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## Aurora, 1977

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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**Aurora**



AURORA

1977

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AURORA

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Richmond, Kentucky 40475



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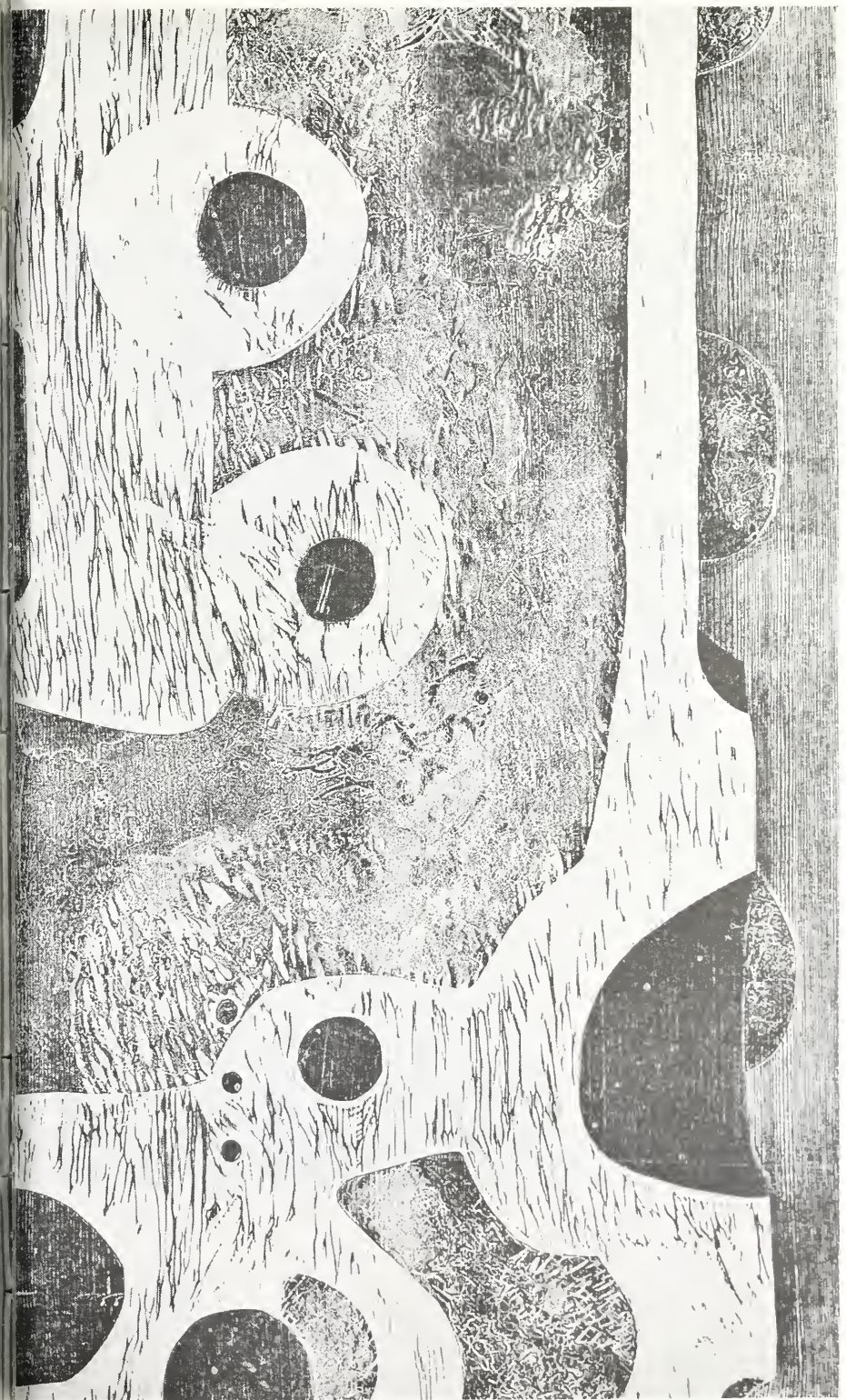
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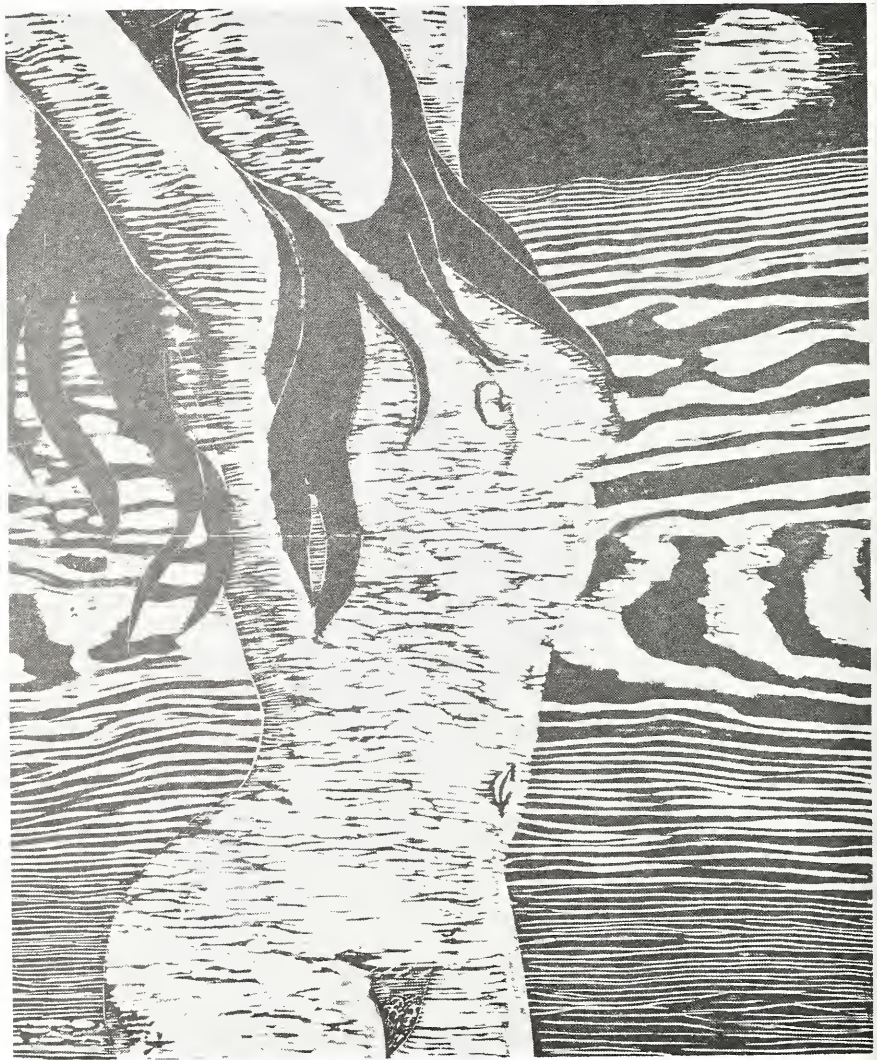
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## CHINA DOLL

China doll, painted pink  
Treasured while you're new,  
Your life's spent in glass and paint,  
Your eyes stare cold and blue.

What is your wealth? A Chiseled face?  
A body soft and new?  
Through your gray eyes will you not see,  
There's more to life than you?

Andrea Steeley

A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

Lad has a headful of sawdust  
Splintery fingers and toes  
Grooms with nomtan and carnuba  
Always gets runs in his hose.

His mama had roots in the forest  
A hoary, old chiseler's his pop  
He wears Gucci shoes and a Spred-Satin smile  
His tag reads, "Gepetto's Workshop."

James Bryant

## Eye Contact

The last time I looked  
I thought I saw something  
Flutter there...  
A light, a vague disturbance...  
Interaction.

We played a foreplay,  
Lost...  
We talked of costs,  
Machines and dreams.  
Soft and silent-  
Still...  
A certain strength in  
Separateness,  
Respectfully distant-  
We observed.

Laura Moser

## Flame Throwers

As red becomes a candle's flame and blue its base  
adorns

And night, a settling friend, presides

I often find myself like this--

So memories, like a storm of dusty butterflies

Go coughing, spreading ancient germs of where

And there and never again all up and down where

I had only just about forgotten and seal them so

Forever in this candle's flame--

So I cannot.

Laura Moser

"I ran to sleep"

I was there, yet could not weep,  
And so I ran to sleep.

And in the sleep, I found it strange-  
All day and night, I did not change.

My eyes were shut, and filled with rain;  
My eye lids became window panes.

I could go on, but I was tired,  
And I only wished, what I desired.

Her face, her limbs were part of me,  
But all the dreams were not to be.

All day and night she became,  
But sleep awoke, and conscious came.

I was there, but could not weep,  
And I ran from her into my sleep.

Bert Wayne Ballinger

"alone/april/easter"

rain on fractured glass  
in a city soiled with pain  
and cold street faces  
as hard as the marble  
statue or the ancient  
cob'stone lane  
&  
then realizing the day  
is sweet tidings over death  
and joy to the world  
but still alone in a  
city spilling out guts  
and intoxicated in blood.

rain on splintered panes  
washing the sins away  
on a day soon lost  
and alone in the mind...  
always alone.

Bert Wayne Ballinger

"she is the wave"

she is the wave  
    off the ocean at night...  
freely charging over me  
in a wild flurry.

she is the wave  
    off the silent sea...  
freely resounding  
into my soul.

she is the wave  
    off the emerald ocean...  
secretly touching me  
under an oceanic star.

Bert Wayne Ballinger



## A Poet to His Audience

I am a newborn singer;  
I cannot sing my song.  
I sing those songs you know well of--  
Only one, I speak not of.

I dare not sing it to you, my dear,  
For fear of what will come.  
My voice is a little rough, my dear;  
My verse a little strong.

So at night, when I alone  
Am up to play the stars,  
My guitar I'll strum silently  
As I quietly hum my bars.

Shelby White

## A Lament

Ah, there was a time  
When Gilmore would have excited in my heart  
Great Debate  
Great Speeches  
Great Passions.

I would have argued with my Cousin  
And He would have been  
Just as excited  
Just as passionate.

Now all we do  
Is read the Bible  
And talk about the crucifixion.

Shelby White

## WAITING

Patricia Schweitzer

In her twenty-first year, without benefit of mercy or understanding, the girl is dying. She lies twisted upon the bed, legs like stiff straws, tensed against the pain. She coughs. A stabbing pain sears her stomach. It lingers on and on and does not fade. But this causes no suffering; it is not the pain which makes her suffer. Her suffering is from something else entirely.

A nurse appears at the door just long enough to dutifully ask, "How are we doing?" With her rigidly starched body and mechanically moving jaws she reminds the girl of a ventriloquist's dummy.

In a room not far away a child is whimpering. No one goes to ease his lonely fright. His cries are as little regarded as the caterwauling of a cat in the gutter.

Two young men in white lean against the wall outside her room sharing a cigarette. The force of their laughter jangles the stethoscopes around their necks.

These are the things which cause the girl to suffer, not the scalpel wound which has been stitched and clamped and taped, dividing her stomach. She is trying to condition herself to ignore the fact that others do not care. She must not let this hurtful fact fester and grow within her. For the girl, locked into her world of pain, knows that the suffering of the mind is much more destructive than the surgical wound in her stomach or purely physical pain.

She seeks for something to distract her, but there is little of distraction in the hospital room. The bland cream of the walls is unbroken by ornamentation. The ceiling is creamy too. The only movement in the room is an oblong of light rippling on the floor be-

neath the single window. But one can always keep occupied, even in a small hospital room. One can count the number of tiles visible through the bathroom door. All of them, naturally, cannot be seen, otherwise counting them would be too easy. Sometimes she gets mixed up, forgets the count, and has to start over again. But for a girl who is suffering all this has value; she does not have to listen with terror to a child's painful crying, or care because of the niggardly appearance of a nurse, or mind the callous merriment of young doctors. She can count the tiles and, for awhile, forget that no one cares.

So counting tiles, she prepares for night, though she is never quite prepared, because at night the pain increases and her temperature rises. Then she craves water. It is not too difficult to get water. You push the button on the panel next to your bed and the nurse comes. If she doesn't come at once, you ring for her again, and she comes, sooner or later. She comes, looking as sour as clabber perhaps, but she does come. She puts the water on the stand beside the bed. The glass has a curved straw in it so that the girl can drink without lifting her head.

This nurse is the one with the goitrous double chin. A tall character shaped like an elongated diamond, her uniform hangs like a sheet draped upon a pole on a windless day. Her nose has a pinched look as though she suffers from a continual cold. She always arrives at the end of the day, at an hour as dismal as herself, to perfunctionally perform the nighttime ritual. She rolls the girl over onto her side and props her with pillows. For a few fleeting moments the girl feels the blissful pressure of hands kneading, rubbing, soothing the soreness that lives in her back.

Weeks ago there had been a different nurse. She had been smiling through the fog when the girl opened her eyes. Her hands had been soft and comforting as she smoothed the sweat-tangled hair from

the girl's entreating eyes.

"The doctor has been waiting for you to wake up. I'll get him."

He was an indistinct green blur at the foot of her bed. She heard him say one word, a word which seemed to leap from his tongue and go hissing through the air in a three-syllabled coil like a whip lash. "Malignant."

She had wanted to cry, to sob, to scream. She had done none of these things for fear she would never stop.

Then there had been the welcome sting of a needle in the flesh of her hip, and the word retreated to lurk in the corner of the room.

Gleaming needles and multicolored capsules, these are the units that measure time now in the girl's world, and the sun which seeps in through the window-shade. This sun is no longer a part of nature's rich and golden livery, no longer the friend she used to watch from her kitchen window. She would stand, hands plunged deep in hot, sudsy water, nostrils flared to the pungent scent of perking coffee, and watch the sun laying his blessing on the morning hills. Later, as she'd worked the soil of her garden, the noon sun had burned into her aching shoulders like liniment. After the earth had turned awhile she would sit on her porch with the cat curled in the natural trough of her crossed legs. In the west the orange sky of evening died away as she'd gathered pleasure like a bee among her flowers. Although the sunny sky through her hospital window is no longer an artist's palet, it is still useful. By the sun's position in the window frame she can tell that time is passing. And that is important, the passage of time. Each new morning is important. If the sun is hiding she can still tell when it's morning. The doctors come in the morning. A nurse crackles into the room first to get things ready. She checks the fluids dripping patiently down

the green tubes from the glass globes suspended above the girl's bed. Sometimes she lifts the girl's head with one hand and plumps up the pillows. This is beyond the call of duty, so she does not always do this, but when she does it is a fine thing. Now everything is ready for the doctors' visit. The girl listens for the clomp of their shoes in the corridor. They stop outside her door, paste deceptive smiles on their faces, and march with military precision into her room. They stay a correctly brief moment, ask polite questions. As they talk their eyes study an invisible spot over the girl's right shoulder. This allows no eye contact and is a regulation. Regulations, even though confusing, have their place in hospitals. The doctors march with regulated unconcern through the hospital as though through a drill yard, and the girl is left to while away the hours by herself.

She has a tickle in her throat all afternoon, and strains to be careful so she won't cough and the pain suddenly become piercing again. But with the approach of night, she has as little chance of stopping the pain as a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

A little room in semi-darkness can become a world. Looking at a now gray ceiling and walls that run into each other can give rise to untold thoughts. Not thoughts about walls and ceilings, but images which seem to spring from them. And the marvelous thing is that they fill the mind, and a new image always displaces the one before it, and so the hours pass. From time to time the building speaks, something moves inside the radiator with a rhythmic rumble, from a faucet water plops polyphony.

The girl listens alone, bound by thin air and empty shadows, until the sky turns pewter and the light at the window becomes brighter than the one from the corridor.

Week-end Memories

You brought sunshine into my life,  
along with sunshine  
came fields of daisies,  
a still cool pond,  
and a clear, blue sky.

Together we shared the gifts you gave;  
saturday picnics,  
running barefoot,  
learning to fish,  
as the summer smiled.

But now, you've gone and I am alone;  
winter is arriving,  
the flowers are gone,  
the pond is freezing,  
the sky is cloudy.

I miss you.

Carol Hamilton

## BLUE ON A BLUE FIELD

Blue on a blue field  
That is the essence  
Of me.

Timeless, I drift for days.  
I don't know where or when  
I'll stop.

Tears and watercolors in  
Macabre fashion ordained  
Of life.

Fingerpainting by armless men  
I sit and stare at them  
Alone.

I'm damp inside and its coming  
All through my being  
Too soon.

Tomorrow is another day  
Of washed out blues  
And me.

T. E. Branscum

## ECHO VALLEY

My soul resounds  
As an echo in your valley.

Reverberating it returns  
Back to me, to hold closely  
Till I send it back again.  
I come closer till I'm  
Within a stones throw of the source  
And you precipitate my downfall  
With a million crushing  
Stones.

I shall reach you  
Although battered and torn apart  
And I shall make my camp  
In the midst of  
This echo valley  
And you shall be my friend.

Call to me, my friend.

T. E. Branscum



## CREATIONS

Just as God took a shapeless object,

raw and without beauty,

And patted it and nurtured it and

made it grow,

So we took our love - so young.

We worried about it, perfected it,

and shared it in every way.

Then God took the earth and put

it in a safe place,

Just like I tucked our love away

in my heart to stay.

All I want to know is . . . where

did you put your half?

Patricia Hays

A Company Production

The J. T. Posey Company makes all  
kinds of cotton products I  
suppose.

They probably have their clover-  
leaf trademark on a lot of  
linens and the like.

But I'm sure they made the mitt  
that my father wears so he  
can't pull out the tubes  
his life is hanging from.

It says right on the label:

J. T. POSEY COMPANY

Patricia Hays

## LADY M

Strike forth with your golden daggers,  
Dashing their blades into a million pieces upon the  
sea.

Smile mockingly down - gleam as do my tears,  
Hide not behind the trees for I sense your presence.  
Mark the days finality with no special encore.  
Your beauty serves only as needles stinging within,  
For I feel beauty such as yours, inappropriate.

Nestle yourself amongst the haze  
Tonight - as you did that other night so long ago.  
As the curtain call suggests the ending - so you  
glow the same sad message.  
One circle of happiness in the eternal darkness  
overhead,  
Summoning the crickets to chant forevermore: It's  
over.  
You illuminate the misery in my gazing eyes.

You laugh down, choosing not your cheerful light  
to dim.

Oh Lady Moon, I still love him.

Patricia Hays

## L'ARROGANTE

She smiles haughtily down on the world  
With pure, tangible disdain in Her eyes.  
She builds a shrine to Herself,  
The earth shall worship Her,  
It shall throw itself at Her feet in abject  
Humility,  
And mankind shall kiss the hem of Her dress  
And shall carry Her train,  
For they are all beneath Her.  
She looks askance at God:  
What is he doing up here with Her?

Nyoka A. Wierman

## Contrast in Black and White

It's entirely an accident that I am me  
and you are who you are.  
When the Picassos of God's artists  
knocked the paint over it could have  
just as easily fallen on me.  
Although it was entirely accidental  
inside we're the same--though the  
paint seems to have darkened our minds.  
That we have used linseed oil on our  
ideologies and have become comrades is  
no accident.

Nyoka A. Wierman

## The Ancient Autumn Artist

The ancient autumn artist prepares a  
palette of

          golds and

                          reds and browns.

He sketches

                  curved and carnal

                          lines.

His aching eyes

                  mist

in the melting of

                  his frozen well.

The square eyes

                  of buildings

                                  glow cold.

The round eyes

                  of lovers

                                  glow warm.

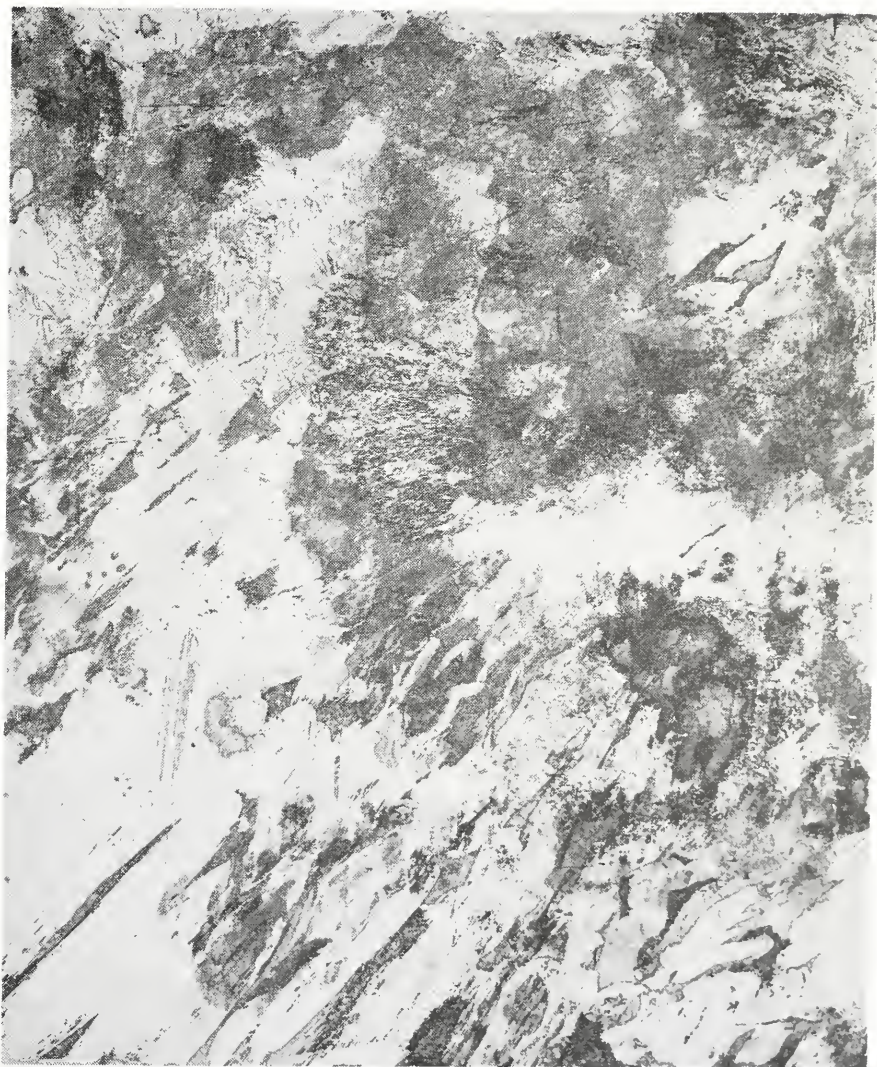
The ancient autumn artist

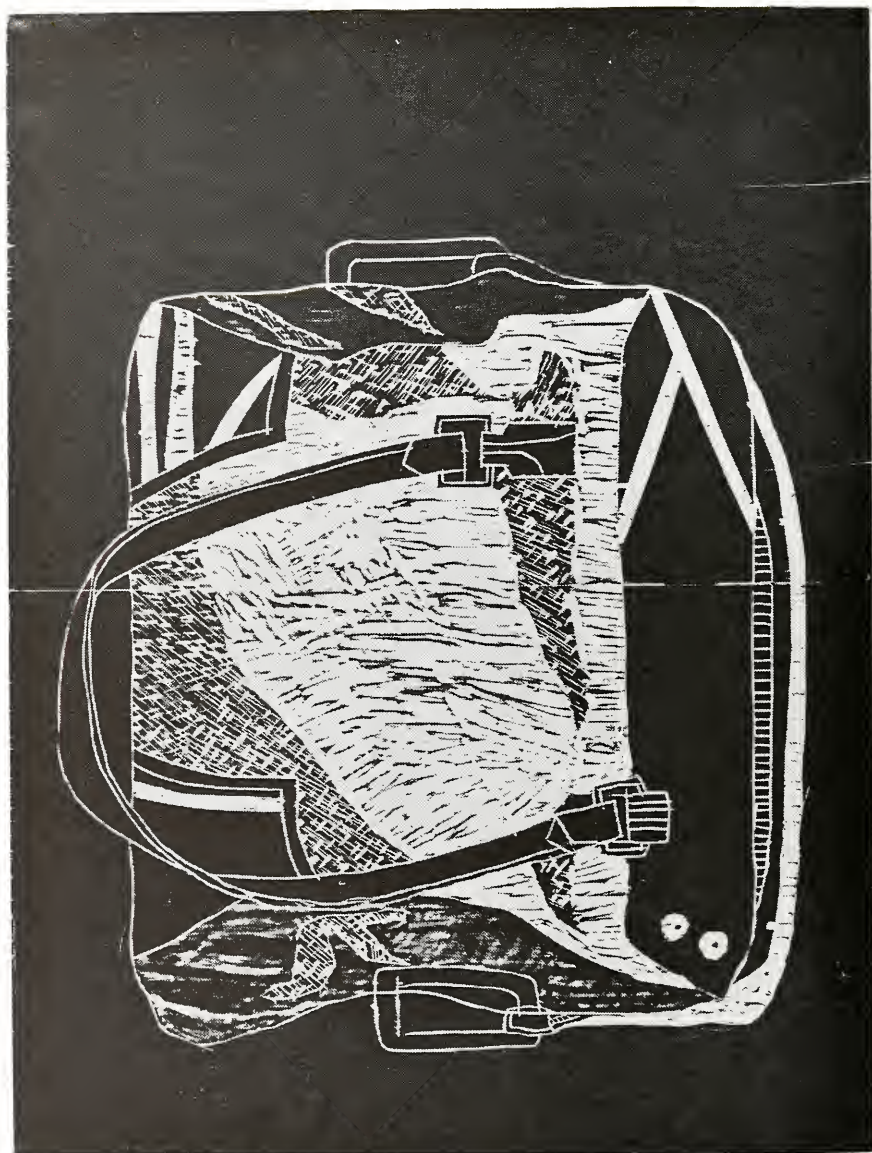
                                  puts down his brush

  and

                                  picks up his sickle.

Robert Akin





Evil You Shun

gallow gray ghosts billow  
over assembly-line streets  
shooting icy arrows  
igniting crimson cheeks

one way weary walks  
through milling mumbling multitudes  
exchanging tangling talks  
and agitating attitudes

the cold  
outside inside blow  
negative waves flow  
from ominous dark guilt  
freezing fingers squeezing  
life from warm security  
shadows dissolve reality  
fear melts the light  
of the nervous nebulous  
neon night

Robert Akin



## Autumn Woman

The icy teeth of winter bite  
down to the seams of dreams  
of springs no longer seen.  
They died in the fluttering dances  
of sapless, autumn colors, no longer green.

At this time of year,  
when my heart is full of fear,  
an autumn haired, autumn eyed woman  
melted the shiver of solitude  
into a tear.

A touch, a kiss, a smile  
a shimmering summer spring  
flowed with feeling for a mile.

That November night,  
a soul sore with pain took flight  
and soared with joy  
and felt a symphony of light.

Robert Akin

## Beer in the Backseat

I was like a can of beer.  
You held me in your hands  
and popped my top.  
I touched your lips and  
tasted your tongue.  
You drank me down,  
until I was empty.  
Drunk and delighted, you  
threw me in the street.  
Tons of tires smashed me  
into a misshapened mass.  
You giggled, as you gulped  
another beer.

Robert Akin

After Waltzing with a Statue of Daedalus

I waltz with a statue of Daedalus,  
Filling bags for a living.  
Bags that have smooth, brown skins  
And plastic guts.  
A lot like me, I suppose.

The bags are full of clean, rational powder  
And topped with a cellophane rose  
Then, like a casket, closed.  
A lot like me, I suppose.

John Samples

For Thomas Stearns Eliot

From the deep gallows of existence,  
My muffled cries can be heard,  
Battered mind being readied  
For the guillotine of words.

So! I am to enter, one foot at a time,  
Your acid pool of wasting rhyme.  
Dare I? Dare I welcome another death  
With open arms and acquiescence?

John Samples

Ezra Pound was a Lion

If you threw a lion  
Into the middle of  
A crowded subway train,  
It would attack  
Someone undoubtedly.

Merely because its  
New position was  
So absurd.

John Samples

In My Days of Nescience

Death, Death, Death!  
Such an obsession for  
Such tender years!  
Yet, these twenty could be  
Rolled into a moment, or  
A few petty lines of argument  
For the absolution of flesh extant.

And I shall grow old,  
I shall wear my skin rolled,  
Pallid, cold, and silent;  
Beyond the sphere of sense,  
Shedding all my shadows  
From my days of nescience.

John Samples

## Birth Of A Galaxy

Ebony space, windless and dry,  
Disregarded, forgotten, lost,  
Life has completely passed it by.  
A tomblike silence lingers here.

Creeping like a thief in the night  
Within the heart, the galaxy  
Erupts with intense, blinding light,  
And the stillness is lost to fear.

The charcoal sky bursts into flame,  
A kaleidoscope of color.  
Creation is never the same  
At the dawn, but the end is clear.

The vast expanse is drenched with blood;  
Amethyst vapors drift outward.  
Blue clouds swell like a mighty flood,  
With suffocating force they come near.

Particles fly on silver wings  
Becoming spheres of radiance.  
Pearls suspended from unseen strings.  
The pain is concealed yet severe.

Asteroids hang in frozen space.  
Planets assume familiar shapes.  
Creation is set into place  
And it will never disappear.

Virginia E. Ober





## THE OLD YEAR PASSES

Barbara R. Getman

The sheets felt cool and somehow substantial under her hands. Her fingers were lying quietly, reverently, on the crisp expanse of white. Only the sensations recognized by her fingertips and palms, and those annoying yet vague complaints being registered by her feet, cramped under the too-tight sheet, kept her from drifting completely into a blissful nothingness. It was too much effort to actually look at anything. Nothing really mattered . . . after all. Through her eyelashes bits and pieces of her environment would float by and out of sight. The tubes which seemingly were hanging from everywhere ended somewhere--supposedly in her arms and orifices. For how long she didn't know . . . But why? . . . she supposed she knew. The knowing, however, was a bitter retribution. It had been a campaign launched of herself, by herself, and for herself. Now, dreamily, she was content to maintain gravity with the mere touch of her fingers and the discomfort of her toes.

The doctor was peering into her eyes. Some of his black hair was falling onto her eyebrows and tickling her eyelids. The scent of him was as intriguing as his accent. The light in her eyes was a violation, though. And then there was the nurse. She glimpsed a tight-lipped old bitch with what looked like one of those little panties that you put on drumsticks to make them look fancy . . . on her head. Thank God they're going. And what was even better, they didn't want to tire her with attempts at conversation.

Jane let her mind float free. She still felt Fat, even though she certainly wasn't. Once fat, you never forget. One mentally carries the burden of the fat with him or her always. It could be like a woman carrying a baby nearly to full-term and then never quite being able, somehow, to bring it to delivery. Those who could gorge would never know what it was



like to deny everything in hopes of attaining some noticeable alteration in the suffocating tissues of one's own body. It was hell to always be hungry. It was hell to take diuretics and appetite appeasers and all the other rainbow of pills that flush out and speed-up and keep-up the losing battle. Jane had heard all the words. She had read all the books, had seen all the clinics, and had swallowed all the damn pills. She had visited all the meetings, had heard all the talk and had struck out every bloody time. The offensive pounds, the blubber, the obesity, the lard would melt off and then creep right back upon her like a boomerang, puffing her up again with hated self. And every time, she had gotten a new chart to follow and a lousier self-concept. She knew all about her uncooperative thyroid, about her sluggish metabolism, and about the unfortunate tendency toward overweight which had been handed down to her like a legacy, or more like a curse or a plague, from generations past. She had had it with tests. All the excess pounds might be no more than twenty or thirty, but they were each a cross to bear and a pain compounded many times over.

Jane remembered how she had decided to end her desperate struggle with the charts. If a little was too much, then it would have to be less. Fasting was in. It really was supposed to be good for you. There wouldn't really be any danger. It could take a very long time to actually starve to death. She resolved only to refrain from fainting in public places. Nothing could be more embarrassing than being fat and feeling self-conscious about it. Nothing could surpass the pain of being called "Big" by those whom you were supposed to be closest to and yet who nevertheless seemed to want to deal out the most hurt.

The pain for the first few days of fasting, taking in only fluids, was difficult but no so difficult as she would have thought. She never entertained in her apartment any way, so there were no others to comment or coax or to be alarmed. It became easier and easier. Really almost too easy. Jane was between jobs and

didn't care to look just yet. She wanted a new woman to seek employment. No one would need to know that she had had a problem. And indeed she thought that her "problem" was as terrible as drug addiction, alcoholism, or flashing in the park. If worse came to worse she could probably let a small gallery handle some of her paintings. But she did not feel strong enough yet to deal once again with the sleek models and the eager, THIN young aspiring artists to whom she had "taught", if one could teach, art. To hell with teaching. I don't want to teach anybody anything! Except, maybe, about me....

As the days wore on, Jane had broken her fast only enough to steady her legs and to keep her head from buzzing quite so badly. The morning scales were a delight to her. She was melting! She never needed food again, she thought....not like before.

"I'll have to start a new affair as soon as I am ready for unveiling," she had gloated. The affairs usually happened between the fat times. Although, every now and then, there would be one who would like his women with more meat and less bone. She just never felt like making herself available, too often, when she felt FAT. They even told her she was beautiful. But she didn't feel beautiful in her head--and that's where it counts.

Being a recluse had it's advantages. No one came, no one saw, and what the hell was there to conquer except in her own little space. Television and books and paintings and baths and finally, bed. Long times in bed. She didn't even have a dog to walk. Everything was beautiful. Another cup of bouillon a club soda and Nirvana. She did feel euphoric. Those Eastern folks knew where it was at all right...

Suddenly, out of nowhere the phone had rung. Jane started and then sat for what seemed like a very long time before she even touched the beige intruder that was eagerly chiming out communication.

"Hell, there must be somebody still out there after the holocaust," she mused.

Still somewhat shocked at the jingling she slowly put the receiver to her ear.

"Are you the lone survivor on the beach?"

"What?" was the reply, "Jane, Jane. . . Is that you dear?"

"Who is this?"

"Good Lord, Jane. It's Alice!"

"Well, I'll be damned. It's my ever-loving, screwed-up, straight as anything sister Alice. Hello, sister Alice."

"Jane, what is wrong with you? Don't you know what day, rather night, this is?"

"No, should I?"

"Well, for Godsakes it is New Year's Eve, Jane!"

"So what?"

"So what!?" Horror and disbelief shook the wires.

"Do you want to go downtown with us and see the big ball drop?"

"How many big balls?" Jane wanted to know.

"Oh, my God. Are you sick? This is New York on New Year's!"

"So, I don't care if it's Tampa in July or Bombay in November."

"What do you want from me, Jane. I'm your sister! Listen, Mel and I will be over in a little while

to have a toast with you. Turn on the television. We'll be over." She hung up.

Jane sat there and grinned at the phone for a while and then hung it up very gently, lest it should ring again. She turned on the television. Yep. There were still crazy people in Times Square. Guess the holocaust hadn't gotten New York. "And that should be the foist to go," she said out loud, while raising her eyebrows and wagging her imaginary Groucho cigar.

She went to her closet and pulled out a jump suit, red, low-cut and slinky. "I've got clothes every size to fit any number of women," she thought. "I could open a clothing store." She sprayed on the Youth Dew and applied bangles and hoop earrings. "Not bad after all," she thought. She bent over to slip on her jeweled sandals and was aware of a buzzing in her ears. She swayed, caught the dresser and steadied herself. Her wrists felt very strange, weak and vulnerable. She could feel the blood throbbing in her wrists and in her temples. She felt like the Visible Woman that kids can buy and assemble and/or disassemble as they so desire.

The doorbell. She went to answer it.

"Come in, dear Alice and Mel."

"My God, Jane. You look so pale and so thin. Have you been sick? Why didn't you let us know? My God!"

It sounded beautiful to her ears.

"No, no. Just tuna fish lunches. You know me, always weight-watching. I'm convinced that I was never thin in my life. Big bazoooms, you know! How've you been?" She plopped on the sofa while they, in some confusion, deposited coats in the closet and champagne in the bucket.

"Where are your glasses, Jane?"

Mel was sitting by his sister-in-law somewhat in awe of the whole situation. His brown eyes were blinking rapidly behind his tinted lenses.

Alice had found some glasses. Mel poured the pre-chilled bubbly liquid into the three vessels. Jane twirled her glass, holding it on high like a chalice and murmured--"What's any more beautiful than champagne?"

They drank and listened to the counting and watched the Big Ball slowly drop. They kissed and clinked and drank some more. Euphoria!

She had started forward when Mel caught her, red jump suit, bazoooms and all....

They were back peering in her eyes and speaking very quietly. Hearing is the last sense to go, you know. God, all of a sudden she felt gorgeous. Skinny and wonderful again. She would do it all over, given the opportunity. It was worth it. Electrolytes... turn out the lights...last rites, who cares?

Deck the halls. . .

## TUESDAY BLUE

Its a blue Tuesday  
And I feel about hung  
I've got my feet dragin'  
And I'm hangin' out my thumb.  
Ain't nobody on this road payin' me much mind  
They just flip their eyes  
And keep wheelin' by.

There's a cold  
Slow rain comin' down around me  
And all that I know seems cloudy;  
My feet are cold  
My head is wet  
And I just lost my last bet.  
Girl, why don't you send some of your sunshine  
    my way;  
Come on and brighten up my day;  
I promise not to break your heart  
All I need is a sunny spot.

Guy S. Jones

## TO A ROSE

My heart has feeling for you  
My mind has dreams of you  
My arms want to hold you  
And my feet want to move you;  
Girl, I want to have you,  
Call you mine  
But I know what happens  
to a rose  
When its taken from the vine.

Guy S. Jones

## Waiting Room

I ushered you out  
of the office of my life,  
took your hand with a  
polite smile that said  
don't call us we'll call you,  
and led you into the waiting room.  
The waiting room  
waiting with cobwebbed eyes.  
You waited there for a time  
and then you got tired of  
all the muzack and magazines  
and somewhere in the waiting room  
of my life I lost you.

Don Williams

## Empty Handed

a beggar,  
hatless humblefaced alley-turd  
with a face like a scarred copper penny,  
fumbled the uncorked bottle  
while smiling back at the vendor  
and watched as his precious miracle  
spilled into cinders.

Don Williams

## Giving Up The Ship

Talking of the Silence of Death  
Who masters all when they give up the ship-  
Give up the ship-  
Told about Death by word of lip.  
The sailors stand  
With knives in their hands  
And on shore  
I hear the Brass Band-  
The Captain stands and presses  
His heart  
And the bite is always  
Worse than the bark.

B. R. Ewing

## Silver and Glass

Wordlessly, they travel-down the slopes  
Seeking other rivers, other reasons-  
Slowly they slide-slowly, carefully-  
And it all goes so easy-so harmlessly-  
So silently-  
Water trickling down-going onward-  
Sliding from my crystal cold pools-  
Past the warm cheeks-down my throat-  
To the sterile linen beneath.

And it all goes so easily-  
So quietly-  
The emotions, the reasons, the thoughts-  
All the vitality and all the voids-  
They go streaming, sliding onward-  
Silently.

B. R. Ewing



## Funeral

Love is dead.  
He's gone and died on me  
And it's not my fault-  
We just had the Dread Disease  
They call Can't Relate or  
Don't Understand-  
You catch it  
Whenever there's  
Too Much Demand.

Love is dead.  
He's gone and died on me  
But there's still Desire  
On your part  
But Indifference has taken up residence  
In my heart-  
And it would help if you would  
Despise or hate me-  
When he dies for you  
We both can be free.

I'm having Love's funeral-  
Will you help me pick out the stone?  
Because there's nothing as bad  
As falling out of love alone.

B. R. Ewing

## TRANSITION

Philosophers and dime store novels  
Share shelves with bean bag  
    Teddy bears  
        a glass menagerie  
            and a magazine  
In a room for a girl  
moved away.

Donna Tucker

## TEN A.M. THURSDAY

Blue skies lend themselves  
    to poetry  
Quite well.  
But brown carpets on office floors  
Know only dirty shoes  
    and cigarette butts  
        and cast iron wheels  
            on the bottom of office chairs.

White clouds  
    pinned on blue skies  
And gray ashes  
    ground into brown carpets  
A medal on a dead hero  
And mud on the jeans of a poet.

Blue skies and bloody heroes  
    Lend themselves to poetry  
    Quite easily.  
But brown carpets on office floors  
Are only friends to those  
Who take time to meet them.

Donna Tucker

REFLECTIONS OF SUNDAY MORNINGS PAST

How weak and undeserving  
I, in all my modest humility  
Am.

A mourner  
for human life lost.

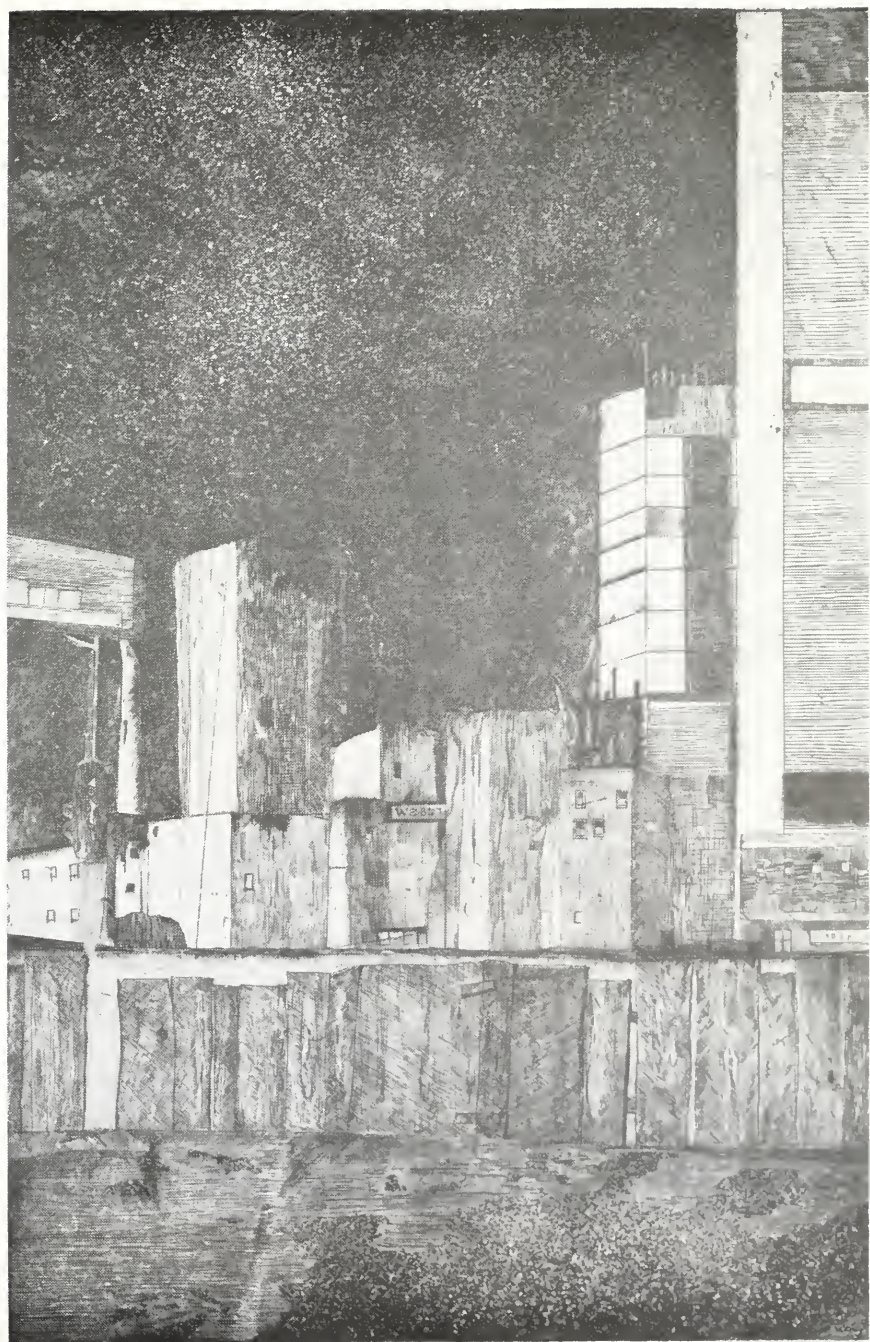
They come single file  
through carved-wood doors:  
Rows of ducks  
quacking humble amens in unison.

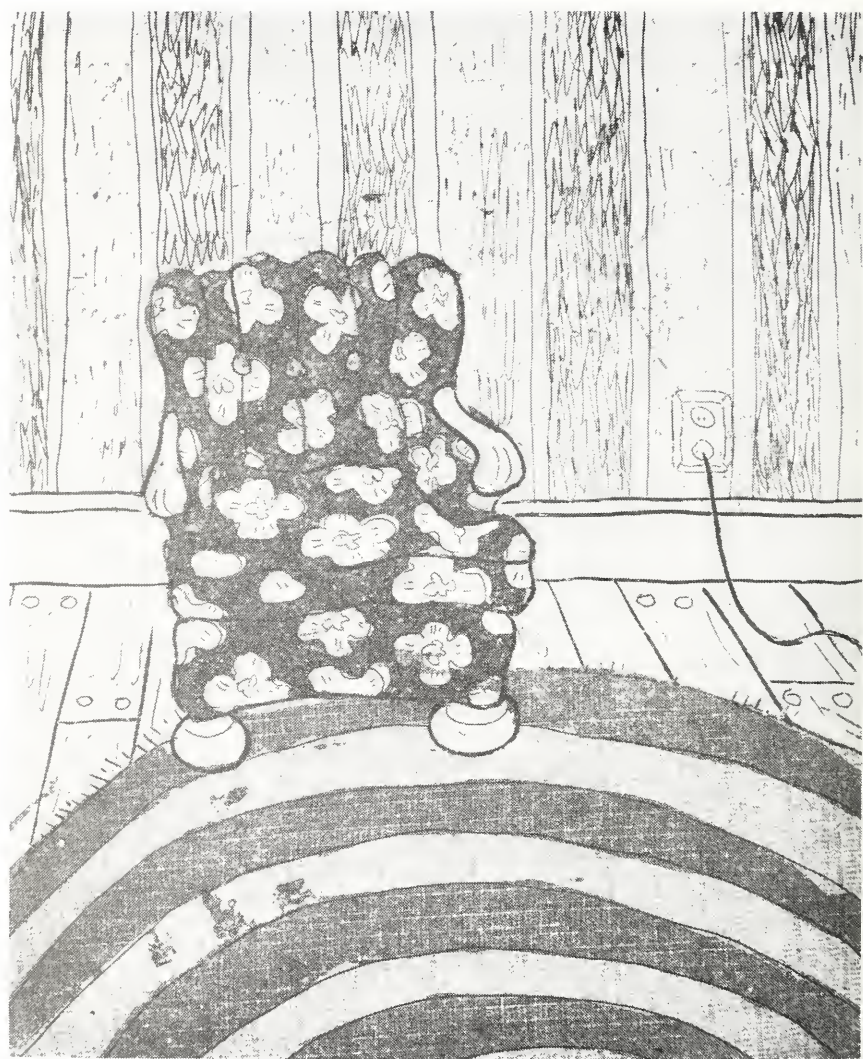
It seems such a small price  
(one life time)  
For such a great reward  
(a thousand life times).

Sunday morning sunshine  
never seems to shine  
quite as brightly  
Through the leaden stained-glass windows.

Pity.

Donna Tucker





## THE ANSWER

Bert Wayne Ballinger

John Daniels was five years old. He was blond headed, with a face dotted with brown freckles. He lived with his parents on his grandparents' farm. Their house was gray, and tar-covered in places. It had three small rooms, and hung tightly on a green cactus sewn hillside. Below and farther down the hill, the house of his grandparents' rested in silence on a greener, more level section of the hillside. It was not gray or tar-covered like his parents' house, but a white frame house, consisting of two-stories. In the mind of John, his grandparents' house was a castle of old. It was a beautiful old house, having artistical, well-placed columns to support its porches, polished, mirror like floors in the twelve rooms, and a Victorian staircase stretching and curving into the darkness of the second-story of the house.

On the outside, John could look at his grandmothers' flowers, a profusion of roses, dallies, and marigolds mixed together, and thrown about in different sections of the yard. John use to run through the flowers, but this adventure had stopped after his grandmother caught him once. John could also sit all day under cool, dark shade trees that his father had planted as a boy. They were tall trees now, and they circled his grandparents' house completely. His father had told him the trees were maples. But more important to John, his grandparents had a small, white birdhouse in their backyard, where he could hear the soft songs of the martins and the strong songs of the robins each spring, and well into the autumn. Sometimes his grandparents would sit on the backporch in the evening, listening to the songs of the birds as the sun went down. It was peaceful then.

One day when the red face of the morning sun hung

loosely on the silvery hills of dew, John's joys of the birdhouse came to an end, an end that he had never calculated or thought of. John watched his Uncle Herman and his uncles' two friends, Joe McHone and Lawrence Abrams come into the yard. John watched them as they walked slowly over to the birdhouse. They then looked straight up the pole to the birdhouse, and started to laugh. John didn't laugh, but kept watching them. Uncle Herman began to shake the pole that the birdhouse rested on. Joe and Lawrence placed their big hands on the pole, and started twisting and rocking the pole between themselves. John stood watching them. John heard his grandmother walk out of her kitchen, and onto the backporch of her house. John looked up to her as she wiped her wet hands on her flowery, blue apron, and then saw her fling a lock of her white hair out of her eyes with a jerk of her head. Her lips were tight and white.

"What are you do'in, Herman?" she asked, eyeing him and watching Uncle Herman's friends shake the birdhouse pole. John continued to watch them, and watched his grandmother out of the corner of his left eye.

Uncle Herman and Joe continued to laugh. Lawrence was on the green grass, rolling about in fits of laughter. John thought their laughs were crazy laughs, laughs he had heard at the horror movies in Monroe City. It was always a laugh coming from the pit of the monsters stomach, and echoing out into the world as a hollow, whispery laugh of darkness. John heard that laugh coming from them now. But John went on hoping that his grandmother would stop them. But she didn't stop them, and they continued to shake and twist the pole with their hands.

"Well, Herman?" his grandmother asked, raising her right eyebrow, and expecting a simple answer from her son. John knew his Uncle Herman didn't have an answer.

Uncle Herman ducked as a martin dived, and attacked him and his friends. They pointed at the martin and laughed. John watched as the purple streak dived over

and over again. But the diving, shallow attacks of the martins did no good, and John knew it.

"It's shaky and dangerous," Uncle Herman shouted, "and you know he's fourteen today?"

"I know how old he is!" grandma said. John didn't say anything.

Uncle Herman continued to shake the birdhouse pole, trying with the swaying force of his body to break the pole off. Joe started kicking the dirt away from around the pole. Lawrence used his shoulder to push the pole, putting his weight behind every push. John watched and his grandmother watched.

A sky blue egg came rolling out of the birdhouse, falling freely, and breaking into a thousand blue pieces. John watched the yellow liquid seep slowly over the green grass and into the ground. John then wished he could put the eggs back together again. But John then remembered Humty-Dumty, and knew he couldn't help.

"Hurry up!" Joe said, snickering and whinnying like a horse. John thought of his black pony when Joe laughed.

Uncle Herman and Lawrence started to laugh too. John watched his grandmother standing on the edge of the porch, shading her eyes from the sun. The sun was up above the trees now and high. But John kept looking at his grandmother, and kept wondering when she would stop them. But she didn't stop them, and John began to wonder why she let them get away with such an act of destruction. John watched as his grandmother went back into her kitchen through the screen door. She waved away the fat, green flies from the door before opening it, and then went in. John stood on the back-porch alone.



Finally the young purple martins and orange-breasted robins started falling out of the white birdhouse. John could hear some of the birds cries as they fell to the ground. Uncle Herman and Joe began to ring the birds necks, twisting their heads around to their backs in one quick motion. Lawrence picked up their limp bodies, and tossed them over the barbed wire fence and into the grazing pasture of the Jersey cattle. The Jersey's sniffed at the dead bodies of the birds, backing away quickly when they caught the scent of death in their nostrils. John ran up the hill to his parents' house when he saw all of this.

At his parents' house, the sun was shining through the dusty caked windows, striking onto the floor in a blinding white glare. John looked through the screen door, and pressed his face up closer against the screen so he could see in. He saw his mother sitting on a yellow sofa. He asked her through the screen door if he could have the young birds. John called them babies. He wanted to save the ones left alive.

"Are they tearin' down the birdhouse?" his mother asked, turning the pages on a wish book. John wondered why she called the Sears & Roebuck catalog a wish book. He had never asked her. Even his father called it a wish book. All John knew was that they never ordered anything out of it. Not one thing. But he didn't have time to ask her now about the wish book. He just took the papersack from her hand.

John didn't answer his mother, but raced back down the hill to his grandparents' house. When he arrived, John found the birdhouse lying on the ground. It was broken and splintered, and didn't seem as white to John now. John then looked at the blue eggs and the white eggs lying on the green grass. He knew the blue eggs belonged to the robins and that the white belonged to the martins. John could even hear the cries of the young birds coming from within the broken birdhouse. John walked over to the birdhouse and bent down upon his knees. He looked inside. Inside, John

found two martins and one robin alive. They tried to get away from John by hopping away, but he caught them. He placed them in his papersack for safe keeping, and started back up the hill to his home. John was happy, and he held the papersack up to his ear so he could hear the birds inside.

"What'cha got in that sack, Johnny?" Joe asked, sitting with Uncle Herman underneath a shady maple. Lawrence stood, smoking a cigarette, and smiling at John.

"Birds," said John, "and you'd better not bother them."

Uncle Herman and Joe got up from their sitting positions, and leaned against the trunk of the maple. Lawrence looked at them and winked. They winked at him. John looked at their mouths. Their mouths were twisted into sly, simple smiles. John didn't like any of their smiles.

"Let me see them." demanded Joe.

"No." John said.

John put the papersack behind his back, and started to move slowly up the hill to his home. He felt like running. He thought he could outrun them. John knew he had outran the wind. When the rains came in the spring, being pushed by the wind, John had outran the rain and the wind. In the summer, John had heard the wind in the trees and had outran it. In the autumn, John had heard the wind in the yellow and red leaves lying on the ground and he had outran it. In the winter, John had heard the wind whistle across the snow, and saw it toss the snow high in the gray sky, and he had outran the wind then. Surely he could outrun them, John thought. John thought he could do it. But--

"I told you I wouldn't hurt them." Joe said, looking at Uncle Herman and Lawrence after he had caught

John, prying the papersack out of John's small hands. It had taken Joe a long time to pry the sack out of John's hands. John had squeezed his small hands tight, but Joe had won.

"You'd better not!" said John, watching the three of them carefully. Joe, Lawrence and Uncle Herman opened the papersack and looked into it. They smiled.

Joe began to shake the papersack, and they could all hear the cries of the birds from within. John began to cry, and tried to reach for them. Joe held the papersack high above John's head. Then Joe, Lawrence and Uncle Herman tossed the papersack back and forth over the head of John. John kept jumping up for the papersack, but he never could reach it. He began to kick at the three, and swung his small fists in a wild, free manner. They laughed at him. John kept his eyes shut the whole time.

Back at his parents' house, his mother met him at the screen door. She looked at the red sun sinking into the nest of trees in the distance, and then looked at John standing in front of the screen door.

"Shoo away those flies before you open this door!" his mother said.

"They've killed them." John said, holding the papersack open to her. She looked inside, and saw the three dead birds. Their eyes were shut, and they looked like they were asleep. John began to cry more.

Finally in a garbled voice, John asked, "Why?" John hoped his mother could give him an answer. She hugged him.

"I don't know," his mother said, "I just don't know." It was then that John realized, for all of his five years, he didn't know the answer either.





## NO QUARTER

James Bryant

### I

At one end of the pier, the grounded end, crouches Gander's Gift and Bait Shop. The land falls sharply away behind the small, square building; at low tide a sinuous beach surfaces below, but at high tide the sea laps directly against the base of the twelve-foot cliff. Due to the drop-off of the land, the seaward end of the eighty-foot fishing pier stands high over the surface of the water.

The sides of Gander's are garishly painted to attract the tourist's eye as he or she drives out Galveston Roadway away from town, or inward toward town --one side or the other of the shop is sure to lure him or her with its pitched promises and its invitation to "COME ON IN AND TAKE A GANDER!!"

Within the shop are stuffed, glass-eyed baby alligators, thick rubber snakes, and wooden tomahawks painted tribal reds and blacks and yellows and prettified with dyed goose-feathers (magenta and aquamarine) dangling from the crux by thin licoricelike straps. One could also purchase Indian spears (fancifully painted dowel rods with rubberstone heads) and coconut husks into which pirate faces have been carved. And other such memorabilia. The bait shop at the rear supplies fishermen with what they may need: live bait, lures, hooks, sinkers, bobbers, even rent-a-poles.

Colored fishnets laden with tinted glass balls, starfish, bamboo rods, and such seaside paraphernalia are slung from the shop's naked rafters in downward swells and upward crests. The proprietor of the shop looks as though he can care about little, unless it be the infrequent sales he makes. He sits behind the

counter at the side of the store and watches a ball-game on a tiny, Japanese-made television set, but even it does not appear to command his attention much.

From time to time people will come in, patter around, walk back out, with only the swinging bell over the door to announce their arrivals and departures. If anyone ever does speak it is in a hushed voice and admonishing tone as he or she pores over the worthless merchandise, every bit of which is stamped in one way or another: "Greetings from Galveston Beach"--the only conceivable indication of where an item has been purchased. Most of the same items boast "Made in Okinawa" or "Made in Hong Kong."

Access to the fishing pier is gained via the metered turnstiles at the rear of the shop--twenty-five cents going out, another twenty-five cents coming back in. At the distal end of the pier sits a young man alone, dressed in blue jeans, a yellow hooded-sweatshirt, Sears sneakers, and a pair of chrome-framed blue-tinted teardrop-lensed Cool-Ray polarized sunshades. The Gulf breeze tosses clumps of the young man's hair quaveringly across his forehead and bears the saline scent of the sea up to his nostrils. He is seated at the very end of the dock, swinging his legs, crossed at their ankles, back and forth over the gold-flecked green waves of the sea. His hands are buried in the mufflike pocket on the front of his sweatshirt. His shoulders are hunched.

Glaucous gulls, laughing gulls, and roseate terns wheel in the salt air roundabout the young man, dip into the salt sea water for fish, arise again triumphant or empty-mouthed, whining at will. Along the shore in the distance sandpipers dart in and out of the lapping sea foam as dying waves disperse themselves on the shingle and seek the deep anew. Sanderlings plow their little furrows with their beaks, seeking to expose the tiny crustaceans which comprise their meals.

The young man is aware of everything around him

but of nothing in particular. He is as indifferent to the world as the world has proven itself indifferent to him. It is the sea alone that can offer him solace any longer, by its constancy, by its always being there and its never saying a word; and he offers the sea solace by visiting her, appreciating her on days like today. The young man hasn't been around much, but he's been around enough to know--and has read books which confirm his suspicions--enough to know that Gander's is America, and that the pier is all that separates him from and connects him to the land mass, and that twenty-five cents is the price he has paid to be rid of it all. He knows also that, except for his bunched hands, his pockets are completely empty.

## II

A young woman wearing a smart, green-and-white, candy-striped summer dress and a grayish sweater tied across her shoulders drops a quarter in the slot, releasing the turnstyle's mechanism, and steps out onto the pier. A scarf in her hair matches her dress. Her arms are folded across her chest, their slim, artistic fingers splayed at the opposing elbows, securing the sweater. She is slow walking the length of the pier, and turns to the side rail some ten feet short of its end.

"Mm, what a beautiful afternoon," she compliments. "Excuse me, do you know what kind of bird that is?" she asks.

The young man, at first unresponsive, cranes his neck to look at the voice. Everything has an eerie blue cast through his Cool-Rays. "I don't know birds," he says, turning his head around to the sea. "I just look at them sometimes."

"Look how low it glides over the waves," the young woman muses aloud.



The young man obligingly lifts himself to stand beside her, but not too closely. "Which one?" he grunts perfunctorily.

"That black and white one, there, with the red beak --see it?" she points. "Every once in a while he'll open his beak and skim with only the bottom tip of it touching the water--sort of like he skates across the waves." She shrugs and laughs at herself, finding the young man to be disinterested in her smalltalk.

"That's how he feeds," the young man says suddenly after an extended silence. "It's a Black Skimmer, or Sooty Shearwater as I prefer to call it. He's scooping up plankton, which is his main staple. By the way, you had him correctly sexed--it is a male."

"I thought you didn't know birds," the young woman accuses.

"So I've heard Barbra Streisand sing--does that mean I know her?" replies the impassive young man.

"I only wondered what kind of a bird it was, that's all." The young woman's hands adjust themselves against her sleeves.

"Why not leave it at 'the black and white one with the red beak'? It's the only one out there that answers such a description." His delivery is as marmoreal as his demeanor.

The young woman casts a longish glance around, surveying the encompassing air. "What about those?" she asks, pointing at some birds scooping arcs and gyres over the water.

"Laughing gulls," the young man nods. "Call them 'the black and white ones with the short red beaks'; it'll do. I'll know you mean the laughing gulls."

The young woman shakes her head, smiles the smile of one throwing the towel in. She eases an arm away

from an elbow and fingers her down-turned forehead, and laughs. In histrionic supplication to Heaven she outstretches her arms, but stays herself from speech. Her arms drop to her sides, then fold once again across her chest. She eyes the young man.

"Why don't you take off those sunglasses; let me have a look at you."

The young man makes no motion so to do, yet puts up no resistance as the young woman places her fingers on the chrome frames.

"You mind?"

He shrugs, grunts.

The young woman pulls the glasses toward her, freeing them from his ears with a slight upward movement.

The young man's eyes blink like butterflies. A corner of his mouth twists in a smirk. "Them's eyes," he says without explaining but with a trace of smile.

"I'm Karen," she says.

He nods.

"Well, do you have a name--or are you 'the brown-eyed boy with the incessant scowl'?" she asks cagily.

He considers momentarily. "Hey," he says quietly, "don't call it a scowl. It's uh--like Richard Starkey once said? 'It's just a face.'"

Karen laughs at the young man's shrugging impression of "the melancholy Beatle."

"Name's Robert," he concedes.

"Oh," she nods. "D'you like Bob?"

"I don't know him."

"As a nickname, I mean."

"Whatever suits you. I prefer--Robert."

"Never broke in a--a sobriquet, huh? I just learned that word," she admits with a laugh; "I've been waiting to slip it into a conversation somewhere." She shrugs, smiles, draws breath. "No one ever broke a nickname in on you when you were small?"

"Sure; what are relatives for? I've been Bobs and Bobbies and Robbies for seventeen years--even a Berto, once. But my given name is Robert, and even if it doesn't mean anything, at this point in my life I would very much appreciate folks calling me by the name I was given."

"Fine... Robert it is. Karen's kind of a funny name; there are no real nicknames to go with it."

"How 'bout, mm--Wren?" Robert suggests.

"Wren? Like the bird, huh? You know, that's the first I've heard that... Yes, it's nice." A sunny smile. "I like it."

"I wonder if you warrant it."

"Warrant it? What do you--"

"Let me tell you something about wrens. The wren --Eastern House Wren, Troglodytes aedon aedon--is a very fastidious, energetic, sort of a temperamental dickens. Are you at all prone to an uncontrollable urge to rearrange furniture when you're choleric?"

"Angry, you mean? Yes, I do take it out on my living room at times."

"And, other times, do you hum around the house while you're working?"

"Oh sure, usually. Or I sing along with Gladys

Knight on the stereo."

"You're a wren," Robert unequivocally affirms. "You are indeed a Wren. May I call you that?"

She smiles broadly, warmly. "Call me anything you want," she Mae Wests, "Just so you call me."

The two gaze out across the waves in contemplative silence.

### III

"Sobriquets, I think, are symptomatic," Robert says at last. "A person applies a sobriquet to another--it's a distancing mechanism. Sobriquets prevent the applicant from ever knowing applicee as a specific individual. Take Bobbie--"

"Please!"

"First you're Mae West, now you're Hennie Youngman. Or was that Milton Berle? No, but anyway, I think that a person forms inside himself an image of what a Bobbie is or should be. Then, he applies that same nickname to every Robert or Roberto he ever meets, and thereby saves himself the trouble of ever having to confront those Roberts and Robertos personally. He is comfortable with the image he has of what a Bobbie is and he never has to stray beyond that. Parents, though, are the worst offenders. They come up with sobriquets that at best only vaguely reflect the name they have given their child. Boberino, for gosh sakes. Now don't you think, in a sense, that is a form of rejection?--so that the only time a parent invokes the child's real given name he fears it, because he has a pretty good sense of what's in the wings when he hears that unfamiliar Robert Allen Angstrom! The damn kid is liable to go into hiding--and it's nothing more than his given name. Had you ever thought of that, Wren?"

"I hadn't, no." She tilts her head, her chin couched in a palm. "Can you name all these birds; I mean, like, even all those little ones on the shore? They all look so much alike to me." She shades her eyes with her free hand, wets her lips, and gazes intently at the shorebirds.

"Ah," he says, "with a little practice you could know them (as they are wont to say) 'by heart'. But, what of it? To know a Semipalmated Sandpiper from a Greater Yellow-Legs from a White-Rumped Plover--or is the plover semipalmated and the sandpiper white-rumped? Do you appreciate them, their grace and beauty, any the more for knowing them by name? I rather think we get hung-up on the names and forget the finer aspects of them. To look and to say, 'Ah, *Limosa haemastica!*'--it sort of resolves the case, we need no more than identify it and move on to the next. I could teach you if you'd like to name them all, but I'd prefer you merely used the descriptives--better yet, point them out with a finger as you speak of them. Point to each individual bird, maybe give it a name of your own, one that you think applies."

"Where'd you learn so much about Birds?" Karen asks delightedly.

"Louis Agassiz Fuertes."

"Who?"

"A naturalist and wildlife artist."

"Um... Can I ask you a question?"

"It's certainly your prerogative so to do."

"Why are you so hostile toward names? You seem to detest names something awful."

"No; I've nothing against names per se. It's just the on-going war I'm waging against words in general."

"Words?"

"Yes. Like 'forgive', to take an example. One person says he 'forgives' another. What the deuce does it mean?" He throws his arms up and blows horse-like through his lips. "Do you see? 'I forgive' is--it's like an abracadabra."

"I'm probably dumb, but I still don't see your point."

"Hey, hey," Robert admonishes, pressing a pair of fingers delicately to Wren's lips. "Don't ever say anything like that about yourself. You'll come to believe it, bye and bye. Self-denigration with words is rhetorical suicide. Don't do it!"

"Now I'm really mixed."

"Of course, of course. People toss words around so thoughtlessly because they don't realize--no one has bothered to inform them--what bilious little bombs words are. My opinion, for what it may be worth, is that words are the most destructive weapon ever to be devised by Man. That no one ever cautions us of their potency I take to be either a severe oversight or a significant ellipsis from our education. So don't ever let me hear you say 'I'm probably dumb' or anything like it ever again."

"Sorry."

"Haven't you learned anything? 'Sorry' is as lame as 'I forgive you.' Anyway, what have you to be sorry for?"

"I thought there was something," Karen shrugs. "If you say otherwise--"

"No! Wren, no, it's not because I say otherwise. It's the way it is, that's all."

Karen stares at him, fearful of speaking, fearful

of setting him off again, fearful lest another hailstorm of criticism should descend.

Robert surveys her silence, then nods. "That's good," he says, "you're coming along well. You, Wren, are becoming word-conscious."

#### IV

"Don't you ever forgive people? Don't you ever say you're sorry?" Wren asks several minutes later, exhuming a subject Robert has thrown some dirt over earlier.

"I don't condemn. You've nothing to forgive if you don't condemn."

"And you never say things when you're angry that you later regret?"

"Wren, listen: last year at school a friend picked up a copy of Playboy magazine. In it appeared a psychological test, one of those multiple choice tests that the reader is asked to answer as honestly as possible. This particular test was designed to indicate one's Anxiety Quotient--how uptight a person one was. This friend suggested we take the test and compare results. He read off the questions and the choices of answers, and we both tallied our scores at the end. We checked our totals against the provided norms. This friend, as it turned out, was a sufficiently uptight member of society. And what do you think? If it weren't for the fact that I'd changed my answer concerning my projected reaction from 'Slightly Peeved/A Few Angry Words' to 'Duke It Out With The Bungler', I'd have flunked--I'd have been categorically deceased."

"Um."

"So you see, Wren, I am not the most upsettable

of persons, not much prone to excreting expletives I will later have to mop up."

"Apparently not."

"Something else I don't do--I bet you can't guess it--I also don't cry ever. Not since I learned, and in a painful way, five years ago, that tears are much less emotional than rhetorical."

"How do you mean?"

"Ah, we much more often cry in an effort to persuade someone that we are hurt, by whatever cause and for whatever reason, than simply to express an emotional state of mind, an honest one."

"You think so?"

"It's something we learn from the cradle. Baby cries, mama comes running, mama cuddles. We're conditioned that way. As we grow older we start faking illnesses just for the attention it protracts. Don't you believe that's so? So long as we at least subconsciously acknowledge to ourselves that tears have great bargaining power, we continue to use them to whatever ends we might exploit their use. I call it Lachrymal Sophistry."

"Yes, but I don't think that's strictly true; not always. Sometimes we cry out of real sadness. I do."

"Yes, but they must be tears that nobody sees. Tears shed in solitude, tears in a darkened movie theater, tears shed over a song--those are the best, the most beautiful, because they are useless. The closest I've been to tears since I realized all of my tears had always been plastic, rhetorical, was when I went to a John Denver concert. Honestly, Wren, that's one beautiful man, John Denver. I've been suicidal ever since I lost my tears; I guess it seemed to me that all of life was as much a crock as my tears had been, that the whole of life was this



tremendously ridiculous joke, and a very cruel one for no one ever telling us so. But that night in the darkened auditorium, amid 18,000 people I was totally alone; I was very close up to the stage; it was like ...well, it was indescribable. But that man, John Denver, the way he sang, the songs he sang, his entire disposition and attitude toward life as something positive--well, I may not have left crying, but I sure left wishing that I could cry. Useless tears, Wren, are certainly the best."

"Am I to applaud?" asks Wren, loosely clapping her hands twice. "You almost had me going, for a minute."

## V

The two lapse into a contemplative silence, their consciousness lulled by the waves. Robert slips away from the rail, meanders slowly updock, where he stands with head bowed. Immersed in thoughts of her own, Karen does not at first notice Robert's coolly defiant stance. What ensues is an absurd stalemate, with Robert the only participant. At last Karen comes to herself as if out of a dream; she experiences momentary disorientation, but regains her sense of things as she looks updock at Robert, whose back is to her. She eases from the rail and walks toward the moody young man. She arrives behind him, sets a hand on his shoulder, and jokingly asks "Sulking again, Robbie dear?"

Robert turns on her, almost viciously. "Why'd you have to come out here?" he blurts.

Karen is taken aback. "I don't--"

"Why couldn't you simply ignore me?"

Words gorge in Karen's throat. "I-- I--" she fumbles, but dumbness overcomes her.

Robert's hands writhe in his sweatshirt pocket; anger contorts his face. "Hadda be nice, didn't you? Hadda turn on the old Southern hospitality." He snorts, jerks his chin, turns away from the girl, leaving her helplessly suspended in amazed confusion.

Karen shuts her eyes and trembles as she tries to understand the nature of her guilt. The entire situation has taken a turn toward the irrational. Try as she may, she cannot decipher the young man's unkind accusations. "Look, I--" she begins feebly.

"Don't bother with explanations, Wren," Robert shoos her. "We're two distinct individuals, temporarily unexpectedly close in space and time. As if we should, in the last analysis, have to explain ourselves, or apologize for what we accidentally are."

Karen chews her lip in frustration. She firms up. "Robert," she says, "I don't like the way you're talking just now. Something has happened out here in these few minutes we've been together. I want you to tell me what it is. What have I done that has offended you so?"

"Damn, Wren, I thought maybe I had at least reached you at some level," Robert scorns, "but now you're talking crazy again. If you desire to do someone a favor, kindly vacate this dock. Otherwise, zip it up."

"Robert, I need to know what I've done," Karen pleads. "Aren't I entitled to at least that?" She shifts around some, though she conscientiously maintains the distance he has set.

"Why can't a dame accept her own innocence?" Robert mutters for Karen to hear.

"Hey, Sport, aren't you generalizing a bit?--you who so abhors those who generalize with names?" She approaches and once again places a hand lightly on his shoulder. "Robert?" she asks quietly.

"I made an ass of myself, all right? Now will you please leave an ass alone to contemplate his asshood?" Robert shakes his head slowly side-to-side.

"Mind explaining a bit more clearly? Why have you made an ass of yourself--or why do you think you have?" There is a paradoxical tone of cool compassion in the young woman's voice.

"I do it every time I speak, every attempt I make at communication ends up this way, with me in the manger. Praise holy Neptune that you're the last." Robert has slunk back inside his impassive melancholia. He turns his back to the rail, curls his fingers around it out to his sides. Wren is facing away from him, her hands pressing to her lips. She stands stock-still, feeling the young man's eyes upon her.

"Give me my sunshades, Wren, and I'll do my impression of Stevie Wonder for you." This is Robert's attempt at reconciliation without compromise. Karen hands him back his sunglasses but refuses to look at him. He slips the Cool-Rays on, tilts his head half-back and rolls it jerkily side-to-side, affecting a cutting smile all the while. He gropes for Karen with an extended finger and mumbles "Hey, mama."

Karen bats the hand away, suppressing a laugh in the process. "What do you mean, I'm the last?" she asks sadly.

"You don't wanna know that, mama," he responds, still Stevie Wonder.

"I do want to know, Robert," Karen insists softly. "I think I do know."

Robert does not answer. He lets go his hand from the rail and walks once more to the distal end of the pier. Karen allows him a short distance before trailing after him. "Robert," she intones, a conscience suddenly possessed of vocal organs; "Robert,

you can't do this. You know that." He stands at piers end, hands lifted to the tubular rail with the paint flaking off. Karen has assumed a position some six feet behind him.

"I tried to impress you, Wren," Robert confesses. "That was wrong, it was hypocritical; I shouldn't have tried to impress you."

"But, Robert--what's so wrong with impressing someone?"

"No, Wren, you're not listening. There's nothing wrong with impressing someone--except when the Navy does it." He snorts at the undetected joke. "Oh well," he mutters. "What I said was that I had tried to impress you; I strove to present myself as something more than I am, something I truly am not. I deceived you. Do you see what that does? I'm as phoney as the superficiality I purport to reject. I'm as much a part of it as the next guy, so long as the next guy's there to be phoney with--with whom to be phoney. Heh," he snorts, "see what I mean? Next thing you know I'll be apologizing for God-(if-only-He-existed)-Could-Only-Know-What."

"Tell you what," Karen offers; "You come home with me and I'll fix you a nice, genuine, superficial-free dinner. How's that sound?"

"Enchanting," Robert replies with a smirk. "Splendid."

## VI

"Come along, then," says Karen cheerily. "We'll have us a nice dinner. We'll talk. Let's find out precisely what's the matter with you, why life seems so unbearable for you."

"You walked through that gift shop, didn't you?"

responds Robert; "And you still have to ask 'why'? How blind you must be, Wren."

The words pierce. Karen is again being convicted and she scarce knows why. She moves up next to Robert, puts an arm around his shoulders. "Come with me, please, Robert. You'll only hurt yourself if you stay--if I leave you here alone." She tousles his hair, smooths it again.

"That's the whole idea," says Robert; "To hurt myself. That's sort of what suicide's all about."

"And you'll be hurting me now, too, Robert--even more deeply than yourself. Had I never found you, things would have been different. But they aren't, because I have found you, and now at least I feel responsible for you, if you will no longer feel responsible for yourself. What you do will be on my conscience, now. So you see, I can't allow you to do as you please. I've got a God to square it with. Maybe you don't; maybe that's your problem. Come on," she says, plucking up spirit, "it's just a walk up the road, it's not far, we can be there in half-an-hour... Or, we could spend the night out here on this pier--you decide. Just let me warn you, it can get pretty brisk out here at night, once the sun goes down."

"The sun doesn't go down," says Robert moodily; "The earth turns away from it." He looks at Karen, studies her face, her smile, her eyes. He is looking for something which, until he removes his dark sunshades, he cannot see. But he removes his sunshades, pushes them up his forehead back into his hair, and then he sees the tear in the corner of Karen's eye--perhaps it has been drawn there by sadness, or by gladness, or by the salt sea breeze--it doesn't matter, it is there, an honest-to-God teardrop. Robert nods, kicks his toe against the surface of the dock several times. "Okay, Wren," he says, quietly smiling, "you've talked me into it, or out of it, as it were." He raises an arm to her shoulder and the two of them walk back the length of the dock, each with an arm

about the other.

Three feet short of the turnstyle Robert freezes in his pace.

"What's the matter?" asks Karen.

"I just remembered--I hope you have an extra quarter. I didn't bring but one, and I used it getting out here."

"I should have," says Karen, reaching around to grab her purse. "Let me see." She pokes around inside the purse for maybe a minute but fails to locate more than one quarter. "Maybe we can ask the man inside," she suggests. "He can change this dollar for --"

She doesn't finish her sentence. Robert has scooped her up in his arms and is carrying her toward the turnstyle. "Drop the quarter in," he says, which she does, and the two pass as easily as one back inside Gander's.

## ETERNITY?

Barbara Simpson

Standing here in the warmth of a spring sun with a gentle breeze blowing through the trees, I can see a small barnyard far below. It is quiet now except for the noises and excitement of children at play. I have been watching those children since I was born. Three years ago, my mother brought me here to teach me a lesson about people. As we watched, she told me about their life styles, beliefs, and emotions. However, I learned my most important and tragic lesson about people on our way back to our home that sad day.

Mom was just ahead of me when we came out of the woods and into the glen. Suddenly, Mom stopped. Then she turned to me and told me to stay where I was. When I started to object, she gave me a glance that I knew that I mustn't challenge. She walked further into the glen, being more cautious than I had ever seen her before.

Then two things happened at once: I heard a sound like a twig snapping, and I saw my mother fall to the ground.

Horrified, I stood there paralyzed. Then I saw two men walk over to the place where my mother lay motionless. I took a few small steps forward to hear what was said.

"Great shot, Joe! She must have died instantly."

"Nice size, even if I do say so myself. She must weight close to 150 pounds."

Then one of them spotted me. I wanted to run, yet I couldn't leave without knowing what was to happen to my mother.

"Hey, Joe. Look over there! It's a fawn. Do you

think that maybe this doe was its mother?"

"More than likely, I wonder what will happen to the poor little thing now."

"Do you suppose Mary would mind if I brought it home as a pet for the kids?"

"She was upset when you brought home that litter of pups. What do you think she'll say about a deer?"

"I guess maybe you're right, but the poor little thing looks so frightened!"

"John, the best thing to do now is to let God take care of the little fellow."

When he said this the man named John laughed and said, "My dear brother, that's a doe."

Then they dragged my mother out of the glen and out of my life forever.

When I think of those words that man said about God, I often wonder if humans know anything at all about God. If they do, then why did they kill my mother? The God I know is a loving one. Why would He want anyone to murder my mother? Or am I being naive? No! I know God! All the creatures of the world and I entrust our lives to him. What right did that man have to play God? What right did he have to decide when my mother was to die? Or was he just acting as an instrument of God? These are the questions I never will be able to answer.

I'm almost to the same spot where my mother was killed three years ago. The glen hasn't changed much. The trees, grass, and flowers are all the same as they were on that dreadful day. I can even sense the same atmosphere. It is exactly the same. Perhaps too much the same.

I feel as if someone is watching me. Someone who



doesn't belong here in the woods. That someone's name is man.

If I walk around the edge of the glen, maybe I can avoid the danger. But this seems impossible, because as I round a large evergreen I come face to face with the man.

We stand there for a moment because we are both surprised by the sudden appearance of the other. It was during these few moments that I realize that I know this man. He is older and different, yet still the same. A chill ran down my spine when I suddenly remember him as the man who had murdered my mother.

My instincts tell me to run. I wonder, "Where shall I run." Having no answer, I start running.

As I turn to run, I hear that familiar cracking sound from behind me. When I see a piece of bark not more than two inches from my head splinter from the tree just to my right, I start to run faster than I ever have in my life. But as I run I find that I am being hindered by tears of terror that blind my vision. God! Dear God! Help me, please! I run between two large oaks.

No! It's impossible! But it is real. There in front of me, blocking my escape is another man. Behind me I hear the footfalls of the other man. I turn in time to see him kneel and aim his gun. There is nothing to do now but close my eyes in a quiet submission to my inevitable end.

I just stand here listening. I hear the birds singing, the gentle breeze blowing through the trees, in the distance the babbling of a brook, the ominous cracking sound, and then....silence.





## NO EXPLANATION

I kissed yellow, bible-story parchment.  
My eyes raked across two shrinking deadwaters.  
They kept flowing back, far away,  
into a ganglion of tubes running from  
tube-foreign places, and plastic, and bile,  
stuck and held with glucose.  
He was my grandfather,  
and just before death he lay there,  
already half-folded-up in that sulfurous room,  
and made us all feel sick and helpless.

Kelle Emmons

## AS OPPOSED TO DOWN

You curl up on your mattress  
and pull the room  
up around your ears,  
becoming a mauve bruise  
on a purple shadow,  
and nothing moves.  
Then, the plant that was far away  
bends down to brush your cheek,  
and your eyes fly open  
startling the room back (large)  
into position.

Kelle Emmons











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