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ALDEBARAN

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William C. Elkington

WEEDING

He squats down for a garden's thinning,
spaded and raised, now grubbing, worming,
toes dug in, swelling in the cool damp black.
He rocks back among shy cuts of rose,
three colors of tulips in rows, and a lilac
as old as the farm, as tall as the house,
as his toes sprout pink and sniff the air,
like two families of moles waking up,
or inch worms standing up on leaves
in a wind that is suddenly familiar.
The sound of his palming hands
is the rasp of a hemp swing on bark; fisting,
the knuckles snap —
twigs on a long walk under foot.



A. L. Hemenway

CROWS

Crows watch me at the other end of the pasture
perched in a tree, shining in the sun
easy, passive targets.

I never even wanted to scare them.

I always sat by the purple thistles
just watching
knowing they were.

I had only to stand with a stick to my shoulder
and they would rise as one black bird
and turn in one motion
and stop —

just out of range — watching.

But

I see barbed wire with deer hairs hanging
and posts and a blooded plow
and dirt with broken skin
and a man with crow feathers
in his hand!

Lou Papineau

IN MID-AIR

On the roof I begin
to wonder why I look
like I am ever expecting
someone to drop by,
sliding down slate
to admire the view.

Bees buzz by in
a serious mood. I fear
the wee implosions
of my own design,
finding seas to wallop
in mid-air.

Robert Joe Stout

OUTCAST

Awakened, I darted into brush,
Head low and eyes twitching: there was danger, always,

Everywhere. The sky, alive with clouds,
Polished the dark moon. From the road, voices:
Deep in the brush, fierce howls;

I threaded the ridge between,
Gnawing bones and crippled birds,
By day hiding in caves
Or the rotting trunks of dead trees,
At night arising to peer at the herd I followed
And sometimes, in street clothes,
Faked being a member of.

Maria Flook

GREASE-MONKEY

I'm so tired of sensitive men. Poets, palsied with weak memories, guilt swelling in their joints. Apologetic, with trick knees. Long distance runners winding down, zipping a snug pride into two-toned jogging suits. Their Adidas executive clean, library lint in the tread.

T-shirts no longer half-mooned with sweat, their armpits smell like ammoniated aisles at the Stop and Shop. The Dial, clocking the minutes, kisses bruised with strain. The paralytic rapture, shower to shower. The mechanical stuttering, a blue smear. The imperfect metaphor a smudge on the cuff. So they try to relocate near the sea, the Tide foaming into their pores. Sudsing onto the page.

I love my grease-monkey. Biceps hard and pale like little planets, a spine stiff with liquid, calm in its pulse of heat. Bent over a simmering body, a rag in his back pocket with a smell of me. He checks the oil, dipping it in, pinching it clean. Hands ash-black, even after ajax. He's careless, sometimes grainy. He holds it in stained palms, something immaculate.

Some men write sestinas, their levis accidentally dry-cleaned. They write prose poems describing wheels turning, grit in the grooves of the modern world, soot in the clefts of love. A fist in the slit of time. They wear expensive, mail order hunting clothes to teach Baudelaire.

My grease-monkey pulls barbells off his single bed. The mattress ticking is striped blue like a GTO. He grits his teeth, throwing my legs over his shoulders. I fight against it, my literate passion. I tell him I love it. Just three words. But he lifts his eyebrows, singed with chrome, "Say what?"

Maria Flook

A poet sits in a velveteen Easy Boy, writing one line poems.
Adjusting his angles, he reclines through five hundred sudden
images. Like plucking blond hairs, his head tilted in an
approximate latitude of regret. He continues late into the night,
wiping herbalescent wisps from his eyes. A rugged hiking canteen
of dry wine slung on the arm of his chair, in easy reach. And his
thirst is so easy, it seems to flow.

My grease-monkey grips me. His dark knuckles press into me like
rough ink. Love is a texture, it is mute. He bites my nipple,
sucking a language from me, makes me gurgle. He listens with his
limbs. I tell you, it thrills me. When he smiles, says, "I'm
hearin' *you* darlin'."



Lou Papineau

MODEL

Lulled by the darkness
I lost track of the foolish wishes
she whispered in my ear.

She was beautiful in the classic mold,
she photographed well,
black and white became her.

We enjoyed each other's company;
to passersby we appeared the model
of inspired young love.

Of course, everything was not always calm
nor rosy: stiff upper lips
were very new to us.

Often we'd refuse sleep, instead
choosing to claw the night away,
such sad beginnings!

Paul Weinman

BODY AND BLOOD

A lady with her scarf asked for wine because it was Christmas and red.

She sat in a corner booth and stared out at packages and their people.

I don't do this often, said she again. May I have some more red,
for Christ's sake.

Jason-Michael Jefferson

ODDS MAKER

Solid gold imitation salvation
a marker in the sky – (say hallelujah!)
deal the hand open
for the long shot sucker bet
scratched action parlay
god is a bookie with a visor;
is it wrong to gamble
or only to lose?

Jon Lang

EATING THE STRANGE

So, when dinner arrived, a steaming platter
Of charred hands clutching small Tibetan flags,
My uncle, a mild man, took one look and collapsed
Into his soup. The waitress whose name was Kali
Grinned and began to strip. "Don't you worry,"
She assured me, "He's good and dead – no air
Bubbles in his bowl." The next thing I saw
Was the Chef, a white blur with blue teeth, rolling
Over the tops of tables, waving meat
Cleavers in all eight of his lunatic limbs.
"Ordnung! Ordnung! Vair is the ordnung?" he screamed,
Charging toward Kali whose body told an ancient
And naked tale: chariots roared over her shoulder
Dipping and careening around her breasts, golden
Figs from the gardens of Nebuchadnezzar floated
Across her belly, along her thighs the Jews
Wandered in search of promise and commandment and yes,
When she bent to unlace her boots, the inscrutables
Vishnu and Buddha smiled from her buttocks; meanwhile,
Across the table two feathery pinions
Burst through my uncle's coat, his new bull-head
Ascending from the soup with the whisper, "I
Am Alfred Omega." On the floor, the Chef coiled
With Kali in a wondrous dance, bringing the building
To its knees in a vast prayer of plaster and glass . . .
But somehow I was alive, stumbling down the street,
And somehow I was home – where all night, with one
Sandwich and the small faith of my infinite fear,
I pondered the apotheosis of a late uncle,
And the strangeness of a life sudden beyond surprise.

Karla M. Hammond

THE CALLIGRAPHY OF FLATWARE

Spooning (as it were)
back to back, I
imagine stainless
words, when thighs
explore the universe

I imagine forking
tongues
corduroying air
several separate
voices serrating

I imagine eyes
knifing
back their looks
in a slow night
of moonlit sheets

I imagine silver
plated sighs
a covey of past
lovers, pulsing
hip to hip.

Cindy Brafman

FOR FRANKLIN, 1974

There is always a moon
to be filled to be drunk
to be written

But the moon at 4 A.M.
is only a dim headlight passing
Another tire to chase down the twilight
to burst on the highway

A wheelspin of sky
Flung from the night
unfilled undrunk unwritten

Elaine Maher

WAITING

I waited for you
at the duck pond
near the old clock tower.
Although I hadn't armed myself
with day-old bread and rolls,
like the Pied Piper
I strolled the grassy banks
followed by a loud contingent
of honking beaks and dripping feathers.
Some lost interest, wise old birds,
Renewed the search for goodies
from the slimy shallows.

The clock tower struck the hour
And still you did not come
Round and round the pond we went
I too, became a strutting hopeful
in a dreary dull procession.
One more silly bird
Waiting for a toss of crumbs
walking round in endless circles.

Maria Flook

BEFORE SLEEP

I notice my ceiling clinging like a giant
entry blank, promising dreams, ready for
signatures. Waiting for me to pinpoint my
real home town. I should be sleeping but
my body pivots westward under the Christian
Dior counterpane, its fluff absorbing the last
trace of your froth. You tell me about your
rodeo colleens, pony girls unlacing leather
jeans in darkened box stalls. Your eyes squint,
wincing from a tang in their love. You've explained,
the ranch hand has taken a boy to bed, somewhere
his lasso circles a tombstone and we tug at death.
But I wear your bandanna, tight like a bandage.

I try to sleep while my sisters sort nuggets
of coal in their cabin, a room humid with loaves.
But its tin roof sheds the north, slanting away
my whispers and messages. Their faces ignite in
memorized photographs. Love is excavation. So hungry,
we strip mine, bulldozing the crust of desire. I still
wait sucking that dry wafer of hope, I expect it and
know it is gone. Like the penumbra of birth, an edge
we sharpen and erase. Instead, I contradict the dark
with a lost hint of light in my bones.

If I could imitate it, sleep. My daughter's luxury.
But soon she will be forced to hunt, at night wearing
dreams like a film she cannot scrub from her limbs.
I'll find her shaking out the sleeves of lovers, our
arms wrapped in dangerous slings. Our bones will jab
all angles. Something will occur, we hope it is like
a sleep. We recognize our dark autographs.

Judy Order

“SITTING SHIVA” (After the Funeral)

The giggles depart from
her trembling lips
like the air spurting
out of a balloon,
suggesting obscene noises
heard through the dark night.
She knows no reward for tears
that wipe away and
leave no trace but
a runny nose
and a weary mind.
Laughter often
understudies for the sorrow
that hides tightly in a ball
blocking the throat,
preventing tasteless food to fill
her empty but non-existing stomach.
So her body performs
its functions in the face
of grievance,
it sits, as told
because the legs are weary
And it walks to the table

Judy Order

where the silent mourners
hide their red eyes
behind fashionable Foster Grants,
and the cleanliness
fanatic Aunt puts on her
white gloves to inspect the
poor departed's dust.

But her mind has no
real escape,
thoughts don't stop because they've
had enough exercise
so they race wildly
through each other
like sport cars and crash,
to be left demolished.
Of no use they too
are dead,
stolen from the mind that
created them,
And the body that held them.

Jeannette M. Fien

ON ELLIS STREET

It was the dank water churning
in the gutter that beckoned you.
And the yellow beacons that sucked
the mist from between road-stones.
Street fever burned in your feet.
The steam seared the flesh
behind your calloused heel.

And in the night, you stamped a grid
on your forehead from a window screen.
You carved your shadow in the stripes
of Venetian blind and breathed a vapor
on the pane, as a tablet
for the names of streets.



Alan Seaburg

THOREAU OF CONCORD

He held
the mirror up
saw a woodchuck
put a wildflower
in its mouth

He went
to the river
his mate
a muskrat
the town laughed

He ran
the snowy hillside
a red fox
leaving tracks
his journal

Lou Papineau

APPEARANCES

At night
after days
of rain
his skin
changes, tightens
its hold
on appearances.

He sits.
Swift breath
evokes like
bed springs.

Eyes glaze,
leave tongue
at mercy
of memory.

James Fenner

SOMETHING SPECIAL

When my landlord sold the house I'd been living in up at Boulder Creek I needed to find a place to stay in a hurry. I was between jobs, had ten dollars to my name and no place to go. A friend of mind told me of a couple he knew down in San Jose who could put me up until I could get myself another job and afford a place of my own.

The thought of living in San Jose, having spent the last two years in Boulder Creek, really depressed me. But it turned out that the Miller's place wasn't so bad after all. They lived in an old Victorian on Thirteenth, just a few blocks from the University, in what at one time must have been a pretty classy neighborhood. There were some apartment buildings on the street, but mostly old Victorians that were now used as fraternity houses. It was a pleasant neighborhood because of the well-kept lawns and aged elm trees that lined the sidewalks. It was an old and sophisticated area. It wasn't Boulder Creek, but it was home. For awhile, at least.

I gradually got used to the place. One thing I couldn't adjust to, though, was the heat. It really did get hot down there. There weren't any breezes to come suddenly slipping through these trees. And after spending the better part of each day traipsing about San Jose in search of a job the thought of spending the rest of it in a muggy room was not pleasant at all. So I took to sitting out on the front porch steps from about four o'clock to eight each day, practicing my guitar and dreaming about all the money I was going to make when I was discovered.

That's really what got the whold thing started, I guess. My practicing out on the porch. There were a lot of old people who lived in that neighborhood, some of them patrons at one or another of the rest homes in the area. I know that because there was one across from the Miller's and I'd seen some of the old

James Fenner

Something Special

people go in and out of there. Others lived in some of the other Victorians, I guess. But I never did find out where this one particular old couple lived. Never even found out their names.

They'd go out for a walk each night and would pass the Miller's at about six thirty. I was always there on the porch, playing my guitar, singing and dreaming. Occasionally people would stop and listen for awhile, then move on, never saying anything about whether I was good or bad or anything. Never said a word, except for this couple.

The first time they stopped wasn't any different from any other time I'd seen them together. They came walking towards the Miller's place at six thirty, like I said, right on the nose. They were both smiling, about seventy, and holding hands and they looked happy. I mean you could see they were happy. Most other old people who passed by the porch looked sad and depressed, like I thought old people were supposed to look. But this couple really looked happy and content with who and what they were; like they were just going out together for the first time.

He was a big man, bald, and had a paunch that I guessed he was embarrassed about because he always wore those Hawaiian type shirts. You know, the ones with lots of flowers that people always wore untucked. He was very broad shouldered and must have been a well-built man in his youth. He didn't wear glasses though, and that surprised me. I had thought old people always wore glasses. He always walked on her left, on the street side of her. I remember when I was a kid how my mother always used to say that was how a gentleman walked with a lady.

She was a little shorter than he was. Isn't that how it always is with old women? Always shorter than the man. And she did wear glasses. White ones. Why did old women always wear white glasses? Was it because any other color wouldn't match their hair? Well, at least this woman didn't have that chain attached to keep the glasses from falling off her nose. And she wasn't a frail-looking

James Fenner

Something Special

lady, either, but I did come to think of her as delicate. I guess because of the way he treated her. Not delicate in a sickly sense, but special. Know what I mean?

Like the first time they came up and asked if I minded if they listened while I played my guitar. They asked! When I said by all means, he said thank you and turned to her and said:

“Isn’t that splendid, dear?”

She smiled and nodded a thank you to me, while he guided her to a seat on one of the steps below. It was the way he did it that impressed me; like she was a princess he was escorting to the royal box at the ballet.

“Any particular song you want to hear?” I asked. I was just being polite. Lord knows I’d be at a loss to play anything they knew.

“Thank you, no,” he said. “You’re doing fine. We’ve been enjoying your music for some time now. We look forward to passing here each night. The guitar is soothing, don’t you think?”

“Yes,” I said. “Kind of puts you off somewhere else. And thank you for stopping. I don’t usually have an audience.” He was sitting next to her now, she looking at me, smiling, nodding a silent yes to everything that was said. I was playing a new song I’d written a few days before about how tough life can be in the city. You know the type. Sort of I’m-paying-my-dues-now-but-it’ll-all-be-worth-it-someday.

They both just sat there watching, listening to my songs, holding hands the whole time and smiling at each other.

After about an hour or so they left. “Thank you so much, young man,” the lady said. It was the first time she’d spoken since I’d met them. Her voice was soft, steady, unbroken. A mother’s voice. “We must be going now. Thank you,” she said.

He took her hand, already in his, kissing her lightly on her forehead as he helped her up.

James Fenner

Something Special

“Yes. Thank you,” he said, and they turned, walked across the lawn to the sidewalk and away. I mean I thought it was sort of unusual they didn’t say see you tomorrow or something to that effect, since they passed the porch every night. But I knew they’d be back. I just knew.

They came the next night, and every one after that. It got to where I’d actually be looking forward to seeing them each night. And after one week of having them listen to me each night I gave up all thoughts of looking for a job, at least for the time being, borrowed twenty dollars from the Millers and then hit just about every music store in town.

I really wanted to give this old couple something they could really enjoy. You know, some music they could really relate to. So I ended up buying some old sheet music from the thirties and forties to work on and surprise them. All of it was written for the piano and it took a lot of time to rewrite for the guitar and my particular style of playing, but I did it.

I’d get up each morning about six, eat breakfast, then go right to it. Each evening when the old people would come, though, I’d still play the modern stuff and my own songs because I wanted to wait ‘till I’d practiced theirs enough and could really surprise them. I even went out and bought two old chairs from the Goodwill store and set them in front of the porch so they’d be more comfortable.

They really liked that. “My, how very nice of you to think of us,” the lady said the first day I put the chairs out. “How very thoughtful.”

“My pleasure,” I said. “Got to keep my public happy.”

It was the same thing every night. They would arrive, smiling and holding hands, he in his Hawaiian shirt and she always in a different dress. They’d say good evening; he’d guide her to her chair, sit down next to her and they’d listen, always smiling, she always nodding.

After many hours of intensive practice on this neat medley of

James Fenner

Something Special

old tunes I finally worked up enough courage to try them out on the old couple.

“Hello there,” I said when they arrived. “I have a surprise for you.”

“Oh, how nice,” the old man said. “The boy has a surprise for use, dear. Isn’t that nice?”

“Oh, yes!” she said. Her voice was still steady and unbroken, but she was excited. You know you can always tell when someone’s excited. “What could it be?”

“Just listen,” I said, and began to play.

I began with Harbour Lights, singing even. Well they just both looked at each other and you could see they were surprised. She even cocked her head low and to the right in one of those isn’t-that-sweet looks a mother gives to a baby when he’s done something cute. The old man grinned like I’d never seen him do before, and when I’d finished the entire medley they actually let go of each other and applauded. Applauded! Can you imagine that!

“Bravo!” said the old man.

“How very sweet of you,” said the old lady.

“Thank you very much,” I said. “I’m glad you liked it. I wanted you to be surprised. It was something special.”

“Yes,” she said. “It was. You played Harbour Lights. That was one of our songs when we were young.”

That was the most I’d talked to them since the first time they stopped by the porch. But it didn’t go any farther than that. The old man had already started to get up. I watched him graciously take her right hand in his again and help her up. Then they said their usual farewell and left. I wasn’t hurt or anything like that. That was just their way. They’d come, sit down and listen, then get up and leave.

They always came back every night at the same time, and even brought some brightly-colored cushions for the wooden chairs. I kept playing the old music for them, adding new arrangements

James Fenner

Something Special

I'd worked up, making changes here and there, really trying to make it a better time for them.

After two months I finally landed a job at a local cafe, working as a bartender and doubling as the entertainment with two shows nightly. I had incorporated the music I played for the old couple into my act and it really went over well. The first night I used it I made enough in tips to pay back the twenty I owed the Millers.

I finally moved from their place to an apartment over on Ninth street. I know the Millers were glad to see me get a job doing what I wanted to be doing, singing, but I had been with them for a long time and I think they were glad to see me go. Even so, they voiced no objection when I asked if I could use their front porch for a few hours every night and play for the old people.

We never grew tired of each other, the old people and I, and I guess we developed a kind of affection for one another. They became more and more relaxed with me, and even began to talk to each other as I played. I don't know what they talked about all the time, because I never really paid that much attention. But occasionally I'd overhear bits and pieces of their conversation. Once, just before the very last time I saw them together, the old man turned to her and said:

"Do you remember how Billy used to play your sister's piano? The one my brother Harry and I took four hours maneuvering into our living room?"

"Oh yes," she said. "And I remember those hands of his. Oh, they were such beautiful hands. Such delicate fingers. So lithe, they were. When he played, they were part of the piano."

"Yes. He was like that."

"You know, dear, I'm glad we still have that old piano. I'm so glad you didn't listen to me then. So glad." For the first time since I'd known them the old lady's voice sounded different. Kind of happy-sad. "Why that must have been the only time you and I really ever yelled at each other," she said.

James Fenner

Something Special

They were sitting facing the street with their backs to me, while I watched and played. He moved his right hand to her shoulders, moving her ever so gently closer to him, holding her right hand with his left and resting it softly on her knee.

"I'm sure it wasn't, dear," he said. "But I still love you anyway."

"And I still love you," she said.

"My, my," he said after a time. "It's getting late. We really must be off." He removed his hand from her shoulders and helped her from the chair. "Goodnight, and thank you," he said. The old lady smiled, nodded goodnight, and they left.

I think it was the night after I'd heard them talking like that, when they showed up about ten minutes late. Nothing was said about this. They just said their usual good evening, he placed their cushions on the chairs and they sat down. But the night after that they didn't show at all.

I'd figured it was going to happen sooner or later to one of them, and I really felt bad about it. I mean I wanted to send flowers at least and I didn't even know their names or where they lived.

But I kept coming to the Miller's every night at six fifteen. I'd just sit there on the porch smoking cigarettes. I didn't play any more. I was just wishing they'd both be coming down Thirteenth any minute.

When one week had passed without them I was feeling really low and ready to give up. I was just about to pack up my guitar after waiting over an hour one Tuesday night when I saw him making his way alone down the sidewalk. I felt myself getting ready to cry but choked it off. I don't know why, but all I could think about was the old lady's white glasses without the chain.

For the first time since I'd first seen him the old man looked like an old man. Sad, depressed, like I thought old people were supposed to look. He wasn't smiling like he usually was and he

James Fenner

Something Special

looked incomplete without her walking on his right. He looked thinner, too.

He walked to the porch and sat on the steps, right on the spot they used to sit before I bought the chairs. I'd quit bringing the chairs days before.

For a long time the old man didn't move, didn't say a word. He just rested his right hand on the place she used to sit. He just sat there staring across the street. I didn't say anything, didn't even pick up my guitar. After about ten minutes he said:

"Would you please play Harbour Lights for me?"

"Of course," I said.

I picked up my guitar and began strumming the melody. I didn't even try to sing. The notes echoed softly through the evening air, but he was listening to that old piano in his living room, the old lady there beside him holding his hand and nodding a silent yes as those beautiful fingers flowed effortlessly across the keyboard.

Tracey Gourdine

SUPERMARKET REALITY

I remember them standing there with frustration and shame passing through their eyes. Their feet shifted the weight of their bodies from side to side as they bit their lips, fumbled their keys, and waited for the cashier's bright red fingernails to stop the endless tapping of numbers on keys. The prices jumped and fell rapidly inside of the tannish metal box, that would soon take their last few dollars. The family seemed to wait breathlessly for its inevitable stop.

I remember the supermarket's largeness, and how it was nearly empty then, but they were careful to keep their eyes at the same level of the register or on the waxy shininess of the floor. The noisy clatter finally ceased and some dark eyes, framed inside dark brown faces, went wide with surprise and fear. The small stocky brown woman, still wearing her spotless white housekeeping uniform, fumbled with the foodstamp booklet while her three sons looked on. Desperation grew in her eyes as she counted and recounted the coupons, stamps, and what few dollars she had.

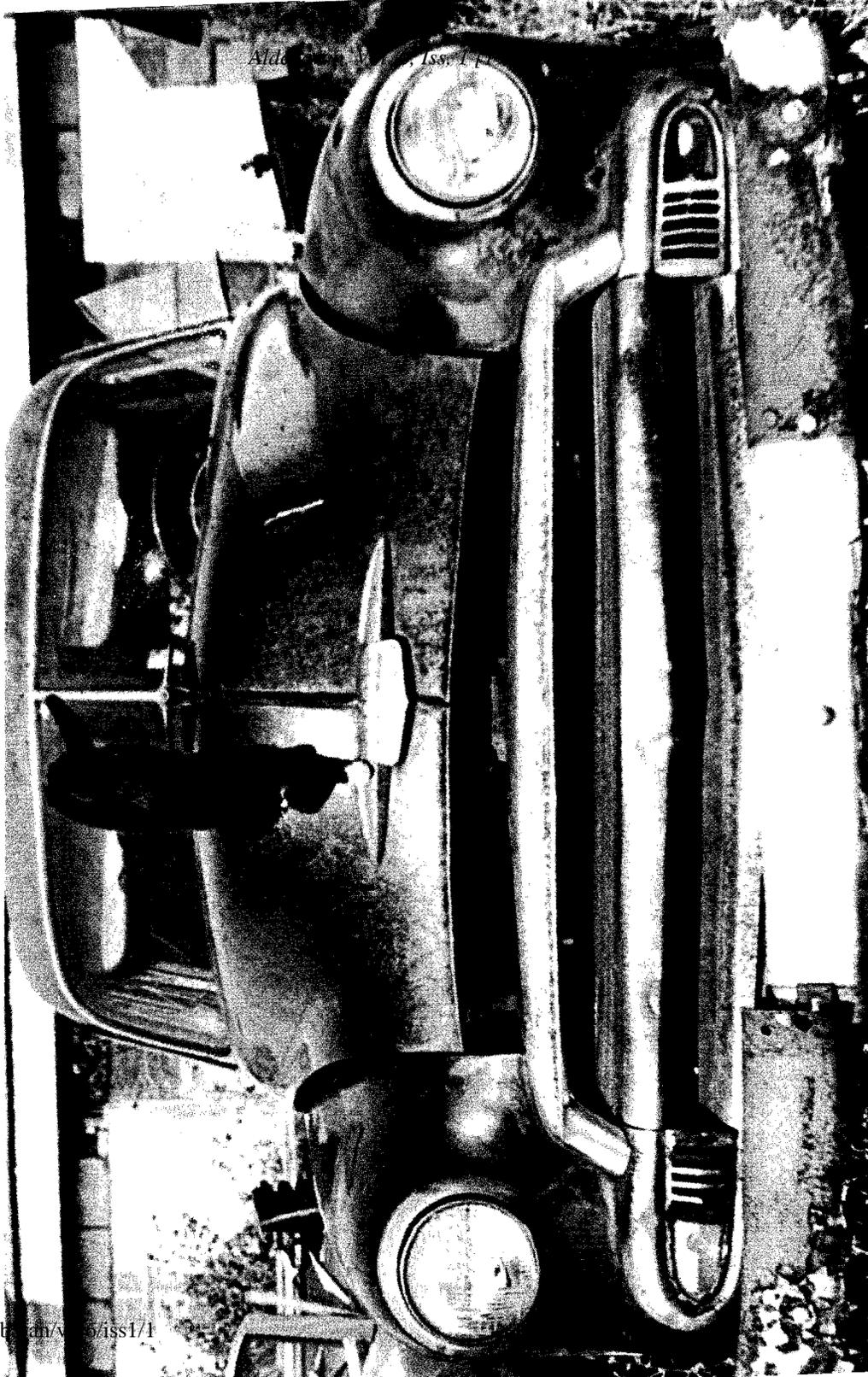
I remember the cashier, young and pimply, growing impatient, and her eyes seemed to say to the woman, "I hope you can pay for this stuff."

The white suburbanites with stuffed wallets in hand, grumbled and mumbled as they looked from their watches and back to the front of the line at the black children huddled there, looking over the rounded shoulders of their tiny frantic mother. A small cry or whimper, like that of a deserted child hopelessly lost in the madness of a department store came through her mouth. Her lips began to quiver and her hands shook as she cast a "what should I do now?" look at her oldest son. Taking her arm, he searched her worried face, telling her, "It's okay momma, I got money in the car." More grumbles rose from the line of white faces as he walked away, head held high, without consulting the cashier.

I remember the middle son jamming his hands deep inside his pockets as if he could or wanted to dive his whole body into his pants and disappear. His face gathered into a tight knot of anger and embarrassment for his mother. As his older brother brushed confidently past him with a word of condolence, the young man turned his back on his family and the food. His face reflected off the huge glass window that looked out towards the parking lot, and he watched his brother's long unhurried stride to the car. He remained standing there like a piece of petrified wood, without looking at his mother, or his younger brother who seemed to be completely oblivious to their situation or economic problems. He stood near the food, lifting and playing with the colorful boxes that were strewn about on the black counter. He smiled when he noticed the promised free surprise inside a box of cereal. While he was tossing and toying the box a whispered but harsh angry bark came from his brother who had turned around. "Put that down, it ain't ours yet!" The child dropped the box at his brother's sounds of a bitter explosion of anger. His brother's back stood tense while his mother kept looking apologetically at the cashier who had all this gum jammed into her mouth, going loud and fast with chewing.

I remember how the handsome son returned lighthearted and secure, and he paid the cashier triumphantly, without using coupons or stamps. She looked down her nose at him but he smiled at her in a way that dissolved her front; she smiled too.

I remember how much his momma beamed with pride at his casualness. They quickly packed up their food and put the bags carefully into the cart as if they were babies in blankets. The oldest son took his mother's arm and grinned at her, and she back at him while the youngest child clutched the side of the cart, chattering all the way. With his hands still jammed in his pockets and shoulders hunched forward, the middle son hurried out the swinging door first, while the rest of his family strolled out slow and proud.



Ald

ISS

This is a Special Section that has been added so that the Staff also has an opportunity to publish their work. It has been Edited by Robert L. McRoberts.

Martha Christina

THE SHOES ARE BLACK

not red, but the story is the same.
I slip them on, their ribbons
bind my ankles in interlocking slave bracelets.
They dance, they dance . . .
I am the dying swan
changement
resurrected, I am
twenty swans, airborne
on wooden blocks and lambs wool
changement
I am posing for Degas
I am Coppelia with a painted smile
changement
I am Zelda Fitzgerald in Paris
changement changement
I am eight and awkward
changement changement
I am cutting the ribbons
with cuticle scissors
but the shoes are riveted to my soles
changement changement changement
I am 30 and awkward and winded and pained
but the twenty-year-olds are stunned
by my smile and my shoes
that are older than they.

Robin Boyd

INTERVALS

I awoke tonight
to find our bodies
were fused our

hollows and bumps
were matched with
jigsaw precision

like dark mountains
against the night
there was no

space to define
where it was you ended
and I began

SCENE FROM A MOVIE

Sunlight
golden glows your arm.
Focus on the pit
behind your elbow:
transparent hairs
shimmer and curl softly
in this dawn
overlooking angular rooftops.

Adrienne Maher

SOUNDING

My heart is a great whale
lurking without shadow deep below
ringing through and through
with pitch untuned but absolute
Pulsing as the earth gasps for air
and unknown moving objects
pulse in muted counterpoint

The moon draws
with a silver straw this blood
through its dark veins
If my own wound leaks a trail
of blue warblers to drown
or beat another darkness
only silver trees could know

I surge for concert with the sun
Unshed tears fling to the sky
and rain symphonic brass
Arched and suspended
mid-air I embrace
then flap my huge tail
a sail changing tack
and I re-sound

Maria Palma Suscella

REMNANTS

childish tea parties
held with Bessie Smith
somewhere in the shadows
toasting to the
pheasant under glass
and smoking imaginary Marlboro's
in our scuffed black slippers
a wilting primrose
obscures the view
of each other's smiles
we lick our lips
after each taste
of the swirling whipped air
we had so diligently prepared
following an old recipe
unearthed in a webbed attic niche

longing to return
to moments that are owned
by Past i plead for
a one-day rental
but he refuses,
conserving them in
empty Del Monte containers
locked in pirate caverns
somewhere off the coast
of Sardinia



Paul W. Levesque

THE FISHERMAN'S BAR

In a seaside town there was a fisherman's bar we went to every summer. It was only one town over from my hometown, but with the curvy roads of the area it took twenty minutes to drive there sober and thirty minutes to drive home drunk. So we didn't go there often, but we went regularly.

The best time to go would be on stifling Saturday nights when it was too hot to do anything but go down to the beach and get high and skinny-dip. Afterwards, we would go down to the fisherman's bar sticky with salt in our tattered shorts and sand-filled sneakers. Everyone dressed like they just got out of the water there. (Once, a doctor's son came there dressed in creased white shorts and deck shoes and an impeccable green t-shirt, but he probably felt uncomfortable being stared at because he never returned). It was good to come down and have a few beers, listen to the juke-box blare, and look at the bar jammed with staggering, unshaven fishermen, but what made it funnier was that many of them were old high school classmates of ours.

You see, we were successes. Not privileged, like the doctor's son, but working-class successes aimed directly at what we saw as the top. These guys were just fishermen. Since most of them spent their high school years swilling whiskey in jacked-up Mustangs, there really wasn't much in the way of old times to go over. Still, my friends were more talkative than I, and I would often overhear and then get roped into a brief conversation with a fisherman. They would say they were still fishing and that they were ready to get their own boat and most would say they were married and some would even say they needed time to think. When it was my turn to talk and I would say I was still in school, they would say "Good luck, man", and the ones that were drunk enough would soul-shake my hand.

When the bar was hot and crowded, though, we could find other successes there and have a real conversation. We would talk about classes and laugh at the fishermen though we were careful not

Paul W. Levesque

The Fisherman's Bar

to laugh loud enough to get beat up. Of course, there were always more fishermen than successes there, and after all it was their bar. But all that ever came there were successes and fishermen.

Every October, the fisherman's bar would close down, not for lack of tourists (the few people who visited the seaside town in the summer were historical preservationists who only drank *creme de menthe*) but because it was covered with a chill shroud of fog in the cold months, though why this kept fishermen away I never knew. It kept them away, however, and it certainly kept away the successes. One year, a friend of mine suggested out of tedium we go down and see what happens on the night the fisherman's bar closed for the season. It was a wintry night with a stiff wind slapping the waves against the breakwater, and as we came through the doors we were talking about the last time we had been there, a sultry late August night when the concrete floor was laden with what had to be two hundred people.

Everything was dull and cold tonight, though, and only four hard-timers remained, sitting in a clot at the part of the bar nearest the exit. We sat a discrete five stools down and sipped our beers with our heads bent sincerely forward discussing politics and Steely Dan. For three drafts everything went smoothly, even when a slovenly looking character of about our age came in with a pretty but used-up looking girl. They sat with the others and ordered gin-and-tonics. Seeing nothing in this, I turned around to resume our discussion of the sewer referendum. My friend seemed anxious to broach another topic, though. "Don't you know who that guy *is*?" he said lowly, and when I pleaded ignorance he mentioned a name which in high school belonged to a person who was friendly with the right crowd, went out with a beautiful girl, never let his shirt tail hang out, and had a dignified air which I could only interpret as deceit since he never wanted anything to do with me. I had heard he had become a fisherman, but I never expected this. His hair was matted about so madly it was hard to tell its length. His face was stuck at the scrawniest point between shaving daily and growing a beard. He had no coat, but his peasant shirt was open a third of the

Paul W. Levesque

The Fisherman's Bar

way down for want of buttons. "Too burned to tie his own shoes", my friend said. "A real vegetable." I glanced at his feet, and noticed he was wearing loafers and no socks. "A definite cabbage. A true carrot," I added, and we chuckled softly as we ordered our next beer.

As I drank I couldn't help but notice that our ex-classmate and his girl always had a full drink in front of them, though they never ordered a fresh one and were drinking in gulps. "He's got a bottle," observed my friend before I got a chance to ask him what was up, and before I could ask him where it was hidden, the bartender, a squat middle-aged woman with an attitude problem, turned to the fisherman and snapped, "Out." He looked at her in drunken disbelief, shrugged, and took another gulp. She was banging on the cash register when she saw he was still there, so she repeated with greater disgust, "Out! I don't let no kids bring bottles in here."

"She's calling the owner," my friend said, and sure enough a tall, crew-cut man with out-of-date glasses emerged from the kitchen. "How ya doin'," he said calmly to the fisherman.

"H'y' doin'," replied the fisherman as he slid off his bar stool. "You're going to have to get out of here," said the owner too calmly. "Edna, put the rest of his drink in a paper cup. We want to give him what's his."

"S'arigh', doh'n wan' it," said the fisherman to the floor, and he then shuffled out of the bar repeating, "H'y' doin', h'y' doin'." The owner lifted a poorly concealed empty Beefeater's bottle from the floor and handed it to Edna. She flung it off-handedly into a wastebasket as she went by us, but I was too busy guzzling my beer to notice. We left two minutes after the fishman had, but the girl he had brought with him stayed and swore in Portuguese at the bartender.

That winter, I stopped being a success, and I haven't been back to the fisherman's bar since. My friends still go irregularly, though, and tell me it's still the same down there. Just fishermen and successes. I don't want to go back, but you never know when you're going to have to learn to fish.

Martha Christina

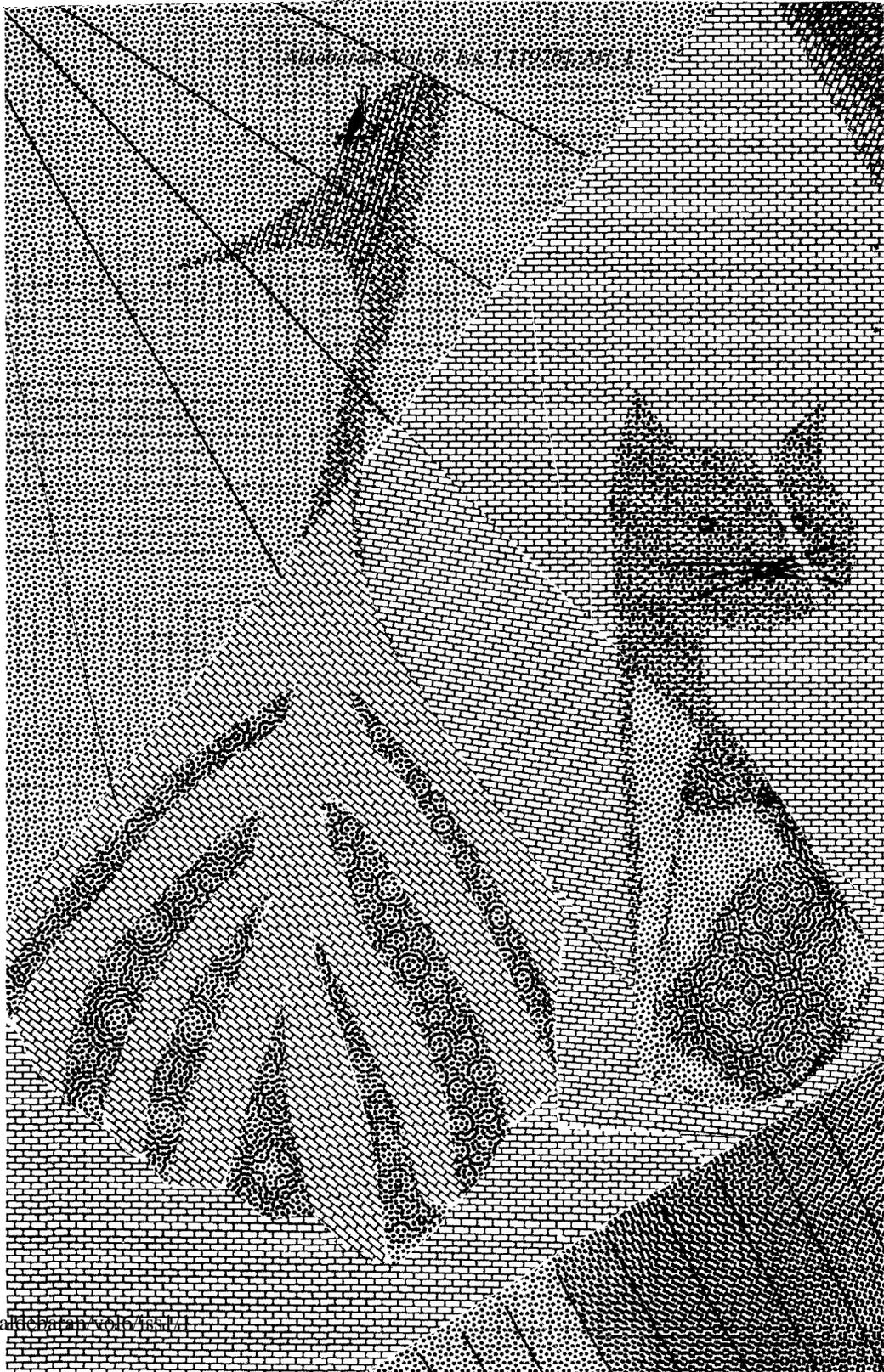
BEDTIME BLACKOUT

The kilowatts stopped their
endless chase around the meter;
streetlights stood like limbless trees;
in soft progression up the street
a lantern moved from room to room;
candles climbed my neighbors' stairs.
Every house sat lightly subdued
under the stars and crescent moon.
I fell asleep on the window-seat
and dreamed Grandmother's dreams.

Sue Pratt

SUNDAY

Slip into your shoes
that tap red valentines
so we can perform our way
to apple blossomed park benches,
watch guitar pickers
sing their tired fingers
around calico bodies
of lovers
who dream
in sleep of circled
lovesongs.



Adrienne Maber

A STRAY LETTER

I miss the cat I'm not sorry that I'll never learn the rules
of pinball that I just like the syncopated ping ping ping and
the cool feeling of the buttons on my fingertips I have
trouble with conversation because crickets distract me and I
don't know lyrics because I hear the guitar part that I can't
pin down like an image to a thought to a feeling to an image
and I'm often guilty of forgetting my keys

On Sundays at the corner thrift shop I never saw a good
bargain I always dressed in the velvet and lace of faded
princesses and square dance queens There with the boxes of
hats and shoes and my own clothes strewn like candy wrappers
in an uncertain curtsy I almost felt lovely
while you told me to hurry

I still scuff my shoes I still love the cat
she purred on me when you went out drinking she purrs inside
me when she stalks the night beneath houses and fences
between windows and bushes in the atonal hum of mosquitoes
and the fierce blue light on the wings of moths and the eyes
of flies she knows my heartbeat

The night I packed my bag without your old shirts or the
greenstamps I dampened her fur with hesitation then followed
her down the steps and rushed towards town darting with
shadows of headlights and streetlamps ducking in doorways
flying past alleys smelling garbage smelling cold the air
filling my lungs with questions finding shelter in a phone
booth with only a quarter and no one to call

Mil Kinsella

UNAVOIDABLE LISTENING INTENT

Interminable thunder from below
The bitch commands the bastard
Phone rings, both demand access
The bitch threatens to leave,
Reaches for the suitcase,
Bastard tugs at her hair
Crash, then cries, silence.

Ten blessed minutes, attempted redemptions
But then the faults and accusations
 swell up the stairway
More hours without subsiding.
Past my door to the attic—
The bastard creeps,
Bitch bellows up—“Come Down”
Repeats—the bastard goes—
Bitch demands door shut
It shuts. Whispers.

Uniform pounds at the door
Door opens—“What’s the problem?”
Intermission.
I flush the toilet, relieved.

The man leaves
The bitch’s voice rises
Bastard sends for C.B. peace
But they both demand restitution
The bitch screams
The bastard tickles and torments
I reach for my suitcase—
Thank God there’s no one to stop me.

Martha Christina

MEAT AND POTATOES

Our friend called from Miami
to say it rained a lot in July
and she'd taken an overdose.
Her husband and son are living
together, apart; A.A. coffee
with honey is nauseating,
and this year she'll send us
last year's Christmas card.
And when I told you why
supper was late, you
said you were starving.

Gus Hemenway

THE WATERFALL

Me and my brother were walking home along the river road leading to our house on a cloudy day in September. We were bare-foot and could hear a car approaching us from behind, so we moved to the side of the road, walking among the rocks and weeds on the shoulder to let the car by. However, I could hear that the car was slowing down behind us, so I turned around to see a man in a convertible looking at me. I instinctively waved, and stopped as the car pulled up beside us.

The man vaguely watched us and seemed unable to tell us what he wanted. It seemed he was almost looking at the trees behind us, and at the river beyond us or something. He finally focused on us, though, and asked us if we wanted a ride.

He was strange, and I couldn't really say no. "Sure," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

We got into the car and slammed the door shut, and he drove slowly down the road. "Where do you want to go?" he asked slowly. There was a sad friendliness in his voice. He didn't look at us, but stared straight ahead at the road.

"Oh, just up the road about half a mile," I said. "We're almost there. We just got tired of walking, so . . ." I shrugged my shoulders and didn't bother to finish. I couldn't think of anything to say. I looked at the inside of the car and then at the trees revolving slowly by outside of the car. It was some kind of fancy car from another state, and there was a suitcase in the back seat with my brother. We came to a sandy spot in the river where we go swimming a lot, so there was only a little way left.

The man turned around and asked me if there was a waterfall somewhere near here.

"Yes," I answered, "It's right near our house. There's a covered bridge over it. We're almost there."

He lifted his eyes a little. "I think I remember this road — the trees. I don't know, though. These roads are all too much alike. I came all the way from Westboro, Massachusetts." He paused vacantly, then turned to me again. "Is there a pool at the bottom of the dam?"

I nodded. "Yes, it's deep.

Gus Hemenway

The Waterfall

“It’s a wood dam; made out of wood,” he said, half as a question.

I nodded, because I didn’t know if it was a question. “We go swimming there all the time,” I said. “It’s neat. There’s rocks you can jump off, and you can jump off the dam — the water’s pretty deep. It’s really neat. There’s lots of people. And there’s a rope you can swing off too — that’s been there a long time. You’ve been there?” I asked, turning to him.

He didn’t seem to be listening, really; he was just kind of thinking of something to himself. I looked back at the glove compartment, and over to the door lever, and then back outside.

“I don’t know,” he suddenly continued. “It was a long time. Me and my wife . . . I don’t know. I can only half remember this road. We came here together once and went swimming.” He was still looking straight past the steering wheel. “She’s dead now. How far is it?”

“Just around this bend — see, there’s the bridge,” I said, pointing.

He slowed the car down, and pulled over by the bridge and stopped the car. He stared a pretty long time at the water going over the dam, thinking of something, and kind of almost crying, or something.

He turned to me after a while and asked me softly where I lived.

“Oh, not very far,” I said. “It’s just up the hill by the church. We can walk.”

“No, no,” he said. “I can take you. It’s on the way. This isn’t the place; it’s different.”

“Oh, no, it’s OK — we may as well just walk,” I said, opening the door.

“No, no, I’ll drive you . . .”

But me and my brother were already getting out. I shut the door and waved, and said good-bye. “Thanks a lot,” I said, turning, and we started walking up the hill.

The car was still for a long time behind us, but finally it started up, and we heard the tires grinding over the stones of the dirt road, and he disappeared down the road away from us.

Sue Pratt

ON AGING

You are an alligatored lemon,
an ugly bulge of oldness
of pitted prunes.
A tired weight of repression
records the smiles
of a once remembered woman.
Now the chair rocks you away
to the beat of your heart,
your eyes fix on the dusty coffee soiled table
with creviced dust marks on dull limbs.
You sigh,
another rock of the chair beats.

Alan DeRaimo

MOUNT HOPE

It was dark on the bridge
and the wind played
the cables like a violin.

The rain caught the windshield
like hot oil on a stove top:
Splattering unharmoniously on the glass.

Lines on the road
disappeared behind tail-lights:
digging deep into the wet pavement.

At the tolls
Racoons playfully fed on stale bread
washing each piece in a puddle
Then disappearing behind blackened greenery
as each car passed.

Mil Kinsella

FOND MEMORIES RESURRECTED WHILE TRAVELING
THRU A HOLIDAY MAGAZINE

Little by little
Page by page
The crossing
Of neuter
Latex watermelons
Hollowed by the juices
Of summer seas
Sings the heat
Of winter's drought.



King James Weyant III

SCREAMING CHILDREN
STORY ONE

The two workers led me upstairs. One opened the door to room 17. It was small, only about six by nine feet. Its inexpensive furnishings showing the signs of the other children here before me. The worker who had entered first took down from the mirror a piece of paper. Its bold, felt tipped title read: Behavior Modification Progress Chart, Rachel Daugherty.

"Was she cured?" I asked the worker who was now crumpling the paper.

"Yes!" he said automatically, emphatically. "Her husband came for her only yesterday."

"Then she was modified," I said of the woman who was once one of the screaming children, but now was again a part of the real world.

"What, no bars?" I asked, pointing to the window.

"No, we don't have bars here," the taller one replied. Instead, there was patterned wrought iron outside of the screen. Four inches above the lower half of the window, small blocks of wood had been screwed into the track.

"Is it glass?"

"Uh, yes."

They were being careful with me, and gentle. Very gentle. I wondered if this was their standard way, or if it was because of the interview. It had seemed to go well, except for that one instance. As soon as it happened, I knew I had made a mistake. Now, though, I still could not decide on another, more balanced answer. I had been honest with him, the interviewer. Simply honest.

He had asked all that one would expect in this situation; he'd enquired about my treatment at the hospital, drugs administered, my age, my occupation, sex life, masturbation, drinking. Then he had asked why. This also I expected, but had not given any real thought to before hand. I answered him the same as I had the doc-

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story One

tors, nurses, orderlies and family when they had asked me in the hospital. I looked back into his imploring, yet hollow stare, and answered, why not.

“Don’t you, aren’t you, uh, afraid? Weren’t you afraid then? Are you afraid now? Doesn’t it scare you?” He was probably younger than me, but much taller, and heavier. As he leaned back in his leather swivel chair, rolls of fat went from his stomach to his sides, forming slopes, then hollows, then slopes under the striped shirt.

“No.”

The interview ended there. There were a few more questions, but they were only for form, only meant to give me a feeling of welcome to this place where I would be staying for an indefinite period. They also seemed intended to give less significance to the interviewer’s only real question, and my only real answer. Then the interviewer spoke to one of the workers as the other sat close to me on the sofa in the waiting area and attempted to make cheerful, light chatter which I also supposed was to show me what a nice place this was, and what great people the workers who were in charge were.

In my new room, one worker emptied the contents of my suitcase onto the bed and began sorting and counting the items that were scattered across the blue bedspread. The other took my razor, nail clipper, aspirin and two bandaids from my shaving kit.

“Why the bandaids?” I asked.

“If someone sustains an injury of any kind, we’ll be happy to take care of them. We have to keep records of such things, you see.”

They inventoried my clothing and other belongings, taking special care to note color, style and size of all items. They also took my needle and thread. After I emptied my pockets, my penknife was confiscated, then, finally, my belt. These items too were carefully marked on the sheet under the heading: “Articles, Safe Keeping.” I had no money, so the worker that filled out the form simply drew a line across the block designated for “Money, Safe Keeping.”

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story One

“Say, is there any reason that my room is next to the nurse’s station?”

“All new arrivals are put on this wing for a short while, then, after we’ve had a chance to observe you, you’ll be moved to the less restricted wing.”

“Was Rachel moved to the less restricted wing?” I asked of the room’s former tenant.

“No, she left before, uh, she uh, it was decided that she wouldn’t require an extended stay here.”

“Will I?”

“Well now, we’ll just have to see how you progress.” Canned. Rehearsed. Repeated.

Next came a dialogue of rules and regulations, dining instructions, and all the different types of crafts I would be encouraged to take part in. I would be escorted to and from all meals by a worker, for the time being.

“You mean I can’t take a walk if I want?”

“No, not unless you are accompanied.”

“Do you give labotomies here?”

“Sarcasm won’t get you very far here, I’m afraid.”

“Do you?”

“No, we don’t.”

The food in the dining hall that night was better than I had expected, but the rest of the escorted group all seemed to finish before I had hardly begun, so I was rushed in eating it. The workers on the late shift ordered pizza in. My repeated bangs on the wall requesting silence went ignored, but the next morning when I met with my chief worker, he enquired if I had slept well, and did I remember having any nightmares.

King James Weyant III

SCREAMING CHILDREN
STORY TWO

There was one woman who died there.

Right there amongst the trees and the acres and the gardens.
Right there in that place of screaming children.

Mornings, before the Community Meetings, she would sit with us. We would talk of how our nights had passed; she would tease her roommate, who had a germ fetish. The workers encouraged us to sit together, to talk with one another. They said that was good.

Sick? Naw, she didn't look any sicker than the rest of us. She would sit there and sit with the rest of us. Sometimes she would sit on one of the couches, sometimes if all the couch space had been claimed by others of us, she would sit on a wooden chair. She would sit there in her blue nightie and jabber along with us every morning.

Had a hell of a smoker's cough though. She would be right in the middle of a sentence when it would fetch her. She would hack and gasp and retch until her entire body would jerk with her spasms. I would sit fascinated as I watched her breast leap inside her blue gown.

Once she had stopped there would be two or three or four offers of was she alright, should they get one of the workers? No, she would laugh in her almost masculine voice. She would spit only a drop or two of blood into her kleenex and lean forward to retrieve another Pall Mall cigarette without the filter. Once, as she bent over, I caught a glimpse of the ugly bluish-red scar. But she seemed healthy.

At nine the workers would come and segregate us into the two groups for the Meeting. There we could voice grievances, plan the day's activities, be told any pertinent news. There the workers observed us, individually and as a group. One had to be careful there. One had to always be on one's guard to act normal, to be in control. After the Meetings every morning, the workers would fill out the first of their daily reports.

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story Two

I had slept late that morning. I had missed breakfast, had not shaved, did not even get a chance to visit with the other children before the Meeting.

It was fortunate that I had missed her. She always sat in the same chair by the open window in these Meetings – once, one of the children had complained about the smoke. I had prepared myself to act pretty normal when one of the workers told us she had passed on.

King James Weyant III

SCREAMING CHILDREN
STORY THREE

“Why did you volunteer?”

“What?” I looked up from the book I was reading to find Sandy’s tearful face staring at me.

It was late, after 3, the rest of the children were long asleep. Each night I would sit up to read. Sandy would sit up to drink coffee and cry. My first night I went to her and asked if there was anything I could do, but was rejected with a terse “No.”

She and I were of the same age; as many as three or four decades younger than most of the children, but enough years older than the rest to be unaccepted by both. Often I had tried conversation, but always met with the same result.

Sandy was the trouble child. She fought constantly with the others, her visitors and the workers. On three occasions she had struck another child, and had once even thrown a full cup of coffee in the face of a Saturday afternoon visitor. The workers would never reprimand her – or any other of us – for these actions, but, instead would speak to her in that soft, calm patronizing voice of ultimate superiority. This always enraged her further until she would finally be subdued and made to remain in her tiny room. There was a special category for children like Sandy; constant observation. She could not even relieve herself unless a worker accompanied her and stood by the sink while she was in the one stall that did not lock.

Many of the other children baited Sandy now; teased her for her round, fat belly, her hair that seemed dirty even after being washed, or her foul language which she used often and shrilly. At times, even the workers were guilty of chiding her into a frenzy.

“Why did you volunteer?” she repeated, her heavily made up face of the previous morning now only a mass of splotches. The terrible acne it tried to hide still pushing through.

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story Three

“Volunteer for what?” I asked, marking my page with my index finger.

“Don’t hand me that, you know what for,” she spat.

Even with the late hour, only a moment before I had not felt any urge for sleep. Now I was suddenly very tired. But her wet eyes, the tremble in her grating voice; even the position in which she faced me told me how important this was to her.

“Sandy, I’m sorry, I don’t know what you mean.” I urged myself to return to my book, or go to the bathroom, or even to call a worker. Instead, I looked at her again.

“You’re on it, I know you are,” she said accusingly, her brittle voice triumphant.

“On what?” I asked again, now turning to face her fully.

“The committee, that’s what. And don’t try to tell me you’re not.”

“What committee?”

“What committee! You always ask ‘What committee,’ don’t you?”

“What do you mean? This is the first time you’ve even ever talked to me, let alone about any stupid committee.” As we talked, she had become more anxious, the pitch of her voice growing higher, the motions of her hands more urgent. Now, she suddenly brightened.

“They *are* stupid, aren’t they?”

“Wait a minute, wait! You’re losing me. *Who’s* stupid?” I asked.

In a different situation, in a different place, all of this would have seemed laughable. I would have continued the riotous dialogue to its absurd end thinking the while how marvelously witty we both were. But we were not in a different place, we were in this place – this place whose sole reason for existence was to contain the people who are different.

“Oh, come on,” she said as if I were intentionally acting foolish

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story Three

“The committee’s stupid, stupid.”

“But you haven’t told me what the committee is yet.”

“Do you mean you’re *not* on it? You’re *not* a member? They didn’t really send you here?” she asked, her bold voice now full of hope.

“I was sent here by a doctor at the hospital.”

“You mean you *really* don’t know what I’m talking about?”

“I have no idea.”

We talked until the morning workers interrupted us when they arrived at 7:30. Sandy described the committee to me; its workings, how everyone she ever came into contact with – whether it be here in this place; the workers, the other children, those who fed us, or all of those she had ever seen, every person she had ever met before she came to this place – were part of the scheme.

She had it worked out beautifully, really. It was a government experiment, to totally control one person’s mind. She had been sold by her parents when in junior high school, she even remembered the exact date. Since then her every action, truly, her every thought had been monitored.

She showed me the scar under the hair in her scalp where they had implanted their device, she explained to me how she thought they went about recruiting members, she described the horror she had been living with for over ten years.

“Still,” she said at one point, her fist shaking, “after all this time, they haven’t got me. Their experiment’s a failure, and they know it. That’s why I’m in this place, because they know they’ve failed. They’ve locked me up here because they know I’d expose them if they let me go. I’d tell the whole world what they did to me. I’d be famous.”

Two of the workers that had just walked past us now approached, a look of sterile concern covering their faces.

King James Weyant III

Screaming Children
Story Three

“The report shows that you two have been up all night,” one of them said.

“Yeah? What of it?” Sandy challenged.

“We were just chatting, neither of us could sleep,” I said quickly.

“And how do you both plan to partake in the day’s activities? After a night of coffee, do you think either one of your reflexes would be sharp enough to go to woodwork, or leathercraft? You know that we have very tightly structured daily routines here, how do you plan to carry them out now?” Again, the tone was the same. Soft, reasoning, but never allowing for argument. “Sandy, you go with Miss Bliven here and wash up,” the senior worker ordered.

After Sandy had left, the worker took the seat she had been in. “Now you know better than this. We expect this type of behavior of Sandy, but surely, you know better.”

Ignoring her admonishments, I asked her about Sandy. There were so many questions I needed to ask: How long has she had this thing? How long has she been here? Could they help her? Was this type of thing common? Could I help them help her?

I had only begun. I had only just begun to tell the worker about our nightlong conversation when I was interrupted. “Now, don’t you worry about Sandy. You’re here to solve your own problems, why don’t we leave Sandy’s to those more capable, shall we?”

“But, but . . .”

“No buts now, we know what’s best. You just worry about your problems. Come on now, how about a fast shower before breakfast. Then, as soon as the Community Meeting is over, you’re off to bed. There is a meeting with your team at two today, so you’ll want to be fresh for that,” she rambled, taking my elbow, gently guiding me away from the sofa and toward my room.

“I’d really like to discuss this with you,” I said, turning. The grip on my arm now became more of a reality than a notion.

“I said it’s time for your shower.”

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