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River Voices, Pontiac Bones
by
David Ridley Braden
B.A. University of Oregon, 1989

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Approved by


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SKIN AT FISH CREEK

LIST OF CHARACTERS

- BIKER LARRY:** Charismatic, about 55, 250 pounds, six feet. He looks like a pirate or a Falstaff, but the spark has gone out of his joviality. He wears a bandana over his head, a worn-out biker jacket, and engineer boots. He is leader to THREE FINGER CARL and IRISH.
- IRISH:** About 35, thin and bony, intense, a desperado. He wears cowboy boots, black pants, a western shirt, and an incongruous British cap.
- THREE FINGER CARL:** About 23, alcoholic, some brain damage possible, scrawny, unhealthy, jittery. He is the mascot of the group made up by himself, BIKER LARRY and IRISH. He wears logger pants and suspenders with a filthy tee-shirt. His saving grace is that he can fix anything well enough to make it run.
- MISS MONTANA:** Between 20 and 23, she's a beauty queen and a country girl. She wears a white sun visor, her "Miss Montana" ribbon, and a competition swimsuit.
- THE KID:** Between 12 and 14. He owns Fish Creek by virtue of having fished it every day for years. He wears cut-offs and a blue tee-shirt.
- OLD MAN:** Mid 60s, distracted, dressed in coat and tie, a bit ruffled. He's a victim of an unexamined life which has recently caught up with him as a result of his wife's illness.
- OLD WOMAN:** A stroke victim, a little older than her husband. She has been a mother to him as well as a wife. She's delicate, bird like.

SCENE: There is motion but no sound for a minute, then everyone freezes.

BIKER LARRY and the boys are passing the bottle in the shade beside Fish Creek. Their red pick-up is parked, broken down, with its hood up, nearby. THREE FINGER CARL is lying down, IRISH is standing. BIKER LARRY is sitting, looking patriarchal.

MISS MONTANA is applying makeup, lipstick, eyeliner, etc. She has everything she needs layed out in circlets of gravel or small rocks taken from the stream bank.

THE KID is fishing, tying on a hook, going through his tackle box.

THE OLD MAN and OLD WOMAN are motionless, gripping each other's hands across a folding card table in front of an Airstream trailer on which a christian fish symbol is visible.

The four groupings on stage, BOYS drinking, OLD COUPLE holding on, KID fishing, MISS MONTANA arranging herself, are all involved in ritualistic activities. There ought to be a rythmic quality to the interaction of these rituals with a counterpoint supplied by the stillness of the OLD COUPLE.

The action has been silent and then, frozen. MISS MONTANA can start it up again by checking her leg for stubble. She moves from tantalizing leg stroke to stylized parade wave at the audience. As she does so, the rest of the characters can resume their activity. The OLD COUPLE remains motionless, the OLD MAN willing life into his wife.

THE BOYS continue passing the bottle. BIKER LARRY sharpens his knife. IRISH sits and rolls a smoke. THREE FINGER CARL sits up, then stands and begins to fidget with a large key ring attached to his pocket by a chain. Of the three, he is most interested in MISS MONTANA. IRISH is calculated about his interest

in her. BIKER LARRY's interest is cursory; he's more concerned by the reaction of IRISH and THREE FINGER CARL.

THE BOYS

(Stopping to look at MISS MONTANA as they talk and drink.)

IRISH

Well I didn't sell the tools. I mean whose idea was that anyway, to sell the goddamn tools when we had to go clear out to Helmsville and dig through a junkyard all day to find a part.

BIKER LARRY

Well we're here ain't we and it's where we wanted to be and we ain't left yet, so it don't matter.

THREE FINGER CARL

I tole you, I just need a crescent wrench to put er in.

IRISH

Real problem is it's a damn Ford. (Looks at Miss Montana.)

BIKER LARRY

It's a good truck. I had to steal it back from that Eileen, cause she kept sayin she was gonna pay me and she only give me a hunnerd down and then told me it was broke.

THREE FINGER CARL

I can fix er. (Begins to fiddle with keys, looking at Miss Montana, still lying down.)

BIKER LARRY

Now I got the The Sons of Satan lookin all over town for me tryin to get the truck back. I'll tell you, I had a rough time down in LA, and I come up here to rest is all and then come to find out Eileen's got a new old man and wants to steal my fuckin truck.

IRISH

(Rolls a smoke, still looking at Miss Montana.)

THREE FINGER CARL

Tell me about LA big Lare. I never been to there.

BIKER LARRY

(Takes out a chew) People don't keep the faith no more. Kids got them piss ant little guns shootin about a million times a minute. I'm tryin to deal some good dope man, and they treat me like I was, I dunno, like nothin. Used to be man, like you could tell who was a brother you know, like you had to at least look at a man before you fucked with

him. These punks don't give a shit about nobody. I'm in this old house, tryin to do a deal, and all of a sudden I'm shootin and I still don't know why. Got shot twice man. I don't know. Fuck the truck man, I just want to sit here.

IRISH

It's a Ford is what it is. Carl sold the tools to get him a bottle I bet.

THREE FINGER CARL

I didn't Lare, honest, but I can fix it. I just need a crescent wrench is all.

BIKER LARRY

It's OK Carl.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Can't keep his eyes off Miss Montana, who is now checking her pubic hair. He stands up.) Damn man, would you look at that.

IRISH

Kin almost taste it, can't you Carl?

(Miss Montana gets up, sashays over to the creek, dips a toe, notices something, bends over, picks up a bottle, opens it and begins reading.)

IRISH

(Cont. as Miss Montana bends over.) Go get 'er Carl, g'on.

THREE FINGER CARL

Shit man, would you just look.

MISS MONTANA

"Dear Miss Montana, I think you are beautiful. My sister says that you live in the forest where there are bears. Do you know secret Indian beauty stuff?"

Amy Taskerton
Ashville, Oregon

MISS MONTANA (Cont.)

Well Amy, I think I do... Oh look, there's more. (She begins fishing out more bottles, lining them up on the bank.)

IRISH

Go on Carl, go get 'er boy.

BIKER LARRY

(Sharpening his knife - He's been brooding, not bothered much by Miss Montana.) Too rich for my blood.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Gesturing with bottle as Miss Montana bends over for another bottle) Just look at it Lare.

BIKER LARRY

Leave her be Carl, like eatin beans on an empty stomach.

IRISH

Go on Carl, tell her all about them machines you dreamed up, how yer gonna be a manufacturer and all.

BIKER LARRY

Dammit Irish, ain't you got enough trouble lookin out for your own self. See Carl, it ain't exactly a woman you're lookin at. It's like she's a part 'o the country, a beauty queen see? She's like the flag man. Ya don't fuckin mess with the flag.

THREE FINGER CARL

Yeah, I know what you're sayin big Lare, but she don't look like no flag to me, looks like one 'a them in a magazine, kind ya read with your fist.

IRISH

Fuckin-A-right Carl.

(All three of them watch Miss Montana.)

THE KID

(He has been making a fort with rocks and sticks. He pokes a spot in the weeds, watches a frog jump, stares into the pool.)

THE KID (cont.)

Frogs know about it I bet and don't like geeks too. Yeah, and I know about it too -- biggest fish ever I bet, gotta be right here and I gotta pretend like I don't know or the geeks'll spoil it. (He kicks fort apart; begins making a small dam.)

MISS MONTANA

(Pacing, serious but always self-conscious, composing her answers.) Dear Amy, the secret of beauty is in the beholder. Tell your sister that the only bears around here are of the male persuasion. (She gets another bottle open, takes out a message.)

THREE FINGER CARL

I'm goin over there.

IRISH

Yeah go to it Carl.

BIKER LARRY

Dammit Carl, leave her be.

IRISH

Let him go Larry. Carl's man enough ain't ya Carl?

BIKER LARRY

Let it alone Irish. She ain't doin nothin to us is she?

IRISH

Well she don't have to for us to want to do somethin to her. Ain't that right Carl.

THREE FINGER CARL

Gimme the bottle Irish. I'm goin.

BIKER LARRY

Dammit Carl, you hurt her, I'll kill you.

(Three Finger Carl starts off toward Miss Montana. Irish rolls another smoke, Larry goes back to his knife-sharpening.)

MISS MONTANA

Dear Jake, thank you for your kind letter. I like a man who works hard and speaks his mind. Of course you'd stand a chance with me.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Has already started over to her but is afraid and hesitant. He has stopped to take another hit from his bottle and now catches sight of The Kid and starts towards him instead.)

MISS MONTANA

(Always continuing her self-conscious walk, thinking, opening another bottle, etc.)

THE KID

(Playing boats now, pushing a stick around.) Geek comin, starboard tack, lower the boats. (He picks up a large rock and drops it, splashing Three Finger Carl.)

THREE FINGER CARL

Damn Kid, whadya go and do that for. Didn't yer folks teach ya no manners.

THE KID

I'm sorry mister. I was playin see, you take a rock like this (picks up a rock) and you blast the Phonecians like this. (Splashes Three Finger Carl again.)

THREE FINGER CARL
 Fuckin Kid's nuts. Heh Kid that your mom?

THE KID
 Nah.

THREE FINGER CARL
 Sister?

THE KID
 No.

THREE FINGER CARL
 Well I was just askin cause I was wantin to say hi to her see?

THE KID
 She doesn't like you. You should leave.

THREE FINGER CARL
 Fuckin Kid. Heh, you catchin any fish here?

THE KID
 Aren't any fish here.

THREE FINGER CARL
 What you fishin for then?

THE KID
 I'm just fishin, that's all.

THREE FINGER CARL
 Kid's fuckin nuts. Heh Irish, Lare, Kid's fuckin nuts. You're a regular little bastard, ya know that Kid? If you was mine, I'd whip ya. (Three Finger Carl inspects the Kid's tackle. The Kid is angry but backs off.)

BIKER LARRY
 (To himself) Kid's OK.

IRISH
 I'm gonna rustle up another bottle.

OLD WOMAN
 (Starting, as if waking, but still holding on.) We're here aren't we Ed? The river? The light through the trees? Where the pain goes?

OLD MAN
 It's gonna be OK, you just hold on.

THE KID
 (To Three Finger Carl) You should go, you're gonna get all wet.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Continuing to rifle through the Kid's tackle box) Heh, Lare, you should see this shit. (He pulls out a collection of bones tied together with fishing line and string.)

THE KID

You should leave that alone. It's mine. (He stabs in the edge of the pool, splashing Three Finger Carl with mud.)

THREE FINGER CARL

(Jumps back and then menaces the Kid.) Goddamn you little fucker.

BIKER LARRY

(Gets up and starts over.) Leave him be Carl. Carl! I said, leave him be!

THREE FINGER CARL

Yeah, well fuck you kid. You hear me, fuck you. (He turns and begins walking toward Miss Montana.)

MISS MONTANA

(Miss Montana has fished out all the bottles now and has arranged them all in a row. She is lying down applying hot rocks to her skin.)

BIKER LARRY

(Arrives at Kid's fishing hole, looks after Three Finger Carl who gets to where Miss Montana is lying, takes a drink, makes to speak, can't and stands there staring at her while she continues her treatment oblivious to him.)

BIKER LARRY (cont.)

(Larry shakes his head at Three Finger Carl, looks into the pool, walks around the area looking at the ground, finally squats by tackle box.) Seen him yet?

THE KID

Ain't seen nothin.

BIKER LARRY (cont.)

Pretty good spot.

THE KID

Maybe, yeah, might be.

BIKER LARRY

Guess everybody's botherin you.

THE KID

It's just they don't know about it see?

BIKER LARRY

Might be I used to have a fishin hole, back a ways that was. You got a big one here, got yer eye on him, got yer stuff all set to go. The boys don't mean to harm but you're right, they don't understand about magic. Tell ya what, you let me see them bones of yours, and I'll keep em off ya.

THE KID

And you won't tell nobody.

BIKER LARRY

I'll swear to it.

THE KID

OK then.

BIKER LARRY

(Takes out the bones, sticks, string, feathers, untangles it, runs his hands over fetish lovingly, sits cross-legged and presses one end to his forehead, closes his eyes.)

THE KID

(Goes back to fishing.)

MISS MONTANA

(Oblivious to Three Finger Carl, sits up, grabs a bottle, reads.) Dear Miss Montana, I love your thighs and breasts. I'd like to grease em up real good and lick em clean as a safeway chicken.

Ed Lahey, Broxton, Colorado

MISS MONTANA (cont.)

(Lying back down, holding rock to her stomach.) Dear Ed, This is one chicken who's staying out of your pan but thank you for the compliment.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Who has been fussing still trying to get his courage up, finally makes it the last couple of steps and stands directly over her.)

THREE FINGER CARL (cont.)

Uh, hi Miss Montana, my name's Carl, Three Finger Carl they call me on account of I only got three fingers cause I left the other ones someplace lyin around. Ha, get it? Huh? Just forgot where I put em, see?

MISS MONTANA

(Sitting) Carl, well how nice, would you just hold these rocks for me Carl? I think your fingers are cute. You've lost different bits of them haven't you? So they're really

quite original - don't you think so Carl?

THREE FINGER CARL

Yes, mam, I guess they are. (Three Finger Carl has been holding his bottle against his side with his arm so that he can hold Miss Montana's rocks with the proper respect. He begins squirming, trying not to let the bottle fall.)

BIKER LARRY

(Lets the string and bones drop to the ground, gets up slowly and goes back to sit under his tree.)

THREE FINGER CARL

Mam? Could you maybe take the bottle, I mean, would you like a drink.

MISS MONTANA

Why certainly Carl, as long as you're holding my rocks for me, I'd be happy to take care of your bottle. (She reaches up and takes his bottle, stands, does some modeling moves with it, stroking it, etc. Puts it at the end of her row of message bottles and parades up and down in front of the line-up as though before a line of judges at a bathing beauty competition.)

MISS MONTANA (cont.)

Now Carl, it seems to me that your bottle is bigger than all the rest. Can you tell me what's in it. What message is there in that big bottle of yours for Miss Montana Carl?

THREE FINGER CARL

I dunno Mam but I'm real glad you like it.

MISS MONTANA

You dear sweet little man, of course you are. Now I want you to dig down real deep and find a message for me in that bottle.

THREE FINGER CARL

I dunno.

MISS MONTANA

Well we'll see if we can't find one. You'll follow me, won't you Carl?

THREE FINGER CARL

Yes mam, I will.

MISS MONTANA

(Holding the bottle in the air, begins a parade march. Carl shuffles along behind her holding the rocks. Miss Montana and Three Finger Carl exit, the

sense being that they are continuing their march and it happens to take them off stage.)

IRISH

(Is still in the truck and has been rummaging around in it looking for the bottle which he has already found, (he could be seen earlier taking a drink from it), and also something else which he appears to have found now as he has his head down doing something intently.)

BIKER LARRY

(Has been stoic but has looked over several times and has lost his patience. He stands, looks over, strokes his beard, suspecting something, shakes off his booze head and starts over to the truck.)

BIKER LARRY (cont.)

Heh Irish, Heh man, where's the bottle? (He arrives at the truck and leans over to look in the window.)

BIKER LARRY (cont.)

Well Goddamn! You fuckin little snitch! (He slams his hand on the top of the truck.) Holdin out on your Bro'. (He begins rocking the truck, using sing-song voice with the motion.)

BIKER LARRY (cont.)

Irish, my Bro', Irish, hittin a dime bag in my own goddamn fuckin truck. Man don't know, don't know how it is. (Bangs the roof again.) I'm gonna hav'ta hurt him, hurt my own Bro'.

IRISH

Shut the fuck up, you'll spill it man, just chill out a minute, lemme get 'er loaded up. I'll split it with ya man, OK, you gonna quit now?

BIKER LARRY

How's yer point?

IRISH

Clean man.

BIKER LARRY

Crank? (Irish nods.) Well be careful you're hand's shakin.

IRISH

Whaddya think I'm tryin to be. I been watchin this fuckin spoon like a cat watchin a half kilt mouse the whole time

you been carryin on.

BIKER LARRY

Yeah well, be careful see. OK, move over. Lemmee flag it.

(They take turns hitting up. This takes awhile. Miss Montana leads Three Finger Carl across stage and out again. The Kid has been shooting his sling-shot (also in his tackle box)).

THE KID

Shit, I hit him, I hit him right in the head. Wonder if he's dead. (Kid exits, comes back with a dead wood pecker which he lays out next to where Biker Larry has dropped his amulet. he sits in front of these absently stroking first one then the other staring at the pool.)

IRISH

Feel better?

BIKER LARRY

Feel like I'm standin in a box-car door in Ju-ly, feel like Marilyn Monroe. You ever find that bottle?

IRISH

Yeah, here it is. (Biker Larry drinks hugely, wipes his mouth.) Heh, man, I don't know what got into me, holdin out on ya like that. (Suddenly amused, to himself) Heh, did I tell you about visitin my sis?

BIKER LARRY

No.

IRISH

Well I get there an' she ain't dyin ta see me but she don't wanta be rude and like not trustin me in front of her old man, proud ya know, family and all? So, anyway they're gettin ready to go away somewhere for a couple of days and she fuckin gives me the keys.

BIKER LARRY

So what did you do?

IRISH

Well her old man's got this brand new boat, big honkin thing sittin right in the front yard. I sold it, sold it three times as a matter of fact.

BIKER LARRY

(Chuckles and shakes his head) And you're down the road free and easy time they get back?

IRISH

You know it brother.

BIKER LARRY

You shouldn'ta oughta held out on me like that Irish. You fuck around too much, like you don't know quit.

IRISH

Bull shit, fuck you talkin? It's good crank ain't it? Where you think I got the money for it? Yeah, that's right. You can thank my brother-in-law for your head man.

BIKER LARRY

I'm just sayin how it is. You don't know quit.

(Miss Montana traipses back on stage leading Three Finger Carl. The Kid has been getting more and more upset about having killed the bird muttering: "I shou'nt of," and "I'm sorry God," while Biker Larry and Irish are talking. He gets up and smashes his talisman against the rocks, picks up some of the pieces and throws them into the pool. Then he sits down again, pulls a couple of tail feathers from the dead wood pecker (a flicker) puts the feathers in his tackle box and begins piling rocks over the dead body.)

IRISH

You wanta know how it is? You think you're some kinda authority? Some kinda gahroo? Well I been to school man, same school as you and it ain't about nothin. Straight people man, always tryin to mean somethin, tryin to pretend man, and like makin up stuff you gotta do so you can play the same game. Ain't nothin but a big motherfuckin nothin man and a bunch of assholes talkin shit. You wanta know what this fuckin country's about man? It's about puttin bullshit in boxes. I tell you what Lare, I'm a perfect fuckin package, I don't believe in nothin, I flat out don't give a shit.

BIKER LARRY

Irish, you ain't nothin but a hurt in the world. Don't have the sense God gave you. I mean, look around you, look at this place, this is God's own country man, the USA. You make me sick man, you make everything sick. Lot a things man, just black and white. (Biker Larry clenches fists, arms out-stretched) You gotta feel em, love em, you think too fuckin much, there ain't nothin left. I feel sorry for you Irish, I really do.

IRISH

(Noticing Miss Montana and Three Finger Carl who are back on stage) Hey man! I'm gonna fuck that hot pants little bitch. You want some Lare?

BIKER LARRY

You don't fuck with a thing like that. It ain't right.

IRISH

She's fuckin with Carl's head, been fuckin with it all day.

BIKER LARRY

It's like her job man. You gotta respect that.

MISS MONTANA

(Near the truck) That's right Carl, you can put the rocks in the truck for me and take your bottle and we'll go to talk to your nice friends.

(Biker Larry and Irish get out of the truck and stand on opposite sides as Three Finger Carl starts putting Miss Montana's rocks in.)

IRISH

You workin Carl? or what? What the fuck you doin sniffin around after this little bitch?

THREE FINGER CARL

It's just some beauty stuff I was helpin out with. See, she's got like these messages from all over and we was lookin for mine in the bottle see because she says I must have one because I got, well, I got'a big bottle.

MISS MONTANA

(Begins doing her swimsuit walk, parading) The messages keep pouring in, a whole sea of bottles, a whole sea of full of the male persuasion and I just keep answering and answering.

IRISH

You want a bottle huh? Well suck on this you fuckin beauty queen bitch. (He grabs for her.)

OLD MAN

(He gently lets go of his wife's hands and starts slowly towards the pick-up truck.)

OLD WOMAN

(Begins making hand movements like she was grabbing at hands that aren't there or climbing a ladder.)

THE KID

(Stops what he's doing and watches, hesitates, then starts over to the Old Woman when he is sure that the Old Man is going to be occupied for awhile.)

BIKER LARRY

Ah damn.

MISS MONTANA

(Sees that the threat is for real and turns to Three Finger Carl.) Help me.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Hold his bottle in front of him, warding off Irish.) Don't hurt her Irish, look in the bottle, there's a message.

IRISH

(Knocks Three Finger Carl down. Three Finger Carl stays down holding his bottle.) Come here bitch. I'm gonna fuck you.

(Miss Montana runs, breaking away from Irish. Biker Larry has started forward towards back of truck. Miss Montana runs into him. Biker Larry pushes Miss Montana and sends her sprawling to protect her. He grapples with Irish and subdues him by wrenching one arm up behind Irish's back.)

OLD MAN

(He arrives during the fracas and stands there, looking slightly ruffled, tie askew, with his hands in his pockets. He stands a little off to the side facing the audience, clearing his throat in the sudden silence that results from the end of the fracas. Miss Montana is lying on the ground.)

OLD MAN (cont.)

I don't think, really, that this will do. I mean it is of course a public place and I suppose it's none of my business, but my wife you see?

BIKER LARRY

(Lets go of Irish. The two of them move closer to Miss Montana and stare down at her. The three men are grouped around her in silence. Nobody knows what to say. After a pause, the Old Man turns

away from the audience and stares down at her as well. The silence continues, becoming threatening as they examine her, moving their heads to follow the line of her legs as she shifts her body, trying to get away by drawing into herself.)

MEANWHILE

(The Kid has taken the Old Woman's comb and is combing her hair. She has stopped making her grabbing gestures and is smiling.)

OLD WOMAN

And I'm sure I remember I always put the dogs by the lilac vase.

BIKER LARRY

You dumb shit, you kilt her.

IRISH

Looks fine to me. Spread em honey, we ain't gonna hurt ya.

OLD MAN

Well, of course, you're quite right, the young lady has an excellent physique, and you gentlemen are naturally interested, but it hardly seems the time or place, not that I want to interfere of course, but my wife, you see...and I'm afraid the strain. She's had quite a shock I'm afraid... the young lady, I mean. You might invite her to supper at your camp. Perhaps you could phone her. That would be proper under the circumstances I think. She really should freshen up a bit... Look for yourselves, dirt streaks, she seems to be sweating and her hair is mussed.

THREE FINGER CARL

(Has been crawling to Miss Montana's side. He is stroking her hair.) Could ya come back now and look in my bottle for me?

MISS MONTANA

Oh my, I'm very tired now. (Sitting) I should have a sweater.

OLD MAN

(Offering coat) Here, will this help?

MISS MONTANA

Thank you, yes. (She puts it on, folds knees in it.) Is there a photographer out there? I need a photographer.

OLD MAN

(Bending to help her.) Let me help you to your feet dear. You've had quite a shock.

MISS MONTANA

No, I think you should go away and get me a photographer. I'm not feeling well. I need a photographer. (She fends off more hands reaching to help her. Then, laughs to herself.) Miss Montana thinks you all look like ugly black little lens caps. She thinks you should back (switch to higher voice register) the fuck off, fuck off, I think... Did you know?... that if you hold a bottle to your ear, you can hear the ocean... (She stands, gathering herself back into her image.) Give me your bottle, Carl. (Carl hands her bottle.)

MISS MONTANA (con't)

(She holds bottle to her ear, puts finger to her lips, trying to capture an audience. She begins rocking bottle in her arms, gives it a little kiss on the neck, begins walking towards table, singing gently.)

MISS MONTANA (con't)

Hush, little baby, don't you cry... etc. (As she sings, she is walking with exaggerated hip roll. She stops, looks over her shoulder to make sure the men are following.)

(The Boys trail over to the table... Miss Montana hands the Old Man his coat. He sits down, holding his wife's hands again. The Kid moves behind the table and between them.)

MISS MONTANA

(Does modeling moves with bottle. They look ugly now, crudely sexual.)

BIKER LARRY

Kid, you know these people?

IRISH

What the fuck is happenin man?

THE KID

Old lady's dyin. She's been dyin all day.

OLD MAN

Stroke.

OLD WOMAN

I put the little magnetic dogs by the lilac vase.

MISS MONTANA

(Puts bottle between her legs and begins making fucking motions.)

BIKER LARRY

You oughta be fishin kid.

THE KID

Fish're waitin.

THREE FINGER CARL

Big Lare? Could ya make her tell me my message. My fingers hurt big Lare. Ya gotta make her tell me.

OLD WOMAN

Like silver air cars in the trees. Like the tow lift when we went went skiing Ed, but there isn't any rope, just the cars like lightening bugs. Johnny? Is that you?

THE KID

I'm here mam.

OLD WOMAN

You're fishin aren't you, Johnny? Like you used to? My but you must be hungry; you've been fishin under that piano all day. Would you like a sandwich Johnny?

OLD MAN

Johnny's gone ma.

THE KID

No I ain't. She thinks I'm him.

MISS MONTANA

I'm cold.

IRISH

Fuck this! You're all swimmin in shit. (He takes his hat off and throws it at the Kid) Here, put this in your box. Go on goddammit, do it before I stuff you in there with it. Two bit bitch and a dyin old bag. Mealy mouth fuck head (Old Man) Garoo and a wino. What the fuck we doin here? WELL FUCK IT!! I'm takin what I came for.

(Irish tips over the table. The Old Man falls over in his chair. Three Finger Carl makes himself small. The Kid backs up as table falls. Irish takes his belt off, pushes Miss Montana onto her back, holds belt across her throat, straddles her and bends to kiss her.)

BIKER LARRY

Shit. (He takes an ice pick from his belt behind his back and stabs Irish in the back. Irish rolls off Miss Montana. Dies.)

THE KID

(Goes to Miss Montana) You alright lady?

BIKER LARRY

Ain't nothin, alright. G'on, get.

THE KID

Geezer's dead too.

BIKER LARRY

Musta been his ticker.

THE KID

Heh lady, wanta see the fish? C'mon, I'll show you. (Tugs at her arm and Miss Montana follows him. Miss Montana is sick - holding her stomach.)

BIKER LARRY

(Rights the table and sits facing the Old Woman.)

THREE FINGER CARL

(Terrified, backing up) I gotta go find my message. OK big Lare?

BIKER LARRY

Yeah Carl, you go find it. (He reaches across the table and takes the Old Woman's hands in his.) I had to do it mam. I'm sorry. It ain't like they say; I really am sorry, been sorry mostly my whole life.

OLD WOMAN

I know you are, Johnny. I told you not to ride your bike in the street like that.

BIKER LARRY

Well, I ain't Johnny mam; but I got to make you understand, cause you ain't here or anywhere exactly, I mean. See what it is, it's like skin, like the whole world and everybody was covered in this skin and it was strong and pully like that stuff at carnivals. Irish, he'as tryin ta get through the skin's all, tryin to hurt his way through. But then there's all these folks walkin around and sometimes they feel like they ain't got no skin at all which is the funny part I guess. Cause they got to find some skin and they take the pully stuff and try to put it on, cover theirselves up like, only it ain't really no good but sometimes they find a patch that fits real good and then you can see em all shiny like and it ain't no good to take it away. Only thing is, mam, I used to could come out here and there'd be places through the trees sometimes or maybe cool by the river where there weren't no skin, no tired old rubbery feel of it in the air even and now I can't find it. I used to could drink and get high and I could see the skin. I could see right through it sometimes. Don't nothin seem to work no more. So I got this raggedy old patch of it mam, pulled right up to ma chin mam.

OLD WOMAN

(Suddenly lucid) Who are you? What are you doing here? Where's Ed? My God, what's happening to me? (She half

stands trying to free herself but Biker Larry won't let go. The effort seems to cost her her brief hold on reality and she lapses back into trance.)

OLD WOMAN (cont.)

Oh Johnny, you're spilling out everywhere.

BIKER LARRY

No mam, but I wish I were.

MEANWHILE

(The Kid has been showing Miss Montana his pool and displaying the treasures in his tackle box. Biker Larry and the Old Woman hold hands.)

THE KID

Caught a four pounder on this one here. I forgot what it's called but it's a red flasher. That was down at the truck hole cause I found this old truck by there.

MISS MONTANA

What's this place called...um? My name's Susan. What's your name?

THE KID

Mine's Tommy.

MISS MONTANA

OK, Tommy, what's this place called?

THE KID

This here's the Goin Home hole. Usually I only come here late but I'm fishin for Old Mud today.

MISS MONTANA

Can I try?

THE KID

Well yeah, if I show you, but lady? We gotta do somethin. I mean the fish won't bite less we do somethin.

MISS MONTANA

Oh Tommy, I know. When I was little, my father called me princess and he bought me a little pink ballerina dress with ruffles and everyone loved me. Then when I was in junior high the boys came, and once that Johnny Foster who lived next door wanted to take me in the haybarn and fool around and I let him and Tim Ecstrom look at me but I wouldn't let them do anything. But I don't want to anymore, Tommy, and I don't want to go over there because they'll know. Everybody will know and I won't get anymore messages at all, not ever.

THE KID

Yeah, you got all squished up inside. I know 'bout that

cause where I live my Uncle was doin bad stuff to me and then my mom went away too.

MISS MONTANA

Oh, I'm sorry Tommy.

THE KID

Yeah, so now I have to go away and that's how come I know I'm gonna catch Old Mud today.

MISS MONTANA

I'll help you catch him. But I don't want to go over there.

THE KID

Oh c'mon lady, um, I mean Susan, I saw you puttin them rocks on yourself.

MISS MONTANA

Rocks, oh, yes...oh.

THE KID

C'mon Susan, I'll show you what to do.

(The Kid and Miss Montana walk over to the table where the bodies are. Miss Montana is fidgety. The Old Woman turns towards her but doesn't seem to see her.)

THE KID

(Looks from Miss Montana to Old Woman and back again.) OK, you just stand here for a sec.

MISS MONTANA

(To Old Woman) Um, hi. How are you?

(The Old Woman doesn't answer, just keeps staring. Miss Montana covers herself with her arms and looks down at the ground.)

THE KID

(Goes first to Old Man's body, checks it out, then to Irish's body, which he pokes with his toe.)

THE KID (cont.)

Gotta fix em, make em right. (To Miss Montana) We'll put em over there. (Points to a spot in front of the table. He steps over the body to get to the place he's pointed out, then changes his mind, walks back around it and steps on it to get there.) We'll drag it over here by the legs.1 (He goes back to Miss Montana.) Susan, heh Susan, c'mon.

(Miss Montana forces herself to grab a foot and begins to pull. The Old Woman turns away and smiles.)

THE KID

(He has also grabbed a foot but Miss Montana is stronger and the body turns to one side. The arm on her side drags up awkwardly and they have difficulty making any progress.)

MISS MONTANA

Oh, this is hard.

THE KID

He's still floppy. Heh, maybe we could stick his hands in his belt.

(The Kid goes to get Irish's belt, a cowboy model with gawdy relief work on the over-size buckle. Miss Montana examines the body, losing more of her fear. The Kid tries to get the belt under the body and can't.)

MISS MONTANA

Here, give it to me, I'll do it.

MISS MONTANA (cont.)

(She straddles the dead man's knees and manages to lift his torso in an embrace while she lays the belt beneath him. She gets the belt tied tightly around his arms, gets up, nudges the body with her foot.)

MISS MONTANA (cont.)

OK. (The two of them drag the body the rest of the way and sit down to rest.)

OLD WOMAN

Ed never understood about the little magnetic dogs and I always kept the flowers fresh in the lilac vase where I put them. Why did Ed go in the trees? I hope he went to find Johnny. Poor Johnny. His father gave him that bike and told him he didn't deserve it. Ed was always good to Johnny but what could we do. Our daughter wouldn't hardly speak to us. Her husband was so wonderful. We gave her everything when she was little and Ed treated her like a little queen. And then Johnny was so troubled but what could we do?

MEANWHILE

(Miss Montana and the Kid have dragged the Old Man from out behind the table.)

THE KID
This one's easy.

MISS MONTANA
Shouldn't we fix his arms?

THE KID
Nah, he's light, let em flop. I can fix em later.

(They get the Old Man's body laid out beside Irish's. Miss Montana and the Kid begin moving them around, shifting the arms and legs, turning the heads, stopping to look. Finally they are arranged so that Irish's legs are crossed and his face is up. The Old Man is arranged so that he is curled on his side, knees up, head in his hands.)

THE KID
OK, now we gotta get some stuff.

(They exit, come back, exit, carrying branches and leaves which are arranged around the bodies until the corpses resemble a small bushy hummock.)

BIKER LARRY
(Who has been watching, lets the Old Woman's hands drop and stands.) It's like they was angels come right out of all the raggedy old skin.

(The Kid and Miss Montana take rocks out of pick-up and place them on the heads of the dead.)

LIGHTS and brief reprise.

(The table is set, huge fish in the center. Biker Larry is groomed with suit coat and cowboy hat while Miss Montana is in a white dress.)

OLD WOMAN
And if I die before I wake,

BIKER LARRY
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

THE KID
Pass the biscuits please.

Fish Creek

The trout comes from nowhere
rising like a taste in my mouth
out of the clear water
as startling as the taste
of my grandmother's bedtime kiss
rising up after twenty years
to nudge this moment from the surface.

And then it's gone, headed for a stump,
huge pale green back, shine sided,
up to a blood red thrash on the surface
and down again to the bright magnified bottom
and the roots of the stump.

It's easy to wade too deep,
the line snaps, my surprise at the slackness,
is drowned by the icy flush of water
in my boots. I yell and gasp
my way back to the bank, laugh
and think about a girl in a yellow dress
I haven't met yet. I'm fourteen again,
walking fish creek, emptying my boots
in the sudden smell of mint.

This Spring

When I cross over the silt of the flood plain
through willows and the debris that hangs
like skin from their branches, I will stand
in the dry rising heat of the stones on the bank
as though I stood between the ribs of the world
and the river were a winding bone that shimmered
down its back. I will listen in the silence
that rushes down from the mountain snows
for the white words of the sun that are careless
as lizards and small brown birds. When I fish,
they will scatter through the dazzle of quartz
and moving water, what they mean resting
like warm sand along the curve of my life.

Gravity

I stare at the river flowing
like iron blood out of the hills.
I've been thinking about gravity,
listening to mountains, trying for some
trembling center of my own,
but I only flutter and I can't think
in anything but a balsa whisper
planing through the trees. The mountains
have a tone that crushes thought
with no more effort than it takes
a few thousand years to crack and scatter
bones. I imagine my hands as big as mountains.
I smooth pine trees along their flanks,
rub one finger against a cliff,
a forehead, above the rock slides
on either side the temples, mine maybe.

Fish Creek in July

Insects and the droning heat,
legs poached in my waders,
the undergrowth like walking through the dream
of someone who doesn't like me, tangled
as animal hair on a brush as big as God.

Ahead, a logging road meets the river,
shallow water, I wade out, cooling and look back.
The twist-eye trees push out against the bank,
spill into the river that pours the spring-long list
of all their green and jumbled growing into speech.
I can almost understand my place in this.

almost hear a sentence in the river's pause
by a grassed bank, turns of logic
in an eddy, rolling cadence
over deep black stone. If I could see
the whole thing at once maybe--
every riffled break of light like the one
I've crossed to fish a willowed gravel spit.

My feet are large in the clear water.
Downstream, a logjam wavers in the heat.
If I could see the whole thing at once,
my teeth might taste as cold as quartz
in water splashing off the fish at my feet.

Skiing the Blackfoot by Moonlight

Seventy years ago, the river's reaching trees
were blasted to make the pasture I ski through.
Tonight, it is white and secret
as the belly of my dog beside me.

The cliffs rise up above us, a frozen wave
breasted out against tracteries
of cold snow foam. The silence is whole.
The cliffs have nothing to say

about everything, and that is a language
that belongs to minded space, moon and stars,
not to me, or the river I belong to.
Still, the river's trees are dark, like a shadow

cast by the cliffs. Stragglings pines
cut off by the field appear to writhe
in the scree at the cliff base: there are prayers
whose futility is an insult.

My own are faint, chilled in the white snowed light.
My dog runs off after a deer. I ski after her
to the edge of the field, calling, breathing hard
among the trees. I can hear the river now,

mixed with my breath, my pulse in my ears,
a noise that walks, crawls, grows through
the soil and air, thaws, freezes, dies away.
Far off, a rock clatters, adds to the skirt of scree.

The dog comes back, but later, on a frozen section
of the river, she finds a carcass,
the head and shoulders of a deer caught by thin ice
and frozen now, protruding.

I have to cross the river ice to get to her.
My skis sound as far from me as the cliffs.
The ice moves, a catch in the throat. I'm balanced
for an instant. The dog looks up, goes back to eating.

Bar, Saturday Night, Missoula, Montana

It's early. Tables and chairs swell
like tongues in the empty mouth of the room.
The promise of flesh slides out of dark wood.
Beer stained conversations struggle
from the arms of a chair. An old woman
sits in a corner. The thin line of her back
has a grace that pulses and would grow
to a thrumming beat if she let it
get away from the gentle rub
of her fingers on her glass.
Two couples enter, find the right place
to sit, to balloon in and out of union.
Outside, the streets are standing up
out of the day's heat and running away,
rubbing themselves to a dry electric fire
under the street lights in the evening's
long northern blush. The fields are listening
and in the river's deepest bend,
the dumbest, slowest currents are flicking
a brute shoulder, smiling, altering a fraction
their course to lift and brush
the long dark hair of weeds over the bottom.

Station

In the bus station, memory is a fraud,
a TV wrap-around armchair I drop
a feeling into like a blackened quarter
with a raised and shiny date.
But it is always the same October here.
Buses, towns, the people waiting
push out of the redlined map on the wall
into a linoleum sky. We are random
expressions in the language of leaving,
moments in a dream of falling,
a tinny sound that echoes up a tree lined street
from a patch of dust on the outskirts of town,
the empty gleam of a hubcap at night.

Tomorrow's Passenger

I came here to be hard to kill,
to be a new week breaking sidewalks
at the rough edges of town,
to be a hard eyed man looking for a room
and something to eat. I came here
to be somebody. I came here to be
wondered at. I came here and now
it is Sunday at the laundromat
and I have been here. I don't want
to smell my sweat after work tomorrow
in the check-out line at the grocery store,
watch my cracked nails counting out
the same five bucks that will be my last
come Friday. I don't want to be recognized,
hear "Hi" or "Ok" drown in my mouth.
I don't want to be forced to leave
again. If I could make myself steal
or break or hit or kill, they would put me
away. I could wait, I'd do good time
and at night, I would dream highways
of dandelions, the roots breaking
tree lined streets, the flowers
pushing through the mouths of people
dreaming, and every one of them
would know me.

The Metal Dream

While I'm having the metal dream
a young man in a motel room changes
channels. A woman pushes a shopping cart,
one wheel stuck sideways.

It's a small dream, one I usually have
while driving, encased in metal,
though a chainsaw or other machine
can bring it on. A metal part must be turning

fast, whirling the air into jelly, thick water
that hardens. Shards of glass push
out of the world as though it were a window.
The shadows of birds turn into shrapnel.

Pointed angles meet, change to steel
and break into jagged teeth and spines.
I think I'm about to die. I feel viscid
about to blend in with my cheekbones, my clothes.

It's as if I were passing through the walls
of a souvenir snow-globe and then,
as if it were breaking into metal.
Metal has such an alien feel.

I'd rather be killed by a shard of wood
than a metal splinter. Wood soaks up the blood,
understands it better. Still, it is my dream,
my souvenir. Afterwards, I feel like I've been spit

from the water under a falls. Gasping,
but wide-awake--it's not all bad--I watch the air
shake back to slower speed. A row of houses
looks new, pushed out of the sky, freshened

by the shrieking dream water. I feel safer,
more polite about the eventual,
as long as it doesn't happen
during the dream. The metal dream

has worn itself a pocket in me,
in my past and future. It's an irritation
I've grown used to, smooth and close,
hard and far away. Before it begins,

it gathers itself to a pearl
beneath my tongue, me and not me,
like touching a baby's head,
or the slow drive past an accident victim.

(stanza break)

Once, I saw a deer run into the shrieking.
Deer are so elegant about fear.
The dream water loved
the arc of its neck. The air split

slowly from our meeting eyes
while the trees rushed by, the road
wound on, the wind kept sounding,
the dark chest of the hills expanded.

The Never Listen

At night sometimes when I'm trying to sleep,
I grow until I fill the building.
I can feel my finger-tips, big as windows,
pressing out, my chest trying to move
through the wall with every breath.
Maybe I remember too much.
It's not that I want to get out,
I want to get into the wall. See,
I'd like to be left standing,
like those pictures after battles:
the walls and the windows. They always look
like they remember what it is to be alive.

Hell, I'm getting old.
My son-in-law's a big shot down in Salem;
I tried to tell him, "slow down."
He says he's not interested in anything
but real estate and law, has a family
to support, doing just fine thank-you.
I'd like to park myself across his back yard,
five floors of windows, nothing behind them
but the breeze blowing through.
I'd like him to know, there's time.

No Matter What

I wish my grand-mom could have stopped
my dad from sending me to this stupid school.
I heard they put the new kids' heads
in the toilet. They laugh I bet.
I can seem them sticking out of their uniforms
like fat scare-crows made out of skin with big
red mouths and hands like those rubber gloves
I saw in the slough when I thought somebody
was dead. They probably put that stuff on
for when you shave too so they can smell good
when they hurt you. They all have these big
buttons I can see myself in. I'm the only one
who looks normal. They laugh like my dad does
when I get caught by some dumb thing,
like when I was a kid and got my first
hard shoes. I wanted to make the same
clomping noise as him and he kept laughing.
If my grand-mom was here, maybe
we could make the bus driver stop.
This would be a good place. There's a big rock
like the one in the park we used to have picnics at.
I could get her some flowers, weeds like I do.
She says they're the best kind. She showed me
how you find water that's near them.
That's how they get their power to stay alive
even when they're picked.

Estrella, Asleep

On any ordinary night,
Estrella murmurs her damp sleep
into the branches of pines, coaxing feathers
out of the wind sough, forcing
eventual birdsong by her breath. But
this afternoon, she painted a demon
on her wall. It was hot, she painted naked.
Blue finger marks streak her chest.
Her demon is blue, black veined, huge cocked.
Each thigh as big as his torso, he strides
like a horse through her room. He has soaked
his body in the village night. All nights
and the pure human sound of night
give life to his blood.
Moans tangle, rise and fall like seaweed
on a tide inside him. His cock stiffens,
bobs. The white light of moans shines
from the waving gold foil plumes
of his cape and crown. Estrella stirs,
her dreams are changing, but her heart
is still and far away. Estrella is twenty-four,
writing her diary full of boys as innocent
as calves. She turns, moonlight catches
the wet of her tongue. Her demon freezes
on the wall. The dark of her room grows hard
as the dark inside a shell and fills
with the ocean voices of her lovers.

Laura

I am Laura, Alicia, Marianna, Elena, Cecile.
I am all the beautiful names of women.
Curled up in the dark bus, my smell
goes only a small way; I hold it to me
for safety. My hair whispers the curve
of my names, repeats them in Niles of light
and shadows. My eyes turn the neon outside
Boise into a parade of wishes. Who could resist
this life? God, how I hate the fear in men,
the closet of their names, the hard march
of syllables, unable at the end to open
to anything: Eric, Bill, John, Sam and Eric
again who left me with this child inside.
Eric, even this huddled rolling back
to my mother is stronger than you.
Why must I be a prisoner to my strength?
I could have any of you, watch a million backs
in my mirror, slip my fingers over deltas
of muscle, through the acrid scents
of riverbanks and hollows until my finger-tips
were liquid. My touch could carry sighs big
as trees or boats. I'd pour through workshirts
and jeans, sing myself through sweat
until I rubbed round even years. I'd water
my names until they grew their wishes
through the bones of armies and greeted birds
in the hard thin shells of their birth.

Yarn Lady at the Station

I'm in the train station. It's like I'm walking through liquid funhouse mirrors, dragging this stuff around, memories like keepsakes, jacks, theatre stubs, the big vein on my grandmother's hand. It's all tangled up in these threads that come out. I mean if the stuff was in a box, it'd be thread but I'm me, so it's thicker, more like yarn. I can feel the strands pulling behind me, between my legs when I walk and guys look at me. It really feels that way. They could grab the stuff coming out of me. How would you like watching your grandmother's vein get smashed up with a theatre ticket and an old earring, or your first puppy getting its head skewered with a paperclip. I mean, guys have no idea. So, I stop. This is nuts. I have a train to catch and I'm late. My dad thinks college is like extended day care and his little girl would freak being alone for so long so he won't let me out of the house. He doesn't want anyone to know our little secret. I'm trying to wind myself in, but I can't because the stuff I wind in is still outside of me. I'm standing there with myself getting all tangled up and frantic so I open my suitcase to check and see if I forgot something. I'm on my knees with my suitcase open looking at my pink sweater. I can feel my dad in there touching me. This lady in a business suit comes up and starts talking about sirens and how much noise my sweater is making but at least she seems to understand, so we had coffee and I missed the train.

The Woman in a Business Suit on Her Way to the Station

It's like the air was made of sirens;
I have to walk sharp shoulder,
tight stomach, don't look,
just to get through.

If I move in little jerks, like a movie
that doesn't work, I can rest in the space
between each frame. I move like a bird;
that's the way birds move, sparrows, nut-hatches,
very delicate, very strong.

But I should have taken a cab,
I'll miss the train, my feet hurt,
I'll break these heels in yet.
My boyfriend'll think I stood him up.

Someone's watching me. It wasn't always
like this. I'm always late. There's so many things
to take care of. They all need me.
That's how you take care of souls,
you have to, but it's too much,

even that tree, the grass, that rock
on the sidewalk; they need me.
A small boy will run out on the lawn,
an old man will rest beneath the tree.

You can't tell them, men or boys, they're busy;
you have to love things for them
or they'll lose their souls. My mom taught me.
God, the sound they make waiting, needing me;
it sticks to my wool knit skirt,

thick as sperm. I have to pick up the rock.
It reminds me of my father, my brother.
There's a ridge where the thought of itself
goes down, into the dent where my thumb is,
like the dent on a baby's head.

My mom and I tried, we picked rocks,
planted flowers, washed, mended, cooked,
and my mom did the books and she told him
they couldn't afford the sprinkler system,

but daddy always wanted the best
and the ranch failed. He lost his soul
almost, except for the part that looks at itself
and turns around again when something dies.

(stanza break)

We kept some horses after the ranch went,
there was a colt and he was the soul.
My mom and I nursed him from a bottle
but he died. My dad's eyes almost broke his face,
but then he went back in.

That's where the rough spot is
on the other side of this rock, quartz
that sticks out like something inside was pushing.
It's hard, but it isn't all smoothed.

The rock could think of itself and break through
there. My brother still works on the ranch
we sold. My dad's a caretaker on another place.
He lives in a trailer. My mom and him divorced.

He never talks about it. Him and my brother
look out of the rough spot and turn around.
I have to put the rock in my suitcase.
My suitcase is full of rocks and bones,
I'm going away, have to meet my boyfriend.

He's nice, he'll be waiting at the station cafe.
He'll look at my blouse, play with his spoon.
His eyes don't make a sound. His face sponges
at the clatter. His voice washes
over the table, spills in my lap.

I need him to smash the dishes, break
the window, scream at the trees,
if only he wouldn't finger his spoon that way,
it's the sound, it rubs and smooths.
Mother, the sound eats my hair.

Inside Her

When she loves someone,
the who I am words
fall asleep in her mouth
and buzz. They feel like her cheek does
when she's gotten it confused
with meat, swollen, like the hurt
was someone else's. Her boyfriend
doesn't know that daddy loved
and stroked her, naked in the bathroom;
she was a good girl helping.
Her boyfriend likes it when she plays
the little girl. But afterwards,
her skin feels like bleeding rubber.
Small hands beat inside her chest
and falter, like a child's tongue
stumbling in a grown-up's mouth.
She's trying to get out.
She feels like she's drowning
in the creek again, at the log jam
fishing hole where her boyfriend took her
to play at not being forty, not having
had a husband who abused her for ten years,
not having had two kids she walked out on
when she left him. Now her boyfriend's gone too.
She's under the log jam again, pushing
against a slick wooden skin, trying
to get an arm through her own ribs.
All she hears and remembers is blood
and water roaring. All she sees is light
like a hole in a canopy of trees,
but blown around and shifting,
and every change from up to down or sideways
fills with a face and a voice
and the voices say, "Be a good girl now."
"It isn't real, no one will believe you."
"You're a bitch, a liar, a drunk."
"I love you.." "I love you." "I love you."
She thinks she'll call her boyfriend,
maybe call her daughter too, try not to say
anything she can't taste. She kicks a leaf
on the sidewalk. Hands reach through her arms,
a face fills her face; her eyes look out
of her skin. She can almost touch them.

Bizzarro Meets Emerson, Freneau, Bryant
and Whittier

Bizzarro had sinned
and was reading nature poems
of the nineteenth century to atone.
He began to sweat marshes.
Sulfurous fumes and baby-duck down
swirled and lapsed on his sepulchral bosom.
Bizzarro smiled and farted.
He was pleased to note
a symmetry. He waved an arm,
turned a page. Wild geese honked
and arrowed on. The inviolate sun
shone down through the wintering sky
like a caged bulb in a tenement hallway.
Bizzarro scratched his head
and snow fell down. He felt suddenly
alone and he reflected,
"winter sun and winter cold,
whose guiding eye will lead me home?"
Bizzarro was afraid; he sweated
factory dust and carbon-monoxide fumes.
He cried blue tidy-bowl tears
and it all ran together into sludge
that clogged the pudgy creases
of his chest and tummy.
Bizzarro howled and kicked the earth;
he smote it a verily as he could.
Dinosaur bones whirled and arced
above his head. Slo-mo, he saw
and gave a fatuous grin.

What Eddie Bloodstone Knew About Hubcaps

Eddie had the bubble-gum blonde dream
 stuck to the frayed seams of his black boots.
 She'd been hanging there since he got too gone
 for the parking lot scene in high school.
 Eddie thought she'd left him and imagined her grown,
 smelling like lettuce and cling-free laundry softener,
 wiping a counter while the kids were off at school.
 Eddie pictured her all sorry and glad, letting him in.
 The scene squeezed up then and got hard sparkly
 like the road he was on in the high mountain sun.
 They were eighteen and Eddie was fucking her on the kitchen
 table
 because he knew he was gonna be president of General Motors
 for her. Eddie had the rock and roll star dream too. It
 was hunched
 in the shoulders of his Levi jacket, made him feel sometimes
 like he was wearin' leather. Eddie shrugged it off but he
 thought
 he'd had plenty of fire, too much had been the problem,
 but if everyone had just left him alone maybe--
 which didn't make sense, because he was alone
 and that was a problem. Eddie blanked, stopped walking.
 He felt dizzy, hadn't slept. He closed his eyes and the
 smell
 of himself was like a blanket rolled out from inside him.
 He was a rock and roll star. Screaming fans swayed like
 seaweed
 in the black pit beyond the stage lights. Eddie held an arm
 up,
 boots together, saluting the empty road. He opened his
 eyes:
 trees. The silences piled at their feet looked at him.
 He looked back. He felt pinched, caught between spaces
 that were filled by everything but him. Car coming.
 Eddie started walking to show he wasn't lost and could get
 there.
 He'd turn and put his thumb out at the last moment.
 As the car went by, it hit a stick in the road, lost a
 hubcap.
 Eddie remembered his breath which he'd been holding; he
 exhaled,
 whispered, "fuck you" and put his hand in his pocket.
 The hubcap sound had made him hungry. It sounded like the
 only sound
 that could make you know a thing was empty. Eddie walked
 over
 and kicked it to hear the sound again. He thought about his
 mother

(stanza break)

and how she missed him. There was another Eddie growing up in little frames on her dresser. He thought she must have more frames stuck down in her sweaters waiting for him to picture into. He knew he wouldn't call her.

Eddie sat down beside the hubcap and traced the lines and bumps of it.

He picked it up, held it to his stomach and walked out into the middle of the road. He held onto it tight. It was cold as the snow smell coming down off the peaks and he began to feel pure. He put the hubcap in his pack. It was like he'd grown a new dream and this one was an emptiness

that moved and became center, because wherever it went, all the solid things moved around it like they couldn't be there

if it weren't. And Eddie was right there in it and he felt like he could stay there, so he didn't feel pinched or squeezed, or left behind, or like the real Eddie didn't count.

Pretty soon, he got a ride and the place where he'd been filled up with birds and squirrels moving; stuff dropped from the trees; there was a lot of noise, and in the car, the guy who picked Eddie up didn't hardly say a thing and Eddie just smiled.

What Happened to Eddie Bloodstone in the Green Dash-light

Eddie was rolled right back
in the seat of his green Pontiac
had his army coat on, had his window cracked
black hair ticklin the corner of his eye.
White line was slappin a shade through his head
like everything he thought was gettin pulled down
and turned over before he could halfway...
So, he takes a hit from his cigarette
and he can see the curl of smoke in the green dash-light
like the beginning of a genie
before it does a lightspeed shuffle and is gone
out the window into a couple hundred miles
of left-behind. Done and gonna do don't matter,
Eddie's locked in tight, but his soul is sailin
through tirescrap roadkill, slipstreamin
a ride on the semis, shootin rainswirl cartwheels
over family sedans. Ain't nothin ever gonna
be the same. Eddie's gettin born out here
between the fields and woods. It's dark as a stomach,
bristly as six cups of coffee and Eddie's goin head-on,
full-bore down the chute. Even that it won't be
remembered by Eddie-in-the-A.M. outside a gas station
and smug sign, (pop. 200) can't shake it,
can't empty the spread. There's gonna be hubcaps
whinin an Eddie blues from North Platte to Coos Bay.
An adult theater in Coeur d'Alene'll
grow a solid shadow underneath the seats.
A guy's gonna trip and catch himself,
sit down laughing and cheer through the show,
the Eddie wind blowin, doin the hyperspeed shuffle
in his head. One one square of pavement
outside a fast food joint in the part of town
where nobody walks, there's gonna be a terrible
weed problem. It's gonna look like some bum
threw up a garden. And the wonder of it all
is that Eddie don't know, can't think now,
blanked out, empty as a million miles,
just drivin, soakin up the green glow.

Eddie Bloodstone After Work

Eddie was at a bar started on his ninth beer. His eye sockets felt too big, his forehead, too far away. Looking out of his head was like looking out the front window of the Studebaker at the dump where he played when he was growing up. Eddie had work dirt in his pockets. He had to curl his head down to see so he could empty the grit out of his money and pay. He felt like Godzilla with a Studebaker head looking down to see where someone had shot him. Past his hand and pocket, the bar floor looked like the floor of the Studebaker. It was dark and lonely down there and the legs of the stools looked like pilings. Eddie felt like he was on a pier looking down at himself when he was twelve. he tried not to look at the legs of the woman next to him but his eyes followed them up, and he was back at the bar where it was bright and the people's voices sounded huge, loud like when he used to smash things at the dump. The bartender stared at him. Eddie paid and drank, looked at the woman. She had shiny stuff on her legs like the shiny smash lines in the Studebaker window. The bar noise faded, but it still bugged him the same way as when he'd hear little noises at the dump that made him think something big was there that shouldn't be. Eddie drank and thought how he'd loved that car, the blunt nosed, sandshark heft of it around him, a thing he could feel like a rock in his pocket. He'd look out the window and swear the world couldn't touch him. He turned to ask the woman could he buy her a drink, and spilled his beer all over her shiny legs. She yelled, and then everyone was looking at him and it was quiet with this rustling underneath like something big scrunching down. Eddie'd been working all week. He had shovel muscle like a snake in his head. It was reared up in him, starin back at all the people.

Eddie Goes to the Slammer

Log-tongue Eddie river-steps
out of the bar to know
this one true thing, shouts,
"It's already happened!" and
kicks the first car he sees,
Silver-Gleam Important, this
in-itself car. Oh,
hurtclean Eddie
can't stand this Not Yet creeper.
Smashcrack it, badbelieve place.
Look you Eddie in the window
with boot that charmed Maureen,
breakface, smearmouth, he says,
"Don't you understand this all alone
is now? No! Not! Not! Not!
this shine-pretend."
Charmed Eddie when the police come
clickarm, banghead, backseat
downtown, to the proof-pudding place.

Eddie Thinks About the Future

Eddie had tastetongue highway lines
running out of his eyes
over cheatgrass, cowbone, barbwire
pasture.

He was up to the Big Montana
on the Flathead Res, come somehow
to the old dump at the dead man's pasture
down by Dirty Corners. Eddie didn't know
which way was what, or how to get there.
He had a flapping in his head,
Not Yet, like crows wings blackbreaking the air
like maybe it was an answer.
Eddie said, "Fuck it," to make the Not Yet
go away and kicked a vertebrae past a pelvis.
He didn't want to look out over the fields,
afraid the flapping would come back,
so he kept his eyes down and pretty soon,
he's starin wishful at old rusted stuff,
thinkin what's he got for leave-behind.
There was real crows wheelin up above,
drawin down the sky to Eddie,
who'd come too early north this time,
and in the wrong month, the one with no breath
that hurts itself to say it,
February, and the crows weavin him
into the center of one of those prayer things
like he seen at the powwow last year,
but only too early now for colors in the string,
too early for any damn thing
but the land rippin up through his stomach
like if he could yell loud enough,
the homestead guy who left this dump
would come alive and Eddie could ask,
"Say, heh, man, what's it mean, this left-behind?"
Not Yet, and Eddie thinkin it must be a place to go
and goin.

Eddie Bloodstone in Love

Eddie was in love with an Asian woman on a Metro Foods calendar. She looked hurt and like she was asking Eddie how he was going to hurt her. Eddie liked that. It made him feel proud, because he knew he'd never hurt her. He would take her in his old green Dodge, out to the gravel plant that overlooked the river. He'd show her the Eddie walk, feet out, waddling, but like his body was laughing at itself. She'd be standing there in her black strapless evening gown, still wondering how Eddie was going to hurt her. Then Eddie would get to the African sex-god, pant-hitch, pelvis-push, and she'd smile and make a little noise, like she'd been caught between sex and salvation in her evening dress on the big river bluff, like angel horns were rustling in her dress and she wanted to laugh because it tickled, and she was embarrassed at being embarrassed. Eddie would walk towards her then, real serious and straight-up, and all of a sudden, her eyes would get big, and she'd step back scared of herself, because he wasn't the right kind of guy. Eddie would feel bad then. He'd take her downtown to the bank so she could feel at home. She'd look at him out the window as he got back into the car. She'd look hurt. Eddie would wait for the bank man in the dark suit to come up and ask her if she was OK. She'd bury her head in the guy's shoulder as Eddie drove away. Eddie always felt hurt and clean and proud when he looked at the calendar. He was really in love.

Eddie Bloodstone in the Wild West

Eddie could see this cowboy thing was no weak sister. Eddie was redoubtable in green army coat at the Mule Palace, Evaro, Montana. He was humming The Star Spangled Banner by the entrance, watching the moves, smoking, nodding, "a done wrong mother, hurt em dude, cruisin mama," checking them off. Eddie was guardian to the Real West Pearly Gates. Uh-oh skinny guy, slickdown, aftershave, comes up giving Eddie the what-for look and before the guy can spit, Eddie does his jump-back shuffle with a turn-around maskeroo, walks back edgy-foot like he's got pointy shoes, stiff, with his knees stuck out, head wobbling on a piece of re-bar rammed up through his ass, quick draws his hunting knife, says, "Heh dude, I'm here to make it real. What the fuck was you gonna say about that?" Eddie hopped a ride with a trucker afterwards. Silence curled like gunsmoke off the rim of every beer can at the Palace.

The Problem with Eddie's Head

Slamsoft rockerjoint makin the plug misfire on the hang-drop was how Eddie thought it must be. Cause Eddie's no dummy and he can see that cocksucker clear as if it was sittin right in the middle of a factory floor, which is more than most folks can lay claim to, and anyway, it's his head we're talkin about, and he ought to know. But people were

sayin

they couldn't understand him. Said Eddie was crazy and there weren't no machine in Eddie's head, and so it couldn't

connect up with no interstate, or no dark fields, or no all night, truckstop cafe, and there couldn't be no Eddie wind blowin Eddie's soul by folks that didn't even know him

like the draft from a semi-trailer-truck blowin by an inmate from the city jail pickin trash by the road. Now, Eddie figured

this was a bald faced lie, but he thought he'd look which is why,

right now, he's down there on the great gristly floor of his head

checkin out that rocker-arm, and stoppin and wipin his hands on an old red rag. And sure enough, there ain't nothin wrong,

though there might of been, cause that rocker-arm is tricky, and it only takes a little bitty spark off the mortifier-bit to send the whole arm joint to Kansas, and that'll kill it, hangdrop'll hop all over kingdom come, and folks'll wonder what the fuck you're talkin about. But that ain't the

problem,

or he'd a been up for parts by now, tried to talk to me see, get some concepts to fidaddle with down there, and make 'er right.

No, the problem, and the reason I'm here, is that Eddie ain't come back. I'm afraid he's lost in the wonder of how all them rods and gears and pipes connect. What I'm

hopin

is that maybe, if we tried, we could grab hold someways and give him a jostle, cause I'll tell you, it's pure damn shame.

The man's got a mind. He could be down there a long, long time.

Eddie Bloodstone Goes to Dinner

The rock jawed wobble eyes closed in
lean and battle brained
holding forth toasts from the fort
at the far dinner place.
"Isn't it true that?"
And sweet Jesus, who cares,
it's all just blood and cliffs in here.
"But can you give us one instance?"
Right-wrong, left-right, right-wrong.
Here, this is the place where the buffalo jump
down to the valley below.

I was holding Eddie's balloon white soul
suspended over the black tooth egress
while his girlfriend Maureen's parents
drifted across the lawn divorcing
politely before dinner, during
and after, and nothing was wrong
for sweet Maureen. Her momma wobble eyed Eddie
over a lipstick smear and asked, "Maureen, honey,
what happened to Jack?" Eddie sucked in his breath
but skip-hopped the glad-rag bull bait.
He saw sentences breaking up like jet trails
over a trailer court. Words were cocktail woozy
in his gut. He didn't know Maureen
from the president. "What was it you said
you did, Ed," her daddy rumbled.

Eddie saw graveyard cars piled up
like buffalo and heard them mewing,
so he told the rock-jaws it didn't matter.
I shot soothing bric-a-brac potpourri
political notions, right-wrong, left-right.
Blue collar waves rose up,
Eddie floated, massaging his hands
under the table, checking Dudessa Maureen's
profile for signs of himself--
no broken twigs, no crumbs, no sign--
trampled, eaten, wiped out by buffalo lemmings
cascading into the political sea.

I was choking on mouthful food,
the right-wrong waves, the rooting swell
denounced and claimed the land
issuing edicts, opinions, worming hosts.
"What most people try to make their lives
is no more interesting than a car manual,"
I said, and tried to add, "for the most part,"
but Eddie's eyes were locked in meditation,
transcendental white floating up
bursting in enormous quiet.

Eddie Bloodstone and Maureen, at Home

"Dumb fucking mutt," he said,
chuckle-headed Bump between his hands
and looked at the knuckle he'd torn
on the green chain. Bump had been penned
all day and would be again tomorrow.
He let the dog lick his knuckle.
He could feel Maureen in the house
wishing he'd come in, and for once
take his boots off first. She'd be hoping
he'd remembered, shit--
coffee?, tampax?, half-and-half?
If he went in, she'd quirk herself
into a nice hip-shot at the counter
and smile and say "Hi,...boots."
Then she'd straighten, show him
how busy she was. The list would be there
hard as her back, all the details--
the undone Eddie in her head
like a wraith trying to clean and sort
real Maureen things. Eddie wandered over
to the woodpile. Bump wanted to play.
Bump was smiling and crouching
getting ready to spring.
"Dumb fucking mutt," Eddie said
picked up the axe and split
a chunk of larch.

Eddie and Maureen, at the Supermarket

At the supermarket with Maureen
 Eddie looked at the blonde stock girl
 and thought about love. He figured
 he must have it now, solid
 as frozen spinach, him and Maureen,
 so he could afford to float some.
 Like with that stock girl, she had that peach
 skin thing, like what was inside
 was also outside and it was all great.
 She'd think it was funny
 that anyone, especially Eddie, would think
 she'd taste great. Cute.
 "Eddie, you're not helping."
 "I'm pushing the cart." Oh man, Georgia train tracks
 and the stock girl at a country crossroads,
 farm smell rising wispy out of the fields
 her in a blue dress and Eddie real casual
 like "nice day ain't it? Mind if I tag along
 a spell," and her like the morning just made her,
 "Umm, hmm, sure, nice day." Oh man.
 "Go find the sliced almonds."
 "Yeah right," soft under the crispy green apron,
 reminded him of that girl when he'd shacked up
 with the Rainbow Family, the daughter,
 like a fuzzy little fruit, young, seventeen maybe,
 and her mom wanting her to have the fun of it,
 getting gobbled without going away,
 except in her mind maybe. And they had fucked,
 which was amazing, her fist time,
 while momma pretended to sleep. Yeah, that was it,
 love! He'd felt responsible for the trees growing
 and the wind blowing. He had to let her know
 that everything would always be just right
 and she thought the sex had been neat,
 better than her mom's usual presents,
 and that was that. Except Eddie got drunk
 the next day and couldn't hold himself in
 and couldn't hold anything out, so he climbed
 to the top of this huge crane, maybe ten stories,
 like a dinosaur bird, urban renewal.
 He hung by his feet from the end, wiggled
 like he was caught in its beak, and waved
 at mom and daughter. The ants gathered
 pointing up at him, paying attention,
 "Where the fuck are the almonds?"
 "They're in row ten sir."
 Oh shit, didn't even see her there.
 And he'd almost fallen on the way down,
 which was good because when he got down,

(stanza break)

he felt finished and glad. Never said a word,
packed his bags and went. "Automotive, Seasonal,
Four, Sugar, Coffee, Feminine Hygiene, Cereal,
Maureen." "Here Eddie, almonds, see, where the hell
have you been?"

Eddie and Maureen, at the Art Opening

Eddie, trundled up and tooth brushed,
 shaved, new shirted, cheek-peck
 heart cleaned for doing different
 and warned to be polite, arrived
 at the art opening with Maureen.
 She'd been gabble headed for a week,
 trumpet shiny about this farmer guy
 and how he did art and how they were pals
 in school. Eddie didn't like it,
 but she'd said not to worry, they'd just been
 friends. She kept on polishing herself
 up inside. He didn't get it.

On the trip into town, she'd been real excited,
 bristly soft, like a new green tip
 on a pine branch. Sexy, he'd thought
 and he'd put his hand on her leg,
 hoping her knees would part when she shifted
 and she'd nudge his hand down between her legs
 with her thigh. She was wearing a dress.
 She hadn't even noticed, hadn't even bothered
 to push his hand away, just let it lie there
 on her leg like it was something broken,
 hanging off the seat belt. He'd moved away,
 watched the rain smoke rolling out of the hills,
 like from a diesel. It would have been OK
 but it was a long drive; he wasn't allowed
 to smoke in Maureen's new car.

He was smoking now. She was already inside,
 swallowed up by giant smilers waving
 fat arm bracelets and shouting her name.
 Just before the door closed, he saw a dude
 he knew behind the women, Angle Man.
 He was the one from at the store
 who'd told Maureen that Eddie'd "been looking
 so civilized lately." Assholes.
 "Tongue in cheek," Maureen called it.
 "Nice," Eddie thought, "be nice."
 Weird place for art, Maureen's shiny car
 looked wrong parked in the dirt
 between warehouses. He tossed his butt,
 watched the end glow in the new dark
 then squashed it quick before the rain
 could put it out. He went in fast

and stopped. He was in a front room,
 like in a restaurant. There was a guestbook,
 but it still looked like a warehouse.

(no stanza break)

It was like a bunch of people
 had been zapped off a greyhound bus
 into a truck stop where they gave away free food.
 They all looked startled, in a big hurry
 to put themselves back on. Angle Man
 was talking to Stainless Woman.
 She looked like a stand-up lamp
 with a loose top. Laughing Boy shot her
 an "I can be cool too" with a leather elbow patch
 from fifteen yards. She hip checked it,
 jerk topped, showing some neck wire, and shot back,
 "I'm easy" with a tongue tip over the edge
 of her cup. Angle Man looked stupid
 and tried to find a hip way to stand
 while the bright remark that filled his mouth
 dribbled down his big chin.

It was like Ice Hockey, hard little looks
 slamming through the lanes of people
 until someone caught one with a casual sip of wine,
 or a flick of fingers arranging hair.
 Eddie couldn't see anyone he could stand
 to die with, except for maybe the little fat girl
 who had been stuffed into a pink satin dress
 and left squirming on the only chair.
 Eddie dropped a John Wayne shoulder
 into a policeman's roller walk and headed
 for a curtained doorway where the art had to be.
 He saw Maureen watching him from a corner
 and suddenly knew that once
 she'd been a fat little farm girl.
 He smiled at her, straightened and went in.

It was dark, lit by flame, gas torches.
 It wasn't regular, nothing hanging up.
 There was an old shack built right up against
 the warehouse walls. It was sinking into itself,
 burned and torn. He was inside the art, standing easy
 on sand that was heaped up. The art started sinking
 into him, like it was silk crawling through his skin.
 He could look out a burnt and broken window
 at clumps of brown prairie grass and see his shadow
 on the warehouse wall. The art crawled in
 and met up with his memory and pulled at it
 like taffy or bubble gum, the dump where he'd played
 when he was little, a junk car window, breathing
 strong and warm on the warehouse wall.

There were six cement pillars sticking out
 of the art. They had slick wrinkled finishes
 like wet old people's skin, or orange seeds.

(no stanza break)

They were edgy though, square, the wrong kind of still. Everything else was moving through itself, going back to where it came from.

The pillars were like people, the way they got stuck in the head. The art guy's family, Eddie figured, stuck in his head, stuck in their own heads. Everything stuck, deader than the trashed up shack, deader than the warehouse walls, except that the pillars were purer, more what they were than the walls, like seeds, like children that could have another chance once they got inside this ruined place and were touched. Eddie touched a pillar and thought of his mother. He put his arm around its legs and watched the two of them blending moving on the warehouse wall. He liked the art guy, he was sorry he'd thought that about him and Maureen. He wasn't even sure he cared anymore.

Eddie stayed there for a long time. Everyone left and the art guy and Maureen came in. They looked just like all the other people had earlier. Maureen smiled, Eddie smiled, the art guy smiled. Eddie looked up at a bare bulb on the warehouse ceiling. No big secret Eddie thought, they know me, but it was kind of scary, like a first date. Later, Eddie drove home and Maureen came and sat beside him, just like two kids in a pickup truck, he thought and shifted, knees apart.

HUBCAPS

CHARACTERS

BUD: About 55, Bud is Announcer Man to the dispossessed, King and Shaman of Sleaze. He wears a white sheet with a hole cut out for his head. Cub-scout badges and designer labels have been sewn onto the sheet.

JEM: Between 24 and 27, Jem is the bountiful, dutiful daughter of Pontiac sleigh rides, high priestess of a macadam hereafter. She wears cut-offs, a tank-top and sequined high heels.

WALKER: Between 28 and 34, Walker is the disaffected son of the upper-middle class, the existential, non-essential denier of the common truth. He is road worn and zombied out, lost in the meaning of meaning.

RITA: T.V. News Reporter.

GARTH: T.V. Camera Man.

HUBCAPS

SCENE ONE

SCENE: Run-down apartment house in the country outside a major city. Left-center stage, a barber chair surrounded by empty beer cans. Bud is dozing on the chair. Back-center stage, Jem is seated at a little girl's writing desk, (pink, with decals and a yellow frilled canopy). She writes with a pink-plumed pen. On the wall above the desk is a large map of the U.S.A. with colored push-pins stuck in it. Down-stage right, Walker is playing with building blocks (a mixed bag, plain and lettered). The blocks are all that he has left of reality, his handle on the "ismology" of his life. The time is about ten in the morning. Sunlight from the front window lights the area around Bud's chair and leaves the rest of the room in semi-grey darkness. Jem's desk has a lamp.

WALKER

(As Jem finishes the letter she's writing, he speaks softly to the blocks. Walker almost always speaks with the intonations of a querulous child who understands much too much about his elders.)

WALKER (cont.)

The question is which block to believe in I guess, not that it makes much difference. But if I believe in this one, it'll make a different question about that one (picking up another block) and then of course, I don't know which hand to hold the belief block in. My heart's on the left side, but not from the block's point of view, and then there's the left-right brain studies, so the right side would be better I guess. (He weighs blocks in either hand, shutting his eyes, then looks perplexed at himself when he opens his eyes. He begins building a castle.)

JEM

(She has finished her letter and puts it in an envelope with a stamp, but she hasn't addressed it yet. She stands, push-pin in hand and begins searching the map, reading off the names of different towns.)

JEM (cont.)

Abilene, Albuquerque, no, too much like oysters stuck in the throat... Raton, Thornton, Green River, yeah, Green River. Utah, don't know if he'd like Utah...sounds like a nice place though. (She sits down to address letter.) Dad, general delivery, Green River, Utah. There, hope he likes it there.

(Jem takes a pair of pink rubber gloves from a desk drawer and exits. She comes back in with a bucket and towel, kneels in front of Bud and begins washing and drying the cans, putting them back on the floor in whatever position they were in before. Walker watches her leave surreptitiously. He's very self-conscious, painfully so. He sees that one of his blocks is dirty and attempts to wipe it off on his sleeve. This only makes it dirtier. He licks it and again looks around to make sure that nobody is watching. He stands up nervously, walks over to Jem's desk and puts the block on it clumsily. It falls to the floor. He hurries back to his castle just as Jem enters with her bucket.)

JEM

(She begins humming, making up the tune to a song that she'll sing later.)

BUD

(He's been dozing with a beer can in his hands slyly peering at the proceedings around him from time to time. The can falls from his hand clattering on the floor. He stretches and yawns.)

BUD (cont.)

Ahh, Jem. We're hunkered down to the highway root today. I can smell the tire-milk sweat of it. I can feel the coils, the blunt-black, white-stripe twist and turn and the diesel hummin in my bones.

JEM

(Playing along, putting on a voice) Why Bud, you do turn my head, the way you carry on. How'm I supposed to get this mess cleaned up and shiny with you goin on about roots and roads and bones?

WALKER

Didn't I used to be before I was? How did my dog when I was little get to be a dog and not a me. It seemed the same to

me, the exact same nothing where we came from.

JEM

Right, so, aren't you gonna ask how he's doin'?

WALKER

Negative space defines what is of course but then, in emotional terms, how do you make it empty. Have to keep trying. I'm nothing, I'm nothing. I am not I, nothing. (Notices what he's doing. Stops to look at his castle.)

BUD

Highway meat, long wrong shoulder roast stew.

JEM

Come on now Bud.

BUD

Yeah, yeah, fergot myself little darling. How long's he been here now anyway. A week huh, right, ok. Hell, I dunno, looks ok to me.

JEM

Well I got him signed up on the disability and he'll be gettin stamps. Got him blocks to play with.

BUD

You get anything out of him since you picked him up?

JEM

He comes out of it now and then, more and more lately. Heh Walker! (she gets up, goes over and scratches his head.) Come on sweetie, dontcha wanna talk to the Bud?

WALKER

Oh Hi Jem. Look, (kicks blocks over) it isn't a castle.

JEM

(Leading him over to Bud) That's right it sure isn't. See Bud, it isn't Walker.

BUD

Well now, any fool could see that Jem, damned if it ain't bustin out pretty near all over him. Well, now, the skinny in the mini mall, the scoop on the poop, what Johnny tole Sally by the sun screen display in this son. I am the king of sleaze and I calls it please cause it rhymes with me. Oh say can you see ...

JEM

By the dawn's early light.

BUD

Thas right and this here is Jem, cause she shines, shine, shines, the many faceted queen of control, keeper of the holy root.

JEM

Now Bud.

BUD

High priestess of the macadam hereafter to which we are righteously wed, Amen. And you son are what the cat dragged in.

WALKER

(Uncomfortable, rubs hands on pants, doesn't know what to do, puts his hand out to shake Bud's.) How do you do.

BUD

(Looks at proffered hand, takes it to examine ..) Nice hands, could maybe use a cuticle and a soak.

JEM

(Taking his hand.) I do believe you're right Bud; the treatment?

BUD

Hmmm, full treatment ... anti-lock breaks, shock absorbers, and a lube, could be, could be ...

JEM

Chair?

BUD

Chair too? Redemptive coupon value? Weather report from the cat-bird seat? Hmmm?

JEM

Full facial? Hot towel shave?

BUD

Layin on the hands then. Lonely bones? Could be, could be. And the feet?

JEM

Now you're talkin. Oil them dogs.

BUD

Hog-shine shimmy huh? Could be a refund. Sure, detail job, cash-back guarantee on it.

WALKER

You don't have to do anything for me. I just need time to think is all. I'm on nothing now.

BUD

Well, that's something.

WALKER

That's great, you really understand don't you? Jem said you would. It's the whole question of being and not being. It's like negative space is what allows being in sculpture which is like negative capability, Keats, you know?

BUD

(Getting down from his chair) Yes sir, that's real nice son, kinda puts me in mind of fried donut holes. You just keep on the way you're goin, doin real good, and jest kinda ease on into the chair here. That's it, step right up.

JEM

There you get comfortable now. Close your eyes and relax. Bud and I have to get a few things and we'll be right back ok?

WALKER

OK.

(Bud goes into the kitchen. Jem goes into the bathroom. There is banging around noise, water boiling, searching through cupboards, curses, etc. Various implements are brought out, a straight razor, a pan, towels, scissors, nail files, etc.)

WALKER

I feel like I was hollow and waiting for something to go through me, or like a hose maybe that nobody ever uses, that's supposed to be all screaming with water, so much that nobody could even hold it I bet and everyone would come to see how strong the water pushed out of me. But I can't turn the water on and sometimes I feel like I seat into the hollow of me and leak out the end. Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I could have been. I know. But I couldn't really do what I was supposed to do, and I couldn't really do the opposite either. I didn't have anything to do it with. I can dig ditches though and lift things, and hitch-hike, and drink, and take drugs. I'm really good at that. But I can't do that anymore either. I wish I could matter to someone I guess, I don't know how though. I can't do anything, but if I could help out maybe you know?

JEM

(Has come back, pulls a chair up to sit beside him, puts his hand in warm water, getting him ready for his manicure. Strokes his arm.)

JEM (cont.)

That's right honey, you carry on any old way you want. Me and Bud, we just love words, all kinds and flavors. Tell you what, I'll sing you a song, ok?

JEM'S SONG

Where the highway runs and empty air
is thick with people's leavings
I taste the dream root and lick the bone
bare.

Family sedans, woman in love,
a man whose brains are bleeding,
they don't leave much, but I don't care.
I taste the dream root I lick the bone bare.
Where the highway runs, I lick my lips
swing my hips, and love,
what the fuck around and it's a trip,
people don't know what they're leaving.
You can taste their dreams
strung out all along behind them.

Where the highway runs, the white line
is my child, my love, my mother.
I was born with this desire
to see the damn thing through.
Sweat and dirt and left behind
is what I feel, but I ain't lonely.
I taste the dream root, I lick the bone bare.

Where the highway runs, there's an empty
jewel,
Got the whole damn world in a swish of air
and everywhere is where I am
where I've been, and where I'm going.
I taste the dream root, I lick the bone bare.

BUD

Bud comes back near the end of Jem's
song and puts a hot towel around
Walker's face.

BUD (cont.)

(In a whisper voice.) Aw, that's beautiful Jem. Help me
with his feet now.

The two of them remove Walker's shoes
and begin anointing his feet with oil.

END SCENE 1.

SCENE TWO.

(Several days later) Jem is in a bikini, wearing a white visor, and reading Vogue. She's lounging on a beach blanket under a sun lamp, surrounded by road kill tire scraps that have been artfully arranged along with a couple of automobile bumpers. (stage right center) Walker, wearing a baseball cap, bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirt, and flip-flops is typing off to one side of her area. he stops, looks at her, types, looks at her. He is obviously distracted. There are now manuscript pages strewn around the floor with the beer cans. Bud enters carrying a white cloth sack over his shoulder. He gets heavily into his chair dropping the sack beside it.

JEM

(Getting up) What did you find. Can I look?

BUD

(As she begins emptying the sack.) I got hubcaps today Jem. It's the wheel and the deal and the plains and the plans all rounded down, and got that neon truck-stop, french-fry shine--like they was lathered and licked by bathing beauties bout a hunnerd times a day--and you Jem, you Jem too, like they might have been licked by you and brought by you, you bet you Bob, all gleamy-schemy.

JEM

You're a wonder Bud, a good man even, but don't you start on this licking thing ok? Me and Walker'd be happy to get some more hubcaps though; wouldn't we Walker.

WALKER

(Getting up from his typewriter, where he's been sitting watching Jem and listening to Bud.) Sure, I can help.

JEM

Walker's getting much better Bud. Look at all the nice words he's made. (picks up a page, reads...) "The inner is the outer. Plato and Aristotle are both right. The conflict of opposing opposites is necessary, even when abrupt. It provides energy for the individual as well as for the society. Paradox is an engine, driving life."

BUD

You ever see a dog lying down, circlin, sniffin around, seem to me old Walker here is doin the same thing, just takin a

lot longer. Not that he ain't pretty mind you. But what I'm after now is hubcaps. (Gets out of his chair, gesticulating, almost singing) Hubcaps is what I want. I want em on the floor and underneath the bed. I want em in my sleep, sailin like planets, want em waitin like pie plates for me to come home. I want the hard sweat smell of em bangin off the walls. I want em in my lips and hangin from my nose like Ubangi bangles. I'm gonna have hubcaps spangled right across the back of my mind and deep inside. And every other thing that I am, I'm gonna throw it at that shiny wall till it all jinks and jangles right outta my eyes and that's a goddamn fact!

JEM

(Picking up one of the hubcaps, (there's only a few in the sack) and a been can, she begins banging them together.) Yea! (she dances, Bud picks up on it, dancing also.) C'mon Walker, dance (she grabs his hand and he shuffles reluctantly along.)

WALKER

(As he realizes that he can put his arm around Jem and that she doesn't mind.) Heh, this is fun, Hubcaps, Yea!

They buzz around the room awhile, banging and stomping, kicking the cans around. Walker is especially enthusiastic about walking all over the pages of his manuscript. Bud tires first and whooshes into his throne. Jem realizes that Walker is wound around her and pushes him away gently. There's an awkward silence while they look at each other.

JEM

Inner, outer, huh Walker? I gotta change.

BUD

(After she leaves) Holy humpin Hamurrabi son, I think you're cured and I ain't sure I like it. See Jem, well she's hard time pure changed by fire. And here, well, she's free here, shiny, hard pure, innocent and well I, uh, well never mind that , you just watch it is all.

WALKER

She's a good person.

BUD

She's cling-free, and satin soft, springtime fresh, mint cool.

JEM

(Has changed into overalls) Ready?

Yeah.

WALKER

Here, I brought you a coat, (Hands him an over coat).

JEM

Take it slow.

BUD

Jem and Walker exit. Bud sits for a moment, then goes over and sweeps out the space that Jem and Walker have vacated. First, he's a bathing beauty, singing a sun-screen ditty, then a very serious and confused young man figuring the world out at the typewriter.

BUD (cont.)

(Sun-screen ditty)

Fun-n-sun, it's the one
for happy buns
oil em, don't boil em
if you want the boys to feel em
then you don't want to peel em
No, you won't hurt none
with fun-n-sun.

(Bud heads over to Walker's typewriter) Hmm, lemme get a feel for the Walker deal. (he strikes various poses, pretending to be a pianist, a deep thinker, a distraught genius...)

(singing) I dunno, that I know what I know
I think that I was gonna used to be
but I forgot, oh yeah, oh yeah
dooo wahhh, doo wahhh.

There is a knock at the door.

Just a minute. (he unlocks door, but doesn't open it.)
Just a minute now. (He gets into his throne chair.) Ok,
now, come on in, slim.

A female reporter and a photographer
with a mini-cam enter. Rita Fox and
Garth Edwards.

RITA

Hi, I'm Rita Fox with channel five, and this is Garth
Edwards. May we come in? Mr.?

BUD

Mr. Bud. Mr. Bloom. Mr. Twig. Mr. Tree. Come on in,
we'll see.

RITA

(She and Garth move uneasily into the room) Well sir, your house, or rather your yard has become quite an attraction. Garth and I would like to film it and ask you a few questions.

BUD

(Raising his arms) Blessed be the news and the children of the news. Blessed be all of those who tell us what they think we think and save us from ourselves.

RITA

Garth? (she and Garth get their equipment rolling) Right.

GARTH

(Opens a window curtain for light and gets ready to film Rita.) Ready.

RITA

This is Rita Fox for five-alive. We're here at the home of Mr. Bud-Bloom Twig-Tree whose house, off I-17 leading into the city has become a commuter landmark and an attraction for visitors new to our area. (Garth pans room) As you can see, the inside of Mr. Bud's home is also quite interesting. Tell us sir, how did you happen to amass this potpourri of the unusual?

BUD

(Stricken) Potpourri, Potpourri! Wonderful, yes, wall-plaque, Rancho Delux, knic-nack, foyer, limitless gnashing of the incorruptable, fresh squeezings from the genuine wood grain paneling in the den, a tinkling lilt to freshen the rumpus room air. Potpourri, oh Rita, I love you. You bring goodness to the air of my home. The word will take out stains. We will hold it in our hearts and it will bring credit to all that we do.

RITA

Cut it Garth. We can't use any of this. Look, Mr. Bud. All I want from you is a few simple answers.

BUD

I love you Rita. I want you to take your clothes off. Come and join me in my sheet. I'll hang your dress and shoes on the wall. I'll make a frame for them, a myrtle wood frame, a genuine frame I'll pledge allegiance every day.

RITA

Jesus. Look, we can use the shots of the yard and the house, it's offbeat. People are gonna love it. If you could confine yourself to answering a few simple questions, it'd be great. People want to know when and how you collected all this stuff. I mean you've got a stuffed zebra wearing panty hose and a pink beret out there.

C'est la vie babe.

BUD

Ok, that's a start; keep it short and sweet, Garth?

RITA

Ready.

GARTH

Tell us, Mr. Bud, how did you happen to collect such an interesting assortment of art objects for your yard.

RITA

Life, madame, hyatt.

BUD

Could you elaborate?

RITA

Well, when you get to Istanbul, you hang a right. There's a guy on the coast there, lives out on the end of a jetty. "Life Monsieur hyatt." That's all he ever says; if you hang with him for a month or two, you'll get the drift.

BUD

So you're a world traveler as well as an artist.

RITA

I'm the Bud, the twig, the tree, I bloom zoom, (rising, arms out spinning) I bloom, zoom, soon, spoon. (he stops) Say, I've got a collection of spoons. Would you like to see them? I got big spoons, got short spoons, long spoons, red spoons, blue spoons. Everybody knows the mouth around the spoon. You could sit in my chair Rita. I could feed you. Look, (reaches under robe) I'm carrying my enamel robins egg blue spotted spoon today so everything will taste that way.

BUD

Ok Garth, that's enough. We'll get what we can out of it. (to Bud) Well, you'll probably be famous. Christ, what a joke.

RITA

Jem and Walker enter carrying a sack.

Look Bud we found some already. Heh, we're gonna grab a couple of sandwiches and make a day of it. Who are these people?

JEM

We were trying to conduct an interview for five-alive. My

RITA

name is Rita, and this is Garth, my camera man.

WALKER

The media is the shaper of the great nothingness.

BUD

You're gettin there son.

JEM

How much are you gonna give us for this?

RITA

We're not giving you anything. Who are you anyway his wife?

BUD

No, this here is Jem. Jem honey, don't pay em no mind. They just took some pictures is all and anyway, they left us a word. Potpourri.

JEM

Potpourri hubcaps, potpourri tirescraps, potpourri cans.

BUD

Yep.

WALKER

Potpourri of nothingness? Tidy little baskets of angst?

RITA

You people are amazing.

BUD

I'll say.

JEM

(She goes into the kitchen) Heh, Walker, c'mon, you can help.

RITA

P.B.S. would love you folks. Let's get out of here Garth.

GARTH

Heh, good luck man. You're alright.

BUD

Semper-fi jack.

GARTH

Hunh, you too. Yeah, right-on man.

BUD

Later.

Rita and Garth exit. Jem returns from

the kitchen with Walker. She's smiling.
Walker is carrying a six pack.

Well, we're off.

JEM

Hallelujia.

BUD

Jem and Walker exit.

END SCENE 2.

SCENE THREE

As before (scene 1) Bud is dozing in his chair. It's late afternoon. Jem and Walker enter. They are boisterous outside the door and quiet down on entering and seeing Bud.

JEM

(Outside, laughing) Honnnnnnnnk, Honnnnnnnnk. There, now you got a honk too.

WALKER

(As they enter) I guess you're right. It didn't feel too bad.

JEM

Wear tighter pants next time. (opening door) Shhh, look. Isn't it beautiful. Everything touched until it comes out of itself.

WALKER

(Taking her hand) You're beautiful Jem.

JEM

Quiet now, like little angels.

BUD

His can drops and he starts awake. He screws his face into a doubtful humorous grimace while craning his head sideways.)

BUD (cont.)

Angels heh? Careful as rain on a steel drum and just as quiet.

JEM

I put the hubcaps in the shed Bud 'til we have stories made for them.

WALKER

They're like lonely moons, like Calypsos and Ios.

BUD

Moons on a snake skin curve of highway, the pontiac, and Jem.

JEM

Oh Bud, we are angels. I love you Bud.

BUD

You love me too, dontcha Walker, ole pal? C'mere and give me a kiss son.

WALKER
 (Very hesitant, looking at Jem) No, you're kidding.

JEM
 I don't think so.

WALKER
 Well, ok then. (He kisses Bud on the cheek.)

BUD
 That wasn't no kiss. Can't he do any better than that Jem?

JEM
 Well, I've only about halfway let him try, but yeah, I'd say so.

BUD
 So c'mon then. I want a big wet one like I could hang on the wall.

WALKER
 But I'm a man.

BUD
 So you say son, c'mere now, old Bud won't hurt you.

Walker, pushed by Jem moves into Bud's embrace and gets a full lipped old-time biker's kiss. Walker splutters and wipes his lips.

BUD
 Ok Jem, he's all yours.

Jem grabs Walker, gives him a teasing peck; Walker grabs her back in earnest. They kiss.

BUD
 Signed, sealed, and delivered, a four page spread.

JEM
 Like perfume and champagne. Like this. (she poses, hanging on Walker's neck.) No baby, you're supposed to look mean and like, "brother what a bother." Here, (she begins arranging him.)

BUD
 Yeah, put a pose on the rose. Heh, lemme get my camera. (He digs camera out from behind chair - a polaroid).

JEM
 C'mon Walker, look like you don't care. We both have to.

But I do care.

WALKER

Well, just pretend you're thinking about thinking then.

JEM

Oh yeah, I get it.

WALKER

Yeah that's perfect. Ok, now pretend I'm off doing the same thing, but you don't want me to know that you know. Right. Ok Bud.

JEM

Walker manages to look completely befuddled while Jem looks like a sophisticated cover-girl. Bud snaps as Jem and Walker run through various poses.

BUD

Focuses too long on a particular pose, one in which Jem is leaning back onto Walker with a wouldn't you like to be him look on her face. (Walker relaxes and smiles in this one.) He lets the camera drop to hang around his neck without taking the shot.

BUD (cont.)

Aw hell, who'm I kiddin. Four page spread with old Bud stuck to the pages.

JEM

Don't Bud.

BUD

Querida, Muchacha, Por Dios Porque? (He was squatting while taking photos; now, he sinks to his knees.) This is fucked. I mean look, (gestures at room) it's all ours, our love Jem.

JEM

Why is it fucked Bud. How come everything we've made is all of a sudden fucked because I don't want to sleep with you anymore? We haven't got it on for awhile anyway.

BUD

But it's all connected to you and me.

JEM

Well can't it all be connected to Walker too? He's here isn't he? And we made him a part of it right?

BUD

Yeah, but he's on the side. It's between you and me.

JEM

Ok, but what's that got to do with fucking me? Look, it's what we do right, we take what comes along and pay attention to it. That's what we did with each other too. It was comfortable, it helped us make this, but it wasn't the man thing, I mean the main thing wasn't the man thing -- I mean, look, someone else came along is all, and I'm paying attention.

BUD

Like with the cans and the hubcaps hunh?

JEM

Yeah, I thought you understood before. I wasn't hiding it or anything.

BUD

It's not the same love Jem. He's not a can.

JEM

Well shit Bud, there isn't that much difference, shake him and see.

BUD

Yeah, but you don't love him the same.

JEM

Polish him up and drink him down.

BUD

It ain't the same.

JEM

I didn't love you the same either Bud. I still don't

BUD

Then what have we been doing all this time?

JEM

We were making all this shine.

BUD

We made it with love. We loved everything until it came out of itself. We even loved him till he came out of himself.

JEM

But the sex wasn't part of it Bud, not for me. That's what I'm trying to tell you. It was just an action, like with the cans.

BUD

That's what started the whole thing though, jokin about the cans and the chair and how hot your butt looked in high heels. You think I'm an old fart, that's all. You don't respect me.

JEM

Oh shit Bud, of course I do, you old fart.

BUD

No, you don't either. You parade around here half dressed all the time and I'm supposed to mind my own nevermind and not pay it any attention at all.

JEM

We're family Bud.

BUD

Family? You mean when you were sleeping with me, you were fucking your own father?

JEM

Ok, fine, if that's the way you want it. But you're still my family, the only one I ever had, and I love you. God damn you, I love you.

BUD

You look up to me.

JEM

Yeah.

BUD

(Gesturing at Walker) But you sleep with him.

JEM

(Laughing) Well, you don't expect me to look up to him do you?

BUD

(Raises his eyebrows at Walker who has been wandering around nervously examining things and has now turned to look at Jem and Bud.) Hear that son, ain't you the lucky one.

JEM

Be nice to him.

BUD

Me? You barkin up the wrong tree now for sure.

JEM

Yeah well the view looks great from here.

BUD

Provided you can see the forest from the trees.

JEM
Now look who's barkin.

BUD
You ain't seen me bite yet.

JEM
And here I thought you was hungry.

BUD
Shit. I'm for the blue lonesome. I'm gonna look up
Melinda, Melody, Desiree, Zevanda, belly up to the bar and
hurt my way even inside.

JEM
Say hi for me.

BUD
I haven't forgotten where I found you Jem.

JEM
You sure about that?

BUD
Aww Jem, I love you, I just...shit, I gotta get out of here.
Bud exits.

JEM
There goes the rent.

WALKER
Where's he going?

JEM
Down to the strip joint at the truckstop.

WALKER
What'll we do if he doesn't come back.

JEM
He'll be back. He just laugh loved me too long, so now he
has to have a good blue lonesome. It's like library books.
He had this one part of himself on loan from himself because
he wanted me to read it, like one volume from an
encyclopedia. Well, I never wanted to read the whole thing
but there was one part I kind of liked and I didn't want to
hurt his feelings so we just read the same part over and
over. Anyway, the book got way overdue, so now he has to
return it to himself and pay the fines.

WALKER
Oh. I thought he left because he was mad at us.

JEM
You're doin fine Walker.

WALKER
I'll help with the rent.

JEM
You already did. We got you all signed up on welfare.

WALKER
I think I should work.

JEM
Why, you gonna save the country or something?

WALKER
I feel better now, and besides I got you into this.

JEM
You did hunh?

WALKER
Besides, a person should work.

JEM
By which you mean, "a man."

WALKER
No, just me; I should.

JEM
You should work your way up in construction maybe, move into real-estate, buy a motel after awhile so you'll have time to play with the kids.

WALKER
I guess so.

JEM
This isn't fun honey, you're pissing me off. Heh, let's go try on Bud's argyle socks and dance naked to Big Band music.

WALKER
Don't you want to feel like you're as good as everyone else?

JEM
I'm better honey. You should have seen the look on the guys' faces when I was dancin. When I took off my G-string, they looked like they were in church. You could have heard a pin drop.

WALKER
But I love you.

JEM

(Switches to baby doll voice) 'Course you do sweetie, you're gonna take care of poor little Jem (feeling his arm) oh, you're so strong. You're gonna teach me how to get nice money because you love Jem. You're gonna take care of me just like that pimp doorman at the club did. (Looking at him) You don't know what I'm talking about do you.

WALKER

Well kind of, but Jem, I wasn't really thinking of a motel...

JEM

(Pushing him into the barber chair) Shut up.

WALKER

More like a bed and breakfast.

JEM

(Climbing onto his lap, straddling him.) Walker, if you didn't need disability before, you will in a minute.

(Lights)

SCENE FOUR (Later that night)

Walker is sitting in Bud's chair. He's asleep, dreaming. A corner of the room opens up behind him spilling light onto the scene. Walker's parents enter through the crack. They are dressed as if to go to a dinner party, but overly so. Walker's dad is wearing an enormous tie and his hair is shellacked. The shoulders of his coat are bulging and lumpy. His mom is overly made up, grotesquely so, and is wearing a huge glittering bracelet and carrying a purse that she has to sling over her back to support.

MOM

(To Dad) Well, I still think she'll leave him if he doesn't cut his nails and get himself squared up.

DAD

(To Walker) Have you got a job? What are you doing with yourself?

WALKER

(Fending them off with slow motion hand gestures, awake in his dream) We're fine, everything's fine. It's ok, you can go away.

MOM

Well, really, we certainly cannot. Just whose son do you think you are--living like this. We saw you with that horrible man, and that girl, she's dirty.

WALKER

But I thought I was dirty, I mean didn't you say you were afraid she'd leave me?

DAD

You are dirty.

MOM

You've got to take better care of yourself. You haven't eaten. You should come home.

DAD

Oh leave him alone.

MOM

I most certainly will not. He's your son. Don't you care what happens to him?

WALKER

Go away, leave me alone. I'd be ok if everyone would just leave me alone.

DAD

We can't leave you alone. We're your family.

MOM

We'll have to help.

DAD

get him squared away.

MOM

Fix him.

DAD

Squared away.

MOM

Fix him

DAD

Square

MOM

Fix

DAD

Help him

MOM

Help him

(The Mom and Dad are chanting by now. The Mom licks her entire hand and wipes Walker's face. The Dad slaps him too hard across the back. He slumps forward. The Mom empties her purse, drools on a handkerchief and wipes him. The Dad pumps his hand, squeezing it much too hard. Walker falls in agony to the floor.)

DAD

A weakling.

MOM

dirty

(The Mom takes out a huge lipstick and begins painting his face. She hands the Dad a large knife. The Dad begins stabbing himself.)

DAD

Look what you've done to me. Look what you've done to me...(as he stabs himself)

MOM

You're a failure. You're dirty. Look what you've done to your father.

(The Mom hauls Walker to his feet. He stands there swaying, his face covered in wet lipstick watching his father stab himself. His mother gets to her knees and begins wailing scrabbling at his feet.)

Lights go out on tableau--a phone rings (parents exit and Walker gets quietly back in his chair)--Jem, in nightgown answers phone. Dim light across stage.

JEM

You're at the what? Bud -- if I have to pay bail, we won't make the rent. (pause) Yeah right -- right -- yeah ok -- Bye. (to herself) - Oh shit.

SCENE FIVE

Morning -- Jem and Walker are drinking coffee. Jem is showered and dressed in jeans, cowboy boots, and a western shirt. Walker looks unkempt, in faded jeans with a hole in the knee and a white tee shirt. He's reading the paper.

JEM

He'll be back soon.

WALKER

(Folds paper to want ads, reading) Drill press operator, must have experience.

JEM

We should have a party.

WALKER

(Looking up) Do you have a pen?

JEM

Do I look like I've got a fucking pen?

WALKER

Did I do something wrong? Are you worried about last night? Are you gonna get pregnant?

JEM

Are you gonna get yourself cleaned up?

WALKER

(Gets up, crosses to his typewriter, gets a pen.) Well yeah, I was gonna get to that.

JEM

Because he'll be back any minute you know.

WALKER

(Sitting down again) I'll get cleaned up before I go.

JEM

You can't go. We have to have a party.

WALKER

(Reading, circling) Laborers needed, apply at job site, 27843, airport road.

JEM

Are you listening?

WALKER

You're not being very practical honey. Heh, is there more coffee?

JEM

(Standing) Did I do this to you? (walks a few paces, with her back to him) I thought we could break through the world like it was quarter inch wall board in a cheap trailer. The three of us, big as Christ.

WALKER

(Gets up, goes to her) We will.

BUD

(Singing as he enters) Where the deer and the antelope play and the skies are not cloudy all day. (Stopped short by mood between Jem and Walker, looking around) No balloons? No streamers? No fireworks? No beer? Jem?

JEM

Hi Bud, welcome home.

BUD

(Silent for a moment, looking at them, Walker sits down) Um, ok, coffee, sure, I could use some coffee. Why don't we all sit down and have some nice coffee.

They sit in glum silence.

JEM

Heh, maybe we should all go up to the hot springs.

BUD

Maybe so Jem, soak and sweat.

JEM

It's got a ring Bud, we could do it here, get a big wash-tub, polynesian posters, hula music. You could recite poetry, Bud's soak-n-sweat. I like it. We could have christmas cookies and beer.

BUD

They got me for child support, DUI and resisting arrest.

JEM

What happened to your robe?

BUD

That was the resisting arrest part. They wouldn't let me wear it. Told me I'd hang myself. It got ripped up when they tried to take it off me.

JEM

You never told me you had a family.

BUD

Yeah.

JEM

You just walked out on them?

BUD

Yeah.

JEM

I mean you told me about the war and about not fitting in when you came back, stampin around the country and all. I pictured you like hombre from the dark lagoon with reptile waffle skin, all dried out and crackly and mean. I didn't see you in a four-by-six with the wife and kids on the lawn.

WALKER

Heh, I know about that, grids right? Like everybody's got these grids, like waffle squares and they put them on the batter and then that's the way it is right, but actually, it's all just batter and you get all stuck in it.

BUD

You gotta get rid of him.

WALKER

The thing is that the grid is beautiful, shiny and pure, like a city at night. That's why I'm going to work by the airport.

JEM

Shut up Walker.

WALKER

I'm trying to help Jem. Maybe I can get Bud a job too. It's all changed Jem. We can't play make-believe anymore.

JEM

You left your kids. I can't believe you just left them.

BUD

I'm sorry Jem. I had a reason though.

JEM

Who?

BUD

A guy I found pullin out of the driveway. I wanted to kill him, but I knew it wouldn't do any good. It was weird, like it was supposed to happen and I had to find the reason in myself so I went lookin.

JEM

But all the time we've been together, you never even wrote them, never even told me.

BUD

I couldn't.

JEM

You couldn't and the whole time you knew I was writin letters to my dad that left me, sending them off to towns that had pretty names because I wanted him to be happy.

WALKER

After we get settled Jem, we'll find him ok?

BUD

I couldn't Jem, don't you see? I never found a reason in me, and then when I hooked up with you, it seemed like I found something outside me that could get in. I was happy Jem.

JEM

Ok. Bud what are we gonna do?

BUD

I gotta leave. If I don't, they'll hound me. They want money. They'll push Jem.

JEM

Just leave hunh? I though you just said this made you happy.

WALKER

I'll take care of you Jem. We'll get a nice house and a yard and everything.

BUD

What happened to him?

JEM

I think he wants to fuck me with a garden hose.

BUD

Now that I'd like to see.

JEM

I'll bet. How's Zevanda, still doing that routine with the stuffed snake?

BUD

Uh, yeah. Jem, I'm sorry. Come with me, ok?

JEM

(Silent, then, to herself) What happened? I can't find anybody.

WALKER

It's ok Jem, I'm here; everything'll be fine. We'll fix it.

JEM

Wait here. (She goes into next room.)

BUD

Shit...she went sideways on us.

WALKER

I didn't do anything.

BUD

Check your shoes.

WALKER

We can all get jobs.

BUD

Hell, I didn't know you were a workin man, why didn't you say so?

WALKER

That's why I have to go to the airport Bud.

BUD

(Rummages in a corner) Here, found em.
(Hands Walker a hard hat and gloves,
sits beside him, helps him with the hat,
adjusting the liner straps while Walker

puts on gloves.)

BUD (cont.)

There, how do you feel?

WALKER

I feel strong.

JEM

(She enters wearing a stripper's outfit, mini-skirt that barely covers her crotch, sequined G-string, tank-top, high heels, etc.)

BUD

I...Jem...don't...

JEM

(Raises a finger to her lips) Shhhh. Be a good boy Bud, don't talk in church. (She continues her routine.)

WALKER

You can't come out of yourself now. The light's broken.

JEM

(Bending over in front of him) You want to touch it honey, make it shine?

WALKER

(Trying to look away) The light's broken.

JEM

(Turning, lifting her skirt, hypnotizing him with the sway of her sequined crotch) There, can you see better now?

JEM

(She grabs his hand to touch herself with, he withdraws it, she comes away with the glove. She moves away, sheds the skirt, and begins a slow tease with the glove. Walker buries his head in his arms, Bud is rapt, focused completely on her. Walker turns away finally, curled into himself on his chair.)

Still in stripper's costume. Lights dim. Bud and Walker leave. Jem sinks to the floor, distraught, trying to hug beer cans to her.

Lights, END SCENE.

SCENE

Jem wearing aqua-marine barber's frock with sequined women sewed onto it and pink heels and pink rubber gloves is arranging mannequins. One of these is already in place on Bud's chair with a T.V. in its lap. On the T.V. (and on others around stage and in laps of other mannequins) a woman is selling discount itmes for a phone-in show. Jem straightens the last mannequin at Walker's desk, then goes to her own writing area. She reads. As she reads, different scenes come on T.V.

First, a highway. Walker, looking lean and fit, is hitching. A car passes losing a hubcap. Walker sits down beside it and strokes it then holds it to his chest, folds himself around it and rocks back and forth.

Second, Bud at a bar. Bar noise but no people around him. He sits nursing a beer, fingers tracing the can. Suddenly, he backhands both can and glass. Heh buddy! someone shouts menacingly.

JEM

(Reading) Daddy, I hope you're enjoying Alhombre. I've never been there, but I passed a sign to there once, and I bet it's nice. People keep leaving but it's me that feels like I'm going away. Walker could have explained it I bet, but him and Bud have been gone a couple of weeks. I'm staying here. Rita and Garth, the T.V. people I told you about, came back. They say they're going to get me a grant. I'm an artist they said. I miss Bud and Walker. I hope they come back. I wish you would come home daddy. I miss you. Love Jem.