


1993

et cetera

Marshall University

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Recommended Citation

Marshall University, "et cetera" (1993). *Et Cetera*. 31.
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etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.

Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas.

When I was asked later why I had killed myself I could only think to say -- because I wanted to electrify the

cosmos! I am the artful voyeur of your brain's exposed and darkened combs, your muscles' webbing and all your numbered bones. *Poetry answers the spirit's need for Beauty, which lies beyond all brutal, physical needs. Poetry is what*

gets lost in translation. "And he has never philosophied on life, I added." "No," Wolf Larsen answered, with an indescribable air of sadness. "And he is all the happier for leaving life alone. He is too busy living it to think about it.

My mistake was in ever opening the books." Perhaps he knew, as I did not, that the earth was made round so that we would not see too far down the road. And did you ever stop to think that without numbers or

measurements, there probably wouldn't be any history? Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. "Caddy!"

In the real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning.

Authors are queer cattle. **YOU LOOK UP ANY BOOK ON CHILD BEARING AND THERE'S A**

SECTION ON BUD NIPPIN' There died a myriad, And of the best, among them, For an old bitch gone in the teeth, For a botched civilization **Fools that will laugh on earth must weep in hell.**

our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness.

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. Isn't it pretty to think so? I am alone, now, Lost in

myself in a mysterious Darkness, the victim in a story. I was born and raised on a Carolina sea island and I carried the sunshine of the low-country, inked in dark gold, on my back and shoulders. All unreasonable things are possible. Everything that can happen will happen. The future belongs to crowds. "Caddy!"

etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.

ET CETERA 1993

the literary magazine of marshall university

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GOD KEEP ME FROM EVER COMPLETING ANYTIDNG. TIUS
WHOLE BOOK IS BUT A DRAUGHT – NAY, BUT THE
DRAUGHT OF A DRAUGHT. OH, TIME, STRENGTH, CASH,
AND PATIENCE!

herman melville moby dick

**I CELEBRATE MYSELF, AND SING MYSELF,
AND WHAT I ASSUME YOU SHALL ASSUME,
FOR EVERY ATOM BELONGING TO ME AS GOOD BELONGS TO
YOU.**

walt whitman "song of myself"

I SHALL SING. A LITTLE OFF KEY PERHAPS, BUT I SHALL SING.

heruy miller tropic of cancer

MURMURS OF NOSTALGIA

lynda b. keith

I am told my grandfather
used to come here.
I toss someone's whiskey bottle

to see it spread out like stars.
No one notices this.
I wonder if anyone remembers
the day he fell.

Dave Smith

You could say that Alfred was a quirky guy. Since hearing a few years ago that Ford Pintos exploded on impact because of the position of the gas tank and engine or something like that. Alfred refused to put more than \$2.00 worth of gas in his 1976 sky blue Pinto at one time. Then if someone happened to run into him. he reasoned, there wouldn't be enough gas in the tank to cause an explosion. This made quite a lot of sense to him.

Alfred never listened to the radio. He made a tape when he was twelve years old with "Poison Ivy" by The Coasters repeating over and over on both sides, and he listened to this whenever he was in the mood for a little music. Once, he had accidentally turned on the radio in his car while trying to adjust the air conditioner. He listened, just for a minute, with all his attention focused on the guy crooning about being hungry like a wolf. Alfred quickly switched the knob off and lamented the fallen state of music the entire way home, where he proceeded to play his tape, first Side A and then Side B. But Alfred was a flexible guy. Sometimes he would play Side B first.

Alfred had been a security guard for a small industrial firm for many years. Recently, he had switched to the midnight shift because people had begun to get on his nerves: he didn't have to talk to anyone at night. He had never wanted to be a police officer, although he had great respect for them, but he liked to wear a uniform. Whenever he wasn't working, Alfred would wear navy blue work pants and shirt, always neatly pressed, because it made him feel like he was in uniform. If there had been any possibility of danger, Alfred would never have taken the job. The most excitement he ever had with his work was trying to decide whether to have Fritos or Doritos with the turkey and mayonnaise sandwich that he ate every night at work at exactly 3:18 A.M. Alfred bought the snack packs of chips, raisins, and cereals because he liked the little packages. Yes, Alfred definitely had a few little quirks.

Every morning, after leaving work, Alfred would stop at the Pit-and-Git gas station and convenience store. He always pulled up beside the same pump, and

if someone was already using it. he would wait. As he walked inside to pay, Alma, the cashier. would greet him as she did every day. "How ya doin'. hon?." she would bellow across the store. and he would respond with the inevitable "Fine. and you?" Al had something new to say very morning and never resorted to meaningless chit-chat about the weather, which was something Alfred could not stand. In the grocery store. the cashier would always tell him about the weather, as if he didn't already know how hot or cold it was outside. He really didn't care anyway, since he had no control over it. Alfred could only remember Alma talking about the weather once. when e ai conditioer in her trailer died on the hottest day of summer. and she felt hke a roasted pig that had gone swimmin' in syrup." That's exactly how she described it. Alfred was always impressed with her colorful descriptions. Then she screeched out "See ya tomorrow. hon!" as he headed to his car and then home.

Home for Alfred was a closet-sized apartment in the basement of what must have been an opulent residence before it was taken over by ivy and decay. The main room contained a chair, a color television, a bed, and a chest of drawers, and the kitchen had the usual appliances with a table and one chair. Alfred also had a bathroom that was almost too small for the massive, antique, claw-footed bathtub. His apartment was clean and functional. but there were no personal items. like pictures or even bowling trophies, to show that a human being actually lived there.

After sleeping a few hours in the morning, Alfred spent most of his time engrossed in the television. His favorite shows were black-and-white sitcoms from the '50s like "I Love Lucy" and "My Three Sons." While watching these old programs. Alfred would be reminded of his mother, in her white apron with blue stitching and frills around the edges. making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for him. She always cut the sandwich in an X-pattern, forming four identical triangles. Whenever Alfred's father made a sandwich for him, he would cut it simply down the middle. A sandwich cut in half was just a dumb, old sandwich, but one cut in fourths was special, or at least it was to a five-year-old boy.

William and Emma. Alfred's parents. had died during the same year, only seven months apart. Both had been well into their seventies. and their deaths were not really a shock to their only son, Alfred, although he still had days when he would think of them and his whole body would ache.

After lunch on one of his better days, maybe it was a Tuesday, Alfred settled in front of the t.v. for his ritual afternoon nap during the soap operas. The t.v. was on one of those syndicated channels that shows old movies in the afternoon, so he waited to see what movie they were going to show. Sometimes, a Ma and Pa Kettle film would be on. Those had been his favorites when he was a kid, especially the one where they won a brand new, totally automated house. But that day, there was a film with Jimmy Stewart, one of his favorite actors. so he didn't bother changing the channel. Rope - that's what the movie was called. Two guys, homosexuals in fact, strangled a friend of theirs for the thrill of doing it. Then. they had a party with all the victim's friends, and, best of all, the body was in a chest on which they had put the party food. Jimmy Stewart was the murderers' old college professor, whom they were trying to impress. All of this got Alfred thinking about what it

would be like to murder someone. especially a friend. Well. he didn't have any friends so he would have to find an appropriate stanger to kill. But, in real life and in the movie, murderers were caught all the time.

If someone were careful enough and really planned well, there would be no way the police could track down the killer. If that killer was a stranger, too, they could not connect a motive to the guilty person. Alfred stayed awake all afternoon. long after th movie had finished, thinking about the perfect crime. He had always thought of himself as a clever guy: he could pull this off without a problem. But who could he murder? He wouldn't want to kill someone who had kids or was married. How about a homeless bum? No. that would be too easy and the police wouldn't even care to investigate probably.

Finally, Alfred gave up. It was a stupid idea anyway. What kind of person would want to actually take the life of another human being? Putting these thoughts out of his mind. Alfred laid his head on the back of the chair and fell asleep.

Later. he woke up. had dinner. and went to work. On his usual stop at the Pit-and-Git the next morning, Alma greeted him and immediately began a tirade about businesses that try to sell you something over the phone. Just yesterday. someone tried to sell her a book on how to write your own will. "Well. if that ain't the most morbid thing!," she had exclaimed as Alfred listened patiently, but with very little interest. "As if I got anybody to leave my stuff to!"

This innocent remark triggered in Alfred's mind all the thoughts he had yesterday in front of the television. Here was someone that he hardly knew. who had just admitted not having any relatives. "There must be someone that you are close to." he coaxed inquisitively.

"Oh, there ain't a soul, hon. All my family has passed on and I ain't got no close friends."

"Someone as friendly as yourself must have lots of friends." he pressed.

"No. I tell you. But I used to have two goldfish. When they died, I just didn't have the heart to get no more," Alma's eyes began tearing up at this recollection.

Alfred hurriedly paid for the gas and paper and shuffled out the door. As he drove home. his mind was racing with questions. Should he? Why would he want to? Why not? The last of these questions loomed largest in his mind. Why not? He'd never taken any risks in his life. He was too secure. He wasn't in control of anything. not even his own existence. He had let everything just happen to him. Alfred never had any goals in his life, so he never had anything to work for. One day, he had stopped caring and had just given in.

Alfred began to think of the murder as his last chance to be himself. If he were caught. there was only himself to blame and no one close to him that would suffer. This was important to him, Just as he wanted a victim with no ties to anyone. What started as a silly daydream gradually became rationalized in Alfred's brain as a great act of valor.

First, he had to find out more about Alma, to see if she would be a good murder victim. He knew. from previous conversations, that she worked the night shift, also. and usually got off a little after he came in the Pit-and-Git every morning.

He would ask her to breakfast and then question her about her life. The next day, when Alfred suggested to Alma that they go to the Pancake Hut when she finished work, she accepted immediately and even managed to get off early. It wasn't hard for Alfred to get information about her. Between mouthfuls of Belgian Waffles, Alma talked continuously about herself. Alfred was dumbfounded at first, because he had not spent more than five minutes alone with another person in quite awhile, especially one who chattered incessantly. As they were finishing their meal, Alfred was growing accustomed to Alma's ways. He admired her friendliness and her independence, and she seemed to be the perfect victim.

Alma lived by herself on the outskirts of town in a mobile home surrounded by thick woods. She worked every night at the Pit-and-Git and spent most of her free time at home, working in her garden. By the time breakfast was over, Alfred knew every plant she had ever grown and every weed she had pulled. When he took her home, the sudden stillness in his car was deafening.

Alfred needed to figure out how he would do it, now that he knew who he would do it to. Poison? Too slow. Gun? Didn't have one. Knife? Too bloody. Rope? That's how they did it in the movie. Alfred was strong enough to strangle her, and there wouldn't be any blood either. After settling on strangulation, Alfred had to pick a day. But he wanted to make sure everything was perfect with nothing left to chance, so he decided to take Alma to the Pancake Hut a few more times.

Breakfast at the Pancake Hut became a daily occurrence in Alfred's and Alma's lives. While Alma continued to dominate the conversation, Alfred managed to tell her a few things about himself. She actually was a pretty good listener. Alfred remarked to himself more than once.

Eventually, Alfred felt ready to go through with his plan. The best time would probably be in the morning when he picked her up for breakfast. "No, that wouldn't be good," he spoke out loud to himself. "Everyone at the Pit-and-Git knows that we go to the Pancake Hut every morning. They'll know I was the last person to see her before she was killed." Maybe he could go to her trailer before work when she wasn't expecting him. Then she wouldn't have a chance to tell anyone that she was seeing him, and they couldn't connect him to the crime. Yes, that would work. All the times he had taken her home after breakfast, he had never seen another person near Alma's trailer. No one would see him arrive or leave, and if someone did, he would simply wait a few more days.

Alfred was ready the next day. He had found an old tie that he could use: Alfred didn't like the idea of using rope because it seemed so rough and ugly to him. Not that the tie was very pretty, though. His mother had given it to him years ago. He had worn the orange and green paisley eyesore once to please her but then hid it, never to be seen again until this day.

He had begun to worry that she might not even be home. Finally, he figured it would be okay to call Alma first, just to make sure. She answered cheerfully and was very excited when he asked if it would be all right if he came over for awhile. "Just give me a minute or two, hon, to get presentable. I've been knee-deep in dirt in my garden all day long."

Alfred took more than a minute or two to get himself in the right frame of

mind. How could he be doing this? He had to - it was his last chance to actually exist and mean something in this world. Putting the tie carefully in his navy work pants, Alfred closed the apartment door behind him with a very final click of the lock.

Passing no one on the way, he turned his Pinto into Alma's gravel driveway. Every heavy step on the loose stones sent a deafening crunch to his ears, as his heart threw itself continuously against his chest. Standing on the cement block step, Alfred knocked twice on the metal storm door. He could hear Alma moving around inside. Again he asked himself-Why? The same answer came to him - Why not?

Alma opened the door, greeting him with the toothiest and most genuine smile he had ever seen. The smell of her recently applied perfume was inhaled deeply into his nose and then into his brain and blood. "Come on in, hon... she said as she stepped aside and gestured to him with her outstretched arm.

What had he been thinking?

This new question echoed in his brain as he pushed the tie deep into his pocket and went inside.

SIMILES

david profit

Like a Piano

a woman plays
soothing notions,
with accented motions,
gentle splashes of waves
on a wintered sea,
keyed to the calming
of gusty emotions.

Is there anything
that can soothe, or seduce,
the tortured mind
and alienated body
of man's struggle
more than a woman's touch?

A Pill For Pain

Swollen in the bed of my debauchery,
I watched the Van Gogh scene of midnight luster,
throbbing from one frozen thought to another.
The icy crystals chandeliered my despair.

But like a nurse,
she opened every early, early morning
whispering the same perfume,
"A pill for pain."

And like a flower,
she smoothed my face with petal-like fingers,
her pistils clinging to my chest.
Blushing, she never, never pulled away.

FRUSTRATION

terry abbott

Watching the coon dog chase the
fuzzy grey cat around the house
really gets me steamed. It is
like watching the big fat bully
at school chase the smallest
kid around the playground just
to get his milk money.

CHOIRBOY

sheenagh k. fraley

The taste
of smooth scotch on ice
strangely
brought back
your smiling face.

It released
your image
from the depths of memory.
and if I could grasp your voice.
once again,

I could lift you
to the heavens
while you sing.

PEACE

alice fay meadows

Warm sand clung to his feet as he walked along the beach. The frothy sea water tickled his toes with tiny waves as the tide came closer. The golden sun setting on the mirrory surface of the ocean soothed the cold chills of an impending end. He walks towards the sun in search of a place of peace and rest. The waves engulf him in a watery blanket of comfort and everlasting life.

IN THE NAME OF GOD

nandinl a. shastry

6:20 a.m. Joann woke up early Friday morning. She reached across the bed to wake Bill, felt the cool, empty pillow, and remembered suddenly that he wasn't there. He had been gone now for 3 weeks. Annoyed at her memory, she frowned and turned off the alarm clock on her nightstand before it rang.

The automatic coffee maker clicked on in the kitchen and she could 'tear the quiet bubbling sounds it made, urging her to get out of bed and start the day. She walked to the hall bathroom in the dim morning light, carefully stepping over the mousetrap she'd placed near the floorboards last week.

The stark white flourescent lamp above the mirror displayed her reflection in all its clarity at 6:35 a.m. She winced at the image and scowled. She hated this time of the day because it was always the first look in the mirror that made her see why Bill had left so suddenly. He couldn't accept what she had become.

Her once firm, young face had become puffy and bloated with age and her long brown hair had become slightly brittle at the ends and tangled often. Bill had first been attracted to her hair when she was younger. It was glossy and curled in a fetching way about her face. This morning it was just matted on her head. She had gained over 50 pounds in the last year and she told everyone her thyroids were acting up. Actually, it was due to a bad habit of 1\ vinkies daily and three helpings of all the foods she consumed. Her stomach growled and Joann smiled, remembering what she was going to do today. It was going to be a special day indeed.

11:00 a.m. She had showered and dressed and tied up her hair in a tight bun. Her breakfast of 5 eggs, 6 pieces of bacon, and 4 slices of buttered toast settled heavily in her stomach. She made herself a fourth cup of coffee and sat on the sofa to watch her favorite show - the Victory Church program. She had been reading her Bible all morning and it lay open on the spotless oak coffee table, beckoning a glance every few moments. The sun shone brightly through the white chenille drapes she'd bought last week and cast a golden glow on the holy book. Surely, it was a sign. God himself had approved of her plan.

A grey mouse scuttled across the living room. She had seen it come down the hall deftly scampering around her mousetrap. Startled by her angry shriek, the mouse stopped midway to its destination under the sofa. Before it could reconsider this last error, Joann had jumped across the room and crushed it with her bare foot and the weight of a 243 pound body. The mouse squealed loudly once, and died. She ambled into the kitchen, got two Bounty paper towels, returned to the living room, scooped up the remains of the mouse and dropped them into the trash can. "Messy ..." she mumbled to herself, and returned to the sofa. She'd already missed the first few seconds of Reverend Skagg's opening hymn and she quietly hummed the chorus with the choir. She had forgotten to wash her foot.

2:00 p.m. Lunch had been 3 sandwiches with mayonnaise, ham and red onion, a pint of potato salad, and a box of Twinkies (6 count) washed down with 2 cans of Coke.

Joann washed the dishes, wiped them, and put them away. There was nothing more satisfying than a clean sink. Then she sprayed the counters and the stovetop with Lysol and wiped them until they sparkled, pausing only for a moment to inhale the antiseptic pine/ammonia scent. She would vacuum the carpets in the apartment now for the second time today. Maybe she'd wash the tub too, if there was time before the Pat Robertson show.

4:00 p.m. It was time to leave now. She had changed into her favorite dress, a blue and pink flowered Sears Roebuck concoction from 1962, and she slipped into her sensible brown moccasins. The long gray winter coat and a muffler would keep her warm in the 30 degree cold outside. She took one last glance at her spotless house and smiled contentedly. She was a good housekeeper.

The Robinson children were playing boisterously outside in the apartment courtyard, and she stopped to tell them to quiet down. The younger one stuck his tongue out at her and ran around the building. The older one just walked away.

She got into her car and turned on the Rush Limbaugh show and nodded to herself at his comments on Bill Clinton's stance on what Rush called, "pro-abortion." What was the world coming to? No one went to church anymore, and the women these days were positively disgusting. They wore little things that accentuated their breasts and buttocks - had they no shame or modesty? Joann had been shocked to receive a catalog from Frederick's of Hollywood in her mailbox last month, and had marched right over to the post office to complain about this pornography the U.S. Mail circulated. She was sure her Bill had been seduced by

one of these young whores. Why else would he have left her?

She was a wonderful cook and an efficient housekeeper. She never spent his hard earned money on new clothes or makeup or other superficialities. She never argued with him, even when he had yelled at her once for watching so many "damn religious shows." She had nodded in acceptance and simply read her Bible in the evenings while he watched his silly sitcoms. His shirts were always washed and starched just right, and why, no one could press a crease into his pants the way she could. Even his handkerchiefs were monogrammed by her and ironed neatly into perfect squares. She decided it wasn't anything she'd done. Of course, it was all because of Charlie.

Charlie, their only child, was 23 years old, and last year he had confronted his parents with the news that he was gay. She had sat in a stony silence listening to his confession and promptly told him to get out of the house. She had said that he was dead as far as she was concerned - she wasn't about to have any sinners in this house, family or otherwise. Bill had agreed initially, but later pleaded with her to change her mind, arguing that Charlie was young, their only son, and influenced by a corrupt college life. She remained adamant and refused to see him.

She hung up the phone whenever he called and eventually had the telephone taken away by the phone company. She would send back all his letters and cards with a special stamp she had purchased which claimed, "Addressee Deceased." Until 3 days ago.

Charlie had appeared at her doorstep with another gangly youth and asked if she was doing alright since 'Dad' left. She wouldn't invite him in, but he left his address on a yellow slip of paper just in case she needed him. She had taken it silently and closed the door, but looking through the peephole, she'd seen the two young men embrace - Charlie with tears in his eyes. Disgusted, she had sat in the dark on the sofa wondering what to do. For the next 7 hours she sat and finally with early morning light she had decided what she needed to do.

6:00 p.m. She drove into the apartment complex facing the college her son attended and parked her car in front of Building 46. She climbed the three flights of floors and heaved her bulky frame before Apartment 305, and rang the doorbell.

He was surprised to see her and smiled when she grinned and held out the chocolate cake she had baked for him. He invited her into the apartment.

She said, "Charlie, honey, thanks for coming home to see me. It's been hard after your father left."

He hugged her tight and replied...Well, Mom, no matter what, I've always loved you."

She smiled. "So, this is your place. Does [unclear] live here too?"

"Yeah, but he's out working today. He won't be back until midnight. Do you want some coffee or something? Let me take your coat..."

"Oh, I'll leave it on for a minute if you don't mind. I'm just a bit chilly. The coffee sounds good. Where's the kitchen? Do you have enough money? Enough food? You know I love you son - I've missed you the last year while you've been ... away."

She followed him into the small kitchen and stood to one side while he prepared the instant coffee.

"I've missed you too, Mom, but I'm okay. This is my life now. I'm glad you're finally starting to accept it: you know there's a group called P-FLAG you can join if it's still hard to deal with."

He turned his back to pick up the two steaming mugs to take them into the living room, and Joann reached into her gray coat pocket to take out the hammer. He was facing her with a mug in each hand and a grin when she brought the hammer down on his head.

The first blow smashed against his forehead and she muttered...For God gave his only son . . ."

IN DUE TIME

rhonda akers

Happiness strives in a virgin heart

Fear takes over as minutes depart

WAL-MART AS PURGATORY

lynda b. keith

... Attention Wal-Mart shoppers,
your Wal-Mart store will be closing in

five

minutes.

We ask that you bring your

final

selections to the front,

Where our

friendly

cashiers will promptly

check

you

out.

And always thank you for shopping with us here at Wal-Mart

Attention Wal-Mart shoppers,

your Wal-Mart store will be closing in

five

minutes.

We ask that you bring your

final

selections to the front,

Where our

friendly

cashiers will promptly

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you

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And always thank you for shopping with us here at Wal-Mart

Attention Wal-Mart shoppers,

your Wal-Mart store will be closing in

five

minutes.

We ask that you bring your

final

selections to the front,
Where our
friendly
cashiers will promptly
check
you
out.
AndasalwaysthankyouforshoppingwithushereatWal-Mart . . .

SUKI'S GARDEN

Tymothee Adkins

I met him in Suki's garden. Suki was an American who wanted to be Japanese. Her real name was Susanne but she insisted that everyone call her Suki and so we did. She surrounded herself with ying-yangs and statues of Buddha, wore kimonos as houserobes, and ate with a set of antique chopsticks her Grandmother had brought back from China. She couldn't handle the fact that she was who she was, a Jewish American princess, not a Japanese geisha girl. I loved her because she was a friend, but I never really knew her.

Steve was also a friend of Suki. I met him in Suki's garden during a weekend party that Suki was throwing for several of her closest friends. I was surprised that I even showed up after she named off the list of people who would be there. I recognized a few of the names but knew that I wouldn't recognize any faces. They all change so quickly.

During the party I spent most of my time in Suki's garden surrounded by plastic pagodas and painted terracotta pots. That's where I met Steve. He was fascinating compared to most of the other guests. There was an accountant named Dan who wanted to be a lawyer, a lawyer named Dave who wanted to be an artist, an artist named Dion who wanted to be an architect, and an architect named Dan who wanted to be an accountant. Aside from them, there was a spattering of poets and actors who were talking about personas and characters that they had played. They were all very genuine people as far as shallow individuals go, I suppose, but Steve was fascinating.

All of the other guests were dressed very similarly. Some of the gentlemen were wearing the uniform of the businessman. Others were dressed in avant-garde garb that looked very much like how avant-garde garb is expected to look. Suki

was wearing a golden-red kimono and a Star of David. They were all wearing clothes that didn't belong to them; clothes that looked as if they were borrowed from the set of a new Broadway show about New York City and Los Angeles. Steve and I laughed.

We sat in Suki's garden and talked about each other and ourselves, pretending to be interested and being interested at the same time. He told me about his childhood, which was quite average as far as horrible childhoods go. The connections we made between my mother and his father and my father and his mother and my sister and his brother and my brother and his sister and our uncles and aunts and cousins and various sundry other relatives were fascinating. It was quite interesting to experience such an intimate connection with a complete stranger. I almost would call it an affair if it weren't for the fact that I was not involved with anyone that I actually cared enough about to cheat on.

Steve's mother had always wanted to be a painter. It was a beautiful dream I thought. and I said so. He said yes, it was a beautiful dream. and for her it was more than that. She spent money on acrylics and canvas and set about creating several wonderfully inspiring landscapes which Steve assured me were most hideous and certainly not up to a professional level. I pointed out that she was not a professional and he agreed with an air of simple understanding. but I suspected he didn't understand. "What we ardently wish we soon believe," he said and from that I gathered he at least had an inkling of what I meant. I told him it was a beautiful thing to say and he explained that he hadn't said it but that a man named Young had said it and he simply had repeated it. I repeated that it was a beautiful saying.

For a while, we were joined by a beautiful young lady named Cordelia. Cordelia was very graceful in her every motion and her words trickled off her tongue with unusual eloquence. She was drinking wine from the bottle. "I'm an actress," she announced in order to perhaps open the door of conversation. Steve and I promptly agreed with her and laughed to ourselves. This confused the poor girl and she was left unsure of what role she was playing. She took a swig from the bottle and began quoting Shakespeare. "What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. O, be some other name! A rose is a rose is a rose." I looked at Steve and asked, "Then what is a dandelion?," and he said, "It is a rose." We laughed and Cordelia staggered away.

We began talking about the other guests at the party. which made us both laugh profusely. After a while. we began to mock them and imitate them as if we were them. Then we laughed at each other pretending to be someone else. In order to keep ourselves from feeling guilty beyond the point of reason. we agreed. in a pseudo-serious tone, that mockery is sometimes the most extreme form of flattery.

"What do you want to be when you grow up... I suddenly said to Steve, hoping to make him laugh. "A person," he said. We both paused as if he had said something profound and then laughed hysterically out of genuine humor mixed with a feeling of discomfort. We both knew that being a person was an amiable goal and a very difficult goal to reach.

By this time the party was starting to lull and everyone went into Suki's living

room to watch comedians on television. Suki had cable. like any self-respecting Japanese Jew, and it became the focus of the crowd's attention. Steve and I sat back, watching the crowd more than the comedians because all of them were taking on roles, doing impressions. or making strange faces for laughs, and none of them were genuinely funny.

After we got bored with being bored, we returned to Suki's garden and started our conversation over again. We talked about reality and came to the conclusion that reality is too unreal to really discuss. so we bounced around a bit of tiny chit-chat for a while until we got sick of our Jobs, our responsibilities, our plans, and our petty lives. We talked about people and how people know other people and how people know themselves and if people are real and if people ever really know people and if people ever really know themselves. We decided the answer was maybe and pretended to be content in that conclusion.

Then I asked Steve who he would be if he could be anyone other than himself. He said, "I would be you," and I knew that I had really made a friend. For the first time, I had made a real friend.

"Were we to take as much pains to be what we ought to be, as we do to disguise what we really are, we might appear like ourselves without being at the trouble of any disguise whatever."

- Rochefoucauld

FALLING SNOW

david profitt

Falling snow
in winter dreams,
buries tracks
along iced roads:
sin is passed,
but won't let go.

THE GAME

rhonda akers

Darkness envelops the light
Fear plays in its existence
Goodness is put to rest
Jealousy brings pain
To Join in the game
Evil awakens to lurk in the shadows
Other players will be found

WAKING UP

rhonda alters

In the forest
Once again
Changed to morning
The life within
Presents itself

DEAD SILENCE

brad a. white

Calling long distance, I questioned her
About her son.
He became a famous writer
After he blew his brains out.

She said she never knew Breece,
Not the way he knew West Virginia.

In a retirement home in Miami,
She sat on a red sofa.
The memories carried her back,
Back to the grey hollow where she raised him.

Silence.
And then she shed tears for the son
Every one wanted to know,
Now that he was a famous writer.

THE MAGIC OF APPALACHIA

robert l. jones

In Appalachia the rich aren't really rich,
only lacking in poverty to such an extreme,
that they fancy themselves better than most.

In Appalachia they dress in their Sunday best,
to enter the halls of an old Baptist church,
to translate the Bible into words they can use.

In Appalachia sins are washed away in muddy streams,
like beer washing down hot dogs at a cookout,
nothing left behind, but the sickening stench of victory.

In Appalachia God is used to get one's own way,
to raise the children to become rich,
who, in their own words, will inherit the earth.

following a cow down route 52 in the rain

dennis watts

I'm coming home for Thanksgiving,
where are you headed today, standing
in your rolling, fenced-in pasture
on a pick-up truck? Maybe the driver
will take you to India, and make you
a God and maybe I'll just keep on
driving, past farms and fields
and the house where I was born
until I'm fifty
miles from nowhere,
and crown myself King.
Did you hear what happened
last time I drove through
here? I almost ran over
one of your brothers, a black cow
crossing the road at night.
We should all be more careful.
gods and kings and white cows
riding through the rain turning
into late November snow, we should
know by now that it's so easy here
to fade into the scenery.

NORWEGIAN ELKHOUND IN A BLUE FORD PICK-UP

dennis watts

I am a dog, road-wise.
my head out the window,
fur flying, my tongue
stretches back down the road
for miles. The forest
is a blur in black and white.
I hope rabbit and squirrel
are watching.
I am a dog, slobber in the wind,
going faster than a dog should go,
knowing more than a dog should know.

ONE NEVER KNOWS WHAT GOD ...

davtd profitt

Loving you,
like hearing the hymn-filled
voices of little children,
tears and tugs at my heart,
but has brought me back, again,
with new-found hope, and conviction,
to Christ-like love, and contrition.

SPRING: HUNTINGTON, WV

callsa pierce

Between cork-covered coffeehouse walls
(Def Leppard screaming on the jukebox),
They crowd thigh-close, eye-linked, sloshing with beer,
Around a wobbly butcher-block table.
Waiting to graduate, they worry the questions.
Mark says, ".A woman thinks with her heart, not her head."
He says it twice.
Karen does not approve of interracial marriages.
Perry places a cluster of azalea blossoms
".Rather like a small candy apple"
On a new dollar bill, to increase the poetic impact.
Alan says, ".A poet should write for love, not money;"
But he drives a red Corvette.
Catherine is drunk already:
She cackles with laughter at every lull.
Teresa thinks Elvis is not dead,
But really living in Jamaica.
On the tabletop, forgotten,
Crimson azalea blossoms lie glowing in the dimness,
Marinating in a pool of beer.

BARN BURNING

tymothee adkins

This weekend was for barn burning
(Next weekend we do houses)
Until the earth is scorched
(And splinters of the wood are scarred with black)
Until the ashes

tum to ashes
tum to ashes

(Or the ashes tum
to ashes tum
to dust)

And are gathered up and buried in the furnace
And no one has a neighbor with a home.

LOOKING IN ON GOD

tymothee adkins

I see a God
pondering his own creation
in the minds of men
and thinking of the awesome
power of those men
and thinking if those men
can really be
then saying their existence
is impossible
and turning to
the more important
things

OF MOOSE AND MAN

brad a. white

I finally got out of bed around 3:00 p.m. It was hot inside my cabin. It wasn't a real cabin though; it wasn't made out of logs. not like the ones on t.v. I took the blankets down from the windows. It was only dark for about an hour this time of year and I was having a hard time adjusting to the constant sunlight. I put some water on the stove and went out to the outhouse. I swung the door back and forth real fast to get the mosquitoes out. There was nothing worse to ruin your morning constitution than being attacked by mosquitoes with your pants down.

After I finished, I continued my morning ritual. At the edge of the porch. I tilted the heavy jug of water over my head and washed my hair. A mosquito speared me in the back while I was rinsing off and the jug emptied onto the yard.

I made a big mug of coffee and walked down the gravel road to check the mail. The mailbox was empty. I was sure I would get a letter from at least one of my friends. I had written everybody letters telling them how great it was up here around Fairbanks and how I was living the good life.

Over the crest of the hill a man and woman on horseback ambled down the blacktopped road. That should be me up on that horse. I only needed to find a woman and buy a couple of horses. Right. I went back to my cabin and watched t.v. until I knew it was time to go. After I collected my camping gear. I stuffed it into the back seat of my VW Beetle and drove down Goldstream Road. Smoke from the forest fires burning around Tok had made its way into the valley. It looked like the area was suffering from a bad case of smog. I was going to try to find the homestead where the Moose Man lived. It was the Moose Man who encouraged me to come up north and live the good life.

I first met the Moose Man last winter while living in Juneau. the state capitol. I was waiting tables at a tourist restaurant called The Cookhouse. The restaurant was empty except for the Moose Man. He ordered the soup and salad bar and spent two hours eating bowls of clam chowder and salad. He was about thirty-five, wore a faded flannel shirt. and had a handle-bar mustache. While I was cleaning up for the night, he struck up a conversation with me.

He said that he was in Juneau to try and get an amendment added to the state's constitution so it would be legal to raise moose just as you would cattle. It sounded kind of crazy to me, but I had met a lot of eccentric people since I moved to Alaska. I listened to the rest of his tale.

He said it all started a year ago when he found an orphaned young moose near his homestead up north. He took it home and raised it with the other animals on his farm. The moose thought he was its mother. He named the animal Frank Rivet. The Moose Man and his wife fell in love with the animal.

After a couple of months, he sought permission from the Department of Fish and Game to raise it. They said it was against the law. so they came and took the animal away and placed it temporarily at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Musk

Ox Farm.

A couple of weeks passed. The Moose Man went to check on the animal. He found Frank in a small cage. When Frank saw the Moose Man, it started bawling like a baby to its other. He took the moose back to his home. A couple of days later, the state police came and SWAT-teamed his cabin. They took Frank away and the Moose Man went to jail.

The story about Frank and the Moose Man made the front page of the Fairbanks Daily News Miner. His wife organized demonstrations at the University and people carried signs that read "Free Frank Rivet" and "Let the Moose Go Home." The Moose Man was released from jail and never charged with a crime. He eventually found out that Frank had been sold to a zoo in Germany and died on the flight across the ocean.

"You can't take an animal out of its environment and expect it to live," he kept saying.

I asked him if he wanted to stay with me and my roommates while in town. He quickly accepted. It was worth bringing him to the house so Jeff and Aaron could hear his crazy story. We were house-sitting for a rich friend who was traveling in Nepal for the winter. It was a nice, clear-stained, wood house. He thought we were pretty spoiled. He called it a city man's pseudo-cabin. In the evenings, Jeff, Aaron, and I would come back from the ski slopes and the Moose Man would be sitting next to the fire reading our outdoor magazines. The Moose Man used to kid us about our high-tech ski-wear. He said we were more concerned about staying in style than keeping warm. It was Jeff who started calling him the Moose Man. He told Jeff that he wasn't living in the real Alaska, but only a romantic version of it. Jeff said, "It's all in your mind, Moose Man." Maybe Jeff was right.

Everyday he told us the same story. Nobody had time to talk to him at the Capitol. The Valdez spill happened only a month before and they were too busy dealing with the spill, let alone listen to some crazy man from out in the bush who wanted to raise moose. The Moose Man left disappointed. He said that we ought to come up and visit him someday to see how the good life was lived, away from the hassles of the city.

Another ten miles and I should be there. Earlier, the countryside reminded me of driving along the rolling hills of Ohio. The same farmhouses were littered along the way, except that there was always the Pipeline to my right. I came down from Cleary Summit Pass and a large valley opened up. The pines were stunted in their growth and occasionally there was a patch of green willow trees with smooth white bark. I passed a muskeg pond with a beaver den set in the middle. A small mound of willow branches and mud was all they needed to build their home.

About a mile from his place, a small sign told you to turn right at the big rocking chair to get to Welltown. His name was Mike Wellton. Mike told me that he had a little gift shop in front of his place, but I had forgotten about it. As I pulled into the drive it was impossible to miss the towering rocking chair. It must have been over fifteen feet tall and a carved sign read, "Largest Rocking Chair in The Largest State." Mike was standing on the front porch of the gift shop with a t-shirt

and jeans on in his bare feet.

"If it isn't the ski bum of Juneau. What brings you up here ... John, right?" Mike said, with a big grin.

"Yeah, I've been up here about a month. I've got a log cabin over on Goldstream Road." I said.

"I lived over on Goldstream when I first got here. Is it near Ivory Jack's General Store?"

"I live just over the hill," I said.

"It's a lot different up here, isn't it? You can really breathe the air." Mike gave me a quick tour of Welltown.

"That cabin I'm working on here is going to be my new gift shop. And over there in those willows I'm going to build my restaurant, as soon as I can come up with the cash. Hopefully the state will let me raise moose soon, and then I can serve some nice moose steaks at the restaurant, and whatever else I want to put on the menu."

We walked back to their cabin. He built most of it by himself. The logs sat flush in the notches. He must have spent some hard days working on it. His wife Sonia was inside ladling water out of a large metal drum. I was surprised that she was as beautiful as Mike had described. She had granny glasses on and long straight hair as black as a winter's night.

"Did Mike tell you about the plans for our Mooseum? It's going to tell the history of the moose in Alaska. Mike, show him those old photos. I think they're over there on the desk." Sonia said.

The photos, from the early 1900's, showed people riding moose with saddles, the same as a horse.

"There's another picture around here somewhere that has a moose pulling a wagon, with the mayor of Fairbanks of 1914 at the reins," Mike said.

I stayed for three days. Mike and I started each day at four in the morning before it got hot and spent the day shaving the bark off logs for the new cabin he was building.

By the time we quit working, I was exhausted. I drove down to Poker Creek and sat up to my neck in the cool water. Mike and Sonia were always working on some project. She was knitting sweaters for the gift shop and Mike was carving something out of wood.

The last evening I was there, his wife cooked up a big pot of moose stew. I ate four big bowls. After the meal, we sat around the fireplace as we did every evening and talked.

"You know, John, the first thing you have to do when you get up here is swallow your pride. If you want to live this lifestyle, you have to accept the fact that you're not going to make as much money as you do in the city," Mike said and looked over at his wife until her face wrinkled into a smile. "Maybe you can't afford to buy that new coat that you want, but have to let the one you have last through another winter." Mike took a sip of coffee. "Don't worry, you'll get used to it. Just go back down to the lower 48 when you think you're tired of living in Alaska. We went down to California to visit my parents this spring and I couldn't wait to get

back. Everybody there is working harder and harder just so they can live in a nicer home and drive a faster car. They don't even know what life is about."

.And you'll get used to the long winters." Sonia said. .When that first day of summer gets here. it's like a gift from God."

Outside the window. the sun was coming over the same mountain that it had disappeared behind an hour ago.

.I think it's time for me to head back home,. I said.

.Tll be sure to stop by and see you and check out your cabin the next time I go into Fairbanks," Mike said.

.Watch out for moose on your way home." she said. "They like to feed along the highway in the early morning, before the cars take over the road ...

Driving back in my VW. I felt empty inside - the way you feel after you've just woken up, and then realize that you were only dreaming. And the stars that looked so close that you could touch them are now a million miles away.

I had just turned onto Goldstream Road when I spotted them. An adult moose and child were feeding on fresh willow branches alongside of the road. I stopped my car and got out to watch. The adult moose must have been well over six-feet tall. carefully pulling down the branches for its child to feed on the tender leaves. I watched them clean the lower branches of one tree. and then with long legs walk over to the next one. I remembered that I had a camera in my car. When I opened the door. they heard me and disappeared into the woods.

I got into my car and sat there looking out the mosquito-stained windshield. The moose was perfectly adapted to living in the far north. I wasn't. I would never let the Moose Man come and visit me because I was leaving as soon as I got back to my cabin and packed my belongings.

I belonged with my friends in Juneau. a city on the edge of the ocean, where we would all sit around in somebody's nice home and talk about building a cabin someday. way out in the middle of nowhere. where we would live the good life.

msTORY 330

rhonda akers

His voice awakens the silence

Only to put it back to sleep

The same rhythm.

same tone.

same topic.

same expression.

Tums lecture into lullaby

DIVORCE POEM

Tymothee Adkins

I cannot unwed myself
from these dead things:
the loss of love
the loss of loss of love
the secret smile
the hand that touched my thigh
the simple songs
with words and tunes forgotten
the warmth of bodies
pressed into the earth
the chill of bodies
under these same pressures
the masks and voices
begging to be forgotten
the sigh you breathed each time
when you were done

CARNIVAL

alice fay meadows

Excitement and mystery
Course through the crowd
On a balmy summer night
At the fair.
Sticky fingers pluck
At sugary cotton on
A cardboard stick.
And greasy lips grin in delight
At the taste of popcorn and funnelcakes.
Laughing children's smiles
Light up the sky
From the ferris wheel
Their tears dampen the dirty ground
When allowances are lost
To swindlers at
The ring toss.
Silence.
A field of memories
Left behind,
As the trucks haul the carnival
Away.

UNTITLED

gallynn bowman

The room was airless as the gas lamp burned low. Esther raised her eyes from the Bible and glared at Ted as he crept in the room. "Are you eating again?" she demanded. "I've told you a thousand times, the body is the temple of God. You'll go to hell for the way you have abused God's temple." She pointed the Bible at him with each word. Ted bowed his head more with each word. The gas light dimmed and flickered, barely lit.

THE WANTS OF A NOMAD

lynda b. keith

Road to hell paved with unbought stuffed dogs.
- Ernest Hemingway

Honeysuckle. I could not figure out at first what the scent was that poured in through my open car windows that night. It was the middle of an abnormally cool summer, if any summer in the South can be considered anything less than smothering. The heat enveloped me as I stopped at the red light, and the smell of gas and the engine of my over-the-hill automobile were also overwhelming. But then the light changed to green and the air cooled instantly as the car accelerated, even giving me a little chill. The town was almost deserted as I drove past all the remnants of my childhood. I took one last look before I left the next morning for college, hundreds of miles away. I had been looking for some kind of reason to finally be on my own, even if college was really a safe way to escape.

I drove, inhaling the honeysuckle perfume as a smoker takes his first drag on a cigarette. I'm glad I had this memory of my home - of the chilling wind whipping around me in the car, with only the faint creaking of my car's old bones and the occasional sound of the tires rolling over a loose stone.

And the honeysuckle.

* * *

Have you ever met someone who repulses you so much, and yet, you can't seem to reject his or her friendship? I felt that way about Larry, whom I met when I began working at the bar on Seventeenth Street, where he was the bartender. Larry's idol, and the indirect controller of his life, was Bruce Springsteen, and Larry claimed his songs as his own life story put to music. We teamed more from a three-minute record, baby, than we ever teamed in school. I used to like Springsteen, actually, which is probably why Larry considered me his protege. But now, I really can't listen without at least picturing Larry. If not recalling some of the uncomfortable moments of our friendship.

Larry had been a student at the university a few years back until, just like Springsteen's "The River," his girlfriend found herself pregnant and the reluctant couple walked down the aisle and became a family soon afterward. We went down to the courthouse, and the judge put it all to rest. No wedding day smiles, no walk down the aisle, no flowers, no wedding dress. Now, Larry poured a few beers - no exotic drinks in this bar - and got friendly with the waitresses and occasional female customers. Conveniently for Larry, he usually forgot to wear his wedding band at work and tended to forget his blushing bride as well. The older waitresses, who knew Larry's marital status, kept quiet and laughed at the new girls behind their backs as they succumbed to his charms.

Larry wasn't a particularly handsome guy. and most of the time. he was not even a likable person. but he was what my friends at home would have called a .male whore." He was also a poet in his own mind, but his only skill in that area was in adapting Springsteen lyrics into .original" poetic verse. to be presented to one of his many friend-girls (as he called them). Once, I was the recipient of one of these poems. and I truly think that Larry actually thought I would not know its true source.

Although we worked in one of the few bars in a town overflowing with alcoholics. the frequent dry spells between customers left us With plenty of time to get to know each ?the at work. Most of the waitresses were working their way through the local university. where I had also begun taking classes. The school was the centerpiece of the town. in its own little microcosm, which was mostly the reason that I looked for a job outside the school. It was so easy just to hide away on campus. but I had done that at home. Here. I wanted out. I needed contact With the real world.

d I discovered we had a few things in common. especially our taste in music. While Larry obsessed about Springsteen, I had a healthy appreciation for the man. Larry and I talked about other things. too. I told him all about my family and friends. whom I had left a few states away when I came to school. While I disclosed mostly superficial facts about my life, Larry told me more personal details about his wife. her pregnancy. their stagnant marriage, and his frequent affairs. I had perfected my listening skills through the years. as my friends seemed to come to me continuously for advice. Still, I was often embarrassed by Larry's candor and by the personal questions that he would ask me. At first. I would be shocked and offended. but as the initial surprise wore off. I would usually just answer. Sometimes. there were even benefits to talking With Larry. because of the male perspective he could provide.

After work, Larry would sometimes suggest a stop at the all-night diner before going home. but something. probably my conscience or some other mystical influencing factor, always told me to decline. Larry would then ask another waitress, and the pair would disappear into the darkness in the direction of the diner. The next day. I would hear all about his night, after which I would preach to him about fidelity and marriage vows and all the other things he had forgotten long ago.

. . .

I stared out the window at a tree struggling with the wind. The battle was lost by the weaker tree, whose strength was waning after Summer had left and Fall asserted itself. The wind never called a cease-fire. never gave the tree a chance to surrender or simply rest. Leaf after leaf - whole branches full of leaves - were stripped. I could not pull my eyes from the tree. wondering how long it would take for the tree to admit defeat and give up. But the tree really did not have such an active choice in the matter. As I walked past the tree later. I acknowledged its continuing. if not somewhat diminished. existence and hoped it knew that I was a

witness to its assault.

. . .

I began dating one of the regular customers at the bar. a construction worker named Craig. For some reason, I felt like I should hide this from Larry: but. as a friend, he should have been happy that I was finally getting over the cliched high school sweetheart I left behind. My boyfriend had wanted me to go to the state university with him, but my nomadic desire had proved to be stronger than my desire for him. *Those memories come back to haunt me* ... Craig, who was at least ten years older than I. was a favorite of all the waitresses because of his generous tips and his genuinely nice personality. This perpetual niceness began to grate on my nerves after a month or so. and we agreed. like adults. to see other people.

But I didn't go out with anyone else and tried to concentrate on my classes. I also began to think more and more of home. which had not really occupied my mind much since I fled the South. My new friends at school and work just made me want to see my old friends even more. but I really couldn't afford to go home, even for just a weekend. After months of turning Larry down after work. I started giving in and going to the diner with him. *Don't make no difference what nobody says, ain't nobody like to be alone* That was as far as we went together: after a cup of coffee and maybe an order of grits. he went home to his wife and I went to my dorm.

At some point in our relationship, Larry appointed himself as my Pygmalion. He seemed to think that red lipstick and upswept hair would solve all my problems. .Have you ever thought about getting contacts?" he asked frequently.

.Are you offering to pay for them if I have?" I was getting a little sick of his comments about my appearance, and I answered shortly.

.Sweetness. you don't have to get an attitude. I just know that you're a pretty girl, and I think you hide behind your glasses," he tried to explain. *You ain't a beauty, but hey, you're alright: Oh. and it's alright with me*

.Can we just drop it?"

Just as Larry was preoccupied with my appearance. I began to notice all the little things about him that bothered me. I had forgiven all the major personality flaws long ago. but now personal habits of his were beyond my limits to overlook. For someone who had only moved from New Jersey a year or so ago. he had picked up quite an annoying country accent already. The double standard was normal to Larry. too, as he condemned women who smoked but chewed tobacco himself. Of course I had to start smoking again, a habit I had overworked in middle school and grown tired of in high school. But the sick pleasure of watching Larry wince as I lit up a menthol outweighed the known side effects of this vice.

Larry also had a vocabulary that would shame a career Navy man, but if I were to utter one single .damn," his wrath would fall down on me like Hurricane Hugo slamming into the Carolina coast. I thought it was pretty funny how upset he would get by this... You're a smart girl. What are you acting like this for?," he asked. to which I would childishly retort, .Maybe because I want to." I was not

really proud of the originality of that response, but I was getting sick of defending myself to him all the time. I had wanted to leave the spoon-fed environment of my home, but now I was being watched by this self-appointed authority figure.

I could see that all of this hurt him though. He really had begun to think of himself as my protective older brother. even to the extent of approving my few dates. He would point out the shyest, ugliest guys at the bar and say, "What about him?" He would offer to fix me up with someone, only to say, "Nah, he's not good enough for you." One day, I asked Larry...And who is good enough for me?" He replied simply. "Me."

That night after work, Larry and I were going to the diner...Why don't we get a six-pack and just drive around?," Larry suggested.

"Sure, why not?"

I sipped my beer as Larry gulped down his. He drove up and down back streets in the town, through alleys, and then into the hills overlooking the river. *Waiting for the bells that ring in the deep heart of the night, they set us loose of everything to go running on the backstreets* We had been talking about one of the regulars at the bar who had just had a kid, when I decided to tell Larry about Craig. It had been so long ago, I figured it would be okay to say something now...You went out with that loser?!" His voice had suddenly grown quite loud in the small car.

"He's not a loser - and we only went out a few times."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

"I don't know - I'm sorry I didn't."

"God, he's twenty years older than you."

"Not quite," I defended, "maybe ten years at the most."

"Did you sleep with him?" Larry caught me off guard with that question. All our previous discussions about sex had centered on him, not me. I hesitated a second before answering truthfully "No."

Larry rolled down the window, threw out the empty beer can and opened another. He took a few gulps and was silent. We were driving down from the hills to the university. He noticed I wasn't drinking my beer, which had become lukewarm, so he rolled down his window again and tossed it out too. Thrusting a cold one into my hand, he finally spoke again. "I just worry about you, okay?," Larry offered... You're young and a lot of guys might take advantage of that."

"Haven't you?," I responded without thinking.

He was silent again until he pulled his car in front of my dorm. I started to open the car door, but Larry grabbed my arm tightly...I gotta ask you something," he said.

"What?"

"Did he do this to you?," Larry quietly said before he brushed his lips against mine.

"God, Larry... I've got to go." I tried to get out of the car again but he grabbed me.

"I'm sorry, really, sweetness... I'm sorry." He paused, then said, "Did he do *this* to you?" He once again moved towards me, but this time his mouth pressed tightly against mine and his tongue forced its way in. With that, I broke free of his

hold, mumbling "Good night."

"I'm sorry," he yelled as I went inside. *Now those memories come back to haunt me; they haunt me like a curse. Is a dream a lie if it don't come true, or is it something worse?*

* * *

As the rain starts, I can only hear it faintly and must see it in order to believe what my other sense has already told me. Sometimes, I am left wondering all day, "is it still raining?," only to shift my sight to the window to once again reassure myself that it is. Often though, the rain's presence increases, in volume and sound. In a downpour, I hear the drain pipe outside overflowing, failing to contain this offspring of Nature in its metallic tunnel. I have often tried to describe the sound and feeling of rain, but in describing something, there is a need to find its basic elements. But, water is the basic element...

* * *

The night after our drive, I found an anonymous note in my locker at work, but from the mistakes. I could tell it was from Larry.

SORRY SWEETNESS

YOUR HERO THAT UNDERSTOOD

He had borrowed and adapted a line from Springsteen's "Under Road." *I'm no hero, that's understood* I smiled to myself, in part because of Larry's simplicity and also for his unquenchable trust in Bruce to bail him out of whatever trouble in which he found himself.

Later, Larry came into the bar, although it was his night off, and gave me two red roses. "I'm sorry," he said again in the most mournful tone I had ever heard from him.

"It's okay - you didn't have to bring me these."

"I bought them from some Moonies on the side of the road."

"Oh well, thank you anyway."

I took the roses home with me to my dorm room, put them in fresh water in a plastic cup, and set them on my desk. The buds never bloomed before they died, and I eventually threw them away.

Larry continued to ask me to go to the diner with him, but I turned him down every night for three weeks. Finally, I gave in. Why? I really don't know - maybe because it was my last night at work. My grades had been suffering from the long nights at the bar, so I gave up my job in favor of my classes. At the diner, Larry and I had our usual cups of coffee while I counted my tips from that night. As we were leaving, Larry asked if I wanted a ride home...I think I can walk one more block to my dorm, Larry," I laughed.

"I figured we could stop somewhere along the way."

"It's getting really late and I have my Philosophy class in the morning. We'll do it some other time," I offered.

"No. let's go tonight. I really don't want to go home." he said. with a slight pleading tone in his voice. I looked at him for a second and saw something in his eyes. but Lany blinked and the look was gone.

"Where do you want to go?" I asked hesitantly.

"A motel?"

We stood under the diner's neon sign, looking at each other silently. Minutes later. I nodded slightly and walked to Lany's car. He followed me. *Now all them things that seemed so important really just vanish right into the air*

I waited in the car while he went into the motel lobby to get a room. I rolled down the car window and lit a cigarette. As I inhaled and exhaled. I thought. Pulling out the car's ashtray. I noticed something inside reflecting the motel lights. I reached into the ashtray and removed his wedding band. I silently replaced it. closed the ashtray. and flicked my cigarette out the open car window. He was still inside the motel as I got out of the car and walked home.

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