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Sun, Moon, Stars, Rain, Vol. 1 No. 1

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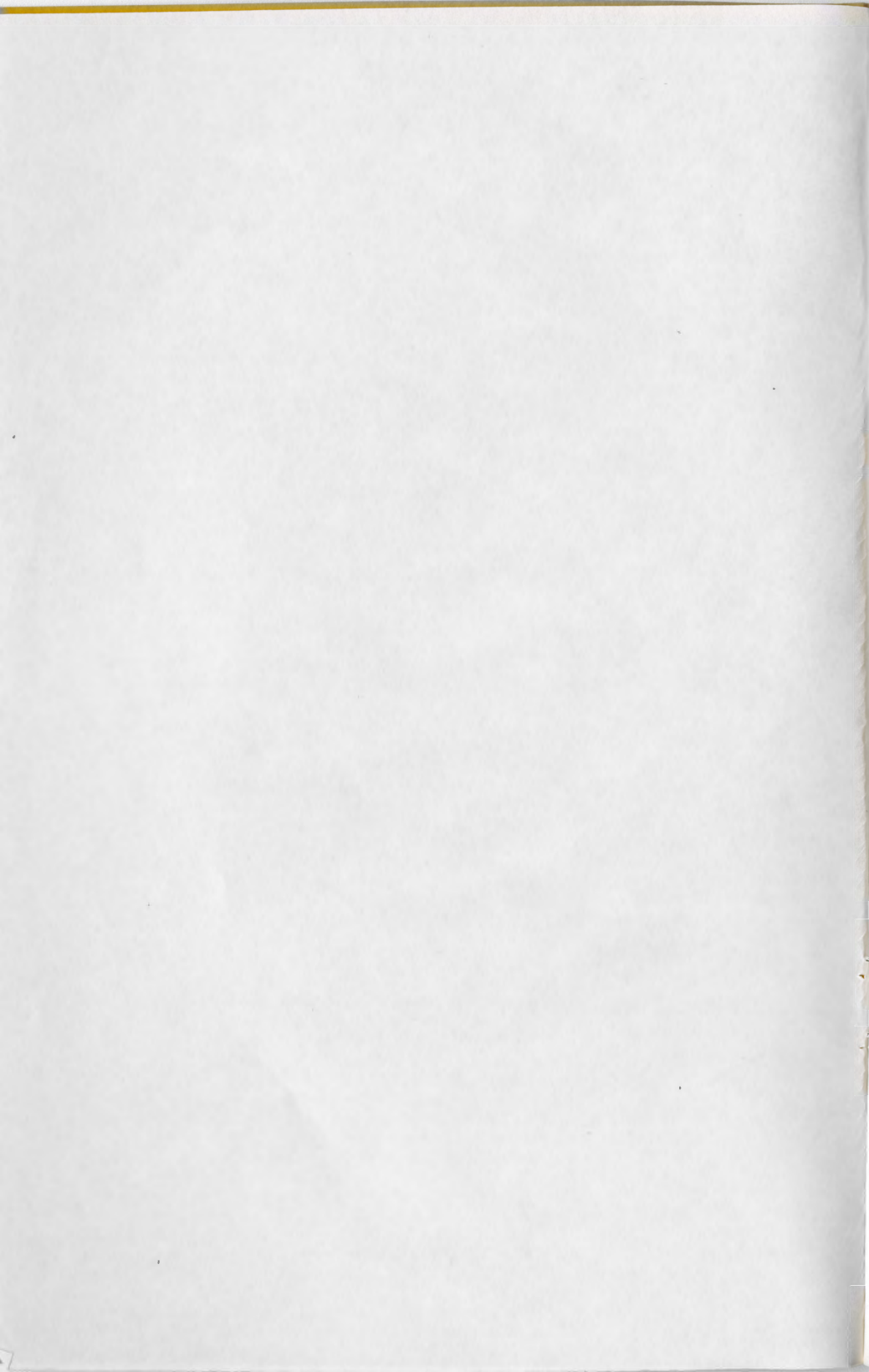
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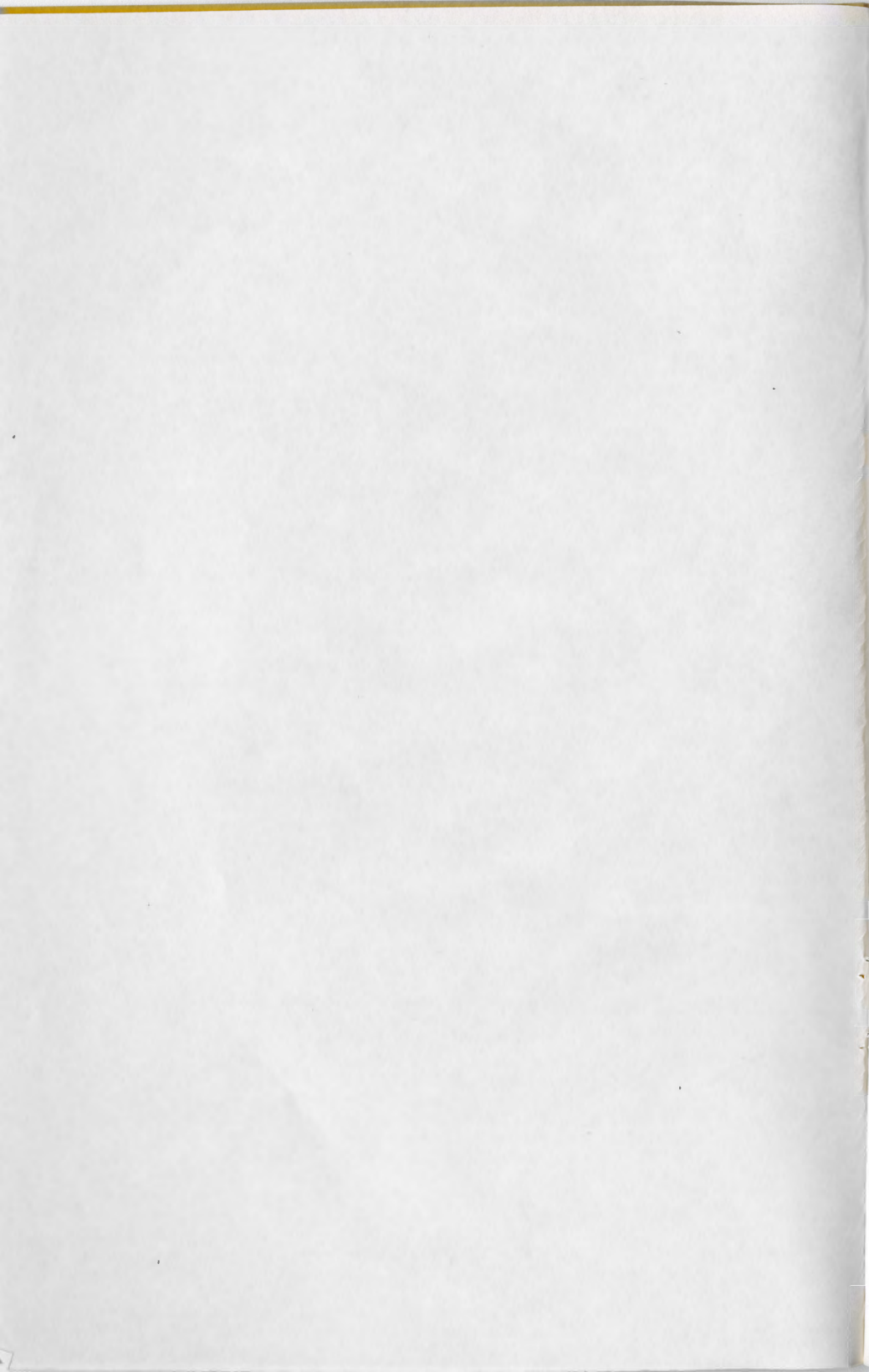


SUN
MOON
STARS
RAIN
spring 1975
vol.1 no.1
ΣΤΔ



To see the sun he looks for the moon,
And where the moon goes he has followed.
But the stars are his eyes,
They glow and glimmer,
Burning embers in the night,
Yet cold and glaring,
 silently staring.
They pierce the heart
And set his soul on fire.
Inward they seek,
Deep into the canyon, deeper they hunt,
 for what? And Why?
What is there they find to be nothing.
And the moon flees across nights lonely
 skies as he soon gives way to the
 red orb that brings morning.
As the songbird greets the dawn with sweet sound,
The multi-colored skies pale and drift away.
All the forest is bathed in the morn's yellow
 haze.
And still he has not found his answer.

Thomas Hartz



**SUN
MOON
STARS
RAIN**

SIGMA TAU DELTA
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE
UNIVERSITY
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS
SPRING 1975

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Holly Whitten... "Deus Ex Machina"

Terry Halladay... "The Long Awaited Return of
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Poetry

To See the Sun...

The Staff of

SUN MOON STARS RAIN

dedicates this volume to

Dr. Ralph Steen

and

Dr. Fred Ekfelt

November 22, 1974

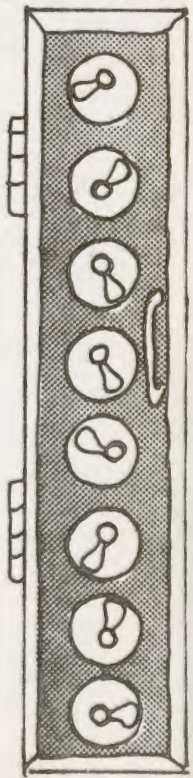
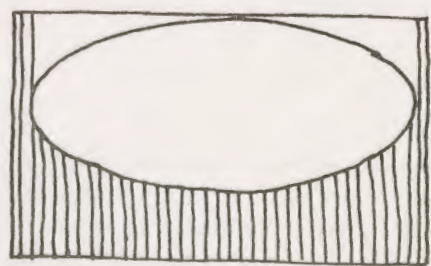
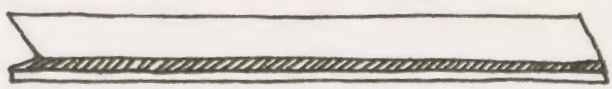
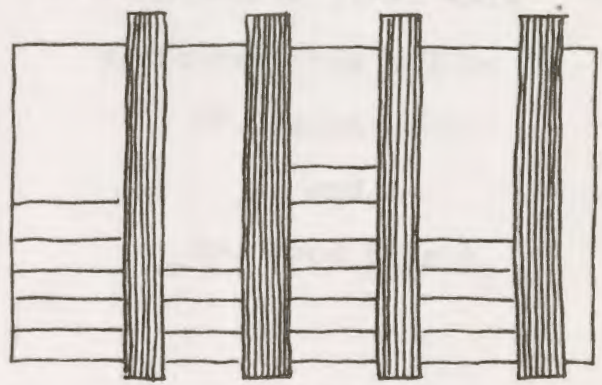
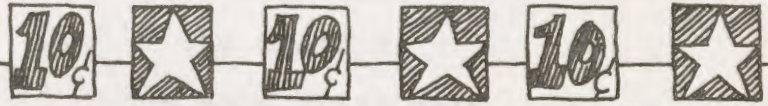
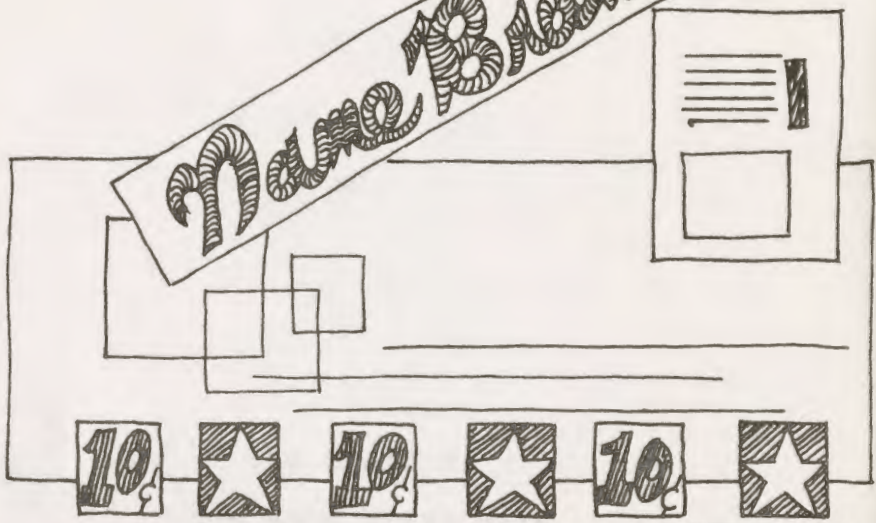
Dans Ex Computer

Link a Fish Down a Well

Essay

Incorporation

Name Band



Vending Machine

Half black, half white
The body is a rectangular prism.
Squares stars from under
A name-brand forehead,
Eyebrows molded from strips
Of aluminum form a frown.
No ears, no hairs trim the box.
But a mouth gapes every second,
Hoping to be allowed to speak.
Each chance, though, is ruined
by a quarter bribe, it buys
A hiccough. Speeches are
stifled with kicks and slaps.

Wendy Woodall

Sometimes

talking to myself tonight
about being serious,
I was outside for awhile
before I noticed I was cold.

I look at you and stare,
you ask me how I can be
so expressionless
but that's the way I am
sometimes.

Gary Ross

THE LAY OF ARAGORN

Over withered heath and blasted moor,
Scourged black by the Dark Lord;
'Midst darkened stumps of once-tall trees,
Laid low by the Enemy;
Through nights when no stars shine forth,
Through mists of far-off Pelenor;
Down-river, past the Rauros Fall,
Where stands Dol Amroth, fair and tall,
Where Sea-Winds whisper through the night,
And Sea-Birds wheel in endless flight;
East, where Mordor plagues the land,
Where the Ring was cut from Sauron's hand;
West to the Kingdom That Was Lost,
Arnor, and Last Hold, Fornost;
And the hidden valley of Rivendell,
Where fair Elves in peace still dwell;
Mountains Misty and White I have seen,
And Rohan--ah, the Wold so green!
Pursuits that I though would never stop;
The attack of the Nine 'neath Weathertop.
The scorn of many I endure,
While I strive to keep their lands secure
From the Power that lurks in Barad-dur:

For I am the Heir of Elendil,
And I bear the Flame, Anduril:
And 'tis told my line will never end,
For my Race is of the Kings of Men.

It was during my wand'rings in Lorien
That I met the Elf-Maiden Arwen,
And wherever I journey, be it near or far,
I dream of my lady, the Evenstar.
For when my Labors are at an end,
'Tis through her that once again
The Blood of Elves shall course through Men,
And through forgotten shrouds of Yore
Shall shine the Light of Numenor.

And if by chance we should win through,
If Minas Tirith glows anew,
If the Dark Lord meets his End,
Then shall Justice rise again,
With the splendor and glory of the Kings of Men.
For if we prevail and the Shadow recedes,
And proud once more stands the White Tree,
Its fair branches reaching towards the Sun,
All Middle Earth shall be as one.

For I am the Heir of Elendil,
And I bear the Flame, Anduril;
There's Wisdom and Sorrow etched in the lines
 of my face,
For I am the Last Hope of my Race;
And there are strength and compassion
 in my hand
For I am the Heir of the Kings of Men.

SPACES BETWEEN: QUESTION OF ROMANCE

DAVID FARRIS

They waited as the musician accustomed himself to his chair upon the small wooden stage. In the subdued light, the people in the audience spoke softly, but quickly, to one another of the day just spent, and of what relief, and even adventure, the night might bring. There were few tables, but many people, often as many as five or six to a table. They drank tequila, and bad Mexican beer, and smoked cheap cigars and hand-rolled cigarettes. Most of them were dirty (their clothes were clean, at best), and their breathing and sweating made the room hot. The bar girls were mostly overweight, and their large bosoms pressed tightly against their flimsy, peasant blouses. The men looked eagerly at these simple women, and, trying to catch the eye of any one that might pass close by their seat, attempted to establish their virility as quickly and as securely as possible. The night was short, and the girls were very busy.

The lights dimmed for the second time that night. The tall man with his guitar began to play. Slowly, he drew the attention of the others. He had played here many times before, and had become familiar to this dark crowd. He was white, and young, and he had dark hair, and a scraggly beard. He was from the United States, and was called Alex by some of the bar girls, his only acquaintances here.

He played slowly at first, almost too slowly, for though he had taken the men away from their drinking, and their smoking, and their flirting, he now lost his grip on them, and they drifted back into their habits. He did not notice their reaction, but yet quickened his pace dramatically, and they turned to him again.

As the music continued, and the people listening became more and more attentive, one man left his table and approached a light-colored girl behind the bar. He was dark, like the rest, but not as dirty.

"You're a Castilian, aren't you?" he asked, in Spanish.

"Yes, I am. Why do you ask me?"

"I like the way you look. I've been looking at you all night."

There was a pause. "My fine is very high."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"I have twenty and some change."

She looked around the cantina. Many girls had been propositioned: of those, most had already gone upstairs. The rest would follow in a short while. Several of the girls remaining downstairs watched her as she talked with her customer. They resented the off-handed and distant manner she assumed with a client. They seldom had the opportunity to choose one customer rather than another. She alone was free to make such a choice, not only because she was the most attractive of the women, but, as cashier, the most prestigious.

She looked back at her customer, "You can only have twenty minutes."

"That's enough for me."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, and called a girl to replace her at the bar. The man and the woman went into a back room, and then upstairs.

The music quieted and then ended abruptly. The spell of the musician was broken, and laughter and loud talking filled the room. The guitarist stood and announced he would play again in half-an-hour.

He was sitting in a chair behind a small curtain at the back of the stage, when a waitress parted the curtains, and spoke to him, in Spanish.

"Catherine has gone upstairs."

"Yes."

"I thought you would like to know."

"Thank you."

She turned away from him to go, then hesitated. "Why do you always wish to know?"

"I want to know, in case anything happens."

She frowned at him. "How would you know?"

"I'm not sure. I think I would though. Thank you again."

He thought of Catherine during his breaks, and occasionally, even during his sets. He had written several songs about her, and they were inevitably his most moving. The way she looked at him made him feel the stranger inside himself, and that stranger . . . well, he had not decided about that yet.

He played beautifully the rest of that night, though much of his playing was unnoticed by the drunken crowd. The bar girls were soothed and romanced by his music, and probably enjoyed him more than the men their drinking. He knew this, and often smiled at one of them graciously as she passed the stage. Most of the men in the room thought he was merely flirting when he did this, and accepted him more on the basis of this common manhood than on his musicianship. He knew this as well, and the knowledge disturbed him. But he had committed himself to this place, and he stayed.

It was late when he could finally talk to her. She had been with three men in all, but was sure to watch him play during the last set. His playing strengthened and became incredibly personal to her as he concluded the long evening's fare.

After he had finished, he went out of the cantina, crossed the dark alley at the back of it, and climbed the stairs of the building facing the back of the cantina. He knocked upon her door.

"Who is it?" a voice came from behind the closed door.

"Alex."

After a moment's hesitation, the door was unlocked and opened. She leaned against the door frame, and smiled at him. "Why have you come?"

"I must see you," he said.

"You have never come here before. Why do you come tonight?"

He spoke in Spanish now. "I have watched you for many nights standing near the bar. I have known of your affairs with men. There are many women like you here in this town, but yet, you are like no other woman I have ever known. I cannot tell you my true feelings, for I would look too much like a child before your door. I wish to sleep with you . . . I wish to know you as you know me, as you know all men . . . I wish to be a part of your living."

She looked tenderly into his eyes, and touched his cheek gently with her hand. "If I could only allow you. You are a beautiful man, and I love you, and your music. But we are not the kind to stay together. You and I, we know too much, we love too strongly. Believe me, please. You will understand someday . . . you are still very young."

He looked down, then raised his head slowly to look at her again. "Perhaps you are right. But I will never cease coming to you like this. And I will always play for you, that you may know I long for you as the long, lonely night longs for the morning's light."

She opened her mouth to speak to him, but said nothing. After a short silence, she said simply, "It is only a small room," and, taking his hand in hers, led him inside as she had so many nights before.

Thanks, I'm Not Having Any

Having learned early that beauty
is not for seizing,
I smile--

And let you pass,

Consciously uncurling the fingers
tensing to grasp.

Squirrels eat from my hand
when I sit quietly;
Flowers stay fresh when I do not
snap their connection with earth.
Butterfly wings do not crumple
if untouched
The uncaged keeps its lustre.

So I take nothing.
I see, admire, thrill, desire.
I deliberately relax the fingers
tensing to grasp.
I lie and gaze at the sun through
my fingers.

I smile--
And let you pass.

T.F.

7H XNBHYR
 A9 AUYMM1

THE LAMENT OF ARNOR

Do you see that line of hills my friend,
 The hills that wind and twist and bend
 Their way towards the Great East Road?
 Well, upon the tallest over there,
 Stood once a Tower, tall and fair,
 But that was all so very long ago.

Now from that, the tallest crown,
 The Watch-Tower has been thrown down,
 And naught remains but a ring of stones,
 And here they whisper to the winds alone
 Of memories of Days long gone.

For there, 'tis told, stood Elendil,
 While the Wind from the East blew about him, chill,
 And White Banners flew proud in a wanning sun.
 And 'tho it touched him with a deadly breath,
 The Wind couldn't vanquish the Star of the West,
 For his last great task was still undone.

Then from the Parapet he withdrew,
And the Horns of his Realm a great blast blew:
And he didn't look, for he knew
That towards his Gates Gil-galad drew,
And for a last fleeting moment, the sky burned blue.

O Arnor, Fair Arnor,
Thy gilded Towers high!
The last mighty Watch
 'Pon the Weather Hills
Whilst Gil-galad drew nigh!

Never a Host will be seen again
As the Last Alliance of Elves and Men,
While the Rowan Trees above Parth Galen
Still bloom.
For Elendil and Gil-galad,
While they strove mightily at Dagorlad,
Their final hour of glory had
On the slopes of Oroduin.

But yet Arnor struggled, a fading Star,
Holding the North against Angmar,
Until in battle she met her End.
Still, ever-ready the Rangers stand,
With a fire in their eyes and Sword in hand,
Until at the Last Call they ride again.

O Arnor, Lost Arnor,
The Home of Men so grim!
I watched with saddened eyes,
 As your Flame grew small and died,
By the shores of Evendim!

David Sullivan

HULK

A voyage-
Families laughing, crying- uncertainty
Destiny plotting; fate
weaving a web of death...
a torpedo streaking onward.

A scream-
Sounds of tearing metal, flesh,
Her oily blood polluting
the shiny ocean's surface
blue, gray, red merging.

A plea-
The shrill electric spurts moan.
Her agony in ripped from
deep within the wounded
bulk..lost hope!

A death-
Bowels smashed...pouring, crushing
Walls of softness- destruction,
steam, explosions, all... all
slipping downward; over.

A man-
In some distant room... planning
Battles are solemn men,
joyful victors, weeping losers,
innocents, only, are hurt!

Tim Couch

To Myself: Dying

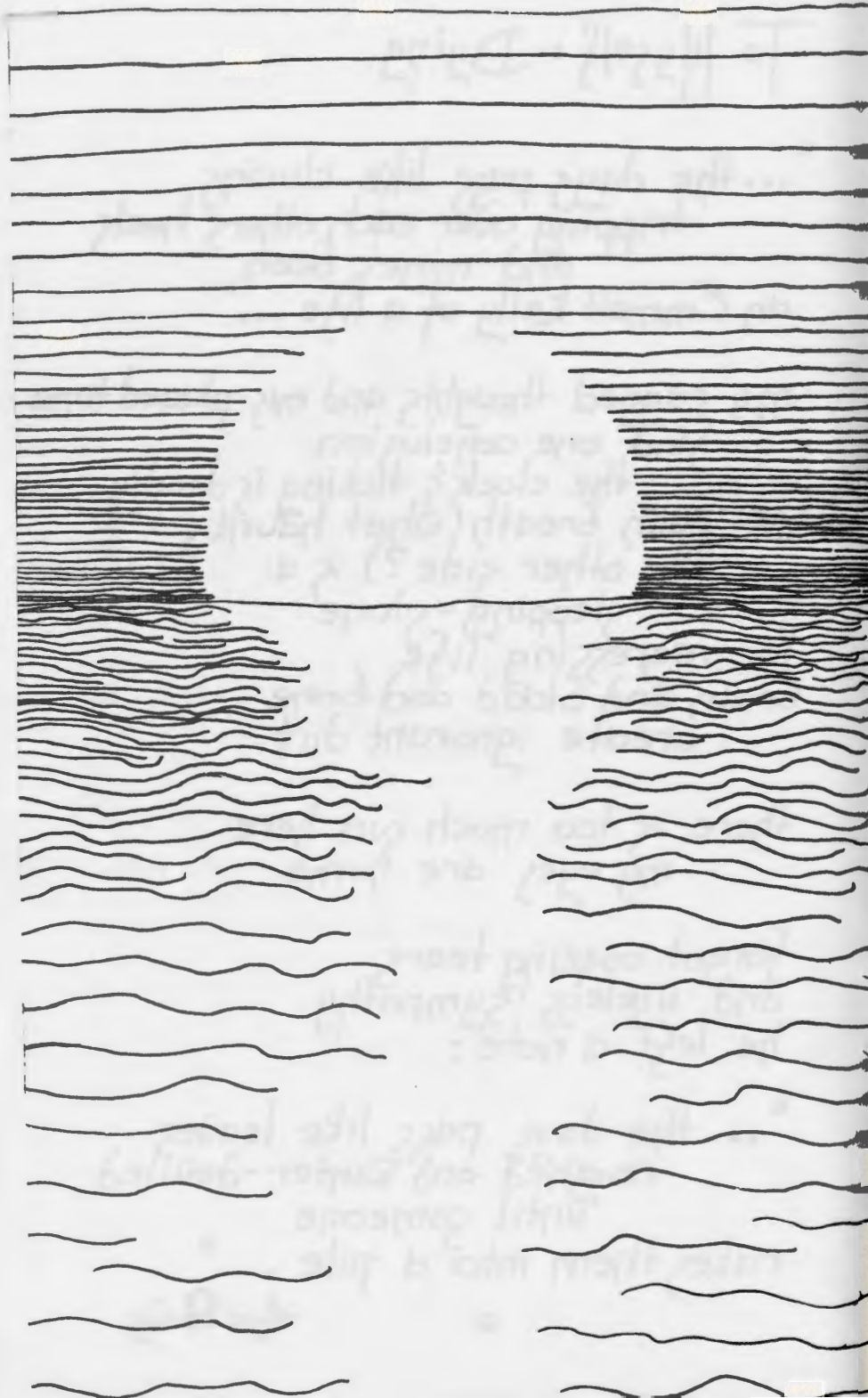
"...the days pass like clowns
tripping over each others' heels
and mine's been"
an Emmett Kelly of a life ..."

my ragged thoughts and mis-placed time
find one conclusion
the clock's ticking is deadly
and each breath (what haunts
the other side?) is a
stepping-stone
for regressing life
brain and blood and bone
create ignorant dirt

there is too much sun here
my eyes are numb

forget coaxing tears
and useless sympathy
he left a note:

"...the days pass like leaves
roughed and winter-deviled
until someone
rakes them into a pile ..."



Second Coming

i wondered how God would feel
to see his beachball floating down the shore
with the wind, carrying the lost souls
screaming,
screaming
to the edge of the world
and God running far behind
like a little child
calling helplessly:
come back
come back.

Or maybe He just stood
and stared
uncomprehending
or waited faithfully
for someone downshore to pick it up
and bring it back to Him.

Or maybe He laughed
as the dot grew smaller
and smaller...
a good, resounding
cosmic laugh
as the ball floated away.

Then
He might bend over
laughing still
and toy with the wet sand
wondering whether He should buy
another ball

And the screams would fade
as He chuckled to Himself
and the stars came out to stare
to stare with a
Who-cares-we're-always-here-anyway-shine.

Robert Jeffers

SEPTEMBER

C. Rubick

Just a few scattered storm clouds passed swiftly through the last remaining days of summer. Doug felt worn, almost glad it was over. He had been surprised, snatched from behind and tossed into the wild summer—the Fourth of July and the handful of firecrackers his father had bought, waiting out hail storms and tornado fears with his mother and father huddled around the kerosene lantern in the small airless cellar with earth and onion smells that were always a mystery, the slow-moving river, dark and willow-covered, he and the others swam in until late July. No, he had not been ready. It flashed by like a preview at the movie in town with all the action crammed into a short space.

He moved closer to the windmill and ran his hand across the bleached cracked board over the well. Overhead the bullbats made their haunting buzzing sounds as they chased insects through the dusky sky. They flew swiftly and were almost impossible to see in the dark. It was useless to think of shooting one, or any other small bird. He would rather try for a jackrabbit or coyote...if he had a gun. A small one would be all right and easy to clean and take apart. Like the small twenty-two rifle Mr. Roberts had shown them. "Field stripping," he had called it. Doug thought of the words, wondered what they meant. The other boys had nodded and seriously seemed to know, and he had not asked. In his mind he removed the bolt as Mr. Roberts had shown, took out the firing pin, easy, twisted the oiled scrap of cloth onto the long thin wire, ran the wire down the barrel and pulled the cloth through. The inside of the barrel amazed him, the perfect spiraling groove and the light flickering from the new oil.

"Douglas!" his mother shouted down the hill from the house in a tone that meant she would not call him again. It would be his father's lower voice, more severe but with a weariness that matched his stooped thin body. The dark bent piece of sheet metal slid easily away from the well opening. Lowered on the brown weathered rope, the bucket swung in a small circle. He glanced to see it turn on its side in the water and sink. Slowly he pulled it up. The rusted pulley squeaked, had always squeaked like some hurt animal.

He remembered how to fit the shell in front of the bolt, shove the bolt forward by the short curved arm that resembled the knobbed end of the gearshift on his father's pickup, then push down on the arm, locking the bolt, snap the safety back, ready to fire.

He steadied the rope as the bucket reached the top of the well, careful not to let it scrape the side and jar a loose brick from the casing. The water poured clear, no dirt or ants, into the galvanized kitchen bucket. He grasped the narrow metal handle and began making his way up the rocky hill, through the scattered clusters of knee high broomweeds. He had seen quail there in the fall. They would run low over the ground through the weeds then burst upward in a small cloud. Could he hit one with a rifle? With a shotgun for sure, but he didn't want a shotgun. A shotgun took away too much. The heavy bucket bent his short body and bumped against his right leg, splashing the cool water onto his levis and black tennis shoe. He tried to hold the bucket away and took shorter steps.

Beside the small unpainted house high in the forked tree that grew tall and spreading for a mesquite, a mockingbird repeated its favorite phrase over and over then changed to another full, loud song. He saw the grey and white bird swaying on a thin upper limb against the constant warm southwest wind. It sang, indifferent to the springy movement of the small branch and creaking narrow green leaves. He reached the doorstep and in the space of a second the bird stopped its song, sprang upward on windmill wings, collected an insect, then settled down onto the same limb.

He opened the screen door and passed through the walled-in porch where he slept and into the hot kitchen, hearing his father's low monotone worry over a sore on the leg of one of his cows. Carefully he lifted the water bucket onto the cabinet, moved quickly to the table, scooting across the wooden bench to his plate. His mother glanced expressionless at his yellow shirt. Her tired eyes scanned his face and hair then returned patiently to his father.

He ate, staring out the north window towards the level treeless area behind the house and thinking of the gun. He barely caught his father's words. "Homer's old man finally got him some poison to put out."

"Poison," Doug said. "What for?"

His father took a bite from a large piece of cornbread and glanced somewhat surprised at Doug's plate. "Why, for the fox, of course. That's what I jes' said." He studied the cornbread then began crumbling it into his plateful of brown beans. "Nobody I know has seen a fox 'round here, not lately anyways. I's guess it was a coyote. Maybe a dog."

A fox. None of the other boys had ever mentioned a fox. He had seen picture at school in a book. It would not be hard. He could stand there, cheek resting on the stock, take in a deep breath and hold it like Mr. Roberts said, sight on the fox, no, a little in front of it as it ran, then squeeze the trigger slowly. "If we had a gun I could shoot it." Hearing his own voice startled him. It was too loud, too high.

His father halted the fork with its load of beans and cornbread. "Shoot what?" He stared, puzzled at Doug.

"Th' fox." Doug glanced at his mother.

"Oh." His father lifted the fork to his mouth. "Well, now that fox ain't bothering us like Homer. You'd shoot it, huh?"

His mother looked at him and smiled slightly. He wished he hadn't spoken. He had been childish. The late supper dragged on with the lingering thoughts of what his father had said until he could eat no more. He moved to the porch and sat on his small bed. A fly explored the inside of the window screen. It couldn't have been a fox. In the picture the fox was running. It was red and brown. They lived in holes in the ground. The late breeze through the sagging screen swept over him and cooled him somewhat.

It was close to dark when his father came onto the porch, blocking out the dim light from the kitchen as he passed through the doorway. He stopped by the large scarred cedar chest at the end of the bed and pulled the heavy lid back on its dry hinges, letting it rest against the wall, then pushed his long sunburned arm down past the blankets and pieces of quilts that Doug's mother had never finished. He searched with a blank face, stood erect, staring down at the quilting scraps, then plunged in again at the opposite end of the chest. He pulled out a long bundle of ancient brown newspaper. From it protruded the wooden stock of a rifle. Doug stared, remembering that all he had thought of the last few weeks about the house he lived in was that it had no guns, that his mother and father had never spoken of guns or of hunting. His father explored with a bony hand the confusion of twisted string around the newspaper.

"Down in the grassy flat." His father spoke slowly, frowning at the tangle of string and newspaper. "That's where the rabbits are. Down by that stretch of old rusty bobwire. Dug out all the brush and kept cows there one time. Doubt if you'll see any fox."

"Where did that come from?"

"My daddy bought it, then left it. I reckon it's been around here as long as you have." With an easy movement he slid the newspaper away from the dull grey

rifle barrel. He held it up in the light from the kitchen, took a step toward the bed and handed the gun to Doug. "Cain't shoot no rabbits without it." Then he moved to the doorway and squinted at the dark sky. "You know how to clean it up, I guess?" From the breast pocket of his overalls he brought out a stained pipe and red flat tobacco can and began fingering the dark brown tobacco into the pipe bowl. "Seems like there might be a cloud bank comin' up in the west." He stared vacantly through the screen toward the red glow of the low sun behind the clouds and scratched his cheek and grey sideburn with the stem of the pipe.

Doug glanced at the rifle, wondering how his father could ever have cared so little for such a treasure, to never mention its existence. Clean it. Yes, there was a small can of light oil in the barn. He jumped off the bed and turned, looking outside past his father, but it was already dark, too dark to search for oil or the right kind of thin wire. He would have to wait until tomorrow.

He sat up late, much later than usual, half listening to his mother and father's idle talk in the front room and thinking about the old gun. Small rust spots dotted the barrel and the wooden stock was covered with scratches and cuts, but it didn't matter.

In bed he stared out the window. The night was clear and crowded with stars. His father had been wrong about the storm. The mockingbird sang on and on somewhere in the mesquite tree. It was a long time before he slept.

It was after lunch before the ancient pickup reached town, his mother stepping quickly to the grocery, he and father towards the hardware store, making their way through the small serious groups of Saturday farmers along the sidewalk. They stopped or slowed by each, his father nodding or speaking to the men standing, arms folded or leaning against lamp posts, some sitting on car fenders, talking of crops and weather, one in sweat-stained straw hat and overalls leaning over to spit a stream of brown tobacco juice onto the street. Doug endured the slow progress, patiently harboring the wonderful excitement, the spell born the night before from the cedar chest.

In Bonner's store his father listened tolerantly to the old man. "Town's dyin' out, Fred. My business is down so bad..." Doug stared over him at the collection of guns in the glass case above the counter, new rifles, dark blue barrels, shining wooden stocks, shotguns, much larger, too large. "You can almost tear a rabbit in two with one of those," one of the boys had said over Mr. Roberts' rifle. The others agreed, laughing excitedly until another had said, "Yeah, like that man they drug outta th' river last month. Almost took the guy's head off." He didn't want a shotgun. They took away so much.

"Yeah, I guess you'd like one of those." They were staring at him, but old Bonner seemed to be speaking to the gun case. "Nobody hardly ever looks at them anymore. Nobody's got time. Even Johnson, comin' in here for poison...for a fox. Ain't ever seen one around here. I told him to be sure and bring it in. It'll probably look an awful lot like some neighbor's old dog." His father laughed and managed to head the conversation toward shells for the rifle.

They left, crossing the red brick street towards the high stone courthouse and by the large brown statue of the man sitting, book in hand, staring with hollow eyes down the wide street. Doug always looked, but he knew the metal expression could

not change from the blank sleepy stare that was so much like the man in the river who stared upward but could not see the high willow trees. He turned away quickly, rolling the two small heavy boxes of shells over in his hands. Their weight amazed him. "Don't take them out of the box til we get to the house," his father said. The day was gone before they reached home. It was too late for hunting.

The pasture seemed different in the early afternoon. There was little wind and he was sweating. He leaned the rifle against the sagging rusty barbwire fence and wiped his hands down his faded levis, leaving two damp marks below the front pockets. He had not seen a rabbit, very unusual, had not even surprised a dove or ground squirrel-nothing but a few speckled grasshoppers that catapulted from the grass around him, making fast clicking noises as they flew away. He glanced down at the rifle and a wave of excitement swept through him. The practice that morning after church, shooting at broken bottles, old cans and the large square empty coffee jars, had gone well, but he had used half the shells.

Beyond the fence lay the flat open field, sparsely covered with kneehigh grass, each blade and stem waving independently yet in a loose rhythm with the other blades and stems all bent by the southwest wind like the leaves of the tree by the house. Without sound a large jackrabbit sprang from the high grass, its long light grey ears upright and rigid. He jumped for the gun, but the rabbit disappeared in the swaying grass, leaving only a thin cloud of dust where it exploded from the ground and a fading imprint in his mind of the animal poised in midair. "Damn." He grabbed the rifle and stood, breathing heavily, but there was no movement other than the wind in the grass. The rabbit was gone. A sudden gust of wind caused him to sway, rolled back his blond hair. What had it looked like? Long stiff ears, hind feet stretched out, he could remember nothing more. It must still be there, hiding close against the hot brown earth. The wind made him take a step back so he turned and followed the broken fence that divided the low hill before him. Occasionally he glanced back into the grass until he noticed the thin wingline of a bird above the fence at the top of the hill.

The raven flew lazily down the fenceline toward him, flapping its long black wings with end feathers spread like fingers. He stopped, raised the gun to his right shoulder and waited, his short legs apart. The wood of the gun stuck to his cheek as he followed the raven. He drew in a deep breath and held it. He would never hit the bird but... "If you're real good," Mr. Roberts had told them, "you can hit a big one like a crow with a rifle, but mostly you got to use a shotgun." He was glad he had the rifle. The raven was large and would pass right over him if it didn't see him. It would turn any moment. Surely it must have spotted him. It was very near, continuing its hand-like flapping up and down mechanically like the stroking of the metal pump rod on the windmill. He was afraid to move as it floated nearer-a huge silent black kite guided by the fence. It must see him there below about to end its life and bring down its black ugliness, stop the continuous flapping wings. His hand jerked, and the gun fired. The raven swerved abruptly, making a sharp angle away from the fence and flew swiftly towards a large willow tree in the distance near the base of the hill.

He fired too soon, had not squeezed the trigger, but he had to stop the black bird's flight towards him. He stared after it. It slowed, flying steadily for the tree.

A strange place for a willow so far from the river. The dark wings stroked as before like a swimmer, like the man in the river in July who had not been swimming down the river at all. The dead man had no control over his direction, simply let the slow tree-lined stream carry him and hide most of his body beneath its surface. Only his head and upper chest floated on the opaque water. Some other boy bumping him, he had thought, as he swam submerged, something against his head, someone playing, trying to push him down. He broke surface. Yelling white bodies scrambled up the slippery mud bank. "Oh Jesus!" a high voice shouted behind him. He turned to see the man floating by almost as dark as the smooth water, except there below the upturned ear, pink flesh, loose torn strips. A part of the man was missing. He moved slowly by the silent wet swimmers that lined the bank among the willows, his head thrown back for them to witness the horrible wrong that had been done. The current bore him from the swimming area, rolled him slightly. His arm surfaced, the limp dark hand, fingers spread, flapped once before he disappeared around the bend in the river.

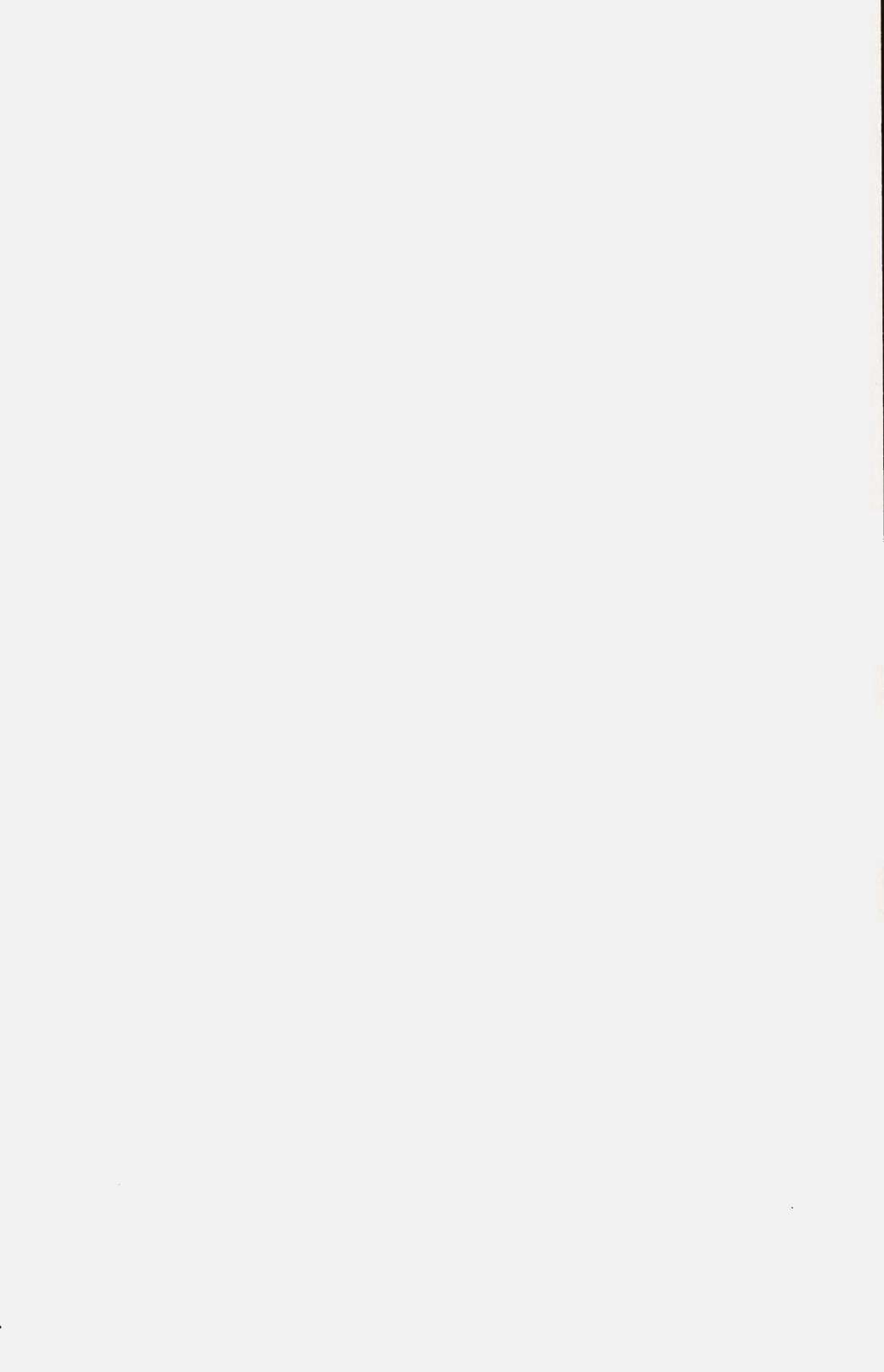
The raven ceased its slow wing movements and glided into the sagging mass of green leaves. He made his way slowly up the fence-line, not glancing at the large willow. The rifle barrel bumped his knee. He brought the gun up, ejected the shiny brass shell casing and cradled the gun over his left arm. The open chamber gave off the smell of powder. He replaced the spent shell, balancing the gun in his hands, then he pushed the safety lever back and rested his finger on the trigger guard. He glanced again at the field of grass. He had to be ready. Frequently as he walked up the hill he brought the gun up, quickly sighting on a fencepost or catclaw bush. The gun was light in his hands. He remembered the cans and bottles he had been able to hit that morning. Near the crest of the rise the ground became rocky. At the top among the low clusters of grass only one small mesquite bush bent with the wind. He made his way towards it.

There was movement in the bush, a small part of it next to the ground separated from the fluttering leaves. He stopped. His heart jumped. It was not a rabbit. He brought the gun up to his shoulder and slowly stepped forward. He could see plainly the small grey body covered with long hair, the grey changing to reddish brown along the back, white chest and belly and long bushy tail. A fox. The small head, thin narrow snout, nothing like the coyotes that trotted silently through the edge of the pasture near the house. It had to be the fox.

It did not run as he slowly approached but stood, head lowered slightly, panting rapidly, the body flexing in and out with each short staccato breath, pink tongue dripping moisture onto the bare ground. It would run before he could get in range. What would they think if he brought in a fox? It moved then, stepping soundlessly back into the bush and continuing to watch him through an opening in the small green leaves. He could hear its breathing, it grew louder with each soft step he took. The hair on his arms felt stiff, erect, his heart beat inside his head. It would jump, be gone any second. He stopped twenty feet away, close enough for a shot, closer than to the rusty cans and coffee jars. The small animal stared at him through the opening, not moving. Would it let him walk up to it? It would not be right to get closer. The fox was like the brown rocks protruding from the ground, not alive except for the panting and the light brown eyes that stared up at him. He brought the gun into position. What would they say? His heart pounded fiercely.

Mr. Roberts would want to see. The fox must hear his heartbeat as he heard its loud fast breathing. It did not seem to care if he heard. He squinted down the barrel, sighting on the motionless head. It was perfect, a flawless head, carved from some red wood, short ears, pointed, fine hairs inside, pink soft tongue and brown eyes that stared up the gun barrel into his own. But the expression, complete indifference, he didn't understand. It should be afraid. He had to shoot before it was too late, but his hands wavered, the end of the gun barrel moved across the sharp clear face, shoot now, but his heart tore inside him in rhythm to the breathing. The eyes, like nothing he had seen, staring into him, through him. The panting grew louder with each long second he stared, louder, echoing in his head with his heart. It would burst. He had to stop it. His hand jerked and the gun exploded, the sound instantly coming back with the wind. The fox was not there. He stumbled towards the small mesquite, a windy gust almost pushing him over. He wiped his forehead and eyes on his shirt sleeve. He looked around the bush. There was nothing-no footprints he could find, no blood on the ground. He searched for several moments. It must be the right place there beside the bush, the soft furry feet, tongue dripping, but there was no trace.

For some time he squatted hunched over the ground near the bush then rose and slowly made his way down the hill toward the house beyond the pasture. The gun hung heavily at his side. He had seen it all right. It was in the grass, somewhere, perhaps close to the jackrabbit, but it was better than the rabbit, better than the picture in the book at school.



Photograph

We've lost ourselves
 within two worlds.
I reach out and try
 to touch yours
and find I only leave
 a fingerprint.



Robert Jeffers

A distorted twin shadows you
As you run, slip and grapple
In the sandpile with the neighborhood boys.
He trails you to the schoolhouse
Preferring to play baseball.
He's the twelfth football player,
A silent chaperone on dates,
Your free guest at the dance.
He receives your two diplomas,
signs your wedding license,
Holds your newborn boy,
And stands at the window watching
As your son slides in the sand.
He is woven within your life.
Even as you sleep, a piece
Of your twin mimics your spectacles
As they rest on the nightstand.

Wendy Woodall

November 22, 1974

Eleven years, eleven years.
Another calendar reads: a night?
Eleven years.

And A.H. is gone too.
And his brave new world is...

(Why do we think
of it that way?
Forever is eleven, or a night)

coming true.

David Farris

INCOMPLETENESS

*My Name is Asher Lev*¹ is a fascinating novel, intricate in its development of interrelated motifs. To me one of the most absorbing dominant ideas recurring throughout the book is the concept of incompleteness. One is immediately stricken by the polarity of this concept to certain statements in the Bible, the holy book of the goyim. In the gospel of John it is stated, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." Christian goyim in general believe that by the death and resurrection of Jesus God's eternal purpose for mankind was fulfilled, the law of Moses was finished, and that henceforth all spiritual blessings are received through Jesus. Such beliefs are, of course, totally alien to the Jewish faith. As a race they are united in their wait for the appearance of the moshiah, and for their expectations to be fulfilled.

In *My Name is Asher Lev* this generic sense of incompleteness is dealt with on a more individualistic basis. Three of the major characters feel a strong sense of incompleteness in regard to specific aspects of their lives. Asher's mother Rivkeh, his father Aryeh, and Asher himself all experience in dissimilar ways this sense of unfulfillment. The intensity of this feeling, and the importance which they attach to it, cause it to be a strong motivating force in forming the pattern of their existence.

¹ Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1972). All references are to this edition and all page numbers will be listed in the text.

The concept of something being unfinished is an extremely important one in the life of Asher's mother. At the sudden death of her only brother, Yaakov, she suffered a type of emotional breakdown. Rivkeh had lost her parents at a fairly early age, and as a result was remarkably close to her brother. They were a great deal alike in physical appearance and in personality. It was naturally quite a shock for her when he was killed in a car accident at the age of twenty-seven, while traveling for the Rebbe. Rivkeh apparently plumbed the depths of depression as she mourned him. It is stated that she "cared nothing. . . for the things a person must do to stay alive" (p. 21). For months she appeared to be completely removed from the external world. It seemed as if only her desire to finish her brother's work for the Rebbe made her return to reality. She stated her conviction about this early in the novel when she said to her husband, "Aryeh, it is wrong to leave things unfinished. . . You taught me that Aryeh. It is a victory for the sitra achra to leave a task for the Ribbono Shel Olom unfinished. . . I want you to remember that, Aryeh. . ." (p. 45). Again, a few pages later she spoke to him, saying, "My brother's work is unfinished. . . I want to finish my brother's work. . . Do you know what it's like for something to be incomplete? . . . The sitra achra would love his work to remain incomplete." (pp. 49-50) Eventually she persuaded him to talk to the Rebbe, who gave his permission for Rivkeh to enter Brooklyn College. Yaakov had been personally chosen by the Rebbe to become a student of Russian affairs, to become an adviser to the Rebbe, and to travel for him. As a result Rivkeh studied Russian history, the Russian language, Russian politics, Jews in Russia, etc. She was one of the very few Ladover women the Rebbe had allowed to attend college. After graduating from college she started working for a master's degree in Russian affairs. Asher's mother wrote many papers, dealing with topics such as the murder of the Russian Yiddish writers and the false charges which had been brought against certain Jewish doctors. She seemed driven to study these matters and often would sit up all night, studying and writing. As Asher observed, "Sometimes I woke in the early morning and found her at her desk, asleep over her books near the typewriter, the pale sunlight shining on her face through the open slats of the window blind. I would . . . draw her asleep over her books, her face cradled in her arms, all of her at rest like a child." (p. 154). Throughout the novel frequent references were made to her extensive studying. Then we learn that she has finished her dissertation, and is going to travel with her husband throughout Europe, assisting him in his work. All of these things she did in an attempt to finish her brother's work. If he had not died she probably would never have even thought of entering college and studying Russian affairs. She believed so strongly that it was wrong to leave something unfinished, and so intense was her desire to complete his work that she changed her way of life.

Asher's father also felt keenly this compulsion to complete his work. During the time of his wife's illness he had been forced to stay in Brooklyn and to care for her and his small son. Later, when Rivkeh had recovered and had entered college, he resumed his travel, but made only brief local journeys, going no farther than Boston or Washington. If any changes in schedule came up he would telephone his wife immediately. He did this because Rivkeh was still somewhat unstable, and was terrified that her husband would be killed while traveling for the Rebbe, just as her brother had been. Then in the summer of 1952 Aryeh heard of the death of

certain Jewish writers in Russia whom Stalin had ordered shot. After learning of this he was no longer content to stay in the United States and to submit to the fears of his wife. He pleaded with her "I'm not made for sitting still. And my father's work is also incomplete. . . They're dying, Rivkeh. Why am I here? Do you know how much work has to be done in Europe?" (p. 60). Again when Asher questioned his mother about why his father traveled so much, she explained to him that it was a tradition in the family, that his father had traveled for the Rebbe, and his father's father, and that it would be wrong to leave such a tradition abandoned. Later in the novel Aryeh himself explained to Asher about the tradition in the family for atonement through travel. He recounted to Asher the story of the death of his grandfather, who had been killed by a drunken peasant the night before Easter. That same night he had been making plans to travel for the Rebbe. Then Aryeh told Asher "When the Rebbe's father was able to come to America, he brought me and your Uncle Yitzchok and our mother. . . with him. . . The Rebbe's father felt something had been left unfinished. A life had been lost because of those plans and the plans had been left unfulfilled." (p. 114). Aryeh had a passionate desire to realize those dreams and plans. It was this desire not to leave something unfinished that enabled him to break up his family, to leave his beloved wife and son in Brooklyn while he went to Vienna and traveled throughout Europe. He spent years traveling about creating yeshivos out of nothing and teaching Torah and Hasidus all over Europe. He made several dangerous and highly secret trips to Russia and devoted much of his time to helping the Jews in Russia. He even risked his life to help complete the work. Aryeh paid a great price for his devotion to the incomplete. As Asher stated upon seeing him when he came back from Europe, "He seemed a different person. He was in his mid-thirties, but his red hair had begun to gray. There were weblike lines around his eyes and deep wedges around his forehead, on the bridge between his eyes . . . he carried . . . a burden he had brought back with him from Europe, the burden of the years it would take him to realize his dream." (p. 173) Later, of course, after he returned to New York to travel throughout the United States, he was described in this way: "There was vigor and dignity about his gray hair and clear dark eyes and thickset shoulders . . . He walked with the sense of his achievement in Europe." (p. 278). During the intervening years, however, he suffered greatly for his determination not to leave something great unfulfilled. As with Rivkeh, this desire was a powerful influence in shaping Aryeh's life.

Asher Lev experienced the same desideratum, but channeled it in a different direction. The first direct reference to incompleteness in the novel is made when it is stated of Asher, "The drawing felt incomplete. It bothered me to have it incomplete. I closed my eyes and looked down at the drawing inside myself and it was incomplete." (p. 37). Asher was only a child at the time, but once having started a portrait of his mother he felt a great need to finish it. Later Asher's idea is reinforced by his mother who said "Do you understand what it means to have a great work incomplete? . . . It is important that you understand that, Asher." (pp. 114 - 115). Asher eventually proved that he did indeed understand this concept. The most striking example of this took place when he painted his crucifixion scenes. After painting the first crucifixion scene of his mother, Potok writes that Asher "looked a very long time at the painting and knew it was in-

complete. The telephone poles were only distant reminders of the brutal reality of a crucifix. The painting did not say fully what I had wanted it to say; it did not reflect fully the anguish and torment I had wanted to put into it. Within myself, a warning voice spoke soundlessly of fraud. I had brought something incomplete into the world. Now I felt its incompleteness." (pp. 311-312). After spending a nearly sleepless night Asher knew what he had to do. It is stated "Yes, I could have decided not to do it. Who would have known? Would it have made a difference to anyone in the world that I had felt a sense of incompleteness about a painting? Who would have cared about my silent cry of fraud? . . . Only I would have known. But it would have made me a whore to leave it incomplete. It would have made it more and more difficult to draw upon that additional aching surge of effort that is always the difference between integrity and deceit in a created work. I would not be the whore to my own existence." (p. 312). Asher could not repress the truths within him any more than his parents could. He could not leave his work incomplete; he was compelled to paint the crucifixions. This strong desire in Asher almost tore him apart, and caused him to lose his father's respect and to some extent, his love. So again, in Asher's life, the importance that he attached to his feeling of incompleteness had a profound effect on his life.

In all three major characters, the concept of incompleteness is an integral part of their lives. Asher's method of modifying his sense of incompleteness caused a major conflict to develop in the novel. The development of this theme played a highly important part in motivating all three characters, and as a result of this they were made more believable. It was extremely interesting to trace the results of this feeling of unfulfillment as they were worked out in these highly individualistic members of the Jewish culture.

II

WHAT THE WONDER
SAID (& WHAT THE
WONDER BRED)

The Computer Speaks

In the beginning was the
word

The four-letter word

The Omega-megaton,
Synchro-cyclotron

Tetragrammaton word-
YHWH.

YHWH SPEAKS

LET THERE BE ELECTROMAGNETIC
RADIATION

ALPHA. BETA. GAMMA.

INFRARED TO ULTRAVIOLET WITH
RAINBOWS IN BETWEEN.

The technician/monk speaks

U7/W7

Why. Ache. Double-you. Ache.
Pungent taste of doublement:
Double your pleasure,

Double your fun
Double bubble, toil and trouble,
(Why? Because I love you)
Double your ache the Yah-way!

Adam and Eve speak

Eve: Like to Eden apple?

Adam: I'd rather have a shepherd special: a glass of water a piece of ewe.

Eve: Passionfruit, then: "A Jug of Wine, A Loaf of Bread--and Thou..."
I'll hands, and thou beside me,
Crying in the wilderness.

Adam: Separates the sheep and goats

Eve: You're a shepherd, then.

Adam: No, that's my brother's line;
I'm a gardener, Eden, Gethsemane...

Eve: A satyr, I thought.

Adam: Satyr. Satan. Ramphallic
horns and colvenotum hooves.

And, you?

Eve: I am Eve, and ever-virgin
Venus; I am deflowered man with
flesh and fruit.

No One Speaks

The VINEYARD, on a hill
Hard and ROUND AS a skull, is treeless,
WITH CRUCIFORM trellises WHERE HANG
OSIRIS, Dionysus, and DYING JESUS.

III

When the Dice are
Rolled Up Yonder

The mourning disciple speaks

Where'd he go? (vertigo)
He spoke of being, of belonging--
But what of longing?
He spoke of the fold--
But what of spindling and mutilation?
He gave out peace of mind with loaves
And fishes. He is gone;
And we, the witnesses
Of great, half-understood events,
Are now alone. Like an arm cut off
But still alive, I fear my independence.
And the searing pain of doubt burns home
The dreadful weight of my new name:
Master.

(The mourning disciple dons his
frock and then resumes his duties
as technician/monk.)

THE LONG AWAITED RETURN OF LEVI

Terry G. Halladay

The wind had been building steadily over the long fall afternoon, setting loose small whirlwinds of dust that raced from one corner of the yard to the other, gathering twigs, scraps of paper and leaves up into their funnels, shaking and throwing them about, higher and higher, then suddenly dying and dropping the refuse in the path of another dervish, more insane than the last. She had seen the front coming, its dark thunderheads and patches of blackness, isolated sheets of rain slashing across the empty horizon, and had gone to spend most of the day in the middle rooms of the house, turning her back on the storm and trying to compose herself for his visit. The storm was now above her, moving from the west and the far side of the house. With her right hand she struggled to close the window, the curtains whipping and beating wildly against her thin arms. The first large drops of rain hit the screen and shattered into tiny droplets, rising as a faint mist, cool against her face and neck.

The window closed to within an inch of the sill but would go no further, leaving space for small, swift gusts of humid air to enter, to blow at her knees. She gathered her robe about her neck but allowed the thin fabric to flap freely over the lower part of her body, occasionally revealing a bare leg, letting the breeze caress her thighs and calves. She stood at the window a moment longer, watching the progress of the line of the storm across the sky, churning and tumbling in on itself in rolling masses of confusion, illuminated from within by brief flashes of lightning which stayed with her as faint violet after-images until the muffled rumble of thunder descended from above the house. Finally, when the sheets of water made the window panes opaque, distorting the view like glasses smeared with light coats of grease, she turned and walked back through the darkened room, moving slowly around the furniture that floated in the shadows like islands in a violent yet silent ocean. Had the pieces not become so familiar during her long stay there she might have been frightened. But it was her custom to sit there in that dusty living room, perhaps with only a small lamp to read by, leafing through some of the old books that were stacked in the large glass-front cupboard in the upstairs hall; or, as was most often the case, idly toying with her thoughts, combining and comparing them with her memories until she became drowsy and went upstairs to bed. She knew what was behind every couch or chair, knew what shadows were large enough to hide something that might threaten her and which ones would only remain empty patches of gloom. Once when she had been especially tired she had fallen asleep while reading and awakened in the middle of the night, her lamp out of oil and cold. Everything seemed to have been rearranged during her sleep; pieces of furniture were where they had never been before and certainly shouldn't have been. For a few moments she had stumbled about, wildly searching for another light, and then as terror gradually overcame her, she had found the door that led to the front porch and had run out into the night sobbing and trembling uncontrollably. She had looked behind her at the house in the darkness, its upper stories towering above her head, changing and contorting before her wild eyes.

After that night she made it a point to spend as much time as possible in that room, working first at memorizing the arrangement and character of the furnishings, then at what seemed to her a new and unexplainable compulsion, trying to recapture or duplicate the fear she had felt that night in her panic. But it never returned in any form.

Her regained confidence made her more comfortable in that room than anywhere else in the house; including the small, warm bedroom which had been hers for most of her life. It had remained unchanged while she was away during her two years of marriage, something which made her return home even more painful. She had appreciated the kind intentions of her parents but the past years of misery and guilt left her life an awkward visitor to a museum, careful not to touch any of the fragile, delicate things which seemed to have shrunk by half their size while she was gone. She felt like a child whose doll house had been made momentarily lifesize by some unknown spirit but who was obsessed by constant fear that it would either return to its former toy-size stature or would swallow her up with it, keeping her forever as a child among its frills and soft textures. With her parents' deaths, a few months after her return, she had moved all her clothes into the guest room at the far end of the hall, away from her old room and from her parents' bedroom.

She went into the kitchen; it was at the very center of the first floor and every wall had at least one door leading off into the darkness of the silent house. She left the door into the front room open to allow some of the slight breeze to follow her, bringing with it the quieter pleasures of the storm outside, and so that she might hear when he drove his car up to the front of the house. She ran her hand lightly over her hair, feeling it smooth down with the dampness.

The table in the middle of the room was set with two places; there was food on the stove and in the oven, simmering and warm with its aroma faintly discernible over the odor of the wood that was burning in the old fireplace that almost covered one wall. She had often wished to cook over this fire but the metal hooks had long ago been wrenched from the brick walls of the firebox, leaving no way to hang the pots above the flames. She had tried building a grate of bricks and metal scraps but it had upset with the first weight placed on it and she had spilled the kettle of vegetable broth on herself and on the ashes on the bottom of the hearth. So she contented herself with cooking on the ancient gas stove, her back to the fire, the flames flickering on the wall before her as she prepared her meals. Tonight she was ashamed that she had nothing more to offer her expected visitor than the leftovers from the night before but she had displayed some ingenuity and was pleased with the new dish she had come up with by thickening juices into gravies, mashing the potatoes rather than baking them and spicing the few scraps of meat in a way that would be sure to please him.

She lived for that now, to make him happy during those few evening hours they were able to spend together. He came to her after his work was done and they sat together at dinner and afterwards in the front room. No one had ever paid this much attention to her; he was interested in all her feelings, her impressions of what she saw during the day and how she felt about the things that had happened to her. She felt he knew everything about her without her having to explain any of it. He was cautious and reserved when he talked to her; he wanted her to talk and to know how he might help her in the future. He hadn't given her any idea about the specific things he might have in mind, such as marriage, but she attributed this to his apparent bashfulness and was sure that time would bring them even closer, with him eventually opening up to her as she had done to him. He moved her strangely, more than anyone else she had ever known before.

She knew he would accept the dinner with a grateful smile and appreciate the effort and creativity she had shown in preparing it, not mentioning the leftovers to her. He always brought the groceries with him at the end of the week so she would have something new to cook with. She had even asked him one day if he could afford the food that he brought to her; she had never given him any money for it and at times felt guilty. This guilt had increased to a point where she thought she might be taking advantage of his generosity; or even worse, he might have some secret motive for it. Until she knew him better she had dreaded the day when he might take his payment; she would have gone along with him anyway but the idea of it being for selfish reasons, as payment, left her cold and a bit scared.

The kettle on the stove whistled again for the third time as she had tried to keep the water ready at the temperature that he liked for his coffee because he would be cold and maybe wet when he got in out of the storm. She got up and turned it down and then off. He was very late; she hoped that he wasn't caught in the storm and stuck along the muddy road that connected her house with the outskirts

of the town. She chewed her lip when she saw that the meat and gravy were becoming dry and pasty; if only he would get here and she could serve him dinner. She looked out the window and saw that the rain had almost stopped, patches of clear night sky were again visible. She touched the glass and felt the cold from the outside that the front had brought. With a small smile, she went over and got the still steaming pot of water from the stove and held it a few inches from the window, fogging the small panes with a light coat of water droplets. One of them received too much and the drops gathered at the top and ran down the pane, ruining the effect. But the others were just right and she put the pot back on the stove. She stood for a moment and watched her successful panes to make sure they didn't run as the other one had. She leaned closer to the lowest one, her nose within a few inches of the hazy surface. She breathed on it slowly and was disappointed to see that it had no real immediate effect. With her index finger she started in the middle of the pane and traced a tight spiral out from the center until the circle touched all four corners of the frame. But this brought the moisture together into larger drops which ran down and ruined it. She was left with the top two squares; they would have to be something special. Carefully she printed her name in the one on the left in capital letters. SHARON. Then on the right she printed his name in the same way. LEVI. Unfortunately she couldn't write with the clear hand that she had been so proud of in school but Levi told her that soon she would be able to write again, better than ever before. The thought excited her but also reminded her of his lengthening tardiness; she went back to watch her dinner ruin itself slowly. She wished that her window writing would remain legible until he arrived, he always enjoyed the small things she did like that and asked her all about how she had done it and if it made her happier and in what ways.

The room was getting a little warm now so she turned off all the burners on the stove and moved some of the wood away from the center of the fire; she could heat dinner up again when he came and it wouldn't take too long and they would talk until it was ready. Maybe he had to work late and couldn't phone her; maybe the phone was out with the storm, it had been so long since someone had called her to be sociable. There had been rumours and stories told she was sure. All her family and their friends had been at the wedding with presents and happy smiles but they had soon heard about the trouble she had gone through and perhaps wanted to avoid her rather than make her uncomfortable with their questions and forced kindness. She thought it wiser to work these things out by herself, being sure that it was all right and settled within herself before she tried to explain it to the others around her. She felt ready about now and intended to write letters to her friends and everyone who had been at the wedding that day explaining about how things had just not worked out at all and her husband had been resentful and violent and had often beat her and left her with the house and the money worries for weeks at a time and then come back and said nothing to her about where he had been and where he had spent the money that he had taken from her before he left. They would understand; a few of them had taken her aside before the wedding day and asked her if there might be some benefit in waiting a month or so until she was sure that she wanted to marry and live with him for the rest of her life. She had asked Levi to bring her some envelopes and stamps so that she might write those letters; he understood completely what she wanted to do and often encouraged her to tell him exactly how she wanted to word the letters and had suggested certain changes

and made many comments that had helped her make up her mind about how she wanted to explain it all to everyone; but then he forgot the things she asked for; he had told her that they didn't have them at the store or he was rushed on his way to see her and hadn't stopped or that she might want to wait and think about it a little longer and she almost felt that he was trying to keep her from what she wanted to do but then realized he had been right all along about so many other things that she found herself wondering if he detected a flaw, something in her explanation she was not aware of, something he had not told her about, hoping she would work it out herself.

She sighed and tried to picture him in her mind, driving through the mud and the wet, hoping that she wouldn't be upset with him being late and all. Probably it was still raining over the town and he had waited until it had stopped or let up enough to be safe. Maybe just this once she would pretend to be hurt or upset about him being late; they had never had a fight and it bothered her sometimes that she always ended up forgiving him for things like not getting her envelopes. But she wouldn't keep it up for long or be too angry because it might not have been his fault that he was late and maybe he had gotten a surprise for her; wasn't her birthday sometime soon? If she forgot so easily now just think what it might be like when she started to get old and senile like her mother had been at the end and unable to remember things even more important than that. That might be it; he had gone home first to get cleaned up after work because tonight he wanted to do more than hold her hand in front of the fire and might take her upstairs to the bed and spend the night holding her and touching her body that hadn't been noticed in God she didn't remember how long since the last good time. There had been the times when her husband had forced her and she had cried and told him over and over that it hurt and that she didn't like the things that he shouted in her ears and the things that he did to her anyway even when it hurt and she bled and sometimes even passed out until morning or when he kept hitting her and throwing water on her until she woke up again to see him standing over her naked and mean.

She was sure that it would be different when Levi finally took her to make love to her; he had asked her questions about what had been done to her and after she had gotten over her shame and modesty she had told him and he had been angry and shocked and had taken her to the doctor and had her checked to make sure that she really wasn't hurt bad. He had taken her many times and had talked to the doctor about the things she had told him, probably to save her from having to tell it again and to a stranger who she didn't know but Levi said that she should trust the doctor as much as him. It would be so nice if he finally made love to her tonight, she had been wanting him to ask her for so long but still felt comfortable and happy knowing that someday they would and it would be even better because they had waited so long and they were both shy about it. Of course he had gone home to clean up and maybe he might have eaten there after he changed and cleaned up but she would save the food for him anyway eventhough now she had lost her appetite in her excitement about what would come later that night. He was always so courteous and polite; imagine, going all the way home in the rain to change and shower for her when it really wasn't necessary because he always came straight from work and smelled clean and didn't have any dirt on his clothes. He had told her that he worked in an office and she had met him when he came to visit her parents who he had known for a long time, having worked with them at her father's

mill, and then spent the rest of the time when he came to visit talking to her and taking her for walks in the fields and for drives in his car after just talking to her mother and father for a very few minutes about the job that day and the money and the care and all the business things that she couldn't keep straight in her mind.

Lights flashed across the windows and she got up and went into the other room to see if it was Levi. But the car kept going on past the house and on down to the other farm that shared the road with her house. So it was clear for cars to come along the road now; she could expect him any minute. She straightened her robe and went back into the kitchen to heat up the dinner for him again. She looked in the pots and kettles and was sad about what was left of her dinner for him. She would be ashamed to serve it now eventhough it was his fault that it had overcooked so many times. She cleared all of the pots off the stove and put them in the sink, after scraping the food out and putting it in the dish she left outside for the cats that lived in the hay barn across the road from the house. She hoped that he hadn't eaten something that had made him sick or too tired to come see her but that was silly and she set to cleaning all of it up and putting the dishes away so that when he got there in a few minutes he wouldn't feel bad and sorry for being late and wasting the dinner tonight and she was sorry that she had fixed so much food just for herself and thought that it was awfully wasteful especially since she wasn't paying for the food but was getting it free from Levi and he had never asked for anything in return except for her to tell him the truth about the things he asked her and that she try to do the things he suggested after their talks and the things he left around written on the small pieces of paper that he printed so neatly. Now it was clean and tidy and he would never know that she meant to eat so late in the evening and they would be able to spend all the evening together and hopefully the night.

She left the fire burning in the fireplace and went back into the living room, leaving it comfortably dark, and sat in the couch that faced the window and wrapped herself in the blanket that she kept there because the window never had closed all the way and she was often cold when she sat there watching for him to come. And she sat and watched until she was tired of seeing nothing but the lights of the town in the distance that eventually turned off one by one except for those along the highway that ran through the middle of the town and she finally fell asleep there with her watery eyes part way open and ready to let her know when he arrived.

But he didn't and she was awakened by one of the cats sitting on the outside window sill, crying at the small crack and trying to squeeze through it. She watched and felt sorry for the cat as it meowed pitifully and then stopped and picked up the headless sparrow it had set beside it and tried to squeeze in again, trying to carry the bird with it. The fire had burned out and the room was dark except for the light from the newly risen moon. She got up and chased the cat away by sticking a broom handle through the window and giving a hard swat to the cat's hind legs, sending the bird carcass flying across the porch and in to the damp grass and mud of the front yard with another swat. She fed the cats and loved them eventhough they often made a mess, leaving the bones from their kills all over the porch and sometimes on the window sills where they might be shoved through on to her floor where they remained unnoticed, hidden under the ruffles at the base of the chairs next to the window until they got rotten and stank. Levi wasn't coming and she couldn't remember the last time he hadn't come without telling her he wouldn't be

there. She sat down and tried to make the fear come again, tried to make the furniture move and change the shadows with it and tried to imagine what the front of the house looked like and if it was all strange and different again. But it would not come and she gave it up as something that could be only once and never again in the same way and felt sad about how the misery of her marriage kept repeating itself over and over again until she left it and how the good things came once and were gone before she could understand them and feel their goodness, like the fear that made her hurt until she thought about it and realized how nice it was. So she gave up and perhaps Levi would come before morning.

She made sure that the door was unlocked so that he could get in if he came during the night. The stairs were steep and dark on the way to the short hall that connected the three rooms upstairs. She stopped and thought for a moment, looking down on the dark room below her. She would sleep in her old room, the one she had moved out of so that if Levi came the other room would be fresh and clean and they could just walk down the hall and climb into the fresh clean bed for the rest of the night. It didn't matter that her bed in the little room was unmade because no one else slept there except her when she first came home. She took off her robe and hung it next to her housedress that was on the back of the door and crawled under the covers away from the cold and felt the goose bumps rise all over her body as she shivered against the sheets. It would be warmer in the other room but she must save that for Levi; it was the special room for guests when her family had friends over and she had to stay out of it and keep it clean for the guests.

She hugged herself under the quilts, drawing her knees up as far as they would go and felt her joints ache and resist and her flat and sagging breasts against her arms and felt for some warmth between her legs but drew away in sadness from the dry and shrunken mound with the very little hair after all these years and cried some into her pillow as she thought about Levi and when he had come to help her when her parents died and had come just to keep her company and talk to her and check on her to make sure that the food was being brought out at the beginning of the week. She worried sometimes that she might stay in the old house, away from everyone until she died, not really knowing what was happening. Sharon cried and choked back her tears, her face hard against the little satin pillow with the embroidery around the edges but then stopped and remembered that Levi was supposed to bring the food tomorrow and maybe they might talk and maybe they might make love in her clean room down the hall. She turned over and lay on her back, watching the shapes of the shadows change and move about the room. The rain had stopped and she was very glad and turned too look out the window at the thin strip of road that led to the town that shown in the moonlight and hoped that she might see a car.

Like a Wish Down a Well

Words, thrown like a wish down a well,
Winking into the sun until the wish
Like the word, like the coin;
All become tinted by age and inactivity.
No soft hand to shine the gloss and
Warm the heart.
No deep pocket to shield the light and
Hide the scars.

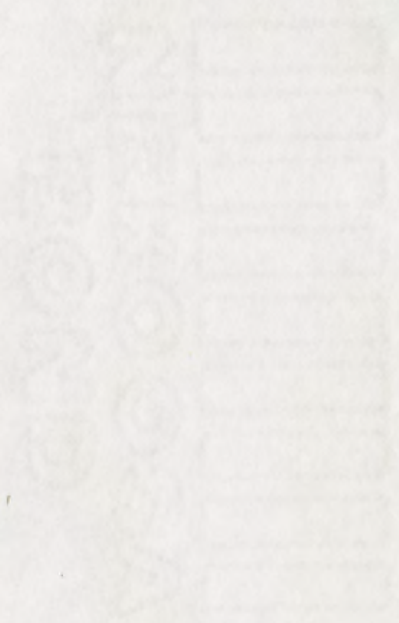
Words, thrown like a wish down a well.
But they were nice wishes with respectful
intention,
They always are.
All become silenced by weary repetition.
No more dreams to light the hearth and
Brighten the glow.
No more substance to break the day and
Replenish the morrow.

Words, thrown like a wish down a well.
Words, lost for strangers to drink.

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