Spring 1991

et cetera

Marshall University

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The Marshall University Literary Magazine
Huntington, West Virginia

PRIZES

First Place Fiction	**MARIE MANILLA**	When Carol Turned Latina
Second Place Fiction	**KAREN ALLEN**	Temporary Creatures
First Place Poetry	**KAREN ALLEN**	Home
Second Place Poetry	**SUSAN K. FULTZ**	My Love Bends
First Place Art	**TODD OSBORNE**	The Dancers
Second Place Art	**A. WOODRUM**	Jesus

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what the editor thinks about it

I've been going around all year talking about Et Cetera as if I would be working alone--the solitary cowboy-editor-in-chief-hero. I might have done it, but it would not have been a pretty sight, not as pretty as this.

These durable people are to thank: Ozzie Finley and H. David Moore II, fiction editors of great dispatch; Christine Delea and Elizabeth Nippert, poetry editors with pliant but fine scruples. For approval along the way and advice in the learning process I want to thank Dr. Richard Spilman. Dr. Richard Badenhausen and Mr. Art Stringer were the poetry and fiction judges, respectively, and I thank them, respectfully. Julia Thomas proofed the copy; you can thank her for taking out those madening typos. Sandee Lloyd gave life-and-death computer advice, listened to my complaints, and kept me from tossing one of the things out the window. I'd like to make personal thanks to John Devison, a distant friend who gave additional, invaluable, emergency computer help.

For everything else, layout, typing, art procurement, work above and beyond the call of duty (especially putting up with me) I have to thank Marie Manilla. For the way you see what you see, she knew it was best (a few gallons of coffee, extra sugar, please).

Thanks especially to the writers and artists who had the guts to put their artistic sensibilities on the line.

Phillip T. Carson

CONTENTS

FICTION

POETRY

ART

TOM W. GIBBS

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN CENTRAL TEXAS

The first shot deposited a bullet in the outside wall to the right of the doorknob.

"Get down on the floor," I told Carol. I pulled my jeans on and walked into the living room to look out the front window.

It was a beautiful day.

Nanci was walking down the dirt driveway to the house. She was carrying a Winchester .30.30 in her right hand. The barrel was pointed at an angle to the ground. She stopped and brought the rifle up to aim.

The second shot put a bullet through the window and into the wall behind me. The lower pane of glass was mostly on the floor to my left.

"Who is it?" Carol called from the bedroom. There seemed to be a little tension in her voice.

"It's Nanci," I said, watching Nanci moving closer to the house. "She's got a gun."

"No shit."

"Right."

Nanci stopped again, about forty yards from the front porch. She appeared to be studying something in the weeds along the road. She quit that and looked up at the sky. The breeze was twisting loose strands of her blond hair around her neck.

I was thirsty. I went into the kitchen and poured a little bottle of Perrier into a glass, added a shot of gin and a good squeeze of lime. I put a couple of cubes in the glass and went back to the window.

Nanci was standing in the front yard squinting at me, her face to the sun.

I took a sip of my drink.

"What's she doin'?" Carol asked.

"She's standing here in the front yard."

"Can she hear you?"

"I guess."

"What's she doin' with the gun? Is it a big one?"

"Nothing. It'll do."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"Nothing."

I was leaning against the wall and staring down at Nanci through the unbroken upper pane of glass. She had a no-bullshit Indian expression on her face. If she had been the Indian maid over in the antique store, Kawliga would have gotten up and run.

I wanted a cigarette. They were in the bedroom on a dresser. I didn't figure Nanci could shoot fast and accurate enough, but I wasn't taking the chance. I wasn't going to walk in front of the window.

"Carol. Get my cigarettes and throw 'em in here to me. And my lighter."

"Where is she, Eddie?"

"Still in the yard."

"I don't want to get your cigarettes."

"You don't have to bring 'em in here, just throw the damn things in here. With my lighter."

"Eddie."

"Carol."

"Eddie." That one came from the yard. "Eddie, come out here. I want to talk." I think she was trying to sound like Clint Eastwood.

"Carol. Get the damn cigarettes."

"I got cigarettes, Eddie. Come on out and talk to me." Nanci levered the spent cartridge from the rifle and followed its arc to the ground with her eyes.

"You plan on shootin' me?"

"You and that bitch, both." There was mean in her eyes. Any other woman and it would have been screams and tears.

"I don't really feel like gettin' shot, Nanci, and I think I'm safe in assuming Carol doesn't either." I took a hardy swallow from the drink. I was trying to find interesting shapes in the low cumulus behind Nanci.

"Eddie, she's going to kill us." Carol was letting the tension get the best of her.

"It sure seems like it," I said. "Throw me those cigarettes."

Carol threw the cigarettes in and then the yellow Bic lighter. I lit one. The smoke snaked out the window. Nanci shifted and raised the gun.

The third shot scared the hell out of me.

It smashed a slug through the upper pane and too close past my left ear. Carol screamed and I spilled my drink all over my bare chest and stomach.

"Shit," I said. "Nanci, you damn near killed me."

The fourth shot put another hole in the wall above the couch.

"You're pretty serious about this, aren't you Nance?"

I could hear Carol getting dressed hurriedly. I wondered if she would try to make a break for it out the back door and into her Monte Carlo. I was beginning to think Nanci might actually kill us. I didn't think it was a good day to die. I figured I was about seventy years short of that particular day.

"Nanci, you're really makin' a mess of your house with that gun."

Carol stood in the doorway, her purse slung over her shoulder. Her chestnut hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She was moving her lips like lip-synching a slow song. I shrugged. I couldn't make out what she was trying to convey.

Nanci lit a cigarette. The rifle was butt-on-the-ground, leaned against her right leg. I moved across the room in two long, swift paces.

Carol grabbed me and hugged me and said, in a whisper, "I like you Eddie, but this is..."

The front door opened with such force it slammed against the wall. Carol broke away and ran into the bedroom. I pissed down my right leg and swallowed hard.

Nanci was standing in the doorway, a real spooky grin on her face. "Carol, get in here," she yelled.

"Nanci, don't kill us."

"Carol."

"Nanci."

"Girls."

Nanci started laughing. "You pissed your pants."

"Yeah, I know. Too much excitement."

"Carol, come in here."

"Nanci, are you going to kill us?"

"I think she is," I said.

"I'm not going to kill you, Carol. I want to talk. This is my house." I didn't know what that meant. Carol came back into the living room very slowly.

"You did piss your pants."

"Too much excitement. You got a joint in your purse?"

"Yeah." She pulled one out and handed it to me. I lit it and filled my lungs. My ear was still ringing. Nanci leaned the rifle against the front door.

"How long have you been here, Carol?"

"Since yesterday. Eddie said you were in Ft. Worth buying a horse."

"I came back early."

"Quite a surprise," I said.

Nanci looked at her boots. "I kind of planned it that way. I knew you'd do something like this. I'll say one thing for you, you kept it in the family."

"How'd you know I was here, Nanci?" Carol asked.

"I stopped to see Daddy on the way here. He said you came out here to stay while I was in Ft. Worth. He didn't know Eddie was here. You're a hell of a sister, Carol."

"I'm sorry, Nanci. I'm sorry."

"I'm gonna change."

"Forget it," Nanci said. "I want to talk to you. I want to know why you did this."

"But I pissed my pants. Have a heart."

"I do. Which piece do you want."

"Touche," I said and sucked on the joint.

"Carol, get me a beer."

"Okay. You want one, Eddie?"

"No. Bring me the Beam."

Carol gave me the bottle of bourbon and Nanci a bottle of Pearl. I twisted the cap off and tossed it on the couch. The bourbon was smooth and hot.

Nanci drank off a third of the beer and

sat down in the rocker by the window. Glass crunched under the chair as she rocked.

"That's really irritating, Nanci," I said. "Can you move the chair this way a little?"

"No."

"Oh."

"So, why'd you do it, Eddie? She any good?"

"Nanci." Carol was jolted with surprise.

"Yeah. She's good."

"Jesus, Eddie."

"Leave him alone, Carol."

"Well, you did ask," I said.

"Yes, I did."

"Well, she's good."

"Better?"

"God, Nanci."

"Shut up, Carol."

"I don't see where this is getting us. Really I don't. What is it you want? We did it. What can I say?"

"Recite a poem."

"Right."

Nanci lit a cigarette and threw the match on the floor. "I don't know, Eddie. I don't know what to do. I'm out of bullets."

"That's an improvement."

"Would you really kill us, Nance?"

"Yes, Carol. I think I would. I wanted to. I wanted to. My heart's a wreck."

"So is your house," I noted.

"Jesus, Eddie."

"Well, shit, Carol. What do you want me to say? I'm just trying to keep things light. That's good marijuana."

"Eddie."

"Carol, I think you better go." I was startled.

"There were tears streaming down Nanci's cheeks. I felt sick at my stomach. Carol left.

I watched the Monte Carlo going out the road to the gate. Nanci wasn't making a sound. The tears kept streaming down her face. The curtains stirred in the breeze. I took a pull on the bottle of whiskey.

I went in the bedroom and changed jeans. I pulled my boots on and a shirt. I got my hat off the bedpost and went out to saddle a horse.

The horses were bunched together under the mesquite at the North corner of the corral. I saddled Opportunity, the four year old quarter horse, and rode out, down toward the river. I rode about a hundred yards and pulled up. I leaned over and threw up. I turned the horse and rode back toward the house.

Nanci was standing by the barn. I swung down out of the saddle and walked over to her. She handed me a bottle of Pearl. "Did you get sick?"

I filled my mouth with Pearl, swished it around and spit it out. "Yeah. Did you see?"

"Yeah."

"I've never seen you cry."

"First time since I was twelve."

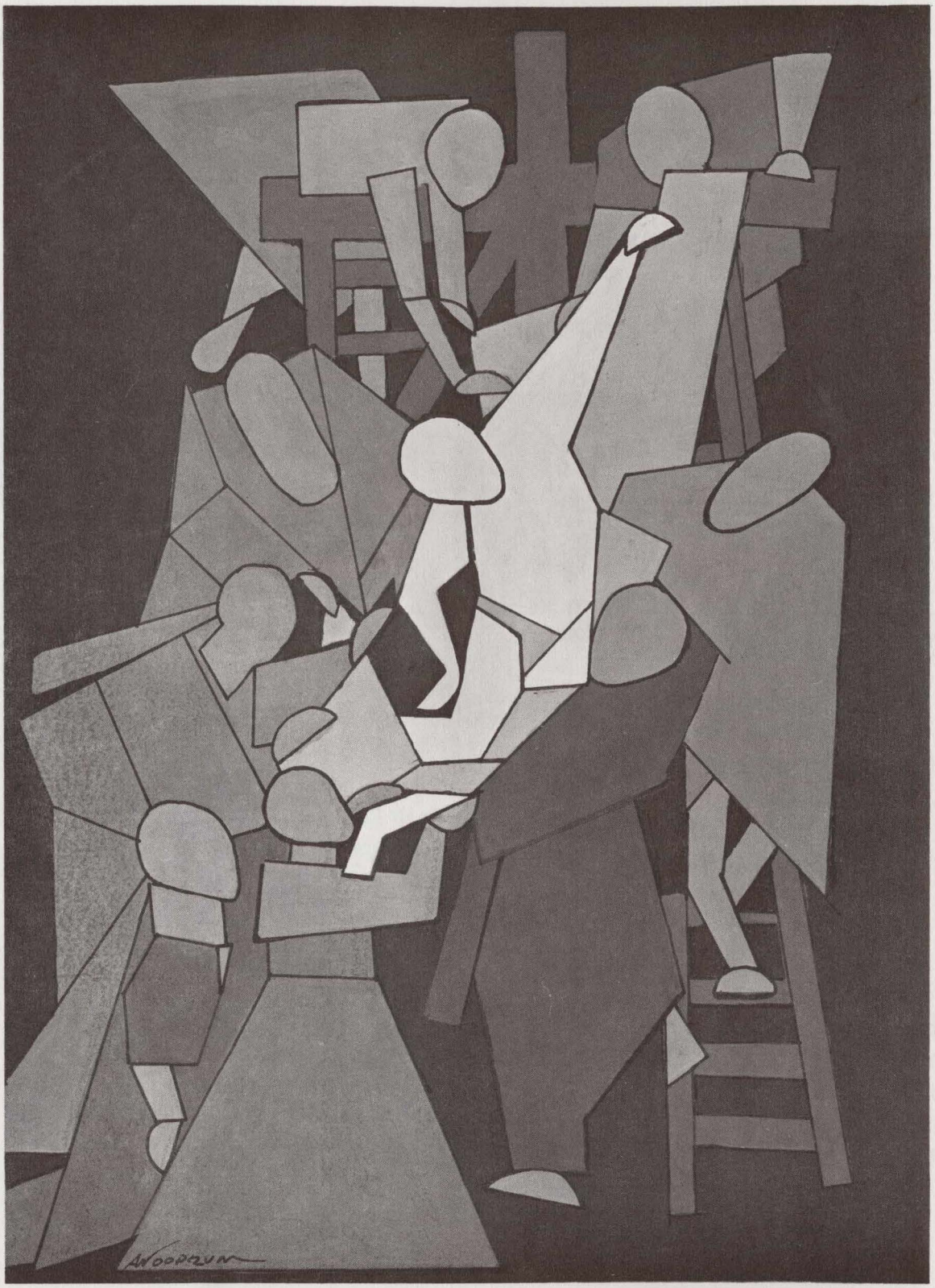
"I really thought you were going to kill me."

"I did too."

"So what happens now?"

"I guess it just ends."

"Oh." etc



A. Woodrum

INNER BEAUTY

She scrubs her face with Lysol,
and blood replaces the oil
that once escaped her pores.
The nightly ritual is continued
as she smears a greasy gel
to form a scathed mask.
It has a pinkish tint
when it joins the blood.
It dries.
She peels it off.
Her wet white bones
glisten
in the bathroom light.

K. L. Stratton

CAUTION LIGHT

I burned my hair today.
By accident, at first.
Then gradually -
as I watched long, curled locks of blond
crumple up into shriveled, broken pieces of hay -
I thought:
"what the hell"

Now the weighted
drops of rain
run through the empty patches
on my head
as I walk to my car.
And as I turn the ignition-
I fasten my seatbelt.

K. L. Stratton

IN THE OVERLY-APPARENT SUNBEAM

In the overly-apparent sunbeam,
the warmth of which seems measured,

I am as solitary as one wing beating,
as clod as frost on this leaning Crocus,

and how I do still feel it
how still so quietly within my own hands

these colors fall always
through a dim veil of ardor,

like dry leaves sometimes
or stones greening over with moss,

or rather like the forest,
moving through periods of color—
brown into specks of violet,

and when I am thinking of our bodies again
together as a pair of wings,

it is not as lonely as I sometimes think it is,
and it is not the pain I feel that defines me,

nor it is neither the absence of you
or the presence of another that makes it so,

rather it is the way I accept these changes
like the sun, everyday, descending behind the trees.

E. Kamlien

MARIE MANILLA

1-800-NO-CRIME

I watch a lot of TV. Background noise. Channel 11. Channel 3. Channel 8. I used to watch soap operas, but they depressed me. I wanted to laugh, so I watched sitcoms. Sitcoms and game shows. But I still didn't laugh.

I hadn't laughed since Sam moved in—eight months. That's a long time not to laugh.

I met him in the Big Bear parking lot. Kimmy was crying, and I dropped a sack of groceries. Apples and Spam everywhere. Sam was sitting in a beat up Ford Galaxy smoking a cigarette. He picked up my food and came home to dinner.

Everybody around here is on food stamps. Me too. We live in a dump. Warped linoleum and yellow dog-earred wall paper. Everybody gets ripped off. People don't rip you off so much if there's a man around, so it was okay when Sam moved in. We'd get up in the morning, turn on the tube and drink coffee. He never left the house the first three months. Just lay there on the sofa reading the phone book. But that was okay—someone to watch the stuff.

Todd Osborne

I'm not a big talker. Neither was Sam. So it was pretty quiet—except for Kimmy. She cried a lot. Mostly there was a reason, sometimes not. It irritated Sam.

He started drinking beer. Which was okay with me. I liked beer. Then he started going out during the day. Which was okay, too. Kimmy was always quieter when he was gone. But he'd come home, staggering drunk—and mean. He'd bounce off the walls and yell at me, which I didn't like. My ex used to yell at me when he was drunk, too.

Then Sam started hitting. But he was slow, so I could dodge him. I'd grab Kimmy and run down to Miss Kizzy's. We'd share a ginger ale and maybe some Cheetos or pig skins. Kimmy would fall asleep on the floor with the cat—Pippin.

A few hours later we'd head home. Sam would be passed out on the sofa. TV blaring. He always turned the TV way loud when he was drunk.

He started bringing strangers home. Three and four at a time. They'd sit around the table and talk low. He'd tell me to take Kimmy outside. I always did. We'd walk down to the school and watch the kids play red rover or freeze tag. When we'd go back home, they'd all be gone. Sam too.

I was never into drugs. Sam was. He did a lot. Never offered me any. Which was fine. Sometimes he'd do too many and stare at the water stains on the ceiling, or pace the front room. Scared Kimmy. Scared me, too.

It got to where Sam was never straight anymore. I could still outrun him—but Kimmy couldn't. He'd shake her real hard when she cried, and sometimes when she didn't. He smacked her, too. And threatened to burn her

with his cigarette. So I started to let him catch me. I always had bruises on my arms and legs after that.

One day when he was out, I grabbed the TV and locked Kimmy and me in the bedroom. He came home lit and was looking for me to hit on. I moved the chest-of-drawers in front of the door. He pounded like hell, but it wouldn't budge. The room was dark, except for the TV. I could see Kimmy's round eyes shining.

He stopped pounding and I guess passed out. In the morning, I cracked open the door. Sam was snoring, face up in the middle of the floor. I tiptoed out, grabbed some food from the kitchen, and went back in.

A few hours later, we heard Sam throw up in the bathroom. Then he gargled and spit and went out the front door. I waited awhile before I peeked out. He was gone. I got Kimmy's toys, the TV guide, some more food, and stashed it in the bedroom. I put Sam's clothes out on the couch.

For two days he'd pound and pound on that door. We just kept real quiet and still. Eventually he stopped pounding. We'd come out when he was gone, but we never knew when he'd come back. We always had to listen. Listen and be ready.

But one day he surprised us. He went for Kimmy. She started screaming. I jumped on his back. He slammed me against the wall. He knocked my breath out—but I hung on. He slammed me again. This time I fell off, but I grabbed his leg. He kicked my face. He kept kicking and slamming his heel down on my back. My nose bled on the carpet. Kimmy kept screaming. I pulled hard at his leg and finally he lost his balance. The floor shook when he hit. I grabbed Kimmy and headed for the bedroom. Sam stayed on the floor.

The next morning he was gone. But we only came out to use the bathroom. Then we locked ourselves back in. He came home that night and made lots of noise. But he didn't bang on the door. I was glad.

Kimmy and I lay in the bed. I watched TV. Kimmy slept, sucking her thumb. I was sore from the fight. My eyes and mouth were swollen. My back was tender with raised welts.

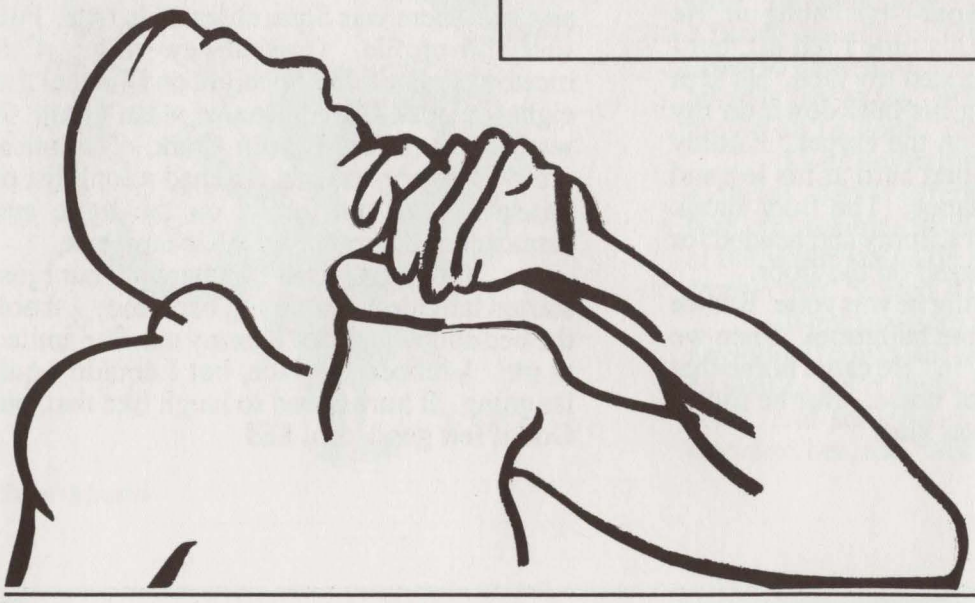
I jumped when I saw him. Kimmy stirred. There was Sam, at least his face. Full shot and profile. On that new show. Crimestop. Every Saturday night on Channel 3 at eight o'clock. Only his name wasn't Sam. It was Elliot. Elliot Wilson Clark. Narcotics, armed robbery, assault. He had a long list of aliases. I sat up, turned on the light, and scratched the number on a Kleenex box.

And then, I don't know why, but I just started laughing. Laughing hard, too. I shook the bed and woke poor Kimmy up. She smiled at me. I rubbed her face, but I couldn't quit laughing. It hurt so bad to laugh like that, but God it felt good, too. etc

DO YOU COME HERE OFTEN?

You know, guys have more
lines than a four-lane
highway, no offense, I
swear—pass me the ashtray
—I've heard them all
before—thanks—It's enough
to make you sick, and I don't
take—I'll have the same,
on the rocks—no crap off
nobody. So when he
leaned up against the wall
where I was standing, looked
deep into my steel eyes and
said, "Would you like a kitten?"
Well! I already had three cats
of my own, but when he said that,
I nearly fell in a heap at his
feet and knew right then and there
I'd follow that guy anywhere no
matter how far or fast he ran. So
now I have *four* cats—Haven't I
seen you somewhere before?

Susan K. Faltz



MY LOVE BENDS

My Grandfather
was a man who made
other men look small, yet a man who
other men where pleased to know, the kind
of man you could call at 3 a.m.
when your mare was having trouble with a foal
or on Saturday when the church needed painting,
a man who never asked a favor in return,
whose handshake was his bond, whose words
were kind.
My Grandfather
was a man who was always busy, always doing
something for someone,
a man who would work the farm all day
in snow or rain and never complain,
a man whose ever encompassing arms
gave comfort and protection to all who came,
strong as the oak, gentle as the willow.

But arthritis
stiffened and twisted his wood, bent him
to a child who did not know, who loved
without understanding (for there were boys
to chase and bikes to ride and green apple
battles to win). So when the time came
for the washing of his feet, in my summer-
days hurry to bring warm water and towels,
I never felt the aching of his waiting and
in kneeling down to slide off worn slippers,
I never saw the breaking in his bending.

Thinking now of Mary,
she who washed with her tears
and dried with her hair,
too late now—my love bends
to his empty chair.

Susan K. Faltz

CHRISTINE DELEA

A HANDFUL OF HAIR

She hated laundromats. In every place that she had lived, and now, being 35, that was seven, she had had at least one awful experience in a laundromat. In Maine, it had been the flasher who had cornered her one night when she was alone. In Rhode Island, during her sophomore year at college, the experience had been the theft of her clothes, soaking wet, from the two washers, as she was next door buying a pop and a sandwich.

She had grown up in a household that always had a washer and a dryer. She was not used to the grime and the noise of laundromats.

In Wyoming, on vacation with her ex-husband one summer, they had decided to wash their new clothes. All of their colorful vacation outfits, the new Western style clothes to take back East, even their never-worn underwear, had been ruined in the dryers. Apparently, some kids had put gum and broken ink pens into each dryer. The owner apologized, muttered something about the "teenagers" and "damn hippies" and "rock music" but said he was not responsible.

Ohio had actually been the most frightening. She had been sitting at a table reading *Death Be Not Proud* (and she swore she would never forget that book because of it) and smoking cigarettes. As she waited for her clothes to dry, her mind wandered and she looked around the laundromat. It was her first time there, she was working as a summer intern at a domestic violence shelter, and it had been the only laundromat close to her apartment.

Her eyes took in the chipped blue paint on the walls, the dirty children screaming for dimes for gumballs, and the fat, loud women at the other end of the room; however, her mind took in nothing. She was thinking of work, of her family, of whatever 23 year olds think of when they are just out of college and new to the world.

Her head was suddenly jerked back by someone's bleach-smelling hand in her long, auburn hair.

"I saw you looking at my husband," came a hoarse woman's voice from behind her.

"Huh?" was all she could manage.

"I want you to stop staring at my husband or I'll beat the living crap outta you from here to Sunday." The woman's grip tightened and pulled back.

"Yeah. Sure."

The hand released its hold.

She had immediately pulled her damp clothes from the dryers—she hadn't seen the woman before and didn't know which grubby, oil-stained man was the husband. She decided not to take chances.

As she walked out the door, shaking, almost dropping her clothes, she heard laughter.

"That's right, run, you little piece of shit!"

At her first "real" job at a foster care agency in Boston, she and the other six people washing their clothes on a sunny, winter Tuesday morning had been robbed by two men with what looked like machine guns. She really didn't know, and told the police that—she'd grown up in a nice home without guns. She had an aversion to violence.

Soon after she married, when the divorce that would tear her apart was only two and a half years away, she had fallen after slipping on ice in the street, carrying the dirty clothes to the car. Towels and blouses and sweatpants and whatever else went flying. She knew she had done something terrible to her ankle, and couldn't move. She lay next to her car on the busy Boston street, praying no one would run over her. Finally, a neighbor came down and helped her. There was not even anyone to sue as the ice had been in the street, nobody's fault. She knew that officially her broken ankle didn't really count, as it didn't happen in a laundromat, it still counted because she was on her way to the laundromat.

The most recent had been an on-going problem which had recently escalated. The

closest laundromat to her apartment was also the most horrible she'd ever been in. The windows were so dirty it was impossible to know what the weather outside was like. One wall sported what looked like a bullet hole. Most of the time at least half the dryers didn't work—but the owners, who were never around anyway, never put up signs, so often she found the broken dryers after filling them with quarters, only to have them run for a minute, and then stop.

She doubted anyone ever seriously cleaned the place. The bathroom smelled as if it had been sprayed down with stale urine. The sink at the back was rusty, and more than once she had watched as old drunks from the bar down the street came in, puked in the sink, and then splashed water on their faces.

The people with whom she shared the small, dark place with its old picnic tables and gray folding chairs all looked the same to her. The men who came in wore dark blue work clothes, or army pants with soiled white t-shirts. Their hair was always oily, as if they could not find shampoo in all of upstate New York. They either had enormous bellies or were sickly thin. They were of different ages, but their wrinkled faces all seemed ageless.

The women, wearing polyester and chain-smoking, all seemed older than they probably were, and they all had children who whined and yelled and picked their noses and slammed doors and threw things and did anything but sit quiet and still. Often the older girls had children, too, and she gave up trying to read novels or study her caseload from the social work agency. The women sat and smoked and gave her dirty looks, or stood in the way and gossiped.

Late one Friday afternoon, she had the place to herself. She had nothing to read, but she didn't mind. She sat and enjoyed the quiet.

As she folded one dryer's load of clothes, she heard coughing from behind her. She turned to see a man, with long dark hair, but besides that like all the others she encountered there, pulling out her underwear from the other dryer she'd used. The back door, which he hadn't shut, creaked closed.

"Nice," he whispered as he rubbed his face in her lingerie. He was unaware that she had noticed him. He turned to the dryer again and pulled out a bra.

"Put that down!" she screamed.

The man turned slowly and stared at her with eyes that looked as though they could melt at any minute and slide down his face.

"Boo!" he screamed, laughing, and then ran out.

"Good-bye, Princess!" he called.

It took a while, but she started to notice that the others who frequented the laundromat called her Princess when they thought she couldn't hear. She began to tune into their talk of her—mostly it centered on her clothes ("weird") and her attitude ("snotty"). She had been alone with that man that day; either he had told these people he called her Princess, or they had been calling her that for some time, unnoticed, and he was one of them.

She'd been leaving notes under the locked door in the back, each one with an explanation of the circumstances, and an amount of money.

"2 quarters—last dryer doesn't work"

"a dollar—machine in the middle is broken"

"3 quarters today—both the third and sixth dryers from the door are broken"

She had never signed them, and wasn't even sure what she expected to be done. On her last trip there, when she vowed to find another laundromat, even if it meant driving all over the area, two men and a woman dropped a slip of paper on her table as they passed. She stopped folding towels and picked it up.

"How many quarters today Princess?" read the note. She looked up to see the three people standing outside with two other women, laughing. Since that day, she went to a different laundromat each week, hitting Fishkill and Beacon and Wappingers Falls and South

Poughkeepsie. Sometimes she would drive for almost an hour to find a place, and sometimes the latest laundromat would be no better than those from her past, but she felt saner.

A party! It's been so long since she's gone to a party, certainly she hasn't been to one since her divorce, and even before that she tended to stay in on weekend nights, reading, watching an old movie late at night, listening to music, writing letters to college friends, family. Her shyness has also kept invitations away, as well as the high turnover in social work. By the time she's made friends, they quit, or transfer, or move. She realizes she has few friends.

But it's Saturday night and her one, true friend at the agency is having a party. With nice people, she has promised. Her brother, a lawyer, has invited some of his friends and associates. People from the agency are bringing dates and spouses and friends.

A party!

The big house is already loud and full of people when she arrives. She chats with various people, accepts drinks when they are

Robin Kahner

offered, laughs at jokes and even tells some herself. Her friend, the hostess, corners her in the kitchen.

"Met anyone you like?" she asks.

"Well, sure. Plenty of people."

Her friend laughs. "No, no. I mean any guys. Cute, single guys."

"Oh. Well."

But she does meet someone, a little younger, who laughs a lot and teases her as if they've known one another for years. He is blonde and tall and muscular. He talks of swimming and jogging.

"You have such beautiful hair," he tells her as they walk to his car. It is a new car, imported, expensive. His hands and his face are in her hair.

They are at his house, a two-story with a huge lawn.

"You live here alone?" She is suspicious.

He laughs. Almost a baritone. "Yes. I'm pretty well off." That strikes him as funny and he laughs again.

They are in the kitchen. They are kissing and their alcohol breaths remind her of college. He tugs at her rayon blouse, just washed that day without incident. That reminds her of her ex-husband.

"Wait," she gasps.

"I'll make us a couple of drinks." He tells her, smiling.

They are still in the kitchen. She watches him make drinks at a bar that swings out of the wall. She looks at the kitchen. Clean, for a man. All the newest and most expensive gadgets.

"Did you win at Lotto, sue the government, or inherit from a rich great-aunt you'd never met?" she asks. She feels good.

"No, I own my own businesses." The word sounds like a snake as he slurs the last two syllables. "A chain."

He brings the drinks to her. They drink, staring at one another. He moves his fingers through her hair, starting at her scalp, ending at her waist.

"Such gorgeous, gorgeous hair," he sighs.

"What type of business?" she asks. She wonders if he notices her, or just her hair. His voice, low and secret, reminds her of the man with her underwear in the laundromat, whispering, "nice."

"Oh, a couple of dry cleaners. But mostly laundromats. And an arcade in the mall."

She steps back. "Mostly what?"

"You know, laundromats. Big money-makers. I just buy the machines, put everything in, some gumball things, you know. Then I never return and I make money hand over fist." He finishes his drink and laughs. "That's how I run all my businesses."

She gulps her drink down, unsure of what it is. His mouth is again in her hair, talking to it. His hands rub her back, warm her.

"Laundromats." Her voice is flat.

"...hair..." She only catches that.

She grabs a long, large knife from the counter and studies it over his shoulder. Chicago Cutlery, a good make. Her knives are from Fingerhut.

He nips at her neck, and she realizes what she is considering, as if it is someone else's thought.

Only if he mentions my hair again, she thinks, trying to find an out.

They kiss, and she almost lets go of the knife.

"I just can't get over this hair of yours," he tells her.

Thinking of the filth and the grime, the broken dryers and her ankle that still bothers her when it rains, the puke and the dirty children, the men and the women, she does what neither of them can believe she is doing.

When he is dead, she writes "Princess" on the lavender floor tiles in his blood and leaves to find an all-night laundromat to wash her bloodstained clothes. etc

A NEW LANGUAGE FOR ABSENCE —A MISTAKE

First light comes through the window
through blue curtains.
There was a time a woman shared the bed
and coming from her sleep
made the blue light intimate.
She had her own music, her loving grace
played with gentle hands, a light touch,
a song whispered as light as the
morning songs of birds and these songs
became a language translated by the early,
beginning light and the breath that
heaves up the singing from the passionate
coupling, the same fierce beauty and wind
thunder brings, the momentary form
lightning gives to things gone shapeless
in the dark. But this is dream as much
as memory. The bed shares only tired
and the fitful sleep of a body alone, the
mind mining nightmares for the stuff
of poems so the night will not be wasted,
so the emptiness will have, at least,
shadows and strange lights that can be
formed into parts of speech. The bed
and the blue light need a new language
to challenge silence. A language spoken
sotto voce, solo, with a rhythm
that remembers the early whispers
of the woman waking.

Tom W. Gibbs

RADIO POEM (STARSHIP NEWS)

...and in the island city
under clear skies
it's
eighty-two degrees

from the world desk
of United Press International

Paul Kantner
recovers from a stroke
in L.A.

Tom W. Gibbs

LAKE WACO, ONCE

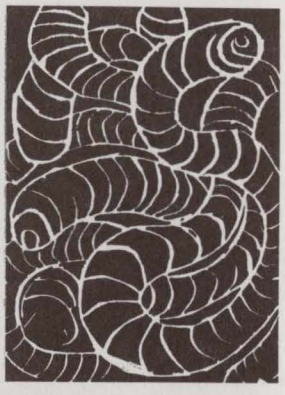
Smooth like washed ashore stones
the lake breeze pushes
the waves
in a soothing sluice.

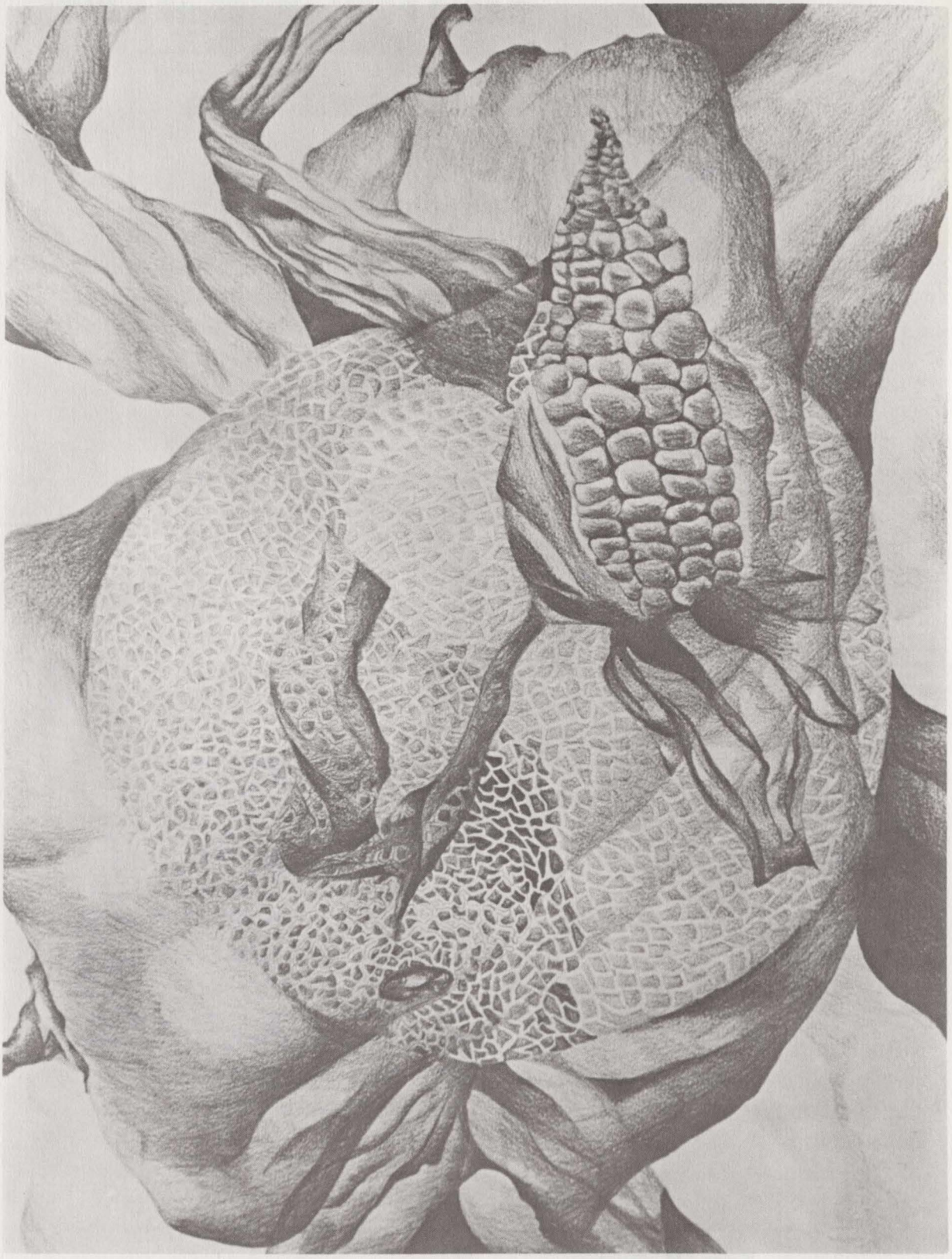
Leaned against the shore
I give in
to the push and cradle-rock swaying
of that
smoothing wind.

A vast curved cloud fish
has been gutted
laid over on its right side.

Underneath
in the hollow belly and below
the horizon glows
heat-orchid
in Dali blue.

Tom W. Gibbs





Robin Kahner

HOME

A red antique water pump
The handle sloping out
A novelty that has no purpose—
The well has been dry
For thirty years. It is now
An attraction of sorts,
A perch for cardinals
And the occasional blue bird.
To the left an odd four foot
Patch of pom-pom grass, tall
And exotic, transplanted
From a nearby field.
Then, seven full rows
Of opening irises
And the beginning of an eighth.
There is father picking
Away the dead, still moist
Buds allowing new ones to come.
In a white tee-shirt,
Jeans and tan work boots,
He makes the rounds
Consoling, urging
The plants on.
Beyond his quiet figure,
A high tree covered hill
Where I used to dream
Indians stood watching
Us on summer days
While we planted flowers
And played tag in the rain.

Karen Allen

W. DAVID HALL

BECAUSE YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THEY DO

You sit at a table inscribed with weights and measurements of the solar system, trying to figure out just how much you would weigh, give or take a side order of buffalo wings, on Saturn, but it doesn't change anything. Donna still goes off to her other life and you are still alone.

You were meeting her here after an NAACP meeting for you and a prayer meeting for her. She saw the Roger Rabbit bookmark she bought for you last week, "just because I was thinking about us," sticking out of your tattered copy of *The Color Purple* and her smile straightened.

"Have you read it?" you asked.

"No. I thought I told you I hadn't."

You sensed slight defense in her voice, unlike the other times you discussed what you read. During those times, she smiled and asked to borrow the ones you were most enthusiastic about. She shyly explained that since some of the works hadn't been assigned in school, she hadn't read them. That's natural, you reassured her, but you were certain it still bothered her somewhat.

"It's just a book. I thought maybe..."

The directness of her words, the almost inaudible whisper that cut into your sentence, stopped you. "That's not just a book, you know," she said, placing a hand on your arm. The small bands of glistening gold shined in the dimming light of the roadhouse. "It's something that is a part of you, something that I know nothing about. I want to know everything about you, so that I can be everything for you, so that we can be everything."

You ordered another Pepsi while she requested a beer. She needed the alcohol for the evening escapes into your world; you needed your wits and reflexes to ward off the intrusion of her world.

You slipped the book into your bag and avoided looking her in the eyes. When you two first met, it was more fun, more exciting, more of a challenge. Sneaking around back-alley clubs and jazz bars made you feel a bit younger and the wonder in her eyes at the dance clubs and hip hop house parties made you feel good. It energized you. You wondered why she just couldn't accept what she knew about your world and your life.

"Baby," you said, hoping she couldn't detect your frustration. "It's like I told you before. It's no big deal, no mystery..."

She shook her head. You didn't even get to finish the damn sentence and already, she was critical. *No*, you thought to yourself while trying to focus on the penguins on the soda can. *She's not being critical. She would have to be listening in order to be critical of what you had to say.*

She got that look again, the look that she got the last time you talked about reading lists. That look that she had the first time you watched "In Living Color" together and you laughed and she grinned out of politeness to you. That look that was searching you for something. She was so determined to find out what that *something* was that she kept missing when it came to understanding you, the most important man in her life.

"What do you think you need to know?"

"If I knew what I was looking for, what I was missing, we wouldn't be having this conversation, now would we?"

She paid for the next round of drinks when they came and you watched her drink half the bottle of Mexican import. While she cooled down, you asked yourself, for a third time: *How do I even begin to explain this "Black Experience" stuff to her? It shouldn't be necessary*, you thought. Being with you these past few months, evenings at the bars, nights at your studio apartment, should have been enough. Inviting her to the forums on African-American leaders, where you presented a paper on Malcolm X and the responsibilities of today's black youth should have been enough. Watching all of Spike Lee's movies on tape while wrapped in a blanket and eating pizza with a fire burning in the fire place should have been enough. Taking her to see

Bruce Hornsby, the only white musician you can stand, and holding her hand as his voice slid over the lyrics of "The Way It Is," especially the second verse:

> Hey little boy, you can't go where the others go,
> Because you don't look like they do.
> Hey old man, how can you stand to think that way,
> What were you thinking when you made the rules?

that you whispered to her while slow dancing in your apartment later that night, should have worked. But she still insisted that *something,* the always present, very special *something,* was missing. During the other times you talked to her about this, the times you set the ground rules of where and when you would meet and who would know and how much they would know, she had mentioned the *something*. You had tried just about everything you knew to get the point across.

Then you came up with another idea. You told her stories. About the things that had happened to you. Hell, you read the news on the radio for a living. If you could tell a silent microphone about a plane crashing somewhere in Russia, where you'll never be able to visit on your salary, and retain the tone in your voice that the producer raved about every time she got you alone, then telling the stories of your experience shouldn't have been a problem.

But it was. The words seemed to be of a language foreign to her. You talked about eating at a place where the rest of the radio crew was treated like royalty and you were looked upon with all the admiration given a man convicted of child molestation. About your first job at Kroger's when the pregnant woman wouldn't let you help her lift the 25 pounds of cat litter into the trunk of her new Buick and the manager chewed you out when she contracted false labor pains because of the strain. About the time you spent three weeks getting up the nerve to ask a white girl, whose name you no longer remembered, out for lunch and she laughed and told you what, in very graphic terms, her father would do to you with a shotgun.

"Look," she said, drawing back inside herself. "I don't like this anymore than you do, but it is the way it is for us." You apologized and tried to change the subject, insisting that that wasn't what you meant, that you were only trying to explain your blackness to her. She was still charged, though, and whispered her anger to you. In telling her the last story, you made a mistake.

Then her best friend rushed in, talking about how Donna's father was looking for her. That, and something about Donna's sister.

"She went into labor." She checked her watch and continued talking as though you weren't there. "Just a few minutes ago."

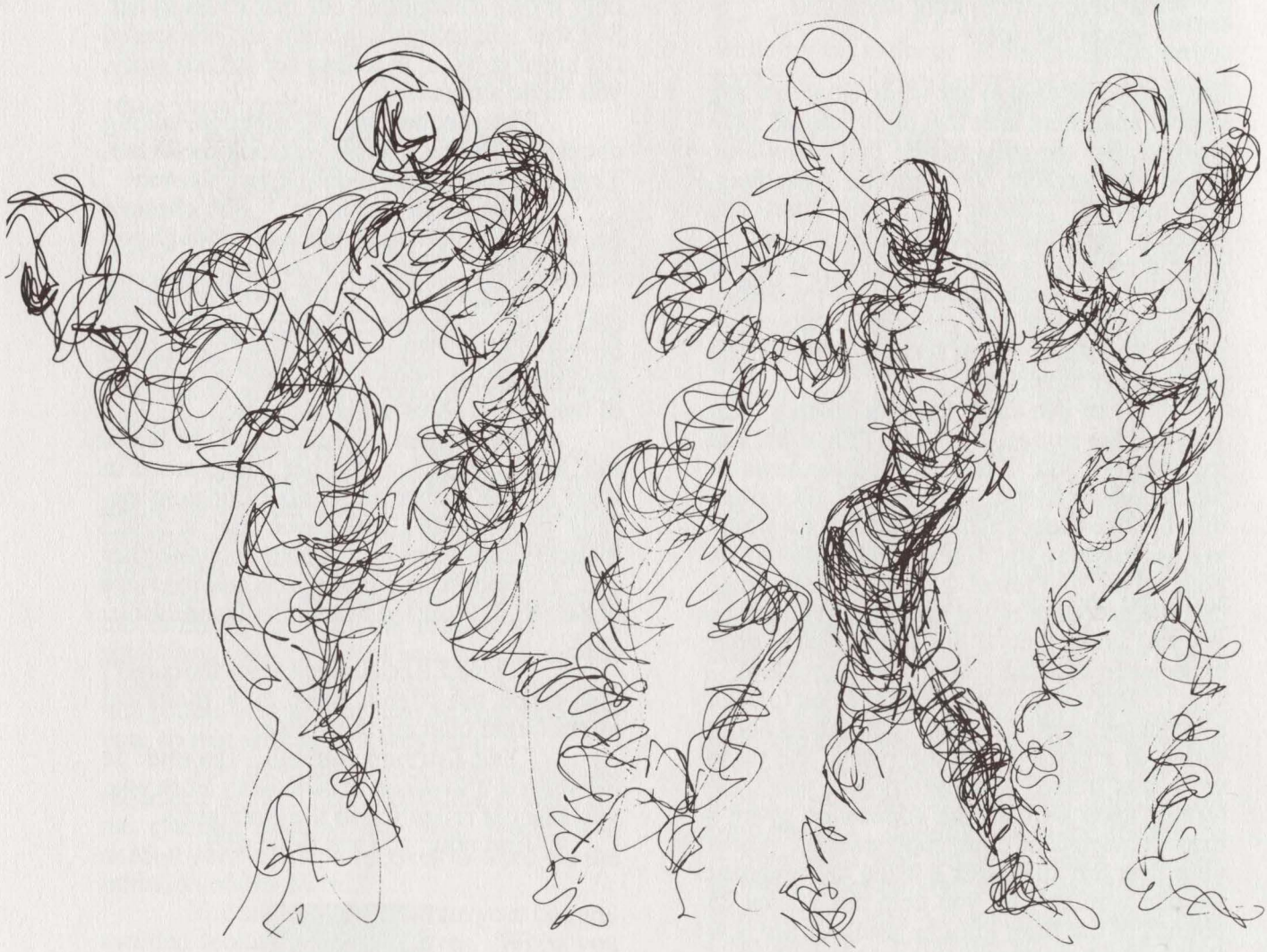
Donna slid out of the booth and drank the last half of her beer faster than the first. She turned to you. "I'll see you later," she said to you and ran out. No kiss goodbye. Not in front of her friend. And never in public.

You wanted to slide out of the booth too, and go with her, but her friend stood in front of you, either accidentally or purposefully you couldn't really tell. But it didn't matter because Donna had already started her car. You looked at the penguins and the rings of Saturn, then out the window as Donna drove past.

"Think I'll be allowed to see the baby?" you asked her friend, more as a rhetorical afterthought than anything else.

"Yes, I'm sure you will," she said. In the second it took her to turn away from you, you saw her reflection in the plate glass.

And now, you are alone. etc



Jody Card

WHEN CAROL TURNED LATINA

George did not get mesquite smoked steak, fried okra, or key lime pie on his twenty-fifth birthday. Instead he got Salisbury steak, green beans, and mashed potatoes at "Valerie's Kitchen" on Maple Street in Paw Paw, West Virginia. Old Valerie brought him an extra big piece of her double-fudge black walnut cake with a green stick candle stuck right down in the middle. She also didn't charge him for the meal and let him make a free long distance phone call to his mama down in Texas whom he hadn't seen in two months. The same amount of time he'd been away on this mall site in Paw Paw.

Besides this birthday marking a quarter century, twenty-five was the year George had decided to take a wife. That way he would have his children—two boys, then a girl—before he was thirty, and they would be out of trade school or married off by the time he was fifty. Then he and the wife could travel the states in their thirty foot Winnebago or maybe start that blueberry farm.

Something about West Virginia made George hungry to start that life. Maybe it was the thirteen miles of sleepy road he looked forward to winding around every morning. At daybreak he would set out from The Black Bear Lodge with his coffee and his tools. He would pass women in curlers handing lunch pails to husbands and children. Or buttoning sweaters and tying shoes. That brown and white dog would always race him to the end of Route 9. And in the evenings he would see the same women, without curlers, taking laundry from clotheslines. Or stringing beans on the front porch. Or weeding their fall gardens.

And he'd have a warm feeling all the way into town until he had to sit down to dinner by himself. Then the warm feeling would turn achy, and that's why George decided to start looking for a wife right away. He wanted to take a piece of that warmth back to Texas, where there was plenty of warmth, but not quite the same as West Virginia warmth. And then he could have little Paw Paw children in his own back yard.

Autumn was a good time of year for George to start looking for a West Virginia bride. Most towns took advantage of the colorful fall foliage and crisp weather to backdrop parades and festivals and pageants. Paw Paw was no different, and two Saturdays into his twenty-fifth year, George was a purposeful spectator at the Volunteer Fire Department's Dew Berry Festival Parade, complete with two fire engines, Paw Paw Senior High School Band, mayor, and the Dew Berry Queen, who got to wear long white gloves and ride down Main Street in a cherry red convertible waving to bystanders.

George wove between fathers piggybacking toddlers, mothers pushing strollers, and clowns readjusting noses just so he could keep pace with that brown maned beauty with the yellow rose corsage and just maybe get a personal wave.

When the parade was out of sight, George ran straight to "Valerie's Kitchen" where he demanded, "Who is that Dew Berry Queen!" But Old Valerie made him sit on a twist stool until he'd calmed down a little, then she said, "Carol Anne is a sweet, sweet girl. One of our own and we're very proud of the way she turned out, so don't you be treating her like one of those tramps down at "The Pit"

where I hear you been visiting regularly."

But George assured her that his intentions were one hundred percent honorable and would she please set up an introduction. Old Valerie still said no, he'd have to manage on his own.

It was just luck that George's boss sent him to Jenkin's supply to place that order for dry wall. It was Carol who took the order, and the warm blush on her face was all the encouragement George needed.

Carol had never heard a Texas twang before. Neither had she ever seen a pair of rattle snake boots. When George came over to dinner that first time it surprised him that Carol wanted to touch the scaly skin. And when she did, she did not flinch, she only said, "They feel like tree bark. Here, Mama, feel." But Mother didn't want to feel those stranger's scaly boots.

After supper, Carol's father took George out on the front porch to talk about the new mall, and Carol. "She's a real good girl," he said. "A hard worker. Got two years of secretarial school," he said. "On scholarship. How many stores did you say?" And George said, "Eighty-eight."

The Sunday that George took her to the mall sight, Carol was sad. Not because of the mall. The mall meant business for Paw Paw. She was sad because of the land that was chiseled out for the mall. But when George started talking about the malls he'd built in Texas, and the office buildings, apartment complexes, subdivisions, Susan's eyes glazed over at the thought of sights unseen. "There's a desert on one side?" "Yep, and ocean on the other." Then Carol took his hand and said, "It's a beautiful mall, George."

It was eight months exactly from their first date that George got to marry his Dew Berry Queen. The whole town squeezed into the Antioch Baptist Church where her father gave her away in his too small, gray rented tux and her mother wore orchids and cried into Aunt Janie's lace handkerchief because "That stranger is taking my baby away." And two weeks later he did. They packed the back end of George's red and black Silverado and drove through Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and finally Texas. Thirteen-hundred-and-fifty-seven-miles from Carol's screen door in Paw Paw.

For five days Carol filled closets and cupboards of the right side of a brick duplex with blenders and toasters and crockpots and china, spoils of the wedding, and George's tools for building. Which is why they were now living back in Texas. Flat (at least where they were), humid, enormous Texas. So different from the misty green Appalachians.

On Tuesday, after all the pictures were hung and the knickknacks were shelved, Carol decided to look for work. Which was almost fine with George since they didn't have any children—yet. And by Thursday she had a secretarial job with a company that supplied parts for oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. "Imagine that, George, the middle of the ocean." So the following Saturday he drove her to Galveston and dotting the horizon, way in the distance, sure enough, were the rigs. They got Wendy burgers to eat on the beach, but George said "No" to where Carol was going to sit, "Damn wet backs," and picked a bare spot further down the brown beach. They fed scraps to the

Jody Card

gulls and picked tarballs from their feet until it was dark and the rig lights flickered in the blackness. "And there's men out there? Right now?" "Uh-huh. Eating Snickers and watching x-rated videos."

Carol had never met a Mexican before, so the first few weeks at work she only stared at the two short, dark women who emptied her garbage and vacuumed her carpet. She watched the mouth of the older one as she whispered foreign commands to the younger one with the long braid hanging down her back. Soon the older one didn't come anymore, just the braided girl, who was shy, but always smiled pretty at Carol when she passed her desk. No one ever talked to her. Neither did Carol. So she just came in every day, 2:30 to 3:15, pushing her cart and smiling her shy smile.

Weekends, George barbecued brisket and invited his buddies from work. The men sat on the front porch and drank long necks while the women made beans and salad in the kitchen. On one of those nights, an old truck hauling a load of furniture pulled into the driveway several doors down. Out jumped three Mexicans wearing jeans, plaid shirts and Dingo boots. While they unloaded a set of box springs, an orange Pinto pulled in behind them. An older couple, a pregnant woman wearing a turquoise shift with pink flowers on it, and three toddlers got out and started helping to unload.

George and his friends got real quiet. Just sipped Lonestar and spit. Carol came out with a plate for the meat. "Oh! New neighbors. Shouldn't we go over and help?" But George just turned the meat and took another drink.

Carol sat right down on the steps with the men and watched the family unload. She was curious about the kinds of things Mexican people would accumulate. So far mostly furniture. Stuffed couches and mismatched chairs. But there were some bright paintings and a few large ceramic bowls.

When George's parents drove down from Midland, they hugged Carol like a daughter and handed her a belated wedding gift from George's brother, Randy. "He felt real bad about not flying up for the wedding," George's mamma said. "But he's been out of work so long he just couldn't afford to go. Course he wouldn't tell you that himself. Too prideful." And they asked George once more if he couldn't get Randy a job with his construction crew. But George said: "Sorry. They're just not hiring. Not white men, anyway." And they all shook their heads except Carol, who felt real bad for Randy, too.

But when they all went to The Blue Steer for dinner, they forgot about Randy and his hard times. Instead, they listened to the live band and ate steaks so big they spilled out over their plates. Afterwards, George pulled Carol onto the dance floor and taught her the Texas Two-step, which she picked up fast. And he danced her around and around that floor, her head tilted back in laughter, his hand wrapped tightly around her waist. George's parents watched the young couple from the table. They held hands on the leather bench seat and tapped out the music's beat with their heels.

When Carol got pregnant she missed three days of work because of morning sickness. George bought her a pine rocker and wanted her to quit right away, but she said, "No, not until I'm farther along." When she came back to work, the only one who said anything was the braided girl. In a timid voice she looked worried and said, "You sick?" Carol said, "Yes. Well, no. I'm pregnant." And the girl smiled pretty and said, "Ay! Que bien!" And the next day she brought Carol a flowering cactus for her desk and taught her how to say "Auxiliadora," her name. And Carol pointed to herself and said, "Me Carol." And the girl said, "Ah, Carolina."

"That slut Judy" lived two doors down and had a rabbit pen in her backyard. George called her a slut because she lived with a Mexican, Joaquin, and kept a trashy house. Carol liked her, though, because she wore big, silver jewelry and no make-up. Judy asked Carol to watch Marilyn (Monroe) and Helen (Hayes), the rabbits, while she helped Joaquin drive to Mexico to film a documentary on the last of the Caribe. "Only for a few days, Hon, I'm taking the train back." Three weeks and all of Carol's carrots later, Judy came back with many pieces of obscene clay art and a Mexican sun dress and apology for Carol. George hated the yellow dress with the orange and green flowers embroidered around the collar and would not let her wear it.

Carol did not wear it, but she did take it to work to show Auxiliadora who said it was "Muy bonito" and "would look nice over Carolina's round belly." And then Carolina asked, "What part of Mexico are you from?" And Auxiliadora said, "I no from Mexico. I from Nicaragua." "Nicaragua!" "Si." And she told Carolina that she once was a teacher in her country but had to leave after refusing to teach the children to count with pictures of

bullets and tanks instead of bananas and mangos. Now she cleans offices, and so does her husband, who used to be a dentist. Then she smiled, but not her pretty smile, and pushed her cart away.

That night over Chicken Helper, Carol said, "They're not all from Mexico, George." And George said, "What?" And she said, "Not all the Mexicans are from Mexico. Some are from Nicaragua." And George said, "It doesn't matter. They're all stealing our jobs." And Carol finished her fruit cocktail in silence.

The week that George went to Beeville, Carol started exploring her neighborhood. George never let her before. "It's not safe out there. Full of spics." So she locked up the house, put a butter knife in her maternity smock, and walked towards West Clay. She really did expect to see brown families living in cardboard boxes, but it was a street much like her own. Well, pretty much, except for the crowds of people spilling out of houses and onto front porches, like there just wasn't enough room inside. The curbs were littered with banged up cars and children playing right out in the middle of the street. Loud music came from everywhere. Carolina cradled her large belly and walked the sidewalk wide-eyed. She smelled cooking food and imagined yellow kitchens tiled with Mayan designs. Or Aztec. Soft tortillas and red beans and rice crusting white enamel stoves, foods she wanted to try but George said, "Too spicy." And she watched mothers curbing children. Calling them closer. "Oscar!" "Felipe!" And her own baby jumped.

The next night she wore the yellow sun dress and did not carry the butter knife. It was on this trip that she started noticing colors. White houses with bright blue trim. Or pink. This time a few of the women nodded at her. A young family sat on their porch steps eating from orange bowls. Father fed the baby while Mother laughed at the mess, her hand occasionally caressing the back of her husband's calf. "Hola," Carolina tried. "Hola," they both returned. And they all laughed at the wide-eyed baby. Then Carolina smiled pretty and walked very slowly.

It was the fifth night that she walked with the pain. The yellow sun dress again, but now also the pain. George was right about Mexican food, too much jalepeno, she thought, but she had to try. Carolina thought she could walk off the cramps, and did manage to lose herself in the music and aromas. The children now smiled and pointed at her belly. The dogs did not bark so loud or so long. Then the pain was too much and she leaned on a car, frightened. Two women came quickly and helped her sit on the grass. Their worried faces knew, but they only patted her hand and said nothing about the blood on her dress. The men called for help, and little Mariah removed Carolina's left sandal and rubbed her foot.

George drove straight through the night and right to the hospital where the information lady told him that "Carolina Miller is in room 205." "Carolina?" And she said, "Yes, that's the name they gave me." "They?" And of course she told him about the two Mexican women who insisted on riding in the ambulance, and the car load of three adults and five children who ran every red light behind it to make sure that Carolina was all right and to return the left sandal.

George hugged Carol first and they

A. Woodrum

cried for a while. He patted her belly where the baby once was, blew his nose and said, "What did they do to you I'll kill them." And she said, "What?" And he said, "Those damn Mexicans!" And she shook her head, very tired, "Nothing, Jorge, they only helped me."

And of course things were very different after that. George made Carol quit the job. "You need to heal fast so we can start this family." Auxiliadora cried softly about the baby and hugged Carolina tight. "Already I miss you," she said, and stuffed a small package into Carolina's hand. She wore the silver crucifix always after that.

The blood would not come out of the yellow dress so Carolina bought three more. One orange. One red. One blue. The Mexican women came everyday after George left to make sure Carolina was all right. They brought her wax bags of pan dulces to eat. The gingerbread pigs were her favorite. She would nibble the ears and legs while the old woman braided her now long hair. George did not like her hair braided, "You look like an Indian."

Carolina did not get pregnant. She got fat—and bored.

When she signed up for conversational Spanish, Carolina did not tell George. But he would throw her a puzzled stare when she offered leche instead of milk, or quiero instead of love. And though the language filled her mornings, it did not fill her hunger.

In late spring, Judy took Carolina to the open air market. "No ingles," she warned, "Espanol." It was hot even for June. The market was a huge maze divided by colored rugs and bark paintings. Every niche held something different. Turquoise and silver. Black and pink coral. Gauze dresses. Sombreros. Woven baskets. Earthenware plates and bowls and suns and moons. Crepe pinatas. Wooden toys. Leather belts. Lizard boots. Geometric blankets. Men and women open to barter. Holding out their goods for Carolina to try. Hold. See how it looks.

Carolina listened to the avalanche of sounds. Quick tongues. Syllables she could almost grasp—but then they were gone. And then she quit trying. Settled into the noise. The clinking beer bottles being pulled out of ice tubs. The mariachi band strumming guitars in the shade wearing black pants with silver buttons running up and down their sides. Children darting around wooden beams, screaming and laughing. The chatter of toothless women battering down the price of strings of dried red peppers. And there were the smells of the tamales wrapped in corn husks that the young boy offered up for her to try. The sweet scent of the red flowers in the Old Man's booth. The sweat of the lithe dark men unloading more and more goods into the already over packed stalls.

And the pretty women smiled.

And the handsome men bowed.

Carolina sat moon-eyed. Mouth agape. "Es fantastico."

Then she started making her own things out of clay. Little terra cotta suns and moons and bowls scattered her own maze of tables, floors, counters. They turned into refrigerator magnets, wall plaques, plant holders. And Carolina gave them freely to her Mexican neighbors who marveled at her talent.

Then she started painting the kitchen tiles. "I got the design from Judy," she said.

"Incan." Right from the beginning George argued about the new smells and sounds and colors in his house. He scolded and ranted and was downright mean. One Friday night he even took the broom and swept all of Carolina's works from the counters and tables into a broken pile in the middle of the living room floor. He scooped it all into a garbage bag, pointed his finger and said: "No more!" Carolina just got quieter and quieter, but she refused to stop. So George started staying later and later at work. And Carolina flourished in his absence.

It was Judy's idea to go to Fonde San Miguel. "You're so creative, Carolina. It's so beautiful there. The middle of Mexico. The mountains. A real artistic community. You'll blossom!"

"Just for the summer, Jorge. I'll be back at the end of the summer. Perhaps late fall."

But George was nervous and called Carol's parents long distance in Paw Paw and told them they'd better hurry down here and stop their daughter because he sure couldn't, at least not anymore. But her father only said: "Pull yourself together, Son. She's still your wife."

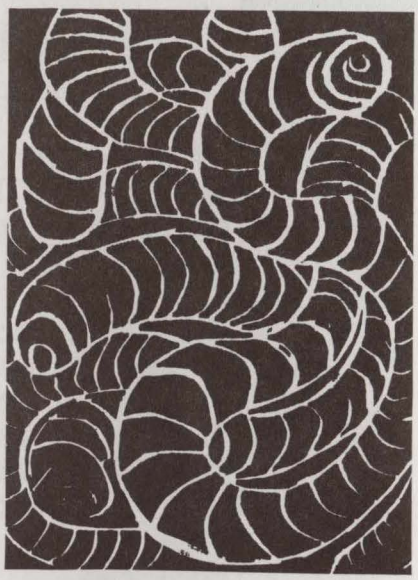
And the evening that Carolina painted the living room deep aqua, George did confront her. "This is just too much," he said. "I didn't marry a fat Mexican. I married the Dew Berry Queen! What happened to my meatloaf and blueberry pie? What happened to my three children and laundry on the clothesline? What happened to canned tomatoes from my own back yard?" And when he was a bit more calm, "Carol, what happened to my West Virginia bride?"

But Carolina only walked slowly to the kitchen to rinse her brush and open the paint can of magenta for the trim.

Carolina was on her second cup of Peruvian coffee when Judy came in with her suitcases and a copy of *La Mala Hora* for the plane.

At the airport, Judy went to change their money while Carolina stood in the Aero Mexico line with the tickets. George circled her like a timid dog. "You're not really going," he'd say and back off. Then, "You can't really go." But Carolina only said: "Of course I can, Jorge. I'm already gone."

Judy boarded first. Carolina hugged her husband. "Jorge," she said, "Adios." And George was left in mid-embrace as she turned to walk the ramp. Her long silver earrings jangled against tan flesh. And the last he ever saw was snake-like braid against red flowered shift. etc



Jody Card

LONDON, PARIS, ZURICH

He's been to Florida and Louisiana
plus all the states in between.
New York scares him, but he figures
he'll get there someday
when he's too rich for fear.
Women depress him.

In a Columbia University library room,
two graduate students argue
about where to eat a late dinner,
but they agree on the effect of
the Civil War on blacks
in the modern South.
They don't know him, and he will
never know about this conversation.

At night, he burns bayberry candles
and listens to old blues songs
on his second-hand stereo. Once
in a while, he'll turn the volume up
and sit mesmerized in a windowsill,
staring at the old trainyard. A neighbor
will bang the wall for quiet, and he'll
turn the sound down. With the quiet
music from the records and the eatened-up
Southern city, he goes to bed
with a trashy horror story.
He likes vampires.

And sometimes his mind
sings to him (I remember
him crying) and he loves that mind-music
with the same intensity he has
in bed with
women, especially white ones
with royal names and tiny knuckles.
Especially the ones who don't care to
discuss his taste in reading, his
beer and donuts for breakfast, and who don't
want him to leave the South.

Christine Delea

TEA ROSES

Were your other lovers' flowers, yellow, orange, red,
sweet-smelling, luscious,
crowding your belongings?
    You couldn't even find the mirrors
in that mess to study your pretty face,
but your mind was on other things;
you did not notice.
    I was in your place for days
before you saw me,
then only because I grabbed your ankles
as you slept and pulled
    until your face fell
into tea roses and you
gasped for air.

Christine Delea

TEMPORARY CREATURES

Chuck's high cheek bones and dark features made him look mysterious enough to be romantically foreign. Even though his face was smashed into the tacky, green living room carpet, I could picture him in a trench coat and hat, a hat that carefully exposed the line of his jaw. He was still dressed in last night's clothes, all black. His eyes were probably as bloodshot as mine. I couldn't find the nerve to invite him to bed, so there he was lying uncomfortably on the floor. Despite my heavy head, I leaned over him like a bee, light and free dancing on his sleeping figure. He still smelled of wine and railroad tar. An unforgettable mixture.

"Lots of people get shot around here," Chuck had informed me as I stumbled over a misplaced railroad tie. How was I supposed to react to a statement like that? All I could say was "Oh, really?" Once I had hoisted myself into a railcar Chuck selected, I busied myself wishing we had climbed into one of those open cars I imagined bums preferred. The one we were in was three-fourths full of gravel, which hurt my ass. It was also on a disconnected piece of track.

I watched his jaw stretch as he tilted the brown paper bag to his lips. I held out my hand and he gave me the bottle. Imitating him, I tasted the wine again, fighting the urge to throw up. I knew I was drunk. Mother always threw up when she was drunk. I wonder if Chuck was faking it. He didn't get sick.

I thought of him in a way he couldn't possibly have understood. I pictured him coming at me fists clenched and tight, with his lips parted enough to see a glimpse of his teeth. He would force me to the ground; then, kick my head across the tracks. What could I have done about it?

"You know these damn lights pollute the sky?" Chuck was referring to the industrial light that hovered above the car. "I can't see the stars anymore...those damn bastards took them away. They call all this ugliness progress?" His words were strong, but his voice was slow. His eyes teared up, but held back.

"The nebulous they," I muttered under my breath. I noticed the lights were the same color fireflies make.

Fireflies, I could never get enough to light my room. I used to catch the little creatures at dusk. I went out in my jean shorts, which were two times the size of my thin legs. I ran along the fence and through the yard collecting them. I stood still, too, waiting to see their light. Then I'd snatch at them like a frog's tongue and put them in a jar with a lid made of plastic wrap. I could never get enough because eventually they all died.

I removed their sweat-heavy bodies from the jar. Pretending to be a surgeon, I dissected them. First, I tugged at their wings until they broke loose. I'd separate the light

segment from the tiny head and smash it between my fingers, then smear it on the back of my hand. It smelled like damp weeds. Within two minutes the glow had turned to cold, gray mush. All I ever got were mosquito bites on my legs.

I knew even then they couldn't help being so weak. I might have liked them less if they had stayed. That's the way most things are. I learned to settle for dead bugs and electricity.

I touched Chuck's jaw that morning. He grinned not opening his eyes. "Good morning." I kissed his cheek.

He groaned, "Are you into necrophilia or something?"

"Are you that bad off?"

"Have you ever loved a dead person?"

"Once." He didn't acknowledge my answer, not expecting it, not expecting anything.

"Do me, dear one, do me." He finally opened his eyes and sat up.

I kissed his cheek again. He smiled taking my hand. He kissed it carefully.

"I love you dear girl."

I never saw Chuck after that day. He must have thought it was the poetic thing to do. No matter though, I don't much go for fireflies anymore. etc

Karen Casteel

CLIMBING

If
we dream ourselves
gorillas

sleeping in trees

we must shed
the fur that
blankets our
consciousness

and once again
become the
tree.

Jim Early

FROM A PICTURE OF MY GRANDFATHER DELIVERING BREAD IN 1930

You were sitting on a wagon
sunk deep in some muddy street
in Fort Gay. Two men sat with you,
one on either side, smiling
for the photographer.
Your hat was pulled low, hiding
part of your face. From what?
You sat slumped, maybe from the weight
of working so hard, so young.
You didn't smile. You looked eager,
if eager is the word, to get back to work,
maybe save a little money.
You've got money now, hidden away in bank
books. Is that why you smile,
watching the preachers and game shows
on television?

Dennis Watts

SHARON CURRY

ANGELS IN THE STREET

Delbert Stone began driving the bus to the Monroe County School for the Disabled when he was 29 and three months later he turned 30. A milestone birthday, except Delbert had no one to share it with and the six handicapped children had become increasingly important to him over time, as if each day a little part of his own life became more and more insignificant in the face of these children he could never seem to understand.

From the first day he had felt a special connection to them. He had no family of his own, an outsider, he always saw himself as looking out at life from some strange vantage point, like the bewildered face of a retarded boy, pressed against the windows of a small school bus.

His boss was a thin little man named Rudy Sniper, who had thick black spectacles that hung precariously from the end of his nose. "Look," he said to Delbert the first day, "these kids have got to be kept in line. We've got a brand new school bus out there that cost the taxpayers ten thousand dollars. Try not to be too sympathetic to them, they'll seize on any weakness they see in you. The driver before you had to be released because he could not keep them in line. You must not be afraid to exercise your authority with these poor unfortunate children." Rudy always referred to them as "unfortunate children," a name that made Delbert think of their lives as horrible accidents, that had happened purely out of bad luck, like walking through a meadow and stepping on a mine.

Two of them, Angela and Rodney, were mentally retarded. The two youngest, Rachael and Ruth, had cerebral palsy, and the other two, Stephen and Michael, were blind and deaf. Stephen and Michael were the hardest to handle. They were both big for their age, and quick to anger. Many times, they became enraged when another child would tease them and they would cry out in the low mournful whine of a deaf person. It reminded Delbert of the cows on his uncle's farm. Angela and Racheal liked to tease Michael because they knew he couldn't find them when they ran away. When Delbert would look up from the rear-view mirror, his eyebrows crossed in a frown, they would run to the back and hide behind the seats. Later, they would find their way back up to the front and sit behind him, quietly stroking the back of his neck with their fingers.

In the beginning, he had tried to make them wear seatbelts, but they screamed and tried to wiggle out and Stephen nearly choked himself. They hated to be confined and Delbert could not stand their screaming and the confused looks on their faces so he took th seatbelts off and never tried again. He felt they were safe inside his bus, as if nothing could happen to them with him at the wheel. He felt like their father. He had never had these strong feelings before. His parents had been dead for six years, and he had no family of his own except for his uncle in Idaho. These were his children. He knew it when he looked at their faces, distorted and happy. He knew it when he prayed at night that guardian angels would wrap their wings around them and protect them all their lives.

Rachael was his favorite though he never showed it for fear of hurting the others. She reminded him of a little sparrow, her features were small and dainty and her hands, though curled up and crippled, were beautiful and soft. At night, he would imagine her little body straightening out, bending upward toward the sun like a flower. In his dreams they were all perfection, their bodies and minds as sharp as glass. They held hands and ran across a blindingly green meadow to the sea. When he awoke, he was always sad at the reality of their lives, but when he saw them and they smiled, they were still the angels of his dreams.

They made things in school and brought them to him. His apartment was covered with watercolors and crayon scribbles. Some had their names in the corner, others were anonymous, but he knew them like he knew the children themselves and could name them without names. Angela loved blue and painting, Rodney made violent scribbles with a red crayon and called it love. Stephen and Michael did not draw, but

Stephen once brought him a sculpture of paper mache. Delbert put it on his dresser next to a vase of tissue paper flowers.

The only things in his apartment were family photos of Delbert and his mother and father. They were old and faded, Delbert was a baby in most of them, a tiny white speck between his parents. All of Delbert's other photos had been lost when his parents' house burnt down. They had both been dead for six years when it happened, and Delbert was working at the railroad ticket counter. One night he came home to a crowd of people gathered around the charred remains of his parents' home, a white two story Colonial decorated by Delbert's mother in shades of blue and cream.

The only thing that remained from Delbert's past now were the old pictures, and they had been sent by his uncle. The furniture was not new but it was clean, two cream colored chairs and a boxy couch. Delbert thought the children's pictures brought their spirits into the room. When he woke, they seemed to laugh at him; their laughter, high and tinkling like a wind chime.

Most of them lived within ten miles of the school, and Delbert drove them right up to their driveways. Rodney's mother was a nurse, and she would stand out on the sidewalk in her white uniform when the bus came around the corner. When Rodney saw her, he would scream and pound on the window until the bus stopped. On pretty days, she often came all the way to the bus to speak to Delbert. Once she invited him to Christmas dinner, her face excited and smiling, while Rodney clung to her arm. "Really," she said, "we have plenty, and Rodney is so fond of you." In the end, Delbert decided to go and spend the whole day with Rodney's family. He was quiet and nervous and sat in a chair by the fireplace most of the time. Rodney's older brother, who was not retarded, kept trying to get Delbert to play backgammon, but Delbert did not know how and was afraid to try. "No thank you," he kept saying, "I'll just watch." After dinner, Rodney came over and sat on his lap and kissed him. Delbert was glad when it was time to go, he was not sure he fit in with everyone. The next time Mrs. Rivers asked him was on Rodney's birthday, but Delbert said no, he had other plans, which was not really true.

One day in the late fall of the third year he was with them, he was driving the bus down Royal Drive, where trees hung over the road, thick with leaves as bright as the sun, watching Ruth in the rear-view mirror picking fuzz off Angela's sweater, when another car came around the sharp corner and smacked into the bus on the driver's side. There was a loud crunching noise as the bus swerved off the road, and Delbert was thrown against the windshield. For a few minutes everything went black, and when Delbert woke up, the kids were screaming and trying to get off the floor. Delbert could feel blood running down his cheek, and he checked the mirror to see. A small gash ran the length of his forehead. He wiped his face on his sleeve and ran to the back of the bus. Rachael was on the floor, Ruth was on top of her. They were crying and pulling each other's hair. Delbert lifted them up, they were so light, as light as air, and put them back into their seats. Stephen and Michael were crouched down in the back of the bus, moaning. Delbert came towards them slowly and touched Michael's hand. "It's all right," he said into his ear, "it's all right." By the time he got them calmed down, it was almost dark, and occasionally a headlight passed across the center of the bus. He slipped out the back to get his bearings.

The bus had swerved off the road into a low-lying ditch. It was not readily visible to the passing cars. The other car was turned upside down, about ten yards away. Delbert approached it slowly and peered inside. A man was smashed between the seat and the steering wheel, not moving. All around him the night seemed to close in with quick silent steps and Delbert felt like he was standing

outside of himself watching as he reached in and checked the man's wrist. He didn't feel a pulse but he knew he could be wrong, he didn't know anything about checking pulses. The children were starting to push their faces toward the windows of the bus. He could hear them crying, "Dellbutt, Dellbutt..."

He got back on the bus and told them they were playing a game and that they had to be very quiet and still. They stared at him for a minute then Rodney started clapping his hands. "Yeah," he shouted, "buthday potty, buthday potty!" Angela and Rachael joined in and Delbert looked back at the dashboard. He didn't know what to do. He tried to start the bus. It made a few choking noises then died. Angela screamed and ran down the aisle. She sat on his lap and started singing. He sang with her for a minute then walked her back to a seat. It was dark now, only the lights from passing cars lit the bus, and that was not often. Rodney started to cry, he buried his face in the seat and screamed. Angela did the same. Delbert knew he had to do something. He pulled the hood and came around the front of the bus. He tried to utilize what little he knew about mechanics, but nothing worked.

While he had his head under the hood, Rodney slipped out and ran up the side of the ditch. Angela followed him and they both stood at the edge of the road, holding hands and singing. It wasn't until a car swerved by and honked that Delbert looked up and saw them. By this time, Michael and Stephen were climbing out the back, with Rachael and Ruth behind them. Delbert ran for Rodney and Angela and pulled them away from the road. They looked at him, confused. "Whassa matter Dellbutt" Rodney said, "aunt we gonna have a potty?" Delbert started to panic. Michael had bumped into Rachael and she was on the ground outside the bus, screaming. He looked at Rodney. "Yes, Rodney," he said, "we're having a party, but it's on the bus. There's gonna be ice cream and candy and everything, but you have to get back on the bus. Please get on the bus." Rodney and Angela looked at each other and Delbert thought they would run away, but they turned and walked back to the bus. He still had to find Michael and Stephen. They were both crawling up the hill towards the road. He was afraid, so afraid. Fear burned like fire in his eyes and every second seemed frozen in time. He ran towards Michael and grabbed him around the chest from behind. He screamed and tried to bite, but Delbert held as hard as he could and hoisted him back onto the bus. Stephen was nearly to the street when he got back to him. He had grass and dirt in his mouth. Delbert tried the same thing with him, but Stephen was stronger, and lunged away towards the road just as a truck came flying around the corner. Delbert closed his eyes and heard the screech of brakes.

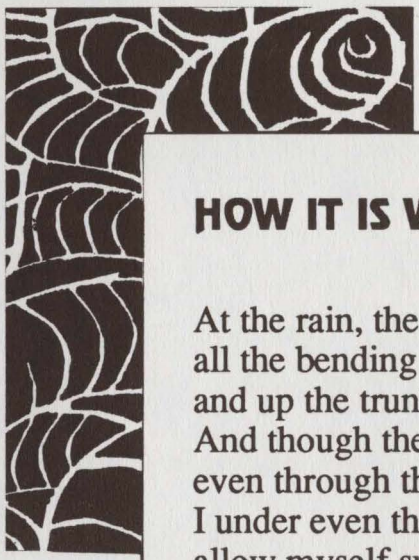
The driver was a fat teenage boy. He pulled the truck to the side of the road, jumped out and started screaming at Delbert. "What in the hell's goin on here, you tryin to get killed or somethin?" He stopped and looked at Stephen who was groaning and trying to get away from Delbert. "What's the matter with him? He drunk or somethin?" "No he's not drunk," Delbert said, trying to conceal his anger, "he's blind and deaf. There's been an accident. I think the man in the other car is

dead and I have a bus load of handicapped children. Please, could you call the police? We need help." The boy ran down to the overturned car and looked inside. "Woooeee," he hollered, coming back, "he's deader than a doornail that's for sure, I've seen more life in a pile of shit." He spit a huge wad of tobacco at Delbert's feet. Delbert could smell alcohol. "Please," he said quietly, "please help us." The boy studied Delbert a minute and moved closer. He touched Stephen's face. "He's blind alright, blinder than a bat, just look at that." He waved his fingers in front of Stephen's face. "Please," Delbert pleaded, he could hear Rachael crying at the bottom of the ditch, "please go and call the police."

The boy spit again. "You know man," he said, "I was on my way to a real hot date when this retardo got in the way. If I take time to call the police, it's gonna make me even later and that little gal's gonna be in a real bad mood, know what I mean?" He winked at Delbert. Delbert wasn't sure what to do and Stephen was getting stronger. He reached into his pocket and got his wallet. "Do you want money?" he said, looking at the boy, "I have money, here take it." The boy crossed his arms, squinted at the wallet. "Well I guess it couldn't hurt," he said and snatched it away. "Now don't you worry," he said, "I'll call the police as soon as I get to a phone. You and them kids better get back on the bus so's someone else won't hit ya. Ya never know who can be comin round that corner." He walked off to his truck, whistling, then jumped in and sped out of sight.

Delbert could feel a cold wind starting on the back of his neck. Stephen was moaning, rocking on his feet. "Come on now Stephen," he said gently, rubbing his arm, "Let's get back onto the bus." Far away, he could hear the sound of a siren, low and wispy as a wind from the North. He said a silent prayer that it was for them, that their parents had worried and called the police. He didn't think the teenager would come through.

Back at the bus, Rachael had stopped crying and was lying on the ground in a tight ball, shivering. Delbert forced Stephen gently up into the back of the bus, then bent down and scooped up Rachael. Her skin was cold. Her brown eyes were huge with fear. Back inside it was dark and quiet, too quiet. Delbert knew they were scared and he desperately tried to think of a way to comfort them. He remembered a package of matches and a candle he had in a bag below the driver's seat, left over from a birthday party he had for Rachael last Spring. He found it and lit the match. The candle cast shadows across the inside of the bus, and all of them, even Stephen and Michael, seemed to be waiting for something to break the dark silence clinging to the windows outside the bus. Delbert wasn't sure what to do. He thought of singing them a song, when Angela climbed up on his lap and began to sing, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so..." Rodney and the others joined in, their voices small and wavering. Delbert imagined the bus was a giant ship, sailing alone through the darkest sea, the children's voices blending with the sounds of crashing waves and the far distant wail of an approaching siren. etc



HOW IT IS WHEN I AM LIKE THIS

At the rain, the trees seem to be yelling,
all the bending stalks bow backwards
and up the trunks turn twisting to heaven.
And though these paved streets let run cars,
even through the thunder of clouds,
I under even the day
allow myself such weather.

How it is when I am like this
is always how the wind is, is
how always it pulls water down
through the sun's orange light.

And the boy caught in the rain
is luckier than he knows, is always
riding, riding through even the tired
lawns of the town, on his blue blue bicycle.
He will learn, when he rides this weather,
the taste of water, and will learn his own taste,
with closed eyes, sweating in the dark.

E. Kamlien

LINES FOR A LOVER

How when this,
the parts of a simple speech,
thread through each seed of a curving mouth,
to caress a calmness as subtle as this paper,
the music of my own throat becomes a chord I have heard
in the anatomy of memory, and the wind that blows
through the scented garden of my hope, lifts songs of desire
so far into my soul, silence becomes me better.

How you, a figure,
impress upon the small geometry of thought
a weight, that closes the light up, and creates
both a portrait and a landscape out of the dismembered mind.

In the driving rain,
in the sound of water,
in the open ended triangle of undone doings,
the speech becomes less like words,
the thought remains like ancestry,
and movement has more meaning than
any force like gravity.

E. Kamlien

LIVING ALONE

It's unbelievable
how many more things you do
naked
than before.

Today I ate raw cookie dough
and watched Oprah.

K. L. Stratton

PALINDROMEDA

Capture all fallen stars
Listen loudly to Homeric Jokes
Be not smug in frailty

Walk not into deep hats
But give children joyful dogs
Feel the color **Orange**

Do not stop laughing trees
Hide all fictional shoes
And revel in hidden smiles

Of Buicks or Bombs,
Of Theories and Imagination
Can I truly be?

Thomas Wiley

A. Woodrum