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The Vehicle, Fall 1980

Susan Mehl

John Stockman

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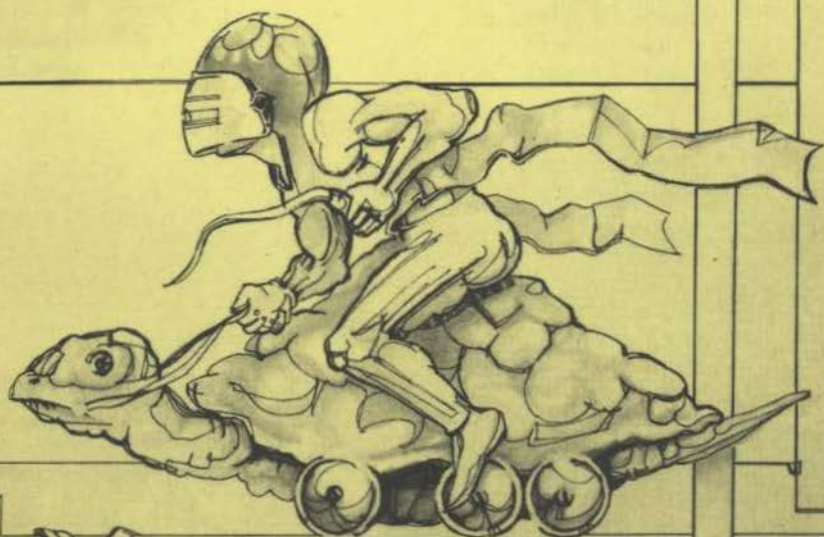
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Vehicle



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Vehicle

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Contents

Untitled	Susan Mehl	4
Mitch	John Stockman	5
Hallway	Andy Leszczynski	6
At The Movies	Elise Hempel	8
Haiku	Angie Patrick	8
On Magnolias	Thersa Kenny	9
Neighbor	John Stockman	10
Wet	Cathy George	10
Haiku	Thersa Kenny	10
The Speed Queen	Carolyn Perry	11
A Thought	Thersa Kenny	14
The Stone Belongs to the Lake	Robert Schumacher	15
Driving South of Winnipeg	Jerry McAnulty	16
Travels with the Executioner	Peter Lindeman	17
Nightwing	Laura Mueller	18
Thoughts of an Uninterested Student	Dru Sefton	19
Rainbird's Man	Mary McDaniel	20
Effortless	Kevin Stott	25
Where the Waves Sound	Theresa Whiteside	26
'45	Ray Wallace	28
Epigram #1	P. James Krueger	28
Untitled	Susan Mehl	29
Reruns	Angie Patrick	30
Sunset	Gloria Rhoads	34
Return of the Native	Ray Wallace	35
The Guitar	Joanne Dunne	35
In Grandmother's Bedroom	Elise Hempel	36
Cindy Poem No. 3	John Stockman	36
Dust in the Dark	Laura Mueller	37
Suspension Bridge	Laura Henry	39
Waves	Leslie Garner	39
Oyama: a Setting and a Girl	Jerry McAnulty	40
the middle of the night	Kevin Stott	41
Old State Road	Laura Henry	43
Dairy Queen	John Stockman	43

Art

Cover by Dennis Wunsch	
Pen and ink drawing by Rose Huber	3
Photograph by Irene Brown	7
Photograph by Irene Brown	27
Photograph by Irene Brown	42
Pen and ink drawing by Rose Huber	44



—Rose Huber

Untitled

I meant to write a poem
with a central theme—
you know, one of those
into which
all the words fit nicely,
locking together
in jigsaw fashion
to form
an impossibly charming
final picture
with no rough edges.

But instead
I found my thoughts
mixing up
like flour and water—
sticking
in the wrong places,
forming ungainly lumps
where I wanted smoothness.

So I threw my pen across the room
and went for a walk in the rain,
with my face tilted up,
and cursed
all good poets.

—Susan Mehl

Mitch

Mitch's giant elm
had a big crowd of birds.
They raised a racket
and left feathers
all over the yard.

His sidewalk was covered
with ash-colored birdshit.
From the front porch
you could hear them crap—
slow plops like popcorn
when the oil is just hot.

"Stock," he said,
"they're driving me crazy."
When it rained
it smelled worse than barns
at the county fair.

One day
he scattered bread crumbs
in the grass,
then crouched behind a window
with his BB gun.

When birds fluttered down
he picked them off
'til the screen
looked like swiss cheese.

He finally got rid of those birds, but now his rooms have flies.

—John Stockman

The Hallway

The door is half open.
A single bulb
lights the hallway.
In the corners, cobwebs
stretch from the walls
like the fingers of a dying man
that touch his grandson's face.
I push the door open
and see the first three steps,
the rest covered in dark
the way sea swallows sand.
I look up.
An old man's
wrinkled face
mirrors me.
I step up.
The echo settles
like dust on the floor.

—Andy Leszczynski



—Irene Brown

Robert M. ...

... of the ...
... and ...
... of ...

At The Movies

When the movie's out of sync
The actor on the screen
Looks silly.
The words come
Before his mouth has formed them,
And when it does
He's already saying
Something else,
Two seconds behind himself.
He cannot catch up
To his meanings, thinks
Too fast, words
Flying from his mind. Mutely,
He shouts after them.

—Elise Hempel

Haiku

almost twelve o'clock
Cinderella's mom beckons
with the front porch light

—Angie Patrick

On Magnolias

Slowly,
gently,
dying.
Their cries
muffled
under tones
of suffocating
pink.
Their soft,
stagnant
scent,
their last
request.

—Theresa Kenny

Neighbor

My mother cannot believe our neighbor
who works nights making a casket,
whistling 'til sunrise.

My mother wants to know his plans
and what's his wife think?
Who's it for, anyway?

My mother takes the garbage out
walking fast past his basement light,
cotton filling her ears.

—John Stockman

Wet

Like an infinite tributary
You flow.
As rain cleaves to the sea
I plunge,
Tippling in your deep water eyes;
Green drenching swirls surge over me.

I burst the surface,
Adrift in the shimmer of a lover's blush.
You bead and fall away,
And I am breathless.

—Cathy George

Haiku

Autumn winds blowing
restless, turning leaves into
windswept memories.

—Thersa Kenny

The Speed Queen

Larry stuffed the gaping mouths of three Speed Queens full of dirty clothes, slopped what he hoped was a cup of blue soap into each top-loader, and fed the machines their quarters.

The machines began to hum and gyrate, and Larry leaned against them, feeling the maternal warmth as they filled with hot water. He slid to the floor, massaged by the machine's rhythm, the concrete's cold seeping through his jeans. He closed his eyes, giving himself up to the mechanical crooning.

"You using these?"

Larry jumped, banging his head into the side of the washer.

"What?" he shouted over the wash cycle.

"Said are you using these machines?"

"I'm using only these three," Larry gestured.

The woman was short and round and dark, and she bounced between the rows of washers and dryers as if she were about to burst from her skin. Larry was thinking of those little sausages Mr. Maritini jiggled in his delicatessen window. Larry would pour off the 4:17 with the other job hunters, the morning's stiffness perspired from his white Arrow shirt, his good jacket crumpled from the press of the subway. Walking fast, thinking of the indignity of waiting in outer offices, Larry would slow with the others in front of Maritini's. As if someone had switched off the gravity, the sidewalk in front of the deli always seemed to have a lump of people floating slowly by, wishing they had fat, bouncy sausages instead of macaroni to eat for dinner. There was a dented trash can on the corner next to Maritini's, and the job hunters filled it with tattered classifieds every day at 4:20.

"Wanted: musician to play trombone in jazz quintet. . .ambitious young person for managerial position. Experience necessary. . .Addressers wanted immediately. . .Fast cash. . .experience, money, opportunity, references, promotion, adventure, money. . ."

Later, opportunity, ambition and the like fluttered under the nose of a snoring drunk in the alley behind Maritini's.

The woman removed a bottle of Lysol and a roll of paper towels from her laundry basket and began cleaning the machine next to Larry's.

"Never know what's been in them, y'know?" she offered. "Can't be too careful, no siree."

"Mmmmm." Larry chewed on his thumbnail.

"You can be my man. . ." Loretta Lynn accosted Larry from a tiny speaker overhead.

"You like country music?" the woman inquired. She was loading washers, adding detergent with precise movements from small pudgy hands.

"I usta hate country music," she said.

Larry studied the row of dryers across from him. Their glass faces reflected the shiny metal surface of the washers, which reflected the glass faces of the dryers. . .

"Especially songs with a harpsichord. Twang, twang, twang—reminded me of people I don't like. People who actually say the stuff you hear in the lyrics. You know—'well, and I love that woman, Lord, just roll her over and lover, love her again.' Stuff like that."

Larry smiled faintly.

"But I kind of like country music now. It grows on you after a while. The things they sing about are so true. So true," said the woman, sliding down against the washer next to Larry's. Larry's machine kicked into rinse. They stared at their reflections in the dryers.

"What?" Larry shouted over the surging din.

"Said it's not a bad winter." The woman leaned closer, and a wave of Lysol wafted over Larry.

"Some winters," she confided, "are so cold. Unfriendly. The wind howls and cuts right through your clothes. You can feel the ice right through your shoes, it's so cold. But this winter is different. The snow is all soft and clean. And we keep having warmer days where the snow melts, and it's muddy, like spring coming. Y'know?"

"Uh-huh."

"I'm Frances."

"Nice to meet you."

"What do you go by?"

". . . Chuck."

"So what do you think of the Sox this year, Chuck?"

"I don't follow them."

"Me neither."

Frances scooted closer.

"Do you think I talk too much, Chuck?"

"Broken" crooned Loretta, "like a million shattered dreams. . ."

"Y'know, I had a dream the other night. I dreamt I found a man in my living room. Wasn't much of a man. He was so thin. I think he was starving. I put him under my bed, and I went into the cellar. I was rubbing my eyes because I couldn't see, and they just kept getting worse. I was going blind, running into things. Blades, they were, cold and sharp against my face. So sharp. Pressing, pressing—but not breaking skin. I was trying to find some water. I wanted to wash my eyes so I could see. And there as a tall girl, wearing pink, with long blond hair. She was playing the piano. Chuck?"

"Mmmmm?"

"What do you suppose it means?"

"Your dream?"

"Yeah, my dream."

"I don't know."

Larry pushed himself up, stiff from the concrete, and opened his washers.

His clothes lay in the bottom of the metal drum, quiet lumps of color. A leg of his corduroys was wrapped around his jean. Larry pulled them apart.

"Haven't I seen you downtown, Chuck?"

"No."

Larry separated his once white socks from his once black T-shirt. Both were now a mottled grey. He tossed them into the dryer where their liquid splat echoed inside the drum. Dye dripped from his fingers.

"Yeah, didn't you used to work at Suicide Prevention?"

"No."

Larry wiped his dripping hands on his jeans, and gathered more clothes from the washer. The clothes soaked his T-shirt as he carried them to the dryer. He dumped the clothes into the dryer, pulled the T-shirt from where it clung to his ribs.

"I used to call there, y'know. There was a kid who worked there, he sounded a lot like you. 'Let me talk to the kid,' I'd say. No matter how down I was feeling, he could always cheer me up. Made me feel better. He was real good, but he quit. I guess it made him sad to work there after a while. You look kind of sad, too, Chuck. Need to have more fun."

"I have enough fun."

"Me, I play softball for fun. I'm a pretty good pitcher."

"Yeah?" Larry was shaking out a thread bare shirt, wondering if he could fit all three washer loads into a single dryer.

"You need to enjoy life more. Hey! Batter up!"

Frances had a wad of cloth from Larry's washer, bulging green through her knuckles.

"Hey batter, he can't hit, he can't hit. Strike out, easy out. Hey batterbatterbatterbatter."

The wad of cloth hit the back of the dryer.

"Strike one. Come on, Chuck."

Larry's jeans flew across the laundromat. The metal button nicked the lip of the dryer, set up a hollow ring.

"Strike two."

Frances stood in profile, hips forward, chin tucked into her bulky shoulder like a pelican. She swayed back, gripping a dishtowel, kicked, and let sail.

"Strike three. Yerout."

Larry stood a moment, rubbed his bristled chin and cheeks. He was sweating. The bone of his hand met the bone of his face as if he had no skin. He stared at Frances, and Frances stared back.

Larry took a step back and then another. And another. The door—he could feel it behind him, and he turned toward it. Frances' reflection came after him, quarter filled, then half filled the glass door with a growing bulk. The electric cold swallowed him; the ice moved under his sneakers; the snow glowed blue in the streetlight. The street was abandoned, like an old shoe in the gutter that even the drunks had forgotten.

"Chuck!"

Larry quirked down the sidewalk, hunched in the wind.

"Chuck—" Her hand was on his arm. Under the streetlight she was smaller. The city had dwarfed them both. He was hungry, thought he'd have a job by now, had never been to the city before. He might not find a job at all.

They walked back to the laundromat. Their breath was thick in the warm heavy air.

"Hellow darling," sang Conway Twitty. "It's been a long time. . ."

"Doncha know," said Frances, "I wish I wore skirts and could play the piano real good. I wish I had real long hair."

Larry opened his dryers and piled his still damp clothes into an old wicker basket. The basket creaked as Larry picked it up.

Frances opened her Lysol and began cleaning a dryer.

—Carolyn Perry

A Thought

My eyes are
hollow insets
of burnt out dreams.

—Theresa Kenny

The Stone Belongs to the Lake

She and I,
We used to skip rocks on the lake.
Hopelessly in love, for
We knew our time would come soon.
We found a piece of chalk
Some children had left after playing hop-scotch,
And scrawled our names,
Jim & Jody
on a big rock on the shore.
Our excitement was only overcome
By the time we had to wait.

Then it happened, the Lord and an automobile
Decided it was time for her to leave.

I went back to the lake,
To skip rocks.
I always thought better that way.
But this time the shoreline was too painful, too alone.
As I walked I glanced
At the rock where we signed forever our lives.
But as the car had taken her
So had the water washed away our names.

At the "home" they gave me back the ring.
I kept the gold, for it was mine,
But the stone belongs to the lake...

—Robert Schumacher

Driving South of Winnipeg

Sunset, orange-red, half an eye
peering over the plains.
Winking rays through corn stalks
parched, yellow, stuck in the ground
a hundred million spears.
Engine's steady drone
rubber purring on the road
grey belt, looped round the world.
Canada's prairie, inching away
sea of wheat, tassels swaying,
waves rolling, wind whipping,
darting in the windows,
whirling, sucking on my skin,
hair dancing, music trailing in my slipstream,
vast, open, stretching country
sandwiched by the August sky.
The shadow of my car
floating like a bubble
ticking through the fence posts . . .

—Jerry McAnulty

Travels With The Executioner

If you're like anybody else, my job makes you sick, or at least the thought of it does. Hell, I agree it isn't a pretty job, and it's not exactly prestigious, but it's given me an opportunity to discover things I'd have been hard pressed to find out in a more "socially acceptable" position. Running a guillotine in the French Revolution reveals a lot about life and about death. Most people don't have a clear idea of death, but guillotining has been an eye-opening experience for me.

What gets me is the people who don't die right. Let me explain: almost everyone I've guillotined has blocked out the idea that his death was imminent. These people end up blocking everything out of their mind and sleepwalking up the stairs to their death. They die like zombies, not like people. All their lives they've avoided the reality of death; and when it comes, they manage to skip out still avoiding it.

What's the big problem with death? It has to come; so far no one's gotten out of it. I can't tell you how bad or how good it is, but I'm sure it's a lot more lenient if it's accepted. Sadly enough, we don't remember anything about birth, our other big event. That's why we should pay particular attention to death in ourselves. If a person could somehow gain an understanding of birth and death, it would seem gaining any other knowledge in life would be little problem for him.

There is one old man I think I should mention, however. He probably didn't deserve to die, yet he did manage to do it in a way anyone would envy. You see, with all the different factions in the revolution, it's hard to tell which side some people are on, and a few innocents are lost along the way. There was a lot of debate about whether or not this guy was a true bourgeois, but he was sent to me on the cart nevertheless. The crowd was up to its usual yelling and jeering as he was unloaded and led up the stairs. Just before we lowered the board into position, he shouted out to the crowd. I forget the exact words, but it was something along the lines of "long live the revolution" and "down with the king." He then quietly assumed the position and that was the only time I've ever guillotined to a stunned silence.

Of course, he left no doubt about his bourgeois status; all the loose ends of his life were sort of tied up with that one simple act. I'm convinced he must have been very aware of what faced him, very resigned to his death, unjust though it might have been. When I pulled his head out of the basket I noticed it didn't have the usual look of horror, but instead looked a bit laid-back and serene.

One of the stupidest things about death is the so-called death rite.

Most are done back in the prison, but a few are done right up next to the guillotine. Wherever they're done, I don't like them. I think they're a sham. We don't need a special, contrived ceremony to make something as important as death "okay." Rites and rituals, in their attempt to simplify life's events, bastardize our most important intrinsic events with extrinsic garishness. Birth has baptism, growing older has bar mitzvahs or communions, where a boy becomes a man in a matter of seconds, marriage is all mapped out and rehearsed, and death has death rites and a funeral. A hero's bravery and a scholar's diligence are tainted with the pomp of ceremony. In the case of a person scheduled for guillotining, he should do some deep thinking and preparation — and nothing else — before hopping on the cart and heading for the guillotine.

Which is where I'm heading. As I said, some people's loyalty can be questioned amid this confusion, and mine was questioned today. My job makes me seem a bit evil, a threat to the people. So now the cart's here, and I'm being led up the stairs. Funny, I've never noticed so much detail in these steps. The crowd's yelling the same things it's always yelled, as I'm put on the board and lowered into position, looking out on the crowd, the angry mob, they don't know death like I do, the ignorant mob, as I feel the shuddering rush of the blade shooting down—!

...

—Peter Lindeman

Nightwing

Twilight pierced by rustling corn—
A thumb pricked on a rose's thorn—
Beneath the evening star's faint light
Ruffling feathers in the night.

Coal-fire eyes gleam in the dark,
Legs scaly like hickory bark
Talons, beak—sharp, ready
Perched on a stalk, black body steady.

Startled into hurried flight
Black bird squawks loud in fright.
Wings beat out an eerie tune,
Silhouette against the moon.

—Laura Mueller

Thoughts of an Uninterested Student

Marooned in the midst of a multitude of desks.
While the professor drones onward of "rugged individualism,"
I am but number 340-56-3949
To him.
The numbers around me whisper, fidget:
Count seconds into minutes into hours
As I do.
...Adding comments to those already engraved upon the desktop:
Bits of autobiographical histories
Of past numbers.
Daydreaming...
Joining those surrounding me in a
State of mental absence
From class, from the earth.
Winding watch
(Watching watch)
Checking shoelaces
(Both tied)
Fixing necklace
(Necklace straight)
Eternities later, the clock finally declares that
All knowledge for today
Has been gained.
Unending patience earns
Dismissal.

—Dru Sefton

Rainbird's Man

He was curled up in the seat, his cheek pressed against the window, his eyes red, swollen. The bus lurched to a stop; a *campesino* beat black sheep across the road. Schoner's legs were numb. He turned and stretched them across the cardboard boxes filled with work clothes and boots, cartons of cigarettes, boxes of oatmeal, a dozen eggs. No razor. He had been in the bus for hours—no—days, and his skin was chafed raw from the tufts of horsehair that pushed through the worn leather upholstery. He put his red eye to one of the holes. The rest of the horse wasn't there.

He watched Mexico from his window. Groves of ebony and rosewood and undergrowths of giant ferns and sago palms gave way to olive trees and scattered chollas but the sky, the Mexican sky, was always the same. All along the coast the government was building huge petrochemical plants and the sky glowed like the inferno, a hellish orange thick with black smoke and natural gas, the death smell of sulfur. They were almost to Reynosa, a few miles from the American border. He felt sick. His head throbbed, gripped by an enormous metal clamp—, steely cold, that was frozen to his skull. Now and then it let a teardrop of ice roll over his shoulder and into his hands. He put the ice in the cracker tin with the chameleons and peeked inside now and then to see if it had melted. Almost to Reynosa.

He had a new job. A better job, Morelos, the *subcontratista*, had told him, flashing a bright smile, his thumbs hitched in the pockets of his silver-studded jeans. New wells were being drilled in Reynosa; there were new men to train. And Schoner had experience. They could use him. Sure. But what had he done? He gripped his forehead trying to remember. He had heard the whisper, the other workers talking, talking. They were afraid of him. He lived alone while they slept five and six to a room. He wired no money home to a family, paid no bribes to the union bosses. He was big. They said his eyes were red. He smiled. Of course his eyes were—red. But they were afraid of him just the same. What had he done? Even Morelos was afraid. "I'm your friend, Man, remember? Don't forget, *amigo, amigo, amigo*," he had said, handing Schoner a bus ticket to Reynosa and hopping off to his Continental like a monkey, a chimpanzee in silver-studded jeans. And Schoner had stood there—there was nothing he could do. Morelos—he had no neck. It was like having no navel: he had never been born, he could never die. And he drove off like a madman, calling from his car window, "Hey, Man, you knew it'd be like this!" But Morelos was crazy. He hadn't

known it'd be like this, living alone in shacks with dirt floors and stray chickens that hobbled around pecking at the worms that popped out of the holes where the table legs had been, his only contact with the world the mud that spewed up from the drilling rigs and the whores, the putas, that roamed the oil towns. But for some reason, he knew he deserved it. Deserved't. Apple pie made him sick. For some reason.

The road to the plant was unpaved, rutted, strewn with road graders and dump trucks and semis filled with barite mud. It was lunch time and the workers straddled the oil pipes, their faces coated with thick, white cream, their hands black with tar, paper plates of ground beef and beans before them. The bus stopped; Schoner's head throbbed; another ice tear rolled over his shoulder. He stuck it in his mouth and tried to bite it, but it was slippery like a tomato seed and he had to chase it around his mouth with his tongue—and then there was the foreman, looking. Schoner heard the whisper, felt his fists tighten. He swallowed the tear.

"You Schoner?"

He nodded his head.

"Come on with me then." He gathered up the boxes, slipped the cracker tin under his arm and followed the foreman past the shoddy wooden booths where coca cola and shrimp in paper cups was sold, to a single white-washed cabin that sprang from the dirt like a toadstool. The foreman stretched out a hairy arm and unhitched the padlock on the door. He turned to Schoner. "Seventy-five a week, be on the rig at five." He stomped away, his head bald, his long, snake neck moving from side to side, glistening with sweat and sun. Schoner's fingers tightened around the cracker tin.

The cabin had one room. The floor was covered this time with sheet metal that gave when he walked on it and sounded like the twang of a saw blade that is bent back and forth. There were no windows. He found a lantern and shook it. It was empty. He'd have to go to town. He hated town; but he hated dark worse; he'd go to town, buy some candles, another lantern, a jar of coal oil. Some canned food, too, and he wouldn't have to go out again. He set the chameleons on the table next to the mattress, tapped on the cracker tin. The lizards were sluggish today. Hungry maybe, or tired. He was tired. Perhaps he could sleep tonight. A bottle of tequila, a lantern—perhaps he could sleep. Closing his eyes—that was the hard part. He closed his eyes and saw with his mind and that was no good. No good at all. His mind saw faces. Children's faces. A woman's face. Eyes, her eyes were blue. He thought he should know them, but he couldn't remember. And then his head started to throb. In another life—maybe—he had known them in another life.

He pulled the lid off a box of oatmeal and sifted it with his fingers until he found a mealworm. He pinched off its head and tossed it on the floor. He found another, this one small so he didn't kill it. Let them do it, let them kill the quivering white pulp. He unzipped his sleeping bag and spread it out on the mattress, emptied one of the cardboard boxes and tucked it under his arm, then pulled on the door, padlocking it behind

him. He urinated behind the cabin, and when he finished, he saw the kids. They were playing in the dirt a few hundred yards away, Indian children, skin the color of the dust in which they sat, their eyes round and brown. He liked kids. "Bus," he said to one of them. "Omnibus. Reynosa. Donde?" They stared at him with their blank, round faces. He pulled out his wallet. "Bus," he said again.

One of them reached out and took the bill from his hand. "Calle de Palma." He pointed a slender finger.

"Thanks." Schoner began to walk in that direction.

"Senor!" He turned back toward the boy, smiling. He liked kids. But the boy, laughing, shaking his fist, cried, "Fuck off, Man!" and stomped the ground so the dust rose around his ankles, while his friends giggled and tried to cover their mouths with their hands—until Schoner turned, flung the box behind him, and began to walk toward them. The giggling stopped. They were afraid; he knew they were, afraid of his red eyes, his huge, forward-bent body, his shaggy hair, his dark beard; and they were thinking, crying, "Corra!" But he knew they couldn't move because the ground gripped their feet; and they could feel the heat from his eyes as he came nearer; and he watched them standing there, poised, ready to hurl the rocks they clenched in their hands—but he stopped.

"That goddamned bus—where is it?" And the boy stammered the name of the street and pointed the opposite direction he had told Schoner before. Schoner watched him over his shoulder as he walked away. He saw the boy sink to the ground, saw him pull the money from the band of his shorts and watch it flutter to the ground, heard the whisper, "Monstruco. . .diablo."

He sank to the bus seat. He was tired, sick, his head throbbled, throbbled hotly now and the sweaty drops ran down his neck. He was hot; the sun was so damn hot, scorching the palms so that their fronds withered, leaving the brown trunks stuck deep in the soil like pretzel rods; and the tar bubbled; and the workers' skin blistered beneath the white cream; and the mud from the wells turned to dust before it reached the rigs, settling in a fine mist over the workers, turning to mud again when it mingled with their sweat. He tried to undo the clamps on the glass so the window would open, but his fingers were shaking and he jammed his thumbs against the metal again and again; but the window didn't open and he couldn't breathe and he was afraid he was going to be sick, sick right on the bus; and he was glad at least he had brought the box because he could vomit in that—but they were already in Reynosa.

He stomped out of the bus and into the first bar he came to. It was dark, and he didn't like the dark; but it was cool, so cool. He found a table in a corner and leaned his cheeks and the back of his head against the wall, the cool cement blocks chilling the sweat into ice drops that slid to the floor all around the table. It was dark, so dark that he didn't think anyone could see him; and being invisible, that was a good feeling. But then he supposed his eyes must glow in the dark like a cat's because a waitress brought him a bottle of tequila. He was afraid she would slip on the ice, and so he reached out and grabbed her elbow.

She smiled. "I get off in an hour."

He drank the bottle slowly. Why was he so upset? They were kids, just kids. He watched the waitress sway from table to table, her brown arm raised, a tray resting on her fingertips. She was wearing a white silk dress that shimmered like opal, gold earrings that flashed white against her skin. She liked him—why shouldn't she? What had he done? Nothing, nothing at all.

She sat down in the chair next to him. "Have some of that?" He poured from the bottle into a glass. "I'm Elaine. Been in town long?" He shook his head. "Didn't think so. The aceite, Huh? That black stuff—it makes you guys want to spend money, right? Might as well spend it on me." She laughed. "You like this dress? Made it myself. That's what I'm gonna do when I get out of here. Open a dress shop. You haven't been here long, huh?"

The girl could chatter. All whores do, he thought—takes their minds off the cheapness. He would take her home with him, contribute to her dress shop fund. He smiled. She raised her glass and it clinked on an earring. She was beautiful. Schoner, watching her lips, drinking his tequila, didn't hear the door slam, didn't notice that all the noise but the girl's voice and the whisper that never left his head stopped; but suddenly the man from behind the bar ran to their table and whispered in Elaine's ear, "Federales."

She jumped from the table and said she'd be right back, for him to please wait, her white dress leaving behind a streak of opal fire. "Why are they here?" he asked the bartender, gripping his forehead with one hand. "The federales?"

They stop the girls from working the bars, Man. Some freak with a hand like a vise been putting the squeeze on girls in the oil towns." He put a hand to his throat. "Estrangularon." Elaine pays me to watch for the police." He shrugged his shoulders. "Man, it's her neck."

She came back with a shawl over her head, grabbed his arm and led him through the back door to an old Chevy parked in the alley. "My car. Get in. Can we go to your place?"

"I got a cabin near the drill site. That where you wanna go?"

"Sure can't stay here—unless I wanna sleep in jail. Which way?"

There was no moon. He couldn't remember seeing the moon at all since he'd been to Mexico. It was never night here with the sky perpetually orange from the burn-off of earth and ground cover and natural gas. It wasn't right. He leaned against the window. Out there—scrubby joshuas and boojum trees, giant upended, uprooted carrots; the drilling sites, immense volcanoes spewing fire and ash, always rumbling, rumbling, shaking the ground so that the *campesinos* wept because their land was being eaten, because their cows would give no milk, because the chickens rushed around the yard like sparrows, wings flying until they'd flapped themselves to death. It was the oil, the aceite, the black devil that fed Mexico, fed on Mexico. And yet he was here, part of it; and by five-thirty in the morning he'd be on the rig covered with mud, the brown Mexican blood; and that wasn't such a bad feeling. But it wasn't right. Not right at all.

She parked the car behind the cabin and rummaged through the trunk until she found what he needed: a gallon tin of coal oil. He unlocked the door and took her inside, filled the lantern, lit it, set it on the table next to the mattress.

"I don't suppose you got a bathroom?"

He laughed. "Bathroom? What the hell's a bathroom?"

"Yeah, well, be right back. Don't go away."

He sat on the mattress, unlaced his boots, shook them off his feet, then jumped when he heard them clatter on the metal floor. "Shit." He straightened the sleeping bag, started to unbutton his shirt, but decided against it. Some women like to do that themselves, start at the top with the buttons and work their way down to —. He laughed. He felt good. It was good not to be alone at night. Maybe he could sleep, safe for one more—. But he wasn't safe. He was in Reynosa, Mexico, fifty miles from Brownsville, Texas and there were federales in town and it wasn't Elaine they were looking for it was him; it was Schoner. What had he done? He couldn't remember, couldn't remember, couldn't remember—stop it! Not tonight. Elaine will be back and Elaine was beautiful and she'd help him sleep, she'd hold him when the light went out. Better, that's better.

She was taking a long time. He sat up and reached for the tin can. The worms were gone—the chameleons had been hungry. He grabbed one of them, the male with the bright red throat, and let it dangle by the tail between his forefinger and thumb. It slowly turned from side to side, rolled its eyes upward to look at Schoner. And that was when he saw it. The meal worm. The one he hadn't killed. The male had swallowed it whole, and it didn't die, and it had bored through the chameleon's stomach and partially through his left side, its jellied, white head protruding through the lizard's beaded skin. Sick, sick, he felt so sick; and the thing to do was to help it. So he dropped it to the floor and he stomped on it quick, quick before it leaped away; and he wasn't wearing his boots—he forgot he wasn't wearing his boots, and the lizard and the worm, brown and white and red slime, stuck to the bottom of his foot and he couldn't kick it off and he couldn't touch it and so he scraped his foot on the metal floor and it came off; but he cut his foot, and then someone came in the door—

"Hey, you know, you might've saved my skin tonight. I was thinking maybe I shouldn't charge you for—Schoner?" He blew out the light. "What are you up to, Man? I can't see a damn thing. How're we supposed to—." But there was light, he knew there was, light from his eyes, his red eyes. She walked toward it. "Where are you, Schoner?"

"Here." He stepped toward her. He was big, so big. He reached over her shoulders and unzipped her white dress, pushed it off her arms, cupped his hands, his huge hands, around her breasts.

"Man," she sighed, "you had me going for a minute there."

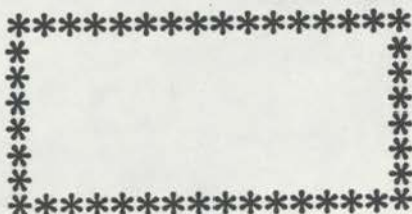
He slid one hand up to her chin and tilted it back gently. His wife had such beautiful blue eyes. He kissed them, slid his hand to her throat. His head throbbed; but he began to kiss her, from the base of her ear down, down to the cleft between her breasts. "You've always been beautiful. And perfect, so perfect." He slid his hand on the silk around to

her hips. He tapped his forefinger lightly on her throat. "But you know, I just couldn't make you happy. No matter what I did." He looked into her eyes, her blue eyes. "Why do you suppose that was, Frannie? Can you tell me why?" He covered her mouth with his hand. "Shhh. I know. You were never happy. Never, never, never. And you wouldn't leave me alone, would you? No." He slid his hand from her hip to the back of her head. Her skin was warm, white, creamy white and soft; and beneath the skin, the ivory bone just a little harder. "You just can't leave me alone, can you?" He leaned closer, whispered in her ear. "You know, Babe, help, I think you need help. Here," he said, stretching his hand around her throat, increasing the pressure of his fingertips slightly, lovingly, "let me."

—Mary McDaniel

Effortless

(The World's First Wordless Poem)



("Effortless" was written out of that creative state of mind that draws an absolute blank. There are no misused words, no hidden meanings, and no tricky metaphors here. This is a poem that brings across a completely different mood for every reader. And the reader is free here to create anything from a pile of Yak excretion to a turquoise armadillo eating strawberry licorice outside a White Castle in East Hartford, Connecticut. This poem is definitely free verse although all three stanzas have the same number of lines. This is "Free Form" poetry...why I knew a guy who read Effortless for six months one night. Is it poetry?? Does it work?? Do poems essentially need words to bring across the vivid imagery?? Who cares. Look for Effortless-Part II at newstands sometime next year...)

—Kevin Stott

Where the Waves Sound and the Sun Sets

Sand,
Doghair
And strawberry stains.
These physical remnants of a vacation
on the lake in Michigan
will be overwhelmed and captured
by a deluge of soapsuds
in my mother's new Sears Kenmore,

abandoning only cleaned clothes
and an inextinguishable yearning in my heart
to be back on the beach
watching
the waves
and the sunset
with my best friend.

—Theresa Whiteside



—Irene Brown

'45

Chariot rests.
Five sullen victors
sit stagnant,
Spectators scream with joy.
Five heroes return.
Congratulations.
Wife's kisses.
Children's hugs.
Handshakes.
Advertisements.
Promotions.
Interviews.
Cheers.
Medals.
The poisoned mushroom still flowers
all those miles away.

—Ray Wallace

Epigram #1

Discontent, when did it begin?
I looked at her with mannered intent.
Her eyes annulled, as smooth as a scythe.

—P. James Krueger

Untitled

Red, woolly knee socks
creep down
with each hurried step
as Michelle and I skip down Dwyer,
past the tan brick church
and its huge side lot
covered with hundreds of sunny dandelions.
We put down spelling books
and Disneyworld lunchboxes
to swing
on weeping willow branches
barely strong enough.

On the shady corner at Sigwalt,
we try to fit our brown-leathered feet
into other people's cement prints
before trudging down the last long block,
gaping
at Mrs. Taylor's perfectly manicured evergreens
and avoiding
cracks in the sidewalk.

Finally outside the red bricks,
we wait,
kicking chips
of playground bark
till the bell draws us inside
to red and white reading workbooks
and monogrammed purple pencils.

—Susan Mehl

Reruns

When I was ten, my brother Mark was nine and caught an incurable disease one afternoon during a rerun of *Marcus Welby*.

It was one of those hot summer afternoons that seem to last forever, and it's too hot to go outside and play, and all there is to do is sit around and wish there was something to do. I was sitting crosslegged on the floor of the T.V. room with my dolls. I had just forced Ken to ask Barbie out on a date for the third time this week. Mark was lying on the couch eating peanuts-in-the-shell and making a tremendous mess while watching Dr. Welby diagnose.

I went into the kitchen to get a drink of water "for the last time I can't see why you kids need a drink every thirty seconds when I'm trying to clean!" I aborted my thoughts of attempting to steal another cookie from the jar, which was all the way in the corner by the stove (and would put me in the path of my mother.)

When I came back Mark was lying on the floor with his eyes rolled upwards and his tongue sticking out. I just ignored him. I knew he was trying to use these tactics to bum a drink of water so he wouldn't have to risk getting into trouble by getting his own.

"Jan," he said. His best little pitiful voice always made Aunt Joyce feel sorry for him when she babysat us. "I've got to tell you something."

"So tell me," I said. I was not in the mood for long drawn-out type conversations. I was irritated that my best friend across the street had not come over to get me to go swimming in her pool. She's got this humongous built-in pool with a diving board and slide and everything. Even though I had put on my suit and walked out in the front yard three times, she had never invited me over. Sometimes she liked to flaunt what she had and not invite me over just so she'd feel important.

"I think you'd better sit down," he said, straining his voice to talk. He sniffed a couple of times like he was going to cry, then bit his lip. Now I knew something was going on. He was going a little bit too far just for a drink of water when he knew there was grape koolaid in the fridge.

"What's wrong, Mark?" I said. I noticed he was holding his left side with his right hand. His left hand was around his neck while he slightly twisted it back and forth all at the same time. This kid was really talented.

He sat up, with much apparent difficulty, and looked at me for a few prolonged seconds with those big brown eyes that looked like our dog's. "Can I talk to you alone?" he said.

I looked around. Except for Barbie and Ken, who were lying upside

down on the carpet without much apparent interest in the conversation, we seemed pretty much alone to me already.

"Help me up. We'd better go outside," he said. By now the mystery of all these actions was beginning to make me curious. I followed him as he limped out the front door. We stopped on the porch steps. My ex-best friend was still splashing around in her stupid pool.

"I just want you to know what a wonderful and dear sister you've been," he began. "I would also like to ask you for a favor."

I knew enough from the past that something was going to happen that I would end up getting the bad end of, like the time I did his chore of emptying the trash for a week so he wouldn't tell the whole school about the things I wrote in my diary. I wasn't about to be taken this time. I wondered where my diary was at that moment.

"Forget it, Mark! I'm not going to do whatever it is. You pulled me clear out here in all this heat to ask me something stupid and I'm not going to--"

"Even if I'm gonna die??" he said.

He totally threw me off guard. I stared at him. He looked down at the ground, then up at me again. "Die?" I repeated.

He nodded.

"What are you talking about?" I said.

"Jan, I was just listening to the Marcus Welby show. There was this kid who played shortstop for his neighborhood team, you know-like I do for the Mean Machines. He came home from practice one day and started feeling really funny, like I did a couple of days ago, remember?"

I thought back to a couple of days before. Mark HAD been feeling kind of sick, but I thought that was from the eight and a half cupcakes he ate at Mary Sue's birthday party.

"And?" I said. I needed further evidence than that to justify his pulling me out here on the porch where my ex-best friend could show off more in front of me.

"His left side started all throbbing and his throat hurt like heck—all scratchy and itchy. Then, in a couple of days he started hallucinatin' and—Dr. Welby said he's going to die. I got those same symptoms, Jan. I think I'm going to die, too. He even had some red bumps like this." He pulled up his jeans' leg to reveal three red bumps. I would have formerly thought they were mosquito bites, but with all these other symptoms Dr. Welby's patient had, too, well. . .

We decided not to mention anything to our mother. She'd been having quite a time of it lately anyway, because she'd found three grey hairs on her head when she was looking in the mirror that morning. Then the electric can opener broke, and the next door neighbor lady that she could not stand was coming over to chat that evening. The fact that her only son was going to die in a short while might be too much. No, we'd just have to handle this crisis alone. I told Mark we must be brave, and we went upstairs to wrap up his bumps, lest they be seen accidentally by some medical person and the truth be let out. While we were in my room, we decided we'd better write Mark's will and get it over with. I got out a pen and the tablet I got for school that mom told

me "not to touch until school starts or I'll make you buy another one with your allowance, young lady!" I thought Mark's death was a good enough excuse to use it. We went into Mark's room and proceeded to list his valuables.

"It's sure hard to decide who I should give things away to," he said. "I guess I'll leave my life savings to you." Eighty-nine cents to Janet Jamison, I wrote. The baseball he gave to his best friend, and his new shorts for school he left to Mom, so she could take them back and get a refund.

"It sure will be hard to leave this old place," he sighed. We sure have had some good times here." He was wandering around the room, touching his baseball, picking up his skates, looking at his poster of Farrah Fawcett. The sentimentalism was getting to be too much for me.

I thought about my mother, downstairs in the kitchen, unaware of the great tregedy taking place upstairs in her son's room. I wondered how she was going to take it. I wondered if she'd be mad when Mark died on the floor and smelled up the carpet. I wished I could spare her some pain.

"Maybe we should leave and go somewhere else for you to pass away, Mark," I said, "you know. . .like they do in the movies?"

Mark hadn't seen enough movies.

"To spare his family from the pain of watching him die, he takes off and disappears gracefully somewhere where his is unknown," I explained.

He was starting to get into the idea. "Yeah!" he said. "We could take a pillow and blanket, food, and a rope. . ."

All I wanted to take was my swimsuit. I thought I'd lie out in the sun while I waited for him to die. I had never seen anybody die before, though. I was hoping I wouldn't get too freaked out or anything.

Mark said he was feeling kind of weak already, so I should go ahead and steal the goods from the kitchen without him. I sneaked down the stairs, quiet as a mouse, until I tripped over the Hot Wheels Mark left in the staircase. I fell into the door. Mom opened it. "What are you doing, why can't you kids keep from making such a racket, how did you fall anyway?" Mom always talked in multiple sentences. I think it did for her what the swimming pool did for my ex-b.f. Made her feel important or something. I gave up the idea of trying to get any trip supplies from the kitchen. Mom had already started cooking, so she was in the kitchen anyway.

I went back upstairs. Mark was resting peacefully on his bed. He looked up at me, his voice cracking, tears in his eyes. "Is that you, Jan?" he said.

I felt sorry for him. I knew how much he was looking forward to Johnny Gibson's birthday party the next Saturday. I decided not to mention it. I didn't want to get him too upset. I wondered if I'd get to use his record player after he died.

"You know," he said, "it sure has been great having you for a sister." He looked at me with dog's eyes again. I thought of supper the night before, when he dumped brussel sprouts in the centerpiece while Mom

and Dad weren't looking and blamed it on me. I thought of his listening in on Sue's and my secret club rituals and telling all his friends, and of not being able to go to the carnival with Ann unless Mark went with us.

"Yeah," I said. Suddenly I didn't care about those times anymore. I even felt sorry for him. I wanted to do something to make him better, especially now that he couldn't go off and die somewhere as in the movies. I went to my room and got out the \$1.20 I'd been saving for the diamond earrings I wanted to buy.

Mark was really pleased when I told him I'd treat him to a Dairy Queen. Mom really must not have heard what we said when we asked if we could go, because she didn't even warn us about not spoiling our suppers. We rode our bikes there. I was hoping Mark wouldn't die on the way there because I knew it would be hard for me to steer both of our bikes with his dead body all at the same time. Mark assured me that it had taken the boy on T.V. an entire episode to die, so he had a while yet.

He ordered a Peanut Buster Parfait, which costs a \$1, and he graciously offered to pay the tax. That left me with enough money to get a small cone. I was pretty mad inside and I was just dying (excuse the expression) to get a butterscotch sundae. Then I remembered why we were there and what a good sister I was and how glad I'd be that I had done this last special thing when Mark was gone. I smiled as I ate my cone and watched Mark dig into his parfait and get chocolate all over his mouth and his shirt. The peanuts looked really good. As we sat there eating I said, "You know what, Mark? Maybe there's a cure for this disease you've got."

"Nope. No cure. Ya just get it and bingo! that's it." For someone who was going to die really soon, he sure was getting a lot out of eating that parfait. If he weren't so sick, I'd be really mad, even madder than the time he loosened my skates and I almost killed myself on the sidewalk in front of that cute Eric Walker's house.

We rode home again, and he didn't die, so I didn't have to walk his bike. We went back into the house. I plopped down on the couch next to Mom, who was watching Burt Reynolds on the Mike Douglas show. Mark disappeared upstairs,

I could take it no longer. It wasn't right of me to just sit idly by and let my own brother die before my parents' eyes. "Mom?" I said. She didn't even hear me. Mom really got into watching Burt Reynolds. "Mom I don't know how to tell you this but your only son Mark is going to die of basearobotosis and there is no cure," I blurted out. I think multiple sentences are hereditary.

She looked at me, irritated. She told me she thought I should find something better to do with my time than involve Mark in a game of make-believe that would put stories in his head. I looked at her coolly. She was just going through a stage of denial, as Welby says. In a minute it would sink in. I decided to wait.

She kept watching the Mike Douglas show. I heard the back screen door slam and I knew Dad was home. "Dad," I greeted him, "You've got

to do something. Mark has an incurable disease and Mom refuses to accept it!"

Dad just looked at me and laughed. "I bet you feel sorry for him, too, don't you Jan?"

Mom looked up from the T.V. "Dan, you haven't been telling that boy stories again, have you?"

He laughed again. "When I was his age, I told MY sister I had a chronic poliotoxic pneumonia," he said, "and she bought ME a baseball glove."

—Angie Patrick

Sunset

Rainbow-hued ribbons
stripe the delphinium
bolt dotted with lace.

—Gloria Rhoads

Return of the Native

The nocturnal lady stands on fourth street,
Alone and wet.
No one has the time,
the inclination,
or even the energy,
to give her what she wants.
It's been like this for days.
Like a bad magician—no tricks.
She decides to go home.
Bruce, her business associate,
will be angry—that's a nice word for violent.
She moves on.
It's a long way home.

—Ray Wallace

The Guitar

It screams and screeches
as my hands strangle its
slender neck.

I palpate its exposed veins.
Its painful cries
Only seem to encourage
My continued abuse.

—Joanne Dunne

In Grandmother's Bedroom

A porcelain hand
Wears her ring
When she sleeps, white
Fingers reaching
From the bureau,
A ballerina.

When Grandmother forgets
The hand gropes
In the dark, tapping
The glass top,
Slips the ring
From her sleeping hand.

—Elise Hempel

Cindy Poem No. 3

Rain ricochets off the hood,
lightning cracks the dark.
Cars trail red
like wounded animals.

I feel her nails,
her teeth; hearing,
far off, the wipers
beating — beating.

—John Stockman

Dust in the Dark

The beam of light spilling on the tile floor near the slightly opened door suddenly vanished. The door swung out slowly, and a large cloth trash cart rolled into the hallway. Two scuffed shoes appeared near the cart's wheels. An old hand gave the cart a shove; and it rolled down the hall, followed slowly but closely by the work-worn shoes.

The corridors near the weight rooms were dark and silent, as were those leading to the pool and the field house. Still the cart rolled on, with the shoes close behind. The reddish glow of the exit lights cast rosy highlights on the trophies in their cases, and moonlight shone through the windows in the main entrance. All was still—all but the whirring of the cart wheels, the shuffle of the work shoes, and the faint sound of a ball bouncing on a hardwood floor.

Two gray eyes stared ahead through the dark hallway. The only light now came from the open doors to the gymnasium. The twang of a bouncing ball grew louder as cart, shoes, and eyes approached the light. The hand loosened its grip on the trashcart, and the shoes left the cart behind as they moved toward the lighted doorway.

Reaching the doorway, the shoes stopped. A white-haired figure in worn gray work clothes stood in the scuffed shoes. His figure was highlighted by the fluorescent glare of the gym lights. The man stood and looked into the gym, shielding his eyes from the contrast in light. He could plainly hear the bouncing of the ball now. The puzzlement in the gray eyes disappeared, and the thin lips quivered into a slow smile.

"Mark, is that you?"

The twang of the ball stopped and he heard the basketball rebound off the backboard. Two more twangs, and then there was only the sound of sneakered feet on the wood.

"Oh, hi, Mr. Hennessy," a sweaty face grinned at the custodian. The boy cradled the ball under his arm and jogged over closer to him. "How are you tonight?"

"Oh, same as usual. You know me at my age—the same old aches and pains."

Mark laughed. Beads of sweat dripped from his tousled blond hair, and his blue eyes twinkled back at the old man from his tanned face.

The custodian looked the youth up and down, from his cut-off t-shirt and gym shorts to his sweat socks and high-top tennis shoes.

"Where did you go for spring break?"

"Florida."

"I figured that. You've got a nice tan there, kid."

Mark laughed again. "You should've seen it last week...no tan, all burn. I looked like a lobster, and I couldn't do anything."

"I wondered why you hadn't been here for a while. Guess I thought you'd given up the basketball or something."

"Nope—just had to let the burn and pain fade away. You know me, Mr. Hennessy—I won't give up basketball for anything."

The old man smiled. Mark was right—he should've known better. "Mark, I hate to say it, but..."

"It's okay, Mr. Hennessy—I know it's time to close up. I haven't been away that long. Just a couple more shots, and I'll go."

"Okay, Mark. Be back tomorrow night?"

"Sure will. Take it easy, Mr. Hennessy."

"Good night, Mark."

The custodian shuffled back down the hallway with his trash cart. He reached the broom closet and went inside. The light bulb dangling from the ceiling shone down on the white hair and hunched shoulders as he bent over the few dust pans he had yet to clean out. He wiped the metal free of the day's dirt and then moved to the floor brooms. He shook the remaining dust from the frayed broom edges into the trash cart.

Replacing the floor brooms, the custodian eyed the storeroom carefully, running through a checklist in his mind. Then he reached for his dark gray jacket and cap and took the keys from his pocket. He pulled the chain to the light bulb and locked the door. Turning down the hallway, he pocketed the keys and shuffled to the gym. The lights were still on, but the gym was silent. Reaching the doorway he peered in. Mark was gone, but a basketball lay on the floor. Mark must've left it, he thought. He bent over to pick up the ball. He bounced it a few times and stood at the free throw stripe. Eyeing the hoop carefully, he tossed the basketball into the air. It swished through the net and bounced on the floor. He smiled to himself, then shuffled to the light switches. As the gym darkened, he wondered what his supervisor would say if he saw him shooting baskets. The thought made him chuckle, and he closed the doors to the gym behind him. A trace of the smile was still on his lips as the scuffed shoes walked down the hall and the hands locked the door to the building.

—Laura Mueller

Suspension Bridge

Over the slow river
spans a sunblock for fishermen.

Rough cut planks, wide,
but to walk on,
not to be carried
like a hundred years ago
by horses, sweaty in sunlight.

Looking down, seeing
fish poke slender noses
through the coffee with cream water.

—Laura Henry

Waves

By the raging ocean
I stare at the crests
Crashing into the rocks,
The roar like the chant
Of an angry crowd.

I am a wave
Lost in the rush
Of the current,
Caught in the
Eternal tide
Flowing onto the sand.

—Leslie Garner

Oyama: A Setting and a Girl

Oyama is still a small town as far as population goes, but it is spread out through the mountains which surround the lakes below, forming a basin, a tight little world hidden away on its own. From an airplane, the clearings amidst the evergreens appear patched with the quiltwork pattern of the orchards where most of the people make their living. One can see the meticulously even rows forming their squares on the hillside,—each box of land with a tiny house clinging to its edge. There are several peninsulas jutting out from the base of the mountains, but their beaches are empty in the spring when the blossoms appear on the apple trees, filling the air with a sweet perfume. The tourists won't arrive until summer. They will miss this time of the year when the land strains as a woman in childbirth, pushing forth its life in splendor from the frozen womb of winter.

The valley rings with the sounds of its children. Swallows chirp shrilly and flutter their wings with a whirr, flitting nimbly through the air with twigs dangling from their beaks. The bees bob in the blossoms among the velvet folds of the petals, strange little bells that buzz when a furry invader sticks inside. Fish leap from the water, flipping for flies, falling in lazy arcs to splat upon the surface; echoes linger over the lake with the ripples.

Green grows everywhere, the leaves on the trees, the grass in the fields, each young shoot sprouting through to find the sun. Something powerful happens in this season; the earth seems to shudder from its very core, exploding with the magnificence of life, then sighing into summer when it is done.

The day was especially quiet when Lina and I walked to the beach in late spring over three years ago. The lake was jaded glass, the clouds hung in the sky like stranded zeppelins, white and bursting full like cotton balls. A thin wisp of smoke rose straight up in a spiral across the water a mile away, etched against the mountains, frozen still as a painter's stroke. There wasn't a sound as we sank to the sand and sat, gazing through the yellowy whips of the weeping willow trees.

There is a point in every season when nature reaches its peak, a sojourn where the earth seems to stop, having touched upon the ultimate in its bounds. This was the peak of spring, a breathless, perfect hiatus, void of time. And as the earth balanced on this fulcrum, my mind swam in a rush of feeling before the moment shifted and the hand of time swung down like a pendulum.

Spring has a way of encouraging change in people, just as it changes

the face of the land. I felt a sudden freedom, and yet an apprehension, a trembling in my heart as I rose to leave with the girl at my side. Looking back I saw the water shiver in the breeze, the clouds were stretching out and tearing up, the wisp of smoke was fading away, the fire was dying.

—Jerry McAnulty

the middle of the night

the red neon readout
from the blackness in my room:
2:47

trying not to think
but
insomnia doesn't matter—
the crickets know that

serenity smothers suburbia
as I curl up next to the wall
blanketless,
and my humming fan
keeps me company

—Kevin Stott

Old State Road

It cuts through the country
scarred and bandaged over again
by tar, a black gauze
coating and creating waves
for bicycles to ride.

Grassy troughs along its side,
clouds of gnats stinging hot summer air
tickling tails of swatting cattle,
the residents of main street.

—Laura Henry

Dairy Queen

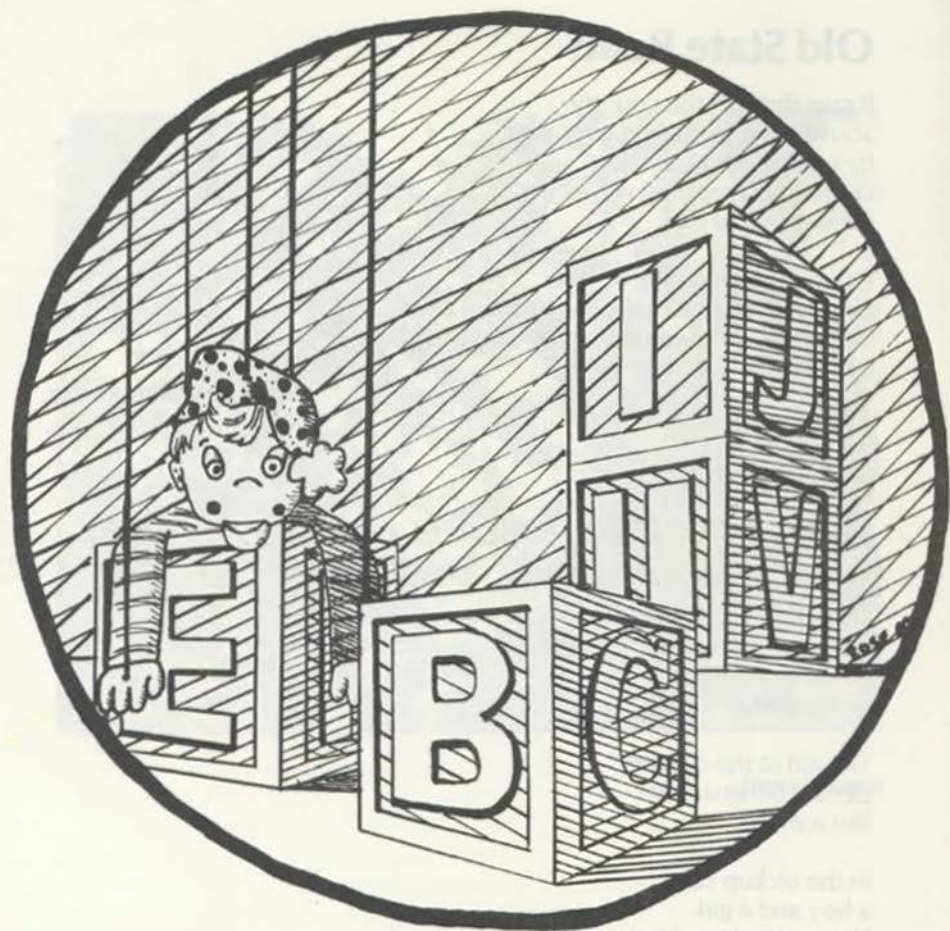
At the picnic table
an overalled farmer and his wife
finish spooning their sundaes.
She still gets in
on his side of the Chevy.

The girl at the counter
peels a banana, neat,
like a zipper.

In the pickup cab,
a boy and a girl.
He sips the last of her malted.

Beyond the lighted parking lot
crickets rub their legs.

—John Stockman



—Rose Huber