It will also hold all the fish you can catch in one day.

It is a sensitive boat and will go off by itself if you don't tie it, and take good care of it.

The boat has 2 sets of oar locks, a bronze tie ring and a small tow ring so that you can tow your father and me home if the motorboat gets in trouble. It also has a holder snap for your fish stringer.

The name of the boat is on the prow, and it is called "Heaps O' Fun." May you have heaps of fun in it, and there is only one thing I ask after you take the boat. Don't you dare ask me what the boat is for!

Your Faithful Friend,

/s/ Mr. Hill

August 4-1933

I remember when you girls got your first boat and insisted on painting the oars red. Your grandfather and I must have argued that with you two for hours. Old Mr. Hill never would have let you get away with it. And your grandfather was too soft hearted in his old age.

The only time I saw your grandfather loosen up was one evening with Mr. Hill. It was a terribly hot evening, after Mr. Hill and father had well surpassed their usual two ounce snifter of brandy, and the two of them began to make up songs about one another. I remember the mellow baritone of Mr. Hill's voice as he sang much

louder than I had ever heard him sing in the Methodist Church. H'd written a song about my father's last blueberry picking venture. Lying on my cot upstairs, I could hear the voice singing clearly:

Here's to you we sing
May the blueberry bog and the Listing log,
No further troubles bring,
You'll get dry in the bye and bye,
And the blueberry bog will too.
May blueberries light on your dreams tonight,
And your friends all be true blue!

The two of them laughed for what seemed to be hours and the rest of the bottle of brandy. I sneaked downstairs and, leaning against the newel post, watched them tap their feet against the porch railing in time to the song. Seeing my father and Mr. Hill that night made me feel somehow closer to them, as if I had finally seen them in a way nobody else had seen them, not even my mother.

I'm sorry that both those men are dead now, that you, Jenny, never had the opportunity to know them a little. I'm not afraid of dying anymore. I used to be just as afraid of it as you seem to be. But there's no use in it, Jenny, no use at all.

I've provided for my family. I've sent you and your sister through college, to one of the most expensive schools in the country. Your grandfather remembered you in his will and you've each got a little stock. Boder should make it through college the same way if I'm around to see to it. But I just don't worry anymore about you kids, Jenny. All the worrying's gone out of me.

And yes, Jenny, I do drink. Don't you see I've got to? I've got to drink, honey. Don't you see? I drink because there's so much, too much to handle. The dean's on my back trying to get me to insure our accreditation, this new x-ray lab, and I've only got two hands. I'm just a dentist. My hands are my work. Two hands. I'm just a sentimental old fool dentist. Moments of great mushiness come on me unexpectedly. I want the respect of my students here. I never did well in school. I never got A's and B's. Only C's. I've flunked courses and, goddamn it, I tried hard. I'm not expecting anything from my students or you except

that you do your best. Not A's. Just your best. Do it for me. For me. I'm your father and I love you. No matter what you do. Just do this for me--this one thing, because I'm your father, see? Your father. Don't make an ass of yourself, just don't be a jackass.

I guess my best memory about my family is our trip west, particularly when we were going through Iowa. Daddy had hitched the trailer on the back of the station wagon by 7:00 and we were ready to leave by ten to eight. There were tornado watches going on all through the state, but daddy thought we could beat it out of the danger area in time. Well, we were driving down I-99 when Boder saw the black cone whipping on down the road. It kept getting closer to us until it seemed like it would whirl us up with it any minute. Daddy kept driving faster and faster straight down the road and all I could say was: "Don't let us die. Oh please sweet Jesus, don't let us die." And right then, I loved mom and dad and Boder and even dumb ole Liza-poooh more than I

ever had or ever will. Pretty soon that tornado veered off the road and we pulled over to rest. Daddy got us all a Coca Cola and we took nearly a whole half hour to drink that soda.