

Spring 1988

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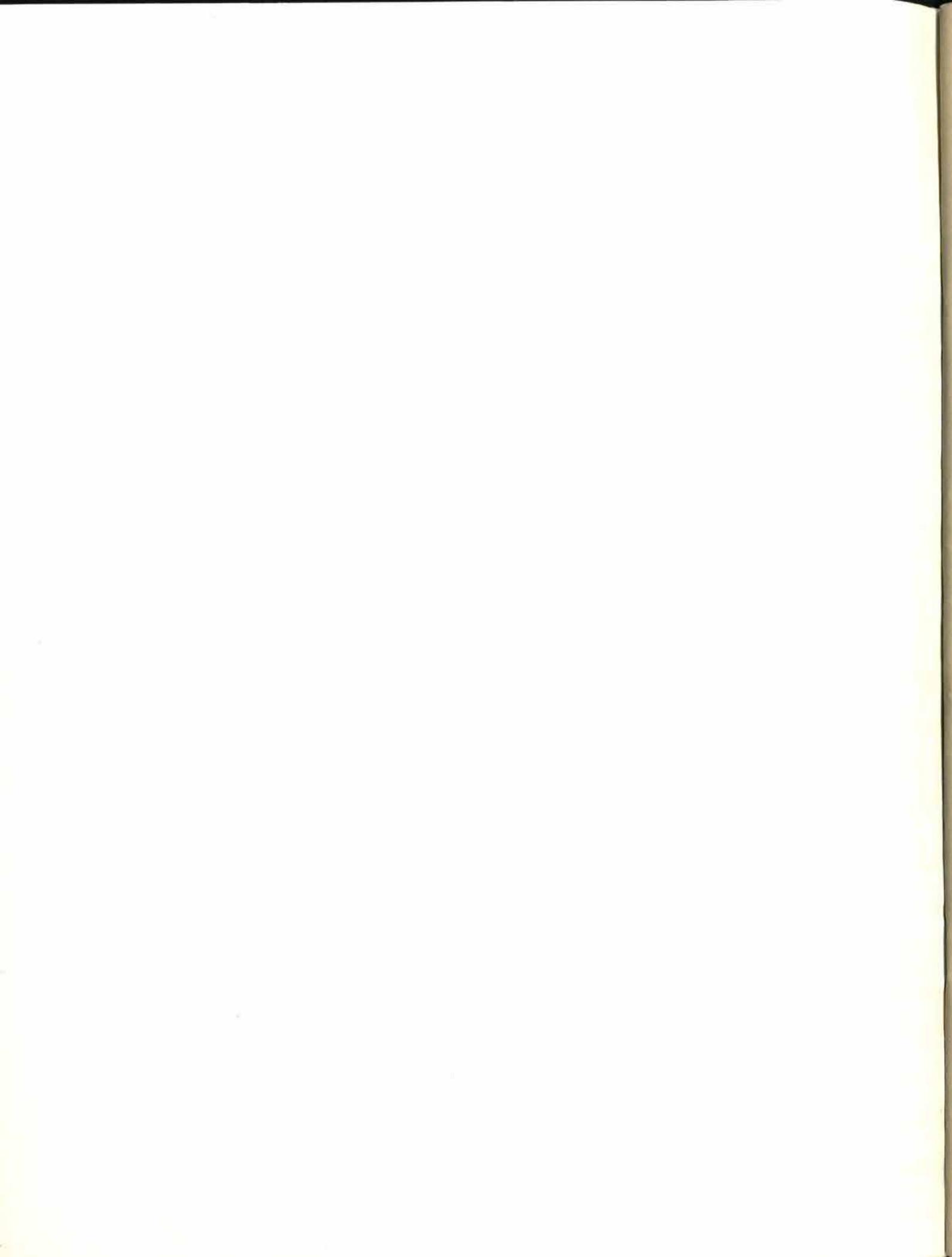
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SPRING 1988

THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY LITERARY MAGAZINE

ET CETERA





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Cover and pages 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 17, 23, 26, 28, 30, 49, and 50 **Hank Orr**

Pages 36, 37, and 38 **Nora Mosrie**

P R I Z E S

Fiction

FIRST PLACE

In a Single Shape Pamela Steed Hill

HONORABLE MENTION -

The Morning the Roaches Left Michael K. Hull

Poetry

FIRST PLACE

Sylvia Timothy M. Wellman

SECOND PLACE

Archaeologists on the Farm Where My Mother Was Born

Timothy L. Wellman

THIRD PLACE

Mary, Playing Spin the Globe Timothy L. Wellman

HONORABLE MENTION

Untitled Rory L. Perry

My Father's Chicago James A. McCoy

Ask Not What Danny Cantrell

The Serious Bitch at the Back of the Chapel Dawn Johnson

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co-operation and technical assistance. Flowers and accolades to the saints who proofread - to anyone who didn't have to help but did. •

Mary Sansom

WE DON'T GET THE DAILY newspaper at our house, or even the Sunday paper with the comics, not because we live so far out in the sticks that the mail carrier can't get to us, but because my mother would rather read her hometown newspaper. Every month she visits her mother in Beckley, and though she would like to stay, she can only take some of it away: a loaf of homemade bread and a bagful of rolled up newspapers that her brother Sam has saved.

She reads the paper in the morning before we get up to get ready for school. If I wake up before the alarm clock wakes me, I can hear her in the living room sipping coffee and shifting papers, occasionally repeating a name she has recognized. In the evenings, she drinks tea and eats grandma's bread while she works the crossword puzzle and the acrostic.

Sometimes she will insist that my sisters and I read a particularly relevant Dear Abby, such as Anorexia Nervosa or TeenageSex, or knowing how we have learned to hate that stupid bitch, she will cut out a column and insidiously place it on a cluttered dresser top, where a month later, we will find it and read, "Dear Abby, my daughter...but she just won't listen to me. Just call me **Helpless in Harmonia.**"

She keeps up with the engagements and marriages and divorces of the sons and daughters of people she once knew in a town four counties away. Most of the people who die there mean nothing to my sisters and me, but my mother has a map in

her head of how the city used to be, and every building that is torn down, every neighbor, and friend, and relative who dies means there is less and less there for her. We have met some of these people in stories.

She and her friend, Joyce, used to walk from Mac Arthur to the Palace Theater in Beckley. Once grandma gave her enough money to ride the bus, but to save money she and Joyce walked instead. She remembers how cold it was walking up that hill past Hollywood School with the wind facing her.

Sometimes, by the way my mother cleans, I think she regrets that she followed by father to Wayne County. "If I had a match," she says, looking into dad's room, "I'd burn down this room. I'd strike a match and burn this whole house down. I'd burn down this whole holler, so I wouldn't have to be stuck up here away from everybody." Then she rips apart books we have never read and magazines we read and reread, and she burns them in the trashpile behind the house. She burns cutoff tee shirts which she considers indecent. She burns the old tennis shoes that we wear around the house because she is afraid we will wear them in public.

After she dumps the trash and sets a match to it, she lies down in dad's room and watches the fire out the window. Sometimes she falls asleep and her dreams alarm her. She dreams the fire she was supposed to be watching has been broken into a thousand pieces by the wind, that the pieces

are caught in the grass, and she can't put them out.

Whenever anything is missing, we are terrified. "Now, don't accuse me," she says, "I haven't burned anything, and I get blamed for everything," and then we find it later, or we never find it, so we're never sure. She always helps us look for missing things, even the things she burns secretly when we are gone, when we are sick, when we have forgotten about something we once wanted.

It is the same with diaries and letters. She once read my sister's diary right in front of me as though I wouldn't tell, and then I made the mistake of reading it so that I couldn't tell. It took me years to figure out that my sisters were traitors, and that my mother must be going behind my back and reading my letters and burning my things too.

One time she burned the journal I had kept for English class in the ninth grade. It was written in code and was devoted to Mr. X. My mother had been cleaning house with a match, and I couldn't find it. I asked her if she burned it, and she denied it. I ran out to the trashpile. The cover and edges had burned, and the ink had smeared in some places, but it was mostly saved. To deaden my fury, I took all her newspapers, and I burned every last one of them, except I saw to it that each one burned completely so that there was no reprieve.

Not too long ago, I dreamed that my mother burned all the books in my bookshelf. In my dream, I was wearing her

summer nightgown. I saw myself from the bedroom window. I was out near the trashpile, but there was none of the color, or heat, or sound associated with burning the trash. The air was clear, except for a few tendrils of smoke. My books had burned down flat and black, all except my blue *Norton Anthology of Poetry*.

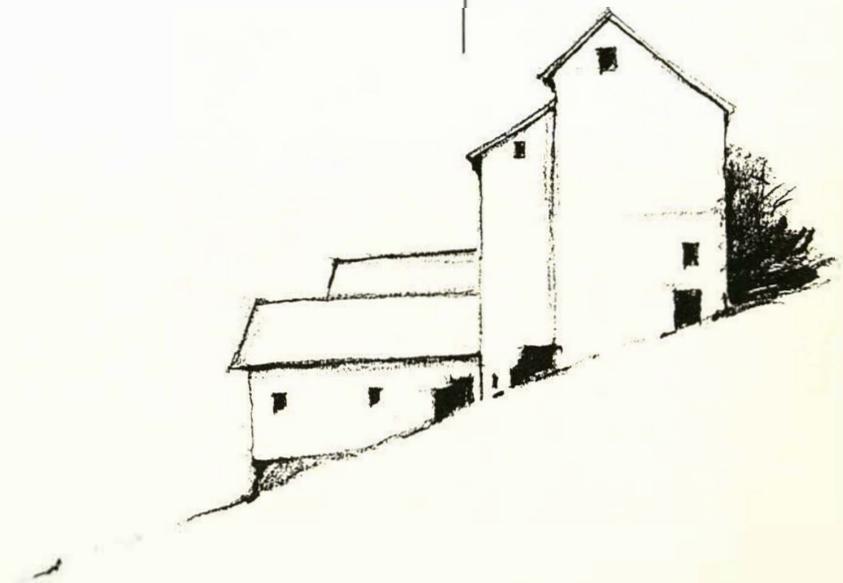
When I have a nightmare and try to speak or scream, the speech that is effortless when I am awake is impossible when I dream. I wanted to murder her because I could not speak. In my dream, I saw her

lying on the ground with her blue gown pulled up around her hips as though she had slipped before I could hit her, as though her back might be broken.

Then I felt her prodding my shoulder, "Mary, Mary, are you sick?" I could feel her bending over me in her flannel nightgown, the one with the safety pin fastened to the collar.

"I dreamed you burned my books," I said, and I felt her recoil. The darkness separated us. "I dreamed you burned my blue *Norton Anthology of Poetry*."

She seemed to think about it as though she were trying to catalog all the things she had ever burned. "Well, I didn't," she said, but I blamed her anyway. •





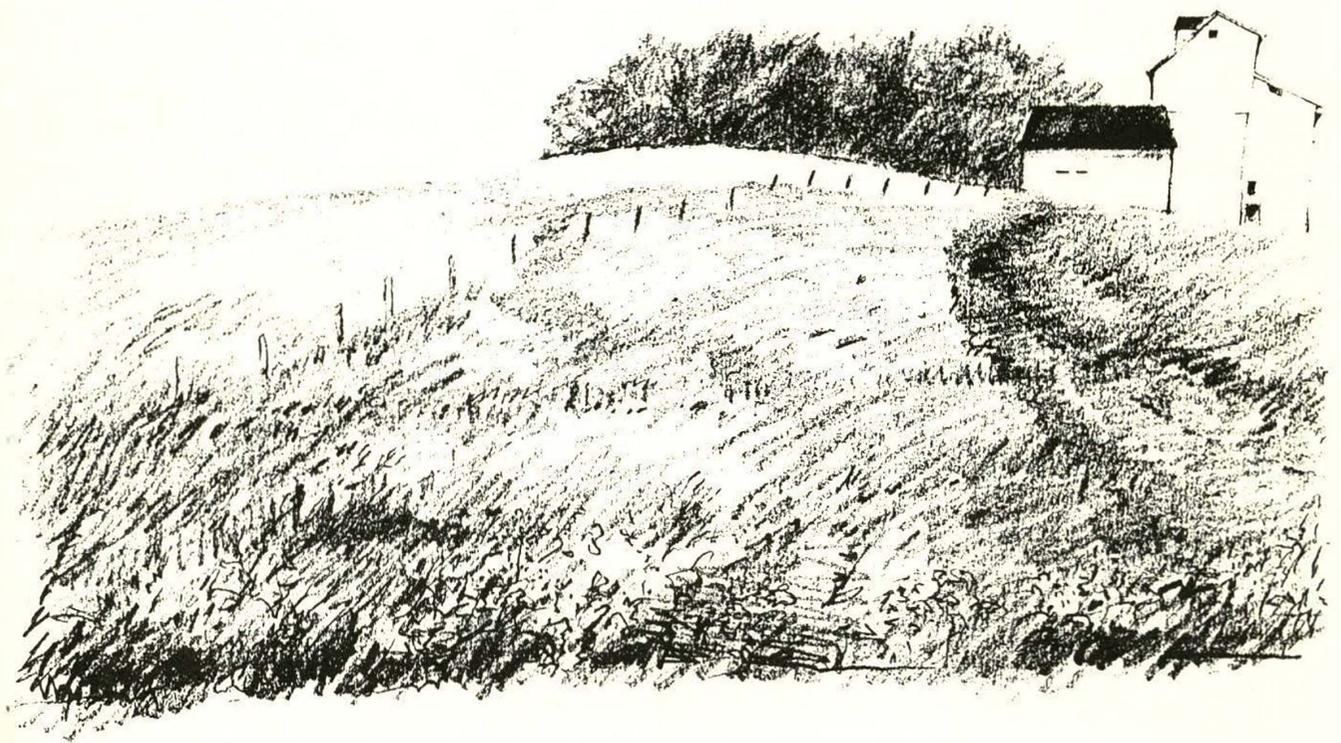
Mary, Playing Spin the Globe

Mary you should have known,
Once you make a choice
You're stuck with it.
Slap the world like a fat behind
And watch it spinning by;
Then touch your finger to the globe -
And there you are.

"This, this continent, this island,
This ocean, will be my paradise,
My marriage bed, my cup of tea."

O Mary don't play that game again;
It's just like growing up.
The spinning globe is a turning fan
And your finger is a life.

Timothy M Wellman



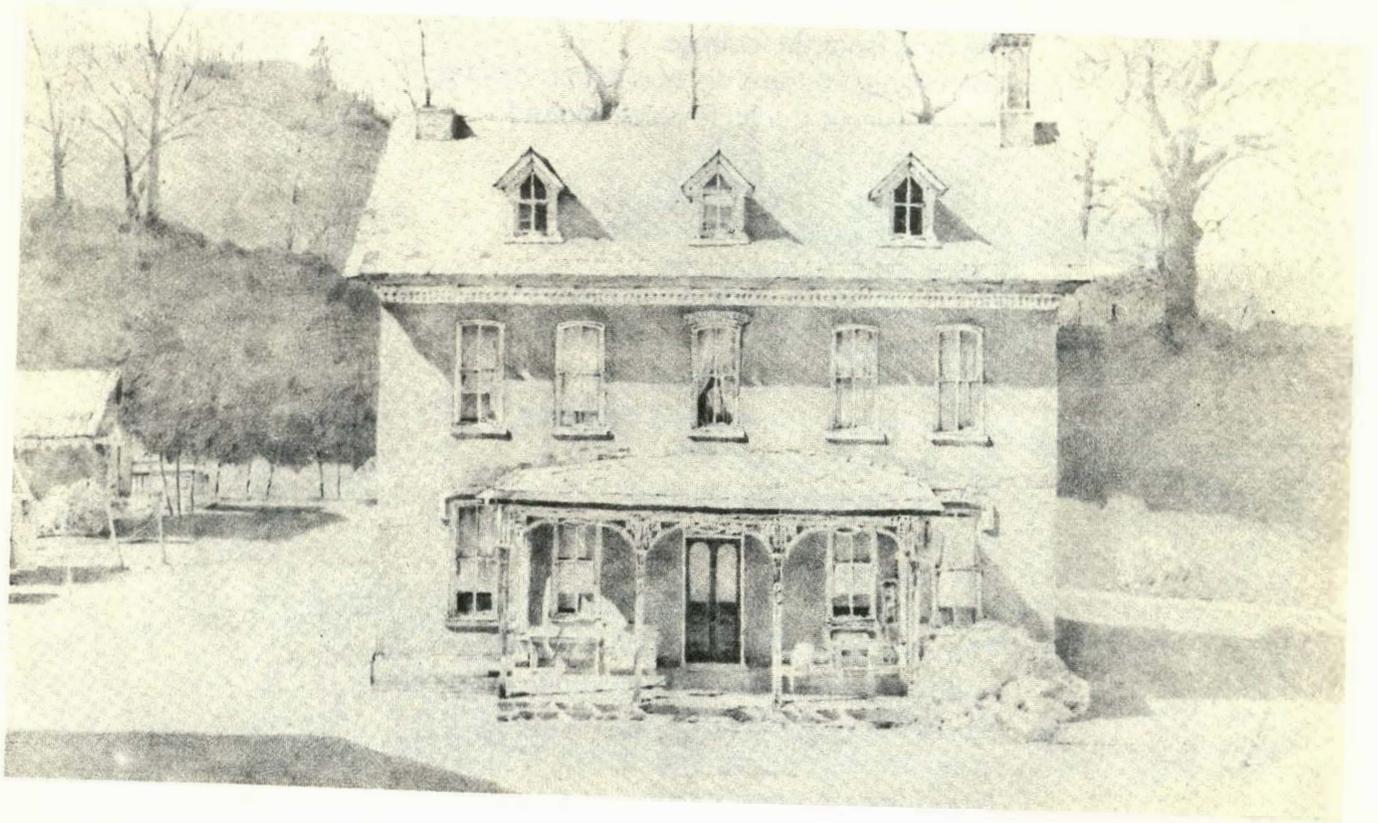
Hank Orr

Archaeologists
On the Farm Where My Mother Was Born

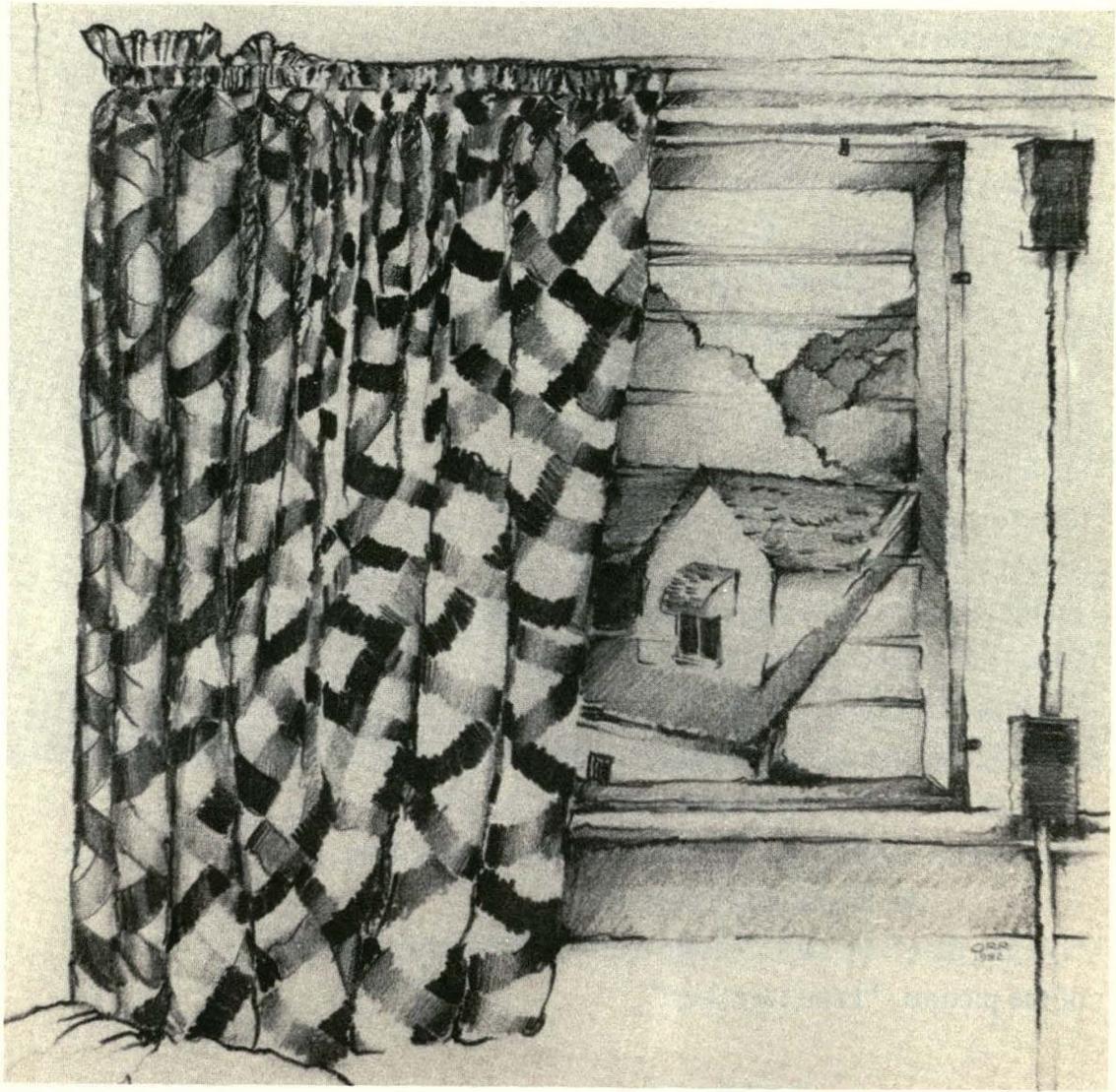
Above the rotting shack
And skeletal posts of an old barn,
The men from the college
Are digging up the lives of ancient indians.
They cross-cut the huge earth-mound
With picks and shovels,
Elated with the soft crunch
Of metal on bone
And the falling out of dirt
From priestly eye-sockets.
They stack all neatly into piles
Marked Femur, Rib, Skull, etc.
And a special pile marked Weapons,
But the weapons are soft ,
Almost embarrassingly civil
To the scientist's converted farming tools:
The warrior spirit
Quelled by the dry thirst for relics.
The ceremony of poking and scraping
Follows the sun's arc into evening -
Hundreds of years ago
They worshipped the sun here;
Now they are worshipped,
After folding themselves
Into the earth tomb;
The womb is reopened
Like a wound
And something must *always* be sacrificed.

At nightfall,
They pound their stakes
Into the earth's cold bleeding
As markers,
Like wooden crosses on a battlefield.

Timothy M. Wellman



Hank Orr



Hank Orr

Pamela Steed Hill

I'M FIFTEEN. My mother nails the curtains to the walls so that my father can't look at the neighbors, why would he want to? In my room, the curtains hang free, occasionally swaying in the breeze from the furnace vent, I don't even know the neighbors' names. Or what they look like. I like being in my room, it's safe here. At least I **think** it is, sometimes I get accused of doing things in here that I don't do, not very often anyway, and I worry if somebody's got the room bugged. Am I on film somewhere? Most of the time, time doesn't pass fast enough. I don't know what I'm in a hurry to get to but I'm counting on it being worth the wait. My mother spends her life waiting. Everyday she waits for daddy to come home from work so that she can accuse him of flirting with the women at the mill, he usually ignores her. I wish I could ignore her as well as he does but it's hard to ignore somebody who's your mother.

When I picture her, I always see her standing at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes and talking about how hard it is to cook for people who don't appreciate it. She stops sometimes and shakes the knife in my direction. You'll know what I mean one day, she tells me, and I get a whiff of her greasy fingers, they're always greasy and smell like onions or potatoes or bacon. I can never think of anything to say to her, so I just try to find an excuse to go back upstairs. To my room, I like it here. I usually pick up a bag of chips or cookies and tell her I have a lot of homework. It's a good excuse, and I don't think she really hears me anyway. Your daddy's the cause of this family's problems, I hear her say as I climb the stairs and wonder how many times she's made the family-problems speech. Sometimes I'd like to be my brother and tell her to shut up every once in awhile but I can never get the nerve to do it. Aaron's a man now, almost twenty, and he can say things like shut up and get off my back and don't tell me your problems, then threaten to pack up and move out if he gets any lip about it. I don't even own a suitcase. I wonder why she doesn't tell **him** to go ahead and pack up and get the hell out. Daddy doesn't say anything to him either but that's just because daddy doesn't say anything to anybody, not much anyway. A lot of times I stop in the doorway of my room and listen to the beginning of the speech. I can move my lips along with her voice and never miss a word. I don't hear any sounds from Aaron's room across the hall and think he must be in there with his headphones on, smoking a joint and not hearing anything but the music. And downstairs, mom is rinsing potatoes and saying they should've never let women start working in the mill. It's a comfortable afternoon. Everybody's in place. And when daddy gets home, he'll take his place behind the newspaper and everything will be right with the world. My world. I leave the bag of cookies at my brother's door and slip back into my own room. He'll want them more than I do, I say to myself, and close the door softly.

My walls are white and bare, I hate posters. There's not much furniture, I don't need it. I spend most of my time at my desk. It sits beneath the window, and when I sit there, I can look out across the creek that runs through our backyard, separating the lawn from the woods, or jungle as Aaron calls it, and pretend that there are all kinds of weird things going on out there that only I know about. I guess I spend hours, maybe days, sitting there staring out across the creek, picturing creatures and robots and psychopaths creeping through the trees and staring back at me, sometimes I really shiver. When I get too scared, I get up and walk around the room or polish my nails or open the door a couple of inches to hear mom downstairs rattling the pans and going on about women at the mill and women next door and me realizing she's right one day when I grow up. When she starts talking about me, I close the door and wonder how the hell she knew I was listening. I swear there's a camera in here somewhere. Most of the time I write down what I picture. I create monsters in the woods and put them in poems. Nobody ever reads them but me. Nobody even knows I write them, especially not my family. Once at dinner, daddy asked me if I wanted to go to college like my big brother planned to do and I said no. I want to be a poet, I told them all, and the burst of laughter that followed was more sincere than any I'd ever heard before. I know it was sincere enough to bring this sick feeling from my throat down to my stomach and shut me up forever. Now if anybody bothers to ask, I tell them I plan to go into genetic engineering. Nobody laughs anymore.

I've never been in the jungle. It's been there twenty yards away for fifteen years and I've never crossed the creek to get to it. I don't want to get to it. Aaron says he has plants growing in there somewhere and that he'll give me a couple if I help him tend to them. I don't want them and I don't help.

He says I'm chicken and I wonder if he means about the plants or the jungle. Mom says the kids next door play in there all the time and that their father goes hunting there during rabbit season. I have to bite my tongue to keep from asking her if she's been watching the neighbors and I wish to God daddy would speak up and ask her himself. But he doesn't say anything from behind his newspaper. I guess he's learned to not read and hear at the same time. The woods stretch out for acres and acres and I have no idea who owns all of it. I do know that on the other side, about a mile away, there's a hospital, an institution for disturbed people, as daddy calls them, mom just calls them crazies. Sometimes during the really bad fights when she's yelling about the woman next door undressing in the bathroom for him, I hear daddy throw down the newspaper and say he's had enough. That's about the only time he talks, when he's had enough. I'll send you across the woods, he tells her, raising his voice, you just wait, you'll end up over there. I'll-send-you-across-the-woods has become the family line for telling somebody they're disturbed. Or crazy. It's the line daddy always resorts to when mom reaches the part about the naked neighbor, and it gets her even angrier when he says it. You'll be going across the woods long before I do, she screams back at him, and then comes the muffled noise of fleshy contact. Sometimes my brother sticks his head out the door, catches me with mine out, and laughs. You'd better stop listening, he giggles, or I'll send you across the woods. I don't understand what he thinks is so funny. Go back in your room and do whatever it is little girls do in there, he says slyly and winks. I hate it when he winks, it makes me feel dirty. Are you high? I ask, because changing the subject is my only defense. What's it to you, he says, and closes the door, I can hear him laugh again. I just don't understand what's so funny.

Anyway, the jungle is there outside my window and I sit at my desk and pretend I'm out there even though I don't want to be. The afternoon is the best time for pretending because mom is in her routine, Aaron's stoned, and daddy's not home. I'm safe. I can always tell when daddy does get home because mom's voice changes. It's no longer the endless drone of one complaint after another, but a series of short, snappy one-liners and a much higher pitch. Shriill, I guess, it comes up through the vent when the heater's not on. I don't hear daddy's voice because he never uses it except when he's had enough from her or saying hello or goodbye to me. He has a tired voice, soft and not very strong, like it's always about to fade away before you hear what he's trying to say. I think I resent his voice for its weakness as much as I despise my mother's for its shrill.

The words don't seem to want to come today. I stare at the blank page in the notebook and think maybe I'd be better off watching tv. Outside, daylight is holding its own. The shadows are just beginning to fall across the yard, leaving most of the woods and the creek already dim. I give it one last shot, stare out into the fading light and wait for my imagination to move. It doesn't. But something does. Something among the trees shifts, a quick leap or an object falling, I can't tell. I strain my eyes to look for whatever or whoever moved but everything is still now. I wait, suddenly excited by the image of something strange happening. But nothing else happens. I know it was probably just an animal or even a branch falling but I want desperately to believe it was so much more. An escaped killer maybe, or a werewolf or the ghost of my dead grandpa. Between the images flashing through my head, I hear my mother's voice, quick and shrill. Daddy's home. Next I'll hear him coming up the stairs, stopping to tap on my door and say, how's my girl? then walking on to the bathroom without

waiting for an answer. I never answer anyway. After the bathroom door shuts, I close the curtains and go downstairs to set the table. It's about time your father got home, mom says as I reach around her for the dishes. He's half an hour late, why don't you ask **him** where he's been? I don't answer. I place the dishes on the table, catching a glimpse of my reflection in each one as I set it down. Sometimes I'm afraid I'll look at myself and see my mother so I don't look very often. Today my reflection is dim like the jungle, and I wonder which one is more frightening.

2.

What are you so scared of? Aaron asks, looking at me across the table. I look back at **him**, his red eyes and silly grin demanding an answer.

I'm not scared of anything, I announce, and mom snickers sarcastically.

Wait'll you grow up, she says, gulping down a mouthful of green beans, you'll see how much there is to be scared of.

Aaron giggles and dribbles iced tea down his chin. The rest of us pretend not to notice the stuffy smell of smoke that clings to his hair and clothes. What do you **think**, dad? he asks, wiping his chin, don't you think sis looks scared?

Leave your sister alone, daddy says softly, not looking up from his plate. I glance at **him**, he looks worried. Or maybe he's the one who looks scared, in this family there's not much difference between the two. I don't like watching **him** for very long. His face makes me sad because it's always either wrinkled or blank depending upon whether he's listening or not listening to the voices around **him**. He must be listening

now, his forehead is **full** of lines.

Who did you work with today? mom asks **him**. It's her prelude to the dinnertime fight.

Same people I always work with, daddy says quietly, still not looking up.

They haven't stuck a woman on your crew yet?

No.

I'm sure you'll tell me when they do.

Mom chews on her sarcasm the way she does a piece of tough steak, long and hard and with a bitter determination to make it last as long as possible. I don't know if her remarks cut into daddy the way they do me, his expression doesn't give anything away. Sometimes I see his eye twitch when her tongue makes an especially loud click against her teeth, and I wonder if it's a sign of his nerves getting worked up. She pauses a moment to shove in a forkful of mashed potatoes, and, when she raises her hand, I catch a glimpse of her oily fingers, short and still oniony. On the other side of the table, daddy's hands are **dry** and bony. They don't smell like anything, not even the mill odors get through his skin. I think he must have conditioned his hide against smells the way he trained his ears against noises. Especially mom's noises. With a fork in one hand and a knife in the other, she halts over her piece of meat and stares at the top of daddy's head. Her voice gets higher.

You're probably the only man down there who's not mad about those damn women taking over the men's jobs. As long as you get your eyes full, what do you care?

Aaron catches my attention and winks. He raises an empty spoon to his eye and pretends to poke it in. It's his getting-his-eye-full routine and it used to make me laugh. Now it makes me give **him** a cold this-isn't-funny look and he grins at my frown.

Do you ever hear your daddy get up in the middle of the night? mom asks, looking at me and cutting into the steak. I don't say

anything but I feel my face get hot. I hate being singled out and asked direct questions, it's embarrassing. Why the hell doesn't she ever throw these questions at Aaron? Because he told her to shut up, probably. I wish I could say shut up. She doesn't expect me to answer anyway and goes on talking when she's sure I won't.

He gets up in the middle of the night, she says, whether you kids know it or not. I guess he thinks that woman next door will be up too. Somebody had better tell her to draw the curtains before she gets into trouble.

I hear daddy sigh heavily and for the first time this evening he looks up and directly across the table. You'd better keep your sick accusations to yourself, he says softly, and I want to scream, speak up, for God's sake!

Who are you calling sick? she asks, the pitch going up. Here we go.

You, that's who. You and your filthy mind.

Filthy? You'd better **think** about who's got the filthy mind in this family, mister.

Aaron points his fork at me and mouths, is it you? but neither mom nor daddy notice. I send **him** another cold glare and he shakes his head, still grinning.

Why can't this family eat in peace for once? daddy asks, glancing around the table for support. He doesn't get any.

Because of you, that's why, mom tells **him** and slams her fork down in her plate. A green bean flops off and rolls toward my plate. I don't dare touch it or look at it or even pretend that it's there. Aaron raises his napkin to his mouth, I know he's laughing behind it.

If you weren't such a sneak, mom goes on, we wouldn't have these problems. It's all your fault. Her voice is loud now, I'm starting to wince.

That's enough, daddy tells her, I don't want to hear anymore.

I don't give a damn what you want to

hear, you're going to hear this anyway. Are you going to say that you didn't move that living room curtain on the side window? I can tell it's been touched.

I've had enough, daddy says, slamming his own fork down. They've got places for people like you.

I can't help glancing at Aaron. We used to make secret bets on who would say across-the-woods first, but it's been a long time. My brother's eager expression tells me he wants to play again, and in a split second, he darts his eyes toward daddy. Aaron's betting on daddy. I consent. My eyes roll toward mom, and Aaron nods. The bet is on.

They've got places for people like you too, mom shouts back. Peeping Toms go to prison.

I'll not be called names in front of my children, daddy roars, and Aaron's eyes look like they're watching a tennis match. I guess mine do too.

Your children know what you are, she tells him, lowering her voice to make it sound more bitter. Whether they say anything or not, they know what you are.

This is the part I hate the most, when she starts telling daddy what I know. She doesn't know what I know, damn it, she doesn't even know what I **think**. Sometimes I hate her for thinking she knows me, but I hate myself even more for not screaming back that it's all a lie, that's not me, that's not what I know.

I said I don't want to hear anymore and I mean it. Daddy's voice grows louder with each word, a full-fledged shout now.

And I said I don't care what you want, mom screams, determined to take this one to the limit.

I'm not going to take this much longer, lady. Do you hear me? I'm going to have you put away.

Aaron's eyebrows raise in anticipation. I can hear him thinking, say it, say it, sending

out his thought-si_gnals in daddy's direction. He wants to win.

If anybody gets put away, mom's voice is getting shrill again, it'll be you. You just wait, you'll end up across...

No, you just wait, daddy interrupts. You'll be the one to end up across the woods.

Aaron raises his glass in a silent toast to himself and grins triumphantly at me. That's not fair, I **think**, if mom hadn't been cut off...well, it's just not fair. I stew in my loss and daddy gets up from the table, slings his napkin down into his plate, and leaves the room. A few seconds later, I hear papers shuffling in the living room. Mom keeps talking, but her voice is back to its normal drone now. She knows she's scored a victory too.

I try to finish eating as quickly as possible. I know Aaron will corner me afterwards to gloat about his win and haggle over his reward. Usually, I have to buy him a new record or clean his room when mom yells for him to do it. Once, he had to promise to not wink at me for a week. I decide to skip dessert and clear my dishes and daddy's from the table. Only the green bean remains and I feel defiant enough to leave it. This is my stand, I tell myself. I don't clean up food thrown around in a stupid fight. I clear the pans from the stove and load the dishwasher while mom and Aaron slice the pie and dip the ice cream. My job done, I pull down the sleeves of my sweatshirt and tell her I'm going outside for awhile. How come? I hear Aaron ask, and I don't look at **him**. Because I want to, I say over my shoulder, and close the door behind me, the dark catching me off guard and making me wonder how come indeed.

For a minute, I think I'll go back inside, tell them it's too cold, but when I get to my spot, I'm okay. My spot is in a lawn chair beside the air conditioner unit that sets against the back wall of the house. The unit is bedded down in heavy plastic for the winter, but I keep my lawn chair out here at least until the first snow. In the summer when it's light until late in the evening, I sit in my chair for hours and write poetry that no one will ever read. If somebody comes out and asks me what I'm doing, I say I'm writing a letter. I have two friends who've moved away so it's a good excuse and nobody pursues it. I write in layers. That's what I call it because some poems hurt more than others. There are different degrees of pain in getting words down on paper, some drift there almost easily because they come from the head. My head poems rage, they're mostly about war. Or the president or food stamps or something like that. Some words are harder to get out because they come from the stomach and are about thin_gs that give me a queasy feeling, like when the house gets too quiet and nobody's fighting. Or when I'm lying on my bed with my jeans unzipped and somebody's footsteps come toward my door and I can't remember if I locked it, God, I hope I did. Most of my stomach poems are about men who teach me things I already know about but pretend I don't. The bottom layer is the hardest to get to, I don't try to reach it very often. It hurts a lot and I don't have a name for it because I can't pinpoint where it's coming from. The letters just hit the paper and form words and the words get scary sometimes. They make me see more than I want to see. About myself. They happen fast, the poems from the bottom. I don't read them until they're done. Sometimes when I read them,

I'm shocked. How could I lay myself open like that? What **if** somebody would find them and ask questions, or even worse, laugh? In my bottom layer poems, I talk about being shy. About wanting so badly to touch somebody or for somebody to touch me and being too afraid to let either happen. Too scared, too shy to walk up to someone and say, will you touch me? will you put your arms around me and hold me for awhile? will you feel me and not let go when I try to back away? It'll never happen. Nobody touches anybody around here. Nobody ever taught me how.

The lawn chair isn't that comfortable and I squirm a lot. But really I don't know **if** it's the chair or just the dark that makes me uneasy. Or maybe it's the jungle. The whole thing is a big black shape now, like a huge dark curtain just hanging there, not nailed down. I stare into it, daring it to scare me, determined to outlast its shadowed gaze. How long we stare at each other I don't know, but the jungle blinks first. A quick flashy movement somewhere straight ahead. Just a flicker of small round light that goes out as quickly as it comes. I sit up, startled. The woods never lose, I always move first, but not this time. The light flares again and now it doesn't disappear. It moves toward me and I want to run. I want to be in my room watching all this from my window. Now it moves a bit closer then shakes and goes out. I think I'm paralyzed. Another flash, closer still, and I can see a shape behind it. The outline of a man, I guess it's a man, the shoulders are wide and the hair short. He holds a match at arm's length in front of **him** and walks slowly, unsurely. I stand up and he stands still. He must see me, my own outline silhouetted in the **dim** light from the window above the air conditioner. Neither of us moves, he can't be more than five feet on the other side of the creek. The light goes out, there's the sound of shuffling, and

another one is struck. The next noise is a whisper, something I can't make out and I don't dare say, what? He says it again, a little louder this time. Are you a girl? the voice says, hey, are you a girl? A little of my fear is lost in confusion. That's a stupid thing to ask, who is this guy anyway? I don't answer **him** and he moves a little closer to the creek. When the match goes out this time, he doesn't light another one. But he whispers again, louder still and a bit more

urgent. Hey, I said are you a girl?

Yes, I hear myself whisper back, and I'm startled by my own voice.

That's nice, he says, sounding very sincere, like being a girl really is a very nice thing to be. Come down to the creek, I hear **him** whisper a little softer. I'll light your way, he says, and strikes another match. I see **him** standing there holding out the light for me and waiting. Why the hell am I moving toward him? All of a

Reunion

*It rained on the day
of the picnic*

It didn't matter

*I sat in the corner
rocking*

*and listened to the rain
and listened to the talk*

It gave me a chill

*the soggy spare ribs
the outdated music
and the laughter of old friends
together again*

Francie Anderson

sudden it seems so normal, the natural thing to do. Someone says come here and I go.

I stop a couple of feet short of the creek. His match goes out again and he doesn't pull out another one. We strain to see one another in the faint blend of lights from the house and the half-moon and the streetlight a block away. He's not too old, probably around Aaron's age, and has thin cheeks that sink in around his mouth. His short hair looks very blonde, almost white, and is cut unevenly across his forehead. He's not handsome, not ugly, he just looks blank. I can't make out the color of his eyes but for some reason I think they're gray.

Yes, you are a girl, aren't you? he says softly, and seems to smile.

Who are you? I ask, sounding rather silly. He looks as though it's a silly question.

Timmy, he says, like that sums everything up.

Where are you from?

Nowhere. I don't know, where are you from?

Right here.

You're pretty.

I blush. Nobody's ever said that to me before. Daddy used to call me his little doll when I was a kid but that was centuries ago and now I flinch at affectionate words. I look down into the creek and hear the strange boy laugh lightly.

What's the matter? he asks innocently, don't you think you're pretty?

No. What are you doing here? I ask him, wanting to change the subject.

Hiding.

Who from?

The people looking for me.

Who are they?

Can you keep a secret?

Sure, I guess.

Iran away. From over there, on the other side of the woods.

Across the woods? God, I think, is this a conspiracy?

Yea, you know, the hospital.

Why did you run away?

They think I'm sick. Do you think I'm sick?

Timmy's eyes grow wide and blink rapidly. He looks scary all of a sudden and I don't like the way his mouth is set. It's fixed, too rigid, too hard. He stares at me, waiting for an answer.

I don't know you, I say, trying to be diplomatic. Do you feel alright?

I got away, you know, he says quickly, ignoring my question. He sounds like an excited little boy with a big secret. That's right, he goes on, I got away because I'm smart.

How did you do it? I ask, not sure I want an answer.

I can't tell you. But I brought matches with me, see?

Timmy fumbles for another match and strikes it against the side of the box. The fire flares quickly and he stretches it across the creek toward me. Take it, he says, and I automatically reach for it. Over the small stream of water, our fingers brush against each other and his skin feels warm. Even in the cold night air, his skin feels warm. I take the lighted match from him and hold it low and close to me. His eyes soften and I see him smile again.

You're cold, he says. What's your name?

Danni.

Danni? Were you supposed to be a boy?

No, it's short for...

I don't think I was supposed to be a boy. I don't think I was supposed to be anything.

Where do you stay?

Out there. It's soft under the trees.

But it's cold.

Not all the time.

Haven't they looked for you in the woods?

Sure, but I wasn't there then. I'm here now and they're looking somewhere else. See, I'm smarter than they are. Danni?

Yeah?

How old are you?

Fifteen. Well, almost sixteen.

Do you have a lover?

Uh, no.

I did. Once. Do you know what it's like?

What what's like?

You know. To do it. You look soft.

I blush again. But this time the blood coming up is met by a shiver going down. I drop the burned-out match, tug on my sleeves, and try to cover my hands with the cuffs. Slowly I fold my arms across my breasts, the cold suddenly seems deeper. I don't want him to think I'm soft. I have visions of my mother peeking through the slit in the nailed curtain and later accusing me of meeting a boy in the woods for God only knows what reason. She'll call me dirty, tell me nice girls don't meet boys in the woods, and warn me that I just might grow up like my father. Timmy looks puzzled.

I've done it before, he says quietly, and I can't look up at him. It's no big deal, he says with confidence, sounding suddenly nonchalant. The changes in his voice are starting to really bug me. So, do you know what it's like? he asks again.

No, I tell him. Let's talk about something else.

How come? Don't you like to talk about warm things? That's why the cold doesn't bother me, you see. I always think about warm things. And soft things. Like you.

Don't say that.

Why not? You're soft, aren't you? All girls are soft. I wish I were a girl so that I could be warm and soft like you.

This is getting too weird. I don't want him to be weird, I want him to be sweet. Timmy is somebody I want to shape. Now I know why he looked so blank to me, it's because



he's like clay. Or mud. Or something plain and formless waiting to be given a certain look. I think I want Timmy to look safe. Unafraid. I want him to read the Sunday paper and smoke a pipe and tell me he did what he had to do. I want him to be relaxed and confident and say gentle words in a soft voice. I want him to touch me.

I think I saw you earlier today, I tell him. From the window in my room. I thought I saw something move out here. Was it you?

Maybe. Do you have a room by yourself?

Yeah.

What do you do in there? By yourself?

Oh brother, I get it now, this guy's working for mom. She sends him around to spy on me, he's her camera. She wants to find out if I do the same things in my room that the neighbor woman does for daddy. She can't fool me.

Hey, did you hear what I said? Timmy asks. What do you do in your room?

What's anybody do? I answer, trying to sound annoyed. I watch tv or study or

whatever. Nothing special.

I wish I had my own room so that I could do nothing special in it.

He sounds sincere and I'm tempted to believe that maybe he's not a spy. Maybe he really wants to know what I like to do when I'm alone. Come to think of it, nobody else has even bothered to seriously ask. Only Aaron, and he can't ask without winking. I decide to test Timmy for his sincerity. He'll probably laugh.

Sometimes when I'm in my room, I tell him, I write things. Poems and stuff. I watch his lips closely to see them crack into a grin, but they don't. Instead, he moves closer to his side of the creek and stares directly at me.

Do you really? he asks. I mean, do you really write poems?

Yeah, sure.

That's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

It is?

Yes.

Why?

Because it means you're a special person.

It does?

Yes, only special people write poems.

Really?

Really.

You don't think it's funny? Or stupid or anything?

No. Why would I think that?

I don't know. I guess it's what a lot of people think. I'm glad you don't.

Of course I don't. I'm smart, remember?

Yes, I remember.

Suddenly I do believe that he's smart. I'm glad he's not a madman or a werewolf or a ghost. I'm glad he thinks I'm special. Timmy is shaping up very nicely. I think he's the only person who's come into my life without a pre-cast mold. But I'm not sure who the sculptor is anymore, I don't think it's me. I can see the image of my mother's fingers, slick and smelly, wrap-

ping around my brain, twisting and kneading, punching in and pulling off the bad parts, my self-esteem makes a soft plop against the floor. I feel daddy's brittle touch, my thoughts being turned over and over in **his** hard fingers, not squeezing too tightly, not wanting to damage the goods. I wonder if Aaron's head feels doughy. Timmy's hands are damp with the freshness of **his** own clay. I think he must be shaping himself. Each change in his voice, each shift in **his** eyes is only a step in becoming something else. Maybe something whole. But not so whole that it becomes set or unchangeable. Timmy must have a million different shapes and he's showing me as many as he can. I think I'll invent a new layer just for him. Finger poems, that's what I'll call them, and they won't be hard to reach. They'll be loose and unmolded and incomplete. I won't finish any of them.

How come you got so quiet? Timmy asks suddenly, and I wonder how long I've been staring down into the dim water.

I don't know, I tell him. I guess I was just thinking.

About what?

Lots of things. Why were you over there, Timmy?

Over where?

You know. Across the woods.

Oh.

Don't you want to tell me?

I don't have anything to hide, he says quickly, and I'm not sick either. His voice and eyes shift rapidly, both growing thin and faint. I want to tell him that I don't like this shape, to change it back into something gentle, something easy to look at, but the words never come. A noise from the house comes, and I hear the screen door opening. Timmy glances past me and starts backing away. I feel a desperate urge to jump the creek and grab him. To pull **him** down into

Respirator Time

In my body-tomb

I can neither move nor speak nor breathe.

Miles of lines and tubes sustain my life

that is measured not by hours or days

but by the eight second swish and click

of the machine that mocks my stillness.

Eight breaths a minute and so

I live suspended by the passing of

five, six, seven...finally

there is that sound

the center-of-my-world sound

the eight-second air sound

and the strained senses relax

for just that brief inspiration

knowing I have made it

just eight seconds more.

Susan Fultz

the weeds and hide there with **him** until the intruder goes away. But I don't jump. I watch him duck away into the black air and I call after **him**, will you come back? There's no answer, only the noise of leaves crackling and growing more distant.

Danni? It's my mother's voice drifting down to the creek from the carport. Danni, come on in, it's too cold to stay out there. What are you doing?

Nothing, I call to her, trying to sound bored. I'm coming.

Well, hurry up. I don't know what you think you're doing out there in the dark.

I walk slowly back to the house, listening constantly for a sound from the woods but none comes. My mother stands in the kitchen doorway, eyeing me suspiciously as I brush past her and head toward the hallway. You're getting to be as strange as you daddy, she calls after me, and I start up the stairs, thinking how nice it feels to be strange.

4

In bed I lie awake and wonder if Timmy feels out of sorts. Different or like a misfit, does he feel wonderfully odd? I picture him curled up against the trunk of an almost-bare tree, huddled there like an orphan, dreamful and so alive. He probably smiles in his sleep. For a moment, I pretend I'm out there with him, but the image is blurry and won't hold still. I don't fit in. I can't imagine myself among the weeds and the rabbits and the darkness. I'd probably get a rash or eat poisoned mushrooms or fall into a bear trap, are there bears in the jungle? Timmy would find me amusing for a couple of hours then tire of my complaints and send me home. We would be in two worlds, mine swallowed up in a single shape and his like a revolving door of faces and voices. I can't keep my image in the woods for very long, it's scary. Nature bugs me, I roll over, punch my pillow a couple of times, and try to decide exactly where I do fit in.

A lot of time goes by, maybe an hour, and I still haven't found my purpose in the world. It's a matter of life and death that I discover it before morning or else I may go crazy. Or become disturbed, as daddy would say, he doesn't like to be impolite. U I went crazy, I wouldn't exist anymore but somebody else would and she may be more confused than I am. There is an urgency in this matter that I haven't realized until tonight. Timmy seems so sure of himself and he's crazy and I'm not sure about anything, what the hell does that make me? I turn onto my back and stare

up into nothing, the ceiling isn't even there, I can't make out any patterns. I give up, close my eyes, and somebody opens a door out in the hallway. Mom's and daddy's door, I'd know that squeak anywhere. I've heard it squeak late at night before but it never mattered too much. Tonight, everything matters. I listen carefully, hearing the floor creak, getting louder then passing, somebody's going downstairs. Silence again and my head is full of pictures. Daddy sneaking down to the living room, mom creeping behind him, holding a vase high over her head. Mom going down to ruffle the curtains, loosen a few nails, the perfect frame-up. Daddy walking in on her, caught you, he says, and pulls the trigger. I lie there, my eyes squeezed shut, listening for the horrible crack, almost lusting for it. Before I have time to realize that there isn't even a gun in the house, another sound comes, a sound too strange to identify from bed. It sounds like a dog howling but we don't have a dog and I get up. My ear against the door, I strain to hear the howl again but it's lower now, more like a moan. This is too much, I can't stand the suspense. I turn the knob quietly and open the door wide enough to get my head out. Across the hall, Aaron's door is closed, down the hall on the right, theirs is open. I cock my ear toward the stairs and wait. Not for long. All of a sudden there's the loud shatter of something glass hitting a wall, then a goddamn it, get out of my way! and a muffled sound, like something soft being jerked around. Somebody gets slapped and somebody's footsteps run from the living room into the kitchen, I can hear drawers being wrenched open and slammed shut. Stay the hell out of here! daddy shouts, and then more jerking noises, something's being pulled apart. Without any warning, Aaron in his underwear flings open his door and points to me, both hands shaped

like pistols. Caught you! he yells, and laughs loudly, he sounds hysterical. Be quiet, I whisper angrily, and he covers his mouth with his hands. What round are we in? he whispers back, motioning toward the stairs. I don't answer him. My ears go back to the lower level where a pounding has started, it feels like the walls are losing. This I gotta see, Aaron says, and darts out of his room and down the stairs. I watch him hop down in his shorts, landing on every other step like somebody dancing on hot coals and I wonder if he has yet found his purpose in the world. I told you kids he was sick, mom screams, and I feel like screaming back, where the fuck is that goddamn camera! Aaron is crouched on the stair landing, his hands clutching the banister, his face pressed between the wooden supports. I join him. What the hell, she knows we're watching anyway. On my knees beside my brother, I look down into the living room and don't know whether to laugh or cry. They look like something out of a slapstick movie, a comedy team, two of the Three Stooges at it again. Mom wields her hammer in one hand, scrambles for nails with the other, and daddy yanks furiously at the side window curtain, most of it is already ripped from the wall. With a major jerk, one section of the drapery falls to the floor and daddy leaps to the other side to begin pulling. Mom shakes the hammer in his face, calls him something I've never heard of, and grabs up the fallen curtain. She starts pounding it back into the wall. I feel Aaron quivering beside me and glance toward him. He's laughing so hard that no noise can come out, and I consider driving my elbow into his crotch. He catches my glance, winks, and says, shit, sis, this is better than Saturday Night Live.

I don't know how long the ripping and pounding keep up, but my legs go to sleep

and my knees hurt and Aaron gives up laughing. The re-nailed curtains look ridiculous, they hang lopsided and gape open in the middle, God, I hope the neighbors aren't up. Remembering the neighbors, I wonder what part they play in this little episode of Family in Trouble. What was daddy doing down here in the first place? Or was he the second one here? Was that woman next door really undressing in front of her window? Was daddy going to watch? A slow, sick feeling oozes down into my stomach and I wonder if all **this** will turn into a poem from the second layer. I think I'll call it *If I Had Hammer (I'd Fuck the Drapes)* but one part is not very original and the other part is too original and I **think** I'll let this one slide.

Daddy, thank God, is finally exhausted. He lets go of a piece of curtain and stands still, his head lowered, shoulders bent. All I can see is how pathetic he looks, I don't feel anything close to real sorrow. Mom continues hammering, softer now and slower, like a carpenter closing out an all-day job. I can almost hear her whistling. Daddy turns toward the stairs but doesn't look at either Aaron or me, he knows we're here. Maybe that's what scares **him** the most, that we're here but just as onlookers. All he's raised is a damn good audience. He passes by below us and goes into the kitchen. A chair rakes across the floor and I hear **him** sit down heavily, he probably holds his head in his hands. Aaron looks bored now, like somebody who watches a good show that's too long. He gets up, ruffles my hair, and walks slowly back up the stairs. I follow **him**, too uneasy to be alone. At the top of the stairs, I ask **him** if I can go into his room for awhile and he looks at me suspiciously. Gonna try to talk your way out of cleaning it up? he asks. No, I tell **him**, you won the bet and I'll clean your room. I just want to talk. He pushes open

his door, bows like a gallant gentleman in underwear, and says, enter.

His room smells like **him**, smoky and stale and sort of raw. He flops down into a bean bag beside the stereo and I sit on the edge of the bed. It's always unmade. On the walls hang posters of Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious and a centerfold of a woman whose face is blacked out. The centerfold hangs directly above Aaron's head and my eyes keep darting up there when I'm trying to look at **him**. He notices my uneasiness and laughs softly. What's the matter, sis? he asks. Haven't you ever seen one of those before?

Not in that position, I answer quickly, trying to sound cool and brave and ending up sounding dumb and small. He laughs again, not at my reply, but at me.

So what did you want to talk about? he asks.

I don't know. I guess I just wanted to talk. Wanna fire one up?

No. Can you wait till I leave? It makes me choke.

Okay.

Aaron, how come you **think** mom and daddy are so funny?

Did I say that?

You always laugh when they fight.

Beats crying.

I don't cry either. I used to, but not anymore.

So why not laugh?

Because it's really not funny. It's kind of scary.

Everybody in this family is scared of something.

What are you scared of?

Me? Oh, I guess the price of a half-bag going up.

Aaron grins but it's not a sincere grin, and I feel like telling **him** that I know he's lying. He's got to be scared of something else. But in my short life I've learned one

thing well, and that is not to pursue a question. Once it's answered, let it go. He twirls an unlit joint around in his fingers, his eyes watching it with anticipation. For a moment, his face seems alert, then sad and dull. The changes remind me of Timmy, and I wonder if he's asleep somewhere in the grass, his dreams lively and filled with shifting colors. Aaron lets the cigarette fall between his legs. He looks old sitting there in his shorts, I wish I could touch him.

Have you ever known anybody who was disturbed? I ask, and he looks up, puzzled.

Disturbed? he asks.

Crazy.

Oh. Yeah. Mom and dad. They're going across the woods one day.

No, Aaron, I'm serious.

So am I. Say, I wonder how come they never got around to yelling that at each other tonight. I knew there was something missing.

Do you think crazy people are smarter than... well, normal people?

What kind of stupid question is that? Crazy people aren't smart. They're just crazy.

But they have feelings too. Maybe more than we do.

You'd better watch it or I'll start wondering about *you*.

Sometimes I wish I were.

Were what?

Crazy.

Boy, you *are* crazy.

Aaron picks up the joint and flips it toward me. It lands on the bed beside me and rolls a couple of inches away. It looks like a white green bean. I don't touch it.

Why do you smoke so much of that? I ask him. It seems like a natural question.

Because I like it, he says, as though that's a natural answer.

But why? What's so great about it?

You ever tried it?

5

No.
Then all I can say, little sister, is don't knock it till you have.

I never will.

Bullshit.

I won't.

Bullshit.

Why don't you believe me?

Because when you grow up, you'll start looking for things that make you feel good.

Why?

Because everything else will make you feel bad.

Aaron reaches around, turns on the radio and closes his eyes. The music is unusually low, and I think our conversation is over. My brother has already said more to me tonight than he ever has, and he must sense that I've gotten a bit too close. Time to back away. Getting close makes me nervous too. Well, I guess I'll go to bed, I tell him, and he mumbles, okay, sis. Doesn't open his eyes. I want to say thanks. Thanks for talking to me, thanks for letting me ask a few questions. But I know when to stop. And what's best left unsaid. I leave Aaron's room quietly and pause at the top of the stairs. I hear a light tapping from the living room, nothing from the kitchen. Back in my room, I pull the curtains aside and stare out at the dark yard below. The jungle doesn't even look like it's there, and I shiver to think that it never existed. Maybe I made it all up. I stand at the window a long time, watching patiently for a flicker of light in the blackness. It doesn't come. Only Sunday comes, a faint orange-purple over the top of the woods. Yes, there it is, the jungle is still there. I go back to bed, tired. And knowing it's all still there.

Early afternoon on Sunday, I'm in my spot again. Daddy is at work, mom is somewhere in the house, and Aaron is somewhere with a friend. Everybody has a place. I try to write but I feel the bottom layer reaching up and my hand just doesn't want to grab it. I don't want to sink into the level of need. I needed too much last night and almost blew it, I almost reached out to my brother. It's scary to think about it today. It's scary to think about the things he said, what will make me feel so bad when I grow up? Hell, what more could there be? I get tired of hearing those words, when-you-grow-up, I wish somebody would talk about right now. Timmy talked about right now and I want him to be here now. There's no sign of him in the woods but I know that if I walk down to the creek and look closely on the other side, I'll find a million burned-out match sticks strewn about here and there, kind of like Timmy's thoughts. My own thoughts feel a bit scattered too, there's no use in trying to write. I lay down my pen, rest my head against the back of the lawn chair, and let the sun sink into my face. The warmth makes me drowsy, anything could make me drowsy after being up most of the night. I'm glad everybody's in place. Sleep takes its own in my head.

I wake up to the sound of a door slamming. The screen door. I rub my eyes and look around, mom stands on the carport, out of the dim sunlight. I've been waiting for you for an hour, she says, obviously annoyed. Come and set the table, your father's not home yet. I don't say anything to her. Somewhere in my head I see daddy not coming home at all. An hour later, there are four places set at the table, two of them empty. Aaron hasn't made it home either, but neither mom nor I bother

mentioning it. It's happened before, it'll happen again, so what? I'm tired of wondering where they are or where anybody is, it doesn't matter. What mattered last night isn't worth shit today, and I take comfort in thinking so what. Except Timmy. Timmy still matters, he matters so much that I don't remember him. I can't place him the way I do a plate on a table or daddy behind his newspaper. He doesn't seem real enough to remember. I wonder if I dreamed about him in an afternoon sleep. If I did, I'm sure it was a bright and rapid dream, confusing and warm like him. My thoughts keep me from hearing much of what mom is saying. Maybe I am getting to be more like daddy, I don't know if that's good. She talks and talks and I think and think and dinner is suddenly over. I don't remember it either. I clear the table, leaving daddy's and Aaron's untouched plates as a silent memorial of something that should be sorrowful, but I don't feel sorry. I don't feel much of anything at all.

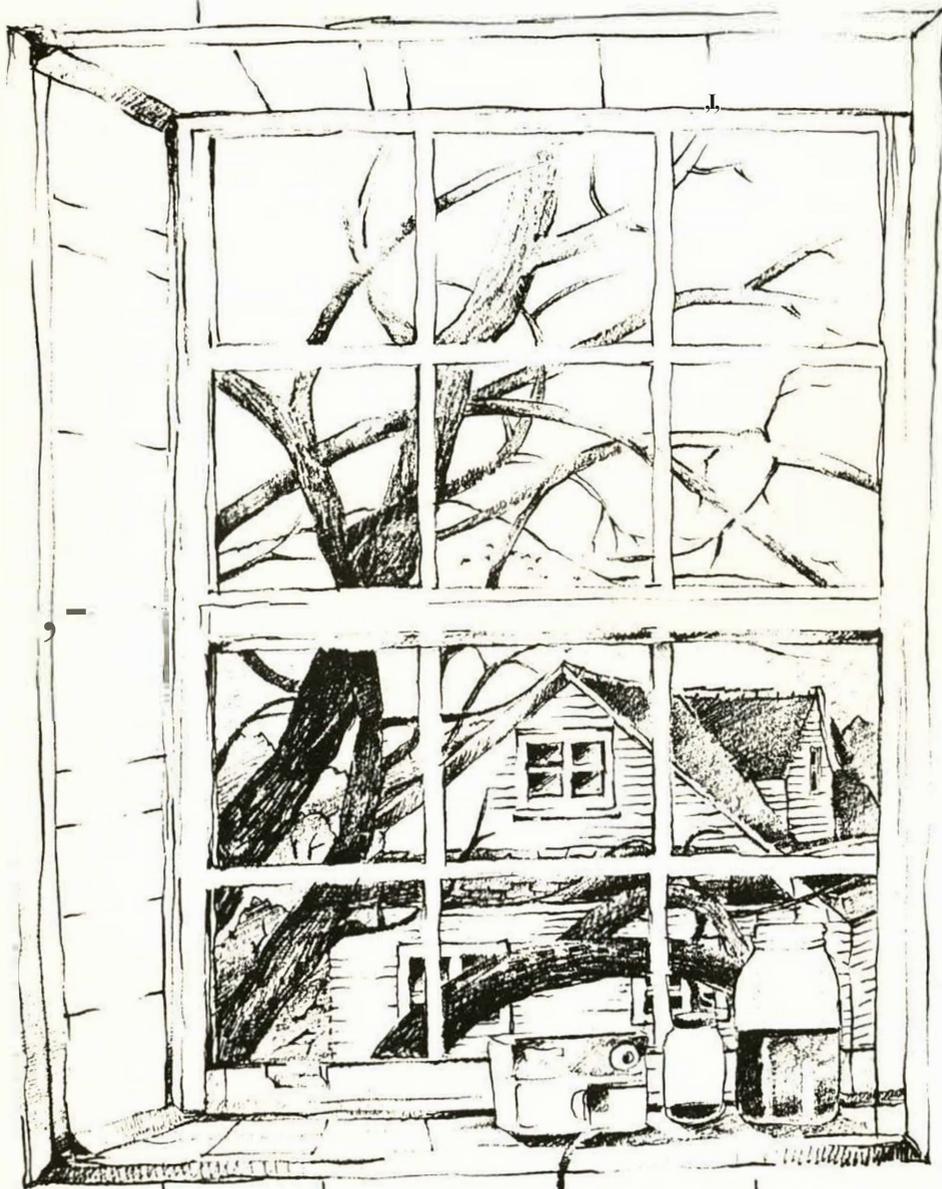
Early in the evening, darkness falls softly, and with it, the cold and longing. I long to see Timmy again. Mom ignores me as I pull on a jacket and open the screen door, she doesn't hear me say, I'm going out. She doesn't hear anything when she's listening for the sound of a car in the driveway. In my spot I wait anxiously, believing every snap of a twig to be him. I see something move from behind a tree and can't keep myself from whispering, Timmy? Is that you? No one answers and a small furry thing darts out and runs along the creek. Time passes, too much time, and for the first time in my life, I want to stop it. I want it to stand still and wait for Timmy to catch up with me, and I sit in my chair shivering and growing old. Somewhere in the house, my mother sits in a chair, waiting and growing old, why are we

always waiting? An hour, maybe two or three, later, the woods are still and silent and I have nearly convinced myself that he was a ghost. Or a friendly, hairless werewolf, or even a madman taking a break from his madness. Soon I'll be able to convince myself that he was nothing. I don't think I really touched him. Our hands brushed in the exchange of a match but I don't think I touched him.

I'm not worried now, or anxious or excited. Just cold. I'm just cold and my ass probably wears crisscross stripes underneath my jeans. It feels like it's time to put the chair away. I stand up slowly on half-numb legs and look one more time into the jungle. It seems to have sunk back into its big black mold and sits there, defiant and unmoving. Fuck you, I whisper, and it doesn't say anything back. Inside, my

mother sits at the kitchen table, thumbing through last season's catalog. Her body between the two empty plates looks thin and intruding, and I wish she would sit somewhere else. I thought you were going to stay out there all night, she says softly, as I pull off my jacket and sling it over a chair. It got cold, I tell her, and she shakes her head in disappointment. It's going to get a lot colder, she says. You just wait, it's going to get a lot colder. I walk out of the room and down the hall, barely able to hear her now. Her voice is dull and not really meant for my ears anyway. Your daddy's the cause... I hear faintly and start up the stairs. Maybe daddy isn't real either, I think, and smile. If Aaron would hear me say that, he'd give me that across-the-woods look and move his finger in large circles at the side of his head. I smile again, walk to his

closed door upstairs, and want to turn the knob. I want to be in there while he's not just to see if I can get to know him better. I place my hand on the knob but don't turn it. For an instant, I think I catch a whiff of stale, raw air seeping out from underneath the door, and, after a few deep breaths, it really doesn't smell that bad. •



Hank Orr

"ASK NOT WHAT,"
(Recollections of Childhood and Camelot)

A black and white Philco TV
shines its flickering light
on the face of a six-year-old boy.

He watches, close to the screen,
as white horses pull a coffin
down people-lined streets,
then,

"Winston tastes good--
like a cigarette should."

"They say the little flame
will bum eternally, Mommy.
What's eternally?"

Trumpets sound and tears are wiped
from faces of people in black and white,
then,

"Flintstones, meet the Flintstones,
they're a modern, stone-age family..."

White street lamps
shine into the back seat
upon a drowsy, ten year old boy.

His father's car takes him farther
away each minute from the new,
improved, resting place/monument;

They hadn't exhumed the coffin yet,
so he saw the original flame,
only in color this time,
'cause real life isn't

black and white.

A grown man remembers
white street lights blurring
on wet, black asphalt

as the child he was
went riding
out of Washington, D.C.

Danny Cantrell

My Father's Chicago

Now
he can't find his bed
but
years ago
my father found his way
to Chicago
and once
he took my brother
and me
there.

He showed us Michigan Avenue and the Lake, Soldier Field
and the Museum of Science and Industry. There was a fountain
spraying water three hundred feet into the air
changing color when a man underneath it played organ music.

And
when people on the wide sidewalks asked if we were twins
he said, "No
they're fifteen months apart but their mother passed away
when they were only five
and six"
as if
that explained who we were and what we were doing in Chicago.

"I was here when you had some bad boys"
he told the cop in the blue double-breasted suit.
"We got some now"
the man answered
in a sweet Irish brogue
but
my dad
wasn't listening
he was in the Windy City with Al Capone and Prohibition, going to school and
seeing the bigwide world
bringing my mother here on a train from West Virginia for their honeymoon.

Maybe that's why I was married in Chicago--my father's still taking me back
and
he will
again
even though

can't
find his
bed.

James A. McCoy

Chairs

My students'
chairs face me.
They

DEMAND
a monologue
and I
recite

again
and
again

and
again
telling
emwhat'ngonnatellem
and
tellingem
then
tellingemwhatitoldem.

Afraid to ask
what
they think
whether
they think.

James A. McCoy



Sticky Little Words

His sticky little
words
clung to
his tongue
like
wet
photographs to
the sole of a shoe.

Smudged and cloudy
his students
took them
for noisy
Rorshachs.

And there
was no communication
and no thought
and no one
cared.

James A. McCoy

He Bakes The Lazy Ones

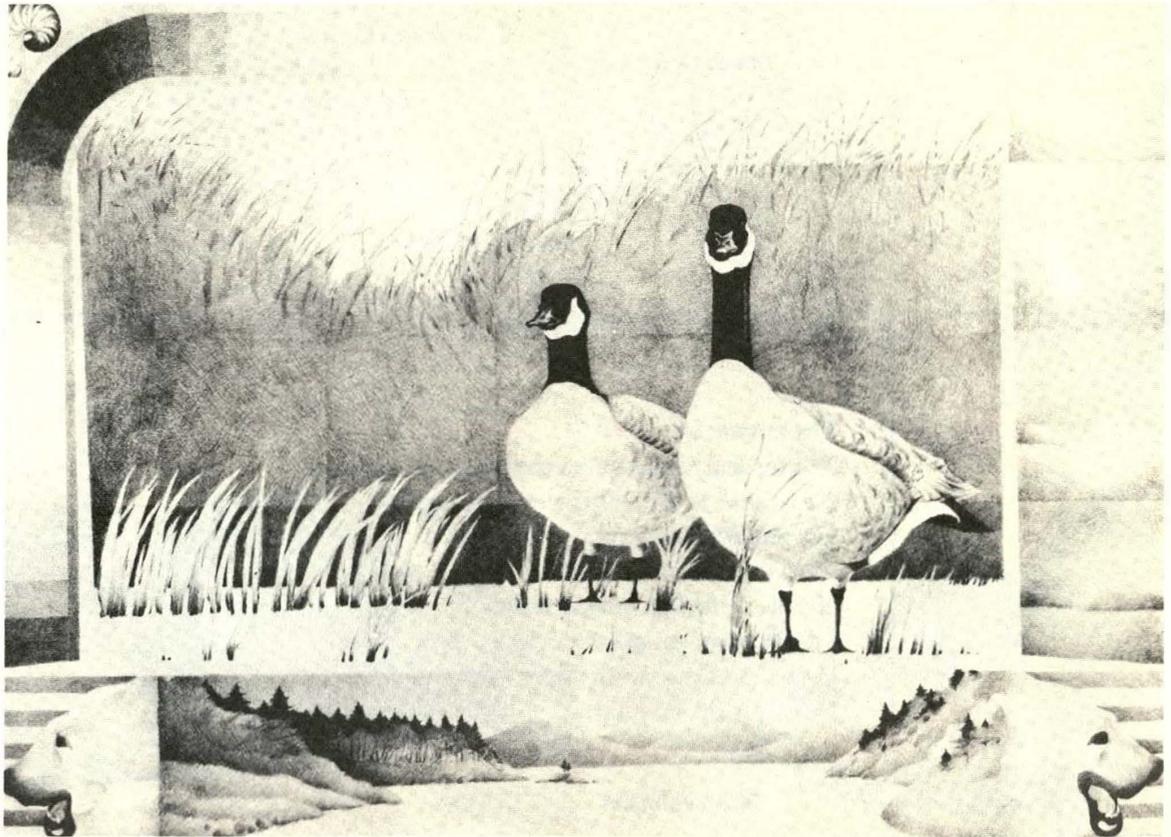
The answer is...
The teacher/dragon was compelled to call on me.
I was close to dreaming when he snapped in my direction.
His multi-faceted, ruby eyes glared at me.
They drank me in like an icy beer.
His black, forked tongue flicked impatiently on his keen teeth.
I don't know the answer, I whispered.
He seared those words from my lips and I watched them crackle into ash.
He bakes the lazy ones.

Dawn Johnson

**Along the Kanawha River
(By the Winfield Locks and Dam)**

Sitting along the river bank,
I watch the slinking of a snake
Through the water along the rocks
Of the river's edge.
The river is calm now,
Undisturbed by the billowing
Barges that break the stillness
And cause fury among the fish.

Lisa Icenhower



Hank Orr

Cellar

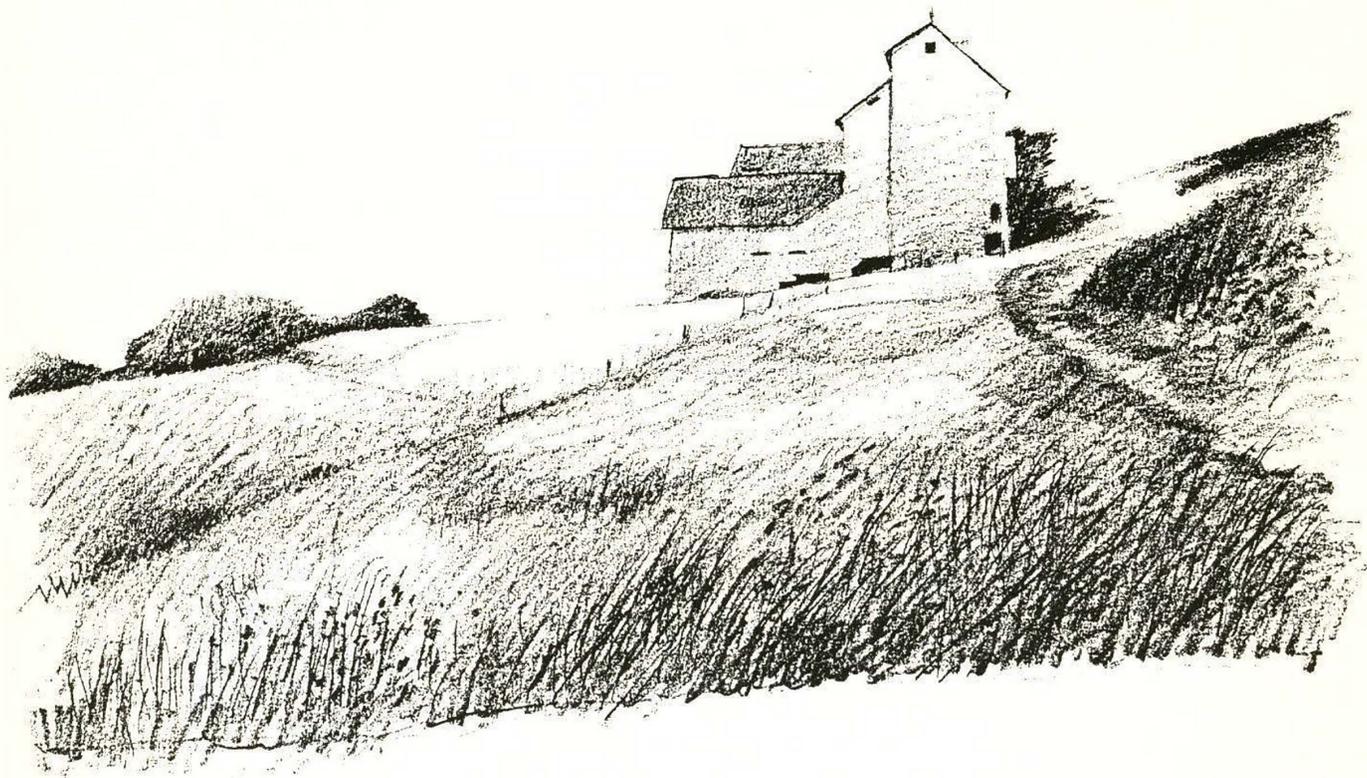
Behind my grandmother's house
Against a hill side
Stood a cinder block cellar.
Cold and damp within the door
I dared not enter alone.
Grandma always went before me
A garden hoe in hand,
Jerked the door open quickly
Allowing an occasional startled snake
To fall into our path,
Where its head met the blunt blow
Of the sharp edge of the hoe.

Lisa Jcenhower

Mosquito

Where are you tiny needle?
Are you flying around my eyes,
my fingers?
Or are you resting on a light bulb?
Waiting--
Humming softly in the night,
Is that you tiny needle?
Buzzing around my ear
keeping me from sleep.
Or are you lurking--
at my open window around the
honeysuckle bush
Watching for that moment to attack
and pierce my skin,
stealing my blood and causing
a prickly feeling to trickle in my band.
If I knew where you were
I'd slap you to death.

Debra Vance



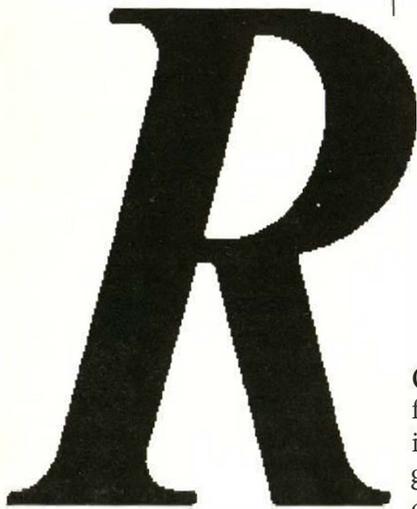
Hank Orr

wee worship

matthew would not pray
this morning in wee worship.
the group of preschoolers
had made a rebellious pact
and refused to bow their heads.
matthew, (who is 3-fingers-old),
was their leader.
leaning sternly back in his seat,
his arms folded across his chest,
he vowed to be different.
so, we talked about Jesus,
and we played a game,
and we sang a song,
but we did not pray.

Lisa Icenhower

T H E M O R N I N G T H E R O A C H E S L E F T

Michael K Huff


OD LIVED DOWN TIE HALL from me in what was once a low rent motel in New Palmersville. He was a tall skinny guy who drove an old yellow Datsun and dressed up as a toothbrush for a living. Rod's professional name was "Timmy The Toothbrush" and he performed at dentists' offices and grade schools throughout southeastern Ohio, encouraging them to brush their teeth and floss regularly. After the show he would give them coupons for a free order of McDonald's french fries. In his toothbrush suit, Rod looked something like a giant royal blue Gumby with stiff white bristles growing from the back of his head. He was once featured on PM Magazine.

I called him "Three Chord Rod." He fancied himself quite a songwriter but having listened to him practice, I concluded he knew only three chords: "G", "D" and "E."

Here's an excerpt from one of Rod's songs called "You've Got To Go For Your Dreams":

*You've got to go for your dreams,
You've got to go for your dreams,
You've got to go for your dreams,
No matter-
How far it might seem-
You've got to go for your dreams.*

Michael K Huff

Not exactly Bob Dylan, is it? Wait, it gets better. That was just the chorus. The first verse went something like this:

*Remember Thomas Edison?
When he said, "Let there be light!"
So he invented the light bulb,
So we could see at night.*

(Chorus repeats)

I sometimes sat and jammed with Rod on the guitar. He thought I was pretty good, which I'm not, but it was good for my ego. He always said that we should go to Open Stage Night at the Frontier Room. I'm highly allergic to public humiliation so I always managed to talk him out of it. A man who dresses as a toothbrush has no shame.

Have I mentioned the roaches? There were lots of them. I managed to keep them at bay with an aggressive perimeter defense of my room and the occasional search and destroy mission to their secret bases under the kitchen sink. My objective was to Black Flag them back to the Stone Age. Peace with honor.

There was a guy, Harry, who lived in the middle room. Harry was a pig. He had long greasy blond hair and beady little eyes and usually crumbs from his most recent meal all down the front of his smelly shirt. Harry lived with piles of empty Pizza Hut boxes, mountains of dirty undershorts and occasionally, his girlfriend, Linda. Linda, surprisingly, was not bad looking. Harry drove a 1978 black and gold Pontiac Trans Am, "Smokey and the Bandit" edition, with a piece of the grill missing and what looked like a bullet hole through the rear deck spoiler. All the roaches loved Harry.

Rod, Harry and I each had a room to ourselves which was joined by a common hallway where the kitchen and a really disgusting bathroom were located. I made a habit

of taking a can of Lysol Spray Disinfectant with me anytime I went to the bathroom, particularly after Harry had been in there.

Rod thought we should just abandon the kitchen and the bathroom to Harry and the roaches.

"Let's just lock the doors and throw in a case of Fruit Loops," he said. "Maybe they'll leave us alone. Sort of a Cockroach Peace Initiative." I said we should nuke the little bastards.

Our landlady was from a country far, far across the sea and she spoke English with a thick accent. She was in her fifties, overweight and had hair a color of yellow not found in nature. When I first met her she was wearing a pink velvet mini skirt, white high heel shoes and a low-necked sweater. Get back, Loretta.

She had a daughter, Mary, who lived in the apartment next door to mine. We shared a wall, but, fortunately, not a bathroom. Like her mother, Mary was rather short and squat. She had a loud hoarse voice and a braying laugh. She partied well into the night and slept during the day. She had a number of different gentlemen callers. I called her "Ten Cent Mary," just like the cartoon in *Playboy*.

I woke up late one night with Hank Williams Jr. and all his rowdy friends coming through my wall at a particularly loud volume. OK, I thought, if you want loud--I got out of bed and after asking myself just what kind of music a person who plays Hank Williams Jr. at that volume would like least, selected Jimi Hendrix's "The Star Spangled Banner," the Woodstock version. I placed it on the turntable and stood back as the opening notes exploded out my Cerwin-Vegas at a level approaching the threshold of pain. Hank receded into the distance as I decided to play along with Jimi. There we stood, my Stratocaster and I, in the middle of my

room at 3 a.m. ripping power chords out of my old Twin Reverb. I didn't bother to tune up first, Jimi never did. Three minutes and forty-two seconds later, as the last of the screaming feedback died away, a silence fell over the apartments. I went back to bed.

Mary stopped me in front of my apartment the next morning as I was leaving for work. She was holding a Hostess Twinkie and sipping a can of Bud Light.

"Did we wake you up last night?" she asked.

"Oh no," I replied, "Not at all."

Sunday morning started out normally enough. I was asleep. That was normal. Someone was shouting and pounding on my hall door. That wasn't normal. I got up and undid the chain. Rod was standing there, hair disheveled, wearing a pair of dark blue bikini briefs and a surprised look.

"Hey!" he shouted. "There's a big ass fire out back!"

I looked out my back window and, sure enough, there were flames shooting out of the window of the room behind Rod's.

I turned back around and watched Rod pick up my phone, dial 911 and shout: "Hey, we've got a big ass fire here!" He ran back down the hall into his room. I pulled on a pair of jeans and followed, stopping to pound on Harry's door.

"Hey, Lardass," I said, "We've got a fire here."

No response. I pressed my ear to the door and listened. They were either copulating or moving furniture, I couldn't tell. I pounded on the door again. "Serious shit, man!"

This time I heard a muffled "Go away" from inside. Duty done, I ran back to my room and began moving my possessions.

I grabbed my Strat. I grabbed my philodendron. I threw them on top of my

THE MORNING THE ROACHES LEFT

Michael K Huff

grandfather's desk and pushed them out the door. Rod was outside, still in his underwear, stuffing his toothbrush suit into the back of his Datsun.

Disturbed by all the commotion, Harry finally noticed the fire. Linda ran out his front door, still slightly damp and sticky as Harry frantically rooted through the pizza boxes, empty beer cans and Fruit of the Looms.

Rod, now fully dressed, stripped the satin sheets off his water bed and piled them into the back seat of his car. Rod lost his virginity on those very sheets. "Hey babe, ever make it with a toothbrush?" he'd asked this redhead he met while enjoying a Moosehead or four one night at the Frontier. Turned out she hadn't. Those sheets had great sentimental value.

Harry ran out his front door carrying a small package.

"Where's the rest of it?" Linda asked.

"Just shut up!" he yelled back at her, opening his trunk and carefully hiding the package under the spare tire.

I was loading my speakers into the trunk of my Ford when Mary stumbled out the front door. Her hair was in curlers and she had on a PARTYTIL YOU PUKE t-shirt that almost, but not quite, covered her bottom. I could hear the New Palmersville Volunteer Fire Department in the distance.

By now the building was, as they like to say on the evening news, "completely involved." Smoke poured out the open doors and the flames began to spread across the roof. After a short but spirited discussion, Harry and Linda piled into his Trans Am and roared off before someone in authority noticed that the smoke billowing out of their room had the distinct odor of a certain controlled substance.

Loretta the Landlady stood on her front porch across the street and swore in five

different languages as she watched her livelihood go up in smoke. Her ill-tempered poodle Precious (whom I always suspected was actually some kind of mutant cat in drag) barked and ran in circles.

It was just as the firemen, many of whom were still wearing their Sunday church clothes, arrived, that the roaches made their break. Driven from their hidden lairs by the heat and smoke, they streamed out of the building, wave after wave of them. They quickly formed a living, moving brown carpet that raced across the parking lot. We gave a collective shudder as they dispersed rapidly into the neighborhood in search of new friends. Mary, who was barefooted, danced through the parking lot trying not to step on them while screaming: "OH GROSS! OH GROSS!"

Ninety minutes later all that remained was a smouldering pile of cinder blocks that four or five firemen continued to play a hose over. Mary had disappeared into her mother's house, where the sounds of a great wailing and gnashing of teeth could be heard as Loretta examined the fine print on her fire insurance policy (something about keeping the building up to code, I believe). Harry and Linda had presumably crossed state lines. I was standing by my car marveling at the amount of a person's life and worldly goods that could be crammed into a Galaxy 500. Rod walked over and sat on the hood.

"Well, John," he said, extending his hand. "It's been nice knowing you."

"Yeah." I smiled, shaking his hand. "It's certainly been an experience."

"Well," he said, starting toward his car, "You take care of yourself."

"You too," I replied. "And take good care of Timmy. I hope you both make it big someday."

He waved and started his car. I watched them, a man and his giant toothbrush suit,

pulling off the parking lot past the remaining fire truck and in the direction, I suspected, of a particular redhead with a taste for the bizarre. I gave the place one last look and then squeezed into my car and started south. •

The Serious Bitch at the Back of the Chapel

Happiness is crashing the wedding
like some tart from *Dallas* or Die Nasty
clad in red leather mini-skirt, inadequate halter, and mink jacket.

Zoom in for a tight shot
of the church doors as they swing open
revealing her silken, shapely legs when she enters.

The diamond tips of her spiked heels
strike sparks as she crosses the threshold.
Her boar is gettin' hitched to the wrong sow.

Silence swallows the room like black holes drink light.
All turn to ogle
the serious bitch at the back of the chapel.

Her lemon-cream curls recline along her shoulders
with that body, bounce, and shine one gets from only the best salons.
The groom stands blind in **his** marriage coma.

Satan just spit in the eye of the Kew-pie-doll bride.
The effeminate preacher's crystalline eyes pause above **his** script.
She is the reason they may not be joined in holy matrimony.

She steps, her body like Brinkley, toward the altar.
Male pulses race in hopes of something yummy jiggling free so they can
briefly forget the miserable, sagging, frigid cows they married.

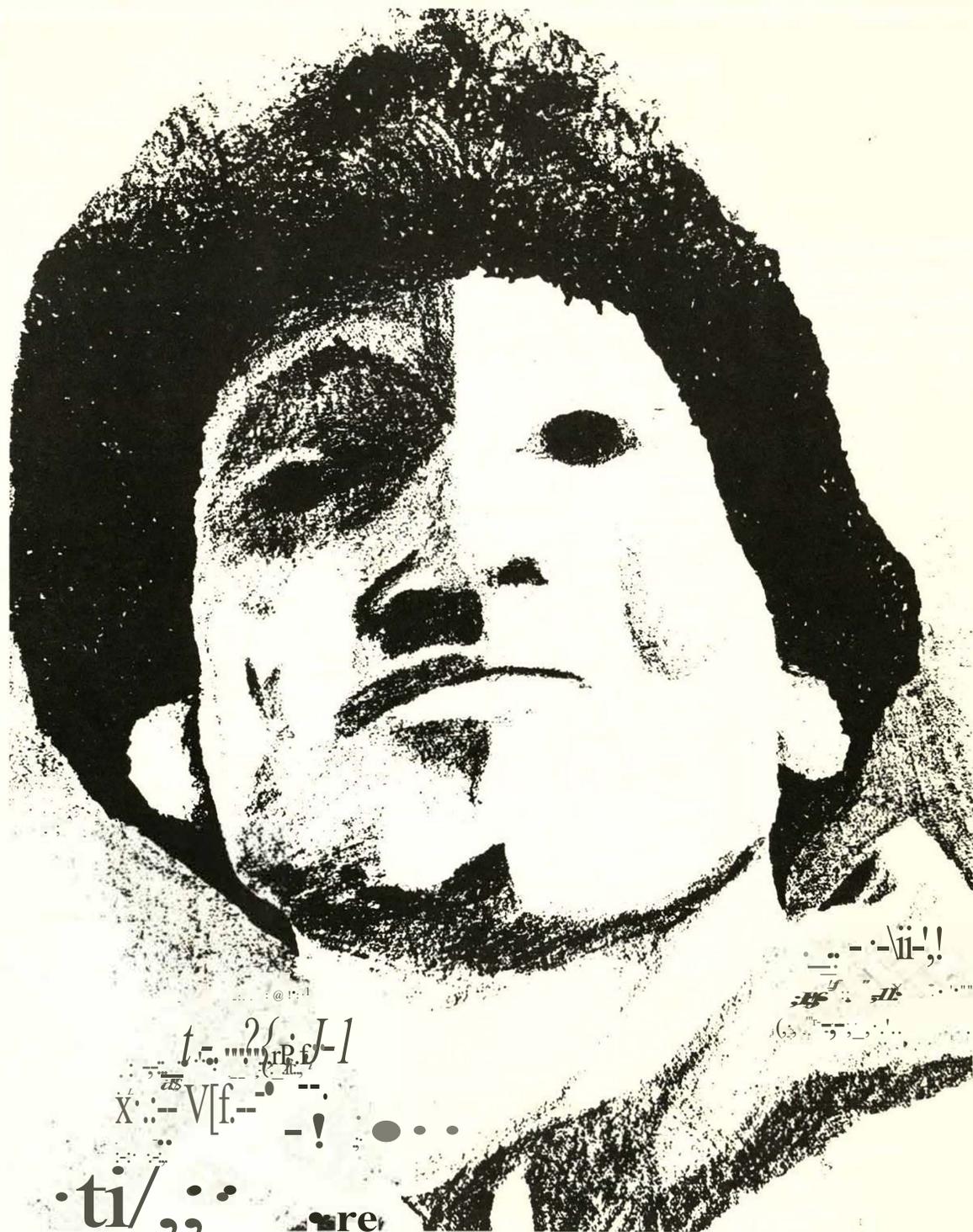
Each step scrapes like nails on a chalkboard
as she slices carpet with her jeweled spikes.
Swelling powers of devastation tremble for release.

With visions of broiling flames and her molten fury
engulfing the prayerhouse
she reaches for the malleable neck of the Kew-pie-bride...

My fantasy evaporates as the happy couple flits past me.
I sit mutely with strangers in the back of the chapel,
my pain and fu_ry swallowed quietly.

I will not be here to lick wounds inflicted by his glacial cow.
My fu_ry will flow into warm water tonight;
as will my pain, my dreams, my blood, my life.

Dawn Johnson



Nora Mosrie



Nora Mosrie



Nora Mosrie

Untitled

This too dazzles,
and chokes
on a drop of innocence.
I am still, and time sneaks--
catching me sometimes
waking, from a nap.
My eyes don't want to open.
Even when awake,
they often refuse to see.
I stand,
not really moving or wanting to,
conscious of my lack of grace,
watching you.
The hair, the slip, mist of scent,
all moving in perfect rhythm,
appearing rehearsed.
It is the rhythm I see
not the hand or its fingers,
only the easy rhythm of time,
and you, in a silk shroud,
defying the very thing I admire.

Rory L. Perry

Todd M. Gault

M

Y WIFE writes novel-

izations of movies and I write comic books. I wrote that Pulitzer Prize-winning story, "The Caped Avenger Meets Submarine Man." It's not great but it pays the bills.

I came home to the apartment late one evening to find Jenny with a suitcase. She told me she was leaving.

Why was the natural question to ask; I did.

"I...I've found someone new," she said.

I was shocked, devastated. No, just shocked, devastation would come later.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It isn't anyone you know."

"Well, I'm shocked that you would leave me for another man."

"It's not a man."

Now I was devastated. I stumbled backwards into an easy chair.

"Let me explain. We met in a bar, became friends, and then it just happened."

"It just happened? Nothing just happens!" I yelled.

"It hadn't been planned, one thing just led to another."

I was getting dizzy. I knew I was going to be sick. My dinner of beer and pretzels was beginning to rebel. I could feel it rising;

any minute I was going to erupt, and half-digested pretzels would be spewed onto the living room carpet. Unfortunately, that didn't happen; I just got cramps in my stomach.

I moaned and Jenny went to get my ulcer pills.

"How can you just fall in love with a woman after fifteen years of happy matrimony?" I asked her.

Then she made her second confession.

"I've been gay all my life."

My head started to throb. I wanted to pass out that minute but I wasn't that lucky. Jenny said she hadn't told me before because she had really never been sure.

"I married you hoping that my homosexual tendencies would go away."

I sank deeper into my chair. She picked up her suitcase and walked out the door. After the door closed I cried. Then I went into the bathroom and threw up. My ulcer was killing me.

What was I going to do? Jenny was my whole life. Okay, maybe not my whole life; say, about 83%. They say every cloud has a silver lining; I think mine is tin plated.

Jenny came back two weeks later to get the rest of her things and to ask for a

Todd M. Gault

divorce. We went to court and got a fair judgement I got to keep the apartment, furniture, and my clothes. Weeks went by and I moped around the house and mass-consumed ulcer pills. Finally some friends, Al and Sue Berkowitz, decided to take me out for a night on the town. They stopped short of handcuffing me.

They dragged me into a bar and all but bolted the door. I protested.

"Look. I'm not ready to meet people. I've just been through a very traumatic experience and...and..."

And then I saw her. The most beautiful woman I had ever seen was sitting across the bar from me. I could not even begin to describe this beautiful, sensual creature. But I will tell you one thing; seeing a woman like that makes a man feel sad...romantic...horny. I had to meet her.

After a few drinks to work up courage I walked over to her table. I tried to think of a witty opening line but ended up saying, "Hi, I'm Max Goodman, um, couldn't help noticing you from across the room." I coughed. "Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all. By the way, my name is Trish."

I tried to be a real lady's man; you know,

calm and cool. I might have pulled it off if I hadn't spilled my drink in her lap. Other than that I think I held up pretty well.

We were discussing Salvador Dali when my ex-wife came up to the table. I called her the pet name I'd given her at the divorce, Plaintiff. Jenny sat down and kissed Trish. They sat there, holding hands. It hits me, obviously, that Trish is the quote, "Other Woman." I sat there fumbling for things to say as my ulcer started to use the rum and coke in my belly to eat through the walls of my stomach.

Excusing myself, I went over to Al at the bar.

"Get me out of here or I'll punch you in the mouth," I said.

Once outside of the bar, I decided to strike off on my own to get some air. An hour or so later, I came to a part of New York I was unfamiliar with. Looking up I saw a sign that said Beer. I needed a drink so I went inside. I walked through the smoke to the bartender and ordered a Miller.

I lit a cigarette, adding to the haze in the room. A man came up and flat out propositioned me. Looking around, I noticed there were only men in the bar. The guy's

hand started to creep up my leg. I gave him a polite refusal and headed out the door. I then ran several blocks, turning at random so as not to be followed.

I decided to head for home. A man under a street lamp asked me for a light. I pulled out my lighter. He pulled out his gun. I gladly complied with his request for my watch and wallet.

"Thanks, honey," he said, kissing me on the lips just before he left. My stomach was on the verge of submitting a resignation.

It's not easy being straight in a gay society. ■

Sylvia

Your captured breath in the bell jar
Speaks of your dissolution.
The words fall into themselves like waves

Of an ocean that has witnessed
A black baptism,
An unholy ritual where the gods

Of love and hope were drowned.
Poetry was a gas to you -
It choked the affectations from your throat

And burned the illusions from your eyes.
The dull bells melt into their original alloys
And the voice of God is anthologized.

When you were down
The world kicked hard;
In dead winter, the pipes frozen,

The birds not singing,
You melted your blood
To warm your babies

And coat your visions.
What was it you saw?
A skinny Jew in Auschwitz,

Or a fat child in a Nazi summer school
Where the headmaster kept bees
And walked with a limp?

The wounds that counted never healed.
Poetry flowed from them;
With every verse,

You ripped away the scabs,
Dipped in your pen, and wrote.
For some ailments, dying is the only cure.

Timothy M. Wellman

After a Thunderstorm on the Corner of 5th Ave. and 20th St.

He moves toward the street,
groping
for the proper walk,
asking for this
(no)
and that
(no)
of the samaritan,
who passes with a full pack.
He lunges
over the wet street
and slumps
against a crooked meter.
The cars float by,
and he mumbles.
He rises with caution,
pushes on to the alley,
pauses, turns in.
Rushing chrome
gives him a lift.
He hits--
and the concrete
welcomes him home.

Rory L. Perry

Rory L. Perry

T

HEY TOOK MY CLOTHES from me and put them in a locker. They kept the key. I was in a room with two beds. There wasn't a curtain between them like I would have imagined, they just stood there, end to end, alone. The walls were made of thick brick, painted green to match the lockers. An old man named CC was in the other bed. His face was drawn in tight and his eyes were huge behind thick glasses. He didn't say anything when we came in, just raised his head and looked at me. Later on we got to be friends, walking up and down the hall together on our way downtown or to catch a train. CC talked about trains a lot. He had worked for the railroad for forty-two years. He showed me the gold watch he got when he retired. We played checkers once and it took an hour. He was kind of slow.

My first meal a large woman named Rosemary threw up on herself and her tray, and continued to eat. Everyone ignored her and kept on eating. I did the same. I wanted to fit in. Rosemary made up fantastic stories about the men she was married to. She smoked Luckys.

We weren't allowed to have cigarette lighters, but there was one on the wall that everyone used. You pushed a button and an element lit up that smelled like a dirty oven. You had to put your smoke in sort of sideways and puff furiously until it lit. I lit Rosemary's for her, because she always took forever and once caught her hair on fire.

The mirror in the bathroom was polished stainless steel. No glass, because you could break glass and use it on yourself. My face was always sort of fuzzy in that mirror. While I shaved, an aide stood beside me to make sure I didn't do anything stupid with the blade. One day Rosemary threw some chairs and he ran out to stop her. I stashed one of the blades in my room. CC saw me, but he never told.

I spent a lot of time in the TV room. I tried to watch it sometimes, but I never saw anybody I knew on TV, so I stared out of the window mostly. That window was the only one we could really see out of, the rest were up too high. I could see a bridge from that window, lots of white steel cables. CC told me a woman walked off the floor one morning.

"Walked right down to that same river--the bridge wasn't there then--jumped in the water and drowned. She was confused from her shock treatment that morning. It was before they kept the door locked."

CC had a habit of walking in his sleep, so they strapped him in the bed at night with leather cuffs. They had to pull them to the last notch for a good fit; CC was skinny. He'd lie there, all strapped in, and tell me stories about the railroad, raising his head from time to time for emphasis and to make sure I was listening. The stories always ended with the watch.

"Come here, boy, see this fine watch. Real gold, you know." CC slept with his hat on.

At night the nurse came every half-hour with a flashlight to see if you were ok. I didn't sleep much, but always pretended when the light was in my eyes. CC didn't snore, but he made an awful wheezing sound, like every breath was hard for him. I wondered if his body wanted him to breathe anymore. I tried to imagine what it would be like for my body to want to quit,

for me to make it keep going. Sometimes Rosemary screamed at night. It sounded like CC's wheezes, only louder and stronger.

A nun came on the intercom and said a prayer sometimes. It bothered me, because if I had wanted to pray I would have done it myself. CC always bowed his head and listened even though the intercom wasn't very good and most of the time her words sounded like a low static murmur. CC always tried to get me to pray. He didn't fuss when I wouldn't.

Rosemary played the piano. It was out of tune and missing some keys. I played along on the guitar. We sang songs that made no sense to anyone but us. The aides didn't like it when we sang. I don't think they liked Rosemary to begin with. It took four of them to strap her down when she started screaming. They didn't understand her screams. I did. She was just singing.

Agatha was a white-haired lady from Logan who was terrified of Jesus Christ and had regular conversations with him. She called me Jesus a few times. I knew that he was supposed to have loved everyone, so I just smiled and said, "It's ok, Agatha, I love you."

We had something called activity therapy. They gave me some pieces of wood to sand and I glued them together and made a little box. I painted it all different colors, and was never satisfied. CC didn't do activity therapy, his hands hurt too bad. He always sat beside me and watched. Finally I decided to paint the whole thing green with a white cross on top and give it to CC. When it was time to clean up that day I shoved the box over in front of him and cleaned up my mess. When I finished he was still sitting there, staring at the box. He was smiling and started singing real loud and real nice. Pretty soon everyone in the room was singing and CC was

Rory L. Perry

striding across the room, holding the box on his palm like a waiter, and singing. The aides came in, and CC laughed harder than anyone I've ever known as he was helped down the hall. It wasn't until later that day that I noticed my clothes were covered with green paint. CC kept the little box by his bed and put the railroad watch in it at night. He would put the lid on ever so gently, then look over at me and smile.

They said I needed ECT, that's electroconvulsive therapy. They told me ECT works well with patients who are severely depressed. They gave me some forms to fill out and read if I wanted to go through with it. They told me there was nothing to be afraid of, that I would be put to sleep. It said on the consent form that death might occur, but that it was unlikely. Death didn't scare me, though. I just didn't want to end up fried. They said I would lose my memory for a little while. Only temporary, they said. They told me it would help me get better, but I wasn't so sure I even wanted to get better. I hoped I didn't spit up like Rosemary.

We went to group. I was the youngest. Agatha always got scared and ran out the door with her arms in the air, screaming about Jesus. CC just looked out the window and sometimes asked me when the train was coming. I always told him soon. Rosemary told us she was married to a bullfighter in Spain once. She said she caught him with another woman and stabbed him with one of his bandarillas. I didn't talk much, looked at the floor mostly. The therapist asked me a lot about why I was there, about what I did before I got there. "I wanted to kill myself, so I drank half a bottle of Drano," I told him. I said if he wanted to know anything more to ask CC, because I knew CC wouldn't tell.

One night CC was crying after they strapped him in. I asked him what was

wrong and he told me he had lost his watch. I looked in the little box on the nightstand and, sure enough, there it was. I put the watch in his hand, and covered his fingers with mine. He stopped crying and for a while I just stood there. He fell asleep and I listened to him wheeze. Soon the watch slipped from his hand. I put it back in the box and got into bed. I asked the nurse for an extra pillow that night. I covered my ears so the wheeze couldn't get through. Eventually I slept.

They found him in the room, slumped down on the other side of my bed. I had been to my first ECT that morning, and when I got back, CC wasn't in group. Rosemary told me he was dead. I went in the room and looked at his bed. They had already taken the sheets and blanket. The leather cuffs dangled from the side rails. The nightstand was bare. It looked like he had never been there at all.

Everyone tried to comfort me that day. Rosemary put me on her lap and rocked me like a baby, and sang one of her songs. She dropped her cigarette and burned a hole in my shirt. She started cussing and they took her away. At lunch I looked over and saw the checkerboard in the corner. I remembered how long it took us to play a game. Sometimes CC would rest his finger on the same checker for ten minutes, then move a different one. He always beat me. He said I had no foresight.

That night I looked out the small window in the door they kept locked. Across the hall was the maternity ward. The nun's murmur came on the intercom. The aides told me to get to bed.

I decided it would be best to go ahead and get under the covers. That way, they wouldn't see the blood when they came to check on me. I knew from a movie I saw

once to cut down the wrist, not across. I got the blade from its hiding place and glanced at the other empty bed in the room. In the morning they would see how clever I was. They might even write about me in the paper the next day.

I pulled the covers back and moved the pillow so I could sit propped up in the bed. I heard a clunking sound and looked down at the pillow and saw the corner of my box. I opened it and there was CC's watch. The night was still then, and the blade made a soft click as I placed it next to the watch. I put on the lid and slept with the box against my chest. When I fell asleep, Rosemary was singing. ■

Alice, 1987

Alice didn't make it through the looking-glass today,
she's out on Highway 9
hitch-hiking with some left-over
American dream,
while buses and Cadillacs
fly right on by.

He's in a great hurry,
but he's no white rabbit,
just another wolf
yanking at her zipper,
Nobody gets a free ride baby.

Just a mile from the nearest town
she screams but no words come out,
and the gas station attendant has glassy eyes
and trembling hands.
He knows her even before he sees
her arms,
slips her a miracle
and the key to the restroom
where she slumps on cold tile
and finds Wonderland.

Sharon Curry

Carny

Your teeth,
flashing like my Fourth of July sparkler,
find me in the dark and clamp
down on shivering lips
still wet from strawberry ice cream.
Dad thinks I'm in my room
but the popcorn
and the streamers
and the old clown smoking
another stogie
keep calling me back to the bandstand
and the soft spot on your Levis
like velvet on my neck.

Sharon Curry

Good Girls and Saturday Nights

Sitting alone on a Saturday night
Eating M & M's and drinking Diet Pepsi.
The telephone rings.
...anticipation...
...wrong number.

Lisa Icenhower

Immigrant Song

I entered her like a lover,
wet and trembling
and stood on littered docks
of dirty shore,
where dark fat hands grabbed at skirts
and cried momma in seven tongues.
She sucked me in and moved me along
jungles of concrete,
enemies without faces,
fear in every eye that watched from window pane,
and closed, sleeping on sheets of filth
in narrow alleys.
She robbed me of my virginity,
taught me well the ways of Midas,
rolled me over on avenues electric,
showed me her secrets in neon lights,
and she was love when she shone upon me,
but mostly she was evil itself, manifested
in white, hot flesh,
beckoning from billboards, watery eyes watching
from street corners,
the names of a million dead soldiers
shouting at the living from behind black walls.
And when I called she did not answer,
just turned her head the other way while her
torchlight disappeared into the silent harbor.

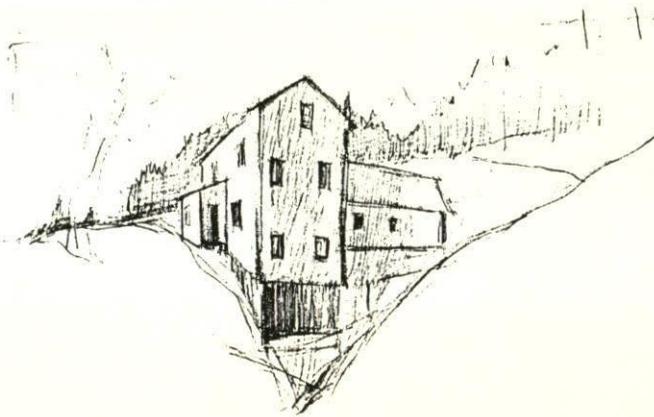
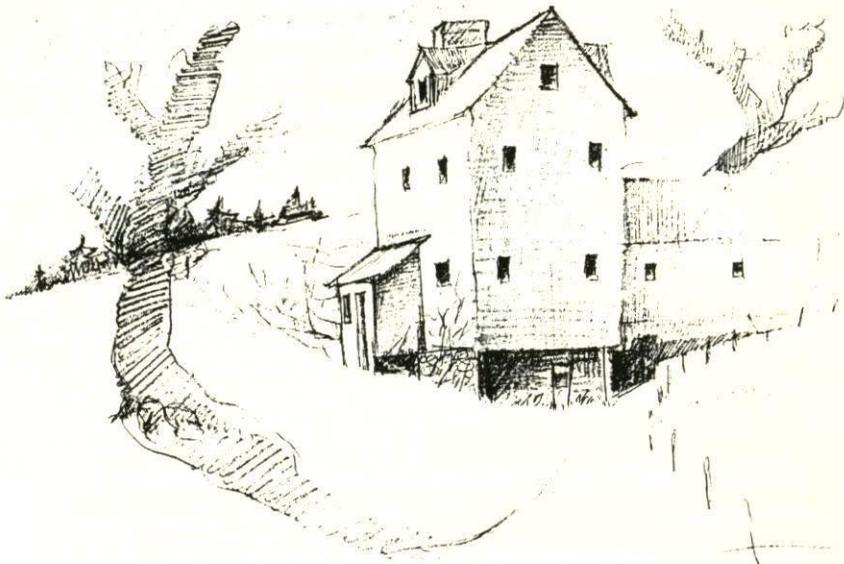
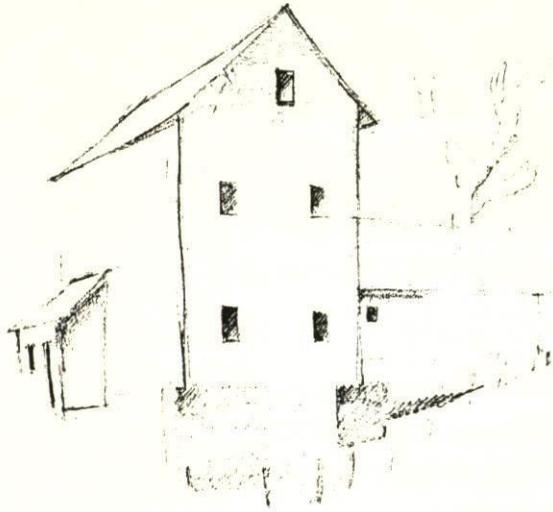
Sharon Curry

Reminiscenza

To the museum in the new domain
the little children and old men came
and pressed their nose on the glass to see
a relic from their past--a tree.

Susan Fultz





Life, Life

Circle, circle golden band,
wrap, wrap around my heart,
take, take my life away,
give, give my waiting womb,
grow, grow tiny seed,
rip, rip my legs apart,
suck, suck little newt,
smile, smile your silly smile,
clean, clean the greasy pan,
bare, bare the pantry shelf,
watch, watch the years go by,
wave, wave the children off,
long, long the silent time,
beat, beat the last heart beat,
sleep, sleep ancient bride,
circle, circle golden band,
buried, buried still on hand.

Sharon Curry

