


Spring 1981

et cetera

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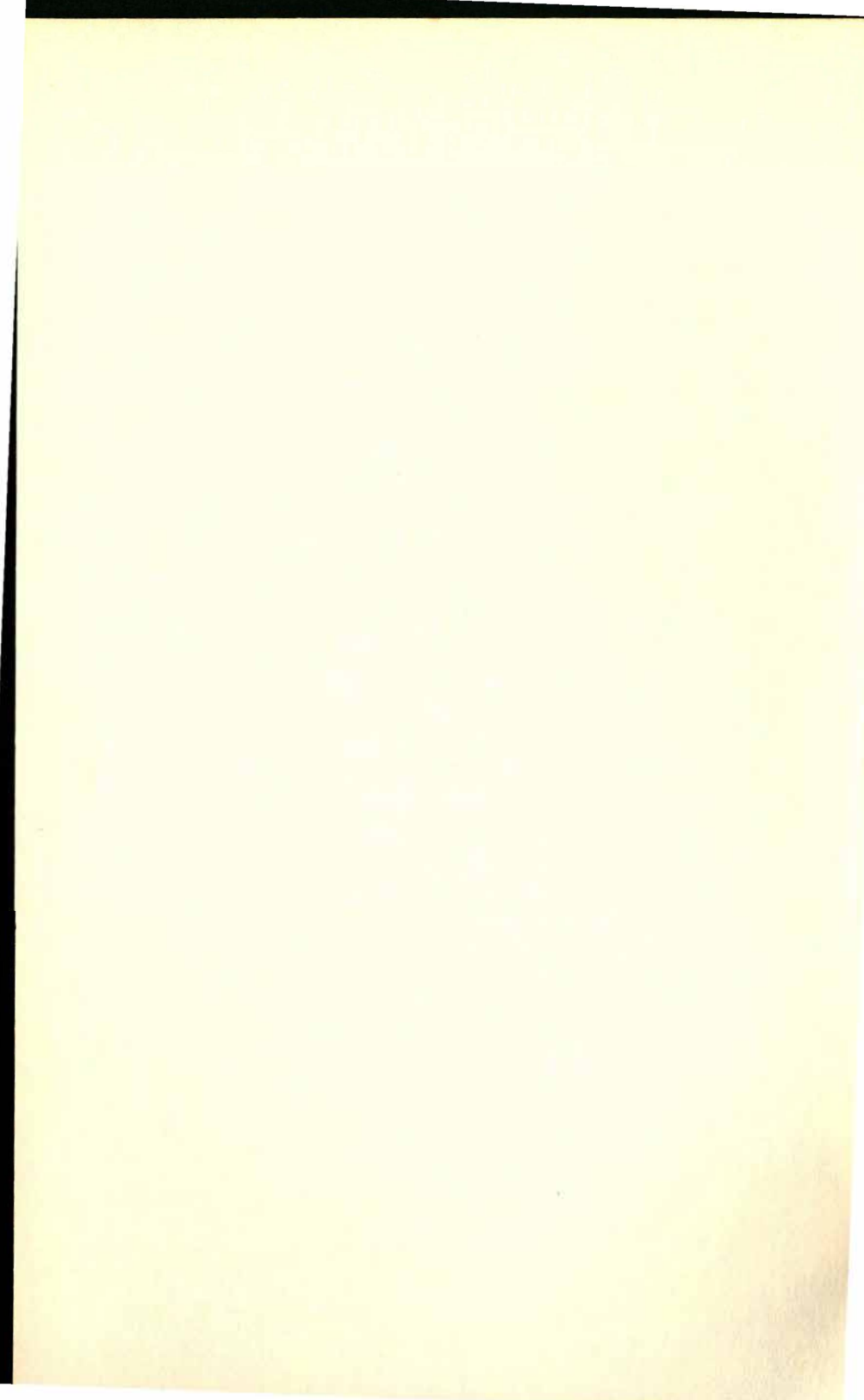
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Poetry & Fiction

Marshall University
Huntington, W.V.
Spring 1981

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DEATH IS AN ELEPHANT
Vachel Lindsay, The Congo

PROLEGOMENON FOR ANY FUTURE READERS

If there's one thing I've learned from being **et cetera** editor this year, it's what a little power will do for you. Even the minute power of a student literary magazine editor. I couldn't begi to tell you how many propositions I got from some pretty attractive women (and some pretty homely ones too) who wanted to sec their work in print so bad they would do anything. Well, I'll lie to satisfy my carnal urges. It's that simple.

So what does an **et cetera** editor do besides get himself laid? Well, there's a lot of lonesome hours spent in his office wishing someone, anyone, would drop by with a poem or a story or just to say "hi!" In just such hours of contemplation, it occurred to me I could probably sneak a quart of Wild Turkey into my office and no one would even notice. They didn't and the empty bottle made a really neat decoration for my desk. Nobody suspected a thing!

You know, there are a lot of people out there who don't think their work is good enough for the **et cetera**. And they're probably right. Actually, it's a real shame because that's first purpose of the **et cetera**: to encourage talented student writers by giving them an outlet for their work. Really, if you write, you should submit. I know how much it meant to me to see my work in print. A lot. And hey, if you don't get accepted, don't worry about it! That doesn't mean you should take one man's opinion and give up writing to become a keypunch operator - but you might want to think about it.

Now you're probably wondering how I went about choosing the work that would appear in the **et cetera** from all the submissions I received, none of which I read. No, I'm just kidding! I read everything that was given to me and my only regret is *that the nwga ine didn't permit room to publish all the wonderful stories and poems written by Marshall students.* Sorry as hell. Seriously, I wish more students would have submitted. It always made my day to find a poem or a story waiting to be read. To all those who submitted this year, I give a heartfelt thanks.

Thanks must also go to the **et cetera** staff, Diane McLain and Belinda Anderson, who were always there when I needed them; to my brother Craig Morris, who did the layout of this magazine; to the **et cetera** advisor, Dr. John McKernan, for whose help and encouragement I am always grateful; to all Marshall University students whose tuition fees fund this magazine; and to the

readers, who make this magazine what it is and what it will be.

I once remarked to a friend that if anyone had any real secrets, he should put them in a preface and they would be safe. Now I have a chance to prove it. If you've read thus far, it's probably Saturday afternoon, all your friends have nown the coop for the weekend. and you have nothing better to do than to read a preface. To you, my faithful reader, I am eternally grateful. I leave you with my best wishes for the future. Bon Jour! Adieu! See you in the funny papers!

Matt Morris
January 198 I

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DAYBREAK AT MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

The night and the highway had been long and black in front of Tony and Rosemary. Now the night traveling was almost behind them and he couldn't wait for daylight so that Rosemary could look at something besides the lights behind the trees. She had dozed off several times since growing tired of the radio and Tony's conversation and always woke with a huffy, "Jeez," or "Jeez God," upon seeing the night still around them. Tony left her alone.

Route 20-59 out of Tennessee seemed to disturb her more than the other highways they had traveled. It was straight, flat, and desolate. She had managed to put a few words together at four o'clock and said, "Mississippi is nowhere isn't it?" But, before Tony could make it into a conversation she added, "Don't answer that."

It was five o'clock now and she spotted the orange and white "Gulf" sign glaring in the distance. Rosemary pulled herself up in the seat and said, "Rest stop," as if she were a conductor on a train.

At first Tony wanted to say, "Not again". She had made him stop at every truck stop since they left West Virginia. What bothered him was that she didn't just go to the rest room or order something to eat; she had to run all over the place making sure her body was seen by every horny trucker there. She would spend hours of good traveling time playing song after suggestive song on the nothing but country and western spitting jukebox. Tony knew "I'd Love to Lay You Down" by heart and hated himself for it.

The worst thing was her trip to the "gift shop" where she would spend ten or fifteen minutes absorbing all the porn. In Tennessee she bought a red condom with a devil (horns and all) painted on the end and had laughed long and lustily watching Tony squirm and redden when she gave it to him.

"At last," Rosemary sighed as Tony guided the car off and up the exit ramp and into the parking lot full of sleeping Macks, Overnights, and Fruehaufs.

"Yeah, I could use a break too," Tony said.

"Oh well," Rosemary said chuckling. "Let's stop anyway."

Some of the truckers had risen early and Tony could see them through the large glass windows surrounding the front of the dirty white cinderblock building. They were sitting at the counter flirting with the waitresses and at the booths near the windows hugging their coffee mugs, preparing themselves for another droning day. Several sleepy eyes turned toward the black 280-Z outside when the doors opened and two bare brown legs swung out and down from the passenger side. Then all of her was out and Tony watched the S-E-X on her T-shirt move around with her stretches, saying it better than any blood red neon sign.

"Alright, that's enough!" Tony said grabbing her arm and leading her to the door. Rosemary's head went back in a laugh and she tore away and bounded ahead of him. She turned before entering, leaning against the glass, "Get us a table, I'll be in the gift shop." He mouthed the last two words with her and watched her hair bounce through the door. She turned right and disappeared into a brightly-lit room off the restaurant.

Tony sat pensive and stone-like oblivious to the discomfort of diarrhea. He thought about how much Rosemary had changed in just three weeks and wondered why. When he first met her she'd been the shy innocent girl he had been looking for. She was beautiful too, just the kind of girl he needed to be seen with.

It had been the first day he'd been up and around since the detoxification and he padded down the hall of the psychiatric wing of the hospital to the lounge for a cigarette. The smoke of his Cal curfed gray and lazy before his eyes and through it he saw her reclining on a black vinyl couch reading a worn out copy of *Women In love*. She had her head bowed into the novel causing her long wavy blonde hair to engulf her face and

curl around her breasts. She didn't look up even as he approached and stopped two inches from her sandaled feet.

"Hi," his voice quivered from the effort to sound relaxed.

Her eyes traveled from his knees just above her feet upwards till they reached his face. When her tanned face appeared from behind her hair he felt himself growing dizzy, high, higher than with all the crap he'd just sweated out of his body. The smile appeared immediately, breaking from her face like the sun from a lazy cloud. Her teeth gleamed and her eyes flashed a secret and a promise. He was dazzled.

A breathless, "Hello," reached his ears and had it not been for the fire of his cigarette reaching his fingers making him jump and hiss a loud, "Shit!" he might have fainted.

They had gotten along well from the start. Rosemary was friendly and seemed interested in him; always asking questions without curiosity but with concern and understanding.

They spent the entire day together everyday; beginning with breakfast, throughout all of the groups having therapy during the day, and the evening was spent talking, laughing, and loving.

One day in group therapy Tony had broken down and talked about how his father had pushed him to go to law school. Tony held his dark bearded face tightly in the memory of that hour. The handsome features twisted with recurring pain. The academic pressure and a bad love affair had made him doubly vulnerable to alcohol and drugs and one day several friends had found him curled into an embryonic ball in his closet. His father had sent him to this small hospital in West Virginia to avoid a scandal. He told the story to the group between sobs and Rosemary had appeared by his side and took his head to her chest, stroking his hair while he continued to talk.

Rosemary never revelled much about herself though, except to say that she was in the hospital for "depression" nothing specific. Tony had been fascinated by her. She had a good mind and a quick cynical wit despite her rural Appalachian background. She used to break up the group during an awkward silence by telling jokes about her hometown, Odd, West

Virginia. "Right next to Egeria and between them they may have four houses. An atom bomb would do about eight dollars damage. Their idea of a matched set of luggage is three Kroger bags." She also had an arsenal of dirty jokes that sent everyone into hysterics.

There wasn't much left of the woman who had talked to him for hours then. Where was the lover who had met him secretly every night at three o'clock to make love and had said, "I love you," over and over during those rendezvous? Now Rosemary never said those words and would roll her eyes and look away if Tony did.

Tony jerked himself out of his memory; it was becoming too painful.

Rosemary loved to prowl through those wicked gift shops. She would cackle at the erotic gifts and postcards and flirt with the man behind the counter. This time she bought a vibrator to aggravate Tony with and the clerk grinned and said, "You **know** what to do with that little girl?" Rosemary leaned upon the glass giving him a little better angle at the cleavage, licked her lips and breathed, "Why, don't you?"

Rosemary did a graceful about face only to find herself face to chest with a man. He grizzled over her for a moment as her eyes traveled from his immense shoulders upward to his younger than she'd have guessed face. She realized her luck was changing as she immediately focused on the combination of awe, admiration, and horn in his brown eyes. She'd seen similar eyes in the hunting dogs her daddy kept pinned up back of the house. If Rosemary had ever come close to loving anything it was one of those dogs. She tightened her face against the surfacing laugh as she saw old Gripsafe's eyes peering and leering at her from somewhere- inside this bear of a man. She saw Bear's next feature after she'd traveled the length of his rather handsome nose with the large pores glaring greasily at her. She imagined herself being sucked into one. His face was the universe and they were the mysterious black

holes where she might disappear into eternal nothingness. But, below his nose was his prize. There it was, glistening wetter than any Maybelline lipgloss or any beagle's eyeball, his beautiful gaping mouth. The overflow of neglected spit threatened to baptise his chin or her shoe within seconds. But the squirrel-like jaws closed suddenly, rippling as he gulped. "Buy you a cup of coffee?" His words gurgled and sputtered to her ears.

At the table Tony kept his back straight and flat against the chair. At proper intervals his right hand would raise and lower a stained white porcelain mug that he gripped tightly by the chipped handle. He held it so tightly that the broken place began to cut into his finger. Had he been conscious of anything but the door to the gift shop he might have winced, dropped the mug, and turned red. The fingers of his left hand tapped on the side of the chair while he surveyed the room, careful to avoid the eyes of the truckers and other customers. His unseeing gaze swung from object to object and returned again to the doorway. Tony was prepared to look quickly away should Rosemary appear and this caused his eyes to dance and his chin to jerk at the slightest movement beyond the door.

Tony fought the urge to go after her with the little left of himself not already in her possession. The battle was almost lost when Rosemary finally floated through the door and the sight of her shoved him back into his chair. His sigh of relief was cut short when he saw her speaking to someone over her shoulder while she moved. Like a ninety-year-old tap dancer, the monstrosity shuffled behind her on the filthy floor and the parade followed the black path to the table where Tony sat poised and waiting.

Rosemary saw the expression of fear and disgust in Tony's eyes. It said, "How do you get into these things in fifteen minutes?" She had often thought that handsome men couldn't possibly have expressive faces. But here his was badgering, fearing, and loving her better than the words she had already taught him to control.

"This is Skippy," she said sitting down and patting the chair beside her for the big man. Skippy sat and Tony waited for the sound of the chair splintering apart. "And Skippy, this is Tony." Tony looked away when Skippy began to extend his hand. "Oh, I almost forgot," Rosemary said pulling the vibrator out of the bag and shaking it at him. "You're being replaced." Rosemary laughed until tears came as Tony grabbed the joke, red-faced and angry, and returned it to the bag. She leaned over to Skippy and said as she wiped her eyes, "Looks like I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

Tony's "What the hell is going on with you?" look was burning into her cheeks as she began a conversation with the intruder. He hadn't seen her so lit up and interested in anything since the days in the hospital. And Skippy turned out to be quite a talker with a little gentle receptive prodding by Rosemary. And of course she was never without that full red lipped smile that said, "I like you so much. You're so interesting. Could you possibly refuse me anything?" Tony fixed his darkening stare out the windows but didn't let a word escape him.

Skippy was a truck driver and a good one according to the other truckers. He drove nine months out of the year and spent the other three on a good-sized farm that he and his father owned and worked. It was three hundred acres in central Louisiana, "Just this side o' Dry Prong" and it turned a nice profit every year. He felt very lucky and well-off but he was lonely.

"Lonely?" Rosemary said, her eyebrows reaching for each other in concern.

"Yes, Mam," Skippy said his eyes growing teary and his mouth trembling down at the corners. "How many women you know'd wait for a man nine months?"

Rosemary thought a moment, her lips quivering with possibilities and proposed, "What you need is a woman who'd travel with you those nine months."

Skippy giggled and wiped the spit from his lips with the back of his hand. "There ain't no such kind of woman."

"What about all the women truck drivers?"

"Them women ain' WOMEN!" His emphasis on the last word made Rosemary shake her head in complete sympathy and understanding.

At this Tony turned to Rosemary and said, "Really profound conversation, isn't it? Come on I'd really like to get on the road."

"Break my heart," Rosemary snapped still looking at Skippy.

Suddenly Skippy turned to Tony and asked, "I guess you two are together, huh?"

Tony forced his face towards the man and growled, "You guess right."

"Where are you going?" he asked unbothered by Tony's tongue.

"Rosemary wanted to see New Orleans, so I'm taking her." Tony's voice became very high and patronising and Rosemary shut off the rest of the conversation and thought. Actually it had been Tony who wanted Rosemary to see New Orleans. He'd told her all about the city just as he had told her about everything he'd seen or done since he was old enough to remember. Rosemary hadn't cared about seeing New Orleans. No, she'd just wanted to be going, always going, anywhere, nowhere.

"How long have you been on the road this time Skippy?" she asked almost in a hurry and Tony flashed her another look.

"Two weeks tomorrow," he answered studying his coffee, swirling it around in the cup, looking like a fortune teller with tea leaves. He didn't even look away from the blackness telling his future when Rosemary laughed and to cover it up, clapped her hand across her mouth and pretended to be choking.

After making sure she wasn't dying, Tony excused himself with a quick, "Back in a minute."

As he walked away he heard Rosemary say under her breath, "Counting the seconds."

By the time the rest room door had closed completely, Rosemary had already jumped up from her chair sending it

grating to a stop several feet behind her. All she had said was, "Let's go!" and Skippy could now see her white shirt bobbing across the parking lot. He sat for a moment without moving. His thoughts formed incomplete questions beginning with what and why. He was trying to understand her, but his brain had been shocked into slow motion. He gave up. There wasn't time. The cups knocked on the table as he rose, sending the black coffee jumping up and out. The crumpled five dollar bill he'd thrown was expanding in the liquid and Lincoln's face was squirming between two folds. He hesitated again, looking first to the toilet door and then in short quick movements of his head, around the room. Feeling as safe as he was ever going to feel, he tucked his head down forming yet another chin and stole his way to the door. Skippy pushed against the metal bar and a final quick picture of the room swung upon the glass. His eyes surveyed the scene, then he moved past it and out to where she'd run.

Tony stood at the urinal listening to the hollow lonely splashing echoing through the gray chipped and flaking room. There was an aching in his chest, but he thought about how like her old self she was just minutes ago and felt better. Maybe she was coming out of that crazy depressed mood she'd been in. He glanced up above his head and focused on two lines of graffiti neatly printed in black above the urinal.

DON'T LOOK UP HERE
THE JOKE IS IN YOUR HAND

Suzanna Barnes

RIDING THE TRAIN TO SPRINGFIELD MASS.

Black patent leathers
dangling limp
not reaching the floor
nose pressed against glass
eyes fixed on trees as they
zoomed past.

Jolt
the train snapped on
splintered bridge
thin pillars
held us high.

Down below
under moon
under us
deep black water

Afraid to close my eyes
or keep them open.

RAIN

One rainy night
Mother called me
to sleep in the big bed
with her.
I climbed in,
snuggled close
-felt her warm quiet breathing.
We listened to raindrops
slapping on glass.
She tucked heavy covers
warm and fuzzy
under my chin
and touched her lips
to my forehead.

Kimberly Boster Benson

GRANDMA

Raised in Logan
raised in coal dust

She swept it from the house
and from the clothes her father and three brothers wore

A satin doll in the company store
she wanted for Christmas went to another child down the row
"Afterwards, I was glad. That girl was sickly, died at an early age."

At twenty she married Grandpa used her cake money
for the license and ferry across the Ohio to Gallipolis
Forty-nine years ago

She papered a two-room shack with bags painted them
and made a home by the river through fire and flood

She asked Pop to move the house to higher ground
"Didn't even take the pictures off the walls, never broke
the first dish. Your mother was little but she helped me
cut weeds from the field to make a good place for our home."

They grew strawberries to pay off the farm
red-stained hands and aching back she picked
quart after quart through the depression
They paid it all

Forty-nine years some good, some bad
she slips chickens and strawberries on the seat of my car
she waves from the front porch of the brick holse
built twenty years ago still "new"

"I know what it's like, startin' out."
She helps me struggle now

CLEANING WINDOWS WITH GRANDPA

Cleaning windows with Grandpa
he outside me inside

"Rub 'em good, now. Get all the spots.
There was an ad in the Barboursville paper
for window washers. 'Spose we could get on?"

I wonder out loud how much it would pay

"Oh, it's just piece work, I reckon."

"Years ago, I got Sammy Kyle on down at the Nickel Plant
on a window-washin' crew. When they was gone, he got on
reg'Jar."

"Rub it here, now."
He taps the glass

"Just look at them spiders-seems like they come back
fast as we clean 'em off.
My bedroom window is the worst. I stay up right smart
at night anymore and the bugs come to the light."

He squirts his cleaner bottle aiming for glass
hitting his eye

"Hey boy! Had it turned wrong!"
He rubs his fist into watering eye
and laughs

"Roll it out some more. Don't never git these roll-out windows,
they're just no good a'tall, always jumpin' off the track-
I broke one that way once."

Picking up buckets and rags we move to the dining-room
to clean the sliding glass door

'Not too long ago, a red-headed woodpecker flew smack
into this glass and knocked himself out.

I just left him lay there on the patio
nd in a little bit he got up and flew off. It's a wonder
it didn't kill him.

A young grouse flew into it this summer and broke his neck.
I hated it awful bad."

Bag of turnips on the back seat and the five dollar bill
Grandma stuffed in my pocket
I drive home

In May
I clean windows with Grandpa again

W. Jean Combs Gilbert

PASSING INTO

Passing into
a Japanese watercolor-
tints and washes more sensed than seen.

(Landscapes of faded tapestry
echoing color of seasons passed,
a quilted, milken quiet of drifts
carefully pieced on winter's frame)

Sculpted above the ice-encased stream
crystal stalagmites in various poses,
trickling driplets
and flakes striking leaves
murmur earth's language-
trigger vague memories in those of us
far from beginnings
between destinations
on pheonix flights.

Ents greet the dawn, creakly yawning;
enlace snow-etched branches,
seek only wood's warmth.
Roots snuggle closer to mute, napping creatures
sleeping deep in the downy dunes.

Wild-children break brittle silence with sound,
swooshing downhill, madly race against time-
a noisy intrusion on two passing by
thought-full with praise of
Carth spirits, entwined.

GHOSTS

Faded-season scented
ghosts
have followed me into
this fall,
lurking
pale, but heavily-
hounding me relentlessly,
slipping unseen into
silent moments of two-
an unspoken three.
With love too long
to hate the ghosts
comes leaving for elsewhere
else when
mine will touch some other
heart
and no longer sense
this chill.

HOPE OF THE NATION

*Droll thing U/t E - 101 mystical arrangtmtnt of
muc1,ss logic for a /u1lk pur-pou. Tiu moll you can
hopt from k II sont Jcnov.e/tdit of yowrs,/f - that
comu too Iott - a uop of lu1uu1111"slablt rtrtu.
I havt wrstttd vult dtatlt. I, II tht most unuctng
roflnt you can (magirtt.*

Jouplt Conrad. "Htarl of DarknnJ"

*C'nt 1'Ennu1! - d1I dtargt d'un pltur 1,volon1a1rt,
II rtvt d'tdiafauds tn fumant son houka. Tu II connu,s.
ltcttur, ct monstrt drlicat, - Hypou,u ltcttur, - mon
stmlablt, - nan /rtrt!*

Citarlts Bawdr/a1rt. "Au luuur"

As he drove he could see every detail of the lush mountainside reflected in the lambent green water. The twisted birches thrusting obliquely over the bank stood above their glimmering doubles that seemed to form a translucent film over the sluggish river. Occasionally, a one-winged poplar seed would whirl down and come to rest upon the images, barely breaking the water's surface yet causing the reflections to tremble so slightly, trembling enough to make the landscape quake.

But he was above all this, speeding along the serpentine highway that followed the river out of Lazarus. The universe followed him, from the bright June sun that made his gold sports car gleam like burnished foil to the images that moved below him in the still water, their positions relative only to his own. It was just as he had planned - the day cloudless, the sky a bottomless blue. He downshifted to third as he went up a grade and banked the car hard to the right, still following the river that suddenly slipped and fell into a series of rapids some thirty feet below the road. The mountain was there, as always, but its mirror had been shattered into glistening white fragments that could only catch and burl back the relentless sun.

"Sherman, if you don't slow this thing down I'm-going-to-be-sick," the girl said. She had not spoken for the last fifteen miles, sitting sullenly as she idly traced a pale red fingernail along a seam in her pink blouse. She had long since resigned herself to having her hair mussed by the wind - vile as that was - and decided to wait indulgently until she could rid herself of the unpleasant situation.

He tapped the brake. "Sorry, love," he said, slowing in earnest only when he saw her perturbed scowl. "You know this thini. It just wants to run. Can't keep a beautiful beast like this chained up all the time." He punched the throttle and speed-shifted back into high. "Anyway, it gets my blood going."

She tried not to look at him. "We *must* get back by six. I told you that."

"Right, right." The tachometer needle crept past three thousand.

"We've been driving for an hour already. You *said* it would just be an hour's drive."

"Almost there."

"Where is this place?"

"Just up here." It was the perfect spot - just miles of riverbank, nothing else. He had gotten a new Minolta for high school graduation, so the premise was there f?r a nice little photo session in a natural setting, a picnic lunch, a little wine, and a pack of rubbers hidden expertly beneath his front seat. All alone with Tabby Hogg! He got a hard-on thinking about it.

She rolled up her window. "I don't see why we have to take pictures here. I mean, we're miles from anywhere."

"Sure. We have to be alone, you know, to concentrate on things at hand. We couldn't very well do it in your backyard."

She folded her arms and slumped in the eat. "Tina wanted to go out to her parents' place on the lake today. I hope this is worth it." She glanced up at the highway, then at the rear deck, careful to avoid Sherman. "Can I see your camera?"

"Sure. The case unsnaps at the bottom." He smiled at his devilish ingenuity. The perfect bait for Tabby, he reasoned, was Tabby herself, or an eight-by-ten glossy thereof. But then after all, if everyone else loved her, why should she be left out? He looked slyly to his right and saw her rubbing a finger over the purplish bulge of his 52mm Rokkor lens. How innocent, he thought. She seemed as tiny and fragile as a china doll with those round rosy cheeks and big brown eyes and petite body with nice little knockers that hung there like ripe fruit.

Her hair was the color of a grocery bag and was cut stylishly short, for she made sure she kept up with the latest trends - "unlike most people here in West Virginia," she liked to say. She bought disco records long before the rest of the class of '76 read about them in *People* magazine. She was nobody's fool. She took her responsibilities seriously - she had already been accepted at one of the *good* southern schools where she would major in success and minor in sociology, and of course she already knew what sorority she'd join. The future was not a joke to Tabra Lynn Hogg.

Nor did Sherman dismiss the real world. His was the class of destiny, he knew - children of the bicentennial, scions of the third century. That's what Tabby had said, with a little prompting by Miss Hastings, at last month's graduation exercises. And for Sherman that future was as tangible as the mortarboard that kept trying to slither off his sweating head as he rose to get his diploma in the Mount Zion High School gym. The days to come were something to take in his hands and set firmly into place just as he wanted, for he now was a man in a man's world. He'd go off to the university in a few months, take some advanced placement tests, become a TKE and graduate in three, three-and-a-half years tops. And he'd emerge a professional photographer equally adept at capturing the brutality of foreign wars for the wire services and the nuances of cleavage and cunt for *Penthouse*.

But for now the only such delights he considered belonged to the girl contentedly curled in the bucket seat beside him. She had managed to get the lens off the camera and now was absorbed in picking at the reflex mirror with an enameled fingernail. Despite her physique, it was hard for him to believe she was going to be eighteen next month. Toying with the camera, she looked like a kitten still wet from its mother's tongue. But he'd seen pictures of her in a bathing suit, and he'd heard about the deep blue welts on Jeff Franklin's neck. That little tryst hadn't lasted long, though, and Sherman was glad she'd decided to ditch that slim. Anyway, he could forgive a sucker-bite or two - at least her hymen was intact. Tabby was fastidious about such matters.

What have I done to deserve her? he wondered, suddenly humble. He'd followed her around since he was a sophomore, joining the clubs she joined, standing in the same cafeteria lines, even taking the same typing class just to guarantee he'd seen her at least once everyday. But there had always been someone in the way - never as talented or bright as Sherman, naturally - receiving the hickies he craved for himself. So a plan became necessary. The car (six cylinders, metallic paint, factory mags and what not) was the first step, for to associate with Tabby Hogg one had to *be* someone, and the golden British flash was an adequate breath of life, to say nothing of parents in high management positions. Astute to the end, Tabby weighed all factors carefully.

But it was only after he mustered the fortitude to talk to her did he realize the depth of her compassion and understanding. She melted him with her nubile zest for the soft and cuddly, as when she confided that she'd always wanted a colored baby or a monkey for a pet because they were so cute (although she conceded she'd have to give it away after it got big because such things were so unpredictable after a certain age). She advised him to have his hair razor-cut if he ever wanted to be accepted in the right circles and distinguish himself from the ever-gauche rednecks who were a blight upon the community. And in the gesture signaling that Tabby considered him possibly worthy of her consideration, she showed him where to find the key to Mr. Homer's standardized algebra tests when they arrived early in the math lab for the weekly meeting of the Appalachian Pathfinders' Club.

"When will we get there?" she asked, suddenly bored with the camera.

"Just any minute. Hey, cheer up! Just thinking about the lunch mom packed and that wine Mike bought for us -"

"I've *got* to go to a rest room," she said through clenched teeth, "*this* minute!"

"Well, there are a lot of trees and things up where we'll be shooting ... " He heard the air hissing through her polished teeth and hurled the car toward a weatherbeaten "BEER & BAIT" sign that rested against a log cabin that seemed half-

buried in the weedy hillside.

"I am not going in there!" Her cheeks were puffing and her lower lip curled into a pout.

"It's the only game in town." He tried to smile. "I'll go with you, in the store that is, uh, I'll wait while you do ... what you have to do." He blushed.

She shrieked appropriately and tested the car door's hinges by shoving it open as maliciously as possible. "Just ... 0000, just leave me alone!"

"I'll walk you in!" he called as she stalked on through the propped-open screen door. He sheepishly followed her into the dim interior of the cabin, which smelled of damp earth. A refrigerated case filled with beer, soft drinks and cannisters of worms took up one wall. Two racks of bread and potato chips stood in the middle, while by the door a small wooden counter, smooth with age, supported an early attempt at a cash register and a bald man wearing a once-white sleeveless undershirt. Three pot-bellied locals with biceps as big as Sherman's thighs leaned against the far wall and slowly sipped from bottles of Double Cola. The entire scene seemed even more bizarre when he viewed it via a round convex mirror, like the kind used in department stores to foil shoplifters, that was perched rather incongruously opposite the counter and presented a distorted fish-eye panorama worthy of a nightmare, vertigo or both.

"Gotta special on tidday," said the man behind the counter, whose seemingly polished pate, receding red-rimmed eyes, protruding teeth and thin, outwardly curled lips made Sherman think of a talking skull. He pointed to a hand-lettered sign taped to the cash register: NITECRAWLER'S, ONE \$ DOZ, 3 for TWO\$.

"No thanks," Sherman said weakly as one of the patrons pointed a bouncing Tabby through the back door and toward In antedeluvian shanty. She made an animal noise in the back of her throat as she stomped through the ankle-high weeds to the outhouse while Sherman stared at the bulldozer tattooed on her guide's bulbous arm.

"Well then," said the skull as he rubbed his hand over his

head as if searching for some final trace of hair, "we got lizards out back, all kinds o' hellgrammites, an' a few sof'shell crawdabs. Getcha a mess o' good bass wif them sof'shells."

"No, um, I'm just lookin' around." Sherman tried to grin amicably, then turned and pretended to browse over both kinds of beer in the cooler.

"Well," said the man with the tattoo, apparently culminating some deep meditation on the subject at hand, "to hell with 'im then, I say." Sherman did not move.

"Yeow, sumbitch," acknowledged a companion as he adjusted his sweat-stained red GMC cap. Sherman watched them in the mirror, always mindful of the door.

"I tellya what, I tellya what," said the third briskly, yet with a hint of a drawl. "Don't need his kind."

"Sumbitch," affirmed the man in the hat.

"Major'ty rules 'round this country, right?" said the tattooed one. "The people done spoke far's I'm concerned."

"Tellya what," said the third, "he's gonna tear the party apart. I tellya, gimme a thousand dollars today an' I still wouldn't vote for 'im."

"Goddamn right," agreed the man in the cap.

The man with the bulldozer on his arm took a drink of the Double Cola and swished it over his tongue for a few seconds. "The Dem'crats done said they want Carter. That damn 'Umphrey gonna blow the whole thing 'fe don't drop out."

"Niggerlover," the man in the cap observed. All three nodded gravely, Sherman started to breathe again, all the time keeping his eye on the mirror. From his distorted reflection the tattooed man seemed four feet wide with arms like hairy telephone poles.

"Here's whatcha need, son," said the skull, who had been rummaging behind the counter. Sherman peeked over his shoulder at him while still trying to monitor the surly trio's actions in the mirror. "Plas'ic glow-worms," said the skull proudly, holding up a package of vulcanized purple lures. "Shine under-water. Sucks 'im in like a magnet. Sev'ty-five for a pack o' three."

"No, no thanks," the boy said. He tried to wipe the sweat

from his oily forehead with his hand and managed to tear open a zit in the process. Cursing softly to himself, he began to look at himself in the mirror, thought better of it when he saw the goons behind him, and strained to see his reflection on the stainless-steel trim that girted the beer cooler. It happened everytime he wanted to look his best. His face would be clear for weeks, and then one morning he'd wake up with a huge cyclopean pimple smack between his eyebrows. And worse yet, one was beginning to protrude from the sparse fuzz that was trying to grow on his upper lip.

"Sumbitch," said the man in the cap, shaking his head. The one with the tattoo snorted sympathetically while the other pawed at the floor. Now somewhat confident that he wasn't the object of their anger, Sherman bent down low to see if he were bleeding, his view of his shiny forehead obscured by fingerprints and smudges on the metal. He tried to wipe an area clean with his shirttail.

"What-are-you-doing?" Tabby hissed behind him. He jerked erect and knocked his metal-frame glasses from his damp face as he tried to cover the bloody bump with his hair. The spectacles dropped in a blur to the grimy plank floor. Glass tinkled, and a snort came from the direction of the disgruntled rednecks.

"Don't move, don't move," he pleaded, but Tabby, moaning gutturally, had already left him and was sitting in the car, arms folded across her chest like a mummy, while Sherman groped frantically for his lost lens.

"Over there tuh th' left, son," advised the skull. "It busted, or what?" Face burning, Sherman finally retrieved the missing piece of glass and half-ran from the store, his eyes tracing the puddles of oil that speckled the dusty parking lot. "Need some help?" the man called. "Got some pl'ars ya c'nuse." Sherman waved him off and locked himself in the car, which had begun to broil in the afternoon heat.

"Why did you park in the sun?" Tabby said, still hugging herself. "Let's get out of here. If I don't get some air I-will-scream." The wayward lens, looking as though it had been cut from the bottom of a pop bottle, hadn't broken and Sherman

tried to snap it back into place. "Let's go!" shouted Tabby. "I have *never* been so humiliated." Her voiced lowered. "There wasn't even a seat in that - that -"

"Outhouse," offered Sherman, who somehow had put the glasses back in one piece and was cleaning them on the leg of his new jeans.

" - and there wasn't any toilet paper!"

"What did you do?" he asked absently, trying on his handiwork and discovering to his dismay that the glasses now listed on his nose at a 45-degree angle.

"Don't-you-ever-mind!" she whined, her voice regaining its usual nasality. He considered going back for the skull's pliers, but the sound of air whistling ominously through the girl's nostrils persuaded him to remove himself, the car and everything else from that place as quickly as possible - like immediately.

The sun seemed to burn its image on the car's hood as Sherman ran through the gears. On the straight stretches the road looked as if it were vaporizing in the distance as the hot air contorted the light like a funhouse mirror. "Open the vents. Do *something*," pleaded Tabby, trying to push her sweaty hair behind her ears. Sherman reached down and fumbled with the dashboard, barely able to see anything because of the grime that he had ground into his glasses. The girl surrendered, put her arms over her head and hooked them over the seatback shut her eyes and made noises.

Soon, however, things began to cool as air blasted through every orifice in the car that could be opened. Going up the last grade before his destination, Sherman shifted into third to maintain his speed and threw the car around a blind right-hand turn. Even through his greasy spectacles, though, he could see the pickup truck flash into view. It was doing every bit of twenty-five. He pumped the brakes, and the little vehicle fishtailed between the ditch on the right and the river to left as the radials and Tabby screamed in unison. Watching this drama - and somewhat unimpressed with it - were a boy and a girl, both about ten, in the truck bed. They made faces at Sherman as his car slid to within a foot of the old tan International's

bumper.

"Omigod, we almost died," Tabby whimpered. Her arms were stiffened in front of her, hands clutching the dash, body pressed back into the seat. "You almost killed me!" she screamed. Sherman's legs were quivering so badly he could barely keep his foot on the accelerator as the car crept behind the truck. The girl in back stuck out her tongue and the little boy waved his fist. Sherman wanted a grenade. "Look at those brats," Tabby said. "Pass them, Sherman. I can't stand to ride behind a truckload of kids."

"I can't pass anybody on a road like this," he replied, finally showing a bit of exasperation. "We just have to get to the other side of this hill, anyway."

"But they're going so *slow!*" she whined. The boy now was resting his chin on the tailgate and flicking his tongue at them like a snake. Sherman downshifted and swung the car into the other lane, only to be greeted by a blaring horn that was quickly followed by a speeding motorhome. Sherman swerved back behind the truck as the children applauded. Tabby hissed. The little girl puffed out her cheeks and pointed to the sullen teen-ager. "Sherman, she's mocking me! Make her stop!"

Livid, Sherman put his arm out the window and waved an upraised middle finger at the brats, who retaliated in kind. "Monkey see, monkey do," Sherman grumbled. The girl stuck out her tongue and continued to make faces at Tabby, who hissed and blustered like a puff adder.

After finally reaching a straightway on the other side of the mountain and passing the truck - an act accompanied by a flurry of middle fingers and taunting tongues on all sides - the sports car passed into an expanse of level land where a field of Queen Anne's lace began to wedge between the road and river. "See that clump of trees down there?" Sherman asked as he pointed. "That's the spot. You can't see it from any other place on the road because of the trees. There's a little dirt lane we turn down about a quarter-mile from here." Sure enough, the road was there, a narrow path through the quilt of tufted white on either side. Sherman drove almost to the

edge of the river, then cut back to the left behind a stand of gnarled birches until he reached a spot where the water was still as that of a lagoon, its surface as smooth as polished chrome. He parked at the edge of the field and they both staggered wearily from the car, a golden beacon shining behind them in the sun. Strolling to the bank, they saw themselves on the water, their heads pointed at the summit of an inverted mountain that was reflected from the far side.

"It's beautiful," Tabby admitted. She leaned against a huge old birch that jutted some thirty feet over the water, its roots, exposed by years of spring floods, twisting along the riverbank like a den of snakes. Sherman went to fetch the picnic supplies, taking great care to drop the pack of rubbers into his camera's gadget bag. Come hell or high water or both, he knew this was the day she'd be screwed.

"You hungry?" he asked as he lugged the basket, blanket and photo gear to a grassy spot in the shade. She grunted in a way that made Sherman think she said yes, so he unfolded a terrycloth spread with a picture of a can of beer on it and removed the chicken, salad and wine from the wicker basket. He'd told Mike, an eighteen-year-old friend from school, to select the right spirits for the occasion, and Sherman was glad he'd entrusted that responsibility to someone in the know. And studying the bottle of strawberry wine, Sherman wasn't disappointed. It was good stuff - Mike had told him so. It was supposed to go down like soda pop and get a bitch drunk in no time flat. He hoped Mike was right, since he himself wasn't an expert in alcoholic affairs. He knew he'd have to bone up on that before he went to college. Tabby had already learned to drink beer, and he'd heard rumors that she'd even smoked dope with Jeff Franklin. But that hard stuff wasn't for Sherman. He valued his mind above all else (Tabby excluded) and felt no need to alter his perception in the least.

So they ate and drank, Tabby nibbling delicately on a chicken leg while Sherman attacked a breast, its grease soon glinting on his chin. And the wine wasn't that bad, he thought. Tabby was guzzling it like water even though she made a face when

she first saw the bottle. "More wine?" he asked. She nodded -almost smiling - and Sherman sloshed more of the pinkish swill into her paper cup. The plan was working perfectly.

"Where are we going to take the pictures?" Tabby inquired after a sip. She looked around, trying not to seem too interested. "After all, that's why we came, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Sure. More wine?"

"No. Too much of this cheap stuff will make you sick. Why'd you bring cheap stuff like this anyway?"

He thought about blaming everything on Mike, but he realized that would just show his ignorance. It never paid to seem ignorant around somebody like Tabby Hogg, so he changed the subject. "Maybe we could shoot on the riverbank." He gulped down the last of the wine, which suddenly tasted too sweet. "You could lie down by the edge of the water, and I could shoot up from ground level -"

"I'm not going to get all muddy. Lck! There are bugs and snakes down there!"

"Okay, sure. What about in the field?"

Of course, Sherman hadn't considered that the sun made her squint and besides, there were bugs and snakes out there, too. And now another problem arose as a cloud of dust floating over the field in question. Sherman waited for a moment and then heard the low rumble of an approaching car. Shit! he thought. The property belonged to one of his dad's business clients and was deserted except for occasional fishing trips. He'd been told it was his to use all day. So who was this? It wasn't in the master plan, but there it was anyway - a ground-dragging once-red coupe that stopped right at the end of the lane, thus blocking the only way in or out. Nice move, dumb-ass, Sherman thought.

The two occupants of the intruding car, almost half of which was gray putty and primer, sat there for several seconds and looked about cautiously. Feeling rather awkward - to say nothing of frustrated - Sherman leaned back against his car and pretended to gaze out at the river, careful to avoid staring at the newcomers. "Who are they?" Tabby asked indifferently.

"Don't know," he replied. The red car's doors opened almost simultaneously, and a man and a woman emerged and strolled toward the teen-agers.

'Howya doin',' said the man pleasantly, smiling behind a long, unkempt beard. Sherman said he was all right and asked the same of the stranger, who replied likewise. Both women remained mute, expressions equally vacant. The black-whiskered man hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his faded jeans, which seemed to consist more of patches than original denim, and began to walk around the sports car. "Saw 'er from the highway," he said. "Figgered this road'd get us down here." He glanced up and down the riverbank. "Ee-yowp, she's a real beaut." He slapped the hood. "Y'all 'lone here?"

"Uh, yeah," said Sherman. The stranger seemed friendly enough, still smiling as he scrutinized the car. He was about Sherman's height, but his arms, protruding from a tight gray t-shirt, were more muscular and darkly tanned. His hair seemed dirty and hung several inches below his shoulders, its ragged ends suggesting that a barber hadn't seen it for months, perhaps even years. But even though the man continued to grin, Sherman still felt an uneasiness when looking into the stranger's mirrored sunglasses that permitted no hint of where his eyes were peering.

"Ee-yowp," the man said, smacking his lips together. He turned his head toward Tabby, who was propped against Sherman's car with her back to everyone. The other woman stood slump-shouldered behind the man and kicked the fuzz from a dandelion. She would've been as attractive as Tabby, Sherman observed, if she'd have taken care of herself. As she was, her limp brown hair looked as if it have been cut in a shag but neglected for several months. She wore a brown t-shirt adorned with the picture of a pouting green frog and the caption "I'm so Happy Here I Could Shit." Sherman was beginning to feel the same way. He could hear Tabby breathing in irritated bursts.

"Ee-yowp," the man went again. "Y'all fishin' or some-thin'? Looks like ya had a right fine picnic over there."

"Yeah, well no, we're down here taking pictures."

"Uh-huh." The man kept looking at Tabby, as far as Sherman could tell. "Man, we ain't interruptin' nothin', are we? I's just, you know, sorta curious 'bout that car'n all."

"Aw no, no, no problem," Sherman said. He waved his hands nervously. Tabby turned to glare at him.

"That's nice. Y'know, me an' Kitty," he pointed at his companion, "we was just drivin' through ... " His smile began to fade, and he looked ominously at the still-silent woman. He turned his face toward Sherman. "Didn't get your name," he said, stating instead of asking.

'T m Sherman. That's Tabby over there."

The man smiled again. "Tabby," he said as if savoring the word on his tongue. "That's nice. I'm Dominic. I call myself that. Like the sound of it. Differ'nt, y'know?" Sherman nodded as if he understood. "Y'all in school?" Dominic asked.

"Sorta," said Sherman. "Just graduated high school in Mount Zion. Tabby's going to Clemson this fall, and I'm heading up to WVU."

"Well, isn't that just fine," Dominic said blandly. "I's in your shoes myself, what, 'bout five year ago. Yowp, just got outta school, goin' into th' world." All traces of the smile vanished and he snorted almost angrily. "Ee-yowp, I was gonna do it all." He clasped his hands behind his head, leaned back on Sherman's car and faced the river. "Say you's takin' pictures?" Sherman nodded and started to elaborate, but Dominic went on. "Usta take pictures myself. Had all them gadgets - wide angle, telephoto lens, the works. Had an ol' Ni-kon F body. Damn thing near solid as a rock. Know what I'm talkin' 'bou?"

"Sure," Sherman said, eager to show his knowledge. "That's a real good camera - "

"Ee-yowp," Dominic cut in, almost speaking to the river instead of the boy, "a man can do most anythin' with a camera. They's an art to it, y'know, like they's an art to ever'thin'. Use a telephoto an' make that ol' river nar' as a ditch, or put on a Wide angle an' make 'er as wide as the Mississippi. Put this in focus, this out, blur this, blur that, anythin'. Anythin' hut one." Sherman waited, but the man still looked over the

smooth water and its brittle glint. Tabby openly stifled a yawn while Kitty crushed a bumblebee beneath her sandal.

"Anythin'," Dominic finally said, apparently unmindful of his lapse, "but show it like it really is." Sherman frowned. The man did not move and spoke on. "Somethin's always 2 little off. Too light in one spot, too dark in another. Ain't nothin' all black or all white. Don't nobody realize that, though. They don't worry 'bout the grays - jus' the blacks an' whites. I done tried to balance the light and the dark, but you can't get by with it - you'll jus' ruin the whole thing ifn's you try. Go for one or the other an' make do with what you get. . . He snorted again. "Ee-yowp, had my fill o' that. A picture don't do you no good noway. It's there an' it's gone, y'know? You got one split second an' that's all. Nothin' ain't never the same, though, an' that's what screws it all up. Oneel that second's gone. they's another, an' another after that. Hell, I could stand here without movin' an' shoot fifty frames an' not have the same thing twice!."

"But if you don't move," countered Sherman, "wouldn't you just be shooting the same thing over and over?"

Dominic turned to him lips drawn tight. "It's jus' what I said." He pointed to the river. "You think that's the same as when I came? A river's never the same. That water's always movin', no matter how slow it might seem to you. It's always changin'. Always." He exhaled heavily, almost sadly, walked toward Kitty and looked at Tabby vacantly. "Shit, let's get on with it," he said flatly. and the woman walked to ~~the~~ battered red car. groped about in the front seat and returned. - all without changing expression - holding a length of cord and a small black handgun. She tossed the cord to Dominic and placed the pistol against Tabby's head, who immediately fell back against the car and made high-pitched nasal noises. Sherman was petrified. "Ifn's you please," said Dominic. raising his eyebrows above his sunglasses.

Tabby sat on the riverbank amid the bugs and snakes, her hands lashed behind her and her mouth taped to muffle her incessant whimpers. Sherman, likewise bound though not gagged, slumped against his car, which had been moved out

of sight from the highway. Kitty leaned against a tree and picked dirt from beneath her fingernails while Dominic rummaged through Sherman's camera bag. Almost blinded by his own sweat, the boy peered at him. "What are you going to do?" he asked, forcing rough sounds from his tight throat.

"Prob'ly nothin' more'n you was plannin' to do," Dominic said and tossed Sherman's pack of rubbers at Tabby, who flinched as if it had been a knife. "My my, ain't we well equipped," he mused, holding up the camera and then tossing it to the woman. "We can hock this shit for plenty."

"Please take it," pleaded Sherman, "but don't hurt us. Take my car and leave us tied up here. We won't tell. Please!"

"Uh-huh, right," Dominic mumbled. He walked over to Tabby and stroked the back of his hand over her wet hair. She immediately recoiled, and he grabbed a fistful of hair and shook her head violently as her feet flailed the mud.

"Please!" Sherman shouted. "Take it all, just leave us **Be!** My God, my God," he began to sob, "we've got so much ahead of us, please, don't, don't, don't!"

Dominic released the girl and she fell back against the roots. Sherman struggled to his feet as the bearded man approached him. "So much ahead of you!" Dominic yelled. "You punk! You tell me what's ahead of you! Tell me your fairy tales. You an' your rubbers. So you was gonna fuck 'er. huh? Ee-yowp! Then what was you gonna do? Fly to heaven? Go to the prom?" He stepped menacingly toward the boy but stopped short. "Lemme tellya, your future ain't here yet. What ain't here ain't nothin'. Nothin'! Y'see, all there is, it's all a joke. Yeah, smart boy, a joke! And long's I'm tellin' it, I'm gonna laugh. Laugh at you, laugh at ever' fucker like you!"

He spun around and stalked toward Tabby. Frantic, Sherman turned to the woman. "Don't let him do it!" he screamed. "For the love of God, don't let him! Look! Look at that! Are you gonna let him be with another woman? Don't you care?"

"She don't," Dominic shot in. "It don't matter to her, it don't matter to me. Just right now. What was ain't nothin', what's gonna be ain't nothin'. It don't matter. boy. don'cha

see." Sherman stared at him, lip quivering. Dominic snatched away the sunglasses and glared at the boy. "It may as well be now as later," he said, his voice suddenly softening. "You gotta.see. Like me. You gotta see. You'll get tired, an' then you'll see." He turned away and unbuckled his belt.

"Please," Sherman whimpered.

The man's eyes glistened in the sun as he looked back at him. "Not in front of 'im," Dominic said to the woman. "Get him away. I can't look at him. Get him away. Now!"

Kitty hooked a surprisingly strong arm around Sherman's elbow and pulled him to the other side of the car while Dominic watched. "Get down," he commanded, and Sherman knelt behind the door, his eyes still following Dominic through the shimmering reflections on the window. He saw him turn away, then back, away, then back, retreating slowly toward the river. Sherman stared at him, his eyes taking in every detail, every image until they finally focused on his own drenched, terrified face amid the mottled green and blue.

E. Catherine Coyne

SOME FISH AREN'T ALWAYS IN THE SEA

Parasitic fools stumble on rocks
Groping for the gems
Of ravaged oysters.
You can laugh at hers
And struggle to be tighter
Not to want to exist in spite of her.
Assume you are the safest
Boat she'll sail ... Well, considering
That dread of suffocating water. Just
Odd, that your ample hands form hollows
Her subtle endowments long to saturate.
Be assured you've harnessed a morsel
Others would intimidate.
Have the rest put their nets
In a different ocean.

beyond summer farm

accumulative summer
lamina
convening rubble, erosions and grasses
in bright nucleate
of stillness and swelter . . .

noon
clotted incandescence
immobile and occult
assumes the green
leaved skins in droop,
oppression's freckles and scales
of shadow
fall thin
among the stems and pores
of drought digestible

cricket's parched voices
along the shale light
refract drawing inward to quiet
inverting their characters
skewered and ingesting the wild
lives laying up
in the hunger of drowse

brown and inedible
pastures in feed bins
manufacture cuds
replacing the green satisfaction.
relieving the herd's must
creating the tranquilized
lethargy and peaceful deceit.

bream in the pond,
pallid islands
edible ruin of strangle, belly up
feeding the flocks survival;

cauterized instincts
 coalesce the frogs
under the shore acquiring its circular
 acreage of hyacinth
and weeds through the fetid herbal
 of their airs decaying ...
the spring's sauce congealing
 undrinkable water,
a brief assimilation
 uselessly sweat and swollen tongues
as quickly evaporating ...
unbreathable rank and stagnant
 scabs of wet
from the spillway
 along the seasonal nood cuts,
pocketed in the bottoms
 and bends
from the carcass of creek
 raise into noon
kilned mirage
 shimmering warp
of its taunting cruel
 imagery of laughter
that aggravates thirst
 closing throats
with sour indignance,
 harassing the dry.
on the deserted rim
 of grey collapse
omelets of pigeon eggs
 broil in the loft ...
surrendering, the farmhouse
 drains its memories
mothering its vacancy;
 a weathered neglect
and dry suckled wife
 of children and sad

collecting its solitary,
gnawing the summer bone,
gathering perfection
becoming earth.

from the soar and glide
of martins carried and cast,
buried in the groin
cool of humus and roots,
the infant green alive
nourished and sculpted
seed of forest,
matrix of fields wild
families and spring . . .

absorbed in the sear and negative,
a cumulus hominy
of heat and sweat,
the wet pulse
penetration and spray of alive,
the filial migration
of weather

to rain itself
and lay itself,
the swell and press
of its naked
juices drinkable
among the fields and throats
that accomplish the season,
gain the evening
taste the sweet and safe
and sing the night
from mourning attainable.

harvests

(A STREAK OF LEAN, STREAK OF FAT)

body from august
 crisp, fallow unedible
attrition from lean
 harvest:

drifts of waste
 abandoned shucks
and shed of ripe

beneath the swelter
 and brittle ethers
settling
 among the burned
stems and voices of crickets'
 low and turgid song
compressing the still

including these naked
 skins
in the summered forest
 among the brown disuse

from green's rare
 thin slivers
from passion eddying frails
 of the unpurchased
spring,
 echo the impulse
from april whorls
 decaying vitality
in the evening kiln
 finished,
randoms of weather's pottery
 rustling to bundle

prior to field's hybernal
on its baked injury
riffs incipient
completion
towards humus congealing
earthwork

meal for springs;
a fertile clabber
of august's pulse
on the fragile
of ripening instinct
impending
green alive.

leafskins, constantly sounding

on breath attenuated,
this body fed on seasons
had lost the primate
necessity of boneform;
become permeable,
a skinsheet on the greenwood
impaled.

dissolution, the soluble bonechaff
assuming rivers;
skins fall a gentle pollen
penetrating earths
again, entering into seed.

released, this breath weather
is windjoined
ethers of self permeating
the distant nebulae,
the eagle's breast

formless ethers,
the body's atmosphere
up swarming radiant light
becoming chill mated rain
a combering serum of pulse
encysting gravity,
streaming into filial places
of bright laughter
and shadow quiets;
commingling with solitude:

self from the body skinned
evisceration,
escaping imperative
nature of decay . . .

a lifesong, the modulated voice
of cicadas unimpaired
from bodythroat leaping,
painlessly reborn;
uninvolved with bone,
from root's umbilical
severed dissemination.

outward unbodied manchild;
self a stamen of breath
with the greater flower
intercourseing,
the body cosmic impregnating.

beyond the debris
and things of self,
past the ear's ability
and skin dusts,
beneath the perfect silence
listen . . .

it is life
constantly sounding;
the tinsel whisper of matter
being reborn as bodylife,
its seasons congealing
into leafskins,
bodies and other worlds.

fieldskin

wintered grasses
combering brown
 against stolid pines'
islanded evergreen d disdain
 from vigorous trunks'
impassive draining vegetables'
 tidal scuds
from green vitality unearthed
 identities'
ruined talc,
 beneath weatherstone powdered;
fieldskin into edible
 flour
meal for roots,
 resumption as humus
necessity for the unborn seeds'
 impending spring

cleaned woodspace, vacant
 inertia
under frost its vegetable passions
 perfectly mown;

nature's indiscriminate
 cryo-scythe
instantly suspending the green
 velocity, the floral
animation in the body glacial

death's quickly unfelt
 congealing the resinous soul
within the autumnal influence;
 remaking the browns
from its skinned timbre
 as future's edible resource
to echo its history
 alive

the seed
in winter chrysalised,
fashioning spring's kernel
secure in the earth
hyberna];
lifepod, the ripening impeccable
instinct of genesis
prior to the pulse,
prior to breath
amniotic
fetus of spring's
green from germination

the season perceived alive
in the warming gain
of march becoming term
on winter's solubles;
a swollen imperative
among the edible farina
of its ancestry feeding,

on the digestible
compost of parents' excellent
grist
and contagious strengths
comes the spring child
greening fields
ravenous from birth
commencing alive.

EXCERPT FROM "LETTER TO L."
OF LOS BANOS IN CALIFORNIA

. . . building from inside out, I am busy conquering the world - because now I'm on my own, independent of obligation, except those I owe *myself*. . . the storm is over, it's been weathered with many damages done, but lessons learned may have been worth the trouble. I should think there will be an EASIER way to learn! MY WARNING - dependence is almost always detrimental to the individualism of either person - constricting and choking the personality of the real person who lies hidden underneath the impetuosity and confusion. Of course, dependence is necessary eventually - we ALL need other people, but too soon is simply too soon, love is uncontrollable! WATCH IT! Attachment and affection must be possible without enthrallment . . .

. . . the view is getting more interesting these days. I can tell it's time to drop the shit and move forward . . . I don't think insanity played any part in my mistakes. Poor choice, rather, was my flaw. But it wasn't a choice as much as it was a mutual agreement; I should have known better! . . . the obvious things! I compromised my ideals! FRUSTRATION IN RETROSPECT!!

Perfection can never be found, but I could have come up with a hell of a lot closer approximation! Yearn and learn.

Alan L., please, never merely tolerate my proclivities - accept them - and we'll get along much better. After all, my personal feelings have no bearing at all on a straight-forward friendship between you and me.

You are the spoils of the battle - one of the few good things gained from my futile pursuit of something that came and passed (oh too quickly).

Fate seems to be master of us all. Understand (if you can) what I merely speculate about (there's no certainty) that in order to feel *complete*, I should have a special one, a partner all mine, someone whose situation and mine can be shared.

We must all die alone, think and learn alone; though others do it too, you must face things from the inside out - yourself - no one else inhabits your mind but you. The world is lonely enough for us humans already. If "interactions" and conversations and cooperative efforts, as well as shared responsibilities, feel right, then why hold back? T'would be foolish.

Check this out: A guy can (generally) get to know another guy better than a girl in a relationship of the same intensity. They

have more similar things, are more alike, have more in common, thus, understand one another better. They can almost read each others minds! Their egos are structured and depend upon the same things. But on the other hand, arguments can be much more damaging, each one knows where to aim his blows to reek the most effect. (Your mind is in the gutter, Alan.)

But consider the positive side (without becoming envious if you can).

The absolute ultimate, a union so integrated as to defy comparison would be the case. Union never really being possible (except for symbollic physical union) anyway but spiritually. The mind. Transcendence of this earth is what I mean.

An end to loneliness forever! A lasting end, love is stronger than death! Believing it is the only way to realize it . . . And the words whispering incessantly in my ear are "conform, conform, conform" coming down from everywhere. The world can kiss my ass! This is to be expressed as emphatically as possible, so let me try again: GO TO HELL WORLD!

I go with the flow of feelings! That should get it. You follow?

I actually feel *lucky* that my physical inclinations make it possible.

So there it is . . . 19 years of standing on the edge of the world -wondering . . . and the realization of what to reach for-to take me so high . . .

. . . dispute it and disagree if you want, but appreciate it please. I have seen a vision and it will someday be reality for me. *That* is the essence of my confidence and optimism. Hell, it's my main reason for tolerating the burden of living!! Drop your overdone pride and take the initiative in being friendly, if you are having trouble making friends in this place called California. Good Luck, I have confo. in you. I'll be expecting your comments, criticisms, and opinions,

SOON!

Darlene Farmer

[I SEE MY NAME IN THE FLAME]

I see my name in the flame of a candle with the flicker of
red, blue, and yellow.

Glancing at a bird in flight,

I see the pressure of the wind as its wings meet a gush with
every movement.

I see shadows where there is no light and I see light where
there is total darkness.

I see reflection where there is no mirror and I understand
words where there is no talking.

Here, I stand on the edge of this great world, and can actually
feel it turning underneath my feet.

And, if the sun is in my reach, I would grasp it and hold
it to my heart.

I'm not a simple person

Just a person doing simple things.

AM I RIGHT?

"But you know I have never been like those other mothers; am I right? I have always felt a mother's place in life is wherever her children are - not galivanting around town to one of those Save the Whale Picnics, or whatever those benefits are; am I right? Whenever one of those holier-than-thou charity workers asks if I work, well I tell them I have the most noble profession there is - Motherhood; am I right? Why, of course I am; who should be more of an expert than me with my three . . ." Louise stopped to take a breath and suddenly realized her error, ". . .except of course you dear with your four. Whatever could I have been thinking about?"

Madeline, a reserved, quiet, and only mildly attractive woman in her mid-thirties had been listening intently to her friend, Louise expound on the glories of maternity for over twenty minutes now. Seeing her first opportunity to speak since Louise had begun, she jumped in with a "Well, Louise . . ." but she could not be heard above the screaming of Louise's youngest son, Earl, who was out of view behind the tool shed but regrettably not out of earshot.

Louise finally bellowed around the corner of the shed, "Little Earl! Will you PLEASE STOP SCREAMING for five minutes so Mommy can hear what your Aunt Maddy's saying?" Earl continued to howl for another 30 seconds until his small lungs could sustain him no longer. He then collapsed to the ground where he convulsed for another 30 seconds and then finally he lay quiet, the empty bleach jug at his head.

On the other side of the aluminum shed, over the chain-link fence that divided their lots, the two women sighed simultaneously and Louise said, "Finally. I thought he'd never shut up. He's been such a pain recently; you know - hyperactivity and all? Maybe he will go play somewhere quietly now. Oh, go on dear - you were saying?"

Madeline glanced around as if expecting another interruption,

cleared her throat and began hesitantly, "Well, I always thought ... " but she was once more abruptly cut off by the raucous voice of her companion; "Melody LYNN Whiting march yourself around here RIGHT THIS MINUTE!! I have had just about ENOUGH of you today, young LADY." As Louise was roaring to a crescendo, Madeline settled herself back into the lawn chair, while being careful to avoid the broken webbing she had meant to replace two years ago, but just had not gotten around to yet. She had been her friend in her 'reprimand rages' many times and knew it was best to relax and wait it out. Nothing would be accomplished by cutting in until after she was calmer, anyway.

Louise continued to screech as the small girl edged around the shed; "All right, what have you been doing to Hank Jr. now?" The girl took great care to stay out of the range of her mother's wild gestures, but her expression was not one of fear as might be expected. Rather she looked calm, almost bored, as if she had survived this same sermon many times. She nodded at the appropriate pauses, but offered no note of regret or apology. Louise continued, "I am TIRED of having to apologize for YOUR BEHAVIOR! I am QUITE SURE your Aunt Madeline does not bring Hank Jr. over here to have you beat on him constantly. Don't deny it, YOUNG LADY. I heard him screaming and we all know what that means. I WILL NOT run around the house every five seconds to check on you. YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER, and I expect you to ACT LIKE IT! YOU GO APOLOGIZE to him RIGHT NOW, and whatever you were doing, just STOP IT!"

Madeline noticed as her friend turned around that although Louise's face was scarlet with rage, she had applied a smile before turning to face her. Louise's tone was sweeter also as she said, 'I'm so sorry, Madeline. I just don't know where they pick such behavior up. We certainly don't teach them to pulverize each other; am I right? They must get it from school."

On the front porch, Melody was standing over Hank Jr. and thinking how tired she was of hearing him snuffle and whine. That would not matter long, though; she knew how to keep him quiet for good. She would just ease the rope she had bound him with earlier up around his neck and pull the slip-knot tight. As she did so, Hank made an entertaining gurgling sound and she giggled delightedly.

Around the shed, Louise and Madeline were saying their goodbyes. "I'd really love to stand here and talk with you all day, Madeline, but I have to go bleach a load of diapers. It seems that's all I ever do. Well, you know how it is; am I right? Take care, dear. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

As Louise made her way through the toy-strewn yard to her back door, Madeline heaved a sigh and gathered herself out of the frayed chair. On her way to her own back door, she turned annoyedly and yelled, "Hank Jr.! Come home RIGHT NOW!! I've got to get you cleaned up before Daddy gets here."

AN EVEN RECORD

The folds of Hilary's body were moist. She shoveled a spoonful of tuna noodle casserole onto the faded green plate, then passed the dish to the girl beside her. She smiled and commented on how delicious it always was. One of the duties of a faithful camp counselor: make the food appear appetizing. Hilary wiped the web of sticky hair from her forehead, and picked up the plastic tumbler of milk, beaded with water droplets. The din in the lodge made conversation difficult at mealtime, which pleased Hilary. The dull clink of flatware against plastic plates, the hum of kids' voices and the big ceiling fans all blended into a general rush of sound. Hilary could enjoy the constant cascade of sound and hear nothing distinct. Except Janet.

Janet had acquired one of the seats by Hilary for yet another meal. She sat low in her seat, her head just grazing the top of Hilary's shoulder, her shoulders bent in, her chin nearly meeting her chest. She was thin to the point of wafer-like. Her coloring was dull and monochromatic, in the gray-brown range. A yellow plastic barrette caught up the wisps of wavy hair around her face. Had she only held her shoulders back, she would have sat nearly eye to eye with Hilary. Janet held her fork in her left fist, bending her arm and wrist into a circular shape to put her fork into her mouth. "What da we do next, Hilary?"

Hilary's stomach tightened. "You know, Janet. The same thing we've done every night after supper since you came. You've been here three days now."

"No, I don't know. What da we do next?"

Hilary's lips tightened; she pressed them into two

thin lines. All she asked for at dinner was to hear lots of insignificant noise. "We go sing outside."

"Where da we go? Huh, Hilhily?" Janet's mouth was gaping open, wet clumps of partially chewed tuna casserole in her mouth.

Hilary looked down at Janet hunched over the table, and felt revulsion at the open mouthful of food. A triangular piece of noodle was clinging to Janet's lower lip.

"Janet, we are going to sing outside on the benches like every other night after supper. You can tell me when we walk past the benches every morning that that's the singing place. I think you know what we do after supper."

Janet rhythmically chewed her food, then picked up her fork and curled her arm up to her face. Hilary scraped the last of the peas on her plate up onto her fork, and as she ate them, noticed all the girls were finished, except Janet. Janet's plate was still full. She had an appetite equal to the other girls', which meant that with her pace, eating was a long ordeal. Hilary sat back and smiled at the other girls, her head turned from Janet. And wiped at her face and neck with her napkin, absorbing the excess moisture.

The camp frequently had retarded campers, and Hilary had had a retarded girl in her cabin before. But the other girl had not been as demanding, even though she needed Hilary's help in the shower and couldn't tie her shoes or button up her clothes. Janet could take care of herself - she didn't need Hilary's help to even put the barrette in her hair. But Janet's incessant babbling drove Hilary to a different edge, made her want to run or scream. She always wanted to hold Hilary's hand, could hardly stand it when Hilary would leave, would push the other girls away to sit next to Hilary.

"Hilhily? What da we do after we sing?"

"Try to say HIL-AR-EE. Say it, Janet."

"Say what?"

"Say my name."

"Hilhily."

"No, that isn't my name. Say HIL-AR-EE."

"Hilharly." She looked up at Hilary, her head sunk between her shoulders. "What da we do after we sing?"

"We play games." Hilary tried to control the tone of her voice. "Finish your supper now. We're waiting on you."

Janet ate another bite and began talking again. "My brother won't eat peas. He bad. My brother won't never ever eat peas. Momma says he bad. Ooooh - he bad!"

"Just eat, Janet," Hilary said, picking up her fork and running it around her plate. The other girls had detected Hilary's annoyance, she had to pull herself together. As a counselor, she had a duty to set a good example.

Janet finished her casserole and the last bite of peas as the bell was rung to go to singing. Hilary stood up to lead the girls out, thinking if she hurried, Janet might linger in the rear with the other girls. But, no, Janet was right there, slipping her hand into Hilary's and talking about her brother. Hilary resented the extra heat generated from Janet's hand, but she couldn't just she her off.

They walked from the lodge towards the rows of gray, warped benches in the shade of the trees that edged the woods. Janet switched subjects, talking about her dog.

"My dog always wants to eat! And when it don't get food it cries! Yes, yes, yes, Hilhily! Oh, and Momma gets so mad and she says 'you bad dog' and it cries more!"

Hilary led the girls into the shade, the coolness hitting them like a splash of water. They all sat on the benches, which felt as smooth and cool as the inside of a clam

shell.

"I told my dog 'You bad dog!' and it cried and it wanted food! Yes, yes, my dog is so fat! All he do is eat! All he do is eat food!"

Hilary wondered about Janet's vocabulary and grammar, Janet could speak correctly and use extensive vocabulary but at points in her conversation, she'd break down and her language would become childish and simple.

She wished Janet was more like the other retarded girl she had had that summer, who needed Hilary even to shower, who never could make conversation, who was always the same. Hilary had known what she wanted and needed, and after a day could second guess what she'd do. But Janet was not regular, and she was seldom helpless.

Two sunburnt counselors in their regulation green shirts and blue jean shorts were on the stage in front of the benches, trying to get everyone's attention. Hilary whispered to Janet to be quiet, and Janet stopped talking.

The first song was throbbing with clapping hands and Hilary couldn't hear Janet's voice. But the next song was melodious and soft, and Janet's attempt at singing set Hilary on edge again.

"Waa-waa-uh-smokey-waa-la - withgrow-" Janet didn't sing with any understanding of music. She seemed to follow a noise within herself that was only remotely related to the external music. "Waa-waa-love her-waa-wee - why oh-boo-"

Hilary listened to Janet, thinking about how just her voice made her aggravated. At least Janet only spent one week at camp! Then, Hilary felt embarrassed. Janet couldn't help how she was or the things she did. Hilary began to run her guilt cycle again. She was accustomed to its appearance now. All week, several times a day, she'd feel aggravation, anger, then guilt and remorse. The

guilt was always in the fashion of the same argument. She was so lucky to not have the problems Janet did, and to have the power to overcome many of her problems. Janet didn't have that power. Janet couldn't help herself, Hilary shouldn't condemn her for things she was powerless over.

The next song everyone had to stand up in front of their benches and do motions. Hilary had watched Janet all week trying to learn the motions, and she couldn't. Her arms would flail when they should have swung, her hands would make a bowl when they should have made a cup. She would watch Hilary intently and try to copy her, but she was either too late or didn't get the motion at all. Hilary felt sorry for her, and continued her guilt cycle, when Janet clapped her hands after everyone else, and then couldn't make a butterfly with her hands. She held her hands up and turned them palm up, then palm down, but couldn't figure how to connect them to make a butterfly flutter like Hilary did. Hilary felt more compassionate when Janet wasn't acting belligerent and demanding. She liked Janet infinitely better when she was helpless and confused.

The next song was Hilary's favorite, and she sang so loud that Janet's mumble singing was nearly drowned out. She looked at Janet once during the song, her shoulders pointing inward, her head low. She was wearing a terry shorts outfit in yellow, her bones jabbing out in all points and angles. She was fourteen, and had soft, high, pretty breasts. It was the most startling thing about her appearance - this sudden soft fullness among prominent bones and sharp edges. Hilary had noticed this edge of woman in Janet from the first moment she saw her, and it gave her a peculiar confusion about what Janet was. All the other retarded campers that summer had looked rather dry and shapeless, their bodies seemed sexless and

heavy, even when they were thin. But Hilary felt a pang of jealousy at Janet's round, full breasts.

When the singing concluded, two more green shirted counselors with sunburnt faces announced the games for the night. Hilary would play kickball again tonight with her girls, and Janet would want to hold her hand when they played outfield. She thought of next week, of playing kickball without having to hold Janet's hand in the outfield. Next week, Janet would be at home, and by next week Hilary would probably never see Janet again. She might never see Janet again. There was no relief in that thought. Hilary thought about it again. She might never see Janet again. It didn't feel pleasant like it should.

"Hilhily, we play kickball?" Janet asked, looking up in her face. She looked so small. "We play kickball? Huh? Oooh, I kick hard. I make the ball go far! Right Hilhily?"

Hilary nodded and walked with her girls, Janet holding her hand, from the shade into the heat of the evening. They walked in procession to the baseball diamond where the kickball game was to be played. They divided into teams, she and Janet on opposite teams. It seemed a small blessing to wave goodbye to Janet and wrench her hand away, and walk into the field alone. Hilary leaned against the fence now and looked at Janet, a yellow spot in the distant field. She looked so small. Hilary wanted to protect her, to go out and hold her hand. Suddenly, Janet began running in from her position behind second base. She ran slightly pigeon-toed, and not in a straight line, but in an irregular zigzag. She ran between first and second and across the center of the diamond. The pitcher, a red headed boy, turned and hollered, "What do you think you're doing?"

"Leave me alone! I do what I want! You bad!" She ran right at Hilary and spread her arms apart, throwing

herself at Hilary, stabbing her with her bones in her stomach and chest. Her body was steamy and hot. "Hilary, that boy bad!"

"You're supposed to be playing out there!" Hilary said, pointing at the field. She felt a pang of sympathy for Janet and put her arm around her.

"I won't play out there. I will stay here. Yes, I stay here!" She stood up and looked defiantly at Hilary.

"Okay. Be on this team then. Stand beside me here." Hilary moved over and made a place for Janet to lean. Janet slid her hand into Hilary's.

"My brother ate a worm once and he got whapped! Momma whapped him! He brought it in the room."

"Where did you get a worm?" Hilary asked, trying to make conversation.

"My brother ate a worm once. My brother bad! Oh, Momma caught him with a worm in the room!"

Hilary felt the aggravation and confusion rising in herself again. This petty irritation could built to the point that she felt real anger towards Janet.

"My brother eated a worm! In the room! Mommy whapped him!"

Hilary felt guilty again. The poor girl - she's retarded! She can't help it! She can't help it that she talks so insanely and drives people to total irritation! Hilary noticed the spray of spit when Janet talked, and moved away from her.

"Momma whapped and whapped him! He bad!"

If Janet were normal, then Hilary could get mad at her. But everyone knows you can't blame a retarded child for their actions! Janet was bending and unbending her knees, first one, then the other, so that she moved up and down. "My dog eated a worm once! But he were outside. He were in the yard. And my brother said he bad! My brother bad, too!"

She wouldn't be so irritated with Janet if Janet were more helpless, if she didn't seem nearly normal sometimes. But Janet could act like a normal seven or eight year old if she wanted to. If she couldn't, Hilary thought she would have been more understanding.

"My dog eats everything! He bad! He fat! Fat dog!"

"Would you just be quiet, Janet!" Hilary suddenly screamed. Her body was pounding from the heat. Her head hurt, and she didn't look at Janet's face. "Just be quiet for once!"

Hilary walked up to home plate, and stood behind it a few feet, waiting for the pitcher to roll the ball. The inside of her head was beating, and she couldn't quite see clearly. The ball bumped down the field and over the base. Hilary kicked at it hard, and began running across the grass to first, then second. Out of the edge of her eye, she saw two kids run home. Hilary plunged on to third, and touched the base right before the red ball thudded against her calves.

Her head pounded. She stood on third base, not looking in at Janet, but out in the field. She was angry with herself. Not for yelling, not for hurting Janet's feelings, as she guessed she had. She was angry at her own inadequacy, for her own need to pity to love.

The next kicker was a girl in white shorts with a dirty seat. She kicked the ball beyond the base lines, between second and third, as Hilary left third base for home. She looked at Janet, leaning against the fence and clapping, her soft breasts trembling.

"Go, Hilary! Go!" she hollered. And she clapped as Hilary clapped and touched home plate. Hilary continued to clap vigorously as she ran over to Janet. Janet stood up, holding her shoulders back, still clapping, and for a moment, they met, eye to eye.

Matt Morris

FEAR OF FACING ANOTHER DAY SOBER

the buildings here aren't tall enough,
anything over ten stories is too risky
considering the gulf-wind factor, and the

fountains in the mall are "turned-off"
before the water freezes, but my white arrow
short sleeve shirt is sweaty. I have

to meet jack and eddie for beer
at the *steak & duck* where the question
arises "is john kennedy really dead?"

of course he is. the real question is
"who's in oswald's grave?" arthur
murray wouldn't ask. he couldn't give

away as much as a rhumba lesson
that way. what all this means is
I have only five dollars left

to make myself feel like somebody.
I couldn't care less that the bus driver
seems "cold" to me in his gray suit

without so much as "how are you today?"
which reminds me, hank's wife won't speak
to me either because he came home drunk,

but "I didn't even know he drank!" some places
I won't go to. like extremes. for one,
there's that little bar on Nebraska Avenue

where they water the whiskey.

W
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the last time
I stayed-up
to see a
sunrise I
had met some-
one very
special that
day in town
I thought "how
romantic
it would be"
after all
the popular
songs about
sunrises
so all night
I didn't sleep
and listened
to the radio
play Hank Snow's
.. It Don't Hurt

Any More"
as I sat
in the back-
yard swing waiting
the morning
glories bloomed
on the fence
and all around
the gate like
a canopy
how wonderful
it was going
to be for
me to see
a sunrise
I'd never
seen one before
I waited and
waited and waited
the grass was
wet and sur-

prisingly cold
but at six
thirty-eight
a gray fog
rose over
the houses
not a sunrise
and I went
to bed thinking
"somewhere the
sun must be
rising on
someone in
love" and slept
till noon I
gave up seeing
a sunrise
that summer
which is another
reason I
want to move

TRASH

"O the remnants of foolish pleasures!" you are more significant than you think! you are the record of my long and unending search for beauty and

speaking just as wisely of my personal habits, such as smoking, eating and drinking to excess! you held my life's blood on a tissue when I broke

my nose and kept my dirty diapers from the dog when I was but an infant! I give you my filth — you remain constant and true. for this I praise you,

most faithful servant! you who have known me better than friend or family, I will not give you cliché orange rinds and coffee grounds for you to stand in the

corner with and be boorish, but will fill you with my old poems, so that you may share in my joy!

THE SNOW THAT FELL BY THE COURTHOUSE
AT MIDNIGHT

a night to remember! snow fell
from the sky, a black sky, and blew
around my feet in circles.
I kicked at it viciously.

"how irrational," you said,
"to kick at snow!" there were no stars
and the only moon was the white
face of the clock in the courthouse
dome. "all covered with clouds," I said.

"and you not even in a sweater!"
I was very drunk. you said one,
"I'm cold," but I pretended not
to hear. streetlamps lit the snow
as it fell. flakes so big they could

cover our eyes! I was thoroughly
disgusted. you promised coffee
when we got home. something to keep
us warm. the flakes stuck to your hair.
"you look silly," I said. you seemed

to already know. I wanted
to hurt you, but nothing I said
or did could touch you, as if you
were numb with cold. oh, it was foul!
the snow lying on the ground like

a white dew. it was midnight.
the courthouse bells rang softly. slowly.
neither of us spoke. how could I
have told you anything. yours the
voice of reason silent. the logic

of snow in the twisted oaks. I
hated you for that! my thoughts black
as the avenue we walked on.

the snow kept falling. "covering
everything," you said. "no joke!" well,
I wasn't laughing, not then nor

now as I think about it.
"there comes a time in everyone's
life," I said, "when he must decide

what's best for him" and that's a decision
he must make alone as I am now.

RADIO

I like to listen to the radio.

In the morning, I listen to the radio while I dress.

In the afternoon, at work, I drink coffee and listen to the radio.

One night when I couldn't sleep,

I called the radio station and asked the disc jockey to play a song
for me.

The song was "Lola" by The Kinks.

He said they no longer had that particular record,

but he was sure he could find something I would like.

He played "All The Way From Memphis" by Mott the Hoople.

When I lived in Florida,

I used to take a portable radio to the beach with me.

This is a common practice for people who go to the beach.

It is nice to listen to the radio while sunbathing,
otherwise sunbathing becomes tedious.

I have a friend who used to live with a disc jockey
who works for a radio station in Boulder, Colorado.

That is, where my friend currently resides.

But apparently, he and the disc jockey had a falling out,

because the last I heard my friend was living with a medical student.

I have not heard from my friend since summer.

And this is probably embarrassing,

but I keep a transistor radio in the bathroom

so I can listen to it while I am bathing.

Often I will sing along with the radio

if it is playing a song I particularly like.

Sometimes I will sing along with a song I don't like
because I like to hear myself sing.

I have a radio in my car that I can listen to while I drive.

Sometimes I will sing along with it too.

Once at a party with friends,
I wanted to play the radio and they wouldn't let me.
They said radio music stinks.
A lot of people feel this way,
but I am not among them.

For the radio is my friend and constant companion,
sending out its friendly waves for my desolate ears!

THE BLUE MIRROR

Lately I have discovered I am the only living poet in America
so no wonder I find it refreshing to read my own poems
and find them full of life and true feelings!

Sure I know I'll never be famous or anything.
I just like to think of myself as an average guy
writing about things important to me.

One day I was writing a poem called DEEP BLUE EMOTIONS
and I didn't realize until I had finished it
that I was actually writing about my father!
That's because poetry is mystical
like many of the ancient religions we've heard so much about.

Sometimes I stay up late at night writing poems.
I keep a hot pot of coffee on the stove
in case I get sleepy before I finish.
I usually write at the desk in my study,
but on occasion I have written complete poems
while lying in bed!

I once sold a poem I wrote in bed
to a magazine for a hundred dollars!

Being the only living poet it is easy to do these things.

Other times, being the only living poet isn't easy.
Once at a party where beer was served,
I was asked to recite a poem
and nobody liked it.

Most people think of poets as sad,
but I think it is better to be happy
because more people will like me that way!

As a child, however, I was very sad.
I wrote a poem about Sadness when I was fourteen.
I was very sad at the time
but I don't remember why.

Some people will tell you children make the best poets
because they don't know what poetry is,
but I have no evidence of this.

Likewise, others will tell you poets are born, not made.
In his *Poetics*, however, Aristotle argued that poets are merely
craftsmen.

A poet named Dylan Thomas once wrote a poem called
"In My Craft or Sullen Art."

I guess he couldn't make his mind up either.

One of my favorite poets is Walt Whitman
because he wrote a lot of poems about America.

I also like the French poets
but they are dead now too
as are the English and Third World poets.

Now there is only me to write poems.

Some people ask me why I choose to write poems
when no one else is doing so.

In high school, I used to write poems to girls
hoping they would date me,
but this is probably not the best reason for writing a poem.

Others will ask me where I get the ideas for my poems.
I tell them sometimes from things that have actually happened to me,
and other times the poem itself just happens!

Just the other day,
I saw down at my desk to write a poem
with no idea at all what I would say
and I wrote a perfectly good poem about trees.
I called it "Trees!"

I plan to publish it this fall.

On other occasions,
I have tried this very same process
and have written nothing but gibberish.

Usually I find it takes a great deal of thought
before I can write a poem that is meaningful.

I think a poem should be meaningful.

And yet, some people say I shouldn't write poems at all
because there are so many more important things I could be doing,
but think how much it will mean to me to know
that I of all people have perserved my life on paper
for my children and grandchildren to read!

And who knows! Maybe they will someday write a poem about
themselves!

THE POIGNANT STARLING PERCHED ON
THE WIRE IN HOPES YOU WOULD CALL, OR
A MOTH HOVERS OVER THE MOON

The creaking footsteps of the neighbors upstairs,
their toilet running - and even though our plumbing's joined,
we don't know them well, barely enough to say "hello"
or to admire the passion plant outside their door.

They've had their fights and the fights resolve themselves:
"damnit, Leslie, I love you! don't you know that?"
and the door slams shut with the thump of a heart.

Through the streets of Lutz, we smoke cigarettes,
walking to the tiny food mart for a Sunday paper to keep us
informed of events which won't effect us in the least.
"I adore Wagner! Is that a tobacco shop across the street?"
Whatever we say in grief is wrong, or at least doesn't matter.

And it's been a long, long summer . . .

There's a duck pond as blue as your eyes,
and a billboard proclaims "Johnny Walker" to the world.
And a farmhouse almost lost in the orange grove . . .

Your eyes, those enormous eyes! drawing me
closer to black windows and moons.

On the St. Petersburg beach with you,
lovers of romantic music, the sea-birds flapping into the sun,
And in the bars, in the pubs, and in every roadside saloon,
drinking beer with you -

"by the pitcher, by the glass,
light or dark or carry-out - "

And let us remember the moon that night,
after the storms and threats of other storms,
as we drove up the western sea-coast, ocean for miles,
rain drizzling in the water like fish eating bugs.

Whatever we wanted to happen, happened -

"It's Yeats' birthday! Let's get drunk!"

I smoked the cigarettes you left on the table;
you ate oranges - the color of your hair - with a spoon.
And should I talk about your hair? I love your hair!
It reminds me of all the orchards from Brandon and back.

And didn't we like the rain while it lasted,
despite the warnings of hurricanes? sprinkling on the roof
those evenings alone watching television or drinking ourselves sick -
would it have mattered if the hurricanes came,
if tall buildings toppled, if the grammar schools were wrecked?

I sat on the rocks at Dunedin one day,
playing guitar and singing while an old man listened.
And biology students barefoot with their pant legs rolled,
walked along the shore, collecting shells and fossils
for classes. And in the evening, after the sunset,

I counted the stars and gave them the names
of all the women I knew, but there was only you,
pinned like a brassiere to the clothesline, swelling with wind,
the sky as white as linen. "Call me, call me, call me,"

I am talking to black cats on the stairs,
their eyes staring back like the moons around Mars.
And the starlings are flying over me,

and land on the wires. The factory windows
in Tampa aren't as sad and dirty as my state of mind.

Have you forgotten me? Am I diseased?

I have missed you as long as I can,
the ivy in the window is turning brown.

I am going to stay in my room
and not talk to anyone again until you call.

Tonight, a moth hovers over the moon . . .

PRIZES

Ken Smith, a senior in journalism and English, won first prize in this year's et cetera's prose competition. Ken is a former editor of the et cetera and last year won many honors for his writing, including the Jesse Stuart Award, a Maier Award, and a John Teel Award for fiction.

David B. Mahone, a freshman, won second prize in the prose competition.

E. Glenn Hennig, Jr., a graduate student in psychology, has published his work in several little and literary magazines, for which he has won many awards, including first and second prize for his poems in this year's et cetera's poetry competition.

