HAYDEN'S FERRY
REVIEW

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# PREMIER ISSUE

They said it couldn't be done. That a handful of writing students couldn't come out of nowhere and with little support and less money create the kind of quality publication you hold in your hands now.

And here it is — the premier issue of HAYDEN'S FERRY REVIEW.

In September of 1985, a dozen or so writers at Arizona State University were sitting around trying to decide how to go about selecting editors for the as-of-then unnamed literary magazine. Less than nine months later we're in the process of distributing the book and selecting new editors to continue on with the tradition of excellence we have established with this first issue.

Extraordinary results don't happen without extraordinary efforts by those involved. Some gave money, some gave their time, some gave their advice and still others physical labor and the use of machinery to allow us to complete our project within our tight deadlines. Unfortunately, all we have to offer at this point is our sincere thanks for helping bring this book into existence.

We would first like to thank Jan Kelly for sacrificing the time she could have spent on her novel to work with us on finding the funding for HFR. Also, a big thanks goes to Bruce Itule and Salima Keegan from Student Publications who supplied the safety net just in case outside funding did fall through and offered us a home for future issues.

Of course, these words wouldn't be here were it not for the many people who spent their weekend inputting the contents onto a computer disk for our typesetter. Racking up more than 100 hours at the computers were Jan, Kelly, Lynne, Judy Hopkins, and Terry Cutler. And for proofing copy we had help from Rob, Sheila Beatty and David Nelson.

Support and counsel for this project also came from Suzy Krevitsky, Diane Calhoun, Helen Ray, our friends at ASASU Bridget Shelton and Wendy Schwartz, Donna from Impression Makers and Diane Peterson at CodeBusters.

We would like to thank Quentin Skaggs for his patience and

creativity in coming up with the graphic design for the cover.

A big thanks goes to John Kleber for contributing the marvelous cover art, which turned out to be thematically perfect for this issue.

With help and guidance from the ASU Development Office and Dennis Eloe, we were able to get a most of the typesetting, printing and paper donated to HFR.

To our suppliers, Impression Makers and Reliable Reproductions, we would like to express our most sincere thanks and we hope that, in modest return for your generous contributions, we have produced a book of which we can all be proud.

Now, on to the art.

Catherine Houser
Coordinating Editor

# CONTENTS

Cary Grossman

# Rat Tail

"Shoot," Wanda cried as a stream of blood and intestines poured down the front of her pants.

"Cut it too close," said Henry, the man working beside her at the table. "A half inch from the base is fine. They don't care." He watched as she pulled another rat from the box, raised her grimy cleaver and severed the tail. "That's it," he said approvingly. "New here?"

"Started yesterday."

"You'll get the hang of it."

They worked in a huge room. Work tables were lined in rows that seemed to go on forever in any direction you looked. The low cement ceilings sported fans that churned the air ineffectually. It was hot and the air reeked of blood. At each of the wooden worktables two people stood pulling dead rats from tall cardboard boxes, chopping off the tails, and piling the rats on the edge of the table. Boys ran between the tables scooping the de-tailed rats into collection bins. The workers kept the tails; they were paid per tail.

The dead rats were packed into the cardboard boxes nose down. They were stiff and their tails stood straight up. When picked up by the tail the rats looked like furry popsicles.

"You know, this may sound silly, but I never did ask. Why do we have to cut off the tails?" Wanda said.

"Skinning machine won't take them with tails." Henry spoke without looking up, without breaking his rhythm. Wanda marveled at his speed and accuracy. His arms were in constant motion, like parts of a machine. If he ran out of rats I wonder how long he would keep chopping? she thought.

"What do they use them for," she said, "the rats?"

"We don't ask," Henry replied. He chopped off ten more tails before continuing. "Mink coats, hot dogs...everyone has his own theory. Better off not to think about it too much. It slows you down."

Wanda paused to look around her. Everywhere she looked she saw people hunched intently over the tables, chopping away. Speed was everything. This has got to be about the lowest job there is, she thought. Lowest for men, anyway. Second lowest for women. I'm not

going to let it get to me. I know I don't belong here. Just have to remember that. I'm going to keep all my wits and all my fingers.

She looked into the box of rats. Still thousands of them. I've been working for an hour and I've hardly made a dent. I'll bet his box is half empty at the rate he's going. Ah, I should never have dropped out of grade school. I could have been a stewardess by now. Something. Spilled milk, spilled milk.

As she worked she grew so accustomed to the whir of the fans and the steel rainfall of cleavers that she ceased to hear them. A sound broke her self-possessed quiet, however. It was a faint sound, muffled and unsteady. Incredibly, in the midst of the workroom tumult, that small, almost inaudible sound disturbed her. She slowed to a stop as she tried to find its source. "Do you hear something?" she asked Henry.

"What?"

"I keep hearing this little scratching sound."

"Probably a rat in your box."

"Live?" said Wanda.

"They don't always kill them very well. Sometimes a rat will come to in the box. Happens to me all the time."

Wanda listened carefully and found that, indeed, the scratching sound was coming from the bottom of the cardboard box at her side. "What do we do about it?"

Henry's pace slackened. "We get paid per tail."

Wanda inhaled sharply. "You mean we're supposed to cut the tail off of a live rat?"

"Everyone does. Not our fault it's alive. I'll do it for you if you don't want to."

"No," Wanda said slowly. "If everyone does it I certainly can." She peered into the box, gingerly pulled out a rat, and rapped it on the table a few times to make sure it was dead. As she worked she listened, almost against her will, to the scratching of the live rat. Short scratches. Long scratches. It sounds almost like Morse code, she thought. Maybe a rat scratching would make some words accidentally. I ought to listen just for fun.

She tilted her head in the direction of the sound and tried interpreting the rat's scratches as dots and dashes. Dot dash, dot dot dash. Au. Dot dot dot, dot, dash dot dash dot...Secours. Au secours. Just nonsense, of course. Funny though, it does sound like code. All the pauses are right. No, just my imagination.

Wanda returned to work but again and again found herself slowing to listen to the rat. This is ridiculous, she thought. I'm losing money

listening to that stupid scratching. I wish it would stop.

She reached her foot over and gave the box a rap. The scratching stopped immediately, then broke out again at a frenzied pace. Wanda unconsciously deciphered the scratches. Allo, they said. "Allo?" said Wanda, speaking to herself out loud. "That almost sounds like a word. Allo. Allo."

"Hello to you," said a boy as he scooped up a pile of rats from the table in front of her. Wanda was startled by the boy's unexpected response. She quickly resumed grabbing rats and chopping as the boy moved away. In spite of herself she kept listening to the scratches and murmuring the results. "Veuillez me dire ou je suis," she said. Still just nonsense. Me is a word but I'm sure it was just accidental. It's like they say about a room full of monkeys. If you sat them all down at typewriters, in a thousand years they'd come up with the complete works of Shakespeare. Maybe that rat will come up with something nice by accident. Let's see. "Tout le monde est mort ici." No, nothing yet. I think I'm starting to enjoy this game, though. It makes the time pass so much more quickly than it did yesterday.

"Est-ce que vous me comprenez," the rat scratched. There is me again, Wanda thought. That's two me's already. Coincidence. Wouldn't it be strange though, if rats had a language all their own and people just didn't understand it? Every creepy little thing on Earth may be talking its head off yet who would know? But then, why would anyone want to talk to a rat anyway? "Parlez-vous francais." Funny how well spaced the scratches are. There are never long runs of them. They're spaced out just like they were real words.

She hadn't realized how much work she had accomplished. The box was nearly empty. When she reached to pull out another dead rat she saw the live one for the first time. It was sitting up on its haunches in a corner, gazing back at her. Wanda carefully picked up a rat from the other side of the box. The live rat watched her motionlessly then lifted a paw and started to scratch again on the stiff cardboard. "Qu est-ce que vous faites." Wanda addressed the rat silently. I don't know what I'm doing listening to your dots and dashes as if they meant something. Why are you such a stupid rat? Why don't you climb out of there or chew a hole in the box or something? I don't have many more rats to go before I get to you.

"J'espere que vous ne me fera pas mal." That's the third me! Maybe there is some kind of a pattern to those scratches. There can't be, can there? What am I thinking? I said I'm not going to let this job get to me and I'm not.

She reached into the box and tried to grab the live rat but it ran from

corner to corner, dodging her hands. She gave up and pulled out the last of the dead rats. "De grace. Je vous en prie."

Wanda sighed, then plunged both hands into the box and plucked the live rat up by the tail. She swung it up to the table and chopped off its tail before it had a chance to move. The rat ran screaming over the side of the table. Wanda shook the blood from the pink tail and stuffed it into the bag of tails that hung from her belt.

Robyn Zappala

# The Hermaphrodite's Wedding Cake

Dressed, I am simple.
What am I most conscious of when I walk?
My shoulders pressed back like soldiers' or
Young girls practicing their posture.

At the wedding the bride has no shoes.
The groom dances alone, encircled
By tall men, clapping their hands fiercely.
I drink both champagne and red wine,
Standing near a wall of glass.
The cake is tiered to the height of a young child.

Each morning I choose to be myself or
The other; unbalance
Grows on me. Knowing that to be alone
Is destined, this body too much more than itself.

I want to be forgiven by the guests at the wedding.
I want to be caressed by a woman dressed in furs
Terribly in love with a man who's gone.
At night, in bed, my hands wag between
My legs. In the dark, I divorce myself.

# To A New Lover

You have begun to notice the small changes
in yourself, the difference

I make. Each night you stay longer,
noting the moon's blankness

on your walk home alone. Three cloudy evenings
in a row leave you guessing:

when things return to normal, how will you
recognize them? You choose your clothes

because of how easily they can be removed.
You have come up with a dozen ways of getting us

into bed; but endlessly
I thwart your plans . . .

This is what I want: that you should open
your legs to me, not knowing what to expect.

# In Another Country

A girl pretending to read a book watches
her roommate undress: hooking her arms back
like gull's wings, she unfastens her bra and holds
it out for a moment in front of her, then lets it

drop. The book the girl is not reading has colored maps
of every country: green across the borders,
hachures of brown; red for the highest
peaks, the sunsets. The roommate

struggles into a nightgown entirely too white.
She is standing by a window
and can see, against the wet outside, a reflection
of Isabel studying geography. She promises

"If it rains we will sleep late."
In a month they will vacation
to some foreign country: one afternoon, sitting
beneath fruit trees she will remember

this evening, when Isabel reached out to extinguish
the light, how the curve of her arm tensed her inside.
She will remember the long rain that night and compare
it to this sun-drenched day, her insides solid again

like rewound wires; will extend her arm along
Isabel's leg, lifting the skirt lightly, feel the surprise
of Isabel's pleasure, press her hand into familiar
skin, a bullfighting poster's bright colors echoing

until her fingers touch the damp cotton of Isabel's
girlish underwear. She will rest, desire invading her
like a country exploding red, desire for their empty
hotel room, its one large bed, white walls and the smell of oranges.

Stuart C. Brown

# Grinning Over Breakfast

Between the place settings, he draws
in the cold smears of grease. The waitresses
flap about him like crows dusting themselves
on a dirt road. He waits for the woman
he slept with. With a thumbnail, he sketches
a running figure and the lean shapes of deer
in flight, a slash of lightning among them.
Before she slept, she took a pen, and like a child,
traced her hand on his back. Thinking her pleased,
he watched her sleep, the blue hand a smudge
of ink and sweat on the sheets, while outside
he heard the splayed fingers of feeding lizards
on the walls, or imagined he heard, until
he too, curled as if grasped, fell away
into himself, full with the small knowledge
of her, of himself, of hands that sweat off
in the night, that move across walls, that push
egg into one's mouth, that wipe rags
over grease on a countertop. Seeing her now,
at the door, he imagines their lives
like a happy man would, and grins with it.

S.P. Stressman

# In Life as in a Strange Garment

Under moonlight, his skin is given a new texture. His clothing, the same he has worn for seventy-eight years, this delicate skin of the aged, is transformed by the moon. Now he becomes translucent, pale as porcelain. His exterior is smoothed; his body is made to seem new. No one alive today has ever called him by his first name.

"Traynor's in his party hat again."

I push aside a pile of fresh linen and see Nurse Voss standing in the doorway. Hands on her hips. Voss is a body language aficionado. Hands on hips equal exasperation.

Attendants can't get around Voss with a joke, or a smile. She's too old to be flattered, and not old enough to be grateful for the gesture.

Tonight, Voss struts around the wards like a devilish red hen, with her chest thrust out and her short, fat legs bulging in white stockings. Her anger stays in her red balloon body, and swells. Swollen, hot, she never pops. Voss counts out loud, until her steam is redistributed. She never shouts at the chinese.

Voss doesn't know it, but we call the patients chinese. Of all minorities, they are the least popular among us regular folk. Oh, everyone approves of old people, in theory, but no one wants to find a withered representative sitting in his living room.

Voss is worried, tonight. Coming on duty earlier than usual, she caught an attendant watching "Perry Mason" in the rec room, instead of turning the chinese in C ward. The thought of bedsores makes Voss shiver, as if she's never been exposed to them. Voss likes her wards clean, full of white sheets and cans of Lysol. Beds four feet apart. Matching robes for men, matching gowns for women. The smell of decency, wafting through the corridors, overpowering the acrid scent of sweat and urine.

So, it makes Voss twitch a little in her starched whites, to look out her office window and see Traynor sitting on the patio with a green St. Patrick's day hat perched on his head. The buckle and sequined clovers sparkle under the patio light. The moonlight. The traffic. The way cars slow to five miles an hour in front of the Home.

My arms are full of sheets and pajamas that smell of Clorox. From a

B ward window, I can see Traynor. His wheelchair is parked on the cold cement, facing the street. His bedroom slippers are new. A cousin or niece mails him a new pair three times a year. Does she think he wears holes in them, dancing?

Traynor's brown and tan pin-striped pajamas cling to his long, skinny legs. His hard knees jut out. His hands are a loose bundle of knotted joints. Maybe they were beautiful, once. Maybe not. The usual grey flannel robe is wrapped around his body.

He doesn't pretend to read. He doesn't ask for anything. He just watches. Traffic. He wears wire rimmed glasses. Even when he sleeps. So, I can't say whether or not he sees anything, when the white lights of traffic bounce off the glasses perched on his crooked nose.

Nurse Voss can't afford to lose him to pneumonia, so she worries. She paces. She raps the door frame with her knuckles as she passes me.

"Going for coffee. Try to get Traynor back inside. Please."

Traynor isn't new to the Home. He knows the rules, and how far he can bend them. He has a look the chinese get, after the first three months. They stop looking frightened and betrayed when they figure out where their own beds are, and where they sit in the dining room. Unless they're C ward, and have to be fed.

Once they know they are staying on, their eyes stop begging. They get a fixed, hard expression that doesn't tell you anything, doesn't even tell you when they pee on themselves.

This hard, inscrutable face is normal for most chinese. But, with Traynor, I think it may be a face superimposed on his own. A yellow-white, dry mask with spectacles. Somewhere, in there, I think he laughs. I think he laughs, when he wears his hat.

No one knows where Traynor got his party bonnet. It appeared on his head after dinner, one night last spring. The same night his traffic gazing began.

Nurse Voss suspected it came from a garbage can. She wanted to confiscate it, as a health hazard. But Head Nurse, the big super here, was adamant. She believed anything patients became attached to, anything they cared for, could help ease their gradual decline.

"But it might carry infectious germs," Nurse Voss said, breathing in short gasps, her face hot pink and shiny.

"Then spray it with Lysol, and give it back to him, Nurse."

"Yes. Fine. I'll see that it is as clean as possible."

Voss hopes to be Head Nurse someday, so she can change all the rules and run the Home the way she wants. So, she agrees with everything Head Nurse says.

Next night, Traynor was back on the patio, wearing his hat, reeking of Lysol. His mind in the stars. His body parked and forgotten, wrapped in a grey robe. The moonlight washed his glasses milky white. Lights burned white on the street. The air was full of pollen and humming insects.

This was exactly two weeks after the Big Break.

Every month, two or three chinese try to escape. We take it for granted. When a patient takes an especially long walk down the green slope to the oleanders that line 64th Way, Head Nurse sends an attendant out in a white van.

There are no tall fences here. The average chinese can only walk about half a mile in an hour. We've never lost one.

On a Thursday afternoon, while aides collected soiled linen from the wards, Trudi Dexter, a new aide, was left in charge of B ward patients in the rec room. Trudi was breaking Home rules by making a personal phone call. Staff is limited to emergency calls. Trudi's boyfriend, a forty-year-old biker nicknamed Hard Ride, was threatening to leave Trudi for a free-spirited potter living in Tucson. Trudi called this an emergency. She left the rec room in tears, without notifying anyone.

By the time Head Nurse discovered that Trudi wasn't at her post, the rec room was almost empty. The only chinese left were four women, wearing matching red and yellow scarves, playing bridge.

All afternoon and evening, vans and station wagons rounded the same corners again and again; they cruised alleys and backstreets. Attendants crawled through hedges, peeked over back fences, on overtime pay. It would have been easier, if the chinese had travelled in groups. But they travelled alone. They walked in all directions.

From a neighbor's house, it must have looked like a migration, or a pilgrimage to a holy land or sacred oracle. Aged, slow and almost graceful in their persistence, grey-white figures could still be seen after twilight. Moving toward unseen objects of desire. Like sleepwalkers.

Old age spilled into backyards, upsetting barbecues and frightening children from their swing sets. Silent or murmuring women, with wisps of hair clinging to their cheeks and brows, tripped over lawn sprinklers and fell into the soft dirt of flower beds.

One man was arrested while looking through a kitchen window at a family eating dinner. It was well after dark, when all the chinese had been accounted for. All except Traynor.

When we found Traynor, he was at the bottom of Coldray Circle. He had wheeled himself the first two blocks, then coasted down the steady decline of 64th Way. He had landed in Coldray Circle, a small

cul-de-sac of white houses and palm trees. People were still peeking out from behind curtains and half-opened doors, when we arrived.

It must have been odd, seeing Traynor, in his pin-striped pajamas, rolling down 64th, landing with a thud against a green garbage dumpster. A miracle. He hadn't fallen out of his chair. He glasses hung askew, from one ear. He sat before the dumpster, dazed and staring. But, his lips... They curled into a thin, white wisp of skin. You could call it a smile.

Before we pulled away, a large woman ran out of the house directly in front of the dumpster. Rolls of flesh rippled and jumped like jello under her sleeveless shirt and stretchy shorts.

"I'm so glad you finally came. I told my husband I knew he was from Oasis Sanctuary when I looked out and saw his pajamas; I knew he wasn't from a family here. So I wanted to call you right up, but Ralph said wait and see. Well, I know from experience you can't leave old people just sitting out in the air, so I called just to be sure, and talked to the nurse in charge up there, and sure enough, that's where he was from. So I told Ralph, and we waited for you guys to show up. Which you did, finally. He must have been there for a couple of hours, at least. You ought to take better care of them, even if they aren't going to live much longer. I hate to think of my mother being treated that way, where she is."

"We had a few other problems, this evening, ma'am. We had to take care of a little accident."

"Well, God." She stepped back and put her hands on her hips, then looked us up and down as we tightened the safety belt on Traynor in the van. "I guess you have priorities. But, what's more important than a human life? You tell me that."

And she turned her back to us, ran back to her house, went in and slammed the door.

I watched Traynor. I felt a new fascination with this smile of his. He had the look of a pilgrim who has found the holy land. But there was nothing at the bottom of Coldray Circle. He didn't seem to notice that his glasses were crooked. I straightened them for him. His face was still that of a silent dreamer.

I never saw him smile again. But, two weeks later the green St. Patrick's Day hat appeared on his head, and he has worn it for traffic gazing ever since. Under the yellow moonlight; Traynor's expressionless face. Chinese.

Nurse Voss is back from her break, sashaying down the hallway. Expecting a subdued Traynor, tucked into his bed. Seeing his bed empty, she jerks a thumb in the direction of the patio and walks on,

anxious to get the patients settled down for the night.

Personally, I don't see any harm in Traynor's vigil. Traffic doesn't stop, cars don't collide, just because he watches, with the same face he wears when he sleeps.

I've watched him, sleeping. I know it's only a borrowed face. A chinese face.

Tonight, when he's tucked in, will he dream of rolling down a green slope, through the moonlight and the stars, to a white cul-de-sac?

In his dream, maybe the van doesn't come to carry him back to the Home. I'd like to know the end of that dream. What happens next? Where in hell would he go? I drop another stack of clean pajamas on an empty bed and go outside to the patio, to collect Traynor.

# FEATURED POET: Beckian Goldberg

Among the poetry manuscripts we read for this issue, the work of one poet in particular excited us so much we decided to feature her.

Beckian Goldberg's poetry is startlingly aphoristic. At once tender and gutsy, her poems challenge our perception and celebrate survival.

Beckian's work has appeared in ANTIOCH REVIEW, CRAZY-HORSE, NIMROD, NEW LETTERS, and other journals and is forthcoming in AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW.

About writing and her own work Beckian says:

"I'm definitely a night writer: I can't even look at a poem in the morning. Maybe the editor in me wakes up right in the middle of "The Lives of the Rich and Famous," in the middle of "Maverick."

"I'm interested in the small miracles and terrors of our perceptions. I suppose I write out of terminal insecurity about things in the world we can't keep — time keeps on moving."

Beckian Goldberg

# Paris

That summer my brother worked nights
in geriatrics. Sometimes he had to pull
the shit right out of their bowels, frantic,
dry, afraid to waste anything.

The really sick did not even dream
of going home. Ethel dreamed of Paris
and was released, late December.
Wearing a deadly shade of lipstick
she made her son drive three times past
a poster of the Eiffel Tower
in an airline window, went
into his bathroom and drank cleaning fluid.

The fence around the hospital
had a crack running like a ziggurat.
He'd take their vital signs and drink
Jack Daniels on a bench. When he stumbled
onto the floor singing, "All of me,
why not take —" he was fired.

He thought a while of doing something else.
Of going away and seeing the world.
Africa. Women in New York.
But they took him back;
they had no one else.

*22/HFR*

He learned the odor of a mattress
one of them had died on
was vast. But in three months
he'd only fainted twice. He'd let it slump
over the window ledge, stained
with brown continents. And about four
in the morning when the smell receded,
when the air was spreading
blotter ink blue, every morning
until the thirty-first of August,
he and the fat woman
would sit by the window watching the black
backs of the pecan leaves
shake once in the wind, and she
would turn to him
and whisper, "See the lion?"

# Mr. Lucky's

He shatters the bell-end
of the bottle, with bear steps circles
the grinlike grid of the truck. The bar's neon
blips itself pink on the asphalt lot. Across
the darkness I can make out that blunt
angle of a body, the arms raising slowly
grown desiring as I wait, the eyes oiling themselves.
The knuckles fuse,
stun my jaw, my eye. The glass neck
rolls *owaowa* under the truck.
Pressed to his chest, pressed against the heart,
beneath the seal of sweat each muscle
jolts. I feel her place. It is
like being small again. I manage
to wrench his arm apart, hear
that stripped gear of a grunt.
She cries 'no' from a distance I can't
measure or cross. His hold
blackens me. Throttles. And bursts.
When we fall, wrestling, the points
of the gravel pit our backs, his
then mine. But it's the familiar
rocking of this motion
that hurts, like the air behind
the back door of Mr. Lucky's hurts
from swinging, and the cop's car
that brings women howling from its red roof,
those young women who will tell you
it's beautiful to die together.

# Keeping Warm in New York

That morning, Sunday morning, was clearer.
The avenue sharpened; nothing open
while we waited for a hotel room, hunted
coffee. You grew up
in this cold, you said, but now
there was nothing left in your body
that could remember well enough
to keep it out. Sometimes, waiting for a bus,
you used to pray. We keep walking,
clutching ourselves as if suddenly
we really shudder out of love and are not
ashamed. And we try the door of a church,
enter cautiously, slide into a back pew, let
our palms open. The nave is empty and warm
like the space where someone has just slept.
"Church of the Incarnation," you whisper, "oh God,
we're just a couple of frozen Jews."
The flowers on the distant altar blush
at us. Gladiolas tall as my arms.
It is before the service, and the wiry sexton
paces the front aisles like an abandoned groom.
The carnation in his lapel makes another face,
white as surprise. Everything suspects us.

Later we pass the delicatessen
where you ate the rehearsal dinner
before your first wedding, one August
in the fifties. Inside, a few old men
lean on their elbows and are still talking.
That afternoon a black voice hisses
through the wall by our bed, *If you ain't here*
*in eight minutes I'm gonna kill you motherfucker.*
We are tired and warm and the snow
shadow-showing behind the sheer curtains
of our seventh floor window
touches and touches itself
on the way down. We hear a knock. His voice
snarling, *Who is it?*
Her voice, softly, *Me.*
And we sleep.

# Salvation

A helicopter's shadow pinwheels
on the canyon floor. Wild burros
are inclining just the distance from one another
friends do, when presence
but not touch
is the right consolation. Surely

there is a reason these things
make a world: The Colorado curves
the famous textbook set of parallel lines
that will meet at infinity.
As we watch from the rim
a silver beating in the dry grasses,
the halo of the chopper's descent,
all space changes like the nap of velvet.

Through binoculars we read
the mouths of burros
who must be calling out something
it took them a long time to learn.
Airlifted above the rest, one
hangs calmly in harness, bobs his head
slowly as if to say yes, yes . . .

We know the story of Icarus is not true.
Dumbest damn creatures, the ranger says,
don't even look up.
They pay no attention to the mother copter
bearing the gray burro from point A
over the lips of the mesas, up
toward the white cattle trucks
clustered at point B. They remain

bent to the weeds
that burst in rock, medieval alchemists
hard at study, while in the air
the genius of them makes
a new assumption. This morning
one by one they discover
the coming of an age.

Yet even as they are moved they forget
and, miles away on new plateaus,
will resume their old beliefs
in the magic of fissures, in the luck
of the foot, in scent the bridegroom
hesitating
at the hollow of the scented . . .

Already they recall only distantly
rising in harness,
as we do falling in dreams,
and stare out as the trucks rock
down Highway 66
their eyes holding
the kind of picture we have
when we are not ourselves.

# Birth

I snap a cassia pod with my fingers once.
Two women cross the parking lot
in sandals smacking up
the air like chewing gum. They go
down one size in the air to visit
Lucinda, the Hopi woman, having a baby
in that wing where the windows are
the color of spit.
I twitch my stick in the gravel.
When they come back it's with
the true story:
Shaved, sweat like oil on their bellies
they cry, Jesus.
Sonovabitch. Why
did I let that bastard do this to me.
Then they get sewed up.
It's why they come to one another,
bring flowers and jokes
and shirts small enough for kittens,
forgiveness
for everything, even for the road the pickup
clears its four throats on
heading South, Sunny and my brother's wife
and me, and for the station
where we get cold pop. Gallons.
A look from the guy
with black fingerprints on his pocket.
Sunny says it's part of a quota
they gotta meet, those looks
that leave seeds on a woman.

They grow
the world's essential doubles: life
and dream, death and sleep,
time and river,
stars and eyes. Flowers
and women.
To begin a true story, you close your eyes.
You add the word *once* . . .

Ron Hansen

# The Boogeyman

*A version of "The Boogeyman" appeared in THE IOWA REVIEW in 1975 (Vol. 6, No. 3-4, Summer/Fall). Since then, the story has continued to work on the author, prompting this new, radically revised text, here published for the first time.*
*— ed.*

The Corporal pushes aside the green case of machetes and six crates of assorted shoes and moves to the lightless rear of the pawnshop. Ancient muskets and spotted brown swords are hanging from the ceiling. The Corporal peers at one coat for a very long time and then points to it. The pawnshop owner looks up and nods. He says in his own language that the coat is not only a bargain but exactly what a good soldier needs.

"How much is it?"

The man creeps through the junk underfoot and takes the red coat from its hanger. It appears to be only a helicopter pilot's jacket made of resplendent red silk, but the man says, "Yes, plenty important coat." The pawnshop owner flips the coat over. Embroidered across the top is the phrase "Live Free Or Die," and below that is a green dragon with wings sewn in rainbow colors. Curling out of its mouth are yellow flames.

"Yeah," the Corporal says. "That's what I want. How much is it?"

The little man squints his eyes at the Corporal. "I give it to you, soldier."

***

The Corporal drinks a green beer and swivels on a high bar stool to tell a girl in net stockings stories about how he split a private's lip clean past his nose with only one punch, how he rolled grenades into a sergeant's tent, how he shot a machinegun overhead and then walked inside the anarchy of slugs pelting down like rain.

She listens, open-mouthed, and then sips from his green bottle. "You not so tough," she says. "I hear plenty worse than that."

The Corporal says, "I was just getting started."

***

His third whore passes her hand over the sharp creases of his khaki pants and shirt, catches her image in his polished black shoes, peeks through his expensive camera and photographs him crossing his eyes, twisting up his lips, putting on the red coat. He shows her his back and she is speechless for a moment.

"You know what it says?"

"Sure," she says. "I read English good."

"Okay. What's it say?"

She pauses. "Say you want me to stay with you tonight."

***

All that day she tells him exaggerated stories of an American giant who kills great cats with his teeth and cooks weeping men on a spit.

"Hasn't met me yet," the Corporal says.

She speaks of voodoo, curses, magic things. She moves over him, works on him, looks between her thighs. "You sick?"

The Corporal is ashamed.

"No worry," she says. "I get you someone. You be cured plenty quick."

A hot whisper of an afternoon breeze pushes at the drapes. He is open-mouthed, open-eyed, seeing only his important red coat.

***

The Corporal nips off the stink at his windpipe and allows her to pull him around a corner. She drops his right hand as she ducks into a shop. He stoops at a window and looks in at her short legs and the high slit of her purple dress. Above him are rows of plucked birds strung by the neck, spinning slowly in the wind, and skinned, pop-eyed rabbits hung in a sprint; nearby are iron tanks of green eels, tripe, water snakes, gutted fish. There is an aquarium where squid throw out their bundle of arms and glide down to a darker corner. Here the men dress in baggy shorts, squat openly in the streets, scurry as though they have boys on their backs. Gray smoke twists up from pot stoves placed outside the doorways.

The prostitute comes out, showing her gapped teeth as she smiles, a wet, paper-wrapped package in her hands. "You cure," she says.

The Corporal expects her to give over the package to him, but instead the prostitute hands it to a heap of rags that is abruptly next to

him, rocking from foot to foot. Her hair is like wax, her upper lip is darkly mustached, her long gray nails corkscrew from her fingers.

"Witch," the prostitute says.

The witch rips off the papers, chews into a squirming carp, finds the pulsing heart with her fingers, pops it in her mouth. Her fingers mull around in the entrails. She wipes her bumped face with the juice and then raises up an eyepatch to peer at the Corporal with a gray pupil. She seems surprised. "You the island man."

The Corporal turns for an explanation but the prostitute has disappeared. He turns back to the witch but only the carp is there, on the street, on paper, its one eye staring up with loathing.

***

The Corporal runs down the hotel corridor and hits his door hard. The door swings inward, banging the wall. His gold watch, his camera, his important red coat, are gone.

***

Then the Corporal sees the American giant she'd been talking about. It is a bright Sunday morning, his last day of rest and relaxation. As he packs, he looks down to the street and sees the prostitute strolling with a sun-pinked man who is probably six feet eight inches tall. He is wearing a Panama hat, a yellow suit; he jauntily leans on a cane. The prostitute speaks and the American smiles, raising overjoyed eyes to the window. The American yells, "You!" and the Corporal steps away from the open window.

***

The Corporal jerks and jounces and pushes into the snapping canvas on highway curves. Across from him are two other replacements, a private and a helicopter pilot. The private is named Skeeter, the pilot, Kenya. Skeeter operates a radio and appears to want to go deaf--he takes a toothpick out of his pocket and begins jabbing it into his ear.

The pilot will not speak. He only stares with rowdy eyes when the Corporal talks to him. The big truck guns up a hill, changes gears, squeals as it stops. Road dust rolls in through the open back and Kenya gets up, brushing his pants. He says, "You in a crazy company, boy. Your Captain's the boogeyman."

***

Him. He is standing there with his pink head shaved, his great mustache waxed; yes: six-feet-eight, maybe two hundred eighty pounds, and the boy's gold watch on his wrist. He peers at a clipboard and looks up after he reads their names. He recognizes the Corporal with a "Har!" He opens his powerful arms to the troops and smiles with deep pleasure at what he is preparing to say: "I'm Captain Saint Jones!"

Kenya whispers, "The boogeyman."

Captain St. Jones inspects the replacements and approves of all but the Corporal. "Look at you," he says, and touches the Corporal's namepatch. It is hanging by only a stitch. And his pants come uncreased at the Captain's notice, his polished boots look sandpapered, his zipper, of course, is undone.

Captain St. Jones scowls down and says, "You're not a soldier; you're a ragman."

***

Ragman. The Corporal feels hexed. He weakens. His underwear suddenly tatters, his collars fray, seams abruptly rip open leaving spider legs of thread. He discovers yellow slugs in his boots, peels and rinds in his overnight pack, green mildew and sticky webs over everything. He pushes a cleaning rod down his M16 and pulls out steel that is striped with crawling ants.

And then the ragman gets an idea. At night he creeps into the Captain's tent and puts a finger on all the things in it, making them crack, cleave, spot with rust.

***

St. Jones throws up the flap of his tent in fury and peers at his company. The rising sun is big behind Captain St. Jones and his men grow hunched at the sight of him. He wears a musketeer's plumed hat, high black boots are pulled up to his thigh, the great sword Excalibur hangs at his side, his spurs ring when he moves. "Okay, men. Have it your way." He dips his fingers in a jar and twists wax into his mustache. And then he grins. "Patrol!"

***

The Corporal is ordered to pack for the Captain. The rips in his blankets have been neatly patched, pants seams sewn, cracks in plastic cemented together, spots of rust polished out. When the tent is down, the great cot folded, the air mattress stamped flat, the Corporal discovers an old wooden trunk in the jungle close by. He wrenches open the catch and heaves up the lid. Inside are his expensive camera, his important red coat, the carp the witch had chewed open. The Corporal presses the coat to his cheek and passes his fingers lovingly over the green dragon.

***

The Corporal sits in the helicopter, his legs swinging in the wind, watching high grass spray away as they wobblingly lift off. Jungles sway under them, green and yellow birds dart and soar away. The open fields are gold and steamy and roll in the air blasts like cooking broth. They aren't gone twenty minutes before Kenya dips the helicopter to the right so St. Jones can point to weeds parting for stooped runners. He yells words that the Corporal cannot hear and then hangs by one arm from a strut, clenching his silver sword in his teeth. He jumps down and sprints into the jungle. High palms swoop away from him, great trees shake. The chopper cuts and sways and hammers the air over brown people who are cowering helplessly in the weeds. One of them stands and picks his weapon up but words are apparently spoken, for he stops and cocks his head to the left and is pulled down into the grass. Another stands and runs to the jungle but is tripped and swallowed up. A painted man appears in a raincape of weeds and angles a bazooka up at the choppers guns, but he is surprised by a big hand on his rope belt and disappears as though eaten up. Again and again it happens like that, and then Captain St. Jones gets up, waving his big arms overhead, wincing at the chopper's wake as it lowers to him. He jumps up into the helicopter and wipes Excalibur with his palm. He is panting a little, but happy. The Captain grins at Kenya and Skeeter and the Corporal. "Here is greatness," says Captain St. Jones.

***

A journalist in green fatigues patrols with the company for a day, bellying through the yellow savannah, whispering into a tape recorder, snapping pictures of the geography, the plunder, the piled-up bodies. He takes a group portrait with Captain St. Jones eating grapes in a

hammock, his patrol sitting cross-legged below him. And there will be a dark photograph, too, of a villager hung by his ankles from a high tree as Skeeter interrogates him.

"Getting anything from him?" the journalist asks.

"Nope," Skeeter says.

The Captain appears in his high boots and plumed hat and tells Skeeter to step aside. Gripping Excalibur with both hands, the Captain swipes it upwards through the man's body. The skin bursts open with a explosion of green bats and straw. His blowing hair is grass. The journalist attempts a picture but the iris on his camera won't open. Skeeter looks sheepish. The Captain pats him on the cheek and says, "You were asking the wrong questions."

The Corporal spies a black shape in the woods.

***

On patrol a soldier drops to his knees and slumps over. There are no apparent wounds in him but his eyes roll up with death when he is lifted. Another soldier on patrol leaps into swampwater, pitching onto his sides and back as he slaps at the phantom fire that is creeping up to his ears. A private keeps on sleeping as his squad makes preparations. A buddy walks over to wake him up and finds a screwdriver hole in the private's throat. Green leeches suck all the blood from an overweight sergeant in one night. A private drowns on his canteen water even as he is drinking it. Cigarette packs are poisoned.

And they walk into a village of grass huts. A cooking fire of gray embers is in the center with young boys around it, playing a game with their fingers. A pretty girl is stripped and appraised. Mothers are lined up with babies at their hips. Skeeter interrogates in their language and they give him poor inventions. Away in a steamy clearing an old woman is singing in high pitch, "Yo ti ya yam i no bi tamba co o no." As she approaches, the villagers get down on elbows and knees, praying, pitching away their coins, slapping themselves with open palms.

The Corporal is pulled to her. He can't explain it. And then he sees that she is rocking from foot to foot in gunnysacks and signing that he ought to come nearer. Her hair is like wax, her upper lip is darkly mustached, only the eyepatch is missing. She leers at the Corporal and her teeth are gray pebbles. She inchingly raises up her skirt.

***

The Corporal wakes up in moonlight with her body cold beneath him. He can't recall all that happened. One of his eyes has been plucked out and the pain is enormous. He pushes himself up from the witch but somehow she holds him even in sleep. And then a smile comes to her lips and she simpers at the Corporal. "You mine now," she whispers and permits his escape from her. The Corporal is naked in a green swamp and his Army company has disappeared. His skin is painted with blood. He looks down to the witch in puzzlement and she opens a path to the west.

***

And now *he* is the boogeyman. The Corporal follows his company at a great distance. He can hear cassette players, helicopters, warning shots that rap the trees and yipe the monkeys into wild jabber. And he can pause and hear slippered footsteps behind him or pick out the stink of skunks killed on a highway, of forty fish belly-up in a pond. Spiders are in the grass she walks, a gray sickness powders the leaves, yellow slugs grow huge as legs and are overslow in eating the dogs they catch.

***

Horrible things happen to the Army company as they sleep. A man can wake up cloaked in white moths or with a mitten of red ants on his right hand. A pool they sip from on one night can be, by dawn, a dry cup in the earth heaped with poisonous frogs. Young men die of their nightmares or sleep-walk into the jungle. Skeeter, for example, is missing. And the moon is always green.

Even Captain St. Jones is ill with high fevers, headaches, muscle cramps that purple his legs. His ankles swell until his bootlaces pop and stomach pains make him walk in a stoop. At last he sicks up a pale, gutted fish, its green gills pulsing, its eyes plucked out.

Her work.

***

The pygmies are in a circle eating raw meat and rice from wooden bowls. Cross-bows lie at their feet. They speak poetry in whispers, oil themselves, pat their skins with leaves. One of them presses another's wrist and points.

The Corporal stands in steep rock shadow, as still as he can be.

The pygmies get to their feet, pick up their bows, and slowly creep back into the jungle. The Corporal sits in their places, collecting their body heat, their spoken words, their unspoken memories. Skeeter's bones are in a pit on gray coals. The Corporal strips off pieces of Skeeter's meat and eats them as the pygmies sing their word for "boogeyman."

***

A deer yanks a leaf from a limb and swings her head to the south, staring into the jungle as she chews. Her ears perk up and the deer leaps away but Captain St. Jones intercepts the doe on the path, wrapping his great arms around her neck and riding her down into a sprawl. The doe chops at the peat with her hooves and nearly wrenches away, but the Captain rips his bayonet up through the hide and pulls out the deer's insides. High up in the cavity he pushes the Corporal's watch, his camera, and especially his important red coat.

***

How can he explain his hunger, his great yearning? The Corporal crashes wildly through the forest, crying with a big voice not his own. He cuts his biceps and calves with a sharpened stick and paints the trees with his blood. At night, in anguish, he yowls for her and, as a sign of his misery, chips out his teeth with rocks.

He makes traps for the soldiers — straw pits, rope nooses, bamboo spears. He whips spotted leopards into their camps. When the company is out on patrol, he rips apart packs and boxes and tents, looking for his possessions. The Corporal despairs of ever getting them back, of the witch ever letting him go.

***

Captain St. Jones and his company are caught, up to their mouths in swampwater, their weapons high overhead in the moonlight. A picket fence of waterspray spurts up from machine gun fire as the soldiers drop to the swamp bottom or plunge over into high reeds and cattails. Cartridges jam, gun actions go rigid, hand grenades fly wildly awry. Her work. Captain St. Jones pulls himself up from the swamp, cautiously rolls onto a path, and limpingly sprints away.

He is jogging through jungle many hours later when one leg gets caught in a vine and Kenya spins crazily over the cowpath, a rope

looped around his right arm and neck. The skin is peeled from his face.

***

Here there is peace. Here, in the swamp, there are no signs of the Captain or his Army company. The Corporal sleeps on green moss that is dappled with sunlight. He opens his mouth for rainwater. Canaries sing, deer forage daintily, monkeys screech and trapeze in the treetops, a parrot nibbles at a peanut the Corporal pinches between his fingertips.

***

St. Jones stops to read his compass and then slaps reeds aside to push to the east. And then, yes, the putrid smell. He presses more rapidly toward it and drops to his knees by the evil body of the deer. He swipes away horseflies and jams his hand into a soup of maggots. Withers collapse at his pressure, a snake pours itself out of the open mouth. And then Captain St. Jones owns them again: the gold watch, the expensive camera, and the important red coat. He wraps his great arms around them and rolls happily.

***

Around the swamp the native people make a pole corral and, with spades and dams and nightwork, a deep moat that all hope will keep the boogeyman in. Ceremonies take place on the banks opposite his camp. In the ritual performances, a one-eyed boogeyman emerges from the jungle, painted in blood, in a raincape of weeds, and a witch doctor's hand is placed on the heads of pretty maidens until the boogeyman agrees on one. And then the girl is weighted with stones and guided into the creekwater as mothers pray that the green army and the boogeyman will stay away from their village.

***

A helicopter passes overhead and the Captain rushes out into the burning open, swooping his arms up, crying for help, pitching rocks at its underbelly as it yaws and speeds away. He goes back to the slaughtered elephant and eats with the jackals until his belly aches, and then he scoops up his possessions, wiping his mouth on the

lettering of the silk coat. The Captain perceives a greater darkness and looks up at the sun. Only a slice of it is apparent as the moon nears eclipse.

His sign. The Captain looks for a parrot and sees one in a treetop to the west. He wrenches his way through weeds and high grass until he comes upon green water and a pole corral. He splashes deeply into the creek and then dips underwater to pass his hands over the shapes of pretty girls lolling among the carp and eels, crabtraps of stones at their hips. The green water irons out over him and then he bursts up from the bottom, blowing air, and raises up Excalibur. "Yes!" says Captain St. Jones.

***

Hush. There the giant is, sleeping, his huge back rounded, the great sword at his side, glinting silver light. The Corporal spies his worshipped coat, the powerful lettering, the green dragon and the golden torch of its breath. He slides into the creek from his island and swims across underwater, coming up with a gasp when he strokes into a holy girl and her leg oozes away.

And yet the Captain sleeps. The Corporal creeps up onto the hot sand and attempts to pick up the coat. He can't budge it--the weight is like an iron car, or as though the earth's gravity has been changed just for it. The Corporal slinks closer and clasps the great sword, then jumps up in the increasing darkness and hacks at the Captain's head, splitting it from crown to ear.

One roar of pain and the Corporal knows only a giant bear has been killed. St. Jones is laughing at the Corporal's ignorance as he swaggers out of the jungle, the gold watch on his wrist, the expensive camera strapped around his neck. "Ha! You thought you caught me sleeping, did you, boy? Only wish I could've got a snapshot of you; sent it to your witch." The Captain easily picks up the coat and painstakingly slaps away sand. "And now you can give me Excalibur."

"You'll kill me," the Corporal says.

The Captain glimpses something on the island and snaps his fingers. "Quickly."

And then there is night in the late afternoon. The moon overtakes the sun and all is still. Jungle animals cower, the green waters cease, and the Corporal swings the great sword overhead with a strength that is more than his own. He hears Excalibur howl through jungle air and then he hears the Captain scream with agony as his hot blood splashes over the Corporal, as the earth pounds with his great

collapse.

And then light seeps down through the treetops and the witch is stooping over Captain St. Jones, unstrapping the camera, working the gold watch off his wrist, pressing her nose into the all-important red coat. Caws and screeches and yipes rise up from the island as she rapidly zips on the coat and pulls the corpse into green water that swallows the Captain up. His body grows black with eels.

The Corporal has expected a metamorphosis with the putting on of the coat, but the witch is no prettier, no more appealing, and just as poor as she's been. She keeps patting the material and peering at herself in the water and she is so pleased with herself she can pay little attention to the Corporal as he swims back to his island in a downpour.

***

The Corporal has on a green uniform and an eyepatch when he appears on the opposite bank. The native people speak in whispers and when the Corporal looks up they hear the wopping noise and the high whine of an engine. The pretty girls are taken away and the witch doctor makes a ceremony of wiping off his paint. And the Corporal sits there patiently, awaiting the helicopter's approach, the peace accords, another place.

Helga Kopperl

# The Thing You Love Most

(in the voice of William Burroughs)

I.

The toad is my familiar.
Grandfather invented the adding machine.
I never got a penny from my mother's thin face
all instinct, thirteen kids,
rather see a son of hers dead than drunk.
Her sons drank, her husband drank.
It's all in the family.

In the beginning
I was afraid of dark
and of lightning.
If my parents were out
the butler sat in my room.

I left a letter saying:
I'm going to join the wild boys
when you read this I'll be gone.

II.

The day I brought the knife to the *cuchillero*
his shop was full of twisted sparks and carborundum.
This is the day you give away the thing you love most,
when my wife dreamed in blood the game of William Tell.

III.

I'll travel away from her. Plaster casts
of shrunken heads remind me. I send them
as jokes to my friends, from the Amazon
thick as blood with mangrove roots. Tangiers
goes down like sherbet from the pharmacy.

The cafes are filled with beautiful boys,
Kiki of the eyes. Mainline through my ankle.
With one kidney, I can get away.

The pages rearrange themselves,
in Marrakech, Tangiers, Ibiza,
big board players running after errand boys,
new way space out, cut one page to four
and reassemble on the coffee table,
push away the cat or fag ends.

IV.

I climb the rocks tough talking of snakes:
*I did it twice, I hit him across the face,*
*a razor double-edged knife, right in the middle*
*of a sentence, I don't want to hear*
*what you have to say* my son Willy, little ram,

like the stuffed animal with no eyes,
had a liver transplant, like everyone
goes on forever, until one day it stopped.
He couldn't get a job as a dishwasher anyway.
I saw him last in his black overcoat.

V.

Friday's a blank space filled with scrapbooks. I collect
things for years and place them together when they're ready
to speak. I write the dreams first and the beast doctor
rearranges the parts with pumps and sponges and a plunger
washed in the toilet bowl.

In my bunker, no windows, switchblade layout, night stick,
blowgun across the room, bullet lodges in the broom closet
next to the orgone box which harrumphs each time someone
disappears for a quick tingle. I'm not anticipating
trouble. I don't like violence. All my drawers are stuffed
with violence that I never use.

Paul Morris

# The Cargo Cults

There is an ocean in the pear trees.

The migrants are flying into the green.
Straddling three-leg ladders
Deep in the pears, they break each stem
From the branch then place the fruit
Into burlap shoulder bags and climb higher.

Purple Bosch, tiny Anjous, and hooked Comice
Fill the bins beneath them. In the wind
The fruit beats the men's faces as they pick.

We sit in my car on a muddy hill
By the orchard. The word 'CAT' on his cap,
He tells me about the child who died
Last night in Camp 81.
How a *mojadito*
Got paid and drunk, drove his car
Between the shacks until she stepped out in front.
I think of the small glass floats
The Japanese fishermen lose from their sea nets.

At sunset the orchard opens into reds,
Air slows and in the final heat the men fall.
Dark starlings rise and settle, then rise again.

He tells me of his family in Michoacan,
The green money order he mails each week.
How his wife washes his daughter
In a basin on the porch. As he talks,
He runs his thumb across a red pear.
His nail digs a line, the sweet juice
Runs down his hand.

Here the flies begin with their eggs and the fallen fruit.
What are we to do with such loveliness.

# The Coastwatcher, 1943

Low with fuel, sixteen tankers pushed through
The Slot last week, east into the storm.
At night their wakes luminesce into lines
The tides weave together.

Quiet Tom, the Abo, bound his ankles together
To hop up palm trees, my aerial in his mouth,
So I could wire my small codings, my daily office,
To His Majesty; one of those rituals that remind us
Who we are, like shaving, like tea.

Once I handed Tom a jar of paint. He moved so gracefully
He painted circles on the forehead of each sleeping soldier
In the Japanese encampment and carried back two sake bottles.
We were drunk when we heard them at dawn.

We were kneeling in a hollow of yellow moss
On the north slope of the volcano, deep in the lianas
Where sunlight only filters down when I began
My day's message: *Able, Fox, Zebra . . .*
Suddenly an immense dragonfly moved beside us, wings
A lacework of bronze and glass. It darted above me
And another dragonfly, even larger, appeared.

Forgetting my Morse, I watched them mating,
Hanging in the air, wings motionless. A mortar shell exploded
And I could smell orchids.

I move faster now alone, changing positions each day.
Evenings, I move closer so I can hear their radio.
Last month I sat and watched a spider
Gently ease from a rough palm trunk across
Three sleeping men, innocent in their dreams.
It devoured a cricket until there was silence
And a wind smell of new earth and smoke.

Michael Gude

# Nightcrawlers

We are your misery, copulating in the mud
and multiplying; pick any piece of misery
you want, join us, everyone does. Even the gardener,
who fully possesses the garden, and in the darkness
fitfully steps on his tomatoes.

We like to fuck here in the mud,
after a good rain, among the melons
and beans, considering our dreams and talents,
our prayers, our victories and defeats,
the teasing and tormenting and delighting

of body and soul among the muck,
before we are plucked and pailed
and impaled on hooks for a bigger fish.
There is always a bigger fish;
look, we cultivate dullness and sweat

to save energy, and sigh gratefully
whenever we are able to slip back down,
when our bowls of perfumed leafrot and humus
are served and our gilded scriptures read,
when we can see, as in a mirror,

what we've done, there among the dirt.
Often we forget ourselves.
Often we are not warned in advance by a heavy step;
busy with others of our kind, above, beneath the night.
Though our water is piped in over the mountains

from Lake Tahoe and we are clean, the gardener
in black silk pants and slippers supposes
that when his tomatoes droop it is our doing.
If my father could see me now, my love and I,
not picking small bones or lying prostrate

in a flooded street for our sins, but fucking
in mild terror and joy in the mud above,
he would forgive us. He was wise.
We are their misery, he told me, if they did not have us
they would invent another; there is always a bigger fish,

a fish even bigger than the gardener.
Make the best of it, he would say, for time is short
even for we who inhabit where they all come.
On a fool's errand it's useless to worry,
but you and I look each other in the eye from either end.

Dean Stover

# A Personal Day of Judgment in Norway

Each night he talks to himself
about the devil and wonders why
his entire family doesn't go crazy
when Dagfinn, his brother, sings gospels
or spends another day picking blueberries.

On the hillside
in the shadow of Kinn's mountain
Father plays accordian
for visitors who come to hold service
in an old stone church, built, some say
by trolls
after dancing behind the crest
of winter waves.

Jostein sinks a pitchfork
through the pile of grass, striking notes
caught in the dampness of yesterday.
He has just left the breakfast table, never
to eat another meal with his family.
Nearby, the milk machines, or is it
Grandfather's breathing,
a cough too much like guns?
The worst is watching
curdled milk slide from his mouth, slowed
by heavy stubble, then fall to the back of his hand.

At noon, there will be a few hours rest
before Father knocks on the locked door. He lies
on the down-feathered mattress,
one eye open to Grandfather's painting —
a gull waits stiffly
for the sun to angle below the horizon
so he can fly up
to see it again.

A kayak glides through calm water, still
enough light to see a jellyfish
just below the surface,
its center a dull peaceful sun.
White flames trail and when touched, coil
into good-sized worms.

He thinks of salvation:
He does not want to be caught at anything again.

Deanie Fontenot

# The Last of the Hay

The sleet hit the roof like B-B's rolling down metal stairs. Every time he lifted up the hay with the fork and pitched it over the rails into the back of the pickup truck, it released a moldy smell and a talc-like dust filtered down.

The barn was open at one end. Its gambrel roof door was high enough so he could drive the John Deere in, so the February wind blew in the door and whirled the tiny dust particles around and around. Hap pulled up the fleece-collar of his hunting jacket every time the wind found the door.

It had been a cold winter in Louisiana that year. He'd already lost ten calves and God only knew how many more would die before winter was out. They'd had four hard freezes, so the grass was pretty much dead and had been for quite a while. Normally he didn't have to start feeding the cattle till late January or February, but this year he had started before Christmas, and it didn't look like it was going to get any better.

He thought of spring when the black-eyed susans would be so thick along the road and in the ditches that it would look like someone spilled a whole truck load of yellow paint.

Place East was on the road to Toledo Bend Lake. It wasn't a big town, only about three thousand people, but Hap knew everybody in Place East and every farmer around for twenty miles in any direction. He liked that, knowing the people, them knowing him. He had been farming the two hundred acres, ten miles outside Place East, most of his life. His daddy had bought eighty acres back during the Depression. During that time if a person had a few dollars set aside, he could get a piece of land to homestead. Over the years his dad would buy a few acres here and there, whenever they'd come available and he could get the loan. The here and there acres mounted up and when he died, Hap got the house and the land. Hap's sister, Nancy, didn't want anything to do with it. Right now, as the wind blew back fine pieces of hay into his face, Hap felt she wasn't so dumb.

At the time he had thought she was nuts, not grumbling over the estate, saying it was all his, all she wanted was a few mementos of her

father. She took a gold-tone watch. The cover had a hunting dog scene on it. In fact, she had given it to him. Hap remembered the Christmas his dad had gotten it. The old man never carried it. He had left it in its silk-lined box and stuffed it in his sock drawer.

Why she wanted it, Hap didn't know. It sure the hell wasn't no heirloom. She didn't want the felt hat that had his dad's sweat saturated in the band, or the blackened razor strap that hung beside the back door, or his old hunting rifle with the scarred butt. She didn't want any of these things, just a new watch to take back to California.

Hap slapped his palms at his chest and legs dusting off the talcy hay, opened the door and climbed into the cab of the Ford pickup.

The truck slurped and slushed through tire ruts, bumped over dead-grass nodes and lurched at gopher holes. Inside the cab the warm air from the heater made his face sting. The dark clouds to the west crept up the horizon. Pine trees that bordered the fence line to the west were black against the clouds. Just over a little hill he could see the pond. The water was rippling, the small waves running into the bank. On the other side of the pond, the cows were walking toward him. The white-face, the Brahmas, the Charolais, a few Black Angus all trodded toward the truck. Their heads were down and bobbing. In rhythm, bobbing, nodding with every step as though they were saying yes — it's okay, yes — we'll get hay — we'll eat — we'll live — yes — one more day.

In the spring and summer, he'd see this and feel so good he almost wanted to cry. The green grass, the browns, the tans, the blacks, and the splotches of white walking toward him and the truck. In the spring, he didn't have hay in the bed though, he'd just drive out and look. Check on them, see if they were all there. He'd started the winter with 130 head. After last week, he was down to 110. If the weather kept up, he'd lose twenty maybe thirty more before spring, and they looked bad.

He put the truck in park and opened the door. The wind felt colder there than it did back in the barn. The dust particles swirled up and away as he lifted the hay up on the fork and pitched it over beside the truck.

He looked out over the bony backs of the cattle, eyeing them, noting each one, scanning the markings on the faces, legs, or backs. Two were missing. Now he'd have to go look for them, damn. Damn. The one he'd bought from Dirty Denton he knew to be due to calve. The other one that was missing was Kathy's. He'd given his wife the white-faced heifer for her birthday ten years ago. Every year she'd get

a good calf out of her. When it came time to sell the calf, Hap would take it to the sale barn in DeRidder and bring back a check made out to Kathy Chamade.

The first time he'd done that, she didn't really know what to say. In fact, to this day he wasn't too sure how she felt about it.

"What's this for?" she said without giving the check more than a glance.

There was no way she could have seen the amount, he thought. Her short brown hair, with a red-glaze-like over it, curled around her face. Her brown eyes looked at him. He smiled at her, wanting to hold on to the surprise as long as he could.

"Look at it," he said.

"I did look at it."

"No, I mean *really* look at it."

She unfolded the check. Her fingernails were short and a little dirty. She'd just come in from working in the garden. Hap didn't know if it was the vegetable garden or the flower garden, but he knew it was one or the other, the knees of her jeans damp and dirty. She had on an old plaid shirt of his, the sleeves were rolled up past the elbows.

"This is to me," she said and looked at him, squinted her eyes, and turned her head ever so slightly.

"Yeah, sure it's to you. Who'd you think it was to?"

"Why? What's it for?"

"To do with whatever you want to do with. That's what it's for."

"But, Hap, it's three hundred and sixty dollars. Why in the hell are you giving me a check for three hundred and sixty dollars?"

"Because it's yours." He let the last word run on just a little longer.

Kathy sat down in one of the kitchen chairs.

"Where did this come from?" She was holding the check out to him. It wavered a little and then hung there--out from between her fingers like a soiled rag.

"Your calf," he said slow, so she could get the good feeling he got when he sold it for her.

"My what?" She dropped her hand back to the table. The check was still between her fingers.

"Your calf. You know from the heifer I gave you two years ago. That little pretty white-face."

"You sold my calf?"

"Yeah." He wanted to touch her hair, run his fingers over the red glaze, catch it in his hand, but he jammed his hand in his jeans' pockets instead.

"You sold Babe's calf?" She looked down at the check in her hand, then laid it on the table.

Goddamn, he had forgotten she had named the stupid cow Babe. He remembered he had laughed when she called the heifer by name. She had glared at him with those brown eyes, turned her back and walked away from him. The reddish brown hair cut the sunlight like a scythe.

"Kathy, she was old enough. What's the matter? I thought you'd be thrilled to death over the check." He pushed the paper around in a circle on the table. "What's the matter? You can spend the money anyway you want to, on anything you want. How many women around Place East that get that? Tell me. How many women, friends of yours, do you know that get three hundred and sixty dollars to spend any damn way they please?" Without realizing he was doing it, he had pushed the paper closer to her, and with one quick flick of his fingers, the check skimmed over the table to Kathy.

"What am I supposed to buy with it?" she said and got up from the chair and walked over to the kitchen counter. She had her back to him. The leg bottoms to her jeans were white and fringed with ravelings. Her old shirt hung down almost to her knees. He liked to watch her, when she was walking or standing still, it didn't matter to him, he just liked to watch her. Sometimes he would walk up to her like she was now, standing at the counter, and kiss her.

Now would not be a good time, he thought. He didn't understand what was wrong with her. Why wasn't she excited about the check? She was pissed, that he could tell from the metal tone of her voice. Why did she have to ask him what to buy?

"Buy whatever you want. Some new chairs, maybe. Those you wanted when we bought the table." He pounded the table with his opened palm, gently — not hard, gently.

"Why?" She seemed to be looking out the window. White cotton, ruffled curtains veed down and were tied back on both sides with little ruffled ties.

"What?" he said. He wanted her to turn around and look at him. He wanted to see her face, her eyes. Then he would be able to tell what was wrong, but she kept looking out the window, the curtains draping around her head.

"Why would I want to buy some chairs for this kitchen. New chairs would look like shit on this old, torn linoleum. Besides, the counter tops need to be replaced, they have for years."

"Then replace the countertops." He felt like there was a hint of exasperation in his voice.

"The cabinets need to be painted," she said. "The refrigerator has to be defrosted every month. We're probably gonna blow-up some night from the gas leak on the stove. I don't think your recliner can take any more tape. The vinyl is shot. The rust on the bathtub will never come off, as long as that faucet leaks. The window screens ...."

"Goddamn it, Kathy." Hap pounded the table with his fist and stood up. "Goddamn it." He held out the crumpled check, "don't buy something for the house. Buy something for yourself. But take this check. It's yours, do whatever you want. Buy a new dress or shoes. I don't care. Just do something with it."

She turned around then and looked at him. The soft brown eyes were rimmed in tears, but none fell on her cheeks and there wasn't the slightest hint of quiver in her voice.

"To wear where? We never go anyplace or see anybody. Why in the hell would I buy a dress or shoes or anything for me?"

He looked at the eyes and the nose with the faint freckles, the brown red-glazed hair that fell over her left eyebrow. He felt the anger work its way up through his stomach and when it got to his chest he thought it would choke him, but it escaped to his hands and his fist held it, held it tight. He wanted so bad to let it hit her in the face, splattering those freckles against the white curtains.

The check danced and flirted with the table-top when he threw it down.

The screen door slammed behind him and it sounded like "smack." The April air felt good, clean and pure and white, white like his mother's clean sheets, and her apron when he'd run in in the morning and bury his face in her waist. White like the thin sleeves on her Sunday dress, white like the curtains that were stiff and lacey and waltzed in the open window of the living room, white like a February snow in Louisiana.

The pitchfork grated on the bed of the truck. Hap pitched the last forkful over the side. Most of it filtered down on the boney backs of the cows. He laid the fork down in the bed and looked at the cattle.

Kathy's Babe and the other heifer still hadn't shown up. When he jumped down out of the bed and walked around to the cab, he turned to the cattle and said, "That's all there is. That's all there is."

The cab was still warm and the motor turned over immediately. He headed further out in the pasture, over to the old pond where the banks had washed out last spring and the pine trees were rotting away.

For seven years he'd given Kathy a check for her calf. He never asked her again what she was going to do with it and as best he could

tell, she never really spent any of it. Sometimes it would be more, sometimes less, but he'd lay it on the table and nothing more would ever be said about it.

They still sat in the old chairs, Kathy recovered them twice, and the linoleum was replaced two years ago, but he bought that. The faucet still leaked, the refrigerator was given to him by his cousin, who bought a new one for his new home, and they hadn't blown up yet from the stove. So where the money went, God, and he guessed Kathy, only knew.

One time he thought he caught her putting money in an old purse on the top shelf of the hall closet. He knew she cashed the checks. She'd do that when they both would go into town. She'd go to the bank by herself. Somehow she always worked it so that they weren't together when she would go. That time with the purse, he was almost sure that was where she was putting the money. He could almost see it — bills rolling and spewing out of the old flowery, black purse, the clasp straining to keep it all inside. About a month after he saw her stick something in it, he snuck over to the closet and opened the door. Kathy was out in the flower garden. He saw her bending over, the old straw hat covering her hair. She was rocking back and forth like a mother with a small child. He knew from the motion she was planting seedlings.

After he opened the closet door he looked around for the purse. His mother had given Kathy the purse right after they got married. Kathy never carried it. She said it was ugly. He kinda liked it. It had big pink and red flowers on a black background. It reminded him of his mother after his father died. She wore black all the time, but she always pinned a corsage to her breast.

Hap couldn't see the purse. He moved things around on the shelf and it wasn't there. There were boxes full of he-had-no- idea-what on the floor. He got down on his knees and felt in and around the boxes the best he could. Something soft was back in the corner, snuggled down beside one of the boxes. He grabbed it and pulled it out. It was the purse. It felt flat and lifeless. If there was anything in it, it was very very small and very very light. The brassy clasps opened between his fingers. The inside of the purse was as dark as the pond on a black night. He put his hand in it and felt around the cool fabric.

"It's not there."

The purse dropped to the floor. He looked up into the brown eyes and saw a blackness blacker than the inside of the purse and a cold glint as hard as the clasp.

"I . . . ." he wanted to say something, but the straw hat almost hit

him in the face as she turned her back to him and walked out of the hall. He heard the screen door slam.

Right now he'd like to ask her where it was and ask her if he could borrow it for hay. Just enough hay to keep the herd alive one more month. One more month, things would be all right in March.

He'd cut back feeding them in January because he hadn't been able to afford more hay then. Kathy had told him to borrow from Jess Johnson, one of his neighbors. He's told her he'd let them all starve before he went to begging all over Place East. Just like he wouldn't beg from Jess or any one else around, he'd be damned if he'd beg from Kathy. He'd never beg, no matter what.

The 107 pine trees around the pond were all dying. A little green remained on the top branches, but the rest of each tree was dead. It was as if they were reaching up, trying to stay alive.

He noticed a mound of tan under a tight cluster of trees on the other side of the pond. The truck jerked and rocked and the bed clamps popped against the metal.

"Oh God, oh Jesus, God." He didn't want to see what he was looking at. The cow was trying to give birth. It was the heifer he'd gotten from Dirty Denton. He could see part of a leg sticking out and knew even before he walked over to her the birth was breech. As he got nearer, he noticed the cow's short, hard breaths. Her ribs pressed against the skin and her winter coat reminded him of their old torn linoleum, almost a dirty, patchy reminder of something that was new a long time ago. But this cow wasn't old.

He pulled on the little leg gently — it didn't move — he pulled again, still no movement. Pieces of the birth sac had been out in the air so long it had become white and cottony.

Hap walked back to the truck. The rifle that hung on the rack inside the back window felt warm when he lifted it up and pulled it out of the cab. He felt underneath the seat and pulled out the yellow and red box of shells. He loaded the gun and walked back to the cow. The sound of the gun going off ran up the pine trees to the green tops, flew out over the pond and raced over the hills.

He started over to her but turned back to the truck. No use checking, she was for sure dead.

He had to find Babe now. He had just gone down a little hill away from the trees when he saw her. She was down, too, lying on her side. Dead, he thought. But when he drove the truck alongside the brown and white body, he could see the up and down movement of life. He had loaded the gun and was out of the cab before he realized what he was doing. He walked closer to her and looked into the round brown

eyes. The heavily lashed lids closed and opened, closed and opened. He could almost see his own reflection in the eyes. His orange hunting jacket made an orange dot in the two pupils.

He raised the gun up till the wooden butt rested against his shoulder. He looked down the long, dull gray barrel. At the end were the brown eyes.

The gun rattled on the rack as he drove over the cattle guard, past the barn and out the gate onto the pot-holed road that led to Jess Johnson's. The sleet sounded like dry twigs banging as it hit the windshield and melted.

# The Vow

Your hair unwinds and all the boys stretch
a little taller on the bridge.
At a table in the sun and the noise
heat steams from your hands.
Your shoulders are burnt, dark patches
that sting. You are fifteen
and the sundial of the promenade.
Without searching you spot the loveliest boy.
His mouth is coral and wide, his body, steel,
thin as an oar. This is what you have waited for,
to tap your hand to your breast and feel
the sweet charge of cliche inside you.
You kiss at the air. Tonight you will pile,
like fire-rags, your clothes beside his.

At another table sit a woman and man.
The child, like a pendulum, moves back
and forth between them. A cup is spilled
on the table. The three of them look away.
When the woman looks up and into your eyes
you sense that the beginning of history
is the beginning of emptiness.
But something is whistling, winding in your ear.
You stand up and tremble like a spire in the light.
You will not get old, you swear, never get that wise.
Time is important enough to be ignored.
Your feet are two waves under you as you rise.

Kristen Catalano

# Bedtime Story for a Past Lover

Pick ten of anything. Buttons from the clothes you've just removed.

Pick one to suck on, under your tongue, its tang like copper, that first penny ever alive in your pocket.

Flip one on its back and watch its legs move.

Hold one in your armpit, where the fever starts. Children running and running in the rain.

Hold one responsible for the mess you're in.

Hold one steady at the top of the hill, then fly, untangle, scream, and this time *it* just wins bottom, and you both breathe hard and happy.

Let one go.

One of them will swear, always, it never saw your face.

One of them will remember a night with trees, shadows chased across a lawn, rain waiting, pine smell, the wind up. It never heard, it never saw the thing that came.

One had a dream about a star coming down to become a tiny planet which survived just one week on earth, though it had all the earthly requirements. When it died, he buried it in the backyard under the wheelbarrow. He brought it something every day. A bunch of violets. Long clumps of crying, the whole sky cracking open. A handful of mint.

Or a blue eraser. But it doesn't matter. He dreamed the whole thing. Or the wind blew it all away. Every few days the wind blew the yard clean and sent the wheelbarrow singing into the fence. It doesn't matter. The lights in this room will go out when I leave. Just let me. Just sleep.

William Olsen

# Eighteen Species of Hummingbirds

I hurry to find the name in the bird book, but
like what we are all dying to call reality,
the bird's gone when I come back.
The book closed, three more appear all lacking names — like
rufous, blue-throated, black-chinned, Anna's, Allen's —
the best part of me trembles to see the small and jeweled
suspended above the blood-red, broken-fisted
blossoms of the flagellant ocotillo.
They're perched upon non-existent twigs,
bills thrust out from emerald haloes of wings,
even the changing remove they keep from each other
being beautiful, and with the thorned
tentacles swaying in the same remove,
the same bare air, the only place they meet,
I wish my body could bloom for them.
One night
I dreamt of hummingbirds: I was on some
inscrutable mission as usual,
with a domestic end, which led me to
the kitchen, opening all the cupboards —
a hummingbird had made a nest under
the sink, in the plumbing, which dripped honey
instead of water — into a coffee can
there for that purpose: to collect the surfeit
the hummingbird didn't need — and there in the nest
stitched from carpet, lint, shirt threads, and spider webs
two fledglings, sherbet-bright bugs, were hatching
out of the same nowhere, the same necessity
from which the mother appeared, the reading of my wish,
and as the overseer of delicacy
she pumped food into their stomachs with a jabbing
that looked like the murder of the innocents.

What of her painstaking skills, her nurturing
the purely helpless and gawking — had my dream wished her
nearly into a murderer, was murder
what I wanted, and what house was this my
dream erected? I woke outside houses
altogether, camped above Tucson, under a pine
up among crimson tatters — and looked up
to an entire meadow living under
who'd believe it maybe a hundred hummingbirds
sucking from whippled beardtongue and phlox — I must
have wished myself here. They hovered from one blossom
down to another, which stood below, open.
I was inside their sky, they must have seemed
too weak to walk on ground for me to wish them luck.
The honeyed, the nervous, up to their necks in blossom,
they didn't have the look of being looked at.

Candace Greenburg

# Waiting for the Days of Grace

Maybe it was a day like this:
the sun trying to climb the sky
and not quite making it,
or the trees steaming down by the river,
their branches starting to tremble
from the breeze.

A day like this that the farmhouses
burned blue in the Russian dawn
and the children went sleepwalking
into the forest. A day like this
that Yitzhak Steinblat
kneeled in Shul
and said the third blessing
while he touched the candle's flame
to his lips, or Zvi Michalowski
climbed out of the open grave
gently placing his hand
then his knee on the backs
of the dead.

What I think about today
is the listless light
that presses down on everything
and the time that is required
for forgetting; about the clearinghouses
and brick ovens and how the soul
wanders back and forth like a moth
caught between the glass
and the steady burning.

I think about the neat columns
of names arranged in a book
and the way they are checked off
like a grocery list.
I think about what is to come
from the small explosions
in our hearts
and the rusting away of our mouths
that each year
have less and less to say.

I am wondering about
the clean white shirts
and black arm bands
of the fascist,
and about the old women who sit
in the closets nibbling bread.
I am wondering when the days
of grace will come,
and how long it will be
before the finches and sparrows
nest in our palms again,
wondering how long before
we will be able to lie down again
all day under a tree,
just watching the light
spin and dance
from branch to branch.

Arthur Stone

# The Death of Lorca

Called from a balcony,
no doubt, by the gesture
of a friend, dreams still trailing

like silk beneath the August moon,
he went down, expecting no more, perhaps,
than an exchange of words or touch.

Below, he exchanged friendship
for the escort of civil guards
along the twisted streets.

Beneath the dark silver of the moon,
he could no longer imagine green eyes,
green stars, the green wind of life.

As his blood flowered like dark roses
from his shirt, he looked into close eyes
and swore: "Friend, I want to die
decently in my bed."

Denied, he rose like a shadow of water
and embraced the severed breast
of the moon.

Steve Beatty

# Stealing Home

"You're making it too complicated," Max advised. "In spring training, there are only three basic stories." He counted them off with his fingers. "One, rookie trying to make the team. Two, veteran trying to hold on. And three, injured player trying to come back."

That was four years ago. Nothing was complicated that year.

I had a great spring. And it carried over into the regular season.

Twenty-six victories, a 2.04 ERA, World Series MVP, and the Cy Young Award. It all seemed so easy.

What a difference four years makes.

**March 5**

This year's rookie story is Marc Reardon. A twenty-year-old pitcher who played two years of college ball and one year of Double A, he's the golden boy of the farm system. The scouts call him The Future. And with a ninety-seven-mile-per-hour fastball and a hard slider, The Future could be this year.

He's a quiet kid with a pretty, young wife who comes to every game. She's short and blonde, just the opposite of Laura; and yet, when I spy her in the stands during a game — watching the game rather than visiting with the other wives, scouting the players, studying the managers, yelling encouragement or hitting her legs with her fists in disappointment — it's Laura I see.

Occasionally, when he thinks no one is looking, I'll see Reardon glance into the stands for his wife. And I see the encouraging smiles they give each other when their eyes meet. And I know what they're thinking. "This is it. This is our year. This year we're going to the majors." And I can't help liking them, even though it's my spot on the roster they're after.

**March 12**

"Statistically, the second inning is the least eventful inning in baseball," intoned Dicky for the edification of those of us who hadn't read his recent book BASEBALL BY THE NUMBERS. Since the start of spring training, for a solid week now, he's been inundating us with

statistics.

"In spring training, numbers mean nothing," responded a writer from a rival paper, fed up with Dicky's continual chatter.

"Unless you're struggling to make the team," chipped in another, "in which case numbers mean everything."

"Statistics always mean something," Dicky replied.

I listened curiously, my own statistics uppermost in my mind. Thirty-seven years old, two hundred and eighty-seven wins — just thirteen short of the magic three hundred — an eight and twelve record last year, a free agent without a contract. Scott Mattison, story number two.

**March 13**

"That makes three more scoreless innings for young Reardon," observed one of the local sportswriters.

"Eight innings, no runs, six strikeouts, four walks, and three hits," Dicky said, not to be outdone.

No one replied. It was an unwritten rule that we ignore Dicky's statistical outbursts.

"Hey, Mattison," Max shouted as he entered the press box, his cleats clicking on the concrete floor. Max and I had broken in together with the '68 Cubs and were teammates for ten years until he was traded to the Giants. Four years ago, he retired and they made him a coach. But even after seven years, Max didn't look right to me in a Giant uniform.

Reaching me at last, he plopped down on an empty seat. "Where are you hiding Laura?" Max panted, winded from his hike up to the press box. "I stopped on the way up, but she wasn't in her usual spot."

"Still in Chicago. Things were too busy at the office to come out with me."

"That's too bad," he replied, unable to keep the surprise out of his voice. Laura always took time off for spring training.

"She said she'd fly out as soon as she could."

Max nodded and changed the subject to young Reardon. "The kid's gonna be something special. He's got the best mechanics I've seen since —" he stopped, thought for a moment, chuckled dryly and added, "— since you."

". . . looks like it's going to be between the two of us for the final spot," I said. It was early, but I was already in bed, lying on a heating pad.

"You think he's that good?" Laura asked, her voice sounding distant and uncharacteristically tinny over the phone.

"I don't know, he could be."

She was silent and so I said, "I saw Max today. He asked where you were."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I told him about work and said you'd fly out as soon as you could."

"How is Max?"

"Ahhh!" I exclaimed, pain having shot up my back as I'd turned and tried to shift over onto my side.

"Are you all right? What's wrong?"

"It's nothing," I replied, easing down flat on my back. "I had a slight collision at first during drills this morning. Must have strained my back a little. But it's nothing serious."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I'll lie on the heating pad tonight and it'll be fine in the morning."

"If you say so."

Laura had always hated talking on the phone. If I were home, I always had to answer it. And if she were home alone, you never knew if she'd answer it or not. I could see her now, standing at the counter — she never sat when she was on the phone — unconsciously twisting the phone cord. "So when do you think you'll be able to fly out?"

"I don't know. We're still awful busy at the office. I wouldn't feel right leaving Jeff alone with all this work."

"That's what partners are —"

"Sorry, honey," she interrupted, "but the dryer just went off and I've got to get my blouse out before it wrinkles." I was silent. "Honey," she continued, "I'll be out just as soon as I can. I promise. Gotta go now."

"I love you," I replied, but she'd already hung up.

**March 14**

"Mattison, what are you doing here?" Stratton asked as I entered the training room.

"Slept wrong and my back got a little stiff," I lied, easing into the whirlpool.

"Oh."

I'd forgotten about Stratton. I'd gotten up early to come to the training room, hoping to get in and out without anybody noticing. But, of course, he was there. He'd torn up his knee late last season when he ran into the wall trying to catch up to a home run. And now he was undergoing the pain and drudgery of trying to rehabilitate a knee.

Relaxing in the comforting whoosh of the whirlpool, I watched him

as he worked his way through the various weight machines. Each working another muscle, stressing the knee in another direction. He was using light weights, three sets of a hundred repetitions. I counted silently with him, watching the sweat pour off his powerful black body as his muscles strained with effort. He began with perfect form. After fifty or so, he started to breathe heavier, and the movement of the arm of the machine became sloppier, the smooth rhythm of his earlier efforts lost. Around seventy-five, his breathing became grunts, at times accompanied by obscenities, and the movement broke down to a jerk, all rhythm lost. Still he kept on until he completed the set and then he collapsed in a pool of sweat, relaxing briefly before he reached up, pulled out the pin, moved it up a notch, and started the next set.

**March 15**

I remember I'd thought there must have been some mistake when I'd first gotten the call. I made her repeat my name three times, certain she had the wrong person. But she didn't. Laura and Sean were in the emergency ward. An automobile accident, she said.

The nurse took me to Laura first. She was in a room on the second floor. They'd given her some Demerol and she was knocked out. According to the nurse, she had only a few minor cuts and bruises.

Then we went to the fifth floor: intensive care. But it wasn't Sean I saw there. It was some other boy, too white and fragile to be Sean, whom I saw there hooked up to a bunch of tubes. It was some other boy who lay there in that false sleep that didn't refresh, didn't rejuvenate.

Still, I never thought it would happen. If you make it to the hospital in time, make it through the surgery, it isn't supposed to happen. But I should have seen it coming. The signs were all there. I mean, he was definitely on third. And it wasn't the first time. I'd seen him dance off bag and feint toward the plate at least twice in the past couple of days. But the brakes always came on and he'd head back to the bag after the pitch. And so I wasn't too surprised when out of the corner of my eye I saw him start toward the plate again. Only this time he didn't stop. This time it was the real thing. He was going all out. And I wasn't ready. I just watched dumbfounded. The doctors and nurses reacted quickly. They'd practiced this play a thousand times. But even perfect execution can't stop the inevitable.

**March 16**

"At thirty-seven years of age, the percentages conspire against the comeback of Scott Mattison," read the lead sentence in Dicky's

column this morning. I didn't read any further. I didn't want to know what percentages were against me. There'd been too many unfavorable statistics in my life in the last ten months. Sixty percent of those who enter a coma never regain consciousness. In families where the only child dies, fifty-seven percent of the parents divorce.

Four years ago, it had all seemed so simple. The world was a baseball I could hold in my hand. A fastball I could throw ninety-five miles per hour. A curve I could break over the outside corner of the plate on a full count.

Statistics didn't matter then. They were like the laws of gravity in space: I was beyond their jurisdiction.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chicago | 100 | 020 | 001 — 4 |
| Seattle | 130 | 010 | 00x — 5 |

| **Chicago** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mattison L (0-1) | 1 1/3 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Trout | 3 2/3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Sanderson | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

| **Seattle** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Langston W (2-0) | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Barojas | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Claudill | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |

**March 17**

"They scratched Stratton again," were the first words I heard as I stepped into the crowded press box. Not wanting to be drawn into this particular discussion, I stood quietly in the back hoping no one would notice me.

"I hear he tripped on a sprinkler head while running in the outfield this morning and re-injured his knee."

"That's not what I heard. I heard they botched the surgery and the knee isn't responding."

"Word is they're trying to trade him."

"No one's going to buy damaged goods."

"You never know. There's a lot of teams that could use a healthy Stratton."

"According to Dr. Moczynski, you won't be able to tell for another six months how successful the surgery was. The knee could be as good as ever."

"The knee's gone," Dicky said. "He'll never be the same."

"You don't know that."
"Statistics show —"
Unobserved, I slipped back outside.

**March 19**

"Ever since I was a junior in high school people have told me I reminded them of you," Reardon said as we stretched together out in the outfield. It was the first time we'd been alone and had a chance to talk.

"Oh," I replied, not knowing what to say.

"And I hated it."

I stopped stretching and turned to look at him. We were doing pretzel stretches for the lower and upper torso and his back was to me. "I didn't want to be like anybody else," he said while continuing to stretch, unaware that I'd stopped. "I wanted to make my own name. So I started to watch you whenever I could. I analyzed your pitching style, memorized your delivery: the height of your leg kick, the length of your stride, the way your foot dragged across the mound on your follow-through. Everything. Even stupid little things like the way you touch your cap with only two fingers. And then I made sure I did it slightly different."

I smiled.

"But it didn't work. I changed everything and they still said I was another Mattison. And then, to top it off, I was drafted by the Cubs. I was so mad I slammed down the phone and swore for fifteen minutes, convinced I'd been cursed to follow you forever. The day I signed my contract, I swore to myself I'd make people forget all about Scott Mattison."

I remained silent, wondering where he was going with this. He was still stretching, looking in the other direction.

"And now, after all these years of resenting you, I finally realized how much you've helped me."

"Oh?"

"Your motion. Your mechanics. They're still the basis of my delivery. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be here today. I just wanted to let you know, to thank you, I guess. And to apologize for the terrible things I've thought about you."

I laughed and he turned around. "Shit, I may even call home and have them pull some of the pins out of the voodoo doll," he added with a grin. We both laughed and headed toward the dugout.

**March 22**

Max and I went to The Fire House for dinner. We've been eating

there for seventeen years, since we were rookies back in '68. Hardly any of the ball players go there anymore. But the steaks are still good, the drinks honest, and there's something to say for tradition.

After dinner, we retired to a corner booth in the bar.

"So you decided to go back home to the Cubs?" Max said.

"Old loyalties die hard," I responded.

"It isn't the same as when you and I played there."

"So I hear."

"It's all bottom line now. They don't care about tradition or loyalty. Hell, they fired Ernie and now they want to put in lights."

"It's still home. They just win more now. You ever think of trying something other than baseball?" I asked, lifting my glass to signal the cocktail waitress for another round.

"Don't know anything else," Max replied. "All I've ever done is play ball. And besides, Julie and I are used to the life. We like our winters off. How about you? You think of what you're gonna do if–" He stopped, embarrassed at bringing up the forbidden subject.

"If I don't make it," I said, completing the sentence. "Yeah, I've thought about it." The cocktail waitress arrived with our drinks. "I called Laura last night."

"And."

I finished off my old Scotch and set it aside. "She never answered. I tried all night."

"Maybe the phone wasn't working or maybe she had to go out of town on business," Max suggested, popping his fingers. Like all catchers, Max's hands weren't pretty. Gnarled fingers pointed in unnatural directions, the result of too many foul tips, too many balls in the dirt, too many of the million and one things that go wrong for a catcher.

"I don't think so. I think she was there and knew it was me calling."

"That's crazy."

I picked up the fresh Scotch and took a long drink, hoping to dissolve the lump forming in my throat. It didn't work. "I don't think she wants to talk to me. Before I left, she said she couldn't look at me anymore. Maybe now she can't talk to me either." I drained the Scotch before setting down the glass.

"What do you mean she said she couldn't look at you anymore?"

"It's my eyes. She says she can't look at me because of my eyes. Says they blame her for Sean's death. Judge and jury, she says."

"She needs help," Max said softly.

"I looked at them in the mirror that night. Studied them for twenty minutes," I said. I looked to my Scotch, but it was empty.

"It's not your fault," Max said, putting his hand on my shoulder and signaling for another round.

We were silent until the cocktail waitress delivered our drinks.

I took a long sip of Scotch, feeling the burn as it went down. "I don't blame her for Sean's death. It was the other guy's fault. He ran the stop sign. Our lawyer wanted to sue, but I said no. It wouldn't bring back Sean and I didn't think it would be good for Laura to relive it again." I reached for my Scotch, stared at it for a moment, and then slowly rotated my finger along the top of the glass as I continued, "I don't even blame the other guy anymore. I mean it wasn't like he was a drunk driver or something. He just missed the stop sign. Made a mental mistake." I stopped. "Now I don't know. Maybe I should have sued. Maybe it would've proven to Laura that I don't blame her."

"It's not your fault," Max said again.

"I don't know. I think part of the reason she feels so guilty is because she wasn't hurt more. I know it's terrible, but sometimes I wish she'd broken her leg or something."

**March 23**

"It was a last minute thing. Jeff heard about the seminar that afternoon and so we had to rush to get everything done in order to make it. I just didn't have to time to call," Laura explained.

"What about afterwards?"

"We went over to the Hilton for a drink with the buyers from Maxwell's and ended up closing the bar. I was feeling pretty woozy so I just took a room."

"What about your partner?"

"Jeff wasn't in any condition to drive either. I convinced him he'd better stay over, too."

"Oh."

"I heard on the radio that Reardon lost today," she said.

"Yeah." She waited for me to say more, but I didn't.

"Are you pitching tomorrow?" she asked, not giving up.

"Supposed to."

"Well, I guess I better get back to work. Good luck tomorrow."

I said nothing.

"Are you still there?" she asked.

I hung up without replying.

**March 24**

"Smack!" There's something soothing about the smack of a baseball into a catcher's mitt. At least, there is for me. It's a sound I've

grown up with. A sound of promise. A sound of success.

Five minutes of warm-up left so I'm letting it out, working up a sweat. Fastball, fastball. "Smack." "Smack." Curve. "Tooh." Fastball. "Smack." Slider. "Pfft." Change-up. "Plop," the mitt swallowing the sound. Fastball, fastball, fastball. "Smack." "Smack." "Smack."

Some days your warm-up tells it all. You can feel the heat on your fastball, the sharp snap on your curve. Hear the wicked hiss of your slider and the mocking laughter of your change-up. The catcher doesn't have to move his mitt. You're in that magical rhythm. And the batters don't have a chance. They just don't know it yet.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Milwaukee | 000 | 001 | 002 — 3 |
| Chicago | 001 | 200 | 03x — 6 |

| **Milwaukee** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Haas L (2-1) | 4 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Cocanower | 3 2/3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Ladd | 1/3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| **Chicago** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mattison W (1-1) | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Eckersley | 3 1/3 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Smith | 2/3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

**March 26**

"Bad breaks. They say they even out. The ball takes a bad bounce against you, it'll take a bad bounce against the other guy sometime and even out. But it doesn't work that way. Sure it may even out statistically over a large group of people. But it doesn't even out for the individual. At least, that's what Dicky says."

"Dicky!" Max exclaimed. "You've been listening to Dicky?"

"I had breakfast with him this morning."

"You're kidding?"

"No."

"Why? So he could write another article saying you're washed up?"

"I figured he'd know whether it was true or not."

"I wouldn't believe anything Dicky said."

"His book proves it."

"How?"

"Take a look at Honeycutt and Sutcliffe last year. Both pitched well and had about the same ERA. But the Dodgers didn't score any runs

for Honeycutt, so he barely breaks .500 and ends up 10 and 9. Meanwhile, Sutcliffe has more runs scored for him than any pitcher in the league. He goes 16 and 1 after coming over to the National League, wins the Cy Young Award and signs a multi-million dollar contract. Honeycutt doesn't win anything and is lucky if he doesn't take a pay cut. And that'll never even out for Honeycutt."

"It happens," Max allowed, with a shrug.

"Exactly. And that proves it isn't true. All that stuff about things evening out is a lie."

Max didn't reply right away. "You're not talking about baseball, are you?" he said, at last.

I looked away.

"We tell ourselves it evens out. Otherwise, you drive yourself crazy," Max said.

I was silent.

"You can't bring him back. There's no way it can even out."

"I know," I said. "I know. But I shouldn't have to lose Laura, too."

"You've got to give her time. It takes some people a little longer to come back. You just have to hang in there."

"You can only hang on for so long."

**March 27**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cleveland | 010 | 102 | 001 — 5 |
| Chicago | 000 | 010 | 32x — 6 |

| **Cleveland** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blyleven | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Comer | 1 1/3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Waddell L (1-2) | 2/3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

| **Chicago** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reardon | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Brusstar W (1-0) | 2 2/3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Frazier | 1/3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

**March 28**

"Did you see Reardon in the hotel bar last night?" Max asked.

"No," I replied.

"Looked like he'd lost his best friend."

"He had a tough game."

"One of the writers was drunk and was riding him."

"Who?"

"I didn't know him."

"Oh."

"But anyway, he was riding Reardon pretty good and Reardon, he was taking it all right. But his wife, what's her name?"

"Carol."

"Yeah, Carol, she was sitting to the left of Reardon, out of the writer's view, and she was boiling. I thought for a minute she was going to pull a Laura."

I smiled. "Really?"

"She didn't have a pitcher nearby, but if she had . . . ."

We both laughed, remembering back seventeen years when Laura had thrown a pitcher of margaritas in the face of a fan who was riding me. We've laughed about it ever since.

**April 1**

It was in the papers this morning like a bad April Fools' joke.

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The Chicago Cubs today released veteran outfielder Willie Stratton. Stratton, 30, who suffered torn ligaments in his knee late last season when he crashed into the center field wall, said his knee is stronger than ever and he hopes to catch on with another club. A Cub spokesman said Stratton just didn't fit into their plans this year, but that they wished him the best . . . .

**April 3**

The phone woke me from my nap. "Hello?"

"Surprise, it's me," Laura replied.

"What's up?"

"Nothing. Just thought I'd call and see how you were doing."

"Oh."

"The paper and all the sportscasters are saying tomorrow's game will decide whether they keep you or Reardon," Laura said.

"For once they might be right."

"I saw them interviewing Reardon and his wife on TV," she said. "I — I just wanted you to know that I'll be watching. And rooting for you."

I swallowed, surprised at the emotion I felt. "It's good to know."

"Well, I've got to be going. I'm already late for a dinner meeting."

I wanted to ask if Jeff was going along. "I'm glad you called," I said.

"So am I."

**April 4**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chicago | 000 | 010 | 000 — 1 |
| San Francisco | 000 | 000 | 000 — 0 |

| **Chicago** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reardon W (2-1) | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Mattison | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

| **San Francisco** | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laskey L (2-2) | 7 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Minton | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

"You looked awful good out there today," Max said, as we sat down at our usual booth.

"So did Reardon," I replied.

"Yeah, but he's still a kid. You don't keep a kid to be the fifth starter and long reliever. You send him down to Triple A to pitch every fourth day and bring him back up in May or June."

"I hope you're right."

"They say anything to you after the game?"

"No. But Whitey called."

"You're kidding?" Max said, genuinely startled.

"No. Said they'd made a mistake in releasing me. Said he'd be interested in signing me if the Cubs don't. Like to see me get number 300 in Busch Stadium."

"I don't believe it," Max said. "A general manager actually admitting he screwed up."

I smiled. "Maybe things are finally turning around."

**April 5**

"I made it. Jimmie called me into his office this morning to tell me the news."

"Congratulations, honey," Laura replied, and I could feel the smile in her voice.

"I wish you were here," I said, it slipping out before I'd thought about it.

"I'm sorry —"

"I didn't mean it that way," I interrupted. "I just wish we could celebrate tonight. But I guess it can wait till Sunday."

"You'll be coming home Sunday?"

"Yeah, sometime in the afternoon. I'm not sure when, so I'll catch

a cab."

"Okay," she replied. "How did Reardon take it?" she asked curiously.

"He was clearing out his locker when I got back from Jimmie's office. He saw me come in and actually walked over to congratulate me."

"Sounds like a nice boy."

"He is. I told him not to get down, that if he just hangs in there he'll be back up before the summer's over.

**April 7**

I got home early in the afternoon. The door was locked and Laura didn't answer when I called out her name. I figured she must be upstairs in the bathroom. But she wasn't.

I found the note on the refrigerator. She said she needed some time alone to straighten things out. Said she was proud of me and would be counting down the victories to 300.

Norman Dubie

# The Train

Accident could be a god to little boys.

The way they hurt their necks
To look through glass down to the twisted
Wreckage in the gorge. The conductor
Telling the ladies from Jamaica
We are one stop from the border. The older
Of the two is shocked by a sudden pasture
Beside the lake, ice houses
Left there for the summer — she says, "Oh, Chloe,
Look at the shanties; to think there is
Such poverty in Maine." She begins
To finger the pearls sewn into the shoulder
Of her dress; the diamond she's wearing
Has the fire of fat in it. And then
A tunnel, and then more birches with the lake again.

You smile at me and look across
To the girl in black stockings who is asleep,
Her lips
Moving, her skirt rising with the jumping train.
You straighten your blouse. Sharing
A thermos of coffee, we have said twice
That we'll be late for the station. Beyond the window
The day-lilies are a smudged crayon.

Who is drowning in the lake? Whose father
Is falling on the stairs? Which of us
Racing north will be truly late? We are
All annoyed, stepping out into the rain.
The city that we raced for, racing for its own sake.
The girl in black stockings is waking on the corner.
She has ruined the hard parallelism of the rain.
She said her brother died in the jungle last week.
We said, with intonation, what a shame.

Brenda Hillman

# Four O'Clock Fugue

Help me find the hidden picture,
says Louisa. Brain-tired, halfway
through the journey, I advise her
Go for the snake beneath the load of hay.
The dentist's office, a stagnant pond,
has froglike chairs that squat and stare;
the other mom has focused on
her patent leather shoes, the lamp mirrored there . . .

Each cavity you get is one too many,
says the solitary poster at the side
while a disembodied toothbrush gets the corners
of a tooth, and the tube coats it with fluoride . . .
I've got to make sense of this somehow —
not Thinking-I, the Modular I
that drives through town
and has no use for poetry,

doing the errands with a roughened edge
despite the fugue on Telegraph,
fire falling from the bridge,
left onto Ashby . . . Louisa starts to laugh,
the scrawny aide has called her in;
every six months the same technique,
don't brush sideways, either up or down.
I choose among the things to read:
Walter Cronkite on one magazine,
a slick tome on avoiding mental illness:
Chapter Titles: When to Use Your Brain,
Inability to Relax, Persistent Stress —
so much is hidden and is still close by!
The child's little body tilted
back in the banana chair . . . her picture lies
open where she worked: Rumpelstiltskin

and the girl . . . the receptionist hides too,
behind the room divider, behind the reminder call
she's making, her flat voice peaked with voo-doo.
The nouns surround the spinning wheel,
gold swirling in the shack
of magic life; the girl is tired of this.
She wants the dwarf to take it back
so she can find the whistle and the fish.

James Cervantes

# Make the Turtle Whole

"There is the sense of neurotic coherence"
— Frank O'Hara, "Ode on Causality"

When he's sick, she gets sick,
but before that, neighbors heard
his voice, like the hammers
of a dead piano, beating down breath
on her, and before that, acacia blossoms
floated down the aquaduct, with pink toes
dappling them, and hands with cigarettes
writing them down, imagining Balzac or Zola
fishing with their pinkies, as they did
prior to this, two hard at the game, crayons
of the past melting in the same bed,
where the brass turtle on a square of marble
bore its flute and incense and rattled
to the edge, useless evermore, though the same
had happened in the beginning, when in passion
he'd brought down his heel and bled on carpet,
turtle-back, and her white calves, then licked
them clean and made the turtle whole.

Leilani Jay

# Door Running

It is never when I am fully awake.
It is never when she opens the door.
The door when she opened it,
when the door flew back
and the screen sprung open,

its dark interior.
And the screen door opened
smacking the wall of the porch.
Then we knew she was ready.
Only then when the broad door

opened to the full afternoon,
hanging like skin on the wound
of a dark interior.
The dew had gone from the tall grass.
But her face when she was running

and the trees billowing
in the distant field.
We knew she would be ready.
The porch from the grass was a wound
in the broad day opening,

never when she was running away.
Her face and hair passed streaming fields.
And the screen smacked the wall
and the broad door running,
fully awake.

Rita Dove

# After Storm

Already the desert sky had packed
its scarves and gone over the hard blue hills
when I awoke, throat
raw from the tail end of a dream
through which your cough and
the smoke of a cigarette sailed. I followed
the deep light of the hallway out

to where the patio roof gaped,
bamboo shades mocking the palm tree
in splintery arpeggios. You stood
flicking ash onto the trampled grass.
I could smell the rain leaving, the sage
enthralled in a bitter virtue for hours.

Cynthia Frederick

# Travelling to a Land We Cannot See

Eripuit coelo fulmen mox sceptra tyrannis
— Turgot

Every evening in summer they'd sit on the veranda in front of the office and read, or watch the last hour of light play across the plains. Tonight, there was a breeze, which quieted the locusts and swept the fine desert dust into the air, reddening the sky as the sun rolled toward the horizon.

"Storm," Edward said, and he rose from his usual place on the bench and walked across the gravel to the truck to roll up the windows.

Carolina looked up from her book. Immense grey clouds were building in the east, and in the northeast a crimson curtain of virga hung over the mesas. She stood and moved to the steps to watch the vast sky dance over the landscape. The cottonwoods across the highway leaned in crooked old age near the canal and they gave up silky bolls of white strand and seed which waltzed in twos and threes through the September dusk. In the foreground, the neon vacancy sign blazed blue. A dog barked.

Days would go by when there would not be a single guest. The new four-lane provided a more convenient route and countless two-story motels for truckers and salesmen and vacationing families. Mostly local people — the farmers and the Navajos — used the old highway. Carolina and Edward could often walk for hours down the faded center stripe of the endless asphalt road, encountering no one but the horses, sheep, and cattle which grazed freely and lazily on the sweet grass.

It was almost seven and Edward locked the gas pumps and pulled the clanking metal accordian doors across the small garage. She watched him pick up the bucket and fling that day's water across the drive, and she smiled because her husband was strong, graceful, and handsome. He was the same fine-looking man she had married a

dozen years before, in 1930, the day after her eighteenth birthday.

"There hasn't been a car along in hours," he said. "Get dressed and come with me." Edward played piano at the Antelope Bar every Saturday night.

"Best not," Carolina said, smoothing her dress over her knees. It was an old calico dress, worn to the softness and color of her skin. "Could be somebody will come around. Could be a bad storm."

He sat down next to her and took her hand and kissed it. "I don't want to go either," he said, and began to unbutton his shirt. "Except Jimmy called this morning and said he might come up and play — told me he hocked his motorcycle for a new guitar. He'll have to hitch."

She ran her hand up behind his shirt. His back was strong and fine. "I made up a peach pie for the band."

Edward went inside and Carolina watched the lightning. She could feel the rains coming on and the winds growing stronger, redolent of damp earth and creosote. How she loved that smell! She thought of the times she'd helped her father cultivate the garden behind the cafe, how she'd press her face to the soil just to smell it, how she'd taste the soil on a radish pulled from the ground, and then how the water from the hand pump would splash cold over her lips and tongue.

A pair of headlights on the highway grew brighter, then the car slowed, turned in, and pulled up to the gasoline pumps. Carolina went inside and took the keys from the hook, then walked over to the shiny black car. The wind was gusting now and the thin fabric of her dress pressed around her legs. A man got out of the car, a tall lean man in a dark suit and felt hat.

"Some storm," he said. "I need gas."

"You've come to the right place," Carolina said, unlocking the pumps. While she was busy with the nozzle, he tried to raise the hood of his car but could not. "Need some help?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, still struggling, "yes, if you don't mind. This is a new car and . . ."

"I'll check the oil, water, belts...this country is hell on belts." She found the hatch and raised the rounded hood.

He stuck his head under the hood and watched her quick small hands at work. The wind was growing fierce and shook the metal. "It's a friend of mine's."

"She's a beauty." Carolina wiped her hands on a blue rag and slammed the hood. The stormy sky was reflected in the black lacquered curves of the sedan, and in the bluish windows. A few raindrops fell. "Where are you from?" she asked.

"California."

"Where you headed?"

"New Mexico."

The pump stopped ringing off the gallons with a click. "Have you been driving all day?"

"Nine, ten hours."

"That's two dollars for the gas. And your ration coupons. You can stay here, get a good night's sleep, then go on. You have a ways. Could be a bad storm."

He looked out over the darkening sky, and she saw that his eyes were kind and unusually bright blue. Beneath the brim of his hat his face was angular, taut pale skin stretched over prominent bones. "Yes," he said, "yes, I suppose you're right. I am tired. This storm is really something." The rain was falling more steadily.

"Well, drive around to room four and I'll get you the key. I can fix you up some supper in the cafe if you'd like."

Edward met Carolina at the door. He smelled of lemon soap, and a freshly laundered white shirt clung lightly to his still-damp skin. "A guest?" he said.

"Room four." She smoothed back her husband's wet hair with her palm.

"Nice car. Looks new. And expensive."

"He seems kind. And handsome. That car has government plates." She smiled and leaned upward and kissed him. "I'll get the pie. Why don't you show him the room?"

As Carolina wrapped the pie in waxed paper, she heard the rain fall more heavily against the roof. Out the window, past the blue gingham curtains, she saw lightning pass between clouds and heard the thunder. She remembered the summer storms of her childhood, remembered crawling between her mother and father in their bed beneath the window, the white chiffon curtains waving breezily above their heads. The smell of yeast was still on her mother's hands after she put up the nightly dough to rise, and the smell of rosewater was light on her mother's cotton gown (rosewater her only extravagance). She recalled her wonder at her father's slow steady breathing while outside the sky cracked open and the ground beneath them shrugged. Her mother held her and sometimes they whispered prayers or rhymes or softly sang, and if they woke her father, he never said.

Edward came inside, shirt so soaked from the downpour she could see through it. "Edward," she said, and started to unbutton his shirt and peel it away.

"It'll dry. I've got to go." He picked up the pie and kissed Carolina on the forehead and then left. Through the rusting screen door and sheeting rain, she watched the truck pull away.

She ran across the gravel to the room with the porch light glowing and knocked on the window. The door opened. "Towels," she said, holding the carefully folded stack against her chest to keep them dry.

"Ah, yes...towels," he said. "Come in, come in...you're soaked."

"This is the worst storm we've had in a long while." Room four was always her favorite because it had a small Mexican fireplace put in years before when her mother and father were still alive, for the use of a permanent boarder who could not bear gas or electric heat, an elderly ex-priest who would burn only piñon wood. The room still smelled of cedar. "I hope the room is okay," she said. Lightning lit the sky blue outside.

"It is fine. Really very comfortable." With his hat off, the thinness of his face was all the more apparent, and the pale blue of his large eyes all the more remarkable. His wide but lean shoulders seemed like nothing more than a wire hanger for his set of clothes. She guessed he was in his late thirties.

A thunderclap boomed overhead and they both winced and smiled. "Worst storm in ages," she said. "I haven't heard thunder like that since I was a little girl."

"'He stole the thunderbolt from heaven, and the scepter from the tyrants.' I don't believe I've ever heard thunder like that."

"Are those your words?" she said, handing him the towels.

"Turgot's, I think."

"A poet?"

"A statesman. It's the inscription on Houdon's bust of Benjamin Franklin."

"Ah, yes," she said, stepping back toward the doorway. She felt the rain wetting the back of her dress. "I'll be in the cafe if you want some supper."

"Yes. I'm famished. I wouldn't mind a sandwich. Just let me get settled in here."

She ran back to the main building in the dark pouring rain made worse by gusting winds. When she got inside, her dress was heavy with water and it clung to her skin. She went into the bedroom and looked at herself in the oval beveled mirror above the dresser. She was as wet as if she had swum in her clothes; her hair was molded in tiny waves to her face, and she could see the outline of her slip and every curve of her body beneath the thin calico. She kicked off her shoes and stood in her barefeet. The light on the dresser flickered.

She pulled her dress over her head and let it fall damp around her feet, then peeled away the white silk slip and stepped out of her underwear. Thunder shook the house. She went to the closet and pulled out a neatly folded towel and dried herself, then put on another dress, one she had sewn for herself out of pale yellow cotton, and a pair of old white espadrilles. She brushed her hair away from her face with her grandmother's silver-handled brush, and tied it back with an ironed white ribbon. What a strange and troubled man, she thought.

When she walked through the hallway and through the double curtains into the cafe, she saw him standing at the screen door in the pounding rain, knocking. She hadn't heard him through the storm's noise. She hurried to the door and unlocked it saying, "It slams shut that way, sometimes...it locks itself...and I was in the back changing and didn't hear you standing there...I'm sorry...come in...you're drenched..."

He entered and pulled off his hat, from which the rain water still dropped, and she took it and hung it on the hat rack in the corner.

"Let me take your coat," she said, and saw that he was carrying a small portfolio beneath the lapels of his jacket, trying to keep it dry. She helped him off with his jacket, and hung it next to his hat. "Sit down anywhere."

"You changed your clothes," he said, and chose a table in the corner by the window, set his portfolio down on the faded blue and white checked tablecloth, and stared out at the road. When she brought him a napkin and silverware and a glass of water, he didn't seem to notice, seemed wrapped up in the view.

"You wanted a sandwich?" Carolina said. "Or will you need a menu?"

"A sandwich," he said vacantly. A flash of lightning lit up the window. He looked up at her. "Sliced turkey on wheat?"

"Lettuce? Tomato? Mayo?"

"Just mayonnaise."

"Just mayo," she said, looking at him looking out the window.

"And coffee," he said as she was walking away.

"Coffee."

She brought the coffee right away and saw that he had pulled out some papers and was jotting notes with a short pencil. "Work?" she said, moving one of the papers to make room for the cup and saucer.

"Yes. Research." He pulled the papers together and straightened them in a pile.

"Research. Interesting." She smiled. "Your sandwich will be right up. Do you want the bread toasted?"

He was reading and didn't seem to hear her at first. Then he looked up and said, "No."

As she piled the wet slices of turkey onto the bread, she wondered what song Edward was playing, wondered if Jimmy had caught a ride, hoped Edward would bring Jimmy back to stay for a few days so she could listen to him play the guitar while she washed dishes or ironed, listen to him serenade her with his lonesome ballads and amaze her with his fancy picking and win her over with his crooked smile. She'd fry him a chicken to take home, and he'd whisper in her ear like he always whispered in her ear before he headed out, "Marry me," just loud enough for Edward to hear.

Just as Carolina set the plate before him, there was a crack of thunder directly overhead; the lights flickered, then died. "I'll get a candle," Carolina said. "They may come back on, but most times it takes hours. I was afraid this might happen."

"Candlelight dining," he said when she placed the candle on the table.

"Can I get you anything else?"

"No," he said, and when she turned to walk away, "but why don't you sit down? Join me for a while. I've been driving all day and haven't talked to a soul. Unless you're busy...."

She sat down opposite him and looked out the window, resting her chin in her palm. "Seems the rain has let up some," she said.

He took a bite of his sandwich, then said, "Why don't you make something for yourself? This is very good."

"My husband and I ate supper before he left. I'm fine."

"Where did he go, your husband?"

"Into town. To the Antelope. Saturday nights he plays there."

"Is he good?"

"He's very good. Everybody says so. He can play anything. He taught himself, but he studied in Europe."

"Is he from around here?"

"No. I am. I grew up here, was born in this very place. My daddy built this hotel and my momma ran it. They're gone, both of them, so it's mine now. Where are you from?"

"The East. New York."

"Edward was born and raised there. A million light years away from here, he says. I've never been."

The rain and wind had all but stopped. "How did you meet?"

"He and his brother were driving across the country to California. They stopped here for the night and stayed a few days. I was sixteen. He was thirty-one. I guess we fell in love. My momma and daddy didn't

take well to that. He came back through a year later and stayed. He got a job baling cotton at the Frye place. Once he developed some muscles and picked up a few honky-tonk tunes on the piano, my daddy let me marry him. All that going on thirteen years ago. I love him very much. How about you? Are you married?"

"Yes. I have two children, a boy and a girl, Peter and Toni. You don't have children?"

"No." She stared at the candle flickering. "What kind of research is that?" She pointed at the stack of papers on top of the portfolio.

"Scientific. I'm a scientist. My wife is a biologist. We met at Berkeley."

"I'd like to go to college. Would you like some more coffee?"

"Yes, please. May I smoke?"

"Feel free." She brought the coffee pot back and a cup and saucer for herself. As she walked across the room, she saw him strike a match and light his pipe and the tobacco glowed red in the bowl.

"What are you working on right now?" she said.

"Thunderbolts."

"Thunderbolts?"

He looked at her and smiled and shook his head. Then he looked out the window and said, "Never mind. It's not something I can talk about."

"Then how about a piece of homemade peach pie? I grew the peaches on my own tree in the yard out back." She waited, and when he didn't seem to have heard her, she reached across the table and touched his hand.

"Yes," he said, startled. "Homemade peach pie."

She brought back two slices and two forks and another candle. "I don't think the lights will come back on, at least for tonight." He lit the second candle for her.

"Why don't you go to college if you want to? This pie is really delicious."

"I've got this place to care for."

"But you've lived here your whole life? Don't you ever get away, travel?"

"I've never been outside the state."

"Do you want to go?" She looked up at him and his eyes looked even paler blue in candlelight.

"To see the world?"

"To see the world."

"The world isn't such a pretty place right now. Besides, I couldn't ever leave this place."

"You are happy, aren't you," he said.

"Yes." It was all very simple to her. "More pie?" He shook his head, so she stood and cleared away the dishes onto a tray and carried them into the kitchen. Out the kitchen window she watched the storm move away from them, the lightning now streaking through the rain to the ground, tearing the sky in half. From the window, out across the desert, the view was uninterrupted. There was room enough for storms here.

"Can I help?" he asked from behind her.

"Heavens no," she said, hands immersed in the soapy water.

"Well, I can't work without the light and I've never washed dishes in the dark and I thought...." He suddenly seemed shy and awkward. She rinsed her hands, and when she turned to look at him as she dried her hands on the dish towel, she saw him standing against the door frame, tall and lanky, arms crossed over his chest, one hand holding the pipe, one foot crossed over the other, in the grey light.

"Aren't you happy?" she asked, not really knowing why she asked. She turned and picked up a plate and began to dry it. She felt his lovely eyes looking at her back.

"Birds are happy," he said. "Children are happy. The Japanese are happy. They are a peaceful people by nature. I suppose I'm happy. I love my family. I'm just tired, I guess."

He was standing behind her now, whispering. She could feel his breath against the still-damp tendrils of hair on the back of her neck.

Then the headlights cut across the dark rooms through the front windows and there was the sound of two doors closing; Edward was home and he had brought Jimmy with him. Carolina turned and looked up at the man as she untied and pulled the white cotton apron up over her head. "It's my husband," she said, dropping the apron onto the floor at his feet.

"Carolina!" Edward shouted as he came in through the front door. He was carrying a flashlight and the beam from it flickered around the room.

"Edward, is that Jimmy with you?" She smiled at the guest, then moved awkwardly around him into the office. Her husband and Jimmy stood in the doorway, arms over each other's shoulders, smelling of beer. "Lights went out," she said, then she hugged Jimmy warmly. "Is this an army uniform you have on?"

"Oh, sweet Carolina," Jimmy said into her hair.

"Jimmy's gone and done it," Edward said, stepping away from his friend and shining the flashlight on him. "They've signed him up."

"Oh no," Carolina said, "Not the army...."

"They found me out," Jimmy said laughing. "It's off to Gay Paree with me for wine, women, and country."

"When?"

"Tomorrow morning. Edward's taking me to the airport."

"Storm's passed," Edward said. "Looks like a nice night. I'm glad the power went out. I'm glad they closed up the Antelope. I'm glad we're all together. Let's sit outside a while."

And so the three of them did. Jimmy played his new guitar and sang his lonesome songs and they looked up at the sky, now clearing enough to reveal a quarter moon and a universe of stars. How rich the damp earth smelled!

Carolina walked over to room four and knocked on the door. "You slipped out. Would you like to join us?" she asked him.

"No," he said. "Thank you, but no." He smiled gently.

"Does the music bother you?"

"Oh, no...it's lovely. I've been listening. But I think I'll turn in now."

"Okay." Carolina stepped back one step, out of the candlelight coming from the room. "Then I guess I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes. Goodnight. Thank you."

"Goodnight."

From the veranda she could see the faint glowing of the candles behind the curtains, and once she thought she saw the shadow of a man lingering there. When Jimmy put down his guitar, Edward went inside and played the piano and became lost in it after awhile. Carolina and Jimmy sat on the steps and listened to the perfect silence of the rain-washed desert as it carried away the music.

"I'm going in," she said, and rose. The moon was sinking into the west. Everything else was still.

"See you in the morning," Jimmy answered, and stayed seated on the steps, looking up at the sky. "You two really have it made here."

"Yes."

Carolina went inside, undressed, and stepped into the shower. It was well past midnight. The hot water felt good on her skin, and the darkness around her felt mysterious and somehow comforting. She could hear the piano.

In the morning, the storm would be forgotten. In the morning, the sun would explode over the empty plains. In the morning, the man in room four would get into his car and drive further on down the road toward the blazing sun and the light from it would pierce those transparent blue eyes. In the morning, Jimmy would fly blindly to Paris, never to return. In the morning, Edward would unlock the pumps and pull open the garage door as he always did, as he always

did. In the morning, she would rise and go to the guest room and peel the sheets away from the bed and gather up the towels and launder them and hang them like white flags on the clothesline in the sharp autumn air. In the morning, the locusts would resume their shrill song.

She dried herself and put on her cotton gown and slipped into bed. Edward came in after a while and woke her with his fine gentle hands and his soft mouth and there, under the sheets, they let the shimmering moment turn love into sweet ardor and back into love again, arcing them tenderly upward away from the cruel and beautiful earth, and setting them back down again.

Jeanine Savard

# Classicism on the Water

He hasn't touched a drop in years
And thinks his whole life
Has been caught by a fierce
Belatedness — a dream, on the other hand,
That reels on without him
Ever catching up. As he stands
On the shore of the lake,
Squeezing our names between his hands,
More like bird-call
Than a real desire to join us,
I'm sure, this night, he'd understand
The intersection of lights across the sky
And in the water, our lives
Never belonging
Only to themselves — The way
Our rowboat angles, advancing for the idea.
I'm shaken by the eagerness
Already draining from his face
As he bends the boat down, climbing
Into the middle seat. He says, Why not
While we watch the radiant spin
Of the oars and stars. He suggests
A race to the island and back,
A panic-run for tomorrow
When each of us in our own boats
Would meet and gather at the landing.
I ask him if he's ever dreamed
The same dream twice but he says,
Impossible. My husband reminds him
Of the elements in dreams we share: a bird
Flying out of a linden into another, or
The birches we burn
In our separate houses, their smoke
Intercepting the moonlight in rooms

Far away and near as we are now
To scraping this boat against the sandy bottom.
He laughs and thinks we have it all
Confused, that truth is in watching
The separateness of things, a snail
From a frog, and the distance
We're removed or
Set back from fleshy progress.

Peggy Shumaker

# Newlywed

It was the morning Vixen
broke through the fence — shouldered over
the splintered cedar
she'd clawed loose and bolted
down the arroyo and into the cholla.

My mouth had dried in the night. My tongue
reached for the corners, smaller now and hard,
and tried to moisten them. I was ashamed
how I might smell to you,
though you were happy to see me then
in the first light. Later,
this would not be so.

I let you watch me sleep.
I was still lost
in the dream of adobe houses melting
without roofs — filling up
with a wide-open blank white sky.
The tabula rasa smothering all the world.
I shuddered, jerking fully to sleep,
and you understood that
as a sign of my waking,
and laid a hand on my waist.

You wore on the back of your hand
a rare-but-serviceable leather.
I held my mouth to your broken places.

When I rose to wash the tight dried smears
from my thighs, you found her
whimpering at the sliding
door, her prodigal muzzle
bearded with fine white spines.

# Wounded Science

I had gone away from you
by then, so you took a room with nothing
in it to remind you, a room overlooking
an iced-over field with nothing
in it, overlooking
the experimental
farms where cows with windows
healed over in their left
sides low, and behold
gurgled complacently, chewing over
pressed sawdust and fish trash,
trying to draw some small nourishment,
staining their palm-wide
scooped tongues on the mineral
blocks. It was your job to see
that they never lay down. The experiment
depended on balance, clean glass,
unrestricted vision. Your grant
specified a hankering for new info
on the inner workings, revelations
involuntary in nature. The plastic cud
slid over and back pretty much
as you'd predicted.
Stainless barriers
kept the impression of your hands
sterile and whole until the seal-eyed
washwoman flipped them away
under her rag, and you stood
cow-like in relief. *I know*
*what I know*, you told yourself,
and it was almost more
than you could stand.

Jay Boyer

# A Conversation with Joseph Heller

*The discussion which follows between Joseph Heller, myself, and some twenty to thirty students took place at Arizona State University on March 9, 1984. Heller had given a reading on the evening of March 8 and I'd interviewed him as part of the program. I'd intentionally avoided questions having to do with the process of his writing, preferring to let our creative writing students ask such questions.*

*Heller's latest novel,* GOD KNOWS, *was only recently completed and the process of writing was fresh in his mind. The previous evening was the first time that he'd read from the novel publicly, and, surely more to the point, the first public reading of any of his work for nearly five years. Much of the novel had been written while he was recovering from Guillain-Barré syndrome. Heller was stricken with Guillain-Barré syndrome in the winter of 1981. Little is known about the disease, save that it invades the nervous system when the body's immune defenses backfire, that it's rarely fatal, and that it's almost always horrific. It strikes without warning and leaves much of the body paralyzed.*

*Recovery is almost certain, though it can take months onto years; and after a costly hospital stay and extensive physical therapy, Heller's recovery was nearly complete. During the interview following the reading, I mentioned to him that his characters seem to learn from their experiences only once they've confronted their own mortality and I asked him what he'd learned from being confronted with his. "Guillain-Barré?" he said. "God wants us to have better medical coverage."*

*— J.B.*

**Who do you enjoy reading?**

I enjoy reading less and less because when I'm working I'm too tired to read most of the time. I work all day long. I mean writing a novel is just like my job. And I'm thinking about it all the time — what do I think

of the writing I did this morning? What am I going to do with it when I get back to it? My mind is always going over it when I'm writing; and when I do start to read, it's usually late in the evening when I'm getting tired. And often —

I know less about contemporary literature than I used to when I wasn't writing all the time. There are many books that I want to read again. And there are new novels that come out, they might be very good, but if I start to read and I feel that they're not going to stimulate me, that they don't coincide with something I can do, then I generally don't get through them. And the ones I don't get through are probably among the best American novels. They're very good, better than I can be. But there's nothing in there I can use that coincides with what I know and do.

Bernard Malamud I've read. I'm thinking now about the time of GOOD AS GOLD. He has works with diction that coincide very well with the language in the one I wrote. Saul Bellow.

Others, John Updike, Cheever, are better and more competent novelists than I am, but they're not novelists I prefer. I like novels that have a kind of craziness to them. Really. Kafka, now Kafka was crazy. James Joyce. Joyce was disciplined, but he was a lunatic. Have you ever read Richard Ellman's biography of him? It's one of the funniest books in the world. And even books I don't understand, like GRAVITY'S RAINBOW by Pynchon. I can't really get close to it, but I'd rather read a book like that than — there's an obscurity there, an irrationality, that keeps me reading, that I guess I like as a reader. That's why I like Kafka too.

I'm not saying I'm not open to reading other people. At a certain point I'd read every book that was published that was praised in a review or somewhere else. But I think it's very hard to be writing all the time and to read the books that everyone else seems to be reading.

I mean you probably ought to be reading a book of essays — history, psychology. That's probably more useful to you.

**How do you get your ideas?**

I don't know, I really don't. I just get them. And then I write them down pretty often. I try to keep track.

**Do you jot down ideas for future books?**

No. I just jot down things for the book I'm working on at the moment. I carry note cards and things while I'm working. I have to, because at the pace I write it may not be until two or three years later that I will get to that part of the book. My mind looks that far ahead, but

I never look ahead to the novel that will follow. I never work on more than one novel at a time.

**Do you work from an outline?**
Yes.

**On CATCH-22?**
I had several outlines for CATCH-22. I had it all planned. One had characters listed. One had episodes. Even so, the chronology of CATCH-22 — I wanted to be sure I avoided unintentional anachronism, for instance. Now I did put some anachronisms in CATCH-22 on purpose. Major Major. The IBM that made him a major. But I wanted to avoid unintentional anachronisms. I tried to make everything possible.

The novel I've just completed, GOD KNOWS, is just filled with anachronisms. I try to keep track of them and that's pretty hard.

**Do you do repeated drafts if you're uncomfortable with what you've written?**

I can't go ahead knowing I'm going to rewrite something. If something's not right I've got to go back. I can't go ahead. That's what takes me so long. I've never done more than one draft of a novel. It's just the way I work. Whereas other writers I know, maybe they sit down and write a first draft very quickly. But me, in the worst stages, if I'm handwriting, if I want to correct a word, I go back and rewrite the whole page just to change a word. And one of the reasons I stopped working on a typewriter is that I make typing errors. I'd retype a page and because I'm not a good typist I'd hit the wrong key when I was doing a page over and if I tried to erase and I left a smudge I'd have to start over again.

I know that's a rotten way to work. But it's also true of me that once I get past the middle of a book I can write as rapidly as anybody in the world. I do a lot less rewriting then. The first half of my books tends to move very slowly for me. They're crammed with details and I'm very careful with what I'm doing and I go back and go back. But the last half or third, usually I make very few changes.

I didn't make many with GOD KNOWS.

When I started writing novels I wasn't very sure of myself, but I think I know enough by now about what I can do, and what I can't so well. With the first three books I was discovering things about writing a novel. CATCH-22 I thought was going to be short — when I began; SOMETHING HAPPENED couldn't get beyond thirty pages. I thought I'd have to struggle to find ways to make it long enough. And then I

started finding things that I knew I'd have to elaborate on.

**How do you know when you're through with a novel like CATCH-22?**

I know when I'm done because I usually have the last paragraph of the last chapter written before I start writing the second chapter. And to me it's like, okay, this is where I'm beginning; I want to get to this line, or to this paragraph. And I think about it in the same way I'd think about getting to San Francisco.

It's true. I had the last line and the last paragraph of CATCH-22. In SOMETHING HAPPENED I had it down the same day I had the opening line. Those were changed. I had to; I'd rearranged a lot of things. But they gave me a place to begin and work toward. In GOOD AS GOLD, I had that last paragraph down and I had the last line of GOD KNOWS a year or two ago. And so I just try to keep getting the manuscript to the point where the last line makes sense.

Before I begin writing a novel I've got to know the end. Before I'll start the writing of it I'll put things down on index cards and notebooks, and I'll give a lot of thought to, number one, if there's a novel in it, and two, a novel I can write. I have to convince myself of that before I can go on.

In much of my work — with the exception of GOOD AS GOLD — the story takes place retrospectively. The person telling the book has to know how things are going to turn out in order to be a credible narrator. The chronology, the presentation of episodes, foreshadowing, and such things, depend upon that.

But that's me. Don't follow me. I think it's a mistake, though — I remember hearing once that Philip Roth had two short stories that weren't quite working so he put them together and came up with a novel. There's another story — I'm not sure I believe it: I mean, Faulkner told so many lies — about THE SOUND AND THE FURY, which is one of my favorite novels. It began as a short story, just a chapter with Benjy, and he finished that story and thought it wasn't clear enough. Anyway, as I say, I don't believe it. He may think he did it that way.

**It doesn't follow that because you know how a book will end that the ending will be easy to write. CATCH-22, for example. The last hundred pages or so read as if they were very difficult for you.**

Everything's hard to write. I had the last few pages, or maybe the whole last chapter. I guess I had the idea, the disputations, the ethical arguments that take place between Yossarian and Major Danby. I

knew all that; and I had the knife come down and he jumped and so on. But getting to that was very hard. In fact, it was one of the few times I went ahead. Now maybe two or three chapters before that last one, I just could not proceed. So I skipped two chapters, because in terms of the outline I knew what chapters I had left to do. And my mind worked, so I went ahead. And then I went back to the other two.

**Since CATCH-22 doesn't follow a conventional narrative line, did you have trouble selling it to a publisher?**

No. And I keep running into people who have heard or read about how hard it was for me. Somebody at UCLA was telling his students that the reason it was called CATCH-22 was because it had been rejected twenty-one times. What happened was that I wrote the first chapter of the book and by that time I had a literary agent. There were publications — it was possible to publish chapters of your novel then and I gave it to him and that's what we did. It appeared about a year later, NEW WORLD WRITING #7. That must have been 1955. And then I received letters from editors of about five book publishing companies saying they'd read that chapter and they'd like to see more. I had about two-hundred-and-fifty pages typewritten and I gave that to the agent and he sent that to the publishers.

Simon & Schuster gave me a publishing contract. So I had no trouble getting it published and I knew as I was writing that in all probability it would be published. And that's one of the reasons I could spend so much time on it. I knew I had a publisher who thought it was going to be an important book and he didn't give me a lot of deadlines.

**But isn't it true that by 1960 you were getting pressure from Simon & Schuster to finish the manuscript?**

No. There was no pressure whatsoever. I missed the deadline by maybe two or three years and they never bothered me. And one reason for that — you see, I fell into the habit early: whenever I completed a section, I would send it to the editor so he knew I was writing.

The advance was very small in terms of a publishing contract. It was fifteen-hundred dollars. Seven-fifty on signing; seven-fifty upon completion. And since I was working in advertising by day and doing pretty well financially, it wasn't the money that was important to me.

It might have been difficult to get it published. I was lucky. I mean, I had a good agent who knew a good editor at that time. And also, that was a time when literature was opening up.

**When was it finally published?**

It was published in 1961 and two or three years before that there were a spate of novels that appeared that were trying something new and were successes — widely read. GINGER MAN was one. ON THE ROAD was another one. Pynchon's V was being written. It came out a year after CATCH-22.

For some reason I can't define there were all these novels being published and read. Bob Dylan was writing lyrics that were not — I just knew the time was right.

The problem since then for people with novels they've written is that they're told, 'this is too much like CATCH-22, even though the war's a different one.' Or, 'it's too much like what Kurt Vonnegut's done, even though the quality of the novel might be better.' There's no need for another CATCH-22 or there's no need for another GRAVITY'S RAINBOW.

**When did CATCH-22 become a best-seller?**

CATCH-22 wasn't a success in hardcover, of course, not a big success, and if it was published today it would probably have a hard time getting into paperback. Even then I think I only got thirty-thousand dollars. It was very small. I got the offer right after it received a very good review in NEWSWEEK in 1962. Thirty-thousand dollars wasn't such a big price to pay for paperback.

But I was lucky. It wasn't really a huge financial success until it was out of hardcover. But at that time a paperback company could take a chance and offer between sixteen and thirty-thousand dollars. It's harder to get books published now than it was in 1958 and 1961, because of financial conditions. Paperback companies back then would almost definitely buy the rights to any book, regardless of whether it was best-seller or not. But now, they'll only publish commercial novels or books that were best-sellers in hardcover. And that will be even more true five years from now. So, quality novels are likely to have a rougher time than I had with CATCH-22.

**How would you describe your writing?**

Well, I don't write realistic books. I write books out of the imagination. When I say 'realistic,' I don't mean I don't use reality. I'm saying realism as a way of describing an approach, because certainly I try to deal with reality.

The idea's what's important to me. The content. But not so much, oh, 'characterization,' as it might be for another method. I don't characterize very fully. And I'm always amazed when people come up

to me and mention one of my characters and say, I know that fellow, or That character's my roommate, or My roommate is Milo Minderbinder. If you start examining one of my novels and compare them with conventional literature, you'll see that they're really not three-dimensional characters. They have a couple of eccentricities of speech or behavior and that's pretty much all they have.

CATCH-22: I have no idea who Yossarian is. I don't know what city he's from, I don't know if he went to college, I don't know if his parents are alive, I don't know what they were like, I don't know if he had any brothers, had any sisters, I don't even know what his face looks like. None of that information is given to you, and yet nobody seems to realize that. They seem to have a picture of him.

**But your characters are drawn broadly enough so that readers can project an image onto them.**

Well sure, yes. I could have done more with — Colonel Cathcart is one, and Chaplain Tappman is another that's more fully described in the book. And they're not too bad. In the second book, SOMETHING HAPPENED, you get an awful lot about Bob Slocum. And this new one, GOD KNOWS, is also a first-person monologue. But what you get is not so much what they look like or where they come from, but what preys on their mind, the relative way they think about things. But as for creating a biography of each character, you know, what they were like as children and so forth, well, I don't know. I'd say, Your guess is as good as mine.

I just become used to them as I write. And so long as it makes for credible and consistent behavior, then I'm satisfied.

But don't imitate me. You have to have a mind as twisted as mine to write like this.

**Do you think you've already written your best book?**

I don't know. I don't know how to answer something like that. If you mean do I think the book I'll write next will be better than the earlier ones, it's hard to think in those terms. A book like SOMETHING HAPPENED was a much more difficult book for me to do than any of the others, more dangerous, you might say: to write a book where virtually nothing happens yet still try to hold the reader's attention. That's harder to write than GOOD AS GOLD, where a lot depends on humor — because humor for me is easy.

CATCH-22 was easy — easier. It was a satire and most of the objects of satire — it's actually a very conventional book in terms of morality, I see now. But at the time I thought I was writing a very

iconoclastic book that made fun of all these sacrosanct things; but in terms of its morality, it's fairly safe.

Look, I guess I don't know what a 'best book' is. There are so many different types of literature, and all of them valid. Plays, novels, and all of them trying to make a point about their society. Tolstoy was an example of that, Proust, Baudelaire, Shakespeare. None of Shakespeare's plays are about his own time, though. We really know nothing about Elizabethan society in terms of what we see in the plays.

**It seems to me that the real test of prose style is that any sentence of a good novel should be unique and distinct from any other sentence anyone else has ever written. I know that's a hard test, but among the people who come to mind who'd pass it would be Hemingway, John Cheever in his late stories and novels, Richard Brautigan, Michael Herr in DISPATCHES, his recent book on Vietnam, Tom Wolfe and THE ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST. One sentence in any of these books immediately identifies the author. Do you think your own works would pass the test?**

No, they wouldn't. And I also don't believe that you really mean what you're saying to the extent that you're saying it. I can take many sentences out of Hemingway that could have been written by another writer. I can find sentences in Cheever that could have been written by Hemingway.

Certain books do rely heavily upon style, but language is only one part of that. Elements — attitude, values, a stance taken by the author, all that's part of it, too. You mentioned Hemingway and there's no better example of how important attitude can be. People recognize Hemingway by his values or attitudes as much as they would by his sentence style — which changed, by the way. The Hemingway sentence style is not the same Hemingway in FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS as it is in "Big Two-Hearted River."

I also have misgivings — it seems to me that language may be of less importance to the novel than we seem to think. Many good novelists are not necessarily good writers, and I think of myself as one of them. I don't think I'm as good with language, that I have the same facility, as John Cheever or John Updike. But Theodore Dreiser wasn't a master of language either. He'd be characterized as being very bad with prose. It's the character you read for in Dreiser, the drama. Eugene O'Neill —

To my mind there's not one novel in a dozen that can stand a test like that. You have to look at all the things about it, all the elements together. In some, language is very important. But if you're going to

single out one element, why language in the first place? Why not say the most important thing in Hemingway is what he left out? What Hemingway leaves out would be enough to make dozens of novels. In Updike, the Rabbit books, there's still an interest in prose, but there's an emphasis too on character and character development. In CATCH-22, my attitude toward the subject, the government, might be the most important thing. I don't know: that's hard for me to judge. But things like vocabulary, and chronology and so forth are really only important insofar as they make that attitude clear.

A better test might be what's special about a novel, what makes it most difficult to imitate.

I'm disagreeing with you, but I'm not criticizing. We all have our ideas of what a novel should be and how to judge one, what we like to read. And there are remarkable novels by fine prose stylists: Proust, Joyce, Mann.

But they're not very easy. You're not watching a TV show. There's something very special in them, but they're slow and they take a certain amount of commitment. I'd always preferred a more rapidly moving book. You know I could not enjoy reading Dickens until I was fifty or fifty-five. The same thing with Jane Austen. Now they're two of my favorite authors. And Mann. He has an enormous mentality, and the Germans will tell you he's a very humorous writer. That's right. They think he's funny.

No, I just can't agree with you. In fact, I think what you've said about Hemingway is one of the things that made people tire of him.

**Do you teach writing or give writing workshops?**

I did teach writing. I wasn't very good at it. I taught writing at City College in New York for four years, but I didn't like it very much.

When I was at Berkeley for one week at a writer's conference — but that wasn't really 'teaching' fiction writing: I had submitted to me in advance the work of the students assigned to me.

The big advantage to me of taking a creative writing course in college is that it will encourage you to write. I mean it lends the same credibility to the writing of fiction as to any other subject you might take. And too it establishes an atmosphere in which you can develop, and which you can find a place for airing your work.

As for workshops, I don't think I know what a workshop is supposed to be. I mean, I know people go to workshops at Breadloaf or someplace — I don't know how long they last, but my feeling is that if they don't last three weeks the benefits from them aren't very much.

**Do you find writing a chore?**

It's not easy. But it's exciting, it's stimulating. If it were easy I wouldn't want to do it. I could probably write a television situation comedy very easily. I could probably write movie scripts very easily. But because it would be so easy, after a while I wouldn't be able to do it very well at all. For the first year or two I'd probably be very good at any of them. But it wouldn't engage my interest because it's too easy.

A chore? I write novels because novels are my choice. It's stimulating: that's what I want to do. But it's hard, it's irritating, it makes you unpleasant, it makes it hard to be with people and hard for people to be with you. Particularly me. I can be sitting with somebody and there'll be a lull and I'll start thinking about my book and suddenly I'll be impatient to get the conversation over with. And the person has no way of knowing that's what's just happened; that I've gone back to work in my head.

But I write novels because I want to. I mean, I think people can enjoy their work and still take their work seriously. But they can only take it seriously if it isn't easy.

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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