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The Vehicle, Spring 1975

Ted Baldwin

Stanley Guill

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Vehicle

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EASTERN ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY



Vehicle

--The Student Literary Magazine

Vol. 17 No. 1

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TO THE READER:

Share this magazine. Due to the dismal budget situation, there is only one VEHICLE for every four students.

As in any literary magazine, the judgments of the editors are subjective. We have attempted to present what we considered the best of the material submitted to us, not what we felt would be the most popular or accessible. We invite you to share our prejudices.

The second issue of VEHICLE will follow shortly.

Bill & Ray

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CURRENTS

Ted Baldwin

The waters fight each other on their way to the mill farther south of Snicarte slough. It's way up this time of the year, spring gushing out the guts of the farmland, carrying along the trash and debris left over from the last flood. Across the water, on the south bank, are the spoiling bodies of a pack of wild boars caught in the quickslime; soon the water is going to clean them away. Down the middle of the slough the snags play hide and seek with the waters and it's a good thing the traffic on it isn't heavy. Small boats handle fast water bad enough without hitting damn logs.

Every year the banks fill out and leave the people out in the rain and the mud. Every year the people move in and out with the flood, like a hopscotch...bibles, babies, brothers, bumsandbooze, waters waver with the ooze and on and on. And now every year the waters will be higher, the fault of the new dams they're building. Assorted ministers help out on the weekdays, going by what Pa told me. Some people stay in the church waiting for things to dry out. Others hole up with relatives like us. Ma's brother, Uncle Harry, is one that lived on the rivers and sloughs for a long time, and every time it looked like the water was coming he'd show up with a pan of cleaned sucker fish, just in time for whatever mealtime it was. We didn't mind his visits but he always thought he was imposing, or acted like it. Ma never much cared. She used to tell him to "just go on" and "one more never hurt the table anyway."

I spend most of my free time walking the ridge that separates the slough trees from the woods part of McNatt's back lot. He lives mostly by himself in a rundown farmhouse and couldn't care

less who runs on his land as long as they don't tease his dogs or kick up his weedy garden. That's the hard part seeing as how the weeds from the pastures faded into the back yards and those weeds went into the garden until not even the old man himself knew where the good parts were. Walking through there at night is hard because there are many holes he dug for some reason or another. The joke was that he was digging back to Ireland for potatoes.

The ridge is ideal for a lookout over the slough as the trees allow just enough cover to see but not be seen. Pa's place runs down along the dirt road that ends at the ridge, but it's out of sight from the ridge and that makes it a perfect place for smoking or watching the bank lines or evading one of those arresting officers from the new T.V.A. Sort of a private place for doing what you want. Running the ridge sets you apart from what's bothering you. Like I said it's somewhere to be without others. Rabbitt Flats. Not a good name for a ridge, but we named it that because there was another place by that name, so most people never know which one we mean, which is what we wanted.

Nights I spend out there alone remind me of the behinders and flat toppers and the vampires we used to be scared to death of when Uncle Harry went fishing with us. Sitting out in the boat and only a coal oil lamp to fend off the bugs and great bullfrogs lurking in the depths of old Snicarte, it gets very easy to think everything talked about is true. Old boats feel different than fresh wood ones and oars move with their own personality. Sometimes they just forget where you're going and the hull drifts over and back with the currents in a hypnotizing way. Thoughts run loose then and it's nice to wonder how it all began or if God really knows everything you do or even what it would be like to be able to make the slough run backwards. One after another the clouds gather in the narrow channel above the slough where the trees cannot cover. Stars that were out are hidden slowly and the moonlight coming over the ridge trees dies away. The water does its work at night, acting real calm with only a small gurgle against the drifting side of the boat while mists rise up in a low fog in gentle currents with the water flow. The fish stop biting and the nibbles trail off too until there is no connection between the slender line and the bottom of the slough. Tension gets pretty high

in that type of silence and chill little breezes bring the dew settling in on the cane poles and paper sacks holding old bread for sucker bait. I get all yawny then and try holding out until the fish begin biting again, but for some reason or another I never manage to last and I fall asleep. Pa always warns me about staying late on the water and Ma, worries all the time that I'm "gonna drown sure as tarnation". Funny thing about the whole business of fishing is that they don't seem to mind my going alone nearly as much as they do having company along. They must think we'd start cutting up or something, or get into trouble of some sort. For instance, every time that Uncle Harry goes with me we're sent off with smiles and lots of be carefuls, but they want us in early, and we never get any good talking done let alone losing the best time for fishing. They don't mind our trips as much when we take Rudy Miller or one of the Newmans in the boat, but when it's just us two I have to answer all sorts of questions about the night, and tell them little things like what we did and who else we met while we were out there. I can't see any reasons for the things they ask and it's always the same answers they get. Once though, Uncle Harry and I met someone by accident near our old ruined dock. It's not too often we meet someone near our dock because it's set way down the bank from the other docks and homes. What was even stranger about this guy was that he knew Uncle Harry very well, at least well enough to call him by first name by sight. He didn't say much to Uncle Harry and left soon but I saw it was bothering him so when he asked me not to say a word about it I couldn't find a reason to tell and kept quiet. It never hurts none.

This afternoon I got out of school early, while our teacher went to a meeting in Paducha. He liked me and said if I did as well the next year and as good when I finished high school in Tazwell I could probably go on to school. Even though I liked him a lot I was glad to see him go so I could get out and onto the ridge. Rains bringing in the new flood were finally over, and we could go outside without getting wet for the first time in a week. Down by the old abandoned village of Bath I found a few dried tobacco leaves in a shed used to dry them the year before. I had a small stash of them put back just for emergencies like today so I was happy to get some more to put up. Pa always said if he caught me smoking he'd whale the tar out of me but he did catch me once

and nothing happened. He just frowned, said he was looking for someone and I'd better make sure the thing was out when I left the barn cause he didn't want no kid of his burning the place down. He'd just as soon let the hobos catch it on fire. Anyway, I got up the Flats in no time at all and laid back in a cool and moist clump of grass, taking slow, cool puffs on a special corn cob pipe I made just around Christmastime for the spring. I had set out some banklines for the spawning catfish as soon as I could, and thoughts about how I was going to surprise Ma with the fresh bullheads for supper. The afternoon sun caught my back so I settled down to smoking and daydreaming. Next thing I felt was a dead twig falling on my neck when I realized that it was dark out and all the plans I'd dreamt of were shot. The winds had changed around to the south and the warmth of the afternoon sun failed in the dark after twilight. I had forgotten the sweater I usually wore for the ridge chills.

I got together the stuff I had taken to the ridge for the day and removed the lines from the shore. Most all of the stinkbait was gone and there was only two little flatheads that I threw back. Pa taught me never to waste life and to take the time to put the small ones back in the slough. Walking back down the ridge towards the house I noticed a funny glow in the clouds over the spot where I thought the barn should be, and the first thing I thought of was maybe the sunset was lingering in the highest clouds. As I walked through the trees I kept an eye on the sky and began to wonder why it didn't fade out and darken. Light at night that was as bright as that meant only one thing, and that was that something big was on fire, like our barn. Pa always told me that a fire meant we would be finished here and we would have to move out of the woods to one of the cities, most likely St. Louis. I broke into running, heading down the ridge as fast as I could, dodging trees and low branches and muskrat holes in the murky light. I had to cut around a short piece of land to cross over a new lake made by the high waters. I was moving pretty fast and almost fell into a clump of vines and limbs on the edge of the water and that scared me plenty because I knew about the snakes that lived in the brush piles. It was coming in fast, the water gurgling into dead stumps and hollows and covering the marks of McNatt's hand plow with its dark trashy crud. Big carp were moving in with the water,

splashing in panic when I splashed into their paths as I ran through the bottomlands. Something grabbed my ankle and I yelled as I fell face first into the slime, coming free of the stump root with only scrapes, and losing my pipe, the poles, and the few hooks I had. Grabbing what would float I hurried faster, scared of what I would find when I did clear the ridge.

Turning the corner up the muddy road to our place I saw the light again, and wondered why it had no red in it like fires we watched in town. Then I saw the beams that made up the light, like the lamps shining on cars that ran the hard roads. I couldn't figure out why there could be cars at our place because most people rode the electric that ran by only a few miles from the farm. To have that much light meant that there were five or six cars at least and maybe one of those new rescue lights the police bought. That worried me even more. My chest hurt bad from all that running and my foot ached where I tripped. I didn't even feel my stomach growling from lack of supper.

I ran in the porch door through the house, that way was faster than stumbling through the old boards and nails on each side of our house. The house lamps were lit and I went on back through the house, and I saw the familiar denim jacket that Ma had sewn up for Uncle Harry lying on the rug at the back of the room. That meant he was staying with us again while his place flooded. Entering the kitchen I saw Pa sitting at the table, his arms wrapped tightly around Ma, wiping away the tears that were flowing down her cheeks and holding off her sobs as best he could. Pa was just staring out the back window, Ma hanging on tighter and tighter and I saw a tear drop off Pa's cheek, too. I never saw that before. Pa never cried. Out the window was the barn and everything looked alright out there except for the lights. Then I looked at the supper table and saw it was set for four places and there were three plates half full and an empty one set for me. That didn't make sense because it was a good hour after supper and no one ever left food on their plates at our house, unless they were badly ill or something. Those tears running down Pa's face scared the hell right out of me. I figured probably what it was that something bad happened and that Uncle Harry was taking care of it while Pa took care of Ma, but they were both crying. I tried to see what it was they were looking at so hard out the kitchen window, but I

wasn't having any luck, and I couldn't ask because it might be from something I did or didn't do but there wasn't anything I ever did that was as serious as this seemed. That window was eerie because they just kept staring out it, and neither one of them acted like I was there, though they knew it. Just out the frame. White lacy curtains hanging over the dirty pane wasn't nothing to look at, streaked with grease stains on the inside and by rain and nosey birds on the outside. On through it was a clinger vine over one corner and the old barn filling the other side. The red paint on the barn was nearly gone and the dead gray of the wood was showing faint marks of a hex sign. That barn wasn't any different now, and I didn't really think they were looking at it.

I finally got up enough courage to ask what it was that was the matter, but Pa just said sit down and shush up. He never talked to me that way before. I felt so helpless that I wanted to cry and I had no way to know what was going on. I began to watch out the window too, expecting to see anything but no knowing what to look for. Slowly the headlights and a few people went by the window and I could just hear the voices a little and a few loud whistles which made my mom sort of bite her lip and bury her head in Pa's shoulder. The talk was real low but I heard some things like "fixed that one" and "her kid is just like him." Pa grimaced at that and began talking real low in a prayer. After the last of the headlights went by and there were no more people Pa got up and said "stay with your ma, boy." He took the wirecutters and a knife out of the junk drawer and went out the back door. When he went I asked Ma where Uncle Harry was and why all those people were out there, and why wasn't Dad out there with them. She looked at me and cried to God that I be able to understand, holding me real tight.

I couldn't take it any more. I ran out back, nearly falling over the posts and sliding in the muddy car path. At the barn I heard some muffled sobs and low talk in Pa's voice, a gentle easy talk with no harsh words. Down at the side of the barn lay one of the younger Newman brothers, the seventeen year old. Pa was bending over him and was trying to calm him down, covering him with the jacket he'd worn out there. The boy's leg was crooked in a funny way and Pa placed it back right. I could't figure if maybe he'd fallen or been hurt in some other way, but surely all those people

would have helped him in some way. Pa swore at me and said I should have stayed with my ma like he said, but now that I was there I'd have to help. As he held up the light I saw why he'd not wanted me there. Uncle Harry had been trussed up in baling wire real tight, and then hung from the loft pulley by a thin rope. He'd never had a chance.

A few days after that night, Pa came back from town in a new Chevrolet truck like we'd heard about once. He also had lots of money, more than I dreamed we'd ever have. He said he got it from what Uncle Harry left and from selling our farm, but the whole valley wasn't worth half the price of the truck alone. We moved a day or two later, taking only what we needed in the truck, taking along the Newman kid, leaving the solitudes of the Snicarte slough for good.

DANCE OF THE LOONS

Darlene Sourile

It comes in fours,
Veiled in the softness of a cat's tail
beckoning,
for the dance of lifted arms and downcast
eyes entwined around a lover's core.

From slice to shadowy disc that
burns with intensity
the wick of desire and sets
your matchstick hips afire
to my grey ashen orbs.
That stare.

NE PSALMS PAS

Darlene Sourile

i see

You dropped a handful of white, disembodied dreams
dripping along in the blanket hues of blue.
all hail the Tool....

my oven insides are overheated!
no green stream can stay cool enough

Baby

Your manila sun bakes me done

maybe

it will heat the aching yeast
right out of my breast yes

my bread would rise so high
a buttercrust must floating light in the sky
but You punch me down, why
do You need to save Your space face?

i thought the plan was for dough to be bread
You lousy Baker
turn off the tease heat
while i crawl inside my dead-baked head
and ferment.

eulogy to a rose

Darlene Sourile

Swaying, petals part as secret doors
For yellow rays....
Dancing, the lyre is life in a
Ballroom for bees.

Stung swiftly by the tainted touch,
Rose severed in her bed.
The pernicious scalpel gleams in the sun
And drips cellulose.

The faded rose worships warm sun in her days;
Vainly brown-stained and perfumeless she is
Paralyzed in her vase.

Like cats in mythical cradles
They have sniffed her weary,
Pressing their curious prints upon
Her scarlet.

Fear spins a web over her portals.
The opaque rose ebbs
In her porcelain prison.

A RAT IN THE TABLA

Stanley Guill

Thad rested his chin on the cool gray iron of his grade school fire escape; he felt the need to change himself or become his alterego, or maybe change his alterego. Exactly what his alterego was, or means, is not important, but it usually took the form of some vehicle.

Thad sat calmly at the top of the stairs so he wouldn't churn the grapes inside his stomach. In order for the grapes to stay unchurned he was pleading with his corn flakes to be subtle and serene. They would not; they were trying to displace Thad's center of gravity and in turn, make him topple down the fire escape. When he finally threatened to vomit them up, the corn flakes settled down like a hen on her eggs.

He stood and grabbed the spade that was beside him. He had something to bury. It wasn't anything as exciting as his wife's corpse. His dog was named Alphonze; it had been a gray mutt that caused a female friend of Thad's to fuck up her bike. Thad gave it instant forgiveness and first aid. Apparently Alphonze never learned to stay out of the way of moving vehicles; yesterday the governor's car had hit him. The car was slightly damaged because of Alphonze's size, which was large.

Thad's spade broke the soil by the swing sets as he looked at Alphonze's mangled body. Thad growled at him as if he would respond, but Alphonze lay still only collecting flies. Thad recalled how virile he felt when he would take Alphonze for a walk, like the one they were on yesterday. He had felt castrated when the governor skidded into his dog. The governor was heavily apologetic, after all, if the news leaked out that he hit dogs, he might lose votes.

Thad whistled a dirge as he dragged his dog's body to its grave. He nudged it into the hole and covered it with all too little soil. He would probably be dug up, but otherwise he was safe. Thad jumped onto the mound a few times to pack the dirt. His boots, brown, blackened by the dirt, walked away.

The shovel became a prop for Thad's dance homeward. He was scooping and swinging it in time with the song he was whistling, which had the same melody as the dirge. He charged an old man with his spade positioned as a lance. The old man didn't respond. Thad danced again as he approached the elderly man.

When Thad returned home, Lucille was sitting on his front porch with one buttock making contact with the top step as one shoulder leaned against a pillar. Thad belched and smiled. She stood and mumbled something. They embraced and Thad belched again. His grapes were starting to bother him. The corn flakes were already partially digested. Lucille asked him where Alphonze was. Thad explained.

They entered his house and sat down on the sofa. Thad wished he had Chippendale furniture or anything with more style than his present modern bullshit. The spade fell down on the front porch; the wind picked up. She tried to nestle with Thad but he couldn't do it. He was repulsed by the way her shag was looking particularly layered and hacked at. He broke into chuckles. Lucille asked him if he was not depressed by the death of his dog.

Thad didn't have any obligations this day. He left the couch and put some avant garde on the stereo. He did some dancing to the parts with definite rhythm. The trouble with avant garde music is that sometimes Thad found it hard to dance to. At an exhilarating part of his dance, he accidentally kicked over the garbage. This made him aware of Lucille again. "Lucille, do you have to work today?", he asked. She nodded and lit a cigarette. What a response.

Thad walked into the kitchen and copped an apple from the refrigerator. While he was walking back to the main room he decided he'd better sit next to Lucille, because if he couldn't feel her proximity he would get violent. She was an artist and found Thad a great inspiration. He was a failure and found her somewhat a bore. They sat on the couch and ate the apple together,, the silence unbroken except by the boisterous churches. Thad picked

up a dictionary from the coffee table and looked up the word flatulent. The governor said it the day before and Thad was curious about its meaning. He stroked his blonde flat top and manipulated his lips while he read the definition. She squeezed his ribs which caused a succession of wrestling and laughing. He ended up twisting her arm, she asked him to stop because the arm was essential to her work.

"What are you working on now?", he asked, to make conversation.

"A surrealistic oil painting. You saw the sketches when you were over the other day."

"The one with the gulls?"

"Yea, you inspired it," she responded.

He then remembered the dream he had had about the gulls. They were dinner guests at the state capitol building. He was the cook who had to cook herring for them, or the governor would cook him. The only place he could obtain herring was by crawling down a well and catching them with his bare hands. He was successful, and he no sooner got out of the well than the dinner guests soared away and waved bye-bye with the tips of their wings. Lucille was the sort of person who would use this dream of Thad's as material for a future work of art, so he didn't mention it.

She was wondering why Thad seemed so distant. She asked him why, but he didn't respond. She decided to clean his front window for him. He was thrilled. He dashed to the kitchen for the ammonia cleaner, a rag, and another apple. Thad wasn't a denture wearer, therefore he had no problem with apples. Lucille kept her mind in a water glass at the side of her desk at night or whenever Thad saw her. He tripped on the rug during his return with the goodies.

She started with the inside of the window and Thad went outside and watched her boobs as he ate the apple. They were unconfined by anything resembling a brassiere. He almost forgave her hair for the way her boobs looked under the black sweater. She was leaving streaks in the window and occasionally there would be a film of moisture from her breath. He looked out in the yard and thought he saw a van with "Brain Tumor" written on the side; however, it was only "Brian Tubben" who was a local

vacuum sweeper pusher. Thad cleaned his teeth of the apple bits that caused him discomfort. Lucille walked onto the porch with the cleaner and the rag. She sprayed the cleaner on the window and started streaking. Thad regarded her ass. She noticed it through the reflection.

She walked over behind him and said, "I'm going to look at yours now."

He thought that it couldn't be very intriguing or anything but he allowed her to stare at it while he cleaned the window. The ammonia made him ill.

She said she had to be going or she would be late. He thought: God help her if she was. He watched her leave and then he watched the grass die. The neighbor came out on his front porch and inhaled deeply as he picked up his paper. It's a good thing to do, but to Thad it was symbolic of something he didn't like.

Thad walked into his house and tried to become his alterego. This was necessary because he couldn't do art and be the person he was at the same time. What he did do was to concentrate deeply on his painting and forget about Lucille and the neighbor and the governor. After a few minutes of concentration he thought himself a school bus that had wicked horns and was sleeping on its side under a billboard. A policeman gave him a ticket, but he tore it up with his windshield wipers. Being a school bus, he was above the law.

Finally the windshield broke, so he went to his basement and set up his easel. His present work was a portrait of Cortez. Cortez had fascinated Thad as a very young boy. Thad had been a chunky little boy with super-crooked teeth and shoulder length hair. One day he had sneaked away to the barber shop and begged the barber for a free haircut. The barber said he wouldn't cut little girls' hair, so Thad unrobed himself to prove his sex. Cortez was depicted as Thad on a horse. It was a romantic picture and Thad glowed with pride as he rode his horse around. The horse looked remarkably like Alphonze. Thad had to leave his painting for a second and pace, he threw some punches at the furnace.

A rat appeared in a remote corner of the basement and crawled inside of Thad's tabla. Rats didn't usually mean much to Thad but his one seemed to have potential. He went over to the tabla but the rat heard him coming and completely eluded him. Thad

looked under the table with the plants and in the ironing basket. He sat still waiting for the rat. The little fellow was making noise on the other side of the room. Thad went to see, but tripped half the way over. A gloom caught up with him this time, and when he finally did see the rat, it was looking at itself in the mirror and nodding its head. Thad looked in the mirror and saw a rat's head instead of his own. This made him hungry so he ran upstairs to make himself some chicken soup. He was successful and while he was eating, Gert entered. She was a major influence on Thad. Gert mostly influenced Thad by what she said. This was a more dynamic influence than Thad had on Lucille. Thad once set fire to a collection of paintings because Gert wasn't impressed.

He asked her for her opinion of his Cortez. She told him he was locked in his own realm, and she couldn't see any hope for his escape.

He finished his soup and began screaming at Gert. He told her that she would end up with Alphonze if she didn't shut up.

Gert didn't know about Alphonze and she begged Thad to take her to his grave. Thad was very reluctant and failed to see the point. The next thing they argued about was if they were going to take Gert's car to the grave or walk. Gert had an old round-styled white car that reminded many people of a refrigerator. Gert kept her mind in a refrigerator as Lucille kept hers in a water glass by her bed. Sometimes Thad thought that his mind was in a paint brush, but that was a mistake. His mind was always in the right place.

They decided to walk. The midday sun shone off of Gert's red hair. The red reminded him of the school building, making the anticipation more intense. They stepped over a smashed pumpkin on the way. When they arrived at the school some other dogs were sniffing around Alphonze's grave. Thad went back to the fire escape; on the way there he picked up a dead chicken. He climbed the stairs slowly, thinking about what Gert had said about him being locked in his own realm. When he had ascended the stairs he decided she was right. The chicken soup surged to his head, making it feel expanded. He quivered and vomited. Thad passed out, falling into his puke.

When he awoke, Lucille shot an arrow; it spliced the apple that had been put on his head. The governor was holding a quiver and exclaimed "Good show!"

FRICTION

Lou Ann Hazelwood

I ride through my days
like a kid on a squeaking
merry-go-round
in some weedy playground where
dust sticks to bare skin
and insects choke loudly
in the summer heat.

With a hard push,
I ride around,
and around,
counting every circle
until I lose count,
falling back
against the wooden seat,
squinting at the sun.

Oh, it's glorious,
all right,
to watch people, trees, sky
melt together
in one big blur,
to close
my eyes
and feel the air
running
past my head,
to laugh
at standers-still.

But I can't
shake the feeling
that I'm
dragging
a foot
behind me
somewhere
in the dirt.

ON MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH

Lou Ann Hazelwood

I shiver, push my face between the breasts
that lie in fallow. Like a field that's tilled
and waits again for seed, the bosom rests;
too long disused, it wastes, its yearning stilled.

I come to suckle at this barren place,
to take the shriveled breast between my lips
and nurse. Against my scorching tongue, a trace
of moisture falls; I choke on drying sips.

In sick disgust, I pull my mouth away.
My throat begins to rasp, like brittle grass
that jars against itself on windy days,
and waits for dusty, drying winds to pass.

A nightbird cries out sweet. I hold the sound
in cupping hands, drink deep and slow, and drown.







THE BIRTHDAY VISIT

Cjndy Russell

Rhea woke before the sun came and she was glad. She rolled off the glider where she slept on the closed-in front porch and padded barefoot to the screen door and pushed it open. Stepping out into the semi-darkness, she closed the door carefully, holding the long grass, snuffling it like a young dog. She stayed there for a long time, watching the sun come, savoring the dampness of the grass as it crept through her thin cotton night-dress, making her cool and clammy. A diesel truck screamed by on the hard-road.

She could hear someone moving within the house and she jumped up, creeping to the door, crouching as she passed beneath the windows. She slipped in as she had slipped out, again gripping the doorknob. She stripped to the skin, shivering as the air touched her wet body. Carefully folding the wet night-dress, she hid it under her pillow to dry. The floor trembled and she felt its vibrations come up through her feet. The glider rocked gently. Mama Rose was up.

"Time to get up, child . . . oh, you're up. Get your clothes on! What you mean, runnin' round naked in front of them windows? Make the neighbors think you're crazy. Now get that bed made and put on your good pink sunsuit. Gonna be a hot day."

"Yes ma'am." The floor shook, rattling the blue glass fruit jars on the floor next to the door as Mama Rose retreated to her kitchen. A loud squeal of bed springs told her that Granddaddy and Uncle Dean were up. Rhea dawdled over her morning bedroom chores. It was her job to make up Granddaddy's bed and Uncle Dean's and to put away the bedding on the front room davenport where Mama Rose always slept. Mama Rose hadn't slept with Granddaddy since Rhea could remember. She said he snored and

smelled like a horse.

"Rhea, come on out here and get something to eat." Mama Rose's deep voice rumbled from the kitchen at the back of the house. Rhea went.

"Where's Uncle Dean?"

"Out cuttin' the grass. What you want for breakfast?"

"Nothing. Just one of these sugar cookies. Where'd Granddaddy go?"

"Out to feed the horses." Her granddaddy owned a patch of land outside town with a small barn on it where he kept his two horses and his garden since he retired. "Go tell your Uncle Dean to come eat." Strains of "Stars and Stripes Forever" swept across the road. Mama Rose looked out the window over the sink. "That damn girl's out again. Go get Dean."

Rhea went outside. Brenda Seltzer across the road was out in her yard practicing her baton twirling. She wore a tight halter top and short-shorts. Her breasts bounced every time she jumped to catch her baton. She leaped about frantically to the music, tossing her hair, always careful to face Rhea's yard. Brenda was sure to be out whenever Uncle Dean was outside. She spotted Rhea. "Well hi there Rhea, honey." Her voice was cloying. "I haven't seen you out in ages." Rhea ignored her. Brenda never spoke to her unless Uncle Dean was around. Rhea shouted over the rattle of the push-mower.

"Mama Rose says to come eat."

Dean set the mower up against the house and went in. Immediately, "Stars and Stripes Forever" ceased and Brenda stalked into her own house. Mama Rose sat at the table with a cup of coffee. There was a plate of biscuits and thick gravy with bacon and hard-fried eggs, waiting for Dean. He sat down and made pig-like noises as he stuffed the food down his throat.

"Go get your barettes and let me braid your hair, girl." Mama Rose gave Rhea a little push.

Rhea slowly walked out onto the porch and dragged her soap box of belongings from under the glider. She dug through tangle of underclothes and hair ribbons and retrieved two pink plastic barettes. She trailed back through the cool parlor with its dark wood tables and chairs with white lace doilies on their backs and arms. The parlor was Mama Rose's kingdom. She had pilfered

money from Granddaddy's pockets for years to buy the stiff, formal furniture. No one was allowed to sit in the room except Sunday company.

"Get a move on girl, bring a hairbrush." Rhea fetched the brush from the wash stand in the bedroom and trotted into the kitchen. Uncle Dean had bolted his food and returned to his work, and Brenda was back in her yard twisting and twirling to the march on her daddy's record player. Rhea positioned herself with her back to her grandmother, standing between Mama Rose's fat, wide-spread knees. She was pulled backward by the vigorous brushing of her long thin hair. The hogs-hair bristles scraped her scalp, causing her to try to wiggle away.

"Hold still." Mama Rose gave an impatient yank on the hair. She quickly twisted it into two tight pigtails and fastened them with the barettes. Mama Rose spat her on the bottom, "Now get outside and keep yourself clean while I do these dishes."

"Where we goin'?"

"We got a visit to make."

"Where?"

"Just you wait and see. Now get."

"But where?"

"I said get. Now let me be."

Rhea slammed the screen door and sat on the dusty back stoop in the sun, her chin in her hands. "Don't you slam that door at me young lady." Mama Rose shouted after her. Uncle Dean was rounding the far corner of the yard. Brenda's daddy had mader her get in the house, so the road was quiet except for the rattle of the push-mower and the clatter of dishes in the sink inside. She wandered around the corner of the house under the trees. Across the road on the opposite corner sat old Joanna on her front porch rocking hard and singing to herself. Rhea flattened herself against a tree trunk. She hadn't made it on time. The thin rusty voice came to her. "Hey, you, girl. How you doin'?" Rhea came out from behind the tree. She smiled and waved and then walked back around the house into the sun, quickly, as if she had a purpose. She hoped Mama Rose hadn't heard Joanna. Every time Joanna called, Mama Rose made her go over and sit on the old woman's dirty front porch. Rhea hated watching the old cobweb-covered platform rocker shake and groan. The old Italian woman couldn't

even speak English good. Her prune-like, toothless, caved-in mouth worked constantly, sucking hard candy and muttering to herself. Joanna always forced Rhea to take a piece of candy which she spat out as soon as she got in her own yard. Joanna's twisted greasy hands moved constantly, winding artificial flowers that she sold at Woolworth's for a quarter a bunch. Crazy old woman.

The dishes had stopped clattering, so she figured it was okay to go in. The kitchen was empty and on the table was a paper sack. Rhea peeped into it. In the sack were a half-dozen gingerbread men that she and Mama Rose had made the day before. Mama Rose had picked the best ones, none of them Rhea's. Her's all had broken arms or legs or heads but she had iced them fancy anyway. Feeling left out, she went over to the tin breadbox and got one of her gingerbread men. The best decorated one had no head. She slipped it into the sack on the bottom of the pile. She looked up. Mama Rose stood in the doorway. "What you doin' in that sack? Them ain't for you. Get outa there, now."

Rhea stood back. "Where we goin' Mama Rose?"

"I told you leave me be. Now hush."

She knew they were going somewhere important. Mama Rose had got herself up in her best outfit. She wore a short sleeved black taffeta dress. Around her neck, almost buried in the folds of flesh was a string of plastic pearls and on her ears were matching button earrings. She had tortured her huge breasts into a brassiere, though usually they hung loose on her belly. She had struggled into a corset and stockings and her feet were forced into tight pointed black patent leather high heels. "You ready? Let me see your face. It clean? Okay." She hollered out the back door, "Dean put that mower away and get the car." She picked up the sack from the table. "Run get my pocketbook, Rhea. It's on the dresser in the back bedroom." Up close Mama Rose gave off the smell of cedar from her good closet.

Uncle Dean honked the horn. Mama Rose slung her shiny black 'good' pocketbook over her arm and pushed Rhea out the door. Uncle Dean's car was big and black and shiny and old. Rhea and Mama Rose squeezed into the white seat beside him and Rhea peered over the dashboard. Uncle Dean drove like a crazy man, Granddaddy said. Mama Rose hung onto the arm rest and nagged at him to slow down. He put his elbow out the window and held

onto the edge of the roof with his left hand, ignoring her. He kept glancing at himself in the rear view mirror. He had combed in a fresh squirt of Brylcream on his hair and it was slicked down real good.

They pulled into E.C.'s Texaco station and Mama Rose lumbered into the office to talk to E.C.'s wife Melba. The tiny, monkey-like woman ran her husband's business, coming in to work in a pair of his khaki overalls. E.C. and Melba sold everything; food, drink, gas, oil, tires, used cars, and everything else they might make a profit on. They even charged a nickel to use the toilet. The station served as a bus stop because it was on the edge of town on the hard-road.

A big bus pulled off the road onto the gravel under the Texaco sign. The sign in its front window said 'St. Louis'. Mama Rose came out of the office. "Get my sack out of the car, child, let's go."

"We going' on the bus, Mama Rose?"

"Yes, get that sack, now."

Rhea scrambled into the back seat of the Ford, fetched the damp, crumpled, brown paper sack and handed it to Mama Rose. Mama Rose sailed over to the bus. She reminded Rhea of a ship, her great pointed breasts breaking water before her. She boarded the bus with great dignity, Rhea trailing in her wake. Handing the driver her tickets, she glided down the aisle gripping the backs of the seats, searching for the right one. Not over a wheel-too bumpy. Not in the back--you never know who you might have to sit by. Not too near the front--the driver stares at you in the mirror. The seat must be in the front half of the bus, near the middle, with two seats together and their own window. Mama Rose found a suitable one and pushed Rhea in before her. They settled in as the bus started with a jolt and Rhea found herself wedged between the metal wall of the bus and her grandmother's sweaty arm. She flattened herself against the wall, leaving an inch between her arm and Mama Rose's so the sweatiness wouldn't spread to her own hot dry body.

Mama Rose discovered an acquaintance across the aisle, and she and a bird-like little woman in blue were already swapping obituaries and birth notices happily. Rhea stared out the window, trying to count telephone poles and listen to her grandmother's

conversation at the same time. She felt the bird lady looking at her. "Now this here is your little granddaughter."

"Uh-huh. My daughter's girl. That's where we're goin today. I'm takin her to see her daddy at Anna. It's his birthday and he don't have any other family, poor fella."

The bird-lady clucked, making her seem more like a bird than ever. Rose caught the end of this. Daddy. Her daddy. It had been a long time since she had seen him, but she could hear him laughing. Laughter going up and up to the ceiling and then down again, on and on. Rhea could remember waiting for him to come home at night. He would swing her up in the air and whirl her around and around, growling at her until, when she was very small, she would get scared and cry. She was embarrassed about crying and being frightened, now. She would cry and he would begin laughing, and she knew it was all right--as long as he laughed. Rhea couldn't see her mother at these times, but she had a sense of Mama hovering on the outside of them, begging him to be careful. Sometimes his laughter would wake her up at night and keep her awake in her bed for a long time.

Her daddy was at Anna. When Rhea first came to live with Mama Rose and Granddaddy, she heard people talk about someone being taken to Anna and she pictured a big woman who took care of them. She told this to her cousin Jay and he laughed and told her that Anna was a town. A town where they had a hospital for people who went crazy. Her daddy must be working there.

Rhea could remember the day last year when her daddy didn't come home. She asked her mother where he was, but she said he had been able to get a job out of town and he had to go there. Rhea started to ask more, but her mother went into the bathroom and locked the door and didn't come out for a long time. After her daddy left, her mother spent a lot of time in there so Rhea didn't ask anymore.

One day, her mother sent her off to school and when she came home, her mother wasn't there. She didn't know what to do, so she fixed herself some supper and sat up late playing the radio, waiting. The next afternoon, she was still alone. Mrs. Kress from next door came over looking for her mother and when she didn't find her, she started asking questions. Rhea couldn't answer them, so she went and got her husband. He looked around a bit and tried

to get something out of Rhea but she couldn't tell him anything so he called the police. They came, and a fat policeman with red cheeks and badbreath held her on his lap and asked her questions in baby talk. She scooted off and wouldn't say anything. Mr. Kress sent a wire to Granddaddy the next day. Her mother had thoughtfully taped his address above the sink in the kitchen in case of emergency before she left.

Her mother didn't come back. Mr. and Mrs. Kress put her on a train for Hurst a couple of days later. They pinned a note to her coat collar with her grandparents' name and address on it. Rhea removed it as soon as she got to her seat on the train.

She seldom mentioned her mother and daddy. When she did, her granddaddy would spit and walk away. Mama Rose would mutter something like "Your daddy was just too smart for his own good." Rhea left it at that and made up her own details. She hoped her daddy had a good job at Anna. She hoped he had a job. A growing lump in the pit of her stomach told her he didn't, though. It told her he was one of the crazy people.

Rhea realized that she was getting stiff and she realized her position, leaning on Mama Rose. The hot air blowing in had made her sweaty anyhow, and it trickled down her shoulder blades. She looked out the window. The road on her side of the bus was bordered by a high barbed-wire fence overgrown with honeysuckle vine. The bus pulled off onto the gravel at the side of the road. She almost fell sideways as Mama Rose stood up.

"Time to get off."

Rhea stood up, grasping the rolled-up paper sack and followed her down the aisle, off the bus. The narrow door flapped shut almost before they were out of it, and the bus took off down the road, leaving them in a cloud of dust. Mama Rose waved the middle finger of her right hand after it. "Damn bus."

They were at the end of a paved driveway that disappeared through an iron gate in the fence. On the white brick gate post was a brass plaque that said: "Anna State Hospital". Inside the gate she could see a little stone building. A short bald-headed man in a khaki uniform came out carrying a clipboard. Mama Rose peered through the bars of the gate and gave their name. It must have been on his list because he hauled the gate open enough to let them in. Rhea wondered who they were trying to keep out.

Inside, the drive wound around and out of sight. It was

blacktop, lined on both sides with crabapple trees and the surface of the road was covered with smashed fruit. Rhea picked up a crabapple and, putting it in her cheek, she sucked hard on its dry bitterness. They picked their way along the side of the road in the grass.

Within the fence it was like a park; lots of shade trees and grass. Under the trees were wooden benches and lawn chairs. In one of these groupings, a dressed-up old man and woman sat talking at a young man in a blue, wrinkled, pajama-like garment, who sat ignoring them, throwing crabapples at a tree.

Rhea's sneaker was rubbing a place on her heel and she could feel a blister starting. There was a pebble in it. She played a game, giving a little kick when she took a step and the pebble rolled out from under her big toe. When she stepped down, the pebble rolled back, nagging. Mama Rose carried her patent leather high heels, walking flat-footed in the grass.

They approached a big building with "Administration" over the doors. They went in and Mama Rose gave a sigh that seemed to come from her feet, it was so deep. She hastily slipped on her shoes, grimacing. Rhea shielded her eyes. It was so dark in here after the sunlight outside that she saw black and white spots for a while.

They walked through an empty waiting room full of chrome furniture covered in orange plastic. Mama Rose pushed her into a huge green metal-doored elevator. The door closed and Mama Rose pushed #3. Rhea stumbled against her as they started up. "Will you stand up straight?" The elevator jolted to a stop and Rhea braced herself in the corner so she wouldn't stumble again. The doors rattled open and they stepped out.

The lump in Rhea's stomach turned over as the stench hit her. It was like the garbage in the barrel behind the garage just before Granddaddy hauled it off once a week, only worse. She held her hand over her mouth and nose. There was a big desk across from the elevator and Mama Rose stood before a big nurse with red curly hair.

"Ahem."

The nurse looked up. "Yes."

"I'm Mrs. Keller."

"Oh yes, the gate called and said you were on the way up."

"We come to see Jack Davis." Rhea stood behind her, clutching the sack to her chest.

"Yes, the doctor told us you would be here today, so we took him off the ward and put him in a little private room over there." As the nurse smiled, Rhea focused on a red lipstick mark on her teeth.

Mama Rose glanced behind her. "Well." The nurse clapped her hands briskly. "I'll just take you in. He's just finishing his lunch and he'll be real glad to see you, I'm sure." She started down the hall, her white rubber-soled shoes whispering on the tile, and Mama Rose and Rhea followed behind her, their shoes making a great clatter in comparison. There was a man sitting on the floor against the wall, crying. He wore blue pajamas like the young man outside. He was very thin and his head had been shaved. The tears ran down his cheeks, some detouring into his mouth, the rest skiing off his chin onto his shirt. He made no sound.

The nurse stopped in a doorway. The lump in Rhea's stomach grew colder and harder. A thin young man sat on the side of a hospital bed, his bony hands and wrists dangling between his knees. He stared at the floor below his feet. The nurse smiled real big.

"Well, Jack, your company's here. Can you say hi?" On the table was a tray of food; melting red jello, green peas, hard mashed potatoes, and a pork chop, swimming in the greasy green water from the peas. The nurse forced a spoon into his hand and laughed. She patted him on the shoulder. "Now you eat your lunch while you have a nice visit." She turned to Mama Rose. "Sit down. Make yourself comfortable. I'll tell the doctor you're here. I'll be at my desk if you need me. Have a nice visit." Her shoes whispered down the hall.

Mama Rose heaved herself into the straight chair by the bed. Rhea stood frozen in the door, tightly clutching the paper sack. Mama Rose cleared her throat. "Boy oh boy, you've really got it made here. Don't have to work, lay in the bed all day, uh huh." She smiled and nodded her head. He kept on staring at his feet. The spoon dangled from his fingers. Mama Rose kept on nodding her head.

"Yes sir, really got it made. Hey, I brung Rhea with me. Bet you didn't even know she's growed so much. Three quarters of an inch, isn't it, Rhea?" Rhea still stood in the doorway. Her mouth was so dry she couldn't answer. She forced herself to stand still even though she wanted to turn and run to the elevator. She felt a faint urge to go the bathroom. Her right hand gripped the doorknob and its knuckles turned white. She jumped as the nurse's voice came over her shoulder. "Sorry to interrupt your visit, Mrs. Keller. The doctor would like to see you in his office downstairs." Her voice rose. "Don't you worry, Jack; I'll bring them right back. You finish your lunch now."

Mama Rose looked relieved and stood up. She glanced at Rhea. The nurse caught her look. "Oh, don't you worry about the little girl, she can come stay at my desk with me. You'd like that fine, wouldn't you honey?" Rhea tore her eyes away from the bed and followed the nurse and her grandmother down the hall, almost tripping over the crying man.

The nurse gave Mama Rose directions and she got in the elevator and disappeared. The nurse, who wore a name tag, 'Miss B. Moroni', pulled up a straight chair for Rhea at the side of her desk. She pushed a blue ball-point pen and a piece of typing paper at her. "Why don't you make a nice picture for your daddy?" Rhea stared at the pen as it rolled off the desk. She didn't pick it up. An orange light came on over the desk and the nurse patted her on the shoulder and went whispering off down the hall and around the corner.

Rhea stayed where she was, staring at the unmoving lights over the elevator. She could see the crying man down the hall. He had stretched his legs out on the floor. She stood up and started slowly down the hall. She inched past the crying man, flattening herself against the opposite wall. She forced herself to get closer and closer to the room at the end of the hall.

He was still sitting on the bed holding the spoon, the tray of food untouched. She edged into the room clutching the paper sack before her, and sat on the chair where Mama Rose had been. She stared at him, taking in the short, dirty hair, wrinkled clothes, and

long yellow fingernails. He looked up and thier eyes met. Rhea felt as if someone had touched the back of her neck with a cold hand.

"I'm hungry, Mama." He whimpered, so low that she could barely hear. She glanced at the plate of cold greasy food. She reached into the sack and gave him one of Mama Rose's gingerbread men. He looked at it, turning it over and over in his hands. She went over and sat on the bed next to him, shoulder to shoulder. "Happy Birthday." she whispered. He looked at it and at his own. He put the head of his into his mouth, snapping it off. He held it to her, triumphant, and started to laugh. The laughter was just as she remembered, climbing up and up. She could feel the cold lump at the core of her begin to melt, and, oblivious to the sound of whispering feet running down the hall, she started to laugh.

(haiku)

Stanley Guill

Symmetry roots and
The ground merely a mirror.
Leaves fall up and down.



Gaul

a love poem
(by approximation)

Ted Baldwin

on calculating the relative
differential between
our two bodies.
I find myself thinking in
spherical coordinates.
The tangent I make with
your plane surface
alters my arc length.
You
seem
uncertain about your idea of
an upper limit and
partial differentiation of
our function
reveals a
confusion in you;
I detect,
as I suggest integrating
from
negative to positive
infinity,
an infinitesimal change,
as your cartesians go
polar...
Somehow, I want to
calculate
the area beneath your curves,
and sum it up.

WOUND

Ted Baldwin

Solar arc
across the new year sky
low and quiet, a passive herald of
our presence there.
Light filters through
and into our thoughts. We huddle
there, emotions bared to one another, as
the chill slowly breaks down our circle,
and into our fears.

Winds
flow in over the country plains,
bitter cold butted against the
shallow warmth of low,
ceiling sky.
Streams
of snow file down and
around smooth hillocks as I watch,
ever marching against
depths of one summer's
watermarks.

Words

pierce the stilled air
of our shelter, cauterizing, searching out the wound,
as though to mend what has been
undone.

Tears,

unfelt, draw each of
us nearer, then fall
unnoticed to the crystal
ground below.

Pines

stretch and waver as winds
shift in their drive
across the site.

Roses lie naked
on the ground, mirrored
in the ice laden stones
of men.

Petals,

reflected within
us, lie dying beneath our feet
while snow files ever past,
striking silent reverry.
Crusting ice,
too weak to hold the
uninvited, breaks as we walk. A
flurry of cold dust diverges,
to fill the rift.

Untitled

Barbara Ann Robinson

Caught in
a veil, lacy
like fast falling snowflakes
And as cold--
No gaps for
the voice of the wind.
Alone,
protected,
surrounded,
by the womb of
a virgin, unviolated
by reality.

TUNDRA FOX

Kay Murphy

The red moon drops
pulling the heat over the vixen
drying the night smells
loosing the belly skin

Her ears catch
the fall of the last star.
She stretches towards the cave
tracking stunted shadows.

The male sleeps
her smells bringing
dreams
trembling his thighs.

They mate urgently
in the shelter
spotting the frost with sperm
before the winds come

Fall blows the geese high
lemmings burrow towards the pap root
The slow decay too quickly

The pups are dropped breathless
between the shrubs. She covers them
with the smells of night and
drags into the wind.

ANOTHER WEDNESDAY NIGHT

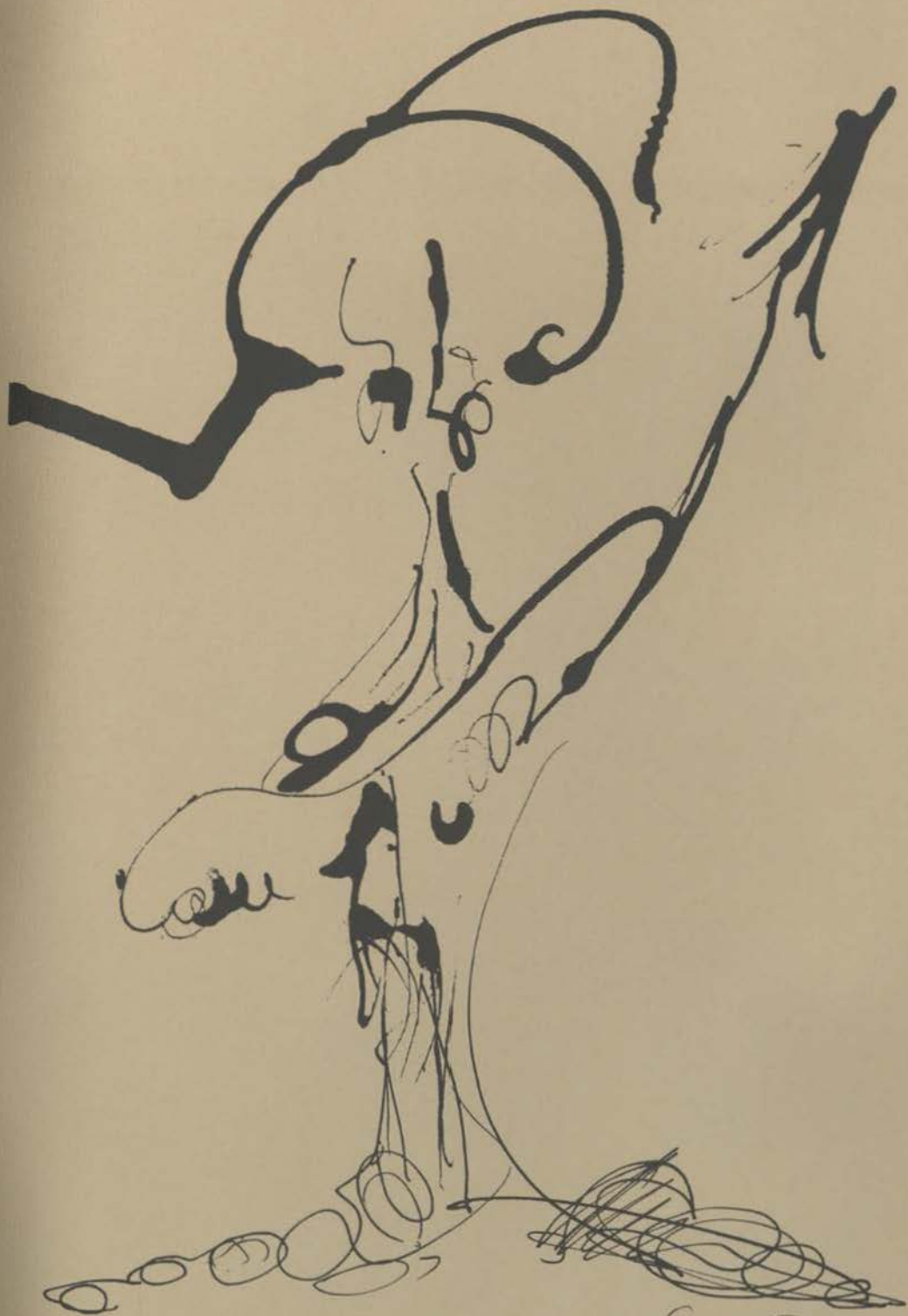
Kay Murphy

We sit in the booth
your eyes wet
from the straws stacking between us
mine dry as tomorrow morning's tongues

You smiling clapping
the last strains of the evening
trying to bring it together
before the singer leaves

us to our own flat beats of love
dull from years of Wednesday night
sex played with notes of guilt
serenading our indecision

Trembling I fold my hands
around another glass
another Wednesday night
and you



Bill

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