5-1-1971

Aurora, 1971

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

AURORA

PATRONS

Mr. and Mrs. Lundy Adams
Roy Barlow
Ursel Boyd
Gordon Browning
Robert Burkhart
Arch B. Clark
Leroy Conrad
Arthur Curtis
Francis Davy
Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Harris
Robert Holtzclaw
Kay Hopkins
David Kik
John Long
Gerald S. May
Walter Nelson
Janet Oldham
Larry Pope
Mr. and Mrs. Carl W. Reed
Jay Roberts
Kathleen Smith
Barbara Sowders
Julia Steanson
William Sutton
Kelly Thurman
Turley B. Tudor

AURORA also wishes to express its gratitude to the Kentucky Arts Commission for a prize award of $150.

We regret any omissions necessitated by our press deadline.

AURORA

Vol. 4 No. 1

STAFF

Betty Jo McKinney

Robert Ruh

Cheryl Jones

Howard Thompson

Estill Pollock

Cindi Dorman

Beth Cocanougher

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PHEASANT HUNT

Cheryl Jones

The day had finally come. For the first time I was going hunting with my Dad. He had made me wait until I was ten since I was a girl. It had seemed like a long wait but this Thanksgiving I would help Dad bring in a pheasant. The sun shining through the three east windows of my bedroom woke me early. I threw off the blankets and jumped out of bed onto the icy linoleum floor. Being careful not to wake my sister, I ran to the bathroom, splashed some water in my face and pulled on pounds of warm clothes.

Making no effort to be quiet now I ran downstairs and hit the floor with a thud. Dad who was the only other person up told me to settle down but I was in no mood to do that. I stood on the register in the kitchen warming my feet while Dad fried eggs and bacon. He fried them just the way I liked them and somehow they tasted better than any eggs my mother ever fried for me.

I tried hard to eat as much as my father, even to drink a cup of coffee. assuring myself in spite of the horrid taste it would keep me warm while we were out hunting. While we ate Dad explained the difference between the male and female pheasant, and that he always tried to kill the male instead of the female since she might have babies someday. Leaving the dishes covered with eggs and bacon grease for my mother and sister, we went on to more important things.

Dad pulled on his bright yellow hunting jacket with his license pinned on the back. I put on my boots and Dad had to help me again with the zipper that always got caught. His face wrinkled up with the stuggle. Promising me some new ones, he finally got it up, catching my sock in it.

He got his gun out of the closet on the porch and slipped it out of the sheepskin-lined cover. It looked quite harmless and even a little bit beautiful, the barrel glossy from the oil, and the wood of the stock well-polished. He took time to tell me all about it.

"Now see this little lever right here?" he began, pointing to the safety lock.

"Yes," I said feeling very important and listening carefully.

"Well, when I push this up like this, that means that the gun can't go off even if it's loaded. But, you still have to be careful. Never stand in front of it."

I nodded, taking in every word.

"Now I'm going to load it." He took a shell from his pocket and rattled a little knob around on the gun and slipped the shell into the cavity. He squinted, and rattled it shut again. "You see I'm taking it out again until we get out to the field," he said, removing the shell.

I thought it all seemed quite simple and saw no reason why I shouldn't be allowed to shoot. But, Dad gave a definite no. It didn't matter as long as I was going along with my Dad. I could still say that I'd gone hunting.

At last we were off and going. We went down through the back yard and over the fence. Dad let me hold the gun while he climbed over. It was heavier than I thought and I had to be very careful to keep the barrel pointed up. Down through the cornfield we went, stepping over the rows of chopped-off stalks left from picking corn a few weeks earlier. I had to struggle to keep up with Dad, taking extra skips every now and then.

Nothing could have been more perfect for me that day. I could tell Dad was happy too. He was singing, but it came out like snorts because we were going so fast. His face was wrinkled to the point that I couldn't see his eyes. He always squinted that way, giving him crow's feet back to his ears.

We came to the creek and watched a muskrat swim into his hole before we crossed by jumping on rocks. We decided to go over to Mrs. Willis' pasture since she'd sold her cows and said we could hunt there anytime.

This was going to be beautiful. I envisioned myself carrying the pheasant up to the house. After showing it off in front of my sister and telling my little brother exactly how we'd managed to get it, I would take it in for Mother to dress for dinner. She would probably give me the best feathers to take to school. Then there would be next Thanksgiving and by that time I would be shooting on my own.

We walked for what seemed like miles, seeing only occasional rabbit tracks. The brilliant white of the snow made my eyes ache as I searched desperately for that irridescent green head with a bunch of male pheasants under it. There was nothing. The only sounds were distant shots of other hunters and the crunch of frozen grass as we slowly scoured the field. My feet were freezing and my fingers were numb, but I was determined that Dad wouldn't know it. If he found out, he'd want to go back and we couldn't do that, not until we got that pheasant. I didn't do a very good job of covering up, for before long he asked me if I was cold.

I shook my head but my teeth were chattering too loud for me to talk.

"We'd better go back," he resolved and started to turn around.

"No, not without a pheasant."

"Well, it won't be the first time. Let's go."

This was too much. I broke into tears. "Not without the pheasant, Dad, not without the pheasant."

He looked at me rather puzzled. I guess he didn't realize what an obsession it had become with me. He looked at me through his squinting eyes for awhile. He didn't smile. Again we started off in search of my pheasant.

We walked for about another half an hour. Then Dad motioned for me to be quiet. I clamped my mouth shut to keep my teeth from chattering and held perfectly still. I felt the cold of the gun brushing against me

as Dad got ready to aim. My throat was pounding. This was it. We'd found our pheasant. I followed Dad cautiously toward a clump of brush making as little noise as possible. Carefully, he released the safety lock on the gun. We waited.

Then it flew. Up out of the brush it came flapping its wings furiously. In an instant Dad raised the gun to his shoulder, closed one eye, followed the bird for a second, then pulled back the trigger. The shot was deafening, shattering the silence we'd held so long. For a few seconds Dad stood there after the shot, the gun raised, the glossy black barrel against the blue sky reflecting the sun.

I hadn't looked down yet. "Did you get him?" I whispered, not sure what answer I wanted to hear.

"I think we did," Dad said quietly and pointed to a heap in the snow

"Let me carry it up please," I begged, my triumph overcoming my unsureness. This was what I had waited for. I ran over to where my pheasant had dropped. I stopped short. There it lay, its shiny green head thrown back at a crazy angle. Its mouth was open showing its tongue. The blood ran out of its neck onto the snow forming a little pool of red around its head. The brown striped feathers were spread out on the snow like a fan. My throat closed up.

"I'm not going to cry," I told myself. I couldn't in front of Dad. This was what I had wanted all morning.

By now Dad had come us behind me. He stood there for awhile, then started to hand me the gun. "Hold this while I get the pheasant."

I put my hands behind my back and looked at him. He said nothing. Putting the gun down in the snow, he picked the pheasant up by its legs and stuffed its lifeless body into the pouch in the back of his jacket. I looked at the spot of blood it left, at the gun barrel in the snow, then up at my dad. I waited for his face to break into the familiar wrinkly smile and for some joke about what good hunters we had been. Neither came. He bent over and wiped the pheasant blood from his big hands, picked up the gun with one hand and held out the other to me. I couldn't take it. That wasn't the big rough hand that could gently hold my smaller one, but the hand that had pulled the trigger of that beautiful, terrible gun. I followed a few steps behind as we went back to the house without a word.

EPITAPH TO MY EDUCATION

A vocalized name breaks the shrouded silence.
My name bombards the assembly hall,
Floats to me and settles upon a blade of Whitman's grass.
No receiver . . . of what?
Questions . . .
They duped my into believing a hard-
earned piece of pulp could certify me
to give answers, not ask unanswerable questions.

Marble slabby stone gradations encircle me,
reminding me of hard-back seat ceremonies
displaying parent-pleased graduation inactivity.
The solitary monologue of a dodo bird
harping on a crumbled tree stump
suggests the podium performer delivering
to stagnantly satisfied seniors.
A stream of black sweat flows
and forms a pool to baptize each hand-shaken soul.

I, a loather of ceremony,
sit smugly against a tombstone,
hug my knowledge to my breast,
and contemplate live colleagues
at their apathetic best.

Edwina Haddix

OPTICAL DELUSION

I

Flick—a light wipes
the chalk-covered world
map whose colorful claws
creep along gray walls
and student seduce with
Paris-plastered roaming routes
of pretty posted signs,
detouring uncharted minds;
the apple big box proudly
holds its SuperQuickCleaners calendar
as the forty baby boxes
reflect an apologetic glow
for their immortalized
jim-loves-sue somebodies
and wait expectantly for their
daily tictactoe attentions;
the gray-brown ceiling sky
hovers overhead, suspensefully
"Big Brothers" sought success
and weighs upon bodies chained
to chairs and minds muzzled
to loudspeaker air;
a suicidal bulletin board
points starry-striped fingers
jabbing disillusioned drop-out
flesh—an offering to kill
the hunter—perpetuate the beast.
Bing—a bell and reflections
suddenly appear on each desk top.
Eighty eyes, propped open
by pithless toothpicks, plead
unknowingly to be awakened...
The militant company of unsat seats
forward their top table shields
to face the foe with rivet-steel eyes.
A second before the bigred roll-call
a parade of kaleidoscopic eyes
play lucidly and nakedly before me.

II

a bill-bottom-barrelled stare
winding from recesses of
whoknowswhere floats by—unaware . . .
sameyes with hurt, throwing dirt,
purging hands on unCheered shirt
shoot unblanked bullets into
ralpheyes of cookie jar chances
which flash squirt gun glances...
cathy-shy-eyes dart about
escaping each other, the world,
and maternal love she's lived without...

each molecule of material to learn
is combusted by kindling dougeyes—
lusty learning, burning eyes...
open-nozzeled rose-eyes sprinkle me—
drench me in Saturday morning cut-lawn love...
robert-hookie-eyes quietly say
that someone has to bale his father's hay...
school's in, school's in
teacher put some smarts in
and care, and humor, and
fLeXibiLiTy!

III

Voices from an empty hall echo
into the now empty room.
The ringing-scarred silence
squeezesandshoves bombarded thoughts
between screwed up walls of nothing left.
Flick—another day and month away;
I quickly tear the calendar,
and slink away without a look,
seeking enthusiasm in a friendly book
as the letters, shrinking microtight,
drift like students' faces into sight.

Edwina Haddix

EIGHTH WONDER

Robert Ruh

I remember the first time I saw the creek. In early spring. It ran at the bottom of a knoll which completely hid the subdivision from view. The water sparkled as it jagged over the rocks, making a sound like Listerine. There was a cliff on the other side which Terry called a "clift," and beyond the "clift" was nothing but trees and more trees. Greg explained to me that the creek was the deepest where the bank sloped the most, and that's where you fished. But that day we were on a bombing mission.

Robby, Greg, Terry and me lay on our bellies, our chins hanging over the cliff, as we missled little dirt clods down into the creek. When I ran out of ammo I would yank a giant clump out of the cliffside and roll it back and forth between my palms until it made a mounded arsenal. I carefully selected a brittle fragment that had been tunnelled every which way by black ants (the ones with the most holes blow up the best) and held it in ready position over the unsuspecting enemy below.

"Ten . . nine . . eight . . seven . ." rasped Greg, just like a kamikaze. "Three . . two . . one . . bombs a-wa-ay."

I flicked the warhead down into the cluster of marbles trying to make it up the hill.

"Ba-choo, ba-choo. A direct hit," squealed Robby as the sound of flying shrapnel echoed across the creek.

It was fun being the bomber pilot, but it was as much fun just lying there and watching the squadron of gnats over the water. They flew in perfect formation as they buzzed above the eddies, watching for trouble. It was fun being the bomber pilot, but it was fun too when Robby was or Greg or Terry. That's what was nice about the creek—you have to stick together there or the dirty Japs will stick a bayonet through your throat.

The guys really took care of me. Once Terry was going to drink out of the creek and I told him not to because my mom said you would get typhoid if you did. The rest of them laughed and asked me if I didn't know anything. That there was two ways you could drink it. One, if you steamed it, and two, if you drank at the bottom of a waterfall. Cause rocks and moss and stuff purified it on the way down. It really did taste good, better even than cistern water.

They even took me up to the far end of the creek where the monkey-vines were. Robby said they were grapevines even though there weren't any grapes around. It didn't make sense, but he was the oldest and I guess he knew. We would swing out over the creek, free as a newspaper as Terry said, and drop. Greg told about a boy who let go when the creek was frozen and it killed him. And the guys said it was neat when the creek was frozen and you could play hockey with sticks and use a rock

for a puck. And then they started saying things that rhymed with puck, and I remembered what my mom had said about playing with boys who used "vile language."

I guess the guys did talk pretty bad. It didn't really bother me when they said ordinary cusswords, but when they used God's name or said that other word, I knew I shouldn't be around them. I didn't really understand what "doing it" meant, but I realized that it was bad, and I wished the creek wouldn't trickle so quietly.

I would find excuses to wander off when they started talking like I imagined Catholics talked, although I had never met one. It was really something to hear them compete—whoever could cuss the longest and the fastest without repeating a word was the winner.

Those sessions finally prompted me to stay away from the creek. It was not that I wanted to stay away. I like the guys. But I knew, at least I had been taught since I was a mere pip-squeak, that there were certain things that a person could not do and say. I had learned where to draw the line. So, with mixed emotions I decided not to go to the creek. It was as if some unseen presence was helping me to draw the line, though. My mom would have called it my conscience, I think.

At home, however, I was given the "opportunity to help" by cleaning the basement, carrying out the trash, and watching my brother. Doing that, my dad said, would keep Mom off her feet and she wouldn't have to worry where I was. He said we should do all for her that we could because she wasn't feeling too well. As fat as she was getting, it was no wonder to me that she felt bad, baby or no baby.

I didn't mind the jobs, but I couldn't help thinking about the creek and how the frogs leaped from the bank three steps before you got there. A plunk was a funny sound when you thought about it.

About the third day, while I was smashing down the trash in the can to make room for two more bags, a thought suddenly occurred to me. It's really something the way thoughts happen. As I was stomping on the second bag, the side split, and a mayonnaise jar full of table scraps smashed to the ground. I got that tight feeling in my throat like I was going to puke as I bent down and picked up the mess with my hands. There were blobs of mayonnaise and left-over potatoes lying cold all over the ground with slick potato peels folded in. Bits of spit-out broccoli and pork grizzle decorated the swill, and I gagged as I washed the slime from between my fingers.

That's what I mean about thoughts. Who'd ever thought that at such a time the creek would flash in my mind? I would go to the creek, but alone. I didn't have to play with the guys to have a good time, did I? I would be the lone explorer, noticing every leaf and ripple, and would help stranded settlers. No one could object to that.

I found being the lone explorer all right at first. The creek had a kind of peace around it that made you smile even though no one was looking. The water flowing, dragonflies hoovering, wind blowing, but all slowly, silently.

It was in that atmosphere that I came upon my eighth wonder of the world, tucked safely beneath a large, flat, shale rock. The rock was only half in the water, the dry half wedged cock-eyed in the bank. With

woodsman's skill I pulled on the rock to see if I could dislodge it. And it flipped upside-down into the creek.

There, covering the backside was a jelly-like mass, thick and oozing. A gooey film spread itself over the globules, shifting shape with each nudge of current. Like the fluid of a broken thermometer, reaching with silvery fingers in every direction and then coming back together into one glob. Streaks and specks of black and gray dotted the otherwise transparent bulk.

I was mystified by the sight. Nothing I had ever seen before resembled it, except maybe the heavy mucus in your head when you had a cold. I got a queer flutter in my stomach when I thought about that rock being covered with mucus—a sick feeling. But I could not take my eyes off the rock. I was fascinated by it. It was strange and secretive. I had no idea what that slime might be, or where it might have come from, but I realized, easing the rock back into place, that it was my discovery and mine alone.

I visited the rock nearly every day after that. I studied the goo from every possible angle, looking at its perfect units. They formed wonderful patterns, like a colorless kaleidoscope, which were always changing with the water. In time, my wonder became too much to stand, and I could think of only one way to find out what my treasure was.

"Listen Robby, if you promise not to tell anyone, I'll show you something like you've never seen before."

"If it's on the creek," said Robby, the matter, a fact, "I've seen it."

"O.K.," I said when we reached the creek, "suppose you tell me what this is," flipping the rock on *this*.

"Boy, oh boy, what a find, what . . a . . find," he said, making his voice squeak on purpose.

"Well, what the heck is it?" I yelled. I wasn't exactly mad but I couldn't see why Robby would act so silly about my secret.

"Frog eggs," he said flatly. "Plain old frog eggs. I can show you a million of them up and down the creek."

I had spent so much time there, thinking and guessing, that I wasn't ready for the answer. I had not really expected one.

"You mean baby frogs will hatch out of there?"

"Tadpoles first. Then they will lose their tails and become frogs. Millions of them, all over."

"Well, these are my frog eggs. I'm taking care of them. You won't tell anyone where they are, will you?"

"Hell no, I won't tell."

"Swear on a stack of bibles?"

"On a stack of bibles."

So I continued my daily watch and waited for the birth of my pet tadpoles. I started getting nervous, however, while watching that glob. It seemed like they were never going to hatch. Each day I would sit there and stare, feeling guilty that nothing was happening. If only I could have done something to help. The guilt seemed to grow with each silent hour. I thought, "Here I am at the creek, taking care of my eggs. I really shouldn't be down here because my mom is going to have a baby, and I am supposed to be around to help out." What was worse though was that

it would upset her even more if she thought I was playing with that "rough bunch," and that was exactly what I wanted to do again.

I enjoyed being with my glob, but just sitting there brought back memories of bombing, fishing, and swinging. It seemed I had a duty at home, one to my eggs, and if I went back to the gang I would be neglecting both. But all those hours of watching had brought no change in the eggs, I told myself one of those long days. How could looking up the guys hurt anything, I asked myself. After all, Robby was the first real friend I ever had and was the first to show me the creek.

Greg and Terry acted like wiseguys when I came up to them. They said I had another thing coming if I thought I could get back in the gang whenever I decided to. They asked me what I was doing back at the creek, that they thought I was too good to mess around with them. I told them "heck no" that I really liked them, and asked what were the plans for the day. They said they were going to a haunted house, but they would have to vote on it to see if I could go. I looked at Robby, but he walked away out of hearing distance and huddled with Greg and Terry.

When they came back they weren't mad anymore, and said it was good having me back in the gang. It was good to be back. I had never even seen a haunted house before. I didn't even know what one was until they told me, and I decided I was lucky to be "in."

The house sat on a hill, and as we climbed up to it, Greg said not to make any noise because you never knew when there were spooks around. I didn't believe in spooks, but I still crouched low to the ground.

Through a broken window I saw an old pump-organ back in a corner, and in front of it lay long streamers of red hair. Robby pushed the cobwebs aside and asked me if I knew what had happened. He said a long time ago a madman had strangled a lady there while she was playing the organ, and that the hair was all that was left of her. The reason it was red was because of the blood. I was scared, scared like when I was allowed to stay up and watch Thriller Show.

But then Terry said they were going to tie me up there for the madman to get. I shot a quick smile to each of them, swallowing the lump as they circled around me.

"Hey you guys, what's the deal?"

"No deal for you," said Terry.

"We don't like candy asses," hissed Greg.

"Hey, don't call him that," said Robby, "he may run home to his mommy."

"Yeah, and have you seen his mommy?" Greg laughed.

"Yeah, she's knocked-up," Robby said with a snicker.

"How about that candy ass? Her and your old man have been doing it."

Those words sounded over and over again in my brain — doing it. doing it . . . . what could that mean? Why would they say that about my mother? I could remember them saying it before, and they always laughed way down deep. And then they would say that other word, I thought, as I kicked at a little patch of grass.

"Hey, I think he is going to cry."

"Don't cry," Greg echoed.

"No," said Terry, "Wait until you see what we did to your precious frog eggs."

"You promised you wouldn't tell," I looked up at Robby. "You swore on a stack of bibles."

"Bullcrap."

I could not believe that he had really lied to me. He was the boy who I thought was my best friend; but when it sank in, I grew furious. "You better not have touched those eggs," I said. My red face seemed to encourage them.

"And what if we did," said Terry, folding his arms across his chest.

I stared at the three do-you-want-to-make-something-of-it faces, and, without deciding to, bolted. I ran, my legs thrashing in front of me, through brown and gold and flashes of green. When I got to the bottom of the hill, I glanced over my shoulder and saw that they were not following me, but I continued, my legs a mill in a wind storm.

When I arrived at the rock, the water was rushing and foaming over it, but the rock appeared unmoved. I lifted lightly, and there still on the bottom was the jelly-like mass, not a single part moved.

I picked the rock up with both hands—"her and your old man have been doing it," the sound bounced around in my head—and carried it a few feet downstream. I thought about my baby tadpoles, then the creek, then the guys, then my mother, as I struggled up the bank with the rock. Nothing seemed fair—my mother griping at me ever since she got fat because of some pesty baby, or the way the guys talked about her, or the way they acted toward me because of her. I wanted to defend her, but they would have hated me even worse, even though I liked them.

I looked at my baby tadpoles once more when I got to the top of the bank. In back of me the creek banged against the rocks, trying to free itself. "Doing it, doing it . . ." I walked to the nearest tree, and jerked the rock high above my head. I heaved it with all my might against the trunk, and the goo spewed out in all directions. It covered the trunk, and I watched it drip drop-by-drop to the ground.

"I don't give a damn," I yelled out-loud. "I don't give a damn."

IS THIS REALLY ME?

Frustrated by a predetermined means to a way
which is no more.
Today — absolute goals with indefinite means
absolutely no where — lost.
Please excuse me for my inadequacies —
fulfillments always come in stride
But I want them NOW!
Contrary to all popular beliefs — the eclipse
of the sun and - or moon is a complete intercourse
in the sky. (I wonder what Freud would have
said about that conjecture?)

Jacqueline Brown

HEADIUS ASCENDING

"It may taste bad, but the wow minnows through in schools of higher-tide."

Ernie Lundquist

(for R.E.P.)

Mine was half the luck of Cocteau
Zig-zagging in time out of joint....

Winter's claw scoops chestward to shock
my lungs into cowardice: sacs hacked
by edges of air; this as rising smoke:
Twin balloons sucked colorless—
& I must find my plastic pouch.
Today is Wednesday and so is tomorrow...

To roll or not to roll, that is
the questioned prayer prayed on mary—
(jane knows but she won't tell)
mary, mary mother of stained lungs
shelter us from winter's white hits
& lead us into Circe's-song for thine
is the glory and glory amen.

Wednesday & 1968
I like grass when it is called grass;
no metaphysic insight — like Bang!
Bhang Bhang. You're dead or alive.
& the manic snow will ice my breath
to Marakesh expressly for

Bang Bang, the bullet's copper gullet
sends up its prayers to mary: I
am twenty years in coming Mother:
I heard a fly Buzz when I died

Robert Ruh

COMPOSITION IN BLUE HOWL

"It were no better to be alive in a world of death
than to be dead in a world of life;"
Gregory Corso

-more- The howling blue in its windish fervor
reeks into clottishly meaty beer gracefully splattering into such sticky sources.
The liason lasting long lingering un-hours — wet lamenting
howls begin the horrifying dissent
bumping beautifully with the plastic powder
- pinkened howl -
Stiffness zig-zags the reclining master
- redened howl - mutate the lost and rally the existing chill.
"The awful mistake of happiness." twenty-three yellowish reds and twenty-three blueishly blacks the total composition enacting
a brutal suicide
- metal clashing blue howl -
None remembered they remembered
but they remembered
such mud packed deadish-felt embracing dying death.
Towers of black and blue
scream redishly to the Man
- can you see: can you see -
GOGA rides the bubbling elephant through the
frozen rubbish
- now is the time you bald headed bastered: now: do it now -
Orange balls batter the bastered bald disclosing fire - water- air-
The coyote howls red insanity so high all is blue.
It were better but now it's worst - the son
smokes down a trash-shute in search of a
father - the red screams of insanity pulsate the boy bigger than the bubbling elephant
GOGA wishes a trip -
You in the shade there beating-on: what's your
name -
orange balls plugged the head - no more.
The virgin of babylon fills the cup with
smelly juice -
a yellow puss plays like a coffin lid - there is someone rotting in that there coffin.
The dam blasting back the
clottishly meaty beer breaks -
The bubbling
elephant leads
the uneven flow.
The howling blue in its windish fervor reeks grey.

David Paige Hale

A NICKEL'S WORTH

Jim Webb

It was a New York night, a night not to be confused with a Chicago night or an eastern Kentucky night. The sun had stayed for two hours in the now cooling, tar black street and the heat was rising to meet the cool night falling. There was no wind from the lake shore and there were no wind-whipped, tree-studded valleys to stifle the curtain of August warmth that bound both sides of the street. It was from this canyon of polymer tenements and barbed wire heat that we ventured. We just wanted to find an oasis.

The van was parked against the curb near my brother's apartment building. The tires, miraculously, were still inflated (it having been eleven days since they were last icepicked). Perhaps the Texas license plate had struck a sympathetic Puerto Rican heart. "Hey man, no not that one, he could be Mexican" and we were saved as in the Passover. But more likely, they just hadn't hit Robb's street since his last flats. Yeah, they just hadn't prowled his street, a Puerto Rican hamlet. A Mexican would probably be just as apt as a Gringo to get a flat there anyway. My brother would have made you think he was a used car salesman the way he could kick a tire. He circled the van and got a gassy pleasure each time his foot bounced back from a tire. I could have sworn I heard a kid pinging an overly inflated basketball on the sidewalk, but it was just my crazy brother and his happy tires. I think if he could come out and kick his tires each day without hearing a sinking thud, his faith in mankind would be eternal, at least on a day-to-day basis. Well, this is becoming a tiring subject and I didn't even want to talk about tires. Wow, when you think about a good thing while talking about something else you just gotta mention the good thing. Well, the tires were a good thing, especially seeing my brother get a kick out of something. He gets such a bang out of little things that it kinda gives you a charge just to watch him. Anyway, he was the guide, so we allowed him time for this inspection of the caravan's equipment before we started across the New York City desert.

We opened the side doors of the van and Ernie, Shirley, C. J., and I piled in on the translucent-in-some-places green rug that half covered the floor. There were no windows and the only things resembling seats were the rounded sofa-like arms that formed a shell over the wheels. Robb drove and Marilyn passed the oil. The van, circa early sixties, had an insatiable appetite for oil and, like a petulant baby, would not perform unless rewarded. Marilyn applied her learned magic and the engine stopped its whining long enough to hurtle us off into the ink night in a hanging cloud of oily exhaust.

Looking through the front window of a van from the floor in the rear, you see the strings of glowing bulbs that hem the skirt of nighttime.

You can hear the traffic, but can't see it, and you can feel the living current of the light bulb people in the animal warmth they generate. You see the lights swirl by and you swear you're going eighty, but the speedometer trickily bounces around the thirty-five mark in sporadic ticks. The van won't even go eighty, Robb says. But you're happy to think of going eighty and know it's only thirty-five. You're a racer without the danger, a mountain climber going up the two block 39th Street hill. And when you stop at a red light and are holding hands with C. J., you're not looking up at the lights, but down on the clouds. Until a band of kids darts out and bangs with open hands on the side of the four wheeled tin drum like the clap of thunder and you fall from the clouds. "We gonna let them get away with that?" Everyone laughs and you remember where you are and you know a street fight in New York City may not be as friendly as one in Hazard, Kentucky.

Robb finally stopped the truck, threw it, and us, in reverse, and in a rather nifty, haphazard way parallel parked. The sudden buffeting upset the part of our brains that has the gyroscope and we all went wobbling like polyethylene punching clowns with sand in our feet. In various modes of motion we disembarked. C. J. gracefully tripped on the rug, Ernie of the six-feet-four inch frame patted the roof with his head, I crawled out, and Shirley descended like a lady, a lady on roller skates. We soon lost out sea legs and looked up and saw the oasis. There were rows and rows of lights and yet we couldn't see at all. We could hear the churning monster and were compelled to stand for a moment in awe. My brother had delivered us to the restorer of lost dreams, the replenisher of waning emotions, the bargain basement deal of a lifetime — the Staten Island Ferry.

The Ferry is like nothing else in this world. At night the street leads down to it like a ribbon bordered with sequins that lies waiting to be pulled from a happy birthday present. At the end of he ribbon "you pays your nickle and you takes your ride" in the great big floating box. With phantasmagorical glee, we dropped our nickles in the toll boxes and scattered out in pairs for out first personal impressions, feelings that were kind of like the aura of one's first unaccompanied journey to the first grade. Wow, I'm a big kid now and I can do and see things in the big world. Well, the Ferry carries you to the world and has a way of making you sit at the table until you eat and, if you're lucky, you can eat too much and get heartburn. The trip to Staten Island, if your heart pangs up, can take you to and from your heart for the rest of your life.

C. J. and I made our way from the aft through the bus-station-like passenger area to the railing that ringed the ship. Below we could hear the dog ocean lapping the water in its bowl and to our distant right we could see the purveyor of the harbor, the Statue of Liberty. We were probably not the first lovers who felt her torch was the front porch light and her the meekly mumbled about lady behind the door. But she was to be there to guide the Ferry.

On a clear night the stars shine so much you think you can see your reflection. Space mirrors to the beauty of the heavens. It was that kind of night when the Ferry lurched into the bay with a whoosh of water and a bray from its boisterous Olympian trumpet.

The drone of the engines, the hum of little men pedaling the paddles, was a lullaby and the lilting wind rocked us as we stared into the immediate blackness. C. J. said little and I answered everything she didn't say with my eyes. It was kind of like playing whirly-go-round, holding hands and spinning till you collapse in childish delirium. The Ferry too played our game, holding hands with us, and we, hoping for an eternal triangle, wouldn't let go.

There was an inner life too, beyond the immediacy of C. J. and me. The regulars in the "lobby," seen through yellowish windows, looked like shadows in a Jack O' Lantern. Occasionally, one of these spectres would come out to see if the harbor still looked like it had every day for the past twenty years. They had found life or had given up the search, and to them the Staten Island Ferry was a bulky bus running on water, that ranked on the melancholic scale right along-side a Mack truck. It was really hard to think of them as anything other than unenthusiastic fans who had come to watch out romantic game because they got a free pass at the local tavern. But from these, one romantic did emerge.

I first saw him on the fringe of my reverie as he was talking to Ernie and Shirley. He was balding and had stubby, hard working hands. Beyond that, he was just the kind of guy you pass a thousand times on the street, but never see. He first caught my eye when he was pointing toward Miss Liberty to a dimly lit rectangle that seemed to rest on her shoulder.

"That there was stockade during World War II," referring to the rectangle and still pointing. Ernie nodded.

"Yeah, I had to stay there tree munths, but they took pretty good care—I mean food, warm, and stuff." Saying this his eyes glittered.

I knew Ernie would nod again. Ernie's like the Ferry, he is for people.

"I didn't do nothin', they just wanted to send me overseas and I wasn't ready. Hell, they trow ya in for a coupla weeks, give ya a gun and ship ya out." The way he talked, it could have happened yesterday, even though he was at least in his mid-fifties. The gleam in his eye was fresh.

He was gripping the rail, the loose grip of a man divorced from the present, a man sliding into recollections. Barely audible above the Ferry's lion purr, he smiled when he began again.

"Yeah. The Staten Island Ferry. I useta stand in my window and watch it go all day. And night too. I could think of them people on it. I couldn't see them and they couldn't see me, but I knew they was on it. When I was in there, that stockade, that's all I wanted in the world was to ride the Staten Island Ferry. That's all I wanted."

Another nod from Ernie, the people lover, followed by unnecessary question one is sometimes compelled to ask, "What did you finally do?"

"Well, I got out and went to war. I guess I got too tired of watching the Staten Island Ferry and not bein' able to ride it or anything."

I think Ernie understood more than I. He had just come back from war.

"But the first day they let me out, you know what I did? I rode the Staten Island Ferry for what was most of the day. And each time I looked where I'd been sleepin for tree munts and was sure glad I was ridin'

the Staten Island Ferry instead of sittin' up there lookin' at it. Yeah, I sure was." His grin was in each word and you could tell he was no longer on the Ferry with us, but was riding it in the exclusive return engagement floating in his mind.

He remained a few moments more in placid rumination and then left saying, "Ride the Staten Island Ferry whenever you can, kids." He ambled off as inconspicuously as he had arrived and we returned to the Ferry's partners, the night, stars, and water.

The crush against the collapsible tubes lining the dock brought us back to the blaring lights. One last glimpse out over the bay, trying to hoard as much as possible, camels preparing for the Sahara, and then we turned, walking, to the van, city, country. Beneath my ribs I felt an infant twinge.

CASTLE OF CLOUDS

Pale blue, light white
Clouds in the air
Form the king's castle
In the land of somewhere.

The queen is a golden woman
Mother of honey
She lives in leisure
In the light of the sun.

Children move everywhere
And dance with the wind,
Overflowing, tumbling over
Melting and blending.

All laugh and run
With their whirlwind father
They live in seclusion
And never look down.

Mike Norris

IN TIME OF WAR

Slumming near Hatteras, an old routine
; the shutters of this North Atlantic cottage
flutter like a bird's sprained wings. Slates
scab the roof. A bronze-plumed weathercock
corkscrews on its rusted spike, salt air
groaning through its eyeholes: everywhere,
this seascape of cold, continual blue.

Little else remains:— sloth's dull hysteria,
the sluggish insanity of our vacuous sublime.
What little's possible remains beyond these old
familiarities of Time & continuity of Space.
Squeezed-out tubes of "Quick-Tan" litter
the public beaches. The off-season approaches
like the ghost of something dead for nothing.

Last summer's mermaids have sloughed
their fish-net swimsuits with the hides
that flaked away like scales—bussed
back to Raleigh or Winston-Salem: co-eds,
or secretaries now that summer's ended.
In each boarded oarshed, their faded, deflated
life-preservers hang like spoiled sides of meat.

. . . There are vacancies here. The whole
unfurnished, shell-shocked scenery's for hire.
Thought stales in my skull's hollows.
I am nobody, a veteran of this mental block:
unoccupied, & at home at these extremes.

The weathercock's clacking, metallic flight
sustains this emptiness: from the vane's
orange-flaked spine, heaven hangs
like a discarded helmet upon a stick.

Something's
lacking here:
its absence extends
beyond this acreage.

All our fair-weather
faiths are in retreat:

Terminus, deity of boundaries,
your absence extends
beyond our weather; whole
horizons sour in your distances.

Slumming near Hatteras:
no peace
to the warring routine
of an old life.

What little's possible
remains beyond these old
familiarities: the winged
vane's greening bronze
grows greener as season
washes into season.

Accustomed to our climate,
it flies no where:

points to nothing,
for no reason.

Estill Pollock

A SPARE FOR JONATHAN

(for Jonathan Galassi)

"A car . . . incorporates the experience
of racing in order to render daily use
more enjoyable and secure."

Enzo Ferrari

i

A car spells out a lifestyle . . . ;
conditions of travel, points of no return
& interest. But when our purring hulks burn
out along some unmapped mile
of backroad, pile
into trees or passers-by, we find those mechanistic
truths we live by expendable—spent
when our stalled machinery's dials tick
down to zero. Ignition's flint
without the edge to drop . . . damp powder
dead to spark:
like Rimbaud's fly, drunken in the tavern's privy,
'. . . enamoured of borage, dissolved by a sunbeam.'
We
are never what we seem....

ii

In the dark
of our lives the old dreads tower
above our listing hulls like masts.
But in hearthlight, day or starlight,
our height
of spars
confuses the common view to praise:
shrouds seem sails; grounded, we seem to sail.
Enough of our own wind that those
landlocked hazard—"It lasts."
Voyage by voyage our frail
ships empty
down the sucking fathoms & hole of hell's sea.
Jonathan, by shipload or by carload, the vanity
of cars,
we are dying,
totaled along lanes on maps we
-'ve never seen:
it's the trying
breaks & makes us run, the posthumous rescue
after our mean
reckonings have failed;
plaques for something we didn't really
do
— tried & could not — how we
lost control . . . what availed.

iii

A car spells out a lifestyle . . . .
John Nims' Mercedes immaculate
on the faculty lawn.
In a fifth of rye we'd killed
we dreamed leagues of roads, to hell
& back again . . . back? — rather tried
&, in that, died.

iv

My brain's blood sours in its cells.
Hell's
nearer. 'When a poem stops', Nims said;
—' . . . when a poem stops the reader
should go through the windshield.'
When we died . . . .
My mind's ill.
Suicide's nearer.
Against thought's blank, the gun-muzzle's
cold zero multiplies our death, easier than words.

v

When the poem stops . . .

vi

A car spells out a lifestyle...;
walking's nearer; footfall
of the ghost.
Everywhere,
breath is wreckage. Though out of its rust,
out of loss, as if against the final NO,
our thumbs
—all thumbs—
like triggers, cocked to die,
still slash the air
for rides . . . .

Estill Pollock

BY HIS OWN HAND

To J. G.,
against the time.

It was time
that it were time to make an end:
killing time in Boston,
in capetowns from Hatteras to Cod,
I saw it time to make an end;
fogbound ketches crawling seaward
in Point Judith's tides—
white flags for sails
hoisted to scissoring gull-wings—
the foghorns groaning on suicide
; & wished goodbye
to this dry stalk of breath,
a husk rooted in the rest of my life.

I wrote to you in Cambridge:
"my brain's blood sours in its cells".
Found in Narragansett,
my knot of breath fraying at rope's end,
sock-feet padding a quicksand of air
above and overturned Sears & Roebuck barstool,
I
-'d wished goodbye
to figures fire-locked & fair,
Catherine & Miss Cecily McNaughton,
reclining to suntans in Newport, R. I.,
napes of milkglass
flushed in their hair's soft flame.
Found dangling by neighbors in my thin
& static air of wrong connections,
blacked-out but alive, sucked back
to the warm bog of a life racked by living,
last week, in an Avis rental,
I was shipped out
to the house of flawed sense.

To you, two months ago in Cambridge,
I posted the scrawled note—
"...suicide's nearer",
& ached to make an end,
my mind's ill gnawing from the back
of mind to light; the telephone's recording
droning off its hook—assistance
I no longer wanted. Blinds drawn,
the cat let out, I tried to die,
to commit nothing back to God.

All I've surrendered are personal effects,
wallet & razor, the use of forks & knives:
the ward attendant
shaves me, whether or not I need it,
once a day; spoons
out chicken-broth
with professional detachment;
dogs my friend, a veteran
of the Punic Wars, & me to showers—
careful I'll not smash
the shaving glass
&, with a sliver, drain my longing—
careful Hannibal doesn't glance
his own reflection
& assault the enemy he sees there.

Thursdays,
therapeutic shock
jolts our dampened senses,
synthetic health's voltage
flushing color to our cheeks
for visitors on Fridays. If you come,
bring Camel cigarettes
& the latest *Punch*.

It's all an inside joke....

Lifers, we're all in stitches here,
twisted up in jackets half our size:
dressed to kill
time; lifestyles out of mind.
Our minds: second-hand goods,
wedged like shoetrees in skulls
stretched to wit's end.
Each,
a bad fit.

Estill Pollock

HOMAGE TO GRACCHUS

(derived from Franz Kafka's parable "The Hunter Gracchus")

"My ship has no rudder, and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death." — Kafka

Last things:
it's an old lie.

The fanjet's groaning hydraulics
braking my night-flight into Newark,
my last Camel
hissing down the Men's Room flush
(there's another pack
in the baggage i've misplaced);
i slouch in the West Terminal
Bar & Grill, soaking Ballantine
bottle-ale, thumbnailing the soggy scabs
of labels into the ash-tray.
It is 1967.
I am between flights,
& waiting for a lift in weather.

Waiting for a lift —
outside, the cabs crawl curbward
for their fares,
& then depart; a scene
of hearses excerpted from some Gothic
tale; headlamps hacking graveward,
twin-drills of light
boring through a Styx of fog.

If i wasn't down to pocket-change,
i'd make New York, or Metuchen
in an hour:
but everyone i knew there's in Vermont.

Everyone is someplace
else than there,
& me.

Metuchen in an hour,
a song someone i knew there sang—
a woman i tried to make
& died a little leaving: "when you're lost
in the rain & it's Easter time too,
& your gravity fails
& negativity won't pull you through . . .":
i've time enough to kill,
& just as well it's here as someplace
else; across the river, New York tonight—
a flickering fist of fireflies,
wedged in a jar of smoked glass.
People taxi toward its glowing bulb
like moths.

Just as well it's here as Natchez,
Huntington or L.A.; cities,
they're all the same now,
& because i've nothing
to return to, there's little need
or matter in my going.

Last things?—
it's an old lie,
& all delay, toward whatever end
I hope of making, between flights:
& still the cabs depart, meters running,
ferrying strangers into the night—
always someone else
with means & destinations
definite in mind; a planned absence,
purposeful & exact.

1967;
& i am between flights,
between breaths—"& your gravity fails
& negativity won't pull you through . . .";
Action, Reaction, they're all the same now:
what i've become—
rudderless upon these chartered wastes,
dragging anchor,
pretending harbor
at every passing river portlight.

Outside,
the cabs crawl curbward for their fares,
& then depart somewhere,
into darkness tangible, finite
& to an end, meters running,
into everywhere else but here;
from earth depart:
move—
toward a negative
& opposite reaction
ferry their positive fares,
their dead freight.

Last things:
Gracchus, patron of this loss,
it's all delay —
everywhere i go is between flights,
between Departure & Arrival.

It's all delay:
& between breaths, coffined airtight
in its compass-case of flesh,
the heart's needle,
that old lie,
geared to exile,
still whirs
across the face of misdirection.

Estill Pollock

FALLING

Terry L. Rankin

It hasn't snowed, I mean *really* snowed, around here for the past two or three Christmases. They say the air's too warm because of pollution.

I wonder who "they" are? "They" that built the interstate highway but can't get lead out of gasoline. "They" that war for peace. Cain lives.

Think I'll take the old road and go by Clay's Ferry since the road will be clear. The river will be creamed-coffee brown, the houseboats dry-docked, the beaches smoothed by the rain. It will all be the same in its change. And it will change in the spring to be the same again.

Sorry, fella, I'm taking the next exit to old US 25, but somebody'll stop for you.

I wonder how long he's been standing there. It's cold for that. But somebody'll stop for him. Besides, I'm already going out of my way, and anyway, traffic's a lot heavier than it was when we hitched to the river.

"Maybe whoever picks us up'll buy us some beer." Snookie, the unredoubtable optimist.

"If anybody picks us up, Snook." Rice's beer mug was forever half-empty, never half-full.

"Alright, Rice! So I should've brought the I.D. But the last time we tried it, it didn't work. I mean I can hardly pass for thirty-seven and anyway my ol' man knew we'd swiped it. Quitcha bitchin'."

"Guess you both know that our first problem is a ride down there. I mean a hundred I.D.'s won't get us a ride. First first an' all that crap."

"So?? Any suggestions for gettin' a ride, professor Grady. I been standin' here with both thumbs out for the last half an hour!"

Snookie took a long drag off his cigarette to oil the diabolical machinery of his brain.

"They'll never stop for three of us. Three cruds like us standin' here with our thumbs hangin' out . . . I mean would you stop? Hell no! So you two hide in the ditch while I hitch a ride and then when somebody stops for me we can all get in."

"Oh that's beautiful, Snookie! Now just what would you do if you were drivin' along and stopped for one guy an' the three of *us* came runnin' up, hun ? Open your trunk an' get out your welcome mat? Sure . . . ."

"I'll tell you this, Rice. When I get my license I ain't passin' no-body up, 'cause I'll remember standin' out here like a sign-post. Yeah, when I get 'em . . . Hey! here comes a car! Get in th' ditch!"

In the ditch, among the trash and the stick-tights, Rice and I pledged allegiance to the same vow to the fraternity of future thumb-bums. And as usual Snookie's idea would eventually work. One time it was a fag with smorgasbord on his mind, but we got our ride to the river just the same.

If there was enough time, we would get off at the interstate bridges over the river: The highest east of the Mississippi, they say, about 600 feet. Twin flats of road just over a quarter-mile long with the three-dimensional steel cobweb of support arching underneath, spanning four pairs of concrete towers. And under each bridge a cat-walk rolled with the metal maze from pillar to pillar, bank to bank. Because of his fear of heights Rice would walk down by the old road, leaving Snookie and me to mount these demons. It was a matter of boyish manhood to us, our honed daring pitted against the bridges' apathetic suspension of us just an inch-and-a-slip from "the plunge" to the river gargling far below.

Caution was enough until a "semi" or even a Volkswagen shot past overhead, followed by a wake of rushing air and a tremor that would shake the mesh underfoot and the entire superstructure all around; we felt then as convicts must feel during an earthquake. Then the low belch of settling girders signalled panic's end, though our death-grip palms remained one with the steel support-cables strung alongside, catalyzed by sweat and 1000 volts of pure fear.

Why??

It was the earning of the first 700 steps to the middle — to the pillar with its roots in the river — that made the last 700 the "coming-home" half of the journey; they became things we owned by right of the conquering; private domains awaiting their lords. There in the middle, at the transitory zenith, we paused to mark another trip over, scratching in the concrete with our church-key openers beneath our initials left from the first time.

A dozen times, perhaps; though of course it was never the same. IMT had attained the nobility of a necessary and unspoken ritual, the completion of which gave the summer sun a warmer soak, beer on the little beach below a deeper slake, drunkenness a freer abandon; the whole day yet to come gained an ascetic intensity.

Rice would already be at the beach building a fire. The beach was a sandy plateau completely hidden from the outside by a green net of overhanging branches. It was summertime home and fair-weather utopia for our budding masculine adventure. It dozed under a third bridge, the old one, merely sixty feet high and used only by Joe "Wrong-Turn" Tourist and local partrons of the Circle-H (for Honky-Tonk).

Next to the beach was the swing — a rusted cable tied to the highest branch of the tallest birch, it hung daring at water's edge where the bank sloped upward with a steepness concentric to the pendulum of the swing. All for a 15-foot drop to the river. But, being not too high for Rice, it gave the afternoon a wet pleasure and cooled the breeze. At least it would until the "students" showed up. How Eastern ever found out about it, well . . . it doesn't matter, they did: Giggling co-eds hanging onto the arms of the more adventurous jocks and dormant intellects of the coming age. Odd that they always seemed to be northerners to whom the "outdoors" had meant Central Park on Sunday afternoon and Daytona Beach in March. At least these were the ones who brought blankets and, bless their hearts, coolers and washtubs brimming with iced-down beer. Sometimes even a *keg*.

The beer, of course, turned Snookie's gray matter into Satan's

carousel. We "had" the only flat and sandy privacy around, they had the beer, and since the jocks always had the girls, a bargain seemed inevitable.

But that would be too-simple and un-cunning solution.

Too much beer soon made the swing their stomachs' dread. They were chilly, but we had a fire.

"Hey! Y'all can dry out here by our fire if you wanna. Plenny o' room." Snook was beautifully passive.

About an hour of sunshine left, so we'd have to work fast.

"Thanks. Youse guys want a beer" Gratitude in the face of such cunning was a pity. They didn't have a chance.

Converstaion lagged after a couple of rounds. They were northerners again. "You kids live around here Come here a lot? Did youse guys put up that swing? Anybody ever jump off that bridge?"

Aha! The *cue*!

A moment of silence . . . .

Snookie crossed himself with truly iron respect for the dead, "Only guy I ever heard of did it died before he hit the water."

"Aw, c'mon! Off that little bridge?" So Red was to play sucker. Curious bunch, redheads.

"Ooohhhh! the *little* one! I thought you meant the big one." Snookie grinned and shook his head. "I don't know, didja ever hear 'bout anythinglike that, Grady?" Snook passed the buck to spice the bait.

Red looked to me for revelation.

"Heard a guy did once. They say our math teacher used to dive off it when he was a kid. That's why they call him 'Tarzan'."

Whereupon I would exit to take a leak while Snookie and Rice toyed with Red's curiosity. He would marvel quietly at the thought while they disclosed such various factors as river trash, half-waterlogged stumps floating three feet under the surface, not to mention the 20-mile-an-hour undercurrent for which the Kentucky River is notorious. Red probably used D=rt to compute the odds on survival. By the time I'd returned he'd sure like to see somebody try it. Sometime.

"Gimme a smoke, Snookie." Ignorance in the flesh.

"Sure, here. Red here says he'd sure like to see somebody jump off that bridge, I was tellin' him how you dive for your school team an' . . . ."

"Not on your ass, buddy! A three-foot board into a pool ain't suicide, but that *is*, so *f'get* it!"

"See, I toldja, Snookie. I'm 'fraida heights an' Grady ain't that stupid!" Good ol' Rice and his fear of heights.

"C'mon Grady, he offered Rice a six-pack and what the hell, I'll do it if you will."

"Yeah Snook, I know, you'll be right behind me!" A six-pack! We got to have at least a case! "Will you give me a six-pack to throw Snookie off?

"No s---, kid, I'll give you a six-pack to jump off it. I probably won't see ya here again an' yer friend'll do it with ya. G'wan, it won't kill ya!"

"I wouldn't do it for your date, your car keys, *all* your beer, *and* your wallet, Red, so forget it!" Now that the upper bid is set, maybe we'll get somewhere.

Awakening them from their stupor, he explains the situation to his

friend and his date.

"C'mon Fred. Chip in a six-pack. Janet doesn't want hers and that makes a case. Besides, wouldn't you like to see it? He'll do it for that, c'mon."

Fred says "unnhhhhh" and burps his affirmative.

"Awright, kid. A case o' beer an' yer friend will go off too, so go on."

"Damn, Grady! Eight beers apeice! An' Snook'll do it too!"

"Waitaminit, Rice! Just who cut you in? You gonna jump too??" I waver; capitulate.

"Aw, I'll walk up withya. Gimme six at least." He pouts over a smile that only Snookie and I see twinkling within the words.

Meanwhile the other couple of the group emerges satiated from the woods. They up the bid to a total of thirty-six beers once informed. Twelve apiece!

"Alright, dammit! But you've got to get out on the rail with me an' Snookie's gotta go at the same time I do! An' one of you has to swim out an' wait . . . " solemn tone of foreboding, ". . .just in case."

"AGREED!!"

Snookie snickers the last pinch of spice, "Yeah, a greed for beer!"

We march to the bridge as Red swims out below us. First to mount the rail, I refuse to go until Rice and Snookie stand beside me. Red shouts up to us his inability to tread water forever. Back on shore even the passed-outs are watching. We shake with evening cool and anticipation, getting down, then up again.

"NOW! by God or the deal's off!" shouts Red, which triggers the trio to turn in unison, their backs to the water, and execute from sixty feet three perfect back somersaults in exquisite layout poisiton, all in congruent fluidity, all emitting Snookie's notorious war whoop all the way down, which sounds in the canyon of the river and resounds like Boone's bloody revenge!

"yyeeeeeeEEEEEHHHHHAAAAaaaa hhhhh!!"

iiSSSHHHHH---kaaFFLOOOOOSSSssshhh!!

The river explodes around Red's poor gaping face -- the expected impact tripled, and P. T. Barnum's derring-do revived!

The trio is boiled to the surface choking with laughter and bursting with the pride of total and irreversible victory!

Red is dragged to shore in a state of shock.

The spectators roll in the sand and, between hysterical laughs of approval, point our way to Red's brimming cooler of iced-down Pabst Blue Ribbon.

Rice had this fear of heights, you see.

The river is up and the swing has been cut down. The river is swift and muddy brown with winter's swelling and the black lattice-work of December's stripped trees exposes the gray beach, desolate and packed hard by the autumn floods. We jumped from right about here.

It's cold and I'm late.

The hitch-hiker is gone but I kept my word, I went back for him. They say it will snow when the sun sets so red and long on the horizon.

It is a winter of church-key vows and rusty ritual to the spirit of Abel. I hope it does snow. I mean *really* snow.

THE LOWER EAST-SIDE POLLUTION FARM

1. Polythemus

Giant with one eye,
can you hear me calling?:
that Greek has hurt so many,
done so much wrong.

Polythemus is going to die;
look: you can see him falling,
O Son of Neptune,
gazing through one eye.

Ten years after . . . the day
when Polythemus dies,
Neptune shall be heard,
& with him his plastic gig:
plastic smoke, plastic gas,

smothering the entire world
for taking the life of Polythemus,
his son's life . . . .

Time: America: anytime—now.
Farewell Giant with one eye,
for soon, Polythemus,
a change must come . . . .

2. Plastic Shearer Freaks Out

. . . breathing hard, no breath barred,
can't you see what's happening to me?
It's Brotherhood Week,
go on & freak out (I won't peek),
turn your head, what do you see:
Social Sexual Relationships.

Consistently using his spout,
Plastic Shearer Freaks Out;

writing commercial poetry,
ten minutes worth,
bringing forth a new birth:
Love beads, long hair; seed of grass.
What a pair, I've had my share . . .
brushing my teeth just to see you smile.

We smoked POT so we could love a lot;
walked over to Fourth Avenue
just to see toe-nail polish:
rolled around in glue-fumed plastic
we went to sleep, quite comfortable
(while freaking out smoke
got in our eyes), but we never told
lies. You should know it feels
so GOOD . . . .

Excuse me while I shout:
Plastic Shearer Freaks Out.

3. The Lower East-Side Pollution Farm

No harm done:
just a little fun,
all in the dirty sun;
pretty nose,
20 toes
(anything goes
when the whistle blows).

Bits of poetry
written on the wall
in the hall
during the Fall.
Frank Zappa done it
Tuli Kupferberg done it
& now I've done it too:

IT happened yesterday,
it's happening now,
it shall happen tomorrow . . . .

It keeps its charm:
all at the Lower East-Side
Pollution Farm.

4. Bethlehem Steel

Working in those mountains,
drinking out of fountains;
going home at night . . .
it's like beating my head
against Bethlehem Steel.

Rock-dust in my hair,
no jokes to share;
nothing in sight, not even a light...
it's like beating my head
against Bethlehem Steel.

No woman at home,
I'm all alone—no phone;
tell me the news & I'll tell you my blues:
it's like beating my head
against Bethlehem Steel.

I've heard the people say
it's a beautiful day today;
no more pain . . . I'm leaving this place:
no more beating my head
against Bethlehem Steel.

John Shearer

SMALL TOWN

The scream of stopping freight trains:
Regurgitation of industry pipes:
Odor-smoke from frying hamburgers:
Smog.

Humming courthouse on Saturday:
Women gossiping: Old men whittling:
Young preachers yelling in the courthouse yard:
God.

Motorcycles loudly clearing their throats:
With chest-swelled "roughs" clinging to their backs:
Young women criticized for mid-thigh skirts:
Mod.

Silence settling after curfew:
Rain washing dead streets:
Zero from the black river:
Fog.

Nanette Fox

GRANDMA

Lynne Schmidt

When I was younger, the day I most looked forward to was Sunday. It was on Sunday when my father, my sister and I would drive to Grandma's house and bring her home with us to eat dinner and stay the whole day.

The appeal of Grandma's house, with her two parakeets, her candy bowl and an old-fashioned china closet crammed with stored up knick-knacks was so acute that I would always run ahead, taking the steps by twos, until I reached her second floor apartment with my sister trailing a short distance behind. Breathless, we would bang on the door waiting for Grandma's greeting, "Come on in."

When she saw us, she would smile with a smile that embodied a certain hardiness and cheerfulness and exclaim, "Well, look who's here!" as if she hadn't seen us for several weeks. She'd kiss us both and would then listen to any news we had to offer. No matter how insignificant, her eyes would widen in a "Well, how about that!" expression giving any event the importance we felt it deserved. I can remember the first time I learned to whistle. No one was as impressed as Grandma and when she said, "That is really swell," I practiced the rest of the day trying to whistle "Yankee Doodle" so I could perform it for her.

It was this deep interest and enthusiasm for anything and everything which made me like Grandma so much. If I took extra care of my hair, she would notice it immediately and compliment me. With Grandma's approval, I was sure it looked nice. Sometimes she would give my sister and me a dime or two, thus adding what we considered a substantial amount to our meager allowance of thirty-five cents per week.

After our brief weekly news exchange, my sister and I would run downstairs and wait patiently for Grandma to descend the stairs which separated her from the outside world.

Her legs, thick with water, bulged over her shoes, and since she had trouble walking, she would move down the stairs backwards, taking one step at a time, grasping tightly the life line of the bannister, until she was outside and on the level again.

It was these steps which posed Grandma's biggest problem as she put it. "If only I could have a room on the first floor somewhere, I could get outside and take a walk whenever I wanted," she'd complain.

Mom and Dad talked it over and decided that Grandma could move in with us if we could find a suitable house. I was thirteen and although I had begun to lose my childish enthusiasm for Grandma's visits, I still thought it would be nice for her to live with us permanently. We found the house and decided to move.

After we moved, I visited Grandma's room every day for a while, but it seemed like all she did was complain about how sick she was. I knew that she and Mom would talk about how her legs ached on those Sundays when she visited, but I could always escape by going outside to play. I had no idea that she talked about it so much.

Although her doctor had told her that she needed exercise, soon she never left her room. She wouldn't even eat with us anymore. She'd slyly tell Mom that she must have her breakfast in bed. Mom, good-naturedly, humored her, but soon she decided that all of her meals must be brought in to her on a tray. Since the doctor had told Mom that Grandma needed excerise, Mom set the tray away from the bed so she would have to get out of bed. However, Grandma would merely get up, pull the tray over and crawl back in bed. We had moved so that she could get exercise, but the only one not getting exercise was Grandma.

She would stick her head out of the door and call for my sister or me. "Lynne, sweetheart, will you go to the store for me? I'd really enjoy a snack right now," she'd say. I could never understand why she couldn't go to the store for herself. With the store less than a half a block away, the short walk, the air and sunshine would do her good, I would think to myself when I had to make the trip for her.

She would often find something "urgent" for my Dad to fix and on the first of every month when Grandma would receive her retirement check, Mom had to drop whatever she was doing and hurry to the bank for fear that someone would "break in and steal the check." Her shopping list was always the same, but she would still repeat it in her usual stage whisper. "One fifth of whiskey, one quart of wine, two hundred Anacin tablets, three boxes of cough drops, a Fleet's enema (just in case) and anything else you might think I would like."

With the whole family at her beck and call, her demanding nature kept us busy, but not without resentment on my part. Eventually I wanted nothing to do with her.

Like a pack rat, she began to hoard things. If she didn't finish one of her soft drinks, she would stuff the bottle neck with tissue or newspaper, set the bottle on the floor behind the desk and save the remainder for the next day. She wouldn't dream of putting it in the refrigerator for fear someone would drink it. She even saved her chewing gum.

Once Grandma had her doctor cash a check for the entire amount she had in the bank and then she stashed the money around her room in tobacco bags, books, boxes, etc.

Things went from bad to worse. She seldom smiled. Her mind was regressing. Sometimes she would stick her cane under the furnace register cover and shake and poke around. We asked her what she was doing and she would say that the fire needed stirring up. Other times she would "see" her chickens in our back yard and worry about their freezing to death.

All of these recent events were on my mind when I took my new niece, Julie, back to see Grandma. I walked into the room and said, "Grandma, this is Julie." She reached out her arms and said "Let me hold her." I had no choice but to comply, even though I felt her wasted arms made her too weak.

Holding the small child, Grandma smiled and began to talk to her. The baby widened her eyes and then began to smile and reach for Grandma's glasses. Grandma looked up at me and said. "She is such a pretty baby."

"Yes, she is," I replied.

"You know, I used to hold you like this," Grandma said.

"That was a long time ago," I said.

She cradled the tiny baby in her arms and I studied her face. Now as I look back, perhaps I might have imagined it, but her smile seemed almost identical to those I remember on those Sundays.

She looked up and gave me the same smile, but I turned my head away because I felt a sickening sadness in my whole being.

I began to avoid her even more than before. Her existence had become too drab and confining to suit me.

Nevertheless, one day Mom cornered me and informed me that Grandma wanted me to wash and set her hair. I did my best in making up excuses, but Mom insisted. There was no exit and I had to agree reluctantly.

At the appointed time, Grandma came waddling out of her room and over to the kitchen sink. I told her to bend over the sink and I gently splashed her head with water. Gently, because her head seemed so fragile and tiny. I discovered that my hands could almost engulf her whole head. "What a small brain!" I thought to myself.

The soap suds oozed out between my fingers and my mind wondered to the "Johnson's Baby Shampoo" commercial which promises "no tears." The only protection Grandma had was a wet washcloth which she clutched frantically, not once unveiling her eyes throughout the whole ritual.

"Grandma, you can raise up now. I've finished washing your hair," I said.

Slowly taking her usual precautions, she raised up and I dried her hair.

I couldn't understand why she wasn't washing her own hair and why I got stuck doing the job. "She'll probably give me a quarter and expect me to really have a night on the town," I thought.

I rubbed her vigorously, almost with hostility.

"Grandma, I have to do this to get it dry," I said deceitfully, feeling a surge of superiority rising in me.

As I fumbled with her limp hair, I wondered why she took all this trouble for so little of it. With each new curler I lost a little bit of gentleness with her and, testing her, I tried to see how rough I could get before she would say something. Soon her hair was ready for the dryer and I was free to do as I pleased while it was drying.

When I returned, I unfastened the hood of the dryer and took the curlers out of her hair. I tried to fix her hair as best I could, covering her bald spot as my main objective.

For the first time I took a really good look at her. Short, pear-shaped and, although her skin was shrivelled, she was unpleasantly dumpy. Her tightly curled, cropped hair, what little there was, framed and shadowed her face making it appear smaller than it really was. Pale and wrinkled she looked grim. Worst of all, she was old and weak.

When I finished she handed me a quarter and said, "Get yourself something nice the next time you go to the store."

I said, "Thanks, Grandma," and walked out of the room. I looked at the quarter, laughed to myself, tossed it on the television and went outside.

PLAITED SMILES UPON THE WINDOW

Plaited smiles upon the window
Of every muted house I see—
In every pane reflects myself,
In every image my soul could be.

Dust-colored paintings hang around us,
Dumbly seeing the pavid scene.
Your back is orange and near the mantle—
Your face is shadowed—and looks to me.

Hesitant sighs—our conversation breathes—
Prodding thoughts say nothing—slowly
Leaving but our flesh to speak—
My thoughts belong to none but me.

Holy silence slides from the corners—
Like a ghostly-painted god it sees—
All the softly stolen glances—
All the attempts to try to be.

Yet, we're relieved by night's demand—
As we place a screen before the fire,
Close the books that we weren't reading,
And take our silence up the stairs.

Joyce Graves

THE BLUE UMBRELLA

Sherry Brashear

It was an old umbrella, a nice antique kind of old. The handle was made of heavy, carved wood, stained with jagged lines and whorls of walnut like the veneer of my parents' bedroom suite. When a person chose to open the umbrella, he slid the metal fitting up to the catch; and the rusty, navy silk would unfurl itself like the secret banner of some mystical nation. It was a majestic compliment to the rain and would have encouraged covetousness of the most pious heart.

The umbrella came to our house by way of Aunt Carrie, a woman who had never experienced the sin of envy, or any of the other sins for that matter. I was a child at the time, but I could sense an aura of romantic ease that surrounded the blue umbrella and separated it from Aunt Carrie's desperate frigidity. I was greatly relieved when its owner deserted it, leaving it in the hall closet of our house, subject to the dust and my stolen glances of admiration.

The benevolent dust hardly had time to muffle the utility of the umbrella before Aunt Carrie ended the visit she had made to see us. On Wednesday night of what had been intended as a week's stay, Aunt Carrie eloped with a Fuller Brush salesman who had stopped at our house on Tuesday. I will always think that it was a great and noble thing she did. My father's view of the situation, however, was gloomy. He said something about the powerful amount of resolution there must have been on Aunt Carrie's part, for her to give up her normal cold-hearted deliberateness and consider the salesman's reputation for short-term compliance. Daddy believed that the action of his thirty-six year old sister was deceitful and flighty, and he hailed her mating with various other unmentionable epithets.

We heard from Aunt Carrie months later. Daddy wouldn't let me read the letter, but Mother told me about it. She said Aunt Carrie was living in the Saskatchewan Province of Canada, and that she was very happy. I heard Daddy saying that "frozen wasteland" was an appropriate mirror of his sister's character. I have not seen Aunt Carrie since her elopement, except in my mind's eye and then only vaguely, swathed in snow. What I am talking about is the blue umbrella, bequeathed to me by my Aunt's absence. I am telling you about it because it acted as a fulcrum for the prying loose of my adolescent fantasy. I claimed it in my childhood, and a little later it claimed me.

It was a very peculiarly made umbrella, with a heavy carved handle of wood, or bond perhaps. The knob end was in the shape of a Gorgon's head, clustered about with serpents, leafy pods of fat grapes and curling tendrils, on an endless curve toward the metal rod that ran to the body of the umbrella. There was an animate power about it that gave it the feel of leathery flesh when my young hands touched it. I could feel that

power crawl through my body, lulling me into an acceptance of it with its easy undulation.

There was a pocket on the navy body of the umbrella, near its outer edge. My blue umbrella was the only one I have ever seen with such a pocket. I kept a small pencil in that pocket. My childhood philosophy of life involved the idea that a pencil could create numerous new worlds. It is true that I never quite understood the significance of that belief, but I was convinced that everyone needed a philosophy of life. It would have surprised me then if I had known that the quaint philosophies are the first to be distorted and destroyed.

At the opposite end of the blue umbrella's handle was a small button that had no apparent use. It was the conclusion of my ultra imaginings. My bouts of contagious dreaming were concentrated in that magic button. If I chose to press it, a great monster, not unlike that one that decorated the umbrella handle, would leap forth to devour my enemies. I can't completely scorn that idea now, except that in present circumstances that monster would ravish me. I think this would make Daddy grimace if he knew it.

That incongruous umbrella was a sort of status symbol to me in my growing up. I would carry it with me, like a child's favorite decrepit toy, when I went to any important place. My feigned adult rationale was that one could never tell when bad weather would approach, best to be prepared. After a time the blue umbrella became a totem. I carried it on, innocently and soberly, trusting it through the insensible maze of late childhood.

In that dazed finality of ignorant emotions, I began to take the umbrella everywhere I went. It added the dignity of a cathedral to the small church I attended with my family to worship the sleeping-beauty god. It was a familiar ritual for us to walk twice each Sunday to that church, me with my umbrella under my arm.

That was the way it was on my thirteenth birthday in one hot-green April. I walked alone to the Sunday evening service. For the first time since I had owned the blue umbrella, I realized an actual need for it. The sky had begun churning to a fuzzy, forboding gray. It seemed to have opened like a huge hand and flung down soggy bits of clouds like gray cotton. Now the hand seemed to be closing back, the neutral flesh of the palm only visible in a few places. And the sooty clouds were caught close to the earth by an invisible shield. My usual cheer was suppressed by the human qualities nature's elements had taken. The wind was coming in sporadic gusts, sickeningly warm and sweet, like the medicinal breath of an old relative who bends close to speak. The surrounding landscape, its lividness beginning to give way to green, appeared to be pulsating with each wind tremor like the final vibrations of the vital organ of a worn out body.

When I reached the church I realized how dark it had grown, making an even darker cave of the church with its open-flung double doors. I heard the pianist trying to coax a song from the old, oaken piano, and it struck me that all the separate pieces of the evening made up one unit, excluding me. And the atmosphere of that world was tenaciously sucking me into its vortex. A light flickered on inside the church and

dimmed the evening almost to blackness. The few people who were arriving added a sharp loneliness to the brooding, musical night. The strains from the piano would ordinarily have been peaceful and pleasant, but something about the subtly malignant evening made the dull chords beat out a dirge. I hurried into the church.

As I took my seat the minister stepped up to the pulpit. He announced that the meeting would be short due to a predicted storm. Then he directed us to turn in our hymn-books to number thirty-six, and we sang "He Arose." Our voices sounded over the hush of animal life like a death wail. I tried to shake off the feeling by putting my whole heart into the song. "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighy triumph o'er His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain..." I realized then that I was still clutching the blue umbrella under my arm.

As I settled my body, ready for the sermon to begin, thunder jarred me, loud and ominous, and lightning wavered in the gaudy holy-purple windows. In the moment of silence that followed one of the double doors shivered and rasped open, bringing in rain and with it a shapeless figure topped by an old hat.

The minister cleared his throat, and the congregation tried to tear its eyes from the man who had just entered the church. He seated himself on the long bench that ran the length of the church's back wall. He was a big, colorless blob of a man, his appearance textured like the matter that collects at the corner of a dog's eye. He didn't seem to notice any of the other people around him, coming in out of the rain and wind he was just another derelict object in an antique world.

In an attempt to rescue the congregation from foundering its attention on the strange old man, the minister nervously declared the topic of his sermon, the words abruptly spewing from his mouth.

"The Lord has said that the greatest feeling a man can have is charity toward his brethern, and that's what I'm speaking about this evening. This won't be a long sermon because of the weather. Just follow along with me as we study the word of the Lord."

The minister plunged on into a disconnected spiel of Bible quotes, and for the first time it seemed to me that his almost unconscious declarations of ecstacy were memorized. I felt guilty for thinking it, but he reminded me of the pitchman at our once-yearly carnival, trying to interest his flock in the miracles of salvation possible through charity.

Through the sermon questions began to introduce themselves to me, questions I felt ridiculous in asking myself. Why was I so completely replused by the old man who had entered the church? I had always loved old people and old things. I kept forcing myself to feel a small trickle in my soul of the charity that would have been appropriate. I stopped listening to the minister after a while because of the difficulty involved in trying to sneak glances at the new member of our congregation. Sitting on the wall bench many seats back from me, this old body seemed to be strangely still. My neck ached as I tried to keep him in the corner of my eye long enough to get a complete picture of him. But all I could achieve was the image of a twisted mass of pale green and gray, in the midst of which hung a palely livid face. As I turned my head back around I let

comfort flood my sore neck, and on the edge of that pleasant weakness I felt a thrill of horror and fascination for what I had seen. There was another feeling that began to bloom in me then like a March-cold Jonquil: a desire to repudiate my old shell-like self with its old unawareness of ideas like "charity." My need for extreme reality became such a romantic non-reality that I almost missed the congregation's standing for the final song.

The song finished, "Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come." Everyone sat back down for the final prayer and the words of departure. Despite the preaching-down their excitement had taken, the members of the congregation seemed to be anxiously anticipating a closer look at the old man on the back bench. The feeling was shared by the minister, who jerked a few of the closest hands, then strode down the aisle so he might be the first to be greeted by this visitor. In the wake of the minister's rooster-stride, others followed with revival-zest bursts of energy. But the shepherd and his sheep were met by snores. The old man was asleep. The minister stopped in front of him, tugged at his own coat a few times and hurried out the door. Others were slower and bolder, and some stopped and circled around staring at the sleeping hulk that had been deposited on the back bench of their church.

I made an excuse of toying with my umbrella until everyone had left the building. I wanted to look at the man too, but I wanted to do it in a way that I considered more humane than the other people's rude stares. I was sure that he was a tramp, who had heard that the doors of this church were never locked. Walking toward him I noticed that his head lolled disjointedly on his chest, eyeless in sleep. He was dressed in what I supposed was his entire wardrobe. I could see, beneath the shapeless green and dun-streaked raincoat he wore, the frayed edges of two old suit jackets. His shirt front was dark with muddy stains. His feet were shod in cracked, weathered shoes, cloven-split at the toes. His face, in the shadows of the back wall, was griseled and hung with pockets of flesh, fuzzed with beard. Across his decaying blue and yellow brow marched one straight caterpillar-tufted eyebrow toward misshapen ears.

The pathetic, the facinating thing about the man was the shape of his hands. They were gnarled, liver-spotted on the backs with pink, mushy palms, two magic claws curved around an old weathered walking stick. And as I paused near him, I noticed that his countenance seemed to waver like a stiff, stained tabloid rattling in a rubbish can.

As gently as possible, but in a fury of fascination, I stepped up to the old man and in one flowing motion took the old stick from his hands and replaced it with the blue umbrella.

The ancient mound of a man stirred in his sleep and clutched the old umbrella. And as I stood there frozen and transfixed, his face opened, he tottered forward and grabbed me. In the strangely lengthy moment that followed, I found that my terror had frozen us both. Like a third person standing in a distant pew, I could see the scene we made. At first we were figures etched on glass: the wine-colored wall, the rotting green and brown of the old man, and me a piece of white, with jagged lightning circling above us we were another gaudy church window. Then we became a bas-relief, half-alive and half-sunken into the wall. I could see

my slow motion struggle to be freed from this grotesque tableau. Then a hole in the old face opened and began to move in speech. Ignoring the strange noise, I let the third person be myself again and increased my struggle. But somehow I could only winch lamely when the ruined umbrella came down in the hand of the bleating old creature who held me, and the Gorgon destroyed resistance. I could only feel numb at the prodding old hands and body, even stronger than I had suspected. Then I knew I would not escape and the weakness of laughter filled me, for the nebulous word "charity" and for the image fading from me of Aunt Carrie carrying her umbrella through the snow.

THREE FACES

I am a vessel—
an urn of curved earth
fashioned to contain.
Both the fruits of thy body
and thy essence,
may mingle,
to continue,
in me.

I am a weird sister—
Do you not see the talisman
that I have woven?
Beware the many lives
of innocent conjuration.

I am a unicorn—
I have seen the Lion
Seeking through my forest.
I can hold him
neither in nor out.
I am a unicorn—
I know the needs of freedom
that pursue the wild things.

Sharon Bolt

THE ASYLUM LOVE SONG

Now I'm committed to self-asylum, you come to me
Each evening with you gingerbread accordian.
A fellow lunatic, by my window climbing in the trees
And singing your love. I've been glad enough to hear it
Until tonight.
The sound blooms like a spring-crazed Persian garden,
And spills itself, a blundered red-ink blot,
Suffused outward it flourishes and sprouts
Curved hands, curled arms and sated valentines.
It is a love of gaudy procreation,
That wants no blond and blue-eyed child named Hans
To fill the spaces where nothing else will grow,
But snake-eyed, deaf mute offspring with flaming hair.

For me the only love song is that that's sung
By sad Tarwathie's wailing Humpback Whales,
Lovlier amplified by extinction.
The maniac predators sail their glassy seas
Clutching, flat, hot guns fast to the chest,
Fascinated by the bullets that are expelled,
In grotesque protraction, the shape of what they kill.

But I cannot tell you out there in the trees,
Antiphonally frilling your musical passion,
So much in love with merely its expulsion
You do not hear the sudden April rain
That swings its beaded portiere between us.
Your face hangs, a brilliant metal moon,
As the startled lightning comes and goes
Exposing brassy planes and knobs of flesh.
And the broken porcelain cresent, your moving mouth,
Keeps its embellished vibratto thickly weaving
through the last light's glimmer and the liquid beads.

The sound oppresses, but it will not force from me
What lays behind my gray-chiseled barricade.
The hungry lions of my raw-jagged emotion
If suddenly uncaged would soon devour
What's left of my imprisoned, maddened soul:
Bringing confrontation of naked flesh to flesh
On the brink of a renaissance of pain.
Then the blunderbuss report: bright birds appear
And peck out livers with garish rainbow beaks
Until their craws explode. And there is left
A ragged morsel that whimpers, grins and groans
The dying phases of life's physical schisms.

Tonight I am locking my window forever.
Your voice's soprano singing of gilded chains
Is the last sound I desire to hear.
And that desire the last.
I will seek comfort only in the grating sound of self on self
And the labored, choking breath of midnight passing cars
That carry away dreams whose visits I have not enjoyed.

Sherry Brashear

LAST PAGE VISION

We have fled here to Salt Lake City,
Me and the young Jesus.
Running out the gauntlet of other bitter lives
Through the travesty of our fading awareness,
We are hoarding what is left of reality here
In the frosty Molock Motor Inn.
Emotionally bereft and beyond salvation
We await the end:
When the fragile images, preserved within the mind's eye
Will be crushed by the mad blink of antipathy
And will fall, like broken wind chimes
Retaining their lovely clinking,
Bearing it as a gift unto destruction;
Like the image of the candle flame
Seen in total darkness
Far past the quinched and quick-fled light.

For the fading moment is at hand.
Our minds weaken in slow unwrinkling
Freed from the folds and creases that wrapped us in the real,
Drunk with anticipation of our careening free fall.
Lying on the bed, loins girded
With powdered milk and synthetic honey,
We are waiting for the rent of purposeless intent
In the veils of our temples.
We are watching the dawn break
In brittle beauty,
The Golden Egg legend shattered into fulfillment.
Here glimmer the last oily puddles of awareness
Drying from the heat of the sun,
A prelude to the sense's sterility.
In utter independence of the season
Given impetus by imagining's uneven plane
The delicate urn of the heavens has broken:
The fallen shards denied our reaching hands.
While our utter dependence on real inspiration,
Goaded by the bomb's one-eyed chauvinist aplomb,
Has pushed into a more than mortal abyss
All possibilities of creation.
    I Am outside even the Jesus in me
    Gazing through the isinglass window of self
    I see the unfocused whirling of the unreal:

The broken day's light surreal
And dripping over fragmented shell slivers
Quivering life's jelly with its carnival glass shimmer.
The yoke threatens to plop over winter-crook'd trees,
Building's filed and sharpened corners, and barren angled me.
In that clear albumen glitter I am aware
Of the splattering and sudden flagellation
Which clouds the corona of my unholy Jesus' hair.
The fluffy edges of his scar-less being stiffen.
Frozen his body that mine will never cradle,
His groin frozen whose seedless semen I rippling see
Crystallized in an icicle drip and edging
My ragged and unnourished placental memory.

Sherry Brashear

Sharon Bolt is a freshman Anthropology major from Waterford, Virginia.

Sherry Brashear is a senior Speech and Drama major from Viper, Kentucky. Sherry has published an article in *Seventeen.*

Jacqueline Brown is a junior Speech and Drama major from Louisville.

Nanette Fox is a junior English major from South Irvine, Kentucky.

Joyce Graves is a senior English major from Cincinnati.

Edwina Haddix is an English graduate student from Fairfield, Ohio.

David Paige Hale is a graduate student in English from Marysville, Ohio. He has published poetry in the Urbana College literary magazine.

Cheryl Jones is a senior English major from Gettysburg, Ohio.

Mike Norris is an English graduate student from McKee, Kntucky.

Estill Pollock is a junior English major from Richmond. He has published poetry in *Aurora,* the *Harvard Advocate, Alkahest,* and the *Atlantic* creative writing contest publication.

Terry Rankin is a senior Math and Philosophy major from Richmond. He has published previously in *Aurora.*

Robert Ruh is an English graduate student from Park Hills, Kentucky. He has published also in *Aurora.*

Lynne Schmidt is a junior English major from Covington, Kentucky.

John Shearer is a freshman Business major from Richmond.

Jim Webb is an English graduate student from Hazard, Kentucky.