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Associated Student

ARCHIVES

VENTURE

SPRING 1963

R. E.strom



american cities

Our cities are like menopausal whores
working the day shift, but suffering all
night long from hot flashes and cold: neon.
Things you wouldn't do to someone you love
or had to face at breakfast, open doors
for, these are things for which she goes on call,
does them smiling, fixed, asks for more: neon.
No Holy Ghost conception, and no dove:
a bleary-eyed pigeon spats among the stools
like dropped condoms and watches from the sill
traffic that goes nowhere in her veins: neon.
Concrete arteries go in, out, and in
endless tautological currents, pools,
flow back again in soundless flashes till
the electrocuted mind, seized, shrieks: neon.
At night fresh paint and courage, and again
she's out to try her luck, staggered by each
leering blinking face. When was it all
different? Images come, ebb: neon.
She can't recall where it went wrong, or when
innocence was lost, joy went out of reach.
Oh, she's nobody's intellectual:
knows the latest, cheapest, brightest: neon.
And on she gropes, drugged, looking for a friend,
trying the female tricks of dressing up,
and flowers, perfume. They fail to cover
the shame and hot discomfort, the neon
flashing on concrete, the worms lighting up
glass tubing, her lack of any lover.

— James Bowden
Instructor of English

VENTURE

SPRING, 1963

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Number 2

the kissing

Dirk Lutjens Van Sickle

Sioux

i see thee sadly,
darkly navel;
madly available
starkly accessible
as she moves
so slowly softly
like a nude
across the room.
while all else is
given gladly,
the darkly navels
never mine . . .
when the mood
is still and quiet
and the tones subdued,
word silent;
and she rests
so trustful of my tenderly —
still, between her fondly breasts
and the nymphen fairies nest
does the bowlish belly-well protest
as though it holds from me
her complete essentiality
which cannot be but free.
i thought it true
that you should give
of all of you
and i of me.
i thought wrongly.
darkly navel, how you do
protect we two
i now know well,
for when i succeed in kissing you
then at her heel
and at her head
green grass will grow,
for she'll be dead.

of her navel

she died at three o'clock this morning. i knew she was going to die, all i could do was watch. she had been growing more and more pale until tonight life fluttered loose and flew away —

the life upon her raven hair but not within her eyes —

the life still there, upon her hair—the death upon blue eyes.

my ear is running and filled with cotton and i can but half know the feeling of her death; it is maddening, but i wont remove the cotton, she thought it looked silly and it helps me now anyway. how long can i wear cotton in the right ear—is a right ear filled with cotton a traditionally approved symbol of mourning — should it be black cotton?

dont be silly, i like the fog

“but it's cold and wet.”

it softens the street lights. she starts to sit on the grass.

“what street lights. and dont sit down, your dress will get soaked, this grass is wet.”
so what — it will dry.

“but your mother will look suspiciously at me again if you come in with a wet dress.”
so let her look, i want to lie down here. _i like fog. you cant see the moon.

(((the moon cant be seen, not even the trees and they are close and i am claustrophobic. it takes almost two seconds for the dew to soak to my skin and it is cold and my pants stick to me. i have given her my coat to lie on and i am cold. cold can be solid, but not wet cold. she has a warm stomach and i like to pull her sweater out and put my head under it, on her stomach, it is smooth and warm and deep . . . but it maddens her because she has a navel fetish and is driven wild when something touches her navel. my hair is touching and she wiggles and laughs making my head bounce in the fog under her sweater. the more it bounces the wilder she becomes until i move my head so it is cradled between her breasts or down on her solid-soft — she irritates the hell

out of me sometimes with this navel protection. i usually want to kiss her navel but she would die first . . . a party and she is quiet and wont say anything. out of meanness and anger i'm sitting on her and touch her bellybutton but she actually starts to cry; i pull her up against me so no one would notice . . . i was ashamed of my meanness . . . i guess i'm not really claustrophobic.)))

when johnny comes marching home again
hurrah! hurrah!

we'll give him a howdy-do again
hurrah! hurrah!

and the men will shout
and the boys will shout
and the ladies will shout
and the cows will shout
and the ducks will shout
and the pigs will shout
and the toads will shout

ducks dont shout. who ever heard of a shouting duck.

(((saturday afternoon gin blast in the woods, drinking coral marxs - pink lemonade and gin, really one of the worlds fine cold drinks - while we play foods.

“celerY” - fred

“YeasT” - mary

“TomatO” - tina

“OaT” - caroline

Tubes

everyone is laughing and she is very high and rolls over laughing on the blanket by the stream and spills everyones drinks. light blue terrycloth turtleneck beach sweater, black leotards, and deep green elf-like shoes — i was aware then suddenly of her body, and proud of it.)))

this chair is huge and yellow and if i turn the knob at the side it will vibrate. the headrest is torn and the stuffing shows. that is where she got the cotton for my ear that is running. running ears are vulgar. obscene. from here i can see our dark mahogany door. we have a wine red carpet that is worn through to the brown cords in places. it ends before the wall

starts and the margin is hardwood floor unpolished. there is a couch and two matching legless swivel chairs in this room. two end tables and a coffee table with the phonograph on one of the end tables and my copy of "west side story" on the coffee table. four oclock now. quieter than godawful hell this time of the morning. she has six copies of "west side story" plus the book plus the score plus the dance music plus the programs from the eight times shes seen it in chicago and the many times in summer stock. the movie too. shes fanatic. truly hopeless. beside the bookcase is the sliding door that is open and on the other side is the hall with the same color carpet, just as worn, and a white painted cabinet full of pictures and the books we're ashamed of. books about horses. all kinds of them. childrens books and artists anatomy folders. she'll read anything about a horse. she thinks like a horse, she whinneys and jumps over things and canters. at the dinner table she'll throw her head back with a snap and the long dark hair flies and she makes a soft lovely marish whinny. she draws horses, pregnant mares usually, or horses jumping over fences. muscle perfect. and they are all scotch taped to the wall. the bedroom is full of pregnant horses.

the heater is working, the furnace or the blower or whatever makes the noise. i hear it with my left ear. the right one is full of cotton and foul drippings. the whole house should be stuffed with cotton; the hallway, the carpet there, the cabinet, the half opened dark mahogany door, to seep up their foul dripping.

good god the desolation that love brings is hell enough.

but her echo that rides the wind that blows through me is worse each time it rings.

the largest, most essential part of me was full with her.

and gone, her void is visible and clear, like a big dark night full of wind.

the real fall of this house began when lightning struck the toilet. a dark omen indeed. she was in bed and i was sitting here reading. it was a stormy night and quickly there was a tumultuous BOOM-CRACK and she called what did you knock over and i yelled back i thought it was you falling out of bed and

breaking the floor again. she was in that ridiculous nightgown i always made her take off before i'd get into bed, we wandered about the house checking windows and we went into the bathroom and there was the toilet cleaved directly in twain, water all over the floor. naturally i had to cut my finger on the sharp edged porcelain and she laughed and did a little dance of ballet steps - *pate de bras* - she called them - splashing in the water on the floor. seeing the toilet broken i suddenly had to use it; this too she thought was funny, but i considered the whole episode an ill omen and now never use a toilet on a stormy night. i told her it was because i am afraid of the ludicrous and undignified obituary. the bathroom is right next to our room and our door is half open.

black black black is the color
of my true loves hair,
her lips are like
some rosy fair,
the fondest face
and the best of blue eyes,
i love the ground

((wherein she lies))

i have a poor voice.

right now if i open my mouth very wide my ear suddenly hurts. my breathing sounds unnaturally monaural with the stuffed ear.

honestly, you're just like a little boy. i can be on deaths door and i still have to keep the house and cook the dinner, but if you have even a little headache you have to run to mama for succor and i have to put your head on my lap and rub it until your headache goes away. hoooooonestly!

"but baby's ear hurts baby."

pooooor baby anad his minuscule ear hurt. come to mama.

((i go to her and shes sitting up in bed and i get into the foetal position and put my head on her lap and she coos at me in a put-on voice. nude. the breasts, the long raven hair falling to me - hanging over her shoulders and flowing around her breasts. she pouts her lips, looks sad for me and i do the same and slowly turn my head then start to kiss her navel and she throws my head off her lap and doubles up and says))

fiend and wretch'd viper to feint fondness at my bosom only to sully the snow of my navel. avaunt! avaunt!

all the time stuff like this.
muted love that needs no voice.

hooo hooo, my lord,
she is dead;
and the green grass grows
at her heel
at her head,
she is dead, my lord,
she is dead.

“but there is no joy in mudville / the mighty casey has struck out.” i cant even cry for our memories that are now suddenly all mine. cry not even for myself, for the sweet rains that will never wash the salt from my face — i want to cry until my eyes burn away and my shirt is salt-stained and break my head against the floor and scream and slam my fists into the wall and cry until my black tongue swells my mouth open and my eyes bulge — for her, for her and all our now futile children in her ovaries unborn. but . . . all i can do is sit with a goddamned ear full of cotton looking at the flat sweatless walls and unfaithfully strange furniture, look with stunned disbelief at the half open door. i could even eat - i have an appetite, but i wont, i wont move. not for hours - there's no point in it, no place for me to go. ah, this is indeed the acceptable emotion, but it passes. one, two, button your shoe, three, four, close the door. should i close the door? with a three why four should i close the door? should i keep the door open halfway like it is, or should i open it all the way . . . or should i tear the son-of-a-bitch right off its hinges and smash it over my knee!

the lights in this room are rather bright. i wonder if bright light is entirely kosher now or not.

but the moon never beams without bringing me dreams of my beautiful annabell lee,
and the stars never rise but i see the bright eyes
of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride.

four fifteen in the morning — look around the room — get up for the first time in . . . seventy three minutes. out of this chair that fills the exhausted air with its ignoble creak. out and to the cabinet beside the sliding door. photographs. large photographs of her, big 16 x 20s flush mounted on black backed mat boards. almost black pictures . . . here . . . her navel

enlarged to about an inch and half diameter. her skin very dark, the belly of her breasts just showing at the top. last christmas and unwrapped this and then i suddenly grabbed it from her and kissed the navel - she gasped and looked stricken, running out of the room holding her mid-section. i kiss thee, navel of nitrate and put thee aside. lots of pictures of her here . . . nudes mostly. heres her raven hair wrapped around her neck in this one . . . draped all over one shoulder in this . . . over both shoulders in this three quarter profile. theres the hair all over her face with just her eyes and her seduction smile showing. put them down. pick them up again and around the room setting them against the wall, propped on picture frames here, or against the back of the couch. in the yellow chair and look at them all. ektalure x, brown-black; kodabromide, cold-black; opal v, yellow like candle light, all through dektel . . . but they're not mine anymore. i dont want them at all . . . keep them, of course i'll keep them, they're hers — they're her.

((in the s.u.b. at montana i notice a girl in a tan raincoat standing in a corner of the room all by herself staring - no - squinting at people in the grill. a strange sight and i stop and look at her for awhile. she just stands there in the long raincoat and squints at the other students. there's one of my ex-fraternity brothers who i barely know. “who is she, al?”

“i dont know her name, but thats the one who got my derby.”

“her?”

“yeah, she ran me right into the liberal arts building. i thought the damn doors opened in and i ran right into them. i fell down on the porch almost out cold and she calmly walked up and took my derby and walked away. shes gotten more derbys for her house than anyone else.”

“you dont know her name?”

“no.”

it's a small campus - i can meet her somehow. psychology tests and one night after supper in the cafeteria she is with a girl i barely know but i convince the girl i barely know that she should take the tests from me and i manage to convince the squinting one raven hair and blue ? eyes that she would be doing me a great

favor and will be helping me pass the foolish course if she takes the test too. then in the test room . . . all she talked about was evanston and the lake and horses and fog. and that night we walked around campus in the rain under the umbrella talking about premarital intercourse. she frustrated me then with her undefeatable lack of logic.)))

stop complaining, said the farmer,
who told you a calf to be?

why dont you have wings to fly with
like the swallow so proud and free—
and now she's gone,

like a dream that fades into dawn,
but the words stay locked in my heart-
strings,

my love loves me.

my dripping ear. she put the cotton in. she got it from the chair stuffing and put it in my ear and laughed because it was silly looking.

pooor baby and his minuscule ear hurt.

and there is the door, half open with her on the other side. what shall the dirge be; the dripping of my ear? and my staring eyes that hurt from not blinking and my lungs that ache for more air? i could play BEETHOVEN, she likes him, or i could play "west side story" and bear her pall to the tune of "officer krupke."

no, no, now i'm beginning to lose it. i was ok at first but now cant sustain it and it's turned into just sentimental melodrama. but then maybe it's a good thing for me to lose it, it's beginning to make me sorry — it's not a good thing to do . not at all. sure, an experiment in sorrow, but it's evil. scary. yes, lord, i'll say it's scary. masochistic, too. unclean way to spend . . . my god. an hour and a half. i guess its educational though, in a perverse way, to stimulate this kind of feeling.

sleep well loves sleep.

when other nights we risk moons light
to lay inside this willow cave,

i'll weave my rose in raven hair

and not fear for your sleep.

it wont work - i guess i dont want it to work, dont want it back. it's a shameful dirty thing to do . . . i feel now i should give her flowers or an act of great kindness or love to tell her i'm sorry for something she must never know. she wouldnt understand this at all; it would make her sad, poor baby. the record player — turn it on. it's starting to hum and the hum

is getting louder as it warms up. put "west side story" on the turntable and the needle now down in the first . . . lead-in groove. adjust the volume by the small scratches . . . softly . . . dont want to awaken her yet. still too risky, volume down all the way until the record starts . . . quiet . . . no problem hearing the stylus vibrations of the first notes. now turn it up slowly, slowly until the overture just barely starts to be heard from the speakers — she mustnt hear the record til awakened. here . . . start the record over and across the room to the light switch. wait a moment to adjust to the new fresh darkness and now slowly grope toward the dark bedroom. oh damn that bedroom door and its high pitched squeak! push slowly . . . bedroom not so dark, moonlight, good. she's under the covers — bare shoulders . . . she did take off that ridiculous nightgown. to the bed . . . one knee on the bed - no, withdraw it. 'be prepared,' slowly undress quietly in the brightening moonlight . . . theres the phonograph coming through just fine . . . undressed. now . . . one knee. the bed sags too much . . . carefully and carefully lift the covers gently off her. naked in the moonlight. with that big cherry navel so shadowed and dark looking . . . she'll come to like a cannon when i kiss it . . . probably throw my head right through the ceiling but i'll have done it. for the first time. kissed it. hands on the bed, slowly . . . the bed sags a little more, shift weight . . . breasts . . . skin . . . navel . . . moonlight. she looks about like that big photograph now. god i could look at that black triangle for the rest of my life . . . but on . . . on the kissing of her navel . . . to the violation of the snows of her navel . . . crawl - oh god the bed sags - slowly into zero position. there it is, innocent, unsuspecting, unprotected virginity, one - two - three - banzi!

(The needle is swishing in the last and locked groove of the record and the house isnt dark anymore. Dawn had come and he is still crouched in the foetal position beside her, his head buried in her abdomen, but carefully away from her navel so as not to irritate it, and he is still crying - senseless uncontrollable and unconscious crying. And he cries and he cries and he cries and her violated and now-kissed navel overflows his doubly unknown tears.)



Etching by Roy Ekstrom

big dance

W. H. Wood

Brighteyed and bushytailed
was how I looked when I left home for our
big monthly dance in the
big white-painted hall by the river,
Just sat there watching
all these people
hugging each other, dancing close, touching
Their eyes did not see me
they stared past me into
other milky-white eyes
Moving their arms
waving to everybody, pointing
Moving their feet
swirling in twitchy rhythm to
The Music

... a sax player, eyes clamped shut,
scowling, straining over his horn
... a bored-looking mediocre drummer
who didn't keep the beat because
... a female pianist (who was no better
or worse than any other female pianist
trying to be always what she shouldn't
but had to be almost ever:
mechanical, impeccable, in first place)
was trying to lead the drummer and the
band (drummer fighting back sullenly by
slowing down the beat)
... guitar man who twanged along
happily between both rhythms with
a grin on his face, silly and lopsided,
while standing next to the leader sax man
who paid no heed to rhythm-war behind him.

The dancers
arms wrapped around each other they stream out of
the smokey, drafty hall at intermission to
the waiting dark cars and
half-empty bottles,

The girls
picking their first makeout of the evening and
hastening out the door lest
their choice lose his interest,
but not going too fast, for
they must impress those who are left behind,

The rest of the boys
who are left makeout-less
group themselves loudly in
a corner and hoot obscenities
and glance often at

The rejected girls
who remain sitting and cackling on
the long wooden benches around
the gray stained dingy walls . . .

The Band

... after a hour-hour break begins its
internal struggle anew
... sax man good and loud but oblivious to
... drummer and female pianist, each
stubbornly pounding his instrument in
contradiction to the other
... guitarist flipping fingers over
taut strings and smiling blankly . . .

Everybody is back inside
twenty minutes after the band resumes
most of the couples separately to begin anew
the roulette

Girls who made it to
the cars first round have
advantage this final round over
the rejected ones

Competition becomes keen
with more close dancing as
everybody goes for the
night's final makeout

The neat studs (in white socks)
pick and choose, discard,
bounce from girl to girl

Leftover stags
still loud in the corners
glaring often at the girls
who move their legs fast under
their bright dresses and
stare demurely unseeing over
their aching tight sweaters

All but a few without
perfumed armpits and washed crotches

Required to ward off
stinky sweat, closeness and
stinging haze in the
thick air of the
large hall

Smoke burns
the few unglazed eyes like mine

Clock Hands

... creep toward two a.m. and final
makeout lineups are chosen:
who will take whom home, after drinking
and touching on the hard plastic
back seats of family station wagons

(The folks are at home having watched The Fight,
The Sing-Along Show, The Western, The Comedy, The
Personality-Studded Image Show—having gotten
another beer out of the icebox during the commer-
cials and the news—and now watching The Station
Sign-Off)

The Band

... slurps into The Last Dance which is
the theme song of the band and so familiar
that there is little struggle between
drum and piano—they concur in playing
too slow ...

Steamy air as
pairs touch overextended chests
and itchy groins and
shuffle heavy feet on
brown, soft hardwood floor

Everybody flocking for
the door, streaming past
the empty ticket booth:
seeing nothing through glazed misty eyes
arms draped over and around one another
teeth gleaming yellow
laughs cracking out of open throats
lips parting to admit soon-to-be-lit cigarettes

Soon . . . soon . . .

(continued on the next page)

Foaming down the steps outside
the door and pouring into
the cars in the dark parking lot
Soon . . . soon . . .
My eyes hurt as
I watch them go out,
then skip after them with
my smile and laugh and already-lit cigarette
But unglazed eyes please
remember my unglazed eyes,
hurting from the smoke . . .

poem

D. Pevear

Here I plant myself against the leaves
And the black rock; and the old flock.
Crying in the fields,
Storm upon the hilly sidebeams;
The daisy and the corn,
To reap the river's grass.

Crackle of his wing, the dusky hawk
Tired in his flying; and his dying
Spreads along these years:
Iron plows the earthen-dying,
The comets and the planets,
The silken seeds of death.

Here I plant myself and see them all
In the blue light; and the old fright,
Rolling in the meadows,
Drums against the earthen-crying:
The milkweed and the thistle,
To seek the lover's scorn.

the life

Robert H. Clark

The story that follows is not a story, really: it is the summation of a life; it is everything that really happened in that life. It is, in short, the biography of a man, written without references and without embellishments from the unreal world of the hoped for and the imagined.

A cloud dropped into the valley. It was a cumulus cloud, not a big one certainly, but large enough to be identified as a cumulus, and it didn't touch the ground at any place. In fact, it really wasn't in the valley but above it. Certainly it was above the hills around the valley, but from the hills you would have had to look down to see the bottom of the cloud and looking lower, you would have seen the hills across the valley.

The cloud was pink. Not a brilliant, backlit, pink-orange, but a solid pink. There were huge caverns in the writhing pink and sometimes the inside of these caverns was a shiny white against the natural pink.

A writhing, bulbous mass, the cloud seemed to be enclosed in a membrane keeping it from being feathery. Growing, it was alive; it grew by pulses; a shooting up of a column, rest, another higher column, rest, a final column reaching up, gaining momentum, booming upwards, slowing, the last sudden pulses upwards achingly white, then transparently pink as the setting sun caught up to it.

The bottom of the cloud was purple, then the red left and it was the darkest, duldest of blues, then gray as the color left. Now the bass began to dominate the silent music that accompanies all sunrises and sunsets. The high, clear sound of the choir diminished until only the thin fluorescent line of a contrail remained above the heavy gray cloud. The fire beside the camping trailer was only a bed of coals, and he put the heavy red and yellow steak on the wire grill.

It happens every summer. One Sunday morning you wake up and the sunlight is

coming lazily through the bamboo shades, children are yelling as they play, and a small airplane interrupts the bees in the plumbtree outside the window.

You get up, put on a clean, cool sharp pair of khaki pants, a light cotton shirt, and a pair of tennis shoes. Breakfast is a peanut butter sandwich and the milk left in a quart bottle.

Outside, the air is sensually warm and thick and heavy. There is no silence as birds and insects and dogs and children celebrate their season. Inside the garage it is cool and damp, suddenly smelling mechanical as you pour gasoline into the lawn mower. The lawnmower is heavy and rattly wheeled along the sidewalk toward the front lawn. Push the choke in; turn the engine over once, slowly; pull the choke out; pull hard on the starter rope; push the throttle all the way in. The engine on the mower idles a little roughly at first, but, as you pick up the garden hose and the engine warms up, it smooths out finally and waits, not caring whether or not it mows the lawn. You pull the throttle out, then the clutch, and the blades scissor madly.

The heavy grass rolls back onto your tennis shoes, the noise shuts out the summer sound, and you think about walking back in to that lake where the golden trout are, or you think about the new rifle you are building. Then the heavy odor of plum blossoms breaks through your thinking and you look up from behind the clattering machine, and the whole world is a gray and white plum tree with bees droning steadily and heavy, warm, cut grass rolling onto your tennis shoes.

The label had washed off the bottle so that it looked like a half gallon jug half full of gasoline. The water in the portable ice chest had one large chunk of ice still floating in it and the hand that dipped down to pick up the wine bottle tingled from the cold. The tokay, cold like this, lost most of its fruity

flavor and was raw in the mouth and down the throat, only turning warm and relaxing in the stomach.

The sun was warm and the wool jacket felt good off the back. The hat still felt heavy on the forehead although it was lying on the table with the water glass of wine. It was comfortable, relaxed in the canvas chair, not thinking, not thinking about not thinking because that would spoil it. Not to be hunting was pleasant, pleasant to be going to hunt in the evening, pleasant not to be carrying a bow, pleasant to be going to cook hash and eggs for lunch, pleasant being alone, pleasant seeing the red of the sun through closed eyes, pleasant to have the raw metal taste of the cold wine running down the throat.

He had been hunting up the timbered ridge, always expecting to see an elk but, so far, having no luck. The dark timber, with the big trees far apart that made it easy and silent to hunt, turned to jack pines and he moved very slowly towards the opening. From the edge of the jack pines he carefully searched the park with his glasses. Then he looked above the trees across the park, and studied the bowl-like opening surrounded by sheets of gray rock.

There were a few drifts from the winter

before still lying at the base of the rocks and the only vegetation seemed to be grass. There was probably a lake there and, if there was timber that he couldn't see, it would be an ideal place for elk, early in the season.

The sun had set and, before he left, he promised himself that he would come back next year. Then, slinging his rifle, he started back towards the truck. He moved faster now, trying to get out of the timber before dark.

The nose of the green Corvair left the asphalt as the driver began to fight it back onto the road again. Sliding sideways, it went down the gravelled bank and then, gravel splashing in a roar, he, sitting in the right front seat, realized they would hit the guard rail. He watched the gray, galvanized blade disappear into the door and he heard the sound of someone punching a beer can with an opener. Then it grated into his chest. His ribs broke, he felt the torn metal catching as it was forced through him, his heart was shoved aside, his left ribs shattered, and he was surprised that he didn't scream. He started to open the door with his right hand, but everything below the elbow was gone. He understood that it was in his chest and he looked down.

the shepherd's monument

Mary Clearman

I've piled up stones on the hill,
Round stones propped on each other.
You can see them against the sky
If the wind don't topple them over.

Stones that rasped my hands
In the cold, when I rocked the sheep
And bruised their flanks when they milled—
Now on shale and dead grass in a heap.

The gray-backed ewes run downhill.
I'll follow with the wind on my back,
Sore sides and the taste of vinegar,
And the stones left in my track.



*Woodcut
by Jay Rummel*

eggs for breakfast

Glenn H. Kinsley

Bill stumbled out of bed and dragged himself to the john. The baby's awakening grunts and turnings coalesced into regular foot-bangings, shouts and laughs.

Wonderful start, thought Bill, as he got down his razor and turned the hot water on. Goddam philosophy paper today. Damn. No lather again. Have to use soap. Rub a dub dub. Jesus, what a topic! *The Divine Process and the Consequent Nature of God*. Ahhh. Lay on that hot and searing lather McDuff. "Hey Carol!" he yelled, "What do you think of that for a topic, 'The Divine Process and the Consequent Nature of God'?" Bill knew that she had answered, but he couldn't make out what she had said. He turned off the water so he could hear better and shout again: "What do you think of my hairy paper topic?"

"What?"

Well, he thought, at least I can hear her. He went into the kitchen scratching his belly. "I said," he yelled in the door, "What do you thin- "

"Don't shout, for God's sakes. I couldn't hear you because the baby was yelling and the grease in the frying pan was popping and you ought to know better by now than yelling from - "

"I'm sorry!" Bill said as he stomped and started to turn around. "Just don't get pissed off about it."

She flipped the spatula down into the frying pan. It landed on top of an egg.

"Oh damn you! Damn yol to hell." She turned around, fury in her face and bits of egg yolk on her robe. "Bill Stevenson! You get the hell out of here before I throw this frying pan at you!"

Bill ducked back into the baby's room as he chucked to himself. The baby sat up, looked at her lathered daddy and laughed and laughed and tickled herself and laughed some more. Wonder what's she's laughing at? Bill pondered for a second, and then, remembering his face, laughed with her. Nina stopped laughing and looked closely at Bill. Bill laughed even harder. Typical, he thought. Typical of the whole damn race. Poor Carol. She had every right to be mad, but it was so damn funny. Just perfect. Groucho Marx couldn't do it better. The epitome of humanity. Guess I'd better smooth things over.

Bill stuck his head back into the kitchen. "Hey sweetie? You're not angry are you?" She scowled at the frying pan. Dammit, he thought, those were the wrong words again. - Hey, what the hell - "God damn! How long are you going to cook those poor wounded eggs?" Carol's face tightened. Damn! I did it again. Jesus Stevenson, you're so damn wise, so smart.

"Really sweetie, I wasn't laughing at you. I was really laughing at myself. When you got mad and flipped that thing down and the eggs broke and splashed all over, well, it was so typical of the way I'm always doing things, you know, standing on my rights and getting myself splashed with egg yolk or bird shit or some damn thing - So you see, I had to laugh. You were myself made ridiculous." Oh no! There I go again!

Carol began tapping the spatula against the pan.

"Hey look sweetie, I mean you looked absurd, I mean, - Oh shit! I don't blame you at all. I'd be pissed too. And this whole speech.

It's just too damn typical. It's all pulling into tighter knots. Oh hell! I wish I could talk myself out of a hole instead of into it. I'll go shave."

Breakfast time! Carol set down his plate of rubber cooked eggs. One egg didn't have any yolk, just a shallow yellow disk and a few streaks of hard yellow across the white. Poetic justice, Bill thought. I'll just keep quiet and then I won't make her mad. The egg was worse than rubber. The bottom was leather. Bill reached for the knife and then pulled his hand back. No. She might take that as a comment or something. I've got to cut this egg with my fork. Bill pushed harder against the fork. The egg slid around the plate. Greasy plates too, thought Bill. He tried a see-saw motion. He was concentrating his whole effort on the egg. It was an engineering problem. How to cut diamonds with butter. A sudden twist pulled some a little apart. Ah. I've

got a crack going. The noise of the plate's rocking made him aware of the silence at the table. Bill looked up. Carol was pout-lipped, staring at him. Bill smiled weakly, nodded towards his fork, and then leaned his shoulder into a fork twist towards him.

Ugh. - Oh Shit! Too much.

Bill leaned back in his chair and shook his head sadly. He looked at Carol who was staring dumbly at the grease trail from the plate to the edge of the table. He looked at the baby. She was leaning over in her chair and peering intently at the egg on the floor. Then he looked down at the egg. It lay face down where it fell. The baby sat up in her chair, wide-eyed with confusion.

"Egg on floor," she said, looking from one parent to the other. She pointed to the floor. "Daddy's egg on floor." She looked at Carol. "Bad Daddy." She nodded her head slowly and with decision. "Egg on floor. Daddy bad."

quinte brigada

Robert Athearn

That famous photograph
of a man broken by a bullet—
death caught in the act
on a Spanish hillside.

Did he know the instant that he fell
as the glory faded from his eyes
twisted by the whine of an unknown gun?
And did the others know?

They died with the "International" in their teeth,
their singing mouths shattered
by the axe of an old evil,
their faces lashed by the sticks.

Did they know?
as their brains spattered on the olive trees
that they were probably among the last
to die for any reason at all?

the angels

Robert Athearn

There was an immense stillness, and all the world was empty and blue as only a late winter's afternoon can be empty and blue, when the smoke of chimneys winds straight up into the sky and the sunset is a pale orange flame and the sky in the east is as blue as a virgin's shroud. The little boy was running in circles, holding out his arms like an airplane, leaning to the inside as he ran thumping in the snow; and his eyes were solemn as a cat's.

(—Wheeeee. Wheeeeeee. Rrrrrrrrr.)

He ran and ran. The pines in the west were stark silhouettes on the sunset. And he ran in circles, laughing and red-cheeked, a slight dribble of crystal snot running out of his nose, and his little fat-clad legs jumping like rabbits. He was all over caked snow and his mittens were gone, lost in the still of the bright afternoon, and his light fluffy hair lay and blew like feathers in the wind of his passing on his pale forehead below his knitted cap.

(—Wheeeee. Rrrrrr.)

There was a dark little bright-eyed wintering bird that lived in the crooked apple tree where the boy was playing, and she flew in singing circles and chirped minutely, tinkling in the bright air. Then she set down with a flutter on the bird feeder hanging from the tree and rapidly jerking her close-feathered head back and forth, up and down, as only a bird can do, she ate of the grain in the shallow tin pan. She was a very happy bird, and she sang bright and loud in the tinselled winter, tasting the richness and fat of the grain. And then she flew away again, in a great high slicing circle above the tree, higher and higher, and then back down again. She landed, with a quick swoop and a brilliant movement of wings, on a lump of suet, and she jerked and twitched her little bird body, and pecked the suet, twittered and sang.

The boy came in for a landing. He was all out of breath and very dizzy. He stood, still as a cross, panting, letting his dizziness go

away and watching the bird eat, and then he talked to his little bird.

—Tweet? Tweet? Twit-tweet?

She flew up and landed in the tree, and pecked at an old apple dried on a branch. The little boy stood for a while, disappointed, and then started running in circles again, round and round. It was getting dark and the lights of the house were beginning to be bright and orange on the white and piney landscape. The pines were very black and the snow was blue and bright like smooth water. The cat came up and the boy stopped and threw a snowball at it, and it stalked away with a jungle slouch and a ripple of smooth-furred muscle, winking at him, and stood under a little solemn bush watching with its bright narrow eyes.

The little bird dropped like a leaf and pecked at the ground, throwing snow in the air in little crystal showers. She flopped and fluttered and sang, cleaning herself, making little wing marks in the snow. And the boy laughed when he saw what the bird was doing, and he came in for a landing, chuckling and licking at his nose with his pink tongue. He blew his nose on his sleeve, and sat down in the snow, and lay back luxuriously spreading his arms and legs. The snow felt warm and good. He opened and shut his legs and waved his arms to make an angel sign on the snow, and then he lay back, feeling the cold wet on his ankles and inside the back of his neck, looking up at the first winking star. He waved his arms again, slowly, ploughing up little patterns of snow, feeling tired and cozy as a fire-side cat on the cold snow under the brittle twinkling sky.

He got up, to say good-bye to the bird before he went back to the house.

—Tweet? Twit-tweet?

He saw it then. The little bird lying broken and tiny in the snow, her feathers ruffled and torn, her feet and wings outstretched and her dead eyes like jewels, her crushed and hurt body a little angel mark on the white snow. The boy ran up, feeling the tug of a

small sadness at his stomach, and looked down at the dead bird, and saw the little drops of blood like dark wild garnets in the snow, and he turned, feeling sick and dizzy, the lump of pity in his throat dissolving into terror, and he ran screaming down to the

warm house. It was dark by then and the moon was beginning to lap at the edges of the cold and distant pines. The cat unfolded and followed the boy toward the house, at his own smooth speed, leaving the landscape empty, cold, and dead.

portrait of the artist as a young pedant

Alan Naslund

PROLOGUE TO THE TALE

*They are thronging, mother! thronging,
To a thousand fields of fame;
Let me go—'tis wrong and wronging
God and thee to crush this longing;
On the muster-roll of glory,
On the field of battle gory,
I must consecrate my name.*

Father David J. Ryan, C.S.A.

Is it possible in our American culture or any culture so stifling and so mundane for the free human spirit to long endure? This is a compelling question of our troubled and turbulent times¹ and the entire significant impact of this question's import might best be

¹Note. Our vast country has long been engaged with the question of itself as the learned author* of these lines: ". . . the people of a nation must co-operate with a patriotism that shall emulate the spirit of the hive of bees so admirably interpreted by Maeterlinck.

Nevertheless, we must remember that, while we may with advantage imitate the bee in this respect, the bee does not progress. There has been no enlightenment in bee-life for a hundred thousand years, for the very reason that the bees are dominated by that beautiful spirit of the hive.

We owe our ability to progress and to become

appraised by an objectively pointed study of one of our former American citizens.

The man I speak of is Roger Randolph,² former hack-writer³ and mushroom-raiser—in short—mainstay of our society. I might even say bulwark of the main of our society, since he was representative of that cross-

more and more highly intelligent and enlightened, to the existence of that instability and heterogeneity which stimulate and develop us by causing us to strive for stability and homogeneity," indicates.

*Maxim, Hudson, *Defenseless America*, (New York: Hearst's International Library Co., 1915), p. xviii.

²A thinly disguised parody of *The Laughing Philosophy of Rod Roger Randwell Ridgeworth Jr.**

*(An unfinished work of the author of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Pedant.*)

³Not to be confused with "hack-rider."

sectionally contemporarily typical American suburban, of the usual literary appellation⁴ of *John Q. Public*.

The author must admit, that while he says "suburban," he does not intend to limit his subject too closely. While sometimes Randolph (or Roger) lived in the suburbs, he lived on the littorals of some of the most naturally repugnant towns and cities as well. Oftentimes he chanced to live on an island; but just as often he inhabited the woods. Sometimes by a lake he made his abode; othertimes he dwelt in DARKNESS near the sea or on a mountaintop. As our tale begins, however, dear reader, Roger took his board and room in a split level home (it had upstairs on a level separate from the downstairs), let to him by a mysterious Japanese fellow who had an unusual proclivity for sculpturing giants. But the Japanese fellow died of congested halitosis before our tale begins, dear reader, which is right here. ✎ (the outhor, his mark)

CHAPTER ONE

*"(Oh youth, oh youth, on Bacchus spent
In days and nights unlike Lent)"*

Skoftstad

Roger Randolph was a fine example of the well rounded hack-writer and/or mushroom-raiser. He was not an ingenious⁵ fellow either. What he lacked in privacy he made up for in size, he always told himself. He came from a long line of phony writers of the macaronic style. *C'est-a-dire*, he involved himself with several tongues at once in his proverbs and other concoctions,⁶ much as the famed

⁴Possibly an allusion to "The Garden."

⁵*I.e.*, he was not a rock-head. For the venerable Joseph P. Idding's² remarks on this subject, it is suggested that the reader read the following (*q.v.*)

"Climinite. — Chiefly potash-feldspar, sanidine, prominent as phenocrysts, with those of lime-soda-feldspar, andesine-labradorite; also augite with some biotite; texture of groundless trachytic." (Of a yellow color.)³

²Iddings, Joseph P., *Igneous Rocks*. (New York, 1909), v.1, p. 371)

³Author's note in clarification of the text.

⁶It is but fair to remark, concerning the young artist's work, that his response to queries pertinent to his ill-fated anti-novel with aplomb befitting his situation. "Don't be absurd. It's only a tale," was his famed reply. It has been impossible to gauge his activity or his progress since that moment so long ago in the past because of its extremely historic nature. That of course is a task for

red-skin of early American origin predicted in his remark, "*uglaniosa hetrick gomme logitas!*"⁷ (damned forked-tongue whites). So we can see that Roger was not only a natural function of his locale, but as a result of his environmental background *to boot*.⁸

Perhaps the most salient¹⁰ feature of Roger's type is that he was forordained and pre-predicted by those wise and astute and haughty red-skins. (As mentioned above, to be seen below.) For often, and when not writing, we find Roger hard at work at his hobby, to wit, cultivation of mushrooms in his basement. (The mushroom sprout, contrary to the proverbial Brussels Sprout,¹¹ deriving its derivation from The Brussels Worldly Fair, does not avail itself to readily acceptable home uses. Indeed we might say that the mushroom sprout is more or less conducive to an upholdance of the long-held tenants avouched and claimed in the field of home-cookery, *i.e.*, that home cookery is best practiced in the home and betterest yet in the domestic home, *i.e.*, American Family Home. (So might it also be said of the cabbage in its various kinds and species incidentally.)¹²

In all respects, however, Roger was the same as his father. He was a fine lad, a good scholar, well brought up, insightful, ready and cheerful in helping others. His father had a mole on his chin. Roger had a mole¹³ on his chin. His father took to wife a fine American wholesome, this is, wife; Roger took to wife a fine American wholesome.¹⁴ Roger's father was buried in a grave with his face to the sky, notwithstanding several yards of dirt; Roger was buried in a grave, face to the sky, etcetera to the sky, etcetera.

the historians if I am correct, and so I shall, dear reader, pursue it no further.

⁷Suggesting, perhaps, a knowledge of Petrarch prior to the Columbus invasion; or, more logically, no significant knowledge as we know it today at all.

⁸Cf. Shakespeare's "It boots it sir," etc.

⁹*Op. cit.*

¹⁰A very popular word, supposed to mean "having the ability to sail in the wind—seaworthy."

¹¹*Brassica alercea gemmifera*, and not to be confused with Brussels carpet or Brussels lace, both of which spring from a different (and we may say here for the sake of the tale) and more formidable god.

¹²The reader might profit by comparing Melville, *Moby Dick*: "The Whiteness of the Whale," with this portion of the tale.

¹³For further insights into the meaning of this chapter, the reader is advised to read Nat Hawthorne's *The Birthmark*.

¹⁴In Indiana and other states: "wife."

CHAPTER TWO

"Up with my tent: here will I lie to-night,
But where, to-morrow?—Well, all's one
for that."

J. F. Cooper, citing W. Shakespeare.

On a day when our subject was boiling mushrooms in his dark basement he dropped the lid of his boiling apparatus on his foot and an idea came unto him. Roger felt that he was becoming buried in statistics. He detested it; decided to throw off the old coverlet—strike out into new and heretofore undiscovered and unmapped and uncharted and unknown paths. He murmured with poignant regret and a concurrence of realising ecstasy, "I will be an artist of the most expressive ilk. I will release my emotions through unexplored channels and ducts.¹⁵ No, I will stop at nothing!" All this to get his desire. With a dramatic effort he leaped from the old bed of deceit and lethargy. He struck his blow at experience—true experience of the undeluded, undeleted, undulating, unromantic, disillusioned, genuinely frank and real sort (in the genuinely undeluded experientialcical sense.)¹⁶

Hurling his yet unclassified mushroom sprouts to the floor, he swept across the floor of his dreary and stiflingly prosaic cellar. Laying aside the old broom, he fairly danced up the dark and dusty stairs. Shutting off his phonograph, he vacuumed across the thick-carpeted-floor and grasped his Weatherby hat firmly in hand. "No, no, no," something¹⁷ screamed inside his torn and battered soul, "I will never again grab a Weatherby hat in hand." Clenching his teeth with willful and newfound perseverance, he let go the hat.

"Plop."

It fell to the floor rapidly, spinningly, whirling in the morning sunlight like the

sloughed-off skin of a fierce snake.¹⁸ Indeed, at that moment Roger's determination might be said to have transcended that spirit of a fierce snake, as, indeed, it did. In a moment of violent reflection, Roger surveyed his dwelling. Stifling indeed. A sofa, near a large, clear window. "The sofa stuffed with textile fragments of some clean and clicking, damnably efficient machine," he thought.¹⁹ "Ugh." A carpet across the floor.²⁰ A carpet made of the gentle wool adulterated by neat clean fibres of an artificial sort called "Ugh"²¹ (he slipped unconsciously into the macaronic use of expletives) "nylon!" Several chairs of wood, fashioned for dreary sitting. "Despicable," he returned to English. Numerous magazines scattered about. Paper ones! Paper magazines. "Humph! Paper magazines," he thought. "Well, good-by to you, paper magazines, poor unwitting belch of Linotype. Poor bastard of ravished virgin forests. Good-by, good-by. I'll never again deign to be confoundedly confined by your commonness again. This I swear by the new spirit of genuinity in livingness," he swore.

With the foregoing, his spirit became more at ease. His broiling torrent, like that of the *precieux*-cooking machine (with which he had such a doleful experience in his mushroom days) once the stop had blown, was now quiet and serene—"Nay, even business-like," he thought to himself, scratching the mole he had inherited from his father.

At such a moment of decision, his mind became lax, receptive, clean and brisk in nature—calm and sucking at reality and life like a placid octopus tendril, living in the extreme of realness. "I will," said he in a whisper that grew like an elm or a cow to a shout, "now resolve to remove this trenchcoat, these trousers, this silly hangman's tie, this shirt,—indeed, all my clothes and social apparel that are monotonous. And I shall step forth into the day." Fresh as the day he was

¹⁵Cf. "Zylum up and Phloem down," a popular proverb, whose significance has been lost.

¹⁶Whitman, in *Branches of Weeds, Trunks of Trees, Feathers of Birds, Leaves of Grass*, etc., has something to say of this matter.*

¹⁷"(sùm'thing) *n.* 1. Some thing undetermined, or not definitely understood or remembered. 2. Some thing definite but not specified;—opposed to *nothing*; as *something* to live for. 3. A person of consequence; a somebody.—*adv.* *Colloq.* In some degree; somewhat." *Websters New Collegiate Dictionary*, ed. J. P. Bethel, (New York, 1956), p. 806.

¹⁸The original footnote was written in Greek. Because of technical difficulties, we are unable to reprint it.

¹⁹Pronounced (thôt)

²⁰Cf. Naslund, "Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Pedant," *Venture*, (Spring, 1963) footnote 20, p. —.

²¹Not an exclamation of satisfaction or joy among the Indians as is "toke-toke."

* (The first three are representative of the little-known lost works of that author.)

born, he did so. Strode right out into the streets of time and has been heard from ever since.

EPILOGUE TO THE TALE

*"Circumstantial evidence can be very strong
as when you find a trout in the milk."
H. D. Thoreau*

I have chosen, dear, reader, to entitle this tale THE PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG PEDANT for several reasons. One is that I hoped to evoke in you, yourself, a remembrance of certain tales past and another is that I myself might suggest my indebtedness to the whole entirety of written literature that has preceded before me and my time. By portrait I mean to suggest that this tale is just that: a portrait—an intense caricature of all that I deem important in the subject that I wanted to portray, a young artist, in his struggle with reality, his profoundly deep development from a lesser being to a greater. In a sense, this work could have been called METAMORPHOSIS since it deals with the change of a person's character from one kind of character to another. I chose, how-

ever to think of the whole work as a kind of unit. A kind of picture of the character I wanted to analyse into a reasonable synthesis of a fictional character. This does not mean that I intended to portray reality, however, and there will be no questions please on that account. (I do assure you that I would evade them anyway.) Also the characters herein portrayed have no relation to anyone living or dead, as is proper to this kind of fiction. If they did, then we might rightly protest that the tale was not fiction and would therefore fall outside the real of the fictional—suspensives, correlatives and all—and this is not my intention at all.

My intention is by a kind of categorical imperative to create something akin to the actual as it represents the unreal and conversely. Nor do I mean to compose here any kind of honorific definition of my intention or my intention's final consummation. Indeed not, in fact, quite the contrary.

So I would hope that you would be the best of readers and take this work for what it reveals to you as intended. That is, dear reader, let the work happen to you. Unawares if possible. Carry no preconceptions to this little effort of mine. It brings its own.

Very truly yours,
The Author

II

Morrison Brownleaf

John Dawsworth Pinkle
built a boat
and sailed west
to a place called Eden

and there
it was life among the fig leaves
for a time
and it was love among the fig leaves
for a time
for a very very short time

for this Eden was a very very little place

and he realized
that absolutely no one
could want to live there
forever

they

Allen Toftely

He felt they had not had him when he killed the twelve Germans in the cellar with the short-handled shovel. He remembered hitting them; he remembered hitting them many times with all the strength he had, and he felt certain, absolutely certain, they had not had him then. He believed they did not have him at Belleau Wood either, or in Paris, when they gave him the medal, and made him a sergeant. He could not remember when they had him first, but he knew they had him now, and that he could not escape them. He might have been able to escape them years before, in his youth, but he had not known about the trap then. He had not seen the trap then, he had not cared enough to look, and now he knew it was too late and that they had him.

Two of them, dressed in white, walked down the sun-porch to his chair. They stopped and looked down on him.

"How long's this one been in the sun?"

"I don't know. I suppose just long enough for a sun stroke or worse. I can't see why we even bother with any as bad as this one. We dress 'em, we feed 'em, we baby 'em all day long, and at night we tuck 'em into bed and what for? So we can do the same damned things the next day."

"Well, let's put this one in the reading room. It's empty and he seems to like to be alone."

He thought about all the times he had asked them to call him "Vinicheo, Sergeant Major Vinicheo, if you please," but they never called him by his name. They always called him "this one," or "that one"—never by his name, Vinicheo or even Sergeant Major.

They picked him up, and carried him down the hallway to the reading room, and set him in a brown-leather chair. He felt he wanted a glass of bourbon then, a very tall glass of bourbon that he could sip on all afternoon

and forget the pain in his hip. They never gave him any liquor to drink, but this day he felt if he was very polite and did not ask for too much, they would give him what he wanted.

"Pardon me, pardon me sir, but I was wondering if I could have a glass of bourbon, a very small glass to sip on, perhaps only a teaspoonful. A teaspoon would be quite enough." enough."

They acted as though they had not heard him, and they walked from the room, and left him alone.

Vinicheo thought of the days in Haiti where there had been more than enough to drink. He felt he had died a little in Haiti. He felt he had died a little every place he had ever been with the Marines, except Guadalcanal. On Guadalcanal, he had died more than he had ever died before, and he had died very fast, and they had found out about his dying and knew then that he was no longer of any use. They said he had died enough for them, and that he could live for awhile. They said he could go any place he wanted, and do anything he pleased. He went back to Chicago and lived with Edith and with several other women who were more than happy to share his pension check. He drank a lot of bourbon, and did many things he wanted to do for a long time, but he was not happy. He had already died too much for the women, for the bourbon, and for happiness. He fell and broke his hip while trying to climb into a bus in downtown Chicago, and because he had no relatives left and there was no one who would take care of him, they took him to the veterans' home near Evanston. They get you, thought Vinicheo, but you never know they have you until you have been to all the places they order you to go. They order you into places where you either were killed or died



Jay Rummel



Herb Neitzel



Jay Rummel

a little, and they keep ordering you into those places until you have died too much to be of any use to anyone. They let you live, but only to die for them. You can escape them only if they have not yet got you, and it is very hard to know exactly when they haven't got you. They never tell you You never know until it is too late.

The two dressed in white entered the reading room.

"Of all days for an inspection. A heart attack and now this."

"Let's give this one a magazine. He won't read it, but the General will never know that."

"Look at 'em, look at 'em. Why do we even bother. I bet he doesn't even know his name. He can't walk, I know he can't read, and he can't remember anything. What good is it?"

"Should we leave him here?"

"What difference does it make?"

They left the room, and walked rapidly down the hall.

Vinicheo looked at the magazine. He opened the cover and read a few lines from an advertisement, and he understood what he read. He pushed the magazine from his lap and gazed out a window near his chair. He wanted some bourbon to sip on, he wanted a whole bottle of bourbon to stop the pain in his hip and perhaps help him remember the name of the woman he had lived with in China. He remembered he had died a little in China, but he was certain, absolutely certain they had not had him then.

IV

Jerie Bailey

Happiness steals on my sense . . .

Fleeting . . .

Like dusk,

Whose golden haze

Enshrouds my city,

And blurs the slums

'Til I see them no more

For the dark.

the harvest

by John A. Porter

The sun beat down on row after row of ripe, brown wheat, clear up to a man's shoulder and as far across the prairie as you could see. Ripe wheat ready to burst. Hot sun and no wind. Heat rising from the fields in great transparent waves.

Andy Roth, tired and covered with sweat, stood in the lone room of his and Pap's shack. He took a dipper off the nail over the stove and dipped into the bucket by the door. He drank hungrily, slopping water over his face and chest. Pap sat in one of the two chairs, propped against the table. He watched Andy drain the dipper and stoop down for more.

"Water's gotta last 'til tonight, boy," he said.

"Who gives a damn?" spat Andy. "You don't do nothin' around here but get water and sit in that goddamn chair all day and give orders. Who gives a damn?"

"That ain't no way to talk to me, Andy. I know you been working hard, but that ain't no way to talk. I do all I can. I'm not too well, you know. Maybe, after it cools off some, I'll feel better. You know I want to help."

"Help . . . help, hell! With what? This hunk of dry dirt that won't even grow weeds? You know what we got, Pap? We got just what we paid for — a goddamn dirt farm. That's all that's on it now, and that's all's ever gonna be on it. That dirt and this shack."

Andy jerked around, jabbed the dipper into the bucket and poured it over his matted black hair. Tossing the dipper into the bucket, he stumbled back into the blazing afternoon sun. He squinted out across the field of burnt grass and gopher holes. The tool shed, made of scrap tin sheets, scrap lumber, and cardboard, stood in the center of the yard. Heat shimmered off the roof, and the glare made Andy squint even more. A small chicken coop, surrounded by a rusty wire fence, was off to the left of the shed. Between the two sat an old pickup truck.

Andy walked to the shed and snatched up the shovel and pick leaning against the wall. He dropped them and hunkered down in the small spot of shade under the roof, pulling some tobacco and papers from his faded denim shirt. "And this is why we left," he said. "This God-forsaken strip of dirt is why we left." He tore off a paper, creased it and shook the tobacco into the crease. Rolling and licking it all in one motion, he stuck it in his mouth and fumbled for a match. He brought out two brown sticks with flakes of red stuck to them, but useless and damp. "Goddamn it all to hell," he muttered, and flipped the unlit cigarette into the dirt. He picked up the tools and threw them into the shed. Andy took the key out of the corner of his back pocket and walked towards the pickup.

Wykerman, North Dakota, has one cafe, two bars, a general store and gas station, and a farm implement store.

Wilson's Cafe is wedged in between the town's two bars, Happy Inn, and Pete's. The cafe does a big business early Sunday morning-after the poker chips have been raked in and the liquor's pretty well gone. So, it specializes mostly in strong black coffee and ham 'n' eggs. The rest of the week things are pretty dead, except for the few old men sitting on the steps, and the people that manage to wander off the main road and stop to ask directions, and maybe buy an ice cream cone or cup of coffee. The cafe is something new in Wykerman. Before the Wilson family took it over, the building was used for public meetings, storing grain and feed, and a blacksmith shop. Now there's a traveling blacksmith and most of the meetings are held in the Happy Inn. There's no need to worry about storing grain with an elevator only thirty miles away.

Mary Ellen Wilson stood with her back against the counter, a coffee cup in one hand and a pot of black coffee in the other. Why would anyone want hot coffee on a day like

this? she thought. She finished pouring, sat the pot down, and took a quick swipe at her forehead with her free hand. Turning, she walked to the end of the counter and set the cup in front of Andy Roth.

"Yes, Mary Ellen, I quit . . . it's too d . . ." he faltered, ". . . too hot to work in the fields."

"Yes, it certainly is. But I can't see why you would want to drink hot coffee today."

Andy thought, Drink hot coffee! I've drunk every goddamn drink that's supposed to be cold and this coffee's the coldest thing I've had. He didn't answer, looking up instead at the cool blue eyes gazing at him. Pretty, he thought. Nice looking. Kind of skinny. Not much for chest and hips, but cute anyway. Oh, hell, what does it matter? I can't touch her. He looked at the old Coca-Cola clock over the pie shelf. Three-thirty. "Not bad," he muttered. "Made it in twenty minutes. The old clunk still moves right along. About the only thing that does work."

"What," said Mary Ellen, raising her eyebrows.

"Oh, oh, nothing, Mary Ellen," said Andy. "I was just figuring out how long it took to get to town from the farm." And wondering, what did she hear me say? I got to quit mumbling. It could get me a peck of trouble.

"How is your father?" asked Mary Ellen.

"The same."

"Well, is he getting any better? I saw Doctor Simms yesterday, and he said that as soon as it cools off he would be out to check up on him."

"No, Mary Ellen, he hasn't got any better or worse. He just sits and does nothing. I tell him if he'd just do something besides sit, that he'd feel a lot better, but he won't move."

"Well . . . maybe after it cools off." She looked directly at Andy, her eyes flitting over the sweat-stained face and then past him to the screen door of the cafe.

"Hello, young lady," said a heavy-set, sun-burned man. "I'm Ed Landon, hiring foreman for the N-D Harvesting Company."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Landon?" asked Mary Ellen, moving from behind the counter.

"Well, Miss, our outfit is working through this section of the country and we're a little short-handed. Fact is, we need about twenty men as soon as possible. We have to be ready to go to work day after tomorrow."

"But that's Sunday," said Mary Ellen.

"That's right. We don't work by any rules other than getting the job done . . . and done right. Anyway, what I wanted to know, would it be okay to put up a sign on your door here so's anyone interested in doing some good honest work could get in touch with me?"

"Yes, Mr. Landon, I don't think my father would mind. But where will you be?"

"Oh, I'll be in either one of the bars along side you here." He grinned and went out to tack up the sign.

Andy stared into his cup. He saw the tired, lean, sweat-smearred face staring back at him out of the murky liquid. Anything would be better than going back to that lousy shack, he thought. Anything . . . what the hell . . . he had the pickup . . . enough money to last him until his first paycheck . . . and a bundle of dirty clothes behind the seat of the pickup. And what about Pap? Who the hell cared! If Pap wouldn't help himself, why should he go back and wet-nurse him? Pap had done nothin' since Andy had freed him from that chain gang and taken him across a whole country . . . stealing food and money to make ends meet . . . and to end up with what? . . . and even when Andy was little, Pap hadn't been around much, always going to town and drinking away the money they had.

"Andy, what's wrong?" said Mary Ellen, looking at his tightly clenched fists on the counter.

Andy relaxed and hunched his shoulders. "Just thinking about maybe signing up with that harvest company. Sure could use the money."

"What about the farm . . . and your father?"

"Pap can manage for hisself for a while. There's enough food out there for a week or so and . . . well, you know what the ground's like out there." And thinking, what difference does it make to you? You're pretty goddamn nosey, if you ask me . . . but you sure have got a nice little body. Yes sir, Mary Ellen Wilson, I do believe you're all right.

The night was very hot and very dry and very still. And the crickets made the most of it, seeming to screech "hot and dry, hot and dry."

It was Saturday night, and, from her window, Mary Ellen could hear the low noise coming from the two bars down the street.

They'll all be there, she thought, having one last fling before going off to work tomorrow. The cafe will be busy in the morning. She thought of Andy, a warm knot forming in her belly. Strange . . . he's certainly different anyway . . . yes, he's different from everyone else and they know it, and so does he . . . but it doesn't seem to bother him too much. I'm glad it doesn't, because it certainly doesn't bother me.

Andy sat at a small table in the Happy Inn. He hadn't gone home last night, nor today. He preferred to drive out along the small creek that ran just outside of town, and sleep in the truck. He would have liked to sleep out in the tall grass next to the creek if the mosquitoes hadn't been so bad. Tonight he'd decided to stay in the bar until it closed. He sipped at the warm beer which had been in front of him for nearly an hour. The bar was jammed with townspeople, ranchers, farm hands, and dirt farmers like himself. Someone pushed a dime into the old juke box sitting in the corner of the room. Hank Thompson came on with a wailing rendition of the "Folsom Prison Blues." Andy knew the words by heart. It was one of Pap's favorites, and when he used to get drunk he would holler it at the top of his lungs on his way home — "' hear the train a'comin' . . . it's comin' round the bend . . . and I ain't seen the sun shine, since . . . I don't know when!" Well, he thought, the old man has gotten his fill of sunshine by now.

Ed Landon, the boss for N-D Harvesting, called out for a free round for everyone. He was having a hell of a good time, and a winning streak a mile long at the poker table in the center of the room. Glasses clinked, caps popped, and feet shuffled up to the bar, as men moved to take advantage of that rare free drink. Andy moved, too. He figured there would be one for him, since Mr. Landon hadn't said otherwise. It was the first drink anyone had ever bought him. He moved back to his table in the corner. He liked it best this way. From here he could watch people and sit and think, not bothered with having to talk to someone, or joke, or maybe get forced into a fight. This was fine with him. He felt at ease . . . or almost at ease.

Sunday morning came early — too early for those spending most of the night in the bars. It was barely light as Mr. Wilson got out of

his car, unlocked the door to the cafe, and ran up the shade. His wife bustled past him into the small kitchen, and began banging pans around and slamming cupboard doors as she got breakfast ready for the morning . . . "ham 'n' eggs, toast and coffee - 95 cents" read the sign over the counter. And that's just what it was. There was no more, no less. No extras or fancy trimmings. You took what you got and liked it.

Mary Ellen came in, still yawning and rubbing the sleep from her eyes. The Coca-Cola clock shone dimly in the semi-darkness. Four-thirty. She put the coffee pot on the burner and took a pitcher of water from the ice box, filling the pot to the brown ring stained into the metal. She added what she considered the right amount of coffee, which her father said, "could grow hair on a billiard ball if taken straight." She smiled, thinking of the men as they drank their coffee on Sunday morning, their eyes slowly opening like a turtle's as the steaming black liquid burned away the cobwebs cluttering their brains. And what would Andy be like this morning? Will he be like the rest? She didn't know. He probably stayed with the rest of them, she thought. I doubt if he'll be in as bad shape though.

It was getting lighter now as the red sun burned back into view across the plain. A clear sky. Nothing to hide the glare or keep the heat from the land. In the distance a rooster crowed, an engine coughed into life, and a door slammed. Andy rolled over in the grass and dipped his hand into the cool water. He ducked his head, getting his shirt collar wet, and came up sputtering, "Goddamn mosquitoes. Must have a thousand bites." He looked for the pickup and saw it parked along the dirt road about a hundred yards away. "Had a few more than I planned on." He shook his head, a dull pain eased its way into his eyes. He got up stiffly, picking up the denim jacket he'd used for a pillow, and walked to the truck.

He drove slowly back to town and parked in front of the cafe. A few men were already eating breakfast.

Andy picked a stool by the door, nodding at one of the men who had looked up. Mary Ellen came in from the kitchen carrying a plate of steaming ham 'n' eggs and four slices

of buttered toast. She set it in front of Andy, and turned to pour him some coffee.

"That was sure fast, Mary Ellen," Andy said.

"Fastest service in town, Andy," smiled Mary Ellen. "Are you going out with Mr. Landon today?" she asked.

"Yes, but I don't know where to meet him," he said.

"Oh, he wrote on the sign on the door that all those planning on working should meet out in front at six-thirty. I guess he's going to bring some trucks to take you out."

"Thanks, Mary Ellen. You don't happen to know where we're going to start?"

"Some of the men were talking about the Banner Ranch, but I'm not sure," she said.

The Banner Ranch, thought Andy. Ten thousand acres of the thickest wheat he'd ever seen. Now, there was a ranch. The land had been good to Mr. Banner. Some folks could make something out of the land . . . but, then, they'd all had a head start, and a damned big advantage.

"Will you be coming in nights?" asked Mary Ellen.

Whoa there, thought Andy. What's she asking? He answered, "Yes, I guess so, if we stay on at Banner's for a while."

"Good, you'll be coming in here to eat then." She said it low enough so that no one but Andy heard.

"Yes, I guess I'll be eating in here," he said. Andy looked at Mary Ellen. He smiled. It was the first time he'd smiled since coming to Wykerman.

The trucks came at six-thirty, and Mr. Landon stood on the cab of one marked N-D Harvesting Co., Bismarck, North Dakota, and read off the work roster. As each man heard his name called, he answered, "Here!" and climbed into one of the trucks.

Andy Roth climbed into the second truck and sat down in back near a window. He pulled out his papers and tobacco, rolled a cigarette, and lit it, blowing the smoke in a thin stream out the window. Mary Ellen smiled and waved from the cafe window. Andy smiled, but didn't wave, content on not pushing it . . . but just liking the feeling that there was something to look forward to now.

Andy was put on a grain truck with two other men. They loaded the truck and then hauled the train to the elevator along the

railroad track fifteen miles away. It was hard, hot work and there was never a break. A water bag was passed around every hour or so.

Andy sweated and strained, but with a purpose now. He would make a good ten dollars a day, enough to live on . . . save some too . . . and maybe . . . enough to start again.

The heat of the afternoon rolled out from the wheat field. It shimmered from the smoking reapers and trucks. It hung in the air with the dust. It was everywhere. It shone on the sweaty, red faces of the men; but it did not tire them. Instead it made them dig in, bend their backs and strain to earn their pay. For most of them this was their manna from heaven allowing them to live a little more comfortably for a few months.

At seven that evening the men shut off the machinery, and trudged over to the waiting trucks. The sun still glowed, but straight across the plain now, and into the red haze that covered the land. The trucks moved off through the field and stopped at the creek so that the men could wash up before going into town.

Andy pulled off his shirt and sank down on his knees. He plunged his dirty hands and arms deep into the cool water, following with his head and shoulders. The water swirled around him, carrying off the dust and grime that had accumulated in eleven hours under the baking sun. He came up, rubbing his face, and gave a little shiver. "Sure feels good," he said. The men along side him were busy scrubbing and didn't answer.

The trucks moved again. This time heading toward Wykerman.

Andy waited until the crowd of hungry workers had moved from the cafe into the bars before he went in. He had taken time to go into the washroom in back of the Happy Inn and shave, and change clothes. The new levis and denim shirt were wrinkled from being cramped under the pickup seat; but he felt good as he opened the screen door—real good. He let the door bang. Mary Ellen looked up from the table she was wiping.

"Hi, Andy," she said.

"Hi, Mary Ellen. What's for supper?"

"Well, we have a special tonight. Of course, if you want breakfast again . . ."

"No, I'll take the special, whatever it is," Andy smiled.

"Are you saying our breakfast isn't any good," said Mary Ellen with mock seriousness.

"Oh, no . . . no. I just meant I think I'd like the special. What is it?"

"Bacon, scrambled eggs, toast, and . . ."

"Coffee?" Andy finished.

"Right you are, and for exactly the same price. Okay?"

"Sounds good to me. I'm hungry enough to eat the plate and all."

Mary Ellen walked into the kitchen, giving her small hips a little twist as she went through the swinging door—knowing that Andy would be watching.

Andy felt the urge come slowly, moving from the pit of his stomach up into his chest. He sighed and cracked his knuckles one at a time. Won't hurt to ask, he thought. Goddamn it, why can't I just up and ask her? All she can say is no. Isn't anyone around to hear. I'll ask her if she wants to go for a ride. I know she'll go. She likes me. She can't be teasing. She treats me different . . . different, how? No . . . she likes me. That has to be it.

Mary Ellen set the bacon and eggs in front of Andy. "It's a nice night," she said. "Cooled off some."

"Sure has. Maybe we'll get some rain pretty soon," he said.

"I hope so." She poured his coffee. "Anyway, let's enjoy it while we can."

It was an opening, Andy knew. It had to be, or was he just hearing it wrong?

"There isn't much to do around here at night," he said.

"For me, no. But there's always the bars," she smiled.

"I don't like them," Andy said.

Mary Ellen took a magazine from under the counter. She leaned against the counter and opened it somewhere in the middle.

It has to be now, Andy decided. "Mary Ellen."

"Um, hum." She didn't look up.

"Would you like to go for a ride?"

The breeze was cool as they drove along the stream. Andy had waited outside for Mary Ellen. She had told her father that someone was giving her a ride home. Mr. Wilson had nodded and returned to the kitchen. She and Andy had explained nothing to each other. There was no need.

"My camping spot's just around the next

bend," Andy said. "Would you like to see it?"

"Yes."

"It's real nice. The grass is tall, and it's cool by the stream. The mosquitoes are kinda bad, though." He rambled on, talking about nothing and thinking of one thing. Andy parked the truck on the side of the road and helped Mary Ellen out. They sat on the bank, not talking, just looking into the water. A half moon was just rising across the plain. Mary Ellen turned to slap a mosquito on her bare arm, and saw Andy staring at her. She started to speak, but he broke in.

"I want you, Mary Ellen," he whispered.

They moved simultaneously, and there was all the heat and shock they knew would be there. Neither spoke as they lay back in the tall, cool grass.

Ed Landon drove slowly down the road. "Fishing isn't worth a damn," he muttered. "This creek must have been fished out long ago." He braked as his truck rounded a bend. Then he saw the pickup. "Guy might have been fishing. Guess I'll stop and see if he's had any luck." Ed got out and walked through the grass. He heard them first. Then, he could see them plainly in the grass by the creek. They weren't paying any attention to what was going on around them, so he decided to watch for a while. "This beats hell outa fishing any day," he grinned. The boy moved so that Ed could see the outline of his face. The girl sat up and her blond hair shone in the moonlight. "I'll be goddamned," he almost said out loud. "I'll be goddmaned!" And he snuck back to his truck.

The men in the Happy Inn took the news about the same. One man ran down the street to tell Mr. Wilson. By the time the pickup stopped across the street from Wilson's house, the whole town knew. And they were waiting . . .

"Mary Ellen, you get in here right now!" screamed Mrs. Wilson from the front porch.

"Roth, you dirty son of a bitch, I'm gonna kill you!" shouted her father, tearing across the yard.

It happened fast. Mary Ellen threw open the door and, without looking back, ran towards the house. Andy, the old feeling coming back, and knowing now what he had done and what would happen, pulled the door shut and jammed the truck in gear. He caromed down the road. As he left town, he saw head-

lights go on, and he knew it would not be long.

He pulled into the yard and ran, panting into the shack. One chair was left. What was left of the other lay scattered about the room. Andy ran out to the shed. "Pap! Pap!" No answer. He walked into the field and stumbled over a shovel. Pap lay a few feet away, partly hidden by the furrowed ground.

"Oh, God, no," moaned Andy. He bent down

and picked Pap up and stumbled toward the shack. He could see the headlights, and hear the sound of a truck being forced up the road. "Here they come. Here they come," he said to the limp form in his arms. He remembered what the sheriff had told Pap before he sent him to the chain gang.

"Ain't no place on God's green earth for Niggers."

schuhmacher

Cyrano de Bergerac

Thumbs and fingers,
leather of his hands,
shoeness of a hide,
the hope of creating
an image of his mind.

Deft needle stroke,
taut string tightly binding
soul to heart,
heart to pride,
pride to hands
that guide the feet on many paths
from the shadow of his shop.

At his last,
eyes sharply to the seam,
hammer singing with his heart,
his name printed carefully on a sole:
SCHUHMACHER



Lithograph by Dave Askevold

the chained frame

By Ron Engle

IT IS EARLY MORNING IN THE HOME OF HENRY AND MERTILE. ON THE WALL THERE IS A LARGE PICTURE FRAME REACHING TO THE FLOOR. INSIDE THE FRAME IS SEATED A LITTLE OLD LADY. SHE IS ABOUT 80 OR 85 YEARS OLD, DRESSED IN BLACK WITH A VEIL ON HER WHITE HAIR. HER FACE SHOWS THE WEATHERING OF TIME AND A STUBBY LITTLE CIGARETTE HANGS FROM HER MOUTH. SHE HAS A CANE WHICH SUPPORTS THE PALMS OF HER HANDS. HER FEET DO NOT QUITE TOUCH THE FLOOR AND THEY ARE CROSSED AT THE ANKLES AROUND HER CANE. SHE IS LEANING BACK IN HER CHAIR WITH A LAZY SMILE ON HER LIPS. ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STAGE THERE IS A SMALL TABLE COVERED WITH WHITE LINEN SET FOR BREAKFAST AND LAVISHLY DECORATED WITH FLOWERS AND CANDLESTICKS. AS THE CURTAIN OPENS, VIOLET THE MAID ENTERS CARRYING A TRAY OF FOOD WHICH SHE DELIVERS TO ONE OF THE TABLES. VIOLET IS VERY YOUTHFUL IN APPEARANCE, LIVELY BUT RATHER AWKWARD IN HER MOVEMENTS. SHE WEARS A TYPICAL MAID'S UNIFORM AND HAS A LITTLE WHITE FLOWER IN HER HAIR. AS SHE ENTERS SHE IS GAILY SINGING,

VIOLET: "Grandmother, My Grandmother, You Are My Only Dream."

"No other grandmother could take your place, give such grace as my grandmother dream."

"In your little frame, oh I'm not to blame . . ."

AS SHE PASSES THE FRAME. Good morning, grandmother! AFTER SETTING TRAY ON TABLE. I said good morning, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Good morning, Violet. GRANDMOTHER MOVES HER LIPS LIKE A DUMMY, THE REST OF HER BODY NEVER MOVES.

VIOLET: SHE CONTINUES SINGING AS

SHE GOES OUT AND RETURNS WITH ANOTHER TRAY WHICH SHE PLACES ON THE OTHER TABLE. SHE REARRANGES THE FLOWERS. Grandmother, do you think these flowers look all right?

GRANDMOTHER: Lovely, dear, simply lovely.

VIOLET: Or would they look better like this?

GRANDMOTHER: Lovely dear, simply lovely.

VIOLET: Or maybe like this?

GRANDMOTHER: Lovely dear, simply lovely..

VIOLET: Grandmother, you're not much help.

GRANDMOTHER: Lovely dear, simply lovely.

VIOLET: You know how Henry and Mertile act when their flowers aren't arranged properly! PAUSE. Well? Say something, Grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Lovely dear, simply lovely.

VIOLET: Don't be that way, grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: Now don't blow your fuse, honey. It don't make much difference how the flowers look. They aren't going to get rid of you. They need you. They need you, honey, and as long as they got the key to the chains that hold this here picture of me, you aren't going anywhere.

VIOLET: CRYING. Oh, grandmother, I love you. I love you! If we could only go away somewhere, just the two of us . . . all alone . . . just you and me, grandmother. SHE RUNS TO GRANDMOTHER AND SOBS.

GRANDMOTHER: You're shrinking my nylons, Violet. They gotta last me a hell of a long time.

VIOLET: I'll get the glasswax and fix you up, grandmother. I could never be happy without you, grandmother. You know I could never leave without you. But how I want to get out of this . . . this . . . prison. DREAMILY. Grandmother, you remember that Christmas when you gave me the tiny box tied with a bright yellow ribbon?

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, it was the last Christmas before I died.

VIOLET: I opened the box, and inside was a grateful grapefruit. (GOES TO TABLE AND PICKS UP GRAPEFRUIT.) It was so sweet—I peeled it carefully . . . ever so carefully and tenderly, and counted all the firm sections. Then, one by one, I plunged them gratefully into my mouth. Oh, grandmother, why did you have to die?

GRANDMOTHER: Well, when you're dead you live like I do, livingly. It's a good thing you had this picture painted of me.

VIOLET: After you died, I couldn't bear it—I felt alone—empty—ungrateful—placid. You were all I had. So I called in a painter. I described to him every detail of your sweet personality, your determined character, your gratifying mind. And he painted this beautiful picture of you. I love, love, love this picture. (SHE TRIES TO HUG THE FRAME.) It's all I have.

GRANDMOTHER: But then Henry and Mertile bought the picture for a price and chained it up to keep you here.

VIOLET: (AS SHE SINGS, "GRANDMOTHER, MY GRANDMOTHER, YOU ARE MY ONLY DREAM" SHE PICKS UP A FEATHER DUSTER AND DUSTS THE FRAME, ETC. SHE DUSTS GRANDMOTHER FROM THE TOES UP. A FEATHER CATCHES IN GRANDMOTHER'S HAIR.)

GRANDMOTHER: My tongue is sticky. Get me a fudgesickle, will you, dear?

HENRY: SHAKING YELLS FROM OFF STAGE. Violet! . . . Violet, get in here and brush my teeth!

MERTILE: Violet! Get in here and help me on the pot!

HENRY: Violet! Get in here and comb my hair.

MERTILE: Get in here and wash my face.

HENRY: Violet!

MERTILE: Violet!

HENRY: Violet! VIOLET DASHES OFF STAGE.

GRANDMOTHER: Don't forget my fudgesickle, dear.

HENRY: What took you so long? Don't you have any responsibility? Don't you know you're supposed to be in here with me . . .

MERTILE: And me.

HENRY: You're lazy, Violet. I won't tolerate it, do you hear. Now scratch my ear for me.

MERTILE: And get me off the pot.

HENRY: I'm hungry! I want breakfast, Violet!

VIOLET: Yes sir. It's all ready. SHE WHEELS HENRY OUT IN A CHAIR WITH CASTERS ON EACH LEG. HENRY IS ABOUT 40 YEARS OLD. HE IS PALE AND LOOKS LIKE A WEAKLING. HE CANNOT MOVE ANY PART OF HIS BODY EXCEPT HIS HEAD. I have your favorite this morning—roasted turtle with fried bacon rings.

MERTILE: Get me off the pot! VIOLET RUNS OFF.

HENRY: TWITCHING HIS NOSE AS HE EYES HIS PLATE. Burnt! Nothing worse in this world than burnt turtles. Hum, you can still make out the spots on his belly. LAUGHS. Love spots no doubt.

MERTILE: Help! Don't drop me. You idiot! Can't you move me with more gentleness?

VIOLET: Yes, mam!

HENRY: Gentile gentleness. TO HIMSELF. HE LAUGHS.

VIOLET: Your breakfast is ready. SHE WHEELS IN MERTILE WHO IS IN SAME TYPE OF CHAIR AS HENRY. SHE MUST HAVE HER OWN WAY AND DEMANDS CONSTANT ATTENTION. SHE TRIES TO LOOK BEAUTIFUL BUT FAILS MISERABLY. HER HAIR IS DYED BLUE. I have your favorite this morning ma'm, fried crap. CRAB MEANT. SHE TRIES TO COVER HER FLUB. HENRY LAUGHS. MERTILE SHOCKED.

MERTILE: I'm going to faint . . . VIOLET FRANTICALLY WHEELS MERTILE OVER TO MEDICINE CHEST AND PUTS GIANT SMELLING SALTS IN HER NOSTRIL.

VIOLET: Help me, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Where's my fudgesickle?

HENRY: My ear itches! VIOLET RUNS OVER TO HIM AND SCRATCHES HIS EAR.

MERTILE: My nose! Help! . . . SHE RUNS BACK TO MERTILE, REMOVES SALTS AND PUSHES HER BACK TO TABLE.

HENRY: Violet, you must be more efficient. That is what we need around here, more efficiency. From now on be on your toes or we'll hang a black curtain over your grand-

mother's frame. Now you wouldn't want us to do that, would you?

VIOLET: PLEADING. You wouldn't?

HENRY: Yes, we would.

MERTILE: Yes, we would.

VIOLET: No!

HENRY: Remember, I have the key. And as long as I have the key grandmother's picture stays here and as long as the picture stays here, you stay, too. You wouldn't want to leave your grandmother's picture *here*, would you?!!

VIOLET: No, I could never leave grandmother . . . grandmother's picture. I need grandmother's picture. It's all I have.

MERTILE: Then be a good girl, Violet, and grandmother's picture will be safe.

VIOLET: ON HER KNEES BETWEEN MERTILE AND HENRY, WEAK AND AFRAID. Yes, ma'am. I'll be a good girl.

HENRY: How long have you been here, Violet?

VIOLET: Twenty years.

HENRY: Yes . . . twenty years. You'll want to stay here forever, won't you, Violet? I mean, here with us and your grandmother's picture, won't you?

VIOLET: Yes! Yes! Oh, yes! I could never leave grandmother's picture. You see, I can't leave grandmother's picture. Never, never! When I was a little girl, as far back as I can remember, it was grandmother who gave me everything I had. I didn't have anything except what grandmother gave me. SHE GLANCES TENDERLY AT GRANDMOTHER WHO SHIFTS HER CIGARETTE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF HER MOUTH. I never had a mother, you know, only grandmother. She fed me, clothed me, cleaned my fingernails and washed my toes when they got dirty. I'm grateful! Very grateful.

MERTILE: And you must remain grateful to your grandmother . . . always.

HENRY: And forever grateful to us for allowing you to look at grandmother's picture. Don't forget, it was I . . .

MERTILE: And me.

HENRY: Who bought grandmother's picture for you and brought it here.

VIOLET: Yes! I'll remember!

MERTILE: That's a good girl! Now stand up on your own two feet. Remember, you are Violet, our maid.

HENRY: Now, let's eat. VIOLET GOES TO

HENRY AND BEGINS TO FEED HIM SOME STRAWBERRIES WHICH DRIP DOWN HIS LIP. SHE TUCKS A BIB ON HIM.

MERTILE: Feed me some toast!

VIOLET: RUNNING TO HER. Yes, ma'am.

HENRY: You dripped juice on me. SHE RUNS BACK, WIPES HIS FACE WITH A HUGE NAPKIN.

MERTILE: Where is my tea?

HENRY: Strawberries!

MERTILE: Jam!

HENRY: Milk!

MERTILE: Coffee!

HENRY: Squash!

ALL THIS TIME TRYING TO PLEASE BOTH, FINALLY IN FRUSTRATION SHE DROPS BETWEEN THE TABLES.

MERTILE: You're getting lazy, Violet!

HENRY: Negligent!

MERTILE: Irresponsible!

VIOLET: TURNING TO GRANDMOTHER. Grandmother!

MERTILE: Grandmother can't help you.

HENRY: She's only an image, a picture, a memory.

VIOLET: IN DESPERATION. Grandmother!

HENRY: Get up on your own two feet and feed us our food.

MERTILE: We need food!

HENRY: Food!

MERTILE: Stand up, Violet. You can't sit on the floor all your life. Get up.

VIOLET: VIOLET DRAGS HERSELF UP. Help me, grandmother.

HENRY: Where are the carrots, Violet? We need our vitamin C.

MERTILE: Yes, we need our carrots.

GRANDMOTHER: I'll give you some grace, Violet. Why don't you steal the key from them?

VIOLET: Yes! Yes! We'll go away, the two of us.

GRANDMOTHER: You do what you want with me, Violet, after all, I'm your dream.

HENRY: HENRY AND MERTILE NEVER HEAR GRANDMOTHER. You're not going anywhere, Violet. You wouldn't want your grandmother's picture smashed, would you?

MERTILE: Into pieces?

HENRY: Tiny pieces?

GRANDMOTHER: Revolt, Violet! Your life is your own, dear.

MERTILE: Remember, you belong to us, Violet.

HENRY: I'm hungry!

MERTILE: Now dear, don't you get upset. TO VIOLET.

HENRY: I'm hungry.

MERTILE: All we want is a little order, that's all.

HENRY: I'm hungry.

MERTILE: Order is the key to life. Control!

HENRY: I'm hungry.

MERTILE: Now get up, dear, and let's finish our breakfast. Because after breakfast you must do the shopping, the washing, the ironing, the scrubbing, the polishing . . .

HENRY: The pruning . . .

MERTILE: The wiping . . .

HENRY: The washing . . .

MERTILE: The baking . . .

HENRY: The raking . . .

MERTILE: The sewing . . .

HENRY: The rowing . . .

MERTILE: The patching . . .

HENRY: Income tax returns . . .

MERTILE: Pay the milk bill . . .

HENRY: The light bill . . .

MERTILE: The gas bill . . .

HENRY: Polish my nails . . .

MERTILE: Dye my hair . . .

HENRY: Make the stew . . .

MERTILE: Scrub the toilet . . .

HENRY: Bake the ham . . .

MERTILE: And stuff the yams. So you'd better get busy, Violet. Time is going by. Don't waste time. VIOLET IS CRUSHED BUT INDIGNANT.

HENRY: I'm hungry. I'm hungry.

VIOLET: God help me! Grandmother help me!

GRANDMOTHER: Dear, I can't help you! You must help yourself.

HENRY: I'm hungry.

MERTILE: Quit mumbling, Violet. I'm afraid you have a grandmother complex. Violet, you must stop muttering.

HENRY: Quit talking to that picture.

MERTILE: You can't talk to a memory.

HENRY: You can't memorize a dream. Your grandmother died—dead and buried. I'm hungry.

MERTILE: Violet, you're lazy. Irresponsible! Stand up Violet! Stand up! Get busy!

HENRY: Get busy!

MERTILE: Get busy!

HENRY: Violet, we're going to have to punish you . . .

MERTILE: For your laziness.

HENRY: We've never punished you before, have we?

VIOLET: No sir. CRYING

HENRY: Yes, we have always been kind to you. But I think it is time that we punish you.

MERTILE: A little punishment never hurt anyone. SMUGGLY

HENRY: We're going to lock grandmother's picture in the cellar for *two weeks*. Now wheel me over to the frame. Right now!

VIOLET: No!

HENRY: Yes!

VIOLET: No!

HENRY: Yes!

VIOLET: No!

HENRY: Yes!

VIOLET: Two weeks! CRUSHED. Two weeks without grandmother? No! I couldn't bear it. PLEADING. No . . . I beg you . . . oh, in God's Name . . . I beg you, don't take grandmother away from me. Please.

HENRY: The quality of mercy is not sieved. Now get up and feed us our food.

VIOLET: IN A QUIET VIOLENCE. All right, I'll feed you. I'll give you food. SHE RUSHES TO HENRY, PICKS UP A CARROT AND SHOVES IT IN HIS MOUTH. Here! Feed on that! SHE RUSHES TO MERTILE AND SHOVES A CARROT IN HER MOUTH. BOTH HENRY AND MERTILE STRUGGLE FRANTICALLY TO GET RID OF CARROT. VIOLET LAUGHS AND SPINS THEM AROUND IN THEIR SWIVEL CHAIRS. You see, I'm your maid and I must feed you!! SHE TURNS TO GRANDMOTHER. Grandmother, I did it!! I rose up in rebellion like the angry young women. SHE DOES A FREEDOM DANCE SINGING THE GRANDMOTHER SONG. HENRY AND MERTILE ALTERNATELY SHOUT, "Violet" DURING THE DANCE. Oh, my body feels so good.

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, dear, I know how it is. My body felt good once.

VIOLET: I'll take you away with me, grandmother, and we'll live by ourselves. You're not dead. I'll go out with boys and more boys. But I'll never get serious; no, that's for the women of yesterday. I'll just enjoy them. Now, it's the women's turn to be

master. Oh, I'll always be true to you grandmother. You and I, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, Violet, now you're talking. I didn't twist grandfather's muscles for nothing. No, sir, I got what I wanted. Now, get a chisel and break the chain on my frame.

VIOLET: Yes, a hammer and chisel. Yes! I'll get a hammer and chisel! SHE RUNS OFF. BY THIS TIME MERTILE AND HENRY HAVE MANAGED TO GET THE CARROTS OUT OF THEIR MOUTHS.

MERTILE: Henry! Stop her!

HENRY: SHOUTING. Violet! Violet!

MERTILE: She can't leave us. She belongs to us.

HENRY: Violet! Violet! VIOLET RETURNS WITH A LARGE HAMMER AND CHISEL. Violet, what are you doing? Pull yourself together. No chisel will break those chains. HE LAUGHS.

MERTILE: Henry, you are my hero! I knew my sweet Henry would come through!

VIOLET: SHE TRIES FRANTICALLY TO BREAK THE CHAINS AS HENRY LAUGHS. They won't break! IN HORROR—Grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Try again, dear! Try harder!

VIOLET: They won't break.

HENRY: You belong to us, Violet. Now come, let's finish breakfast. Grandmother's picture is here to stay.

GRANDMOTHER: Don't give up. Don't let them destroy you. I'll give you more grace. Get a blow torch. They can't stop you. Then we'll go away together, Violet. You and I into the beautiful wide world!

VIOLET: Yes! That's it . . . a blow torch. I'll get a blow torch. A blow torch! SHE RUNS OFF.

HENRY: Violet!

MERTILE: Violet! Henry! This is your fault. Do something. I always knew you'd be the cause of my downfall.

HENRY: What do you mean, me cause it? It's your fault. You're the one who always complains when you're on the pot.

MERTILE: You hold that picture over her head.

HENRY: Well? Isn't it a good hold?

MERTILE: There you sit on your ass and

she's about to melt the chain with a blow torch.

HENRY: Mertile!

MERTILE: Do you hear me? Do something!

HENRY: How? How? What can I do?

MERTILE: Can't you move your hand to stop her?

HENRY: Now you know I haven't moved my hand in forty years.

MERTILE: We'll perish!

HENRY: No, I can't.

MERTILE: Try! Try!

HENRY: (WITH DETERMINED REVERENCE) All right, I'll try. HE ATTEMPTS TO MOVE HIS HAND IN THE AIR. THERE IS A STRAIN ON HIS FACE.

MERTILE: Raise it up! Try. Try. Try. Think in your brain, I must move my forceps, now the triceps, the biceps, sixceps, now the lower radical, and the upper radical. Try! Close your eyes and think of expanding muscles . . . Oh, how big and pulsating. Raise it up!

HENRY: HIS FACE TURNS RED. I can't. I can't.

MERTILE: Try again! You must try again. HE TRIES AGAIN BUT FAILS. Send gens to your antigens.

HENRY:: I can't. It's no use.

MERTILE: Courage.

HENRY: God.

MERTILE: Do something, Henry. Save me! Help me get up!

HENRY: Try. Try to get up. All you need is faith. Stand up, Mertile.

MERTILE: Yes. I'll try. I'll try to stand up.

HENRY: Try harder, Mertile. Harder! Think of plunging into a sea. Imagine floating . . . Mertile . . . come . . . come to me.

MERTILE: I can't! I can't!

HENRY: She can't leave us. CRYING.

MERTILE: After all we've done for her. VIOLET RETURNS WITH A GIANT BLOW TORCH IN HER HAND.

VIOLET: I found a blow torch, grandmother. Oh, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Hurry, Violet! VIOLET RUSHES TO THE CHAIN AND BEGINS TO MELT THEM.

HENRY: Violet!

MERTILE: Violet!

HENRY: Don't leave us. We need you, Violet dear.

MERTILE: We'll buy a new frame for grandmother's picture if you stay.

HENRY: We'll put roses around it.

MERTILE: And spray it with perfume.

HENRY: Burn incense in front of it.

MERTILE: Kiss it a hundred times a day.

HENRY: A thousand . . .

MERTILE: A million . . .

HENRY: A trillion . . .

MERTILE: Violet sweetie!

HENRY: Violet, dear!

MERTILE: Won't you stay?

HENRY: We'll lick your ears!

MERTILE: We'll kiss your nose!

HENRY: We'll love you, Violet!

MERTILE: Yes, we will love you dearly!

VIOLET: It's almost through, grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: At last, dear, we can go away together. We can live. You can enjoy men . . . no responsibilities . . . no conscience! Fudgesicles!

VIOLET: Yes, grandmother, at last I'll be free. Fudgesicles!

GRANDMOTHER: Hurry, dear! Break the chain that holds my frame.

MERTILE: You won't leave us, will you, Violet?

HENRY: No, you wouldn't leave us, would you? We need you.

VIOLET: You think you can keep grandmother's frame chained and I'll stay! You are wrong. There you sit like a frog on a lily pad. TO HENRY. TO MERTILE. And there you sit like a fly in an outhouse. You're parasites!

MERTILE: Violet.

HENRY: Violet. All we want is for you and your grandmother's picture to stay and be happy.

VIOLET: LAUGHS. But we are happy. We're leaving. Aren't we, grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, dear, we're leaving.

VIOLET: You and me into the wide, wide world. Sex! Hate! Fun! More sex! Joy!

GRANDMOTHER: Muscles!!

VIOLET: Men to conquer and destroy! People to deceive!

MERTILE: But what about us?

HENRY: Yes, we need you, Violet. You're all we have.

VIOLET: But you won't have me for long.

HENRY: But we need you. And grandmother's picture!

VIOLET: LAUGHING. Poor Henry! You

need satisfaction! You're always telling me you need satisfaction. Every night I have to run a cloth between your toes.

MERTILE: Henry! You've been cheating on me.

VIOLET: Oh, yes. Every night, I take his shoes off. SHE TAKES HIS SHOE OFF. And then I take a piece of smooth cloth. SHE GRABS MERTILE'S BIB. Then I draw it between his little and middle toe. Like this. HENRY MAKES FACES.

HENRY: Stop, Mertile! Oh, Mertile! Stop . . .

VIOLET: LAUGHS. You have such cute metatarsals. Poor Henry.

MERTILE: Henry. HORRIFIED.

HENRY: CONTORTING HIS FACE. St . . . oooop!

VIOLET: SHE STOPS. THEN GOES TO MERTILE. HENRY IS EXHAUSTED. You know what I think. I think you hate your husband.

MERTILE: I love Henry. Don't I, Henry? Henry!

VIOLET: You hear that, grandmother. She loves him. Then why don't you kiss him, Mertile? Hm? SHE PUSHES MERTILE'S CHAIR BESIDE HENRY. Kiss him, Mertile. Kiss him once. Show him how much you love him. MERTILE ATTEMPTS TO KISS HENRY, BOTH WITH STRAINING LIPS, BUT CAN'T GET HER HEAD CLOSE ENOUGH TO HIM. Try. Try harder, Mertile! You love him, don't you? Help him. He needs you. Help him! LAUGHS. Now I'll take my frame and leave. Goodbye, Mertile and Henry.

MERTILE: Leave? (Horrorified)

HENRY: Leave? (Terrified)

VIOLET: Leave!

MERTILE: Violet.

HENRY: Help us.

MERTILE: We need you!

HENRY: Don't leave us!

VIOLET: Come, grandmother. SHE STARTS TO TAKE HOLD OF THE FRAME.

MERTILE: Do something, Henry.

HENRY: Yes, we must do something.

MERTILE: Help us, Henry. Stop her. She can't leave. God help us! HENRY WITH EVERY OUNCE OF MORTAL STRENGTH IN HIM MANAGES TO LIFT A GRAPEFRUIT IN THE AIR.

VIOLET: Come, grandmother, we'll go out

into the beautiful wide world. Let them sit.

GRANDMOTHER: Hurry, dear.

VIOLET: Yes, I'll just lift your frame up and . . .

MERTILE: Throw it, Henry! HENRY THROWS THE GRAPEFRUIT AT GRANDMOTHER'S PICTURE. WHEN IT HITS SHATTERING GLASS IS HEARD AND GRANDMOTHER, THE FRAME AND ALL COME CRASHING DOWN ON THE FLOOR.

VIOLET: IN HORROR. Grandmother! SHE SLOWLY PICKS UP A PIECE OF GRANDMOTHER AND THEN BURSTS INTO TEARS. Grandmother! TURNING TO HENRY. What have you done!

HENRY: Do unto those as they do to you.

MERTILE: We don't have you, you don't have grandmother.

VIOLET: You've killed her! You've killed grandmother!!

MERTILE: Only a memory, dear.

HENRY: Yes, only a dream.

VIOLET: You had no right.

MERTILE: LAUGHS.

HENRY: LAUGHS.

VIOLET: Oh, Christ! Oh, God! SHE RUNS OUT IN TERROR. HENRY AND MERTILE'S

LAUGHTER SUBSIDES. THERE IS A BRIEF SILENCE.

MERTILE: Henry?

HENRY: Yes, Mertile.

MERTILE: She's gone.

HENRY: Yes, she's gone.

MERTILE: She isn't coming back, Henry.

HENRY: No, she's not coming back.

MERTILE: We're . . . we're all alone.

HENRY: Yes, we're all alone.

MERTILE: Here I sit.

HENRY: And here I sit.

MERTILE: Here we sit together.

HENRY: Standing way up there, HE LOOKS UP with your head almost touching the ceiling, where you can be the first to feel the heat, and the cobwebs.

MERTILE: SOFTLY. Yes, that would be something. PAUSE. Henry, I wish I could run a cloth between your toes.

HENRY: Mertile! I wish I could help you off the pot once.

MERTILE: Oh, Henry!

HENRY: We're going to rot.

MERTILE: Yes, we're going to rot.

THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM AND THEIR FACES APPEAR TO ROT AWAY.

* * CURTAIN * *

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I

Bill Wilborn

intersecting
the lines of space
we two
contemporarily
clutching
one holy
frozen scone
unbuttered

we chuckle like
battered crones
here
by the tuba
lightly
singing
huzzah

nite on a nike site

Bob Athearn

The man,
agonized and grossly pregnant,
screams obscenely at the doctors,
who smile all unseeing,
and wait.

The child,
an indoor geranium,
coughing thinly in prophecy,
holds over his distended abdomen,
a pin.

The dog,
a thin slavering thing,
convulsive and quivering,
vomits a hairball,
which rots.



Pen and Ink by Eric Ellery Fiedler



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