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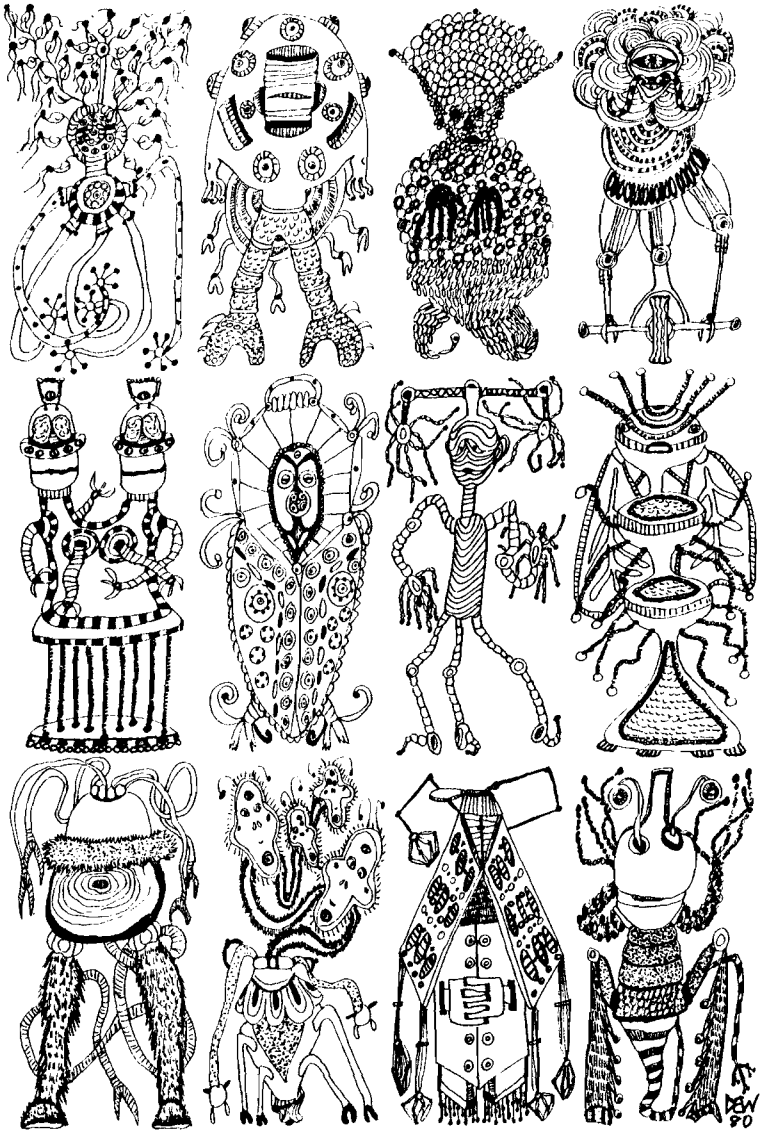

ALDEBARAN

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Katharine Fair

O MEIN PAPA

Two weeks after my twenty-third birthday, I received a small package in the mail. It was from Germany, which puzzled me: because I had already gotten a silver bracelet-watch from my grandmother. I ripped off the wrapping, and opened the cardboard box. Nestled in a bed of straw lay a piece of varnished wood, round and smooth on one end and jagged on the other. An oval photograph—that looked like my cousin, Hans—was glued to it. The young man wore a leather jacket with a thick fur collar and a leather flying cap that covered all his hair and fastened under his chin. On top of the cap he wore a pair of aviator goggles. Etched in the wood, under the photo, were the numbers 23.12.17 and below them the word *Darmstadt.*

I groped through the straw and found a note in my grandmother's calligraphic fountain-pen-flow: "Dear Käsie, I was sorting through some of Opa's mementos when I found this in a cigar box. Opa was twenty-three when his *Fokker* was shot down over *Darmstadt.* The plane did not fare as well as he, but Opa salvaged the part of the propeller on which his photograph is mounted. Wasn't he a handsome young man? Again many happy wishes to you on your twenty-third birthday. Love, Oma."

It was hard—even with his picture in my hand—to imagine my grandfather ever being my age. I always remembered on my birthday that his was two days before mine. He was fifty-seven years older than me.

Next month it would be four years since that day my mother answered the telephone. Immediately she began pinching her chin between thumb and forefinger; it was something she always did, unconsciously, when she was nervous or something was wrong.

At first I thought something happened to my father; we had not heard from him in over a month. He was stationed with the

Air Force in Korea on an isolated tour. So I dropped my book on the couch and walked to the kitchen entrance where she stood leaning against the doorjamb. Her eyes were closed and tears clung to the tips of her lashes. When she spoke into the receiver, in German, I knew it was Opa. His cancer had been spreading throughout his body for the past year.

I got her a tissue from the box above the refrigerator. She dabbed and swabbed her eyes and nose. I stood in front of her with my hands jammed into my pants' pockets while she spoke quietly into the receiver. "At least he's free of the pain. Everyone did what they could for him. *Ja,* Oma, he was a good soul. And now he's found peace." She jabbed her thumb into the wad of soggy Kleenex in her hand.

When she would pause I was sure my grandmother was, in turn, comforting her because she sighed, and said, "*Ja,* Oma. *Ja.*"

I envisioned Oma in her living room, small and hunched at Opa's long teak desk, her rosy cheeks wet as she clutched the telephone to her ear. *Onkel* Max stood behind her, resting his hands soothingly on her narrow shoulders. His brown eyes, usually crinkled with laughter, looked sadly down on Oma. Next to Oma sat my spinster *Tante,* Marta, her head cradled in her folded arms, weeping uncontrollably. Thin *Tante* Rita paced in front of the desk, smoking one *Lux* after the other, and saying quickly between puffs, "Pull yourself together, Marta. Pull yourself together." All Oma's children surrounded her, except my mother who, at that moment, was more Oma's daughter than my mother. They now shared grief, as they shared love, for the same man.

The photo on the propeller was of a handsome man with a broad forehead, deep-set eyes, and a firmly-set jaw. I saw why Oma felt attracted to him.

He was attracted to her too. My mother used to tell my sister and me about Opa and Oma when we grew bored with the bed-time stories she read from books. Opa met Oma when he came to call on her older sister, Liesel. He preferred Oma to

Liesel not only because the small hand he shook was of such soft skin and her eyes gleamed like malachite, but because she admired him so uninhibitedly.

Opa wooed Oma for three years. But Oma's father opposed their marrying. He resented Opa's being Protestant, even though he promised their children would be raised Catholic. He objected to their age, and insisted to Oma, "Kätchen, you are still so young." She was twenty-nine and Opa was thirty-two. But he demanded that they wait until Opa received his engineering degree from the Technical University of *Aachen* and established himself in a business. Opa and Oma agreed, and he bestowed his blessing.

Oma's and Opa's acquiescence to her father's demands never bothered me, until I grew older. Then I asked my mother, "Why didn't Opa and Oma just elope? They were old enough to do what they wanted."

"I suppose they could have eloped. But that would have meant disobeying her father. And that was unheard of in 1929. In German families the father ruled. It was tradition. And everyone obeyed."

"I still would've eloped if I were them. Poor Oma and Opa."

I felt sorrier for Oma than Opa. She used to say her first child was a glider. She and Opa built it in their living room in 1932. White cedar and plywood littered the room for months, but they didn't care. Together they measured, sawed, glued, nailed, sanded and varnished. Finally, they assembled it on the front lawn. But only Opa flew it. Maybe Oma never wanted to fly it, but I though she missed out on a lot of fun.

Opa spent all his free time flying the glider until he wrecked it in a crash landing. That day he came home carrying the wood he had salvaged. He laughed as Oma gently washed his scraped knee, "Well, Kätchen, this crash won't win me an Iron Cross."

"You can thank God for that." When my mother told me this story I pictured Oma crossing herself with the washcloth still in hand. "You should be greatful that there is no war

going on, and that you're not lying in *Darmstadt* hospital with frostbite, your back nearly broken, and your hand full of crushed bones. *Ja, Gott sei Dank."*

"Don't get hysterical, woman. My knee will heal in a few days. Then we can build a new glider, and all will be in order."

"No. *We* won't build a new glider. If you want another one, build it yourself."

Opa never did build another glider. Instead he took up stamps, and never flew again. He became so absorbed in his stamps, that when Oma gave birth to their first child, Max, Opa was in *Bremmerhaven* at a stamp collectors' convention. It seemed like he was saying to Oma that if she wanted to build a family to build it herself.

Another slight to Oma was Opa's sudden change of mind. Right after Max's birth he decided the Catholic Church was too strict. So their children were raised as Protestants. Opa forbade Oma from even taking them to Mass. Opa, who attended church only on holidays, knew how much her religion meant to Oma; she attended Mass daily. She felt betrayed. She was also excommunicated for which she never forgave Opa.

The one thing Oma forgave Opa for, that I thought unforgivable, was Lotte Löffler. Opa met Lotte at the beginning of the Second World War. At forty-five he was ordered back into the *Luftwaffe* as a captain. He eagerly applied for a pilot's position, but was turned down because of his wounds from the first war, and because of his age. I'm sure he suffered more from his wounded ego, then, than he ever suffered from World War One wounds.

Oma said that in his uniform Opa always looked taller than life. Lotte Löffler probably agreed. She was a self-proclaimed actress from Berlin who worked as a hostess at the Officer's Club in Opa's camp. She bought Opa presents—a box of fine chocolate wafers, a bottle of *Auslese Rhein Wein.* Oma said nothing, at first, because he brought them home to the family.

But then my mother told her of a visit to Opa's office. She visited Opa often. His office was in the building that was her

school—before it was commandeered by the army. It was not unusual at Opa's camp for an officer to have visitors; some things were lax before Germany started losing the war, and before Opa was sent to the front in France.

"Many times Lotte Löffler was in Opa's office when I arrived," my mother said. "But only once was she sitting on Opa's desk with her legs crossed, and skirt hitched so high, her white thighs showed where her stockings stopped. And she was stroking his cheek—I never saw Oma stroke his cheek.

"Then Oma complained about her gifts. She insisted Opa return an autographed picture of her. She must have insisted on more than just that because I never saw her in Opa's office again."

"Weren't you mad at Opa for hurting Oma?" I said.

"At the time I thought it was all Lotte Löffler's fault. I was mad at her when Oma and Opa argued. I didn't know what was going on. Maybe if I had, I wouldn't have told Oma."

It always amazed me that my mother, and Oma, never seemed to hold any of Opa's wrongdoings against him. They seemed so accepting of him. Sometimes I felt guilty for disapproving his behavior. I thought I should be more understanding and dwell on his admirable qualities.

I did admire Opa for never joining the *Party.* Max joined the *Hitler Jugend,* and *Tante* Rita, *Tante* Marta and my mother were members of the *BundDeutschesMädchen.* They held meetings on Sundays, but Oma sent her children to church. Party members came to the house and harassed Oma for allowing her children to miss meetings. She told Opa. "How dare they. I'm a good soldier and officer. I fight for my country. Isn't that enough. They must leave you and the children in peace. I'll tell them so," he said. Oma and the children were never bothered again.

My mother was fifteen when the war ended and hadn't seen Opa for three years. His last letter came from the Russian front. Then he was captured by the English. She was standing in front

of the remaining half of her apartment building, flirting with an American soldier who was on patrol, when she saw the man at the end of the road. *Stiel Strasse* was bombed so badly, it looked like a mouth with most of its teeth missing. There were huge gaps where buildings once stood, and the road had more holes than cobblestones. Rubble-heaps of concrete, stone, wood, and glass were everywhere. The man came closer, and she saw it was Opa. She ran down the road yelling, *"Vati! Vati!"* Several women stuck their heads out of windows. He looked at her, then at the American. The pain in his eyes made her wince. He walked past her. Oma came running from the building. Behind her were Rita, Max, and Marta. They surrounded Opa, kissing and hugging him with so much force he lost balance and nearly fell down. He kissed them distractedly, and then broke away from their grasp. He ran down to the cellar where he grabbed a wooden stick and dug until he uncovered a box. With his hands he scooped dirt away from the lid, then tore it off, and pulled out the albums of stamps he buried on the day he was drafted into the war. The stamps were stuck together, and to the pages of the albums; they were covered with so much mildew that most of them were unrecognizable. He fell to his knees and cried. The whole family worked for months, soaking stamps in water over and over again. They salvaged all they could, but most were ruined.

Except for his stamps, the man in my mother's stories seemed to be a different person from the grandfather I knew. I recognized Opa's selfish and imperious behavior, but not the carefree glider pilot or the man who attracted the love of women.

My grandfather was a tall, white-haired, and demanding old man who spent most of his time at his desk working on his stamp collection. I admired Opa for the way he carried himself, so proudly, and I liked him for the endless supply of caramels he kept in his desk drawer.

The first time I stayed with my mother's parents was during my father's second tour of Germany with the Air Force. I was four years old. I have only one memory of that occasion. Martina

was only two and already in bed. I sat on a white porcelain pot at the foot of the table where Opa was poring over an album of stamps with a magnifying glass. After a while my grandmother walked into the room. "Are you finished?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"Well, hurry up child. It's time for bed."

But I just squatted there.

Then she knelt down beside me.

"What's the matter, Kasie?"

"He's looking at me through that piece of glass, Oma," I whispered.

She smiled, "You flatter yourself, *Liebchen*; he sees nothing but his stamps."

What she said was true, but I still couldn't go.

During the following six years the Air Force moved us from Germany to Colorado, to Kentucky, and to Spain before bringing us back to Germany.

I noticed Opa's preference for Martina. Because she had once shown an interest in his stamps, Opa sent her a small book from his collection for a birthday.

During a visit Martina discovered as long as she stayed by Opa's side, while he studied his stamps, she was excused from helping with the chores. Right after dinner she ran to Opa's desk and leaned on the arm of his chair. "Where is that stamp from, Opa?" she said, while randomly pointing to a stamp on the page before him.

Entering the room, I said, "It's time to help Oma with the dishes, Marty."

"She's busy with me. Leave her alone – you're the eldest, you go help Oma," Opa said.

Martina smirked at me from behind her shoulder. I wanted to scream that since her birthday she'd not looked once at the stamps he had given her. But I knew better than to make a scene; my mother had told me how strict a disciplinarian Opa was. She said that one stern look from Opa was enough to put her and her siblings on their best behavior; he was not unwilling to use a belt

or paddle when he felt it necessary, and they knew it too well. The look he flashed me then, made me believe that in a minute he would reach for the belt around his waist. I ran back to the kitchen.

"Martina," Opa called, "Come listen to Hansie sing." Hansie was Opa's canary which he fed and cared for by himself. I could hear their laughter from the next room.

I watched them once, through a keyhole. Hansie perched on one of Opa's forefingers.

Opa ordered, "Sing, Hansie. Sing."

The bird chirped. Martina clapped her hands and giggled. Opa laughed so loud, he scared Hansie away, which made them laugh harder, so hard, that they didn't even notice the third laugh coming from the next room.

On the train going home from that visit Martina showed me the silver five-mark piece Opa had given her. She held it between her thumb and forefinger, under my nose. "Opa told me not to share *any* of it with you."

"You think I care? Well, I don't. I don't give a damn."

"I'm telling on you for swearing."

"Oh, no you won't. Cause if you do, I'll tell on you for not helping Oma."

Our mother was waiting at the station when we arrived. Martina ran off to buy a *Bratwurst* with her money. "Opa gave Martina five marks, and told her not to share any of it with me. And she didn't. I hate him."

"No, Opa wouldn't do that. He probably forgot to give you yours--here." She drew a five-mark bill from her wallet. "Go buy a *Bratwurst.*"

I took the money and ran after Martina, but wished the bill in my hand was a silver coin like she had.

The Air Force transferred us back to Kentucky. I studied German in high school, and decided I wanted to be a translator for the U.N. My father agreed to sponsor a space-available hop to Germany on a military flight, if I saved enough money for my return trip.

For the first time I became aware of the way Opa ordered Oma around. "Kätchen," he yelled from the living room. And Oma came running. "Get me some coffee." She served him coffee in his favorite cup with a large saucer because his right hand trembled and, inevitably, he spilled. "Bring me a napkin. Hurry. Hurry," he commanded. Oma silently obeyed.

It annoyed me how she catered to his whims. I wouldn't tolerate that crap from any guy I dated.

In the kitchen, while we were preparing dinner, I said, "Why do you do everything Opa tells you to do, Oma?"

"What a silly question; he's my husband."

"And you're his wife, not his *Putzfrau.*"

"But after forty-eight years of marriage, it's too late for either one of us to change."

After dinner I wanted to smoke, but was hesitant about lighting up in front of Opa. But when he lit a cigar, I lit a Salem. He looked at me.

"Put that out," he said. His eyes held mine fast.

"I will--if you put out your cigar." Our eyes were locked. Neither one of us wanted to let go.

It was Oma who broke our connection. She stood up, pursed her lips and frowned at me. Momentarily I forgot my battle with Opa for the anger I felt toward Oma for not siding with me. But Opa drew back my attention with the burning end of his cigar which he angrily poked at the bottom of the ashtray. He poked just hard enough for sparks to fly, and still keep the tip intact. I felt sure he was about to lunge for me, when he leaned forward and laughed. His shoulders heaved. He laughed until he started coughing. Oma rushed to his side, but he waved her away. When his coughing subsided he said, "Smoke your cigarette then, because I certainly am going to finish my cigar."

I am not sure whether Opa was aware of it, but during that visit we made our peace. I accepted him for what he was. I still disagreed with his treatment of Oma, but also realized that she was partially responsible for it. She allowed it. Maybe she forgot

how he deferred to her when she refused to help him build another glider, and how quickly he responded to her insistence that he give up Lotte Löffler. But she was probably right, about it being too late for them to change how they related to each other.

Before I left, Opa showed me some of his latest additions to his stamp collection, and invited me to watch a soccer game on television with him. On my last day there, while I was packing, he called for me. The living room door was shut, so I knocked. Opa told me to enter quickly and to shut the door behind; he was sitting at his desk and there was Hansie: perched on the first finger of his left hand.

"Hansie, sign for Käsie," Opa said.

Instead of singing Hansie left droppings on Opa's finger and flew away. I laughed, but Opa frowned, so I stopped. Undaunted, Opa wiped off his finger and waited for Hansie to return. When the bird flew to him; Opa, again, asked it to sing. And that time Hansie sang.

John Stevens Wade

THE PROFESSIONAL

When he was young he wanted to become
a professional rainbow chaser. Someone
who could run beyond the drenched hills
to where the sky shouldered its sack
rain. It was his dream to find
some hidden place where leprechauns
slept by a pot of gold. But grown-up laughter
and the fear of getting lost led him
to the aviation of birds. His plucked wings
flapped in the mow as his landings
trampled hay and he soon collapsed
his mother's only umbrella. Bed without supper
caused him to dream of new endeavors; choices
one makes to learn. He decided then
to become a professional runaway –
someday. Throughout adolescence
the urge to be, to create, followed him:
rain-maker, dew-jeweler, leaf-tinter.
He grew up waiting to become someone.
Then one day he strung some words
into a line and everything he ever wanted
rose to meet him. Now, after years
of pain, frustration and failure,
people are calling this professional
rainbow-chasing, swallow-diving runner
who goes nowhere *poet*. And he believes them.

John Stevens Wade

SNAPSHOT OF UNCLES AND AUNTS

Here is a snapshot of uncles and aunts
under a rusting sky. The spill
of sunlight settling on the grill of a Buick
blurs the face of the uncle with the cane –
he died a year after this picture was taken.
A stillness in the hydrangeas has caught
the eye of the portly uncle who is pulling
his suspenders. His look of dismay
is not for the camera – diseases
have taken over. And the aunt
who wears the fur piece will live
to be ninety. The other uncle
scowls at the witless lens; a lens
that measures the moment to wink at him.
Then the two aunts who have their heads
down and their arms crossed in fat knots –
they must be thinking of bygone days.
They look so defenseless together –
these yellowing uncles and aunts.
It's a nineteen-fifty summer's day.
They lean into the picture's center
while the stiff trees behind them
are thick with stalled branches and leaves.

THE BRIDGE A CENTURY LATER

To Alberto de Lacerda

In the inextinguishable city
I walked like Uncle Walt
on Manhattan shores
over to the Battery,
past wharves with ships of all nations
unloading cargo–
the skyline offered inscriptions under
water – shimmering
A naked sound falls
into the past – a man whom time dissolved
another whom time displaced–
their shadows vanish into obscurity

But the Bridge falls over the curve of time
and from Brooklyn to Wall Street the myth
unfolds
Through the cable strands the fabled poet
is caught in stillness
and surrenders to his theme

Across the bay a lady's taper
swims in the rose-colored dusk–
a genealogy of fathers reaching their end:
island of lost destinations

It is a ledger
a space of identities
secret under the harbor swells
silent in the static of engines–
the copters that fall from the sequined
skies, seaplanes, barges, tugboats

And when the small hours come
an ancient night does not shroud
but reveals some arcane wisdom
a messiah who comes in high night skies
olympian darkness silhouetting
a billion squares of brilliant lights–
not office buildings with their anonymous drones
who flee those great harmonic spaces
for the safer borough shelters

At night the city is left to lovers
the waters dark frigid and alluring
the city that never deserts illusion
and carries your ancestral seed
in its metallic waters

It is a symmetry which you can never enter
a father, your father
walking alone
across a bridge
bearded myriad
walking in the inextinguishable
city

J. Patrick Kelly

LENT

Slow.
So we move, without haste
through the last, lengthening days
of winter.

Early mass in an empty, cold, shadowed church.
Ordinary words are spoken by unshaven priests.
The weak dawn light pales the candle glow.
The sun is still in the whirling winter sky.
Christ the Host falls through the dark air
like a snow flake.
Grace drifts in our souls. Salvation keeps us warm.

At night, dry maple seeds blow across the snow.
I see them in the morning frost, brown paper boats
on a white, smooth sea. All afternoon the sun
melts the snow around them, the seeds sink
into wet craters with ice walls. By night, the surface
is pocked with tiny holes, and no seeds can be seen.
In starlight, I walk out, to see the seeds
in their coffins of ice. Slowly, they melt through
to the fertile earth.

During Lent, I feel a sinking, as I settle through
the sediment of time to rest secure with Christ
in His hewn tomb. At the bottom, in darkness
there is light and heat, the brilliance of the discarded shroud.

It is a slow sinking.
The days of sacrifice.
Fish bones glimmer on our plates like icicles
from the roof of heaven.
The sea, harvest of Lents,
on the coast.
We do not wear sack cloth, or walk on water.

J. Patrick Kelly

Lent

We pray as we can, to the cobwebbed Christ
on His crucifix. Praying to be buried alive,
to rise unrotted on the third day –
the face of God reflected in our eyes.

Every morning, while we pray,
there is more light in the sanctuary.
The earth turns towards the brilliance of the sun.
Still, ice glitters on the faces of the saints
in the tall windows, rainbows stitched with lead.
The blue eyes of the madonna shine with the light
of the sun through the night sketched ice.

Some days the season twists back
and a dead sky lies rigid and grey
all around us. The black rattle of the rosaries
in my pocket assures me of a sky where
clouds shred in the wind of angel wings.

I cling to this vision, until I feel
the true miracle of spring.
Buds haze the sky, as they let go of branches
and skid through the air towards the nourishing dirt.
As they fly back to us, the birds are coated with pollen.

Late snow is like falling angels.
The fragile rainbow of spring becomes
bland landscape, white sameness
like the empty days of damnation.

Salvation is like falling through ice on a spring afternoon.
The leaving of one world
for the shock, immersion and descent to another –
claimed and killed by the sacred water.
We bang our drowned heads on the frozen ceiling,
the river's crust that melts finally
and we bob up, blessed; Christ breathes into our mouths
we gasp, and become the rhythm of His breath.

J. Patrick Kelly Lent

Then, as the chalice of blood is raised,
rain can be heard on the slate roof
of the church. Rain bends around the islands of moss,
rain droops through the hair of the saints
drips from the eyes of the blind healed by Christ's spit.
Frozen buds are given mouth to mouth,
they suck in the rain and live, eat sunshine
when the rainbow comes.

During the gospels there is light in our eyes
as we read the inelegant translations
of the inspired words.
Sometimes, to sit quietly is enough.
Serenity opens up inside us like a flower.
Rivers spread past their banks,
more water reflecting more sky.

The first tulips, daffodils, lilacs, lilies
receive the first bees in their dusty rooms.
Christ moves towards Jerusalem
and the confusing wonder of an abandoned tomb.
Lepers are healed; the world is all blossoms and mud.
Every morning, in the now bright church
we drink the Blood yet unshed for redemption.
We sing hymns and say prayers
and listen for the footsteps of our lovers
on the sun-lit stairs.

Good Friday is cold rain, black skies for the death
and wet birds sitting quietly in the budding trees.
Christ is picked from the stained tree,
a torn blossom. The nails rust on the bare hill
in the spring rains.

All day Saturday, Christ walks through Hell.
The tulips in the garden are like chalices
or one chalice, on the table of the last Supper
reflected again and again in the eyes of the apostles.

J. Patrick Kelly

Lent

For Easter Vigil, the eyes
of the glass saints are candle flames
and outside
the night is warm, the breeze rustles
in the trees, the green is luminous in the light
of the waning moon.
Then it is morning.
We dawn in the tomb, rise with Christ.
The sun is hot, the hours of light are long
The maple saplings make shadows,
like crosses, on the lawn.

Karla M. Hammond

Pilgrim's Epiphany in Bb

Choose any holiday for suicide
& it would be
Thanksgiving: day of grace
& mincemeat
when the family gathers
in its cloister of guilt, stuffed
crazed with gravy & prayer.
Silverware freezes to damask.
In the pale candle flicker
it's the ax blade
that treed the turkey.
Spilled cranberries spot the linen.
Pie plates of pumpkin
cover the stain: domesticity
in disguise.
In the haze of crystal & china
death seems imminent.
Death seems clear.
So when the hostess, mother
of 3.5, turns to her husband
& says "dear, I'm no whore,
I'm no saint
& kiddo you're no Tom,"
don't be surprised.
The clatter of small talk
put to the test
fails & fails again.

Karla M. Hammond

Sorrentine Goddess

Do you recall that Southern tip of flesh?
Sorrento was her name –
pandering her wares in small cafes
along the coastal lip
strange red tongues rattling a litany
of lusts, to dark oiled men;
how their eyes snaked her flanks
hungering the countless limbs
of other rhinestone whores;
& who-was-he who told us later
she'd told him 'bout her little boy
a bent anemic blond-haired lad
whose braces clinked the floor.
It was her cross to bear
in a land of many crucifixions.

We saw nothing of God that day or next.

Karla M. Hammond

La Guerre

They were thinking about war,
the newspaper stained tablecloth,
the squeak chairs make sledding
into place. Floors wounded
with heel marks, boots scarred
hardwood. The heat's music rose
like blood from the fire. The
hearth well-lit. The nobility
of death – all so far away.
Darkness set in to contradict
the mind's lighter thoughts.
Someone paused with a smile.
Yes, she'd have this dance.
In the silvan shadows, an artillary
of sound: the proverbial chit-chat
of good time Charlies. While a continent
away a trench was dug, guns fired
& men were swiftly laid to rest.

Wendy Goodman

Mud Ditch

From the window
I see the boy patrolling
the river bank, a barred animal.
He taps the pointer of his gun
on the dog's nose.
Paws snap to another spot
as her back shys to the side.
It is this way each afternoon
the neighborhood boys, ready to kill
imagining branches as enemy bayonets
and rocks as grenades ready to split.
They walk carefully, shoulders dipped
attempting to be unnoticed.
Faces a dull yellow, pale
as if they've been in the bush
dragging through mud, tasting damp nights.
There is a decisiveness about their movements,
a raw sore wanting to swell in their bellies
and rise to chew flesh.

Wendy Goodman

Bending Into The Steam

I.
During winter afternoons, in cold rooms
with ceilings that were higher than I could
ever reach, I would fill myself
with hot food for reasons other than hunger.
Drinking chocolate and eating breads,
I would wait for the warmth that swept
through fingers and wrists,
heating my bones,
and with it came safety.

II.
I dreamed you back last night;
the walls of our room were oceans
and your arms tore through swimmers
whose necks were poles.
You slipped through, to stand
in front of this bed,
and I hoping we can act
as if four weeks have not passed.
When you lay down next to me
my body burned with fear
because already I knew
you would be leaving.
For a moment, I hid
under your arms and legs
burrowing, as if I was five or six years old again
when hiding was part of feeling
unsure or frightened.

III.
I wrap myself around the pillow
it has turned into a silver shark.
The clock's alarm screeches;
my room blurs with white light.
I step onto the floor;
it is chilled and stronger than me.
Filling the bath deep with water
I tuck elbows into hips
and bend into the steam.

V. Rae Walter

Running Water

Something is unfinished.
You stand at the doorway
self-conscious smile like a corsage,
shifting with uneasiness at the formal
way you feel.
I empty ash trays, pile dishes in the sink
and run water on them.
You are 2000 miles from home
a block from the bus station.
You have a ticket,
but will not leave.

We sleep and talk with walls
between us two days; walk
by a sea wall, New England.
Talking with animated hands
like birds, one flutters to my shoulder,
alights, leaving a trace of feather
that you pick off.
You are 2000 miles from Denver,
you have a ticket. With walls
between us, I do not sleep.

You wrap New England in clothes
so it will not shatter,
taking it away.
I run water in the sink.

Mitchell G. Tomfohrde

SOUTHERN BREEZE

A dampness in the air
penetrates my skin,
infecting every part of my body with cold.
The dark night around me
exposes the blenched
condition of the surrounding landscape.
I wend my way down the drive,
careful not to slip on the ice,
now near the end of its existence.
The sweet, silent kiss
of a soft southern breeze in my ear
reminds me of warmer days to come,
too far in the future
to dwell upon now,
yet somehow close at hand.

Carol Poster

Praying Mantis

Your eyes glitter,
dark diamond, hard,
two morning–
stars guarding an open
arch, the black hall
of your mouth, metal
jaw ready to drop as
any portcullis, after quick
prongs prod victim
under, the soft
ball of your mate's
head, consumed, sucking
meal from the dead, and
then one by
one pearls
coalesce into
the wet glitter
of eggs.

Dan Stryk

THE SKUNK

For weeks, each night
we know his snout

in trash: the faint but acrid
scent of his slight

fear (breeze-borne trickle
of his ready spray).

Each night, each sultry
summer night,

his black/white waddle
roots about our

sleeping waking dreams—
reminds us sharply

nothing living's isolate
or clean. And in the morning,

carnage of damp shreds
and scattered cans.

Nanja Galoppi

I USED TO TRAP WEASELS

(for Geoff)

I used to trap weasels.
Made my own scent,
Old herring.
Steel traps,
A loaf of bread a jug of wine,
In the woods in the wintertime and
happier than thou.

Always catch weasels in the winter.
Any other season they are
brown.

Winter weasels are different.

I used to watch the way it reacted
To any commanding figure.
Fitzgerald's definition of courage,
"Grace under pressure."

I read a story once,
about a man who lost a finger.
He was bitten by an extremely poisonous snake,
That would kill him
in seconds.

But the guy with him just hauled off
And lopped his finger off.
Then took his shot
gun powder,
Rubbed it in. Set it afire.
Cauterized it.

I'd rather lose my finger
Than roll around on the ground
Wincing in death.

Photo credit — Katharine Fair

The co-editors of *Aldebaran* interviewed the poet George E. Murphy Jr. at his home in Ocean Bluff Massachusetts. Co-editor of *Tendril* magazine and the owner of Wampeter Press in Green Harbor Mass., Murphy teaches English to high school students. He recently received an M.F.A. from Goddard College. With poems appearing in a variety of literary magazines, Murphy has published several books, the most recent being *Serving Blood, New Poems By French Women*, selected and translated by Gloria Still.

Q. When did you start writing? Have you always wrote?

A. I guess in high school, for the high school literary magazine. They weren't poems though; they were humorous short stories. The first real poem I wrote was in freshman or sophomore year in college.

Q. Did you make a deliberate statement to yourself -- deciding between fiction and poetry?

A. No. I still remember the first poem I wrote. I still like it although it's a horrible poem. I like it for sentimental reasons. It was about a wonderful one night love affair that I had in Maine. Some friends and I had been up to Old Orchard Beach and one night we were down in the lobby of the hotel we were staying at. There were several girls from Canada and none of them spoke English. I ended up going off with this girl and we took a long walk along the ocean. You know, this very dreamy kind of romantic thing. Romantic in the sense that we really couldn't talk to one another but it didn't matter. And the tragic thing is that she left the next day and I never really got her name or address. I wrote this really nice thing and never even wrote to her. So my memory of it was very wistful. I just sat down one day and tried to capture some of the images. It was very badly over-written and descriptive: Rod McKuenish, and horribly sentimental. But then it was printed in the literary magazine at Boston College, where I was at the time.

Q. That's where you went to school then?

A. Yeah. I think some of my friends or co-patriots, especially women, thought that this was marvelous or romantic. In this poem they saw this side of me that they hadn't seen before. It's very strange that this poem had this affect of a lot of people opening up to me. Especially women. Not in that sense, but they liked me because they saw that I was a real gentle person. 'Oh, what a sweet guy.' It almost sounds mercenary but I thought that was great. And I just started writing more and more. But I don't think I really had any sense of poetry. I don't think intellectually I had any definition of what a poem ought to be.

Q. Do you have one now? Do you have a definition of what good poetry is to you?

A. I think so. It's changing a lot. I just finished up work at

Goddard for an M.F.A. Goddard's changed my thinking an awful lot. I came up with something about a week ago and I don't like it for intellectual reasons. What happens is you start to develop almost a cosmic consciousness about poetry. And in all of these things that I've been reading so intensely, all of this stuff is in there and now it keeps fitting together in different ways. In other words it's leading towards a new definition of poetry. When I look at some of my poems I think I'm becoming intellectually a better critic than I am a writer. I can't keep up with my own concepts.

Q. Would you say that might be due to the fact that when you read you read intensely and you change while you're reading? So that you've written a poem and you've done something else within that week and that might influence the way you later feel about it?

A. Well I don't even want to say exactly that. I'm not completely satisfied with my own writing at all. I used to think that poetry was clever language and that at its best poetry might capture a pretty picture, might put a moment in amber, so to speak. And descriptive writing would be an important part of that. I think that a lot of my poetry is descriptive. I concentrate on visual images a lot. But now that's not enough for me. I think it was Dickinson or Auden that said poetry should help tell us how to live our lives, or something like that. And I think that's the thing I'm hot on now. 'What is this poem showing anybody about life?'

Q. Do you think poetry should be didactic? Are you getting away from just capturing a visual image?

A. No, not didactic; it should never be editorial. Maybe I can illustrate it. Some poems just came in for *Tendril* and there was one that I just read last night. "Love In The Afternoon" is the title of it. And it's a love poem about a

woman sitting in a café with a man. And she desperately--she's horny, I don't know -- she wants to make love with the man. She's stroking his cup of coffee and she's looking at him full of passion. She's leaning across the table and she hears herself talking faster and faster, her voice getting desperate, needing him more than anything. And what she wants is for him not to scan the crowded tables, not to turn his head each time the door opens. When I read that it occurred to me that I am the man who turns his head each time the door opens. When I say a poem should tell us how to live our lives, it dawns on me as a criticism of myself that I may be that man. And maybe the next time I'm gazing into a lover's eyes I'm going to realize I should concentrate more on that somebody. There's something in that poem about life, about behavior, about experience, that's worth considering. That poem did something for me or gave me something. If this woman merely talked about what she was doing in this café and described all the silverware and china and came up with some clever metaphors for the way the silverware could look, at some point I could say 'So what?' But at the end the woman gets up and leaves the café, torn. There's something in that poem about being a person, about how you live your life. That's worth more.

Q. That reminds me. I think it was W.B. Yeats that said a poem should work the way a perfectly made box clicks shut.

A. Yeah, I remember hearing that. Yeah. See I think "click" is the thing that really good poems have. In other words that click maybe echoes, for the rest of your life. I think it *was* Dickinson that wrote that a poem tells you how to live your life or gives you something that helps you live your life. Yeats or Auden also said that a poem at its heart should show a man thinking and feeling. And maybe all of those poems written in workshops and exercises, where everybody says: 'let's write a poem where we talk

about what it's like for a bird to dive through the water,' maybe there's some essential nothingness about that. A poem doesn't come from a person thinking and feeling about their life and about what existence means.

Q. How do you start a poem then? Do you have a core of an idea that you build from? Do you have a time of day when you sit down and work?

A. No, I don't have a particular time of day that I sit down. Sometimes I'll sit down every day for hours, other times I'll go weeks without doing anything.

Q. But when you're starting?

A. It's different every time. Sometimes it will be a line, sometimes a word.

Q. But is it what you think it is by the end of it, or does it become something else?

A. No, it always becomes something else. Let me talk about a poem I did recently because it came from an experience. My two year old daughter amazes me. Part of it has to do with her complete trust in the world. It's amazing. She trusts words in a way that makes me envious as a poet. It occurred to me that she has a faith in language that we all naturally lose. One night she was up here with me and we went out on the porch. She likes to say good-night to the moon --which I think is great, that she thinks she can actually talk to the moon. But when we went out on the porch there was this skunk walking across the back-yard, and it hadn't sprayed yet but it smelled very bad. So she told me that she didn't like it and she wouldn't go to sleep because she was very worried about that skunk in her back-yard, in her sand-box. It was about eleven o'clock and she still wasn't asleep. So we went down there and I

got out some black paint and we wrote a sign that said, "No Skunks Allowed," on a shingle. And once we put that out on the sea-wall everything was fine because the words were there. (A.) skunks can read, (B.) they're going to obey. That's where you get the power of language: what you say is what it means – an implicit trust that language has all this power. If the sign exists then the possibility of skunks being there is eliminated.

Another thing happened: there was a photo album that she and I were looking at my mother's house. And she was sitting on my lap thumbing through these pictures and she couldn't understand that the boy in the pictures was me. Naturally that's not me, and it isn't me, I'm somebody else. When I was a kid carnivals used to come through town on the fourth of July. One of the things carnivals always had then were these little lizards, chameleons. And you used to be able to buy them for fifty cents and they actually had a little copper leash. And you pinned them to your shirt and walked around and fed them bread crumbs and they'd die in a few days. Well anyway there's this picture of me and I'm posing and I've got this huge smile on my face and I'm feeding my chameleon a bread crumb. And she wanted to know what it was and I started to explain to her that it was a lizard and that it changed colors. And then the most wonderful thing happened; she kept looking at the picture and then she turned to me and said, 'It hasn't changed, it's just green.' The same way that I'm not the boy. Appearance is everything. What is, is what is. Only concrete reality exists for her. The chameleon does not change. It's green and you can tell by looking.

I started to think that was great and then I had this horrible fear of what would happen the first time she lied to me. One day I came in and she was sitting at the desk with one of those felt tipped pens. She was whacking away on the wood with it and just wrecked it. I didn't want to yell at her or hit her or anything like that. So I

stood there and I made a sad face and it dawned on her that there was something wrong. She burst into tears and said, "I'm sad too." Anyhow, all these experiences happened in about a week. I started thinking about them and I decided I'd try to write about what my feelings were before I forgot them. Before she changed.

Q. Do you have a journal specifically for poems?

A. No, not really. I have a journal but I haven't touched it in a long while. It was a journal in which I just jotted down ideas. There are thousands of ideas for poems – most of which will never get written.

A lot of the things in these poems are just simple, real experiences presented like the incidences I was just talking about. My hope is that at some point this poem will transcend that. Maybe I'll have something that some other parents can read and perhaps realize something about their own feelings and fears. I really don't want her to change, which is completely irrational, irrevelent, illogical and unfair – because she will. But I'm still afraid. The poem is called "Poem For My Daughter On Her Third Birthday":

In the family album, a young boy
smiles out. Clinging to his shirt
on the end of a gold chain, a chameleon
nibbles on a breadcrumb. "That's
not you," she says, and
after watching awhile, "It
doesn't change. It's just green."

In her sandbox, she negotiates
her name with a finger.
"There I am," she says.

Tonight, troubled awake, remembering

that the abused chameleon
poked into change after change,
gave out and died
two days after the summer carnival,

I want to claim these words are me.
Here I am.
But they might as well be sand
or crumbs she and I might leave
as we go off together. Confident,
she would tell the birds not to eat
our way back.
In this poem. I've changed
into a man. We are walking somewhere.
Over my shoulder, I watch the birds circle.
She scatters crumbs with one hand
and begins to cry. I'm holding the other one
that tightly.

It's weird—the confidence of the skunk sign as she would tell the Hansel and Gretel story. She would tell the birds not to our way back and she would believe that they wouldn't. Meanwhile I'm watching the birds circle; there's that fear. I want to protect her, so I'm holding her hand tightly. The world is full of birds that will eat your bread crumbs and she doesn't see it yet. She doesn't know it. I see one hand as completely giving: throwing the bread crumbs with complete confidence and faith in the world. Then the other hand I'm crushing because I'm so afraid for her.

That comes from some ideas. Other poems come from phrases. Maybe I should look through this journal and talk about where other poems come from. All right. This is a completely different thing. This is a good example of coming from somewhere else. Somebody told me something that might be useful for ideas to write with: write

poems of sequence. Like Monday through Sunday. Write a poem about Tuesday. Twelve months of the year. It was October and it dawned on me that I hadn't written anything in about five days, so I just took the word October. And I literally started with sounds. What I wanted to do was capture a certain feeling about October, which exists in the word October. It echoes. You should say the word October in a big room: Oc-toe-burr. It began with sounds. You start with something and end somewhere completely different.

Q. You trigger your consciousness as you start and it just unravels?

A. Yes. I had no idea when I started that poem where I was going to end up. Poets often talk about how a poem writes itself: that at some point it's a poem. Sometimes there's an idea that you want to include in a poem, but the poem won't let you. The poem starts saying, 'No, I'm going somewhere else.' That's actually starting to happen when I'm writing and it didn't used to happen and that's exciting.

Q. Besides being a poet, you edit *Tendril* and hold a full time teaching job. Do you find teaching and editing to be negative, positive or neutral forces in relation to writing poetry?

A. It's both, I think. It's intensely both because I'm also publishing books now. I just published a book of translations from contemporary French women poets.

Working in a creative writing workshop with high school kids makes me feel good. It's rewarding. I usually don't learn much from that, but once a week or so I sit down with poems and I usually come up with an idea to toy with. And reading poems for *Tendril* is a constant stimulation. The other thing is that in editing *Tendril* I develop a better critical sense. Poems I accepted for publication two years ago I wouldn't think of accepting for publication now.

Q. What poets do you feel have influenced your work? Any

particular poet that you admire?

A. I think that the most stimulating person I know, and that would be the distinction, would be Stafford. I think he's remarkable. In other words, I'm influenced by that poet and by the way that poet works and with the way that poet deals with his writing and the way that poet lives his life.

Q. Do you feel that poets are supposed to be living lives that should be held up as examples for people?

A. If Stafford were a truck driver and I knew him-- I think I'd still--it's *him* I like. It's that person. And I think it's remarkable that a person that's such a wonderful human being happens to be a poet.

Q. Can you give us a definition of poetry?

A. I think there's a fundamental incapability of defining poetry. It's too many things.

Q. So would you define it then?

A. No. I'm not going to touch that. Poetry is what I do when I think I'm doing poetry. I wouldn't attempt a definition. And again, my definitions keep changing. I guess I go back to that Dickinson quote: that poetry teaches us something about our life. You know? When I read Stafford, Stafford opens up a part of me as a human being. He does that. So therefore his poetry is effective. It's good.

Q. How does the reader fit in there? Do you write for a reader? Do you almost feel as though a reader is looking over your shoulder as you write?

A. No. I don't like readers. I shouldn't say that. I'm not conscious of readers. Although sometimes I find myself--

Q. Do you ever ask yourself what the reader might think?

A. I'm a little scared sometimes of completely undressing myself in a poem. Although I keep taking off more and more clothes.

Q. Does your critical sense interfere with the creation of a poem?

A. Like all my other answers today, yes and no. It does because it makes me try harder. In other words, I'll write a line and maybe my creative ability is not as up to par as my critical skills. So I look at that line and say, 'That could be better, that's all right,' or 'That really doesn't do it yet.' It makes me more capable of looking at my own poetry with a better critical sense. Which means I work harder to try to make them better. Which means they probably get better. However sometimes that's very frustrating. It's sort of like if you don't know much about poetry. You can write--it's easier to write.

Q. Hugo once said in his book *Triggering Town* that a poet has to feel as though s/he is taking possession of a certain word or words. Do you have any words that you see yourself using a lot? Words that you feel a strong familiarity to?

A. Oh yeah. There's that. There's a sense of place that's getting very strong. It's the ocean; it's kind of natural. It's tough to sit here and not find yourself thinking about the ocean. Smelling the salt, that does something to your adjectives. We moved here last April. For the past seven years we lived about a mile southeast of here on the edge of the marsh. A salt marsh. I began to study betacology in the marsh, learning all the names of all the grasses, the animals, and things. There's a sense of home about the marsh. It's in a lot of the poems. In fact there's a book that I'm going to be putting together very soon--the title poem of which

will be "Marsh Wine." It's a poem that I'm extremely fond of. The marshland and the sea coast are a very large part of my consciousness. I grew up on the ocean and I always hung around beaches. If I lived in the mountains of Colorado I'd be a different person. I'd probably feel funny at night not hearing the ocean.

Q. Some poets tend to write about a place that isn't necessarily their place anymore. For instance, if you once lived in Colorado and moved to New England you'd end up writing about Colorado now. You objectify what was once considered your place.

A. I don't have any objectivity.

Q. Do you tend then, to write about the things you're doing daily? You live it as you write it would you say?

A. That's more the case. I don't want to sound like false humility, but I don't really think that human beings really understand what their lives are about. And I go through life in a fairly competent and sane way. I'm very orderly and organized. I have all sorts of things that I do. But I can't step back from that and look at it and understand what it's all about.

Q. Even after a space of time?

A. Oh, even after a space of time. I might think I understand what it's all about. I'm not even sure I have anything particularly important or strong to say about it. I guess it's just a reaction to the word objectivity. I'm somewhat implusive. By the way, it's interesting–we started a while ago with asking about people and poets that I was influenced by and I was really talking about Stafford as a person.

Q. It's that sense of poetry rather than the actuality of what appears on the page as a poem. He does, from what

said, have that sense about him that is somehow inspirational.

A. But that's part of it--I don't know if you've ever had a neighborhood priest who's just a marvelous wonderful person. It's *him* and I'm not even talking about Stafford as a poet. He's a man who's a wonderful person. The fact that there's one wonderful person in America who happens to be a poet is great. So that is not even really an answer to your question. Because Stafford happens to be a poet and I think he's a remarkable human being--that's one thing. The poets that I'm influenced by--I don't know who they are--they're whoever I'm reading. If I'm reading Dave Smith, he influences me, and suddenly I say, 'That's a kind of Smithy line here today.' If I'm reading Williams Matthews I say, 'Well let's see if I can surprise the reader in every line with something new.'

Q. There isn't anyone who you can say is *the* poet? That maybe there was a turning point where someone motivated you to do something?

A. Well I think that probably a lot of the motivation that has made me write more and more came from Stafford.

Q. You seem to feel a close relationship between knowing a person and that person's poetry.

A. Yes. That's it. What I am doing in *my* writing that has something to do with who I am as a person. More and more my poems are becoming poems of reflection. They're becoming more and more intensely personal. I'm much less playful than I used to be. In fact I'm not very playful at all anymore. Although I-- I should say there are exceptions. But more and more my poems are becoming very reflective and intensely personal. They're becoming a means for me to discover my life.

Q. Do you ever find yourself stifled by the idea that you could conceivably end up being categorized as a member of a certain school of poetry?

A. It's only stifling to people who do it. I guess what I'm saying is, I don't want to do it. I'm just as willing to read some of those bizarre poems that go all over the page and go on for pages and pages and pages. They're not always to my taste, but I'll read anything?

Q. How about words that reoccur in your poems. Are there any?

A. Oh yeah. We're back to that question. Yeah. One word that occurs a lot that someone sort of scolded me for as a critic was that sleep and dreams and things like that occur a lot and that's too easy and I know it is and I realize it so...uh, that's one of the things I'm going to be looking at in my revisions of some of my poems. My co-editor Moira Linehan pointed out to me--I never saw it--I have no idea what it means--but she pulled out six or seven of my poems and the word "hum" was in there. Hum. I don't know why.

Q. I remember "hiss"...

A. Hiss. There are some images, images that reoccur. It's like taking something from one poem and sort of finding the right place for it. There's an image that occurred in a number of poems and it still hasn't found its home yet. It's nesting. A very elegant white egret standing in a tidal pool. And I can pull out poems in which this egret appears. I don't know why it imposes itself upon my consciousness, but it's there. There's an egret and I've seen it in the marshes. It keeps floating around from poem to poem until it finds a place to build a nest.

Q. Do you have a favorite poem right now?

A. There's a poem that right now is my favorite poem. I've been writing this poem for a year and I think it's finished now. It wasn't until about three weeks ago that the ending ocurred to me. It had all these different endings. It's funny--or at least I think it's funny. Although it really is a serious poem. See even here in this poem, it's a self-discovery thing. The title of the poem is "Reticence." And what I'm talking about is hesitation. That in our lives we'd better off if we were more decisive. The idea occurred to me that sometimes I'm reticent. Sometimes we end up not doing *anything* and then---

Q. Yes. The moment's gone by and you---

A. Yeah. We don't have an action to be glad we performed or regret that we didn't. We didn't do *anything*. It began to occur to me that reticence is a kind of static immobility. That if somebody were reticent enough, not only would they lose the moment, but they would lose themselves. They'd be lost forever. And so the metaphor occurred to me of somebody who was losing a lover and needed to try to save the lover but because they were unsure about what would be the right thing to say, they not only don't say anything, and of course lose the lover anyway, but they become so incapacitated by their reticence that they become completely immobile. They become dead. By working this poem over and over, it's been a way to impose on my consciousness something that I want to impose. Make a decision. Make things move a little more quickly.

Q. There's a very strong sense of rhythm in your poetry: for instance your "October" poem.

A. That became very important to me a couple of years ago. There's one in particular that I have around somewhere. It's called "Disection." It's a pretty playful concept. I read in a newspaper that a high school in California had

done a disection of the human body. I thought it was fascinating.

Q. A high school did this?

A. Yeah, the first time. It was unheard of. I was talking about it with a biology teacher who works with me; I was standing in the biology room looking at a map of the human body with all the things labelled and all the parts in these wonderful latin-made terms. That's what I tried to do. It ended up it was a disection. It's somewhat designed so that at some point in the poem you become surprised at what's really happening in some high school class that they're disecting a human body. But in it--I started it--the litany got going and I found myself revising for months, all these different sequences so that they had a rhythm. Then after that, I remember it was like a turning point. After that, as I write, I instantly read my poems out loud to myself.

Q. Did you ever consciously use set poetic patterns like iambic pentameter? Or have you always just done it--

A. I haven't done it in an awfully long time.

Q. And you don't do it anymore then?

A. No. Sometimes I would-- I've written sonnets to try to see if I could write sonnets. But no. No, I guess it's more of the Williams Carlos Williams/Stafford school--following the impluse. Just going where the poem wants to go. In other words, the same way a poem can discover its meaning, a poem also discovers its shape. It's very precise and yet completely undefinable. There's a right place for a line to end. Line breaks and arrangements are crucial to a poem. There's a way a sentence can be written. Any one sentence can be written innumerable ways. And it's *crucial*. The syntax, the arrangement. You could write a poem, you

could have every image and every adverb that you're going to use and have the whole thing arranged conceptually. It could be brilliant; it could be marvelous but then at some point the syntax makes the entire difference of the poem.

There's a book by Donald Davey the British poet called *Articulate Energy* which is a study in the way syntax works in poetry. He contends that syntax is the blood, is the heart of a poem: that it's not just being clever, that it's not just inventing images, that it's not just finding something to say, that it's not just being sincere, that it's not just exposing the world and life and reality. What makes it all work, like the heart that makes your body function—is the syntax. The precarious balance of rhythyms all depend upon syntax and without it it can't be a poem.

Q. Which one of your own poems do you think best adheres to Davey's theory about syntax?

A. "Consider the Absurd" was a poem that began as an exercise. I decided to try to write a lengthy poem doing two different things. In the poem, the eye goes out and it's following the flock of birds and it goes down the street and then it goes to the docks and then it goes out and looks at something else and then the water, and then the rings go out and you follow the rings over the egret. It's just an extensive visual follow-it-wherever-it-goes poem. But the entire poem is two sentences that just roll and roll and roll. The end of it is one of those things where I was very conscious of syntax. This is all one sentence and notice how it works its way out to that egret and then that egret bursts into flight. If it were arranged any other way or if it were in its own sentence it would be *different*. Then the wind stops and the only noise is the thumping down the docks of a boy on a rusty bicycle.

Q. That poem gathers a great deal of momentum and then releases it at the end.

A. Exactly. And you get out there and the bird just leaps into the air. That's all done with syntax. The images are there. The boy's shirt is clung to his ribs, but anybody can write that a boy's shirt is clung to his ribs and it helps a picture. But what it is is the energy. It's the thumping down the docks, you know? You start to develop a picture and it's audial. Each thing happens in the order in which the eye watches the thing. It's all motion. It's like zooming in on a close-up and you get to the shirt on the ribs and go off and then it falls down and then the rings move out. It's a withheld tension, a building tension. When that egret finally breaks its wings it's like a release of the tension that the syntax has developed. The poem's more than 'Let me try to write a poem in which I try to capture this image that I say one afternoon.' It becomes transcendent. The poem is really about the joy of release--the same way the boy on the bike is a metaphor. The boy just sails off the end of the dock. Why? Because he doesn't give a shit. *Wahoo* into the water, you know? The poem is a wahoo. And I want it to be a wahoo where visually there is such joy in the *break* of that birds wings that you can ask yourself: consider yourself unhappy in this world. Consider the absurd. The whole poem is built on tensions. The tensions have to build; the images have to be right. You have to be willing to accept that mud can be glorious. Now that's the point. In everything that there is in this landscape on this particular day--you would have to be absurd not to find joy and beauty.

Q. The syntax is being manipulated to evoke a certain kind of emotional response from the reader?

A. The syntax of the poem itself, the arrangement of words has to be appropriate to that. I guess what I'm trying to say is that at some point it's impulsive. You follow what you've got and you go with the flow so to speak, you know?

George E. Murphy Jr.

Marsh Wine

Sediment falls to the bottom of the day
slowly, the way the tide drains its clear blue veins
through the marsh from the bog-road.
Seabirds skim the southern trees and drop.
Then dusk, and geese grow sullen past the kitchen.
The day clears itself from my table by the window
while the fire chews and spits the drafts
we have waded through all winter
on the wide oak floors.

This year there've been no blizzards.
The sea remains reasonable, and grey.
The clocks tighten.

Each morning,
pale as breath in blue air,
I find footprints in snow, circling the woodpile
then gone – dark animals gone with the sun.
All day, it reaches through the trees,
greying the stacks. Snow shakes down
through the limbs. I look down at my hands
which are firm through all this settling.

My wife weeps in the next room.
I am drunk. It is winter.
This wine is the color of sunrise through willows.
Our son is dead. My fingers spin the stem
and the tide falls.

George E. Murphy Jr.

October

In this long month of no romance,
absence, like the plates heaped
in the widower's sink, gathers.
And on the wide lawns,
in the otherwise still afternoon,
the leaves crack underfoot.

Dogs, bristle-necked and skittish,
sniff from bush to bush
for that part of themselves
rising in the smoke of raked fires.

Like them, I wander these streets
as the town prepares for the cold.
All day, in the yards falling down to the river,
I hear the crack of wood splitting,
the thin rings of years flung open again.
In every thunk of an axe, I hear a gasp:
the girl who watched me disappear
into a snowstorm when, from the end
of her street, I looked back at her window
while the world went white,
the night her house fell in flames.

At dusk, the stiff tips of trees
click their telegraph rattle,
the air thick with the threat of snow;
going back to my dark house,
evening flows past the other way, indifferent.
There, the hair on my neck rises and,
when I reach for the doorknob,
a spark leaps to my fingertips
as they do from my nightlypacing
back and forth across the rugs
before the fire.

George E. Murphy Jr.

RETICENCE

At the village mailbox, I become indecisive
and cannot move. In the pockets of my long coat,
six love letters, long torturous reports
of affection and apology, tremble like lepers
at a microphone. What could they say
that would change anything? All over me the weather
is weeping like a child and you have left me.

How do I love thee?
Day pass. I remain immobile, counting the ways.
I lose count, start over.
Incessant buses gasp at me stopped there.
They slap shut their doors and leave, then
stop stopping altogether and I grow into the landscape.

It is the children who notice me first, different from the streetlamps
they shoot out with bbs. I am shorter, a stable boundary line
for stickball until they notice my eyes.
I haunt them at dinner, an apparition in the steam of their potatoes.
For days, with wide, sleepless eyes, they return,
glancing backwards from bicycles, clumping from curbstones,
biting their lips.
Small rodents, sniffing out the ineffectual,
build nests for their families in my pockets.
They shred the letters into warm nests.
An old woman from a church group finds me quaint
and brings her friends who hang a wreath for the war dead
and plant a small garden. I think constantly of your thighs.

George E. Murphy Jr.

Reticence

In time, I become a location.
Taxicabs begin to take a left at me.
In mid-June a square is named for my indecision;
the whole town shows up, drunk and singing.
The school has new uniforms, long coats,
six letters in each pocket. They play
with exquisite temerity.
At dusk, the crowd spends hours deciding
to break up and go home, or somewhere.
And I cannot live without you.

Then, around about midnight, you come tooling by
in your Triumph, the Stones up loud on the tape deck,
and your hair dancing in the wind. And you're smiling
as you come by the square where, in a spasm of heartache,
I call out to you, my mouth round as a zero, spilling vows
like black marbles in the wet grass, until you're gone and I realize
that what I wanted to tell you would take a poem,
this poem, which, like so many of the damned things,
I'm just not sure is finished yet.

George E. Murphy Jr.

Consider The Absurd

as, for example, after the storm,
when the sky's western lid lifts
and the white boats sit
so brightly in the harbor

and the terns whirl
in small circles at the water's edge,
their white bellies thrust out
at that other flock
throbbing back from the water

while, in the outer harbor, and the red crane
which has been scraping the bottom
announces from its great claw
a glory of mud. Then the wind stops

and the only noise
is the thumping down the docks
of a boy on a rusty bicycle
his shirt clung to his ribs,
who throws his arms in the air
and, with a wahoo you can understand,
sails clear off the end of the wharf
and starts a set of silky rings
out toward the saltmarsh
where, like an unanswered question,
the elegant curve of an egret
breaks into a flurry of wings.

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George E. Murphy Jr.

The End Of The World

sounds right to the birds:
that song they've been after.
They reel and dip in unison,
a step in the big new dance.

On the shore, the rocks lose their dumb
grip on the earth and swim out clacking.

The sea sits still a beat, then
flings itself into droplets, a rainbow,
and children squeal at the colors.

For a moment we pause,
count one, hear the sound and,
at the moment the bells melt,
we are stunned into sigh or prayer or gasp,
our mouths open as round and right
as the choirmaster's dream
of a harmony that fades upon waking.

George E. Murphy Jr.

Plum Harbor
(for my daughter)

Nine months later, in a blue room
flooded with sunlight, your head,
glistening like a wet plum, will emerge.
At the touch of the rough sponge,
your cry will break the spell of winter.

Today, off the north coast road, wild plums
ripe and swollen, weave with foxbrush where we walk,
your mother and I. It is that day we abandon caution
and climb down granite and limeledge to the sea.

Gulls, all day, have slashed the sky
with deft, wet plunges
ten feet into these clear waters
for rock crabs and bluefish.

Lobster claws, pecked out by seabirds,
dry on fronds and polyps
or lay bleaching on black nettles
or the splintered traps tossed back in storms.
There, on a landing thrust into the sea,
between two upturned boats, we lie,
tongue and notch, locked into one another.
The wind claps against our skin,
again and again, your name, my daughter.

George E. Murphy Jr.

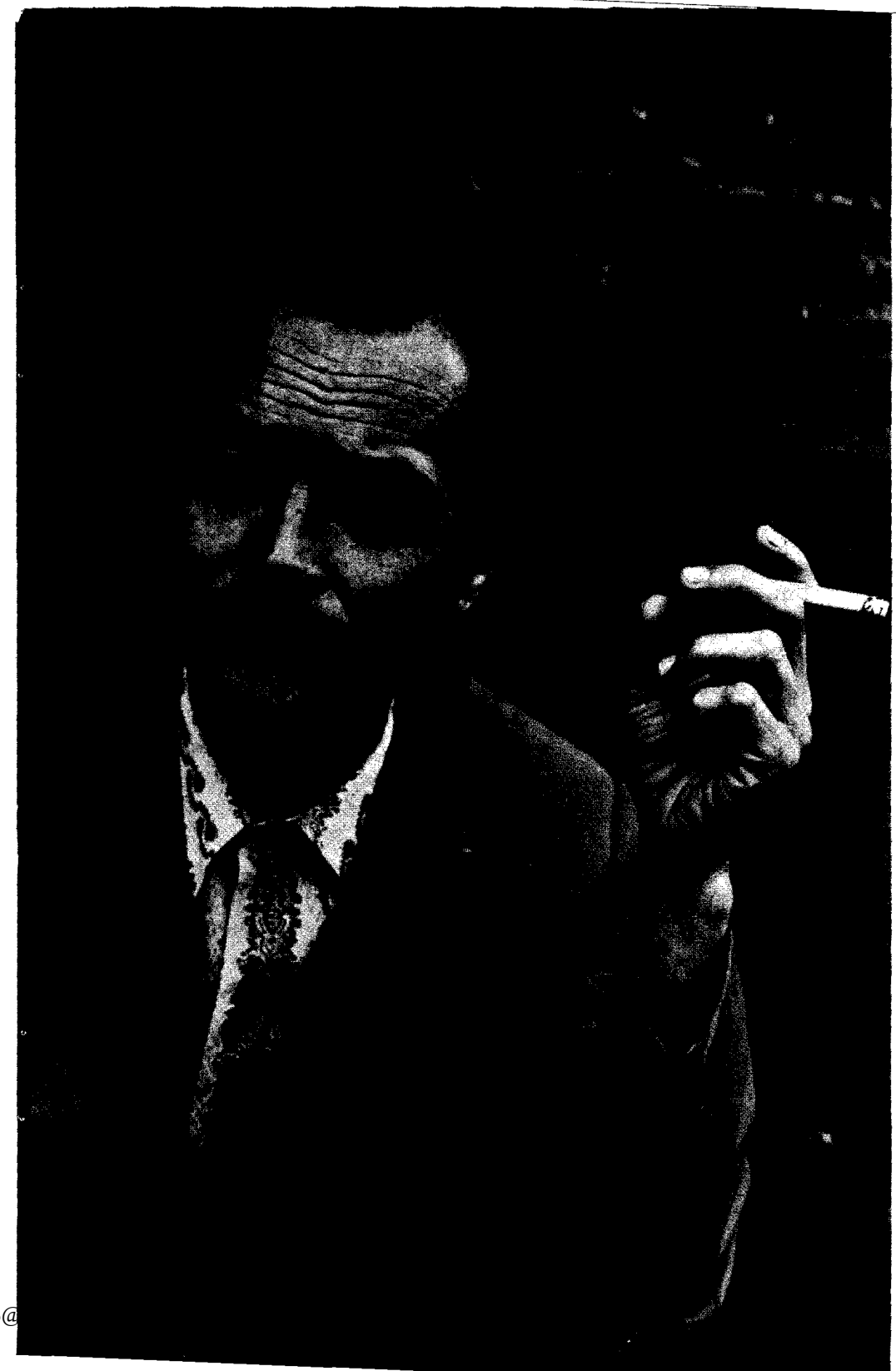
Stars

> "Stop, stop, you who are ragged with stars,
> Die while you still have the time."
> —Luis Cernuda

At the sea-wall with my glass of beer
I have stepped from my house at midnight
to sit in darkness with the stars.
Here, on the wet grass, where flowers
shut tight and sag on their stems, I'm alone
with the heave and sigh of the tide
on the rocks. Above me, in the dark
upper rooms of the house, my family
sleeps beyond the star-specked windows.

To the East, the light off Provincetown
spins an idiot eye through the bay,
finds me again and again, then falls
down the bluff to the North.
At the horizon, anchored alone, abandoned,
a garbage scow consumes itself in flames,
its ponderous cargo of waste hauled off the coast
and left to rage like a torch-head
against the rough walls of the night.

Here, in this great empty chamber,
beneath the whorl of stars,
I ache to sleep but cannot.
On these long nights of watch, I drink
and, like a child, make wish after wish
on the small white star
that quivers on the rim of my glass
like a lantern in an empty lifeboat
in black waters, leaving.



M. L. Hester

6:30 NEWS

Krumbach checked to see if his heart was still beating. It was. He then checked to see if he had all the necessary tools; aspirin (yes), tums for the tummy (yes), special formula vitamins B, C, E and magnesium (yes), bottle of Valium (yes), bottle of vodka and can of tomato juice (yes), presciption of nembutal in overdose quantity definitely yes).

He was set. He was ready. He checked his watch which read 6:28. Two minutes to go. He felt vaguely like one of the Apollo astronauts, ready to blast off, ready to walk in space, ready to land on the moon, moon, moon. Croon/June/moon. His mind was wandering; cut it out, he said. He settled down, was calm as much as it was possible to be. He steeled himself. This is the stuff Kung Fu champions are made of, he said resolutely, though there was no one to hear him.

Dr. Pepper, so misunderstood, the television was blaring. If you tried it, you'd know it tastes good. So good! Lee Trevino sang this last part, wearing nickers and surrounded by leggy girls dressed as huge and sexy golf balls. Krumbach was filled with an urge to try Dr. Pepper one more time, the misunderstood drink. We are all misunderstood, he said softly. He also had a semi-erection, whether for the golf balls or for Dr. Pepper he did not know. It went down slowly during an advertisement for a hemorrhoid balm. Thirty-eight percent of the doctors queried recommend this, the television said. What of the other 62%, Krumbach said. The other doctors were out of town, said the tv. We are all out of town sometimes, said Krumbach.

There was a brief but surging chatter of typewriters, adding machines, teletypes. It was the CBS newsroom. Krumbach crossed his fingers that Cronkite was not, as the doctors so often were, out of town. It was true the master newscaster was getting old, but the country was so strung out it could not bear the terrible daily onslaught of events without a friendly and familiar face. And of course the final AND THAT'S THE WAY IT IS, which prompted one to scream WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT? Carthar-

sis, that was what Cronkite evoked. In these times, catharsis was what it was all about. Muggers were saner than their victims because they could let it out. Krumbach often had anxiety attacks where he rolled about the floor and gasped out the lyrics of pop ballads. This was good for him, he knew. Without the attacks he probably would be very nervous.

Hello, Walter! welcomed Krumbach.

GOOD EVENING.

What's the first story?

OCTUPLETS WERE BORN THIS MORNING TO MR. AND MRS. HERMAN ROACH OF OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN.

Oh no, said Krumbach, and popped two Valiums into his mouth. The population problem! Must have been Catholics.

MRS. ROACH, A MORMON, HAD BEEN USING FERTILITY DRUGS. SIX OF THE INFANTS DIED AT BIRTH. THE OTHER TWO ARE NOT EXPECTED TO SURVIVE.

Burial insurance will go up drastically, moaned Krumbach. He filled his palm with high potency vitamins and forced them down his throat. For stress, the bottle said. He unscrewed the cap of the vodka and punctured the tomato juice can. Continue, he said.

THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE ADMITS THAT THE FORTHCOMING RUSSIAN WHEAT DEAL WILL BE AN ADDITIONAL BURDEN ON THE CONSUMER. THE PRICE OF A LOAF OF BREAD MAY REACH FOUR DOLLARS BY JANUARY.

I don't even eat bread, said Krumbach. I eat hominy grits. They are quite high in pyridoxine hydrochloride, a deficiency of which will make one or both cheeks of the fanny fall off.

THE PRICE OF OATMEAL, CREAM OF WHEAT, AND HOMINY GRITS WILL ALSO SKYROCKET.

Goddamn! yelled Krumbach, scattering the rest of the vitamins about the floor. I don't want my ass to fall off! Then he remembered that lemons were also very high in pyridoxine hydrochloride. I'll eat lemons instead, he said.

FLORIDA FRUIT GROWERS REPORT THAT THE ENTIRE LEMON CROP MAY BE LOST, DUE TO A PESTICIDE-

RESISTANT FUNGUS.

Krumbach mixed a huge bloody mary and siphoned it quickly through a straw. The mixture potentiated the effects of the Valium and he soon felt a warm, spacy glow. They'll develop a new pesticide, he said.

PRODUCTION OF ALL PESTICIDES HAS BEEN TERMINATED DUE TO THE THIRD ARAB OIL EMBARGO. SCIENTISTS ARE ATTEMPTING TO DEVELOP A NEW PESTICIDE WHICH DOES NOT HAVE OIL AS A BASE. UNFORTUNATELY, FUNDS HAVE BEEN CUT OFF FOR THE RESEARCH AS BEING INFLATIONARY.

Krumbach took a handful of aspirin to discourage the headache which he knew was imminent. He decided to take a break and come back for Eric Sevareid's piercing analysis of the day, the commentary.

While rummaging about in the kitchen for something to eat some hominy grits perhaps, he polished off his second and third bloody marys. How can anyone drink at a time like this, he thought, and later: How can any one *not* drink at a time like this? With these thoughts in mind, he mixed a fourth drink and finished it while attending to a private need in the bathroom. When he returned to the den and the television, Eric's deeply-lined and character-ridden face was covering the tube.

MY COMMENT FOR TONIGHT IS SIMPLY 'NO COMMENT, he said. BACK TO YOU, WALTER.

No comment! yelled Krumbach. The CIA has gotton to you too, Eric Sevareid! Krumbach was by now feeling sick to his stomach, and chewed half a roll of Tums for the tummy. The white ovals did take away the acidity, but the nausea remained. Krumbach fairly crept into the bathroom, raised the lid of the commode, and regurgitated the four bloody marys, the aspirin, the Valium, the vitamin pills, and the half-digested Tums. Somehow, though, he felt better. He returned to his seat in the den, which was barely three feet away from the television.

Walter was back too. Krumbach was grateful for the receded hairline, the carefully-trimmed mustache, the illusion that things were in control.

RIOTERS TODAY BROKE WINDOWS AND KIDNAPPED THE AMBASSADOR AT THE LICHTENSTEIN EMBASSY. THERE IS NO KNOWN REASON FOR THESE ACTIONS. THE SECRETARY OF STATE SPECULATED THAT THE RIOTERS WERE ALL ON LSD AND CONFUSED THE EMBASSY WITH THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT. A RANSOM OF $17.20 HAS BEEN ASKED FOR THE AMBASSADOR'S LIFE. FBI SPOKESMEN SAY THE MONEY CANNOT BE PAID ON MATTERS OF PRINCIPLE.

What's one ambassador more or less? said Krumbach. What is a Lichtenstein anyway?

THE SUBWAY STRIKE IN NEW YORK IS OVER. BUT THE GARBAGE STRIKE IN DENVER GOES INTO ITS EIGHTEEN WEEK. THE RAILWAY FIREMAN'S STRIKE IN THE SOUTHWEST IS STALLED DUE TO IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES. THIS IS THE REASON GIVEN FOR THE DIVORCE OF MOVIE IDOL CHAD RIPROCK AND HIS BRIDE OF THREE DAYS, GLORIA MORNINGSTAR.

Love 'em and leave 'em, said Krumbach.

MISS MORNINGSTAR REVEALED TODAY THAT HER SUPERSTAR HUSBAND IS QUOTE GAY AS THE TOOTH FAIRY UNQUOTE.

Well, we can't have everything, said Krumbach.

MR. RIPROCK DISPUTES THIS ALLEGATION, STATING THAT MISS MORNINGSTAR IS FRIGID AS AN ICE CUBE.

Masters and Johnson would be confused, stated Krumbach. I am confused too.

MISS MORNINGSTAR HAS SUED FOR THE CUSTODY OF THEIR PET ROCK, HAROLD.

Save the children, said Krumbach. We can do without everything but them. They are vital.

AN ORPHANAGE IN CHUN KING CHINA WAS STRUCK TODAY BY TREMORS WHICH REGISTERED SEVEN POINT TWO ON THE RICHTER SCALE. OVER THREE HUNDRED CHILDREN WERE KILLED OR MAIMED. THE MUNITIONS FACT-

ORY A BLOCK AWAY WAS UNTOUCHED.

There is no god, said Krumbach.

REACHED LATE THIS AFTERNOON, GOD DENIED THAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EARTHQUAKE. HE QUOTED FROM DEUTERONOMY AND LEVITICUS AND HIS PRESS SECRETARY SAID SIMPLY: GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES.

I could stand a commercial now, said Krumbach. Walter immediately stopped talking, in mid-sentence, and suddenly a girl was on the screen, wrapped in a skimpy towel and rubbing her thighs with body lotion. She was absolutely the most beautiful female Krumbach had ever seen. His adam's apple sank, then slowly rose. He knew, if he ever saw such a woman on the street he would have to assault her, not out of lust but as a gesture to all guys, like him, who weren't getting much, and what they got was generally not worth the effort. One for the Gipper, so to speak. He then realized that the girl wasn't even a real person after all. It was a network concoction, as titillating but with no more substance than an idea. Your not real, he told her.

The girl said nothing. She just kept rubbing her thighs and smiled, showing perfect teeth. She new Krumbach was correct about her.

THIS SEGMENT BROUGHT TO YOU AS A PUBLIC SERVICE, said a local announcer as the girl disappeared. CHANNEL TWO CARES ABOUT SHUT-INS.

Ah, and I too, said Krumbach. Although I am more of a shut-out.

Darlene Mikula

IF THE FACE DOESN'T GET YOU, YOUR NIGHTMARES WILL

Razor blades flash in the light in the distant trees. Closer and closer. Coming closer. At your throat now. The men in white move around you sullenly. "A job," one man says. Can you feel that pull? Sucking. Sucking. Flash. Men are gone. Shopping in Almac's, cost of Gerber's is up to thirty-three cents a jar. You shake your head in disgust. "Oh, hi Marty!" you say as you greet that handsome rangy hipped dude who steals your heart away. Flash. In bed with Marty. So naked, so warm, so strong. In and out he goes and you murmur in delight. He covers your mouth with his, grasping you, pulling you nearer. You haven't felt this good since last night. Flash. Something scarlet red in a metal garbage can. What is it? Only you know, so you turn away. Screaming, you greet that sunshine in tears.

Wiping your face, you sigh "only a dream." Rising off your jungle scene sheets and wrapping your plastic white body in that soft blue terrycloth robe you make your way to the bathroom. Turning on the light, you spin away from the other face that looks at you from the opposite side of the mirror. Sitting on the cold seat of the toilet, head in hands, as the waste passes out of your anus.

"Good morning Miss Normalic," says the receptionist as you pass by the front desk of the Manden Memorial Hospital. The elevator doors open, eighth floor. Three doors to the left, and there she is. Great Grandma lies coiled on her bed, writhing in that cancerous pain. "Good morning, Grandma," you say as you kiss her. She shrieks away, "Who are you?!!" Shaking your head, you turn away from the face you see in the mirror on Grandma's night stand.

Berkeley Mental Hospital and Institution. Cousin David sits at table, stares at cubes on table. Grits teeth, pulls at his nose, and flings arm across table knocking the cubes off the table and crashing against the wall. Cousin David laughs. Stands on table. Jumps down then. Does somersalt into the corner where he remains banging his own head up against the wall. You shudder as

the reflection in the glass window catches your eye, and you quickly turn away.

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Infant Home for Retarded Children says sign on the door as you pass through. Your best friend's little girl lies on the mat, brown eyes moving every second, all nerves working in disorder making her every move uncontolled. "Cerebal Palsy and blind at the same time. Poor *thing* Some voice in the reflection in the silver urn on the mantle speaks to you. You turn away and head down those stairs, never looking back at those faces on the wall.

Matt's Pub. You sit on a stool sipping that "Mean Mother Fucker" as the men call it. You just order another "Mean Mother." Harry enters, smiles when he sees you, sits down next to you. Chews on your ear and whispers something that makes you nod a pleasant yes. Rising from your stool, Harry's arm around you, you glance up at the black and white television. The infant's face regurgitates all over the screen. You turn away in horror.

Harry is so good. "I love you," you say. Cliche. Good line that works every time. Some hardened part of this man's body goes in and out and you sigh in delight. "Sorry I have to go, my wife has dinner waiting for me," Harry says as he slips back on his Fruit of the Looms and Levi's. "It's been nice," you say and smile. You turn away as the face on Harry transforms into that same infant on television who regurgitated all over the screen just one hour ago. Rolling over, exhausted yet satisfied, you pass into a sleep state.

Medical Services Clinic. The sign is blurred. You enter. Sign a white card. Lie on a table. White men in black medical suits move around you. "Just a job," one says and chuckles to the other. Drug administered. Vision blurred. One hour later you awaken. "Just a job," you sigh. "Feel okay?", the man in the green suit says to you. "Is it all over?" you say. "Yes- -its not a hard process anymore you know," he replies. Rising from the plain white sheets, you shriek as you glance at that scarlet red face glaring at you through the clear plastic bag lining the metal garbage can next to your bed. And then you just turn away.

L. Goldschmidt

THE OHIO STATE FAIR

In the dusty field
just washed pick-up trucks arrive
unloading the families
with their polished faces and boots,
relish, flowers and pumpkins
that might get a ribbon this time.

And the women, who have been home all year
washing overalls and making jelly
have gotten their hair done.
Their men have gone off
to the livestock sheds
to joke and swear,
leaving them in small groups
of colored frocks,
to keep an eye on the children
or purchase a dried flower arrangement
or perhaps a plate depicting the event.

The children walk shyly around
deciding how to spend their coins
shaken from a glass pig early this morning,
and expected to last all day.
There's ice-cream and games
where you can win goldfish
or a plastic toy from Japan.
The cow with two faces
can be seen for fifty cents
and the real-live midget only a quarter.

L. Goldschmidt

The Ohio State Fair

The adolescent boys line up outside a booth
where a woman covered with tattoos
can be viewed for six bits.
But they don't know til their money's gone
that she only shows her arms and legs
coated with flowers
and sagging, green serpents.
They don't let on that they've been ripped-off
they want the girls to think
they've seen it all.

L. Goldschmidt

THE BAD BLOCK ON WOOD STREET

There are skinny cats,
and thinner kids with fudgesicle faces
who poke at a dead thing on the road
when cars send the crows flapping
off the street.
A small girl with new shoes
and baggy underwear
plays house in a window-well.
She collects pieces of colored glass,
and feeds candy, her brother has given her,
to a doll whose hair has been cut many times.
She will have sex early.
In an alcove where the doors are boarded up
and trash collects,
a pregnant dog cleans herself
waiting to be fed
by a mother who works the late-night-shift
or a father who doesn't work at all.

NASTY BOY COUSIN

I have not invited you
to my new house
with its old, wooden floors
fancy carved mouldings
and glass door knobs.
Glass ones, not the brass kind
that reminds me of bad dreams and you,
lifting my small face up to the knob
to see the distorted, pig eyes
and huge nose
of the ugly girl
you told me was myself.

Jack Chielli

Part of the Body

in this night wind
darker than most
the maples sway
low to the earth
they heave about
like restless shoulders

i thought then
how is it/how it is
to be years without home
how at the beginning
we start abandoned

it is death
i fear most, knowing
around each eye
a wheel of bone
spins unanswered

Jack Chielli

RAGS

Today we gathered our old clothes
And used them
For rags I washed
The car with one
You dug in the garden
The years just
A dirty tee shirt or two

Sometimes I get swallowed
Up by a thought
About mortality
And mass
It's all you can do
Embrace the chasm
Between us
A single shadow's glance

How silly
To think
You saw something
Under the soil

Jack Chielli

Husk

the corn field wind
whispers yellow
where stalks lean
leg to leg–
across the cold flat
mudded snow
the first twig burns
from ash to ruin
i step careful
of my own flame

what is this surface
that i
wobbled from the womb to see
only years later to topple
over again
onto the ice mud
numbed with laughter

across this vastness
few are safe
yet it is safer
to suffer
than rise to another's flame

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