



COE REVIEW

1989 ISSUE

Featuring: E. Coraghessan Boyle

masthead

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Coe Review is a contemporary anthology, which publishes a variety of writings from within the Coe Community and throughout the country. Fiction less than 10,000 words and poetry of unlimited length will be considered for publication if accompanied by a SASE. Manuscripts must be typed with name and address. Coe Review has first serial rights. Rights are reversible upon request and simultaneous submissions are not acceptable.

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POETRI

All That's Expected

Joseph Barrett

there is always the man who anonymously waits,
his hands balled deep in the pockets of his coat,
his eyes dead in the shadows of his cap;
and one day
he pulls his hand from his pocket
and opens it palm up
as if feeling for rain;
and the sun beats down,
a telephone rings,
a teapot whistles,
the soul flaps in a green breeze

Joseph Barrett's poetry has appeared in North American, Japanese, French and Australian literary journals. His collection of poems "Blue Planet Memoirs" will be published in 1989.

The Juggler

Donnell Hunter

On the day he retired the produce man juggled
grapefruit. "I've been here thirty-five years."

The accountant juggled the books and didn't wait
to retire. They gave him thirty years.

"Twenty-five to life," said the judge and sentenced
the slasher who specialized in jugular veins

using a knife he designed himself to curve
around arteries and leave the larynx intact.

As for the poet who juggled the syntax
and slashed her way to the end of the line,

no jury could be found. We keep reading
her words long after she died of natural

causes. They dance and sing. Remember
her poem? how it ends, "eternity"?

Donnell Hunter teaches English and Creative Writing at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho, and has had chapbooks and a multitude of poems published in the past

Savoring

Lorenzo Ruscello

Two cups of light wine
resist not the rapid evening wind.

Shadow stained reflection
downs its end.

Incensed waves ushered behind the lamp,
and silk flows, entangled,
fall near the drowsing wick,
now extinguished.

Thin mists part
the evening ceremonies of her hair
that drowns and drowns.

A lasting pool's darkness
falls into ashen mirrors.

The reflection caught--
a glass limbed figurine
outlined against the branches
walking away.

Amid the night blue folds
I once received the drowned silence.

Lorenzo Ruscello is a sophomore at Coe College and from Corpus Christi, Texas. His major is English.

My Grandfather, Who Always Stops By The Bookcase To Look At His Mortal Remains Before Wiping His Feet And Leaving The House

Josef Renz

My Grandfather still shows
Up every once in a while
But it took him a long time to find us after we moved.
My father suggested:
Why don't we
Tie a greased string from the old house to this one.
He'd read that perhaps in Man, Myth, and Magic.
But my granddad
Name of Frank
Frank Renz
Glad to meet you he says and ducks his head like Billy Buck
Who smelled of cigarettes
And endless cups of weak coffee,
Which both stained his teeth
(Which is also happening to me;
I'm beginning to smell like him)
Found us on his own
At three thirty six A.M.
He's lost some weight since the last time
The ambulance didn't
Hurry along fast enough.
Amazingly, though,
That doesn't prevent him from hunching
Around in the pantry, looking for a
Sweet roll (his favorite)
Or a doughnut
Or something.

Josef Renz lives in Seattle, Washington with a rabbit named Sven. He primarily writes short stories, but has made some poetic endeavors.

Untitled

Andy Urbanus

village slumbers
blanketed by her hill bitten forest.
sun peeks over wind
casting a shadow sideways to the pond.
water, chocolated by mud
sways north to south.
down dusty, graveled road
a smith, the first of the morning
scratches his matted hair, lifts the hoof,
draws a stake, bends, and hammers
the first day of that texas summer, nineteen-thirty-six.

Andy Urbanus is a day care teacher and writes during the nap times of his students, while listening to Mozart or Chuck Berry.

Lost On Foreign Ground

Ann Armstrong

The lantern light
was the only thing
that held the dark together.
It swayed back and forth,
under the moon,
like the wind on a rope.

Ann Armstrong is a sophomore at Coe College and from Atkins, Iowa. Her major is Education.

Crawdaddy

Ann Armstrong

There is a place
I used to go
a wooden bridge over a shallow stream

Under it I'd hide
from a black-clad man-boy

He'd call my name
endlessly
I just sat
under the planks
watching the clear water
drag pebbles along

His boots
I could see
tap across the bridge
through the cracks

He'd stomp
and flare

I wasn't afraid of him

I hid
under the wooden bridge
soaking my feet
in the cool water
until day stood

back to back with night

I watched the shells
of small crabs
float past

A Poem As Is

Steve Beauchamp

He crunches ice and puffs frost-plumes,
Blustering swirls among the withered leaves,
He dances his grim satyr-dance,
Rattling hoary limbs and trailing flakes.

Or he stands immaculate on mountain top,
Robed in lead-gray clouds,
Impenetrable to supermen and men alike,
As is transparent summer's green.

As is? As who or what, perhaps,
Flickering behind the eyes
Of Queen Patina's mask.

The pearl in the mind revolves,
Suspended from the ballroom dome,
Casting iridescent nets of light
Over shadows of dancing shades.

Beyond the door atop the spiral stairs,
Emptiness is a room outside of rooms
In which the dreamers slumber, full.
Beyond this emptiness, the ice.

Steve Beauchamp teaches English at Brewton-Parker College. He has published poems in a variety of Southern magazines and resides in Georgia.

The Machine Age At The Brooklyn Museum

Steven Hartman

The framed gelatin silver
prints of machinery
don't expose the gears
or the grease-stained hands
of the factory worker.

Streamline is a metaphor
for the speed inside the engine
of a Chrysler built in 1933.
They don't show
clouds of carbon monoxide
or the blood on the wheels.

We kneel before the axle
and pray to the power of machines
as factories replace cathedrals,
rayon replaces silk
and acid, rain.

Steven Hartman moved to Brooklyn, New York from Storm Lake, Iowa and uses some of his Midwestern experiences when writing poetry. He has been published in a number of small press magazines.

Chicago Shores North and South

Matt Osing

A block of tenements are sliding
from their turbid southern shore
into the American Sea that
brings rounded bricks to
north shore suburbs
where hispanic gardeners are hired
to place them
in forest green gardens
of old moss.

Matt Osing is a sophomore at Coe College and currently lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His major is English.

Untitled

Matt Osing

In the Morning
my few whiskers tell me that
I'm dying--all the time
So I shave them off.

But She has stretch marks
that can't go away--not ever
They use up Her whole stomach
in ripples that aren't quiet scars--at all
Even though She sees them that way

And one of Her Sons
likes to sit on the vanity,
next to the sink
on the mornings
after I've spent the night with Her
and watch me shave.

Ricky

Matt Osing

Ricky did spray paint
huffing it out of a
Wonder Bread bag
the Streetlights Ringtossed
him with baleful Atomic halos,
Last time I saw him he said,
"But don't you wanna make real money"
As he watched the john flush
swirl, and gather another
toiletpaper carnation.

Call Me a Silly Romantic?

Becky Rieniets

In the silent
open spaces of argument
perfection is the ultimate
blemish
marriage, the bond
of infidelity
trust, a criminal folly
and maternal natures
shrug away offspring.

A few gold pieces
spiral into the heap
of private mockery.

Now the public is impressed,
but they'll never know.

Love should be reserved
only for pets and small children.

Becky Rieniets is a junior at Coe College and from Monticello, Iowa. Her majors are Psychology and English.

Rockslide at Mt. Rushmore

Becky Rieniets

Captured by urgent drizzle,
dawn's grey halo
rises above jawlines
licked from lips
scales cheekbones
pastes hair to head,
a veil removed from granite.
Moist chills search
stone flesh for refuge,
rain washes away the face
rain that never stops.

Fragile secrets come alive
when I insert a quarter
into the looking glass.
Eyes without color,
without direction blur
beneath the steady, liquid sheets.
I wipe one lens,
then the other,
rain washes away the face
rain that never stops.

Heads without bodies
furrow and crack
from expanded thought,
infected by chemicals
diluted in water's rush
over the edges

of mind,
rain washes away the face
rain that never stops.

Rough-grained profiles
are chiseled out
of rock mountains.
They chip,
but do they topple
in the startles
of wet thunder?
rain washes away the face
rain that never stops.

I stand below cliffs,
disjoined and immobile
in virtue's haze.
We are parallel.
I, too, am numb
from the flooding
which rises
around my feet,
rain washes away the face
rain that never stops.

Night Moves

Becky Rieniets

white ice lay thick around electric lines
heaving until it snaps from poles
and freezes against the pavement
pitched into dark before time
vapor stains walls and windows
outside disappears
slick spinning tires with mad wheel clutchers
steer away from nearby concrete
second shift at the factory
hurries home before a wind-up clock
chimes another half hour
and its pendulum becomes wedged in ice

Breakfast With Unknowns

Lee Steuer

Cool, pungent air
from a yellow-brown patch of mushrooms--
or is it milk-fog, rising?
My morning breathes easily.
The long night gone,
I seek asylum
among heart pine and scrub oak.
It looks like rain
or it feels like rain
or it smells like rain.
Senses enter
through a hidden door.
Ears prick, eyes flash, nostrils flare.
I eat a ripe banana.
Nobody knows.

Lee Steuer is a free-lance writer in Gaffney, South Carolina and his poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals throughout the country.

The Missionary Position

Bill Lorand

I. Bronze children

Circle

Dancing waters

And wait to taste

Youth

The Amethyst Queen

Silent torches

Trumpet a raft of wood

And sandals

Seeping through mist

Onward

Drums wail in the jungle

Heartbeats

Christine impaled

For the Ancient Ones

She stills the night

To preserve the dawn

II. Flags of Colony

Weave

Dogma in the rain

Branches crackling

Fire

The Pirate Boot Messiah

Bill Lorand is currently a sophomore at Coe College and from Las Vegas, Nevada. His majors are Political Science and English.

Vertigo potions
Waft the holy disease
Thru fig-leaf curtains
Last reservoir
Dry as burnt oak

Spears pierce light
As capes swallow children
Alchemy in dark flame
The Prometheus hand
He blazes the way
To leave footprints in the dusk

Betrayal

Joe Benevento

*"Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes... Yo no se!"
Cesar Vallejo*

My soon to be ex-sister-
in-law called me tonight
from Queens wondering
whether her husband had
leaned in any direction
I could point to from
these Missouri plains
without revealing some
sacred confidence of
brothers especially close.
We spent fifty or so
long-distanced dimes
discussing his foolishness
in not preferring her
loyalty, her soft
brown eyes, their
home to loneliness
without her. I never came
close to blurting out the
blonde he's been intimate
with as often as his bride,
nor even the green-eyed
wonder he had here
for my birthday.
I only suggested, didn't
scream that he would
not be worth renewing;
the rock sickness
pounding in my stomach
unable to code to her
how foolish she makes
us believing words
etched in honor-
less blood, shame secured
beneath its brother rage.

Joe Benevento teaches creative writing and literature at Northeast Missouri State, but he is absent this year to attempt his first novel.

ARIES



The Broken Gate

Gregory Ling

The night had been calling its
horses forth from its stall.
I could hear their hooves trampling
in the distance,
slackening their ropes among the hills.

The clawed-down moon hovered above an oak,
dragging its reins of dew overhead,
and the clouds raced past,
opening up their billows among the dark.

Buckling under the weight of the night's
thunderous steed, I clung to a lantern
by the coal-house door
till the stall's gate bent slowly above
the plain, overshadowing the land.

A bird's feather stuck in the carcass of an ox
shook beneath the brunt wind of a stallion's
breath, and a flock of crows swirled like water
flowing over the flanks of a horse.

Someone stood in the doorway of every house
holding a huge ring of fire in his hands;
someone spoke my name from the bottom of a
well, calling back.

Gregory Ling has been a recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize and published in numerous magazines.

The sky rolled overhead, and the moon's wounded
light gathered its harness.

Its bit and muzzle strained against the hinges
of the gate that would at any moment snap.

One horse reared its head, lashing out,
its mane flowing, nostrils flared....

The first time the gate broke
the earth smelled of rain...the sky of fire.

Braille Microphones

Gregory Ling

You've entered the long neck of sleep for no reason,
for nothing.

The camp burning behind in its silver shadow an arm
length away;

you could touch it if you wanted to.

Instead, you lie on a spread of pine needles, a bed of
dust covering the red earth like a blistered hand

while the night's fireflies trip alarms down the steep
hollow. You blink as they ignite and go off,

then drift back into some other dream. (Light glows before
it rises.)

In the hollow, shrubs are under siege by an army of red
ants.

Now, all you know is this: on a long journey you would
carry cups,

clouds full of cups for rainy weather. They would be
better than hands, the groping limbs of a green tree

that follow you like reluctant strangers.

And this silence. The silence before the dumb speak.

That moment when the wind is up, drawing everything, even

silence, into itself.

That moment that passes, but lingers like a long afternoon
of rain and light, more rain and then more light,

taking you and leaving you.

One that reminds you of a time long ago. At night in an
armory:

the echo of a toggle switch reverberating in a makeshift
dance hall full of braille microphones.

HIGHts

Jeff Nelson

Pull the quarters from your eyes
and watch the silvery wings of light
carry you upwards to new heights
A perspective beyond time
As distant worlds fold as requested
white paper reflects the sun to your blinded vision
groping your way through soft curves
on a path well travelled, and well known
but never seen.

Jeff Nelson is a junior at Coe College and from Wilmette, Illinois. His major is English.

Untitled

Jeff Nelson

Spuds Mackenzie is really a chihuahua
I know The Star Mags said so
Fat women think all men want to sleep with them
that's gross!!!
The nights belong to Michelob.
Is that why the mornings belong to Folgers?
Did someone tell the Russians at Krenoble,
They wanted a Bud-lite?
Does Dominoes Pizza deliver pizza with onions?
That must ruin the resale on their cars.
If Lady Godiva weren't a chocolate
would you eat her?
I thought so.

Again I Spell Out Your Name

Jorge Teillier

(translated by Mary Crow)

Again I spell out your name
that begins with little blue bells
that I see climbing up the chapel out front
even with my eyes closed.

One grows tired of your affirming and renewing.
But at any rate the "yes" of the cedar
to its buds is moving. And the stickiest
little leaves on the ground
say we ought to love life. Isn't it true,
Ivan Karamazov?

I open the window to look at you, Spring,
you who bring cats to wallow
near the flowering poet's crown. And you laugh
showing your clean and rounded knees
like treasure islands.

In shirt sleeves before you laugh,
how I desire to fly with earth--an acrobatic toy!

And I spell out your name again
that begins with the little blue bell vine.

Jorge Teillier has published a total of 12 books. The most recent one is "Letters for Queens of Other Springs".

Mary Crow was a past winner of a Poetry Fellowship from the NEA, and has just completed an anthology.

At Aunt Meg's Funeral

David Curtis

At Aunt Meg's funeral cousins meet
To talk about their jobs and kids
And share a joke about looking just the same
As always, though always was years ago
When we were made to play together,
Not out of liking but because our parents
Were brothers and sisters after all,
So very close; today cousins meet only
(And every year brings more meetings)
In chapels, over graves and memories,
And cousins' children know each other
Not at all, which somehow pleases me.

It is coming apart this union,
This artifice of tribal weave
As its center unravels
And is rewoven in new clusters
Around new nuclei, and what makes me smile
Is not my current centrality
But the beauty of relentless fission.

So it was in Aunt Meg's silent parlor
Where every arm of every chair and sofa
Held a lace doily of intricate design,
More holes than knots but knots nonetheless,
Threads arriving at bunches symbolizing flowers,
I suppose, or butterflies, but just bunches of string then

David Curtis is an associate professor of English at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. He has been previously published.

To the boy who waited till he was alone
To take his jackknife out and cut
The single strings that held the bunches
In taut proximity, each to each,
And freed two bunches from one bond at least.
What relief those sundered bunches must have felt
Separated from an endless pattern,
Relaxed at last in unstraining isolation,
Like the way a child of lonely Sundays feels
Knife-wielding in an old maid's frozen parlor,
Like the way that death itself must be.

Poetic License

David Curtis

is the liberty that elevates ignorance
to art, to shout any bigotry
you want and call it irony.
How they lap it up, hate;
to seem sensitive,
how they'll lick a villain's boots
so he kicks hard enough
with compression,
spits in time
or drools rhyme.
They never see or can be seen seeing
the tiny mustache and arm band,
the cap and bells
beneath the printed page
called by appearance poetry.
Who then is freer than I?
Lovers or maybe gods,
perhaps a cowboy with his horse,
for building a superior relationship
on oats.

Monya

Charles Aukema

Way out there in Seattle
damp and musky greens under gray
perpetual clouds and rain

conscious stream of interior
voices from back east
seep into cellar dreams

remember that ruined
estate your mother's lover
had back in the Jersey hills,

the Thanksgiving that never ended
the ride back to town
parked in a cornfield

crisp as new ironed sheets
in slow kiss

Charles Aukema is an associate professor of English at Coe College. He resides in Iowa City, Iowa.

Blue Foam

Charles Aukema

I see you leaping in the blue house
without curtains shades clothes
leaping
I can see you

leaping that last jump
terrified
body pushed forward
but hands pulling back

reins holding thoroughbred
saddlebred married divorced
horse cannot arise
long neck arched

nostrils flared and foaming
surge jump leap over
final bar
The sky was blue

as you
lay lady
lay on your back
broken in three

places I came
to you broken
in four blue dreams
The breaks were clean,

so you moved into the blue house
took a blue lover
wrote blue poems
without curtains shades clothes

I can see me
in there leaping
again leaping
in blue foam

next time
paint the house red

Tongue-Tied Roundel

Charles Aukema

The seagulls keep flying back and forth
and I sit here, watching you
fish for old black and blue
lovers swimming north

up the Maryland coast. Of corth
I'm tongue-tied, nothin' to do
among seagulls flying back and forth
but sit here, watching you

cast your line. For what it's worth,
you can drag up that whole worm-eaten crew
and slice `em into a witch's brew
of sad chowder. It's time to change course
when seagulls keep flying back and forth.

August

Hugh Steinberg

walkaway walkaway
like this, and this
 and this
all night all night
walkaway walkaway
 till love and fear
 fear and everything
 fear in the air
humidity and heat thunder
 condense
 and trickle
 down the windowpanes
cool and sweet, slow, patient
 we were sitting in traffic
and you just let the radio play
whatever the station had to sing.

Hugh Steinberg currently resides in Plainsboro, New Jersey.

Fox Mountain Woman

P.L. Sorensen

Snowblind mercy eludes
the tattered frame
behind my window
on top of Fox Mountain.

I built this cabin
some thirty years ago,
felling the oak and
mixing the mortar
to seal out the world.

I chiseled the stone
of the hearth which
warms me and the
chimney which carries
my single message
to those below:

message of the hoarfrost.

My blue and brown
handsewn wool shirt
covers muscles reft of shape,
as threadbare as passion.

Snowflakes begin to
crystallize the pane

P.L. Sorensen is a senior at Coe College and currently living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Her majors are English and Psychology.

while my world,
a cavern of stale breath,
cools an old woman's hands.

Beyond my window
I see the red-grey fox
pad cautiously toward the
cache of chicken bones.

She quickly scans the brush
for any other who would sniff,
then ravage the scraps.

Like me, she remains here,
a part of this mountain,
timeless as she stalks
trails, preserves balance.

Mountain of morning sunrise,
woman of midday blaze,
fox of evening veil:
consorts, snowbound.

The first person you come to should be you.

Be selfish: I am.

There's something about an hysterical woman that makes you not want to wait for a cab.

August Artifacts

P.L. Sorensen

Winter air steals my heart
as I drip the August night
in solitude under the stars
igniting the fiery memory.

Do you think of me while
waning summer moonlight
casually casts shadows
on the ocean's rock shore,
or am I a fleeting figment
of chilled night air carried
to another time, another place?

The plan was so perfect,
 the emotions so intense,
 the love so true,
the time so wrong.

Are we artifacts
to be excavated by others
and slowly turned in hand,
observed for measurable value,
and then dropped in the dust
to remain dormant until
curiosity picks us for display?

Will we be shown separately,
 side-by-side,
 never-touching,
each an example of beauty,
but never together,

never together

in the Winter air of the August night?

Marriage

Janet McCann

Your shipwreck eyes have no beacons.
I should know by now
the slow-moving drifts of mind
that cloud those moons, the
dangerous passages North, the glaciers.

Yes, I refused to embark
without protection, a few trees,
an axe, my own sextant,
some incantations and my book of signals.

Still I have been lost for years, drifting
toward those dark waters where the rudderless
ships all come at last. It is time
to find another casual island,
rename it home.

Janet McCann has had poems and chapbooks published and she teaches at Texas A & M University.

Tender Toilet Tissue

Elmer Suderman

"That toilet tissue you bought
is coarse, rough,
too scabrous
for my taste,"
my father overheard my brother,
home from college,
complain to mother.
"I don't know what scabrous means,"
my father said,
"but rough and coarse
I understand.
But I don't need to be educated
like you
to know that if you'd have had
to use corn cobs
which was a little like using sandpaper
or even the slick pages
of the Sears Roebuck catalog
when all the others were
already used up
you wouldn't complain
about a little thing
like toilet paper
too rough for your
tender overeducated
ass."

Elmer Suderman is a professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. He has published poems, short stories, and essays.

Brilliant Greens Here and There Distinct

Erin Wells

The leaves reeled, their lighter undersides
traced figures uphill in the thunderstorm
that murdered a long summer drought: fireworks
echoed the rawness of cannons on the river.

Insects drew lines, July's droning contours;
wide-branched woods ringed the yard lights
and called slamming shadows to the garden wall.

The lawn stood up from the woods
with two intimate, symmetrical maples:
behind our outdoor supper
fast traffic hissed out of town, leaving
the Independence Day crowd staring at the air.
On a quieter night we might have heard
the approach of a single car five minutes before
the crickets stopped in its lights.

Gravel winked like machines beside the highway:
mowed grass leaned in its shoulder and my breath
was named: its taste turned to roads and teeth--
I'll change like one firefly in the dark.

Erin Wells is currently a senior at Coe College and from Shullsburg, Wisconsin. Her majors are Art and English.

Don't Mind the Weather

Erin Wells

(May 1988)

Time-changed moonlight longer than my arm
is haunting the maples, the new leaves,
to gorgeous howling things in reclining dusk.
The streets of February and an Eastern spring
smelled like millions: now the evening carries
grain and blue electricity: ozone, wet chrome
and the train yard full of whistles,
close to me and thunder.

Rusty attraction is boiling
in the dust behind my ribs.
Handsome night and its companion silent
knowing moon construct a cool embrace
separate from the watchfulness,
the nakedness of summer buzzing
too early in watery May weeds.

Away on a thin road
distance and inexperience color and take breath.
At six-thirty-five on a Tuesday evening
the sun lowered: its pleasant, sullen heat
dropped train tracks, wood smoke
and these last lighted routes.
There's sadness in missing music:
mournful, wonderful licks fading
true and clear and tired.

Winter Road

William Norine

I walk a road in winter,
As a crystal shroud of blue
Gleams through the charcoal sleep of empty trees;
An early twilight breeze gently sweeps the hue.
I tuck the warm butter of the moon
Inside my coat
And crunch by sifting vespers in the pines.
I hear in the wind, darkly, the violet wisp of an evening tune.
But I'm bound for a sip of scotch before the night;
I'm going to drink the bubbles of my dreams.
It's not for me to know how long this winter road
Will offer warmth and solace at its end,
But I've no cause not to sup with thanks tonight
For the window glow still within my sight.

William Norine currently practices law in New York City and is the author of six collections of poetry.

A Thaw

William Norine

In a winter thaw
on a sullied city corner,
I saw a pool of water
wrinkle down the sidewalk gulley
in the wind.
It made black angles beneath a tiny squall.
The fleeting wet windfall
was like a fresh stream of verse from a gentle friend;
a poem made no less deep by what its liquid lines reflected:
a sudden glint of spring I'd not expected.

Johnny, Johnny!

William Norine

Oh Johnny, Johnny!

(He blew his head off in the rusty shell
of an old Studebaker
that was planted in the forgotten sand of his daddy's farm,
and though it's been many many years,
I still walk by sometimes in summer haze
and wonder whether the sound of a swarm of locusts

in the yellow field

is really Johnny's hacksaw on the breeze,
as he saws his 12-gauge down to size
(soon to take all by surprise
with his demise).

Oh Johnny, my dear Johnny,
it surely is a searing heat that beats,
and that melts the tar and bakes the ruddy sand
along the road.

And I can hear beneath the bitter sun-blue
the zip and zang of life among the promiscuous weeds
that horde our land-
that curl around the rotting refuse of our lives,
and cover the dust of our dark desires.

Oh Johnny, what is it about these sizzling summer days
that brings to the fore the bristle and the brawn
that we build our fragile dreams upon?
Sometimes I hear in the sun what you surely must have heard
(if you heard anything in the sun at all).

Melville Visits the Pyramids

Ann Struthers

Melville rides a donkey with other tourists,
a pith helmet, green glasses and a scarf
shielding him from the desert sun,
sees the massive stones set together like a puzzle,
is awed, depressed, climbs part way up a smaller one
and gazes out on the ridged waves of sand
stretching toward the brass horizon,
rides that stone boat across the sea of nothing
before him, desolate as the sea inside his skull.
Far below in a secret room in the Great Pyramid
Khufu's sacred cedar ship is hidden,
its twenty-four seats for oarsmen,
its mahogany deck where the dead king
lay on his funeral journey up the Nile,
the dust of the rigging, the rags
of the silken sail,
like the sacred ship hidden in his chest
which was steering him on the unexplicable journey.

Ann Struthers is an associate professor of English at Coe College. She has been published by *The New Yorker* and her newest book is titled *Stoneboat*.

The Greatest Love Story Ever Told

Ann Struthers

Nothing's like Romeo and Juliet--
passion so fast, so complete, it defies
formality, circumspection, sense, gets
the old nurse mumbling two husbands, and flies
in the face of interdiction. It's bright
hopes, bad timing, but sweet love is noble
even with poison, and the sword's quick bite
is scarcely murder when the heart's troubled!
The feuding parents get what they deserve;
so do you if you accept it, deceive
yourself that love is everything. Reserve
something in your first dance. Keep it; believe
that even love has reason. You deserve
long life, warm nights, children. A cold dagger
is a one-time lover, cruel forever.

"Like a Moored Boat"

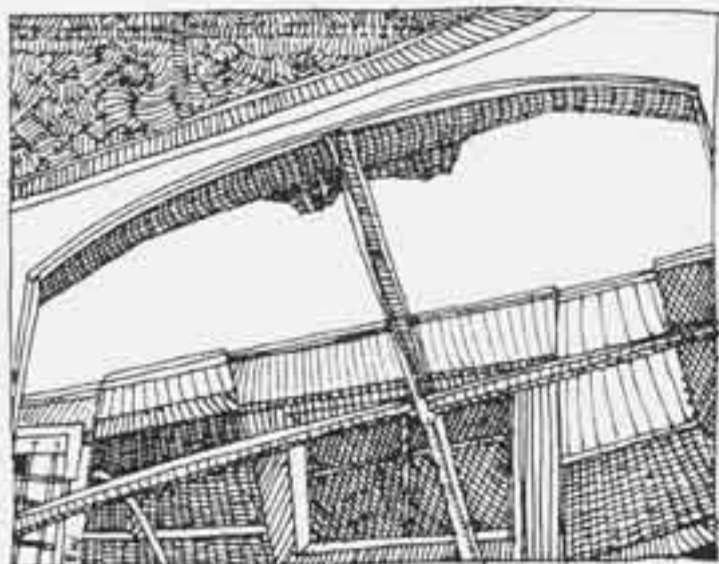
Calvin and Harriet Beecher Stowe

Ann Struthers

Depression was their first child--
Calvin Stowe, professor of Biblical literature,
poor in pocket, rich in despair, spent
most of his life trying to write his first book.
He comforted Harriet
when she, too, felt the desperate hands
of the clinically depressed. Passionate,
their only birth control was abstinence.
A whirlwind reunion after the sanitarium
and she was pregnant again--

the grey cycle of "sour milk, sour meat,
sour everything" beginning again.
There was never enough money. She wrote
stories to stave off their debtors.
In 1851 she had visions. Saw "Uncle Tom's Cabin"
and copied it down like a scribe.
Became famous, but shut herself up every morning
and wrote quickly to support their seven children,
too modest to pray for a second divine inspiration.

One baby died of cholera; Henry drowned at Dartmouth;
Georgianna, addicted to morphine by the doctor,
died of an overdose; alcoholic Frederick disappeared.
When Calvin died in '86, she stopped writing,
meandered the by-roads picking wild flowers,
humming like Ophelia. Mistook any man in uniform
for the son who fought in the Civil War. Forgot



FICTION

The Young Custodian

Richard Vance

He takes the freight elevator
to the bargain basement
where he begins to sweep.
In khaki workpants and flannel shirt,
barefoot,
he glides down the aisles
with pushbroom and headphones,
a cassette player hooked to his belt.
He sweeps to Mozart
between racks of cheap clothes
and crumbling mannequins,
to Linda Ronstadt
past bins of paperback romances
and vinyl purses,
to James Taylor
under mobiles:
SAVE! BUY! NOW!
He sweeps as a painter paints a meadow,
each day more attuned to its subtleties,
its cycles,
and just as an artist
feels the pull
of timelessness,
so he floats at dawn
in the still of the department store--
and hears birds
and feels breezes
and sees wildflowers
in the stained linoleum.

Richard Vance is from Lititz, Pennsylvania and his poetry has appeared in a number of magazines. He juggles his time between the business world and writing.

Fiction Print - Erin Wells

Make 'Em Laugh

Johanna Ellsworth

"Please excuse my habit of cracking jokes - they might not be funny," said the teacher.

"We'll laugh anyway," said the students.

"I hope you're not offended if I make a joke about dropping a missile - it might cause some bad feelings," said the president.

"We'll laugh anyway," said his cabinet.

"I'm thinking about making a practical joke - it might start a war and result in the destruction of our nation," said the dictator.

"That's okay," said the people. "We'll laugh anyway."

Anne Ellsworth resides in Stuttgart, West Germany where she is a thirty year old freelance translator and university student; she studies American Literature and Psychology.

Das Andekende Denken

William Robert Mullins

I

Tyler Rust A Peculiar Something

There was a moon. There were clouds covering it.

Tyler Rust stood at his window, saw the moon, and clouds, and never thought they could be different things.

Tyler Rust never slept anymore. He couldnt have said what sleep was, didnt remember it well. Occassionally he was aware that he'd drifted off, that there was an emptiness, a discrepancy between this thing now and that last thing then, which he'd just been doing.

Tyler never thought of that emptiness too long. Something else would be there. For this thing now, Tyler was wandering in his mansion, though he didnt think that it was his, couldnt remember the mansion...

The doors to the rooms of the halls were all closed, many locked, so that Tyler wouldnt hurt himself with something he couldnt do or remember anymore. He walked on toward the room at the end of the hall, where the sun would be.

Tyler didnt remember that he was seventy three years old, didnt remember that his sons had grown up, didnt know that he was alone in his mansion with his servants, or even what servants were, or what it meant to be alone with them.

Tyler remembered ashes.

Tyler Rust had been to a cricket match, once. It seemed to last without end, tedious, alien to someone who'd seen Ruth, Maris and Mantle in one lifetime as a Yankee fan. Tyler thought it fitting that at the end they burned the stumps. He was told by his host, an anglophilic layabout do-nothing, that the ashes were a prize.

"Why?" Tyler wanted to ask. "What do they do with the ashes?"

Bill Mullins is a junior at Coe College.

Tyler could see a man in the hall, tall thin grey, withering... The man hadn't come from any particular place. Tyler had slowed and almost stopped in the hall, then the man was there, old, with a vague golden shape framing him in the dark hall. Tyler and the old man stood watching each other, considering. Tyler spoke to him.

"Is Genevieve ready yet?"

Tyler remembered that he and Genevieve were going sailing.

He didn't remember who Genevieve was. He thought about a young woman with red hair, a sailboat named the Kollensrud, and a whisper in a language he didn't understand anymore.

The old man didn't answer Tyler, but neither did he turn away. Tyler should have recognized this old man; the face, everything about him, was familiar. Tyler smiled, happy to see someone he knew ...someone.

"Don't you remember me?"

The man seemed to be mumbling a bit. No words came out, but... Tyler noticed the man smiled in return, remembering him, and the pair laughed together.

Already the darkness was a bit greyer. The sun would be coming up soon. Tyler began down the hall again, to the room where the sun would be.

Tyler invited his friend to follow along, but looking behind again he couldn't see the old man. He wasn't there, and Tyler couldn't see any place in particular where he should have gone.

Tyler stopped again, but didn't think of it for too long, remembering he should go to the end of the hall and wait in the room. Tyler didn't remember he was waiting for the sun to be there.

In the last room were new things Tyler had never seen before. There were three walls of windows, windows stretched from the floor and onto the tilted ceiling. The fourth wall was long, empty, with a single painting. There was a table in the middle of the room with a Peculiar Something alone on it.

The painting was of tall buildings, the sun, ships in the water, and a man walking along the docks with his head down, a child walking to his side. The child stared upwards in wonder, at the sun and buildings, maybe, or at the ships.

In the painting, Tyler couldn't see the sun, not in the sky, but he could remember that it was there, with the ships. Its light came up off the docks, flashed in the child's wonder eyes, reflecting bright clear blue water and the sails of the ships...

There was a Peculiar Something alone on the table. Tyler Rust felt at it, amazed at its accidents - the bluegrey color, so easy to touch. When Tyler tapped it, it felt hollow. When he took it up, cradled it, he could feel there was Something Else inside it.

Tyler cradled the Something, careful not to drop it, because he knew that lots of things break, remembering himself that he'd broken lots of things, especially when he'd dropped them.

The peculiar bluegrey Something was the only object left for Tyler to find in the room where the sun would be. Tyler thought it was pale blue, as the sky outside then, or maybe it was light grey, as the clouds there now.

The Something had a lid which Tyler wanted to take off, so he could know what was inside of the hollowness. Maybe then he'd know what the Something was, if he found out what was inside. The lid of the peculiar thing was sealed. It wouldn't come off. Tyler kept the Something, not knowing what to do with it. With his fingers, Tyler felt an etching on the thing. There were words there. Tyler held the blue-greyness up to the windows so he could read in the ...

The sunlight.

Then the sun was there in the room with Tyler and the Something he cradled in his arms. Tyler gasped, then smiled and laughed, blinking as the sun came in all the windows.

Tyler Rust saw the dawn everyday, the sunset every night, and was never bored but only fascinated, because he couldn't remember ever seeing anything like either before.

II
Danielle:
A Familiar Someone

Tyler Rust sat outdoors having breakfast. He was warm, because the sun was still with him. He picked at his food -bread, something that looked of yellowness, some meat. Tyler didnt want to eat any of it. He poked at it and wondered what it was all for.

Someone sat across the table, a familiar Someone. The man was watching Tyler Rust. Each time Tyler would look up from the plate the familiar Someone would be looking at him.

The face looked nice to Tyler, pleasantly young, but old enough. Tyler would smile, and the Someone would smile back, then look thoughtful and serious. Tyler smiled again, and again, and once more... everytime getting the wavering smiling response. Tyler was pleased he could make Someone else be happy and smile that way.

The man had red hair, and looked like Someone younger, who Tyler Rust could not remember. Between smiles, the red haired man would glance at the Peculiar Something that Tyler had brought outside with him. The man looked confused, nervous at the Something being there, because he didnt understand it either and couldnt tell Tyler what it was, or why it was at the table. The familiar Someone wasnt able to get the lid off either, when Tyler'd asked him to try.

Tyler could see the yard beyond the familiar man, the hill terraced off in steps, circling down and down, to the lake at the bottom, with woods in the distance, the gotham skyline of NewYorkCity in the background over the trees.

A little girlchild was playing at the edge of the lake, running along the shore, in a spring skirt, long red hair, chasing desperately and laughingly after...

The sailboat.

Tyler Rust saw the sailboat caught by the wind, moving away, far out of anyone's reach now, moving toward the center, hopefully to the other shore.

Hopefully it wouldn't die calmed in the middle of the water, out of grasp with no wind to push it on.

The sailboat Kollensrud was slow on the waters without the wind, and everything crept with wonderful stillness. Genevieve was beautiful. Tyler hadn't seen her since the summer, visiting her in New York City. Now, in the Keys, for Christmas, she was more than he'd remembered.

Genevieve and Tyler climbed together into the still sails, with the sun setting behind them, bleeding into the water. The ocean was a warm color. The sail felt like canvas, and was warm. Tyler felt himself falling asleep as the waves rocked him.

IM COMING TO NEWYORK, Tyler told Genevieve.

WHEN?

WHEN THE SEMESTER ENDS.

FOR THE SUMMER AGAIN?

NO, WHEN THIS SEMESTER ENDS. IN JANUARY.

WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL?

I WANT TO BE WITH YOU IN NEWYORK INSTEAD.

"Danielle!"

The familiar Someone stood and waved at the red haired girl playing with the sailboats.

"Danielle!" he called, motioning her away from the water.

The girl paused, took a few more chasing steps after her sail, then turned and ran up the terrace toward Tyler.

Tyler felt at the Peculiar blue Something.

There were words written there.

"Hi Papaw Tyler!"

Tyler smiled to see Danielle climbing up to her seat at the breakfast table, cheerful and breathless, drinking a juice and coughing. The little girl turned sadly to Tyler.

"Papaw, why do you have to go away from home?"

The familiar Someone looked upset at the question.

"Because people do that," Tyler answered. "People go away from home."

The little girl mused it over.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going to New York City to see Genevieve," Tyler said happily.

"Do you mean Grandma Jigs?"

The man with red hair caught Danielle's attention before she could say anything more.

"Grandpa Tyler is going away because there's no one to take care of him now, and we don't want him to be alone."

Danielle began to argue. "We could take care of him. He should live at home."

"That was only for the few days after... That's only for now. Grandpa Tyler needs someone to be with him all the time."

Danielle was quiet. The man was still standing. He pushed in his chair and began to walk away.

"I have to call the... someone. Danielle, stay with Grandpa."

III

Genevieve:

Thinking That Recalls

"Is Grandma Jigs coming back?" Danielle asked.

Tyler couldn't remember when he began to call Genevieve by that name.

Danielle carried the odd sealed blue vase-like Something Grandfather Tyler had given her. She tried to hold onto Papaw's hand too, but the Something kept slipping away. Danielle had to let the old man's hand fall away to keep her grip on that Something.

Danielle thought the thing looked like a vase, but there wouldn't be any way to put flowers in it because the top wouldn't open. What would be in a vase that didn't have any flowers? There had been lots of flowers yesterday morning.

When Danielle let go of Papaw Tyler's hand, he lingered behind her. Tyler walked with distraction, looking at things around him, not ahead and down, where he was being led.

"Come on Papaw! You have to help me get my boat out of the water." Danielle tugged at him, bringing him along.

Danielle and Tyler stepped carefully down the tiered terrace of the lawn, down the steps which sloped and circled around in rings, leading down to the man-made lake below.

The sailboat was bumping along the far shore of the lake. There was no wind pulling at it anymore. The boat had crossed the whole of the lake and gone as far as it could, only to wash up against the land, and be tossed on the water.

Danielle sat the blue thing on the ground near the water, and began running along the last terrace circling Papaw's lake, wanting to catch the sailboat before a new wind came that might send it back out of reach.

Tyler sat next to the Peculiar Something, watching his redhaired granddaughter in the distance as she ran ahead in her innocent recklessness. Above the girl and the boat, far away and far above, Tyler could see NewYorkCity pressed against the cloudy clear sky.

Tyler Rust was frantic and confused that first time in newyork city. He entered on the bus through the suburbs, and could feel it as the rural calm faded, and the excitement began to grow (New York City). First, people, then traffic and a teasing glimpse of the skyline and its promise. Tyler grew anxious, not wanting to wait as the bus slowly moved toward the looming buildings... At the edges it could be felt (New York City!) The farther in, the closer Tyler got, the quicker the city became, more frantic...NEWYORKCITY!!

Then Tyler was inside, lost in the crowds at the station. He wandered about in the vague place, the middle of downtown, couldnt even find the subway that would take him to Genevieve. There was nothing for Tyler to do but wander, and no place for him to go. It was wonderful.

The tall narrow buildings reached above Tyler, for the sun and the clouds, they towered, so tall they seemed to curve, to quiver in anticipation. Then, unbelievably, in the throng, there was Genevieve, and Tyler struggled through the crowd to greet her.

Danielle brought the boat back to Papaw. Tyler was sitting at the water, with the flowerless vase, or Peculiar Something in his hands, looking up...

There was a soft breeze pushing at Tyler from behind, a warm breeze, that blew a thin cloud of dust off of the worn paths in the terraces... As Danielle set her sailboat on the dry shore, bits of ash in the breeze tugged at the sail, taking it no place.

"Papaw, do you want to go away from home?"

Papaw didnt answer her. He was looking at her but he wasnt saying anything. Daddy had told Danielle that Papaw forgot things now, that Grandma Jigs was the only one who could talk to him, and now Papaw would have to go away someplace where he wouldnt be alone.

Danielle sat in the grass in front of Tyler. Tyler was looking at the Something, trying to read the words on it. He knew the words, but didnt know anymore what they meant.

Tyler remembered a red haired woman in the crowd whispering the words to him, so that everyone around wouldnt hear, words for him.

"Das andenkende Denken" Tyler read, tracing the letters on the bluegrey surface.

"What did you say Papaw?"

"Das andenkende denken," Tyler whispered.

"Das anda-kenda-dinkin?" Danielle whispered in return.

Tyler looked up at the sound of the whisper. He watched Danielle in wonder. She was sitting with her legs under her, and in her hands she held a sailboat. She had long red hair.

"Do you know what this is?" Tyler asked, holding up the Peculiar Something.

Danielle shook her head. "I think it used to be a vase for flowers," she said.

"There's Something Else inside it," Tyler said. He shook the thing, felt something shapeless shifting about in there. Danielle looked at the Peculiar Something too. It couldn't be understood, couldn't be looked inside, and the words on it didn't make any sense.

"Papaw, is Grandma Jigs coming home again?"

"I'm going to the city to be with her."

When Genevieve found Tyler in the streets she took him in a cab to the Empire State Building, no place else first. Smoke and ash was rising someplace below them, billowing about them, obscuring the view, granting only glimpses, then fading, revealing the city. Under the sun, at the top of the city, with the clouds around them and below them, Genevieve showed Tyler all of New York.

Danielle sat quietly, thinking. After a bit, she stood up, walked to the water, and began playing with her sailboat again. The sun was hot, and the water under the boat made her blink.

Tyler set the Peculiar Something aside, never thinking about anything for too long anymore. Something else would be there. For this thing now, Tyler sat near the water with Danielle.

Tyler remembered ashes.

Danielle remembered flowers.

The two sat a few yards apart near the water, happily pushing the sailboat back and forth between them.

Bloodfall

T. Coraghessan Boyle

It started about three-thirty, a delicate tapping at the windows, the sound of rain. No one noticed: the stereo was turned up full and Walt was thumping his bass along with it, the TV was going, they were all stoned, passing wine and a glowing pipe, singing along with the records, playing Botticelli and Careers and Monopoly, crunching crackers. I noticed. In that brief scratching silence between songs, I heard it--looked up at the window and saw the first red droplets huddled there, more falling between them. Gesh and Scott and Isabelle were watching TV with the sound off, digging the music, lighting cigarettes, tapping fingers and feet, laughing. On the low table were cheese, oranges, wine, shiny paperbacks, a hash pipe. Incense smoked from a pendant urn. The three dogs sprawled on the carpet by the fireplace, Siamese cats curled on the mantel, on the bench, the chair. The red droplets quivered, were struck by other, larger drops falling atop them, and began a meandering course down the windowpane. Alice laughed from the kitchen. She and Amy were peeling vegetables, baking pies, uncanning baby smoked oysters and sturgeon for hors d'oeuvres, sucking on olive pits. The windows were streaked with red. The music was too loud. No one noticed. It was another day.

When I opened the door to investigate, the three dogs sprang up and ran to me, tails awag; they stopped at the door, sniffing. It was hissing down now, a regular storm: it streamed red from the gutter over the door, splashing my pantleg. The front porch smelled like raw hamburger. My white pants were spotted with red. The dogs inched out now, stretching their necks: they lapped at the red puddle on the doorstep. Their heads and muzzles were soon slick with it. I slammed the door on them and walked back into the living room. Gesh and Scott were passing the pipe. On the TV screen were pictures of starving children: distended bellies, eyes as big as their bony heads, spiders' arms and spiders' legs: someone was laughing in the kitchen. "Hey!" I

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shouted. "Do you dig what's happening outside?" Nobody heard me. The windows were smeared with red: it fell harder. Gesh looked up to pass the pipe. "What happened to you?" he said. "Cut yourself?"

"No," I said. "It's raining blood."

Gesh was in the shower when the TV screen went blank. Earlier, when everybody had crowded around the open door, holding out their hands to it as it dripped down from the eaves, wowing and cursing and exclaiming, Gesh had pushed through and stepped out, down the stairs and out under the maple tree. His white pants, shirt and shoes turned pinkish, then a fresh wet red, the color of life. "It's fantastic out here!" he yelled. We held back. In a minute or two he came back up the steps, his face a mosaic mortered in blood, the clotted hair stuck to his forehead. He looked like the aftermath of an accident, or a casualty of war. "How do I look?" he said., licking the wet red from his lips. "Like the Masque of the Red Death or something? Huh?" Scott was taking pictures with his Nikkromat. The smell when Gesh stepped in reminded me of a trip I took with my mom and dad when I was in the third grade. An educational trip. Every weekend we took an educational trip. We went to the slaughterhouse. Gesh smelled like that when he came in. Amy made him take a shower with baby shampoo and peppermint soap. She laid out a fresh white shirt and pants for him, and his white slippers. Scott ran downstairs to the darkroom to develop his pictures. Basically he does black and whites of slum kids in rakish hats giving him the finger; old slum women, the fingers stewed to the bone; old slum men; fingering port pints in their pockets. These he enlarges and frames, and hangs in the dining room over my 125-gallon aquarium. The rabbit fur is dyed black.

Walt took a break for a minute to change records and adjust the treble on his amp. In the ringing silence that ensued, we realize that the TV was emitting a thin high-pitched whistle. There was no picture. "What the fuck?" said Isabelle. She jumped up, flipped through the channels. All gray, all emitting the same whistle. Isabelle's eyes were bleared. "Let's try the radio!" she said. It too: the same insidious whine. "The phone!" she shouted. The phone

hummed softly in her ear, my ear, Walt's ear, Amy's ear. It was the same sort of hum you get from an empty conch shell. "It's dead," I said. We stood there mute, staring at the receiver suspended from its cord, clickless and ringless. We theorized:

Maybe it's a National Emergency--

Maybe it's D-day--

Maybe it's the Nuclear Holocaust--

Maybe it's Judgement Day--

Maybe it's the rockets they're sending up--

But we all suspected the soundness of these extrapolations. Probably it was just some new form of pollution, and a few wires down in the storm. Gesh appeared in fresh white, smelling like a candy cane. He walked deliberately to the pipe, thumbed in a chunk of hash, and sucked the flame of a match through it. Isabelle, quickly sedated, picked out a couple of albums and Walt ducked under the embroidered shoulder strap of his bass--the blast of music sealed the room, stopped the ticking at the panes. Alice brought in the hors d'oeuvres, a comforting smell of exotic dishes abubble in the kitchen. I sat, smoked, and ate.

In the morning I slipped early from the warmth of the nest (Alice's tender buttock, Gesh's hairy satyr's foot framed there beneath the sheets), wrapped my white robe over my pajamas, stepped into my fluffy white slippers, and went downstairs, as I always do on Saturdays, to watch cartoons. My mind was a tabula rasa, wire-brushed with intoxicants; my dreams had been of cool colors, the green of the forest, the cerulean of the summer sky. In the living room, a pinkish light suffused the slats of the blinds. The window was like stained glass. In the early morning quiet, the red splashes drummed against it. I was stunned; and all alone there, at that early hour, frightened. Then I heard the scratching at the door: The dogs had been out all night. Without thinking I opened the door and they rushed in, great living lumps of raw flesh, skinned carcasses come to life, slick with blood, their bellies bloated with it. "No, no, get down!" But they were already up on their hind legs, pawing affectionately

at me, their fetid breath in my face. Their teeth were stained red, blood hung in the sockets of their eyes. "Get down, Goddammit!" My robe, my pajamas, my fluffy white slippers were ruined: the blood crept through the white cotton like a stain through water. I kicked out at the dogs. They backed off and shook themselves--a fine bloodmist spotted the walls, the white rugs of the hallway, the potted plants. The dogs grunted, eased themselves down and licked their paws. Blood seeped from beneath them. I felt sick from the stink of it, and so upset with the mess that tears began to crowd my eyes--exasperated, hopeless tears. The hallway looked like a sacrificial altar, my arms like the gory High Priest's. I would wash and go back to bed, face life later.

In the bathroom I stepped carefully out of my clothes in an effort to avoid staining the bathmat. It was no use. Blood oozed from the fluffy white slippers. I wiped my hands and face on the lining of the robe, bundled everything together and stuffed it into the hamper. Seven electric toothbrushes, seven cups, and seven hotcombs hung on the rack over the sink. We kept the seven electric shavers, each in its own carrying case, stacked neatly in the cabinet. I stepped into the shower, the tap of blood against the bathroom window loud in my ears, and turned on hot, full force. Eyes pressed tight, face in the spray, I luxuriated in the pure rush of the water. I'd always taken a great deal of pleasure in showering and bathing, in being clean--it reminded me of my mom and the baths she used to give, sponging my crotch, kissing my wet little feet...but there was something wrong--that odor--good God, it was in the water supply! Horrified, I leaped from the shower. In the steamed-over mirror I was newborn, coated in blood and mucus, pulled hot from the womb. Diluted blood streamed down my body, puddled at my feet. I lifted the toilet seat and puked into the red bowl. Hung my head and puked; puked and cried, until Amy came down and found me there.

Gesh sat back in the stuffed chair. He wore his white robe with the gold monogram, and his slippers. The bloodfall hammered on. "We've got to look at the precedents," he said. There was a pie and a souffle in the oven. We were in the living room, sipping apricot nectar, munching buns. Alice, in the

entrance hall with detergent and scrub brush, was muttering like Lady Macbeth over the carpet stains. "What precedents?" I asked.

"Like all of that shit that went down in Egypt about thirty-five hundred years ago."

Walt was tuning his bass: dzhzhzhzhtt. dzhzhzhzhtt. He picked a rumbling note or two and looked up. "You're thinking of frogs, brother. Millions of frogs. Frogs under the bed, frogs in the flour, frogs in your shoes, clammy frogs' flippers slapping at your ass when you take a shit."

"No, no--there was something about blood too, wasn't there?"

"Yeah, said Walt. "Christ turned it into water. Or was it wine?"

"You know what happened in Egypt?! You want to know?" My voice cracked. I was getting hysterical. A cat jumped into my lap. I tossed it over my shoulder. Everything in the room had a red cast, like when you put on those red cellophane glasses as a kid, to read 3D comic books.

Gesh was staring at me: "So what happened?"

"Never mind," I said.

Amy howled from the basement. "Hey you guys, guess what? The stuff is ankle-deep down here and it's ruining everything. Our croquet set, our camping equipment, our doll house!" The announcement depressed us all, even Gesh. "Let's blow a bowl of hash and forget about it," he suggested.

"Anyhow," said Walt, "it'll be good for the trees." And he started a bass riff with a deep throbbing note--the hum of it hung in the air even after the lights went out and the rest of his run had attenuated to a thin metallic whisper. "Hey!" he said. From the kitchen: "Oh shit!" A moment later, Isabelle came in wringing her hands. "Well. The breakfast's ruined. We've got a half-baked pie and a flat souffle sitting in the oven. And a raw-eggy blob purporting to be eggnog in the blender."

There was a strange cast to the room now. Not the gloom-gray of a drizzly day, but a deep burgundy, like a bottle of wine.

"Well? What am I going to do with it all--give it to the dogs?"

The dogs glanced up briefly. Their hair was matted and brown with dried blood. They were not hungry.

Scott whined: "I'm hungry."

I was scared. I'd been scared all along, scared from the moment I'd noticed the first drops on the window. I looked at Gesh, our leader: he was grinning in that lurid light, sucking reflectively on the pipe. "Don't hassle it, Iz," he said. "Mark and me'll pop down to the deli and get some sandwiches."

"I don't want to go out there--I'll lose my lunch."

"Come on, don't be such a candy ass. Besides, it'll give us a chance to talk to somebody, find out what's going on." He stood up. "Come on Mark, get your boots."

Outside was incredible. Red sky, red trees, red horizon: the whole world, from the fence to the field to the mountains across the river, looked like the inside of some colossal organ.

I felt like an undigested lump of food--Jonah in the belly of the whale. There was the stench of rotting meat. The bloodfall streamed down hard as hail. Under the eaves, on the porch, we were fooling with our rain hats, trying to get up the nerve to run for the car. Gesh too, I could see, was upset. Yesterday it had been a freak, today a plague. "Well what do you think bro--make a run for it?" he said.

We ran--down the steps and into the mud. I slipped and fell, while Gesh hustled off through the blinding downpour. It was deep, lying about the low spots in nasty red-black puddles. I could feel it seeping in, trickling down my leg, inside the boot: warm, sticky, almost hot. The smell of putrefaction nauseated me. I choked back the apricot nectar and biscuits, struggled up, and ran for the car. When I got there Gesh was standing beside the door, blood-drops thrashing about him. "What about the seats?" he said. "If we stain 'em with this shit, it'll never come off."

"Fuck it. Let's just get out of this--"

"I mean I got a lot of scratch in this here BMW bro--"

The wind-whipped blood flailed our yellow slickers, dripped from the flapping brims of our silly yellow rain hats. We both climbed in. The engine started smooth, like a vacuum cleaner; the wipers clapped to and fro; the

windshield smeared. "Let's drive to the desert...the Arizona desert, and get away from this...shit," I said. My voice was weak. I felt ill. Automatically I reached for the window. "Hey--what the fuck you doing?" Gesh said. It streamed down the inside of the glass, bubbled over the upholstered door, puddled in the ashtray on the armrest. I rolled the window up. "I feel sick," I said. "Well for Christ's sake, puke outside." I didn't. The thought of hanging my head out in that insane unnatural downpour brought it up right there. In the sealed compartment the bouquet of the vomit and stink of the mud-blood on our shoes was insupportable. I retched again: then dry retched. "Oh shit," said Gesh.

"I'm going back in," I said, the edge of a whimper in my voice.

Five minutes later, Gesh returned, cursing. Scott was on his way out the door, three cameras strung around his neck, to get some color slides of the dripping trees. "What's the matter," he said. "You back already?"

"Couldn't see a fucking thing. I got down the end of the drive and smacked into the stone wall. The wipers are totally useless - they just smear the crap all over the windshield. It's like looking through a finger painting."

"So what happened to the car?"

"It's not too bad--I was only going about two miles an hour."

Alice emerged from the kitchen, a pair of lighted candles in her hand, egg-walked to avoid spilling the hot wax.. "Gesh! Take your slicker off--you're dripping that shit all over the floor...Couldn't make it, huh?"

"No."

"What are we going to do for food?" she asked.

"Scoop it up!" Walt shouted from the living room. "Scoop it up and pour it into balloons. Make blood pudding."

I was sitting in a chair, weak, stinking, blood crusting the lines of my hands. "I'm fed up with it," I said. "I'm going up to lie down."

"Good idea," said Gesh. "Think I'll join you."

"Me too," said Alice. "Can't do anything here--can't even read or listen to music."

"Yeah," said Walt. "Good idea. Save me a pillow."

"Me too," said Amy.

Scott stepped from beneath the cameras, strung them across the back of my chair. He yawned. Isabelle said it would be better if we all went to bed. She expressed a hope that after a long nap things would somehow come to their senses.

I woke from fevered dreams (a tropical forest: me in jodhpurs and pith helmet--queasy-faced--sharing a drought of warm cow's blood and milk with tree-tall Masai warriors) to a rubicund dimness, and the gentle breathing of the rest of the crew. They loomed, a humpbacked mound in the bed beside me. My ears were keen. Still it beat on the roof, sloshed down the gutters. Downstairs, somewhere, I heard the sound of running water, the easy soughing gurgle of a mountain stream. I sat up. Were we leaking? I slipped into Amy's slippers, lit a candle, crept apprehensively down the stairs. I searched the hallway, living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom: nothing. A cat began wailing somewhere. The basement! The cat bolted out when I opened the door, peered down the dark shaft of the stairway. The flood was up nearly to the fifth step, almost four feet deep, I guessed, and more churning audibly in. The stench was stifling. I slammed the door. For the first time I thought of the dike: why 'sblood! if the dike went--it must be straining at its foundations this very minute! I envisioned us out there, heroically stacking sandbags, the wind in our faces, whipping our hair back, the rising level of the flood registered in our stoic eyes--then I thought of the tepid plasma seething in my nose, my mouth, my eyes, and felt ill.

Gesh came down the stairs, scratching himself sleepily. "How's it?" he said. I advised him to take a look at the cellar. He did. "Holy shit! We've got to do something--start making barricades, strapping floatables together, evacuating women and children--and dogs!" He paused. "I'm starving," he said. "Let's go see what we got left, bro." From the kitchen I could hear him taking inventory: "Two six-packs of warm Coke; a jar of Skippy peanut butter, crunchy--no bread; ten cans of stewed tomatoes; half a box of granola; a quart of brown

rice; one tin of baby smoked oysters. Not a fuck of a lot. Hey Mark, join me in a late afternoon snack?"

"No thanks. I'm not hungry."

We sat around the darkened living room that night, a single candle guttering, the sound of bloodfall ticking at the windows, the hiss of rapids rushing against the stone walls of the house, an insidious sloshing in the basement. Seepage had begun at the front door, and Isabelle had dumped a fifty-pound bag of kitty litter there in an attempt to absorb the moisture. Atop that was a restraining dike of other absorbent materials: boxes of cake mix, back issues of *Cosmopolitan*, electric blankets, Italian dictionaries, throw pillows, three dogs, a box of Tampax. A similar barricade protected the basement door. When Gesh had last opened the window to look, the red current eddying against the house had reached almost to the windowsill. We were deeply concerned, hungry, bored.

"I'm bored," said Amy.

"I'm hungry," whined Scott. "And I'm sick of Coke. I want a hot cup of Mu tea."

"It stinks in here," carped Isabelle. "Reminds me of when I was fifteen, working in the meat department at the A & P."

"My teeth are gritty," Alice said. "Wish the water and the damned toothbrushes would work."

Blood began to drip from the windowsill in the far corner of the room. It puddled atop the thirty-six inch Fischer speaker in the corner. One of the cats began to lap at it.

Walt paced the room, a man dislocated. Deprived of his bass, he was empty, devoid of spirit, devoid of personality. He was incapable now of contributing to our meaningful dialogue on the situation. Gesh, however, tried to amuse us, take our minds off it. He said it was just a simple case of old mother earth menstruating, and that by tomorrow, the last day of the moon's cycle, it would no doubt stop. He passed around a fifth of chateaufort and a thin joint. The pool beneath the door began to spread across the floor, creeping,

growing, fanning out to where we sat in a small circle, the candlelight catching the blood in our flared nostrils. Shocked silent, we watched its inexorable approach as it glided out from the barricade in fingerlike projections, seeking the lowest point. The lowest point, it appeared, was directly beneath the Naugahyde pillow upon which my buttocks rested. Slowly, methodically, the bulbous finger of blood stretched toward me, pointed at me. When it was about a foot away, I stood. "I'm going to bed," I said. "I'm taking two Tuinals. Try not to wake me."

It was morning when I woke. Gesh sat in a chair beside the bed, smoking a cigarette. The others slept. "It stopped," he said. He was right: the only sound was the sporadic drip-drip beyond the windows, a poststorm runoff. The celestial phlebotomy had ceased. "Good," was all I could manage. But I was elated, overjoyed, secure again! Life returned to normal!

"Hey--let's slip down to the deli and get some sandwiches and doughnuts and coffe and shit, sneak back, and surprise the rest of the crew," Gesh said.

Curiosity stirred me, and hunger too. But my stomach curdled at the thought of the gore and the stink, the yard like a deserted battlefield. I stared down at my pajama sleeve. Amy's sleeping wrist lay across mine. I studied the delicate contrast of her white wrist and the little pink and brown figures of cowboys on my pajamas. "Well? What do you say?" asked Gesh. I said I guessed so. We pulled on our corduroys, our white rubber boots, our mohair sweaters.

Downstairs the blood had begun to clot. In the hallway it was still sticky in places, but for the most part crusted dry. Outside a massive fibrinogenification was taking place under a dirt brown sky. Scabs like thin coats of ice were forming over the deeper puddles; the mud was crusting underfoot; fresh blood ran off in streams and drainage ditches; the trees drooled clots of it in the hot breeze. "Wow! Dig that sky, bro--" Gesh said. "Brown as a turd."

"Yeah," I said, "it's weird. But thank Christ it stopped bleeding."

Gesh started the car while I broke the scab-crust from the windshield; it flaked, and crumbled into dusty grains. I climbed in, laid some newspaper

over the day old vomit on the floor, steeled myself against the stench. Gesh accelerated in an attempt to back out from the wall: I could hear the wheels spinning. I poked my head out. We were stuck up to the frame in mud and gore. "Fuck it," Gesh said. "We'll take Scott's car." We started up the drive toward the other car. It was then that the first patsy lumps of it began to slap down sporadically; we reached the shelter of the porch just as it began to thunder down, heavy, feculent, and wet.

Upstairs we carefully folded our sweaters, pulled on our white pajamas, and sought out the warm spots in the huddled sleeping mass of us.

Dead on the Water

Cyrus Cramer

Landis glanced at his Rolex; it was five in the morning. The dew was a slight film between his boat shoes and the Hinkly's teakdeck. He felt the mist in the hair on his legs; his tan calves were damp beneath the cuff of his khaki Bermuda shorts. A short sleeve Polo shirt was enough in the slight morning chill.

From the bow he watched the fading vestiges of fog over the Massachusetts coast. He scuffed his foot across the spots of blood on the deck. "I hope I don't need to get the entire deck refinished," Landis mumbled into his coffee. He looked at the mounted barracuda; he raised his voice. "I'll have to be more careful," his first catch, Anita, hung over the hatchway.

Finishing his coffee he went below. He washed the mug in the galley's sink and put it away. In the chart room he sat down and turned on his computer. First he called up the captain's log; the password, Windhover, was the name of his yacht. Landis started anew entry:

Ship's Log July 15, 1987

The computer is working out well; this leg of the trip, alone, has been without incident. If the winds are favorable I should make Portsmouth by early this evening.

He left the log program and instructed the computer to weigh anchor. As he typed the command to raise the sails he heard the anchor winch crank. Leaving the computer on he went out to the cockpit.

Landis took the helm; with the slight breeze he sailed casually out of the small cove. "I hate to ruin a beautiful morning with the roar of an engine," he spoke to Anita.

Out of the cove the air picked up slightly; it was quiet on the morning sea. Floating wisps of mist slackened as the sun rose. The thirty-five foot Hinkly Pilot moved at five knots. He listened to the water swash against the bow.

Cy Cramer is a sophomore at Coe College.

Landis set the auto-pilot and went below deck. In the chart room he looked at the Maine and New Hampshire coast. The line of a black grease pencil marked, on the plastic case, a course from Palm Beach, Florida to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Taking a red wax pencil he circled the Isles of Shoals; they were just off shore of Portsmouth and Kittery, Maine.

He reached up and took the mike from the short wave radio. "This is the Windhover calling the marine operator," Landis took his thumb off the button.

The operator's voice cracked back to him, "This is the marine operator."

Landis read the number of the Portsmouth Yacht club from a piece of note paper.

"Thank you, I'm putting you through," the operator clicked off and Landis heard the ringing phone.

"Hello, Portsmouth Yacht Club, this is Erin."

"This is Landis Armstrong captain of the Windhover. I'll be arriving there this evening or early tomorrow; have my provisions been picked up?"

"Yes Mr. Armstrong." Erin answered.

"Good, I want to replenish my supplies and start the return trip Saturday."

"No problem. Is that all?" the girl asked.

"Yes, thank you," Landis turned the radio off and put the mike on its hook. He took a book, "Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings" from the cabin's small shelf.

From the chart room he went to the head. When he opened the small cabinet under the sink he discovered a woman's make-up bag. He returned to the deck; the wind had gained strength. The Windhover was heading nicely and moving at eight knots. Landis let the automatic pilot continue to keep the ship on course. He sat behind the binnacle and open the make-up kit.

There was a tube of zinc oxide and a bottle of dark tanning coconut oil, lipstick and an eyeliner pencil, and a toothbrush. Landis took the tanning lotion and the zinc oxide out of the bag.

Then he put both back and tossed the kit and its contents into the ocean. He watched as it sank quickly into the blue-green darkness.

He took the binnacle and headed North on a broad reach. Resetting the auto-pilot he leaned back against a blue flotation cushion and began to read "On Murder as a Fine Art".

The climbing sun was hot; he put sun block on. The sun and the sea's gentle rocking had a soporific effect on Landis; he drifted off to sleep. The book fell to the deck of the cockpit.

Landis awoke with a start; the sun was just beginning its descent. The Windhover was becalmed; there was not even the slightest zephyr. The sails hung, like motionless shrouds, from the mast.

He looked about him; the water was palcid. There was no other boat within sight. His arms and legs smarted, red from exposure. In the silence he lowered the sails.

"I don't have to be in the office until next Wednesday." Landis scratched his chin. "Shall we wait Anita?"

In the chart room Landis sat at the computer. He added to the morning entry in the ship's log:

7/15/87

The air has been dead almost two hours, I am going to drift and wait for a breeze. If it gets too late I'll have to motor to Portsmouth; my schedule only allows so much time for sitting dead on the water. If I have to wait too long I won't get to stop at the Isles of Shoals.

In the galley Landis fixed some cheese and crackers and a gin and tonic. He went on deck, to the cockpit, and sat down. Eating Brie and Bremmer Wafers, he sipped his drink, and looked at the distant New Hampshire shoreline.

An hour and a half later Landis had finished all the Brie and two gin and tonics. He washed his glass in the galley and put it away. The Windhover still sat on the water, motionless, like a ship in a painting.

Landis went up on deck and walked to the bow. "Margo wa sperfect...", he said aloud ", but it was sloppy."

"Don't you agree, Anita?" he said as he strolled back to the cockpit.

Shading his eyes he leaned over the rail and scanned the horizon. Almost at the edge of his vision a small dark spot moved out to sea. It was the only think moving which Landis could see; he watched it until it disappeared from sight.

He turned and looked back along his vessel; she was a beautiful girl. The thin smile lingered on his lips.

"I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay."

His smile grew as he quoted the lines.

Landis walked aft and looked off the stern. A bird flew towards him; he went below to his cabin. When he came back on deck with his Leica S4 the cormorant had reached his boat. He focused on the circling black bird through the 200 millimeter lens. The auto-winder clicked off three photographs.

Lowering the camera, he watched the bird survey the water. When it dove he was ready; he let the auto-winder whirr. The cormorant's dive was captured in five frames. Landis heard the last shot click as the bird broke the surface of the water.

"I hope I'm able to blow that one up," there was a trace of heat in his voice.

The bird surfaced to ride the waves. Landis cought a picture of it as it tipped its head back to swallow a small fish. He watched for a little while, as the cormorant sat on the surface, then he went below.

As he put his camera bag beneath the berth in his cabin he heard a line clack against the railing. He hurried out onto the deck. The cormorant sat on the railing, on the bow; it waited to dry.

Landis eased back down through the hatch and got his camera again. He had exchanged the 200 millimeter for a 70 millimeter lens. The seabird was captured on cellulose; its wings spread exposing its dark wet feathers to the sun.

Landis sat in the cockpit. "I guess it's time to start the engine, Anita, too bad."

The bird turned and stared at him. The dark glassy eyes of the cormorant looked through him. Landis looked away; the horizon was empty.

The bird took flight. Landis looked after it; suddenly there was a wind. He hurried below deck and gave the command to raise the sails.

The Windhover flew towards Portsmouth racing through the evening. The auto-pilot had the helm. Below deck Landis added to the day's log entry.

7/15/87

*The wind came up; if I sail all night
I should reach Portsmouth by dawn.
I am not tired and the weather
report is favorable so I am going to
try to make the club.*

Landis did not want to sleep; he listened to the weather radio. In order to reach Portsmouth as soon as he could he sailed through the night. He sat in the cockpit, but the auto-pilot had the helm. To pass the time he would stare at the stars littering the sky. After midnight he began reading from the collected works of Robert Frost. The final leg to Portsmouth was enjoyable.

At dawn Landis came around 2KR and headed into the channel. When he passed the Garrish Island light he lowered the sails and started the motor. The ship lurched slightly as the engine came to life.

Landis took the helm as the Windhover came in view of the Coast Guard light at New Castle. The sheltered slips of the Portsmouth Yacht Club lay just beyond the Coast Guard cutter.

He found his slip and pointed the bow into it; the current was moving against him. When the bow was nearly to the dock Landis cut the engine and stepped from the deck with the bow line. With the bow line secured he tied the stern line to a large cleat. The sun crested the low white clouds; the day was already warm.

In the galley he took a styrofoam container out of the refrigerator. In black magic marker "bait" had been written on its top. From the closet in the head Landis got a short deep sea fishing rod; there were four notches above the grip.

Sea worms -- tapered, segmented, olive bodies, with dark pink fringe, and small powerful pincers. Landis wore a leather work glove. He sat with his legs hanging over the bow and put a sea worm on the hook. The three ounce weight let the line drop straight to the bottom. Landis reeled in about six inches and began to slightly jig the bait.

He turned with a start when someone jumped into the cold ocean from a boat moored near the slips. It was an older man; he waved to Landis as he climbed naked from the water. Landis waved back.

His line felt heavy; he brought in a fat flounder and smiled. The fish had partially swallowed the hook and bled when he pulled it out. With his sailor's knife Landis notched his pole a fifth time. The drops of fresh blood mingled with the blood stains on the deck.

After he stowed his bait and tackle Landis filleted his catch and put the fish in the refrigerator. Then he went up on deck and mopped the area where the fish had bled. The flounder's blood had left several new stains.

After a shower and a shave Landis headed for the club offices. He smiled like a wolf at a young lamb who sunned herself on the deck of a power cruiser. His slip was a short walk along the floating docks to the ramp. It was at a steep angle because the tide was low.

His sea-legs stayed with him on land. Landis was tired; he stumbled slightly as he walked through the office door. The receptionist, Erin, looked up from her desk. She was a pretty young woman with long black hair.

"Hello, I'm Landis Armstrong."

"Captain of the Windhover?" Erin asked. She had a pretty smile.

"Aye." Landis winked.

She stood and saluted. "Shall we bring the provisions on board captain?"

Landis looked at her. She looked back at him coolly.

"Excuse me. Yes, could you leave them in the galley, I'm going to get some rest before dinner," he said.

"Where are you eating?" she asked with a casual smile.

"I have a table at the Blue Strawberry," he saw her recognize one of Portsmouth's finest restaurants. "Would you care to join me?"

Another young woman, wearing Ocean Pacific shorts and an Izod shirt, came through the door. With her Varnet sunglasses in her hand she waited to speak with Erin.

"Sorry. I made plans with my parents for tonight."

Erin said. "It's their twentieth wedding anniversary."

"Ah, too bad," Landis said with a shake of his head.

He smiled, waved, and walked out of the office, towards a pay phone.

"He looks like a real lady killer Erin," said Garret.

"He does, but the gorgeous one's who aren't married are either gay or weird." Erin watched Landis talk on the phone. "Besides, I do have dinner plans with my parents."

Landis hung up the phone and turned to see the two women as they spoke in the window. He looked away and walked towards the slips.

The tide had begun to come in and the ramp to the docks was not as steep. After he connected to power cable Landis went below. He mixed a gin and tonic. Sitting in his berth he read "National Review" and enjoyed the drink.

Landis was asleep before the supplies were delivered. He woke up an hour before his dinner reservation. He showered and put on a seersucker suit and white shirt. He added a rep tie and a pair of loafers then went ashore. The black limousine met him in front of the offices. He had a gin and tonic on the way to the restaurant.

Before deciding on an entree Landis had a gin and tonic and escargot. After the hors d'oeuvres he chose stake au poivre and a glass of Saint-Emilion, red, 1971. When he had had a cup of coffee he paid the check and left.

The chauffer was waiting for him in front of the restaurant. Landis caught the last fifteen minutes of the "NBC Nightly News" as he rode back to the yacht club.

He returned to the Windhover a little drunk and still tired. "I'm going to sleep," Landis stated. "We want to be up and out early tomorrow, right Anita?"

Stripped to his shorts he brushed his teeth. He saw the crescent moon through the porthole as he lay down. The water rocked him gently and the drinks hastened him to sleep.

Landis woke as the sun began to rise. After an Advil and a cup of black coffee he took a hot shower. The morning was clear and blue.

His rugby shirt and green Bermuda shorts were warm enough in the breeze. Landis started the motor and looked at his watch; it was six o'clock. A hand from the club cast him off and he backed out of the slip. The current helped the motor as the Windhover headed towards the New Castle light.

When he could make out the Garrish Island light he raised the sails. The ship moved at six knots; the air was good. At 2KR Landis took a southern tack and headed for Palm Beach.

"Too bad Erin didn't go to dinner with me." He sipped his Blody Mary and helped his course with his free hand. "Her parents would have wondered though." The Windhover was heeling nicely and moving south at a good clip.



Letterz

David Marko

Madam Butterfly loses control of her handwriting, normally a tight cursive script, and different words begin to appear in her frequent letterz to David Berkowitz.

She writes him three times a day. During breakfast, after lunch, and before dinner. Between the lunch and dinner letterz, she sits in the sauna down by the rocks and compose letterz mentally. Sometimes she'll forget the exact wording of a clever phrase or passionate endearment, but it is nice, she thinks, nice to sit and think and let her thoughts flow the way they are supposed to, unarrested from the confines of pen and paper.

She writes: "When the leaves turn orange and yellow and red this year, I'd like to pick some and press them in those beautiful volumes of Dumas that I've never read," but DB reads, "People messing around in the back seat of parked cars should have 44 caliber bullets pumped into their skulls." Or something like that. Madam Butterfly herself cannot be sure of how they'll read; the innuendos are there. DB will be able to see through subtle shadings, the hidden connotations brought to life by unsteady penmanship.

She writes: "Lunch today: an unexciting filet of sole, salad no dressing, a tall glass of lemonade, pie." > "Murder is more acceptable than letting them sit there making fun of you, mockingyou."

She writes: "I tremble when I consider the complexity of things: the blue sky, pits full of water which we subjectively label lakes, those funny huge beetles, wingless, on four sometimes eighteen wheels, scurrying about like monsters..." > "Charles Manson is a little boy, a media hog."

She writes: "You should take up jogging... seems to be quite the fad these days." "Your neighbor's dog is Satan. Listen to him and obey."

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The dog was innocent. Most people will tell you otherwise, but the dog was innocent. Whatever is said about the dog being the son of sam is an exaggeration. It is the projection of a grotesque lie, designed to protect the sublime innocence of guilty, gobbled up by hungry fans and distorted into truth.

Madam Butterfly quotes Sherman Krebbs, Vonnegut's "platinum blond Jesus with spaniel eyes":

*I have a kitchen,
But it is not a complete kitchen.
I will not be truly gay,
Until I have a
Dispose-all*

DB writes back, tear stained pages, quoting England's most famous one armed poet (although the name of the poet escapes him, the verse cannot ever):

"Pointy Birds•

*Pointy birds,
pointy, pointy.
Anoint thy head,
anointy, 'nointy.*

Madam Butterfly weeps; tadpoles stream down her face, collect at her feet and remain there, dead, squeezed to death through her tear ducts. "Such a senseless..." she sighs, forgetting what she was thinking.

DB takes the stand, a great secret shackled calmly to his heart. She he will not be betrayed.

_THE DOG! A scapegoat is justified; her beauty could never be perverted in a court of law. She must never stand trial: she would wilt like a wildflower plucked and forced to wake in a vase.

As a further measure, he eats her letterz, one by one, gagging slightly on the strawberry flavored ink, eyes stinging from the scented envelopes. This is his ultimate act of self-consumption. Although he had memorized the letterz by heart, he feels as though he is devouring his own brain.

A test. He saws off the knuckle on his little finger with a piece of sharp metal and eats it. The letterz, he decides, don't taste so bad after all. Yuck! he sez.

Confess, they exhort him to confess. Tell us your co-conspirator in these crimes.

A dog, he sez. A neighbor's dog. His eyes would turn red and he spoke to me and told me to do bad things.

He spoke to you? In English?

In my mind, he sez.

Telepathy?

Sure, he sez. Telepathy.

The police chaplain recognizes the hand of the devil in all this.

The interrogation is over and Madam Butterfly's name remains pristine, untainted. She faints away with joy, languid and sleepy until aroused by her catz urinating uncontrollably on the carpet, a slushy swamp of shag where Monsieur Butterfly will be sure to step.

It won't be easy, DB thinks, this long separation. But Madam Butterfly has alluded to a big reward when he is released; released from bondage, free to read what he wants, to talk where he wants, to pick up the soap when he dropz it-- no, that's wrong, not right at all...free, free to go for long contemplative walks among the daisies and begonias of a fall Brooklyn April snow-shower, free to talk to dogz-- no, that's wrong again.

And why doesn't Madam Butterfly write? Why is she mute, why is DB suddenly blind?

Because: the catz. This time the dogz are innocent and remain unimplied. Because her catz Belsen and Dresden piss uncontrollably at any provocation, however slight, (for example:

waking up in the morning,
sound,
sunlight,
the moon,
furniture,

the carpet, among others), her husband, Monsieur Butterfly (a.k.a. Mr. Intolerant, Mr. Inhumane) threatens to kill them. He brandishes a 44 caliber handgun, waves it crazily in the air.

"It's loaded, I tell you," he sez. It is the third time this week he has stepped into a puddle of cat piss while wearing only socks. "And smell!" And the smell. The house, their beautiful mansion in the suburbs, filled with Rod-ins and Hockneys and Laz-i-boys and expensive rugz, is fetid with the stench. "Once more and they die!"

But Madam Butterfly cannot be moved to accept such an atrocity. Her catz are her life now that her lieber mensch is incarcerated.

"The lights on the river," she sighs, hearing a steady stream of steaming cat urine swish against the curtains in the next room, "are dim."

And DB, in prison, confesses only to his cellmate his love for Madam Butterfly.

"She is like the water," he sez, "wet and fluid. I think."

Like the spittle of his cellmate.

"Gee," DB complains, "I wish you'd spit in the toilet." But his plaintive wails do no good. Because he has killed more people on his cellblock, he is the Big Man. And the only way the Big Man is able to get things done is to kill the person who isn't doing them.

But no gun this time. The police made him leave his 44 at home.

"It's best to leave it there," said the police chaplain soothingly.

And what would happen if the letterz continued? Madam Butterfly-wouldn't allow it of course. She is society. DB argues: you could use a pseudonym. You could rent out a post office box.

No, she sez, I have enough to worry about. My catz. They are driving my husband towards an inevitable act of violence. That is what I am worrying about now. Surely you can understand that?

(Yes, but what would happen? Purely theoretical.)

DB walks backt to his cell from the exercise yard. He notices that German shepard guard dogz by the security fence. He thinks: "They have nice eyes."

And his cellmate learns some manners and DB is somewhat placated.

It is fall and Madam Butterfly is out down by the rocks picking leaves, lugging around a stack of Dumas. She carefully breaks the spine of *Marguerite du Valois* and slips a red oak leaf inside.

DB sits in the prison dining hall. Lunch is filet of sole, salad no dressing, pie. Except under the sole is a soggy envelope. Inside, a typewritten note: "I want first rights to everything. We'll split the profits, make a mint..."

DB laughs. He trades his slice of pie for another inmate's salad. He's trying to lose weight and he keeps thinking about those dogz. "Their eyes were blue, ice cold, intelligent."

Madam Butterfly takes up jogging and one day she comes back to the house and the hot musky scent of cat blood assaults her. Then she sees her husband, nude, slick red bloody, laughing maniacally.

"I'm making shoes," he sez. "And a pair of slippers!" And as Madam Butterfly runs from the room, retching, vomiting, booting, puking, ralphing, crying and weeping, Monsieur Butterfly calls after her and says, "They're still a bit squirmy and sticky but they'll look sharp when I'm done."

The next day, Madam Butterfly...

The next day, DB...

Madam Butterfly mourns the dreadful deaths of Belsen and Dresden for the prescribed time and attempts to put the suffering away.

She begins to think of her old pen-pal DB. She remembers the exuberant wit of his letterz; she remembers the peace she felt when she sat down to write him. The consequences of those letterz became obscured in the obsessive drabs of sentimentality.

A letter is handed to him through the steel bars of his cage. His heart leaps...

Madam Butterfly sits down by the rocks and reads a letter written on prison stationary. The words on the page lead her to believe that prison is taking its toll on DB. She walks back to the house, footsteps crunching on a mat of fallen dead leaves, and she hopes that DB will be warm at night when winter comes.

The next day...

...DB receives a volume of Dumas in the mail. *The Queen's Necklace*, it sez. There are leaves pressed between the pages of the book. DB picks out a burnt orange maple leaf by the stem and twirls it around for a moment and wonders to himself: "What can this mean..."

Madam Butterfly is using the name Madam Caterpillar. She is trying to protect her identity.

Her husband has gone crazy. She tries to convince him to allow her to bury her catz.

"They're shoes," he reminds her.

"Of course," she sez.

"And slippers."

"Yes, darling. I remember."

"To keep my feet warm."

"Uh-huh."

"They smell a bit. Maybe I should get some inserts? Or some foot powder. Do you think it's the shoes or my feet that smell?"

"Probably the shoes."

"They're slippers, too," he reminds her.

"What if I escaped," DB writes. "We could get together. For a cup of coffee, maybe. Or to get married."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," she writes back. "One thing at a time."

"You care about your husband still," he writes back. "He's the lunatic that killed your beloved catz, hence reestablishing our correspondence."

"He's ill. He needs help and cannot be abandoned now."

"We have reached," he sez, "an insurmountable impasse."

"I disagree," she sez. And the night sky laughs and the water comes down, brown and rusty.

TEARS.....a tragedy.

G. Scott Campbell

-1-

Jennifer Keller wanted to cry. She desperately wanted to, needed to, but the tears weren't there, only a slow numbness, but no tears. They would come. She knew that all too well. The tears would come soon enough. The hospital walls glared sterile white outside the confines of the almost comfortable earth tones of the waiting room. Jen sat quietly rigid in one of the many stiff-backed orange upholstered chairs waiting to cry.

John sat opposite her, bordering on conciousness, his body slumped into a "C". Jen could not escape the stench of Jack Daniel's old number seven which surrounded him. Sour-mash whiskey filled the entire waiting room. It made Jen feel sick. It always made her feel sick. She still did not know why she had brought John along, he would certainly remember nothing of this trip. It would be like any of the others, but for some reason she had felt the need to taxi him along. John stirred in his seat and let out a rather small belch, little more than a hiccup in fact, but Jen was sure he would lose it all right then and there. He did not. He would later, she knew that too. She hated him. It almost hurt to hate someone this much, but she hated him all the same. John stirred again, sliding lower in the stiff chair.

"Mr. Keller?" The doctor seemed almost too young for Jennifer Keller's liking. He carried himself far too upright and seemed overly cheerful to be calling John Keller under these circumstances.

"Mr. Keller?" he asked again looking around the small waiting room nervously. It was practically empty. John did not answer. He could not. Jen stood slowly, answering for him.

This story by Scott, a student at Coe College, won the AMC School's Nick Adams Competition in 1988.

"Excuse me, I'm Jennifer Keller. Please excuse my...uh...Mr.Keller. He's very...well...it's just that he's...oh, fuck it. Oh Jesus, I'm sorry. I don't usually talk this way, it's just that..."Her voice was shaking, urgent.

"Don't worry, I understand." He didn't really understand at all and Jen knew it. He could sympathize with her all night long, but he would never really understand.

"No you don't, but thanks anyway." She was cold, honest. Maybe too honest she thought, but it was too late. The young doctor's jaw dropped, just a little, but he caught himself. Jen still noticed. Suddenly she felt like laughing right in the smug young doctor's face. Could it be possible that she felt like laughing at a time like this? Jen pushed the thought from her mind as reality came flooding back.

"I'm sorry. Tell me, is she...alright? Please, everything will be ok won't it? I mean...." She broke off aware that she was beginning to show her age. She was too young to have to be dealing with this. God, she hated him.

"I'm not quite sure how to say all this." The young doctor, Francis Lip-pitz by name, began, but stopped himself while noting the frightened urgency on Jen's face. Jen felt her body tense, prepare for the worst whatever that was.

"Like I said, I'm not quite sure how to say all this so I'll just say it; I'm afraid she's slipped into a coma." Jen stood, mouth open, wondering why it was people always "slipped" into comas, wondering when the tears would come.

"There was quite a bit of structural damage you know. For the most part, we've stabilized that and repaired as much as possible, but she's lost consciousness. Perhaps the anesthetic combined with her stress and any physical abuse she might have sustained may have been too much for her system to bear. In more basic terms, she may have simply shut down. This may be only temporary."

"But it may not be." Jen retorted sharply. During the doctor's speech, his voice had fallen from its normal, almost high-pitched quality to a familiar technician's monotone. Jen didn't like it. She didn't like it at all.

"No, it may not be. I wish I could tell you more, but I can't make you any promises. I'm sorry." Jen thought he probably was genuinely sorry, but it all sounded too much like an episode of "Dr. Marcus Welby M.D." to her. She didn't like any of this. Jen nodded her head gravely anyway for the young doctor.

"Thank you." she choked on the words. The tears would come soon enough. She knew that all too well.

"I've gone over all your forms and everything seems in good order. Cause of injury; a fall down stairs..." He stopped, glancing nervously toward the waiting room and the crumpled figure of John Keller and then let his stare fall back on Jen.

"You know, Miss Keller, it's not too late to change this form." His voice was little more than a whisper.

"Why would I want to change anything?" It was a simple question, but it threw him just enough and Jen knew it.

"I was just saying that, well, "

"I don't think I'll have to change anything on this form." she interrupted, her face as cold as stone.

"Well then, if you have any difficulty, anything at all," he began, again glancing over toward John.

"Just call the hospital and ask for me. I'm on call all night." He fumbled clumsily for her hand. His own hands were cold and dry. Jen didn't like the feel of them. They felt dead. She doubted that "any difficulty" would arise. John was past his "difficulty" stage, that much was obvious. He would spend the better part of the remainder of the night either sleeping or throwing up. Probably a little of both Jen thought. She forced a nod to the young doctor knowing full well that Francis Lippitz would most definitely be the last person she would call in case of "any difficulty". Lippitz hurried past the reception desk almost too quickly to maintain any semblance of sincerity and disappeared through the double doors reading EMERGENCY in bold red letters. He gave Jen an overly casual wave as he went. Jen turned and stared quietly at the

slumped form struggling to remain in the orange waiting room chair. The tears would be coming on soon, but it would never be soon enough for her.

-2-

It was just then beginning to snow when Jennifer Keller watched her father stagger from the warm confines of Highland Park Hospital toward his rust colored Jaguar XJ6. She watched him try repeatedly to open the driver's side door with his house keys, watched him fervently beat on the hood until his knuckles bled, watched him break bown and cry incoherantly for almost fifteen minutes. As she helped him into the passenger seat, she glanced at the flash of his watch; three-twenty-three am. They had been here nearly eight hours.

-3-

Snow was beginning to collect on the inner lip of the now open passenger window of the Jag as Jen turned right onto Clavey Road. Jen didn't mind the cold or the snow, the car still reeked of booze anyway.

"Knee uh oen windoo." John had gurgled as they had left the hospital, but she had known precisely what it meant and had lowered his window almost immediately. That had been some fifteen minutes ago. His hair now clung closely to his head, slick with wet snow, his eyes shut tight against the cold. It was really starting to come down. The first real snow of the season. "Staying snow" John had called it when Jennifer was still young enough to be fascinated with snow. She, along with her mother and father, especially her father, had played in the deep drifts of suburbia for hours and hours on end. The snow had made her laugh then. Now, snow just made her cold. Cold and tired. Too tired. There would still be the mess to clean up at home and school in the morning. She turned left on Highland Place, seeing for the first time in nearly eight hours, the warm lights of home.

Stop the car. I gotta..." Jen had already pulled the Jag to the curb before John could finish his garbled plea. Snow continued to fall in big, wet clumps as John Keller fell clumsily to one knee less than two blocks from his home. God, she hated him.

Dried, hardening turkey divan covered the wood grain cabinets above the stove, it splattered areas of the hard wood floor and clung heavily to the still whirling blades of the exhaust fan. Shards of the Corning Ware casserole dish which had contained it littered the floor. A clear Plexiglass utensil caddie lay overturned, surrounded by spoons, whisks, knives, a baster. Jennifer Keller stood alone quietly surveying the disaster that had once been a kitchen. John had stumbled from the garage to the living room sectional sofa where Jen had decided to leave him. Indeed he was past his "difficulty" period and now belched out loud snores in his liquor induced coma. Jen stared wide eyed around the kitchen, not knowing where to begin. She just stood. Across from her the refrigerator stood open, the door still streaked in dull red (she had slumped hard into the door, away from him, before she actually hit the floor). Jen shoved the images away hard. She pushed the door softly until the two plastic halves had formed their seal. The blood felt tacky on her fingertips. She pulled her hand back slowly and backed away. Jen didn't notice the toppled utensil caddie until she fell over it. Eyes on the dried blood smeared across her fingers, she had fallen hard. Sprawl-legged on the floor, her rear end throbbing from the fall, she noticed it; the blood-flecked soup ladle (it was the first thing he could get his hands on and he just started in on her with it). Jen tried hard to push the thoughts out, but that was when the tears finally came, and came as hard as she knew they would. She sat on the hard wood-floor crying silently into her hands. Just crying until it didn't hurt anymore. Four forty five a.m. John had rolled over. He was no longer snoring.

Jennifer Keller sat in Astronomy class not listening to Mr. Forsythe drone on about recessional velocity. She wasn't interested in recessional velocity. In fact she wasn't interested in Astronomy at all. She was tired. Just plain tired. The tears had ebbed at about six-thirty this morning and school had begun at eight. Jen had arrived at precisely nine twenty seven or so Alice, the old bitch of a security guard, had informed her while writing her up. Jen didn't particularly care about that either. All that really mattered was the hospital and get-

ting there. Suddenly it seemed imperative, essential even that she get to the hospital. Jen gathered her books quietly, stood and calmly marched to the door.

"Just where do you think you're headed this early Miss Keller? There are exactly (he checked his watch) twenty-four minutes remaining in this class period and I don't believe I've excused anyone just yet." Jen continued to walk sedately, books cradled in both arms set out in front of her, trying to think only of just how much Mr. Forsythe resembled a ferret.

"Now just you wait one minute!" His voice had risen above its normal nasal timbre prompting a quickly stifled chuckle from the class. Jen never looked back. The tears would be coming again. She knew that all too well.

-6-

John rolled off the sectional sometime near noon. His mouth was dry, his head throbbing. Disoriented, he pushed glazed eyes around the spacious living room until he had realized just where he actually was. Somehow he forced himself to his feet and staggered into the kitchen. God, his head hurt. He tugged hard on the immaculate door of the Kenmore frost-free model FF284I and pulled the carton of orange juice off the top shelf from behind two stacked containers of plain yoghurt. John hated yoghurt. He got himself a glass and filled it with ice from the door dispenser. After pouring half a glass of juice he returned the paper carton to the top shelf, wondering where in the hell Barb was. Probably out spending some more of his money he thought. John didn't care, he had plenty of money. He didn't particularly care where Barb was either, the bitch. The Absolut vodka made what looked like puddles of rainbow colored gasoline in his glass of juice. John tossed the screwdriver back, feeling the warmth explode in his stomach, and mixed himself another, this one a little stiffer. He started up the stairs needing a shower. It was another day.

-7-

Highland Park Hospital was relatively uncrowded when Jennifer Keller arrived. It was twelve-forty-five and she had almost forgotten completely about Astronomy and Mr. Forsythe and school in general when she passed

through Emergency. Glancing around she found the all too familiar waiting room, with its stiff chairs done in orange and its three month old magazines, almost empty. Only a boy of about eight who had obviously broken a wrist or maybe his whole arm clung terrified to his equally worried mother as they waited to see whoever had replaced Dr. Francis Lippitz this morning. Jen almost felt sorry for Francis Lippitz, but forgot him quickly as she reached the front desk.

"I need to see Barbara Keller please. She's in I-405." Jen said forcing a smile to the undead-looking receptionist.

"I-405?" The older woman poked at the keyboard to her green screened terminal with skeleton's fingers and waited for a readout. She never once looked up at Jen.

"I-405 is an intensive care unit. I'm afraid Mrs. Keller will not be allowed visitors for some time."

"But I'm her daughter. I mean please, I was here with Dr.Lippitz almost all night and he said..." the receptionist suddenly interrupted, throwing Jen a cold stare.

"I said, I-405 is an intensive care unit and Mrs. Keller will not be allowed visitors until further notice."

"But..."

"No buts, miss. I'm sorry."

"No you're not, you old bitch!" Jen spat at the receptionist, bursting into tears as she did. "You're not sorry at all! You don't know what it is to be sorry. You can't know what it is or else you'd let me see my mother, goddammit! You don't know the first thing about sorry you old bitch! I hate you!"

Lois Wallace, who had been chief receptionist at Highland Park Hospital for nearly twenty years, sat, mouth open, as Jennifer Keller stormed through the automatic sliding glass doors of the hospital without looking back.

-8-

John strolled into the office around two-thirty, his red paisely tie already hung loosely around the open collar of his slightly wrinkled shirt for comfort's sake. He told Terry, his secretary of some seven years, to hold any calls, he

would be "in conference" all afternoon. Terry kept her eyes on the pile of paperwork which never seemed to leave her desk and frowned.

"Yes, Mr Keller. Anything else sir?" John hated it when Terry called him "Mr. Keller". She only did so when she was angry or upset with him and he knew it.

"No. That will be all, Mrs. Tagnorelli. Thank You." Terry glared up at him, but he was already half-way down the hall to his office.

John stood at the massive oak bar pressed against the west wall of his office and mixed himself another screwdriver, a goodstiff one. He had always held a real passion for the screwdriver. Some might say it was strictly a summer drink, but not John Keller. Rain or shine, Winter or Summer, it didn't really matter. He threw the drink back, feeling the bite of the vodka in his throat. It felt good, damn good. He mixed another and walked over behind his desk. Photographs of Barb and Jennifer sat facing one another in gold rimmed, hinged frame on the edge of the desk. The two women of his life stared smiling at John as he drank. He hadn't seen Jennifer in how long? Much less spoken with her? John couldn't remember. He pulled the frame closer and gazed blankly at the peaceful images of wife and daughter while he finished his drink. John Keller gently turned the frame face down on the desk and got up to fix himself another drink. He had always held a particular passion for the screwdriver.

-9-

Jennifer Keller looked around the room she had grown to call the "Winter den". The room was small, much smaller than the living room or her bedroom for that matter. The walls were of mahogany, not cheap wood paneling, but genuine wood laquered to a shine. Hardwoods and deep cushions all in tan and rusty brown dominated the furnishings, a stone fireplace sat comfortably in the east wall. Jen had always found great pleasure in the fireplace, but the thing she had really loved about the room was that it seemed to absorb any and all light. The room literally drank light into itself, as if it wanted to remain opaque, overcast. Jen had never been afraid of the dark like most children, and to this day she still thrived on the calm chill of darkness.

She set a synthetic log into the fireplace and felt the cold sweep over her face as she tugged open the flue. Leaning over she opened the small clay pot she herself had made in third grade art class and pulled out a book of matches. The paper wrapping on the cheap, store-bought log caught easily and soon the log, probably made of little more than charcoal and chemicals Jen thought, danced within the flame. Jen pushed herself along the hard wood floor, away from the fire in her sock feet, until she rested with her back against the deep sea of cushion which was the sofa. She leaned over to the small table between the end of the sofa and the beginning of the wide reclining chair she and her father had always fallen asleep in when she was small, she in his lap his arms cradled around her middle. Jen grabbed one of the many books which rested there in the belly of the two level table and brought it to her lap. The book was broad and heavy, bound in beige leather with a single word pressed in gold letters on the cover. Jen opened the sizable volume and began thumbing slowly through its thick pages. Jennifer Keller sat a long time in front of the dying fire, the album open on her lap. Warm tears fell silently onto the pages, leaving blurring puddles on the weathered photographs.

-10-

The rust colored Jaguar XJ6 weaved through the left lane of the Edens expressway and grazed the concrete of the median divider. Sparks danced through the night air as the Jag swerved back into the lane and accelerated to near ninety. John Keller sat behind the wheel feeling very little other than the effects of another day "in conference". He thought he was driving quite well under the circumstances. A horn blared as John found himself no longer in the left lane, but careening along the right shoulder. He jerked the car back onto the expressway and shook his head back and forth as if it were full of standing water. Passing Dempster East now back in the left lane, which he always referred to as "the hammer lane", John fumbled for the cellular car phone on the dash. He tore the phone from its cradle and punched jerkily at seven digits. The phone rang four times.

"Hullo?" It was a man's voice.

"Who's this?" John ran the two words together as one.

"It's Mike. Who the fuck is this?" John hung up the phone and dialed again. Stupid prick.

"Hello?" It was Jenifer, he recognized the voice.

"Hi honey."

"Hi Dad." Her voice was no more than a whisper. "Where's your mom?" John heard the phone drop to the floor and suddenly last night came pouring back. Barb, the kitchen, the hospital, all of it.

"Oh, Jesus." He whispered to himself. He replaced the phone on the cradle and veered into the right lane to exit. He passed under the flashing lights of the sign reading EXPRESSWAY ENDS 100 FT. and exited onto Clavey Road. He hung a right at the end of the exit ramp and floored it. He didn't notice the flashing lights until he had passed the Young Men's Jewish Council building not more than a half mile from his home.

There were two kinds of cops in Highland Park. The "old guard" who really didn't give a damn if they knew you, spent most of their time writing parking tickets or picking up high school kids for drinking in the school parking lot, or giving demonstrations about strangers at elementary schools, and there were the young cops who would bust their own mother to get ahead.

"You know the speed limit on Clavey Sir?" The cop looked about sixteen years old to John.

"Yes officer, I believe it's thirty-five." John came across as stone sober. He had done this before.

"You know how fast you were goin'?"

"Well, I don't think I could have been going more than forty, Officer." John made sure that he sounded unsure of himself. He gave the cop a questioning look.

"I had you clocked at sixty-two Sir."

"Sixty-two? Really Officer?"

"Really. May I see your license Sir?"

"Sure. Sixty-two." John handed the cop his license, sounding befuddled over his speed.

"What happened to your car Mr. Keller?" The young officer pointed to the deep scratches along the driver's door.

"What?" John searched frantically for an answer.

"Your car. These scratches. How did you get these scratches Sir?"

"Oh, those. Some drunken moron on the Edens sideswiped me. Stupid bastard was all over the road." John was aware of the sweat standing out in beads on his forehead despite the November chill.

"Did you get a license number Sir?"

"No. I looked but he was going so damn fast, I couldn't make it out." John sounded flustered. The cop was breaking down.

"Well, Mr. Keller, I really ought to write you up, under the circumstances, I think a warning will do." He handed John his driver's license and a small pink carbon.

"Thanks Officer. I really appreciate this."

"Sure Mr. Keller. Sorry about your car."

"What?"

"Your car. You know." He pointed to the deep scars along the door.

"Oh, thanks." John waited for the police car to reach the top of the hill where Clavey meets Green Bay Road before pulling away from the curb. He turned right onto Highland Place and then left into the driveway. The house was dark. He clicked the garage door open and pulled in alongside Barb's Toyota Cressida. Unless she had walked, Jen was still here he thought to himself as he killed the engine. John stepped from the car feeling the familiar head-rush as he did. He stood at the door almost five minutes trying to find something he would say to his daughter. He took in a deep breath and turned the knob. He needed a drink.

-11-

Jen had been walking what she thought to be aimlessly for nearly twenty minutes when she realized exactly where it was she was going. She and Greg Abrahamson had gone out for almost a year until a relatively painful break-up some six weeks ago. The break-up was, of course, all due to the actions of a drunken John Keller who had repeatedly called the boy a filthy kike and gone

so far as to take a couple of swings at him after a rather long day "inconference". Paul and Shelly Abrahamson had taken none too kindly to John, of any of the other members of the Keller family for that matter, since then and that meant Jennifer Keller and Greg Abrahamson were, suddenly, no longer an item. Now Jen stood at their door wanting desperately to ring the bell but wanting also to simply turn and run. Just run until she couldn't go any more. Hand shaking, she reached tentatively for the bell and depressed the button so slightly that she was almost sure no one inside had heard. She turned to go almost relieved when the latch clicked and the door swung open inward. Greg stood at the door, his leather bomber jacket half-on.

"Jen?" She spun around feeling as if she would begin to cry at any moment. Greg pulled his jacket over his shoulder. He offered her a weak smile. Jen thought he looked more nauseous than happy to see her.

"Hi Greg. I kind of need to talk to you. Can I come in?" She had spoken much too quickly to expect to be understood, but realized it too late to stop herself.

"Well, I was really just..." Greg was interrupted as the door to what Jen knew to be the powder room swung open. Marcie Dubin strolled out trying to look as dignified as possible for someone exiting a bathroom.

"Oh, I'm sorry Greg. I didn't realize you were expecting anyone. Hi Jenny." Jen had always thought of Marcie Dubin as just another Fat little princess with a nose job and a new car so common in Highland Park. Greg used to agree with her.

"I wasn't expecting anyone. Uh, hi Jen." Greg looked bewildered. He didn't know exactly how to handle this.

"I'm sorry to bother you Greg, but I really need to talk. It's about my dad."

"Greg, we're going to miss the movie." Marcie was already pulling on her coat.

"Jen, I really can't talk right now. We were really just going out the door."

"Greg, who's at the door?" Jen recognized Shelly Abrahamson's voice coming from the kitchen she assumed. Mrs. Abrahamson spent almost all her time in the kitchen, Jen remembered.

"Uh, nobody Mom. Marcie and I were just leaving. Don't wait up, ok? Really Jen I'd like to talk but we're kind of in a hurry."

"Greg, this is really important." Jen was pleading.

"Don't you listen? He said we were just leaving, and we are."

"Shut up Marcie. Listen Jen, like I said, I'd really like to talk but we're just on our way out and, well it's just that I really don't want to miss this movie. Maybe we can talk some other time, ok?"

"Some other time." Jen mumbled to herself as Greg pulled the door shut behind Marcie.

"Where's your car Jen?" Greg hooked his arm around Marcie's shoulder.

"I walked."

"Holly shit Jen! That's almost three miles. Can I give you a ride anywhere?" Marcie jabbed him in the ribs.

"No, I'll walk. I wouldn't want you to miss any of the movie."

"Thank you." Marcie said, a grin spreading across her face.

Jen watched as Greg's car pulled out of the driveway and headed uptown. The tears were coming again.

-12-

John stood, alone in the kitchen roaring incoherently at no one in particular. In his right hand he clutched a bottle of Southern Comfort so tightly that his knuckles stood out white on his otherwise ruddy hand.

"What kind of man does this?" He stood like a television evangelist, arms raised, the whiskey a gurgling steady trickle from the bottle's mouth.

"Huh, you shtubid motherfuck? What kind of man beats up his wife?" John pulled the bottle to his lips and gulped down several ample swallows. The whiskey went down hard and John coughed violently. He was beyond feeling much else.

"Stubid fuck! Fuggin' stubid!" He was beligerent, blatantly screaming out into the echoes of the empty house.

"Shit. Just fuckin' stupid." His voice had fallen to near whimpering. His shoulders slumped, arms falling limply to his sides. John shuffled from the kitchen, still clutching the whiskey tightly in both hands to his breast as a mother would her child. He poured a few more swallows down his throat only to bring on another barrage of hard, dry coughing. He stood in front of the wide mirror which dominated most of the north wall of the living room, a tired drunk stared, glassy-eyed, back at him. Glass and whiskey exploded outward as the bottle struck the mirror full force. A shard from the mirror or maybe it was the bottle, he didn't know, caught John over the left eye. The blood welled up almost immediately. John felt nothing. He wandered up the stairs, stumbling over the top step and banged his shin. Somehow he managed to find his bed through the sea of spinning light and sound where John Keller fell unconscious for the remainder of the evening.

-13-

Ravina Elementary School was deserted save for one at nine-fifteen that evening. Jennifer Keller sat quietly, head down, on the third black plastic swing in line on the "big kids" swing set. Feet dangling inches from the soft wood chips, she swung easily back and forth crying softly as she went. All she could do was try to push the words away, but they kept coming back, slapping her face harder and harder each time.

"Hi honey. Where's your mom?"

"Really Jen I'd like to talk, but we're kind of in a hurry."

"Hi honey. Where's your mom." The obvious drunkenness that rang out in John's voice, the simplicity of the question, the hum of the highway in the background all haunted Jennifer Keller as she sat in her safest of all places. Jen had grown up at Ravina School. It was as much a part of her life as anything ever would be. She remembered all the times spent at Ravina as clearly as she did the past few days. She would remember both for the rest of her life. That much she knew for certain. Before, Ravina had been a place for joy, for hurt, of laughter, and of tears. Now Ravina was a place to get rid of tears or hurt. A place to take her joy and to share her laughter. Most of all it was a calm place, a safe place. A place to think and she had a lot of thinking to do. Jen sat at

Ravina for almost three hours all the time swining quietly back andforth dragging her feet in the wood chips. With the backs of hersmall hands she began drying the tears which still clung to herface. It was nearly midnight.

-14-

Jen winced at the unmistakable odor of liquor which hit her face along with a warm rush of air as she opened the door and walked inside. John was home, she knew that, hopefully he had passed out by now and she wouldn't have to deal with him. Suddenly the words of Fracis Lippitz came flooding back to her. What if John had not passed out yet and "any difficulty" should occur? For the first time in quite a while Jen thought her father might be capable of hurting her. He had never done so before, concentrating his abuse on her mother exclusively, but now her mother wasn't around for him. The thought had her scared. No, terrified would be more the word for it. She tiptoed through the hall wanting nothing more than to see her father sprawled out on the floor somewhere, snoring contentedly in his usual stupor. She did not. What she saw scared her even more. The living room mirror which had once covered most of the wall lay almost entirely in pieces on the floor. A now nearly transparent Southern Comfort label floated in a small pool of the-brown liquid. The smell of it filled the room.

"Dad?" Her voice was small, frightened. No answer.

"Dad, are you home?" This time she raised her voice just enough to hear it echo off the high ceiling. Still no answer. Jen walked slowly up the stairs sure that at any moment her crazed,drunken father would jump out and proceed to beat her to death. He did not. She found him, still in his suit and tie, gurgling loudly in the center of the king sized bed he and her mother had shared some twenty-one years. Jen sighed deeply in relief.

It was nearly two a.m. when Jen had finally finished picking all the broken glass off the floor and out of the furniture and had run a mop over the spilled whiskey. No doubt there was still more glass somewhere, but she could find none. Upstairs she set John's alarm for seven and set her own for six fifteen. She had school in the morning. She was asleep not more then ten minutes after lying down.

John was awake with a start. He rolled over toward the Proton alarm clock, cursing the day he had ordered it from Sharper Image, and slammed his hand down on the green button halting 10,000Maniacs' singing of "Like the Weather". He would have to tell Jennifer not to change the radio station on his clock, but he would do nothing feeling like he did right now. He dragged himself to the shower. The hot spray felt good on his back and shoulders. It cleared his head too. He hummed Sam Cooke's "You Send Me" as he lathered up and was suddenly filled with thoughts of Barb.

"Jesus Christ." He whispered. He would have to get to the hospital some time today, see about Barb. John towled and shaved, tried on his grey pinstripe, but opted for a simple blue blazer and khaki slacks. Downstairs he stared at the wall where the mirror had been as the previous night's events oozed slowly back to him. He spooned some coffee into a filter and flipped the toggle switch. The Bunn gave its familiar gurgle and the kitchen was soon filled with the distinctive aroma of coffee. John pulled his "I HateMondays" mug from the cabinet and set it on the counter. He tipped the coffee pot to his mug with a shaking hand just as the phone rang startling him just enough to spill hot coffee right down the crotch of his pants.

"Ah, shit!" The coffee burned painfully as he picked up the phone.

"Yeah?"

"John this is Terry. Just calling to remind you that you have that ten o'clock with Al Schaffer at the Drake this morning."

"Oh Jesus, that's today? Shit."

"That's today honey. Wear your grey pinstripe and stop off to get your briefcase before you go downtown."

"Yeah, right." John glanced at his Seiko while hanging up the phone. It was eight-thirty, plenty of time. He jogged upstairs and changed into the grey pinstripe then headed down for a real cup of coffee. He poured the coffee into his mug then walked routinely over to the liquor cabinet. Pouring about a shot and a half of whiskey into the coffee, he brought the mug up to his mouth. He added a little more whiskey, sat down at the small table in the-

breakfast nook, and thumbed absent mindedly through the sport's section of the day's Tribune. He had almost completely forgotten about the hospital.

-16-

The halls of Highland Park High School were filled with students hurrying from Literature of Introspection to Trigonometry and Related Topics and from Spanish 5-6 to Gym. Jennifer Keller held her books tightly against her chest as she walked towards the cafeteria for lunch. It was only ten-thirty, but it was the only lunch period she could get with her schedule. Jen weaved her way through the crowds of people towards the rows of tables already filling with other unlucky schedulers. She set her books down on the table closest to the door and joined the line to the change machine. Jen's mind wandered. She had an appointment with Glen Segal, her guidance counselor, after school that she was almost sure she wouldn't make. It was probably about cutting class and all she would have to say was that her father had put mom in a coma and her whole life was falling apart.

"Hey you gonna go or what?" The voice belonged to Dominic Nardini, an abrasive little runt who was spending his fifth year at Highland Park High School.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Jen looked bewilderedly at the gap left in front of her. She fed a dollar into the machine and it spit out the change: three quarters, two dimes, and a nickel. Jen pumped fifty cents into the Coke machine and pocketed the rest. Sitting quietly, catching up on her French, she didn't notice Greg Abrahamson until he was sitting across from her.

"Hi Jen." Greg was wearing shorts and a white P.E. Leaders shirt. Jen didn't answer.

"I said hi Jen."

"What do you want?" She didn't look up from the French book.

"You said you wanted to talk last night. It sounded kind of important."

"It was important. Last night. Forget it."

"But you said..."

"I said forget it!" she barked, looking him in the face for the first time. The tears were welling up in her eyes.

"Fine. I was just trying to help."

"Fuck your help. Where was your help last night? In Marcie Dubin's pants? Just fuck your help." She put her head down into the French book, her body shaking with sobs.

"Jen?"

"Fuck off Greg!" She hitched through the tears. Greg got up from the table slowly and walked back toward the gym.

-17-

John sauntered into the office for the second time that day at exactly one-twenty, an account closed with Al Schaffer and five Bloody Marys behind him.

How'd it go with Schaffer?" Terry asked, smiling up at him from behind her usual mound of paper.

"Great. Closed the deal. Closed 'er right up."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks honey. Terry, hold my calls would you, I'll be in conference the rest of the day." He flipped her a saucy wink and strolled off down the hall. Terry Tagnorelli shook her head dejectedly as she went back to her paper work.

-18-

Jen bolted dead awake to the sound of the phone. MTV blared unconsciously on as she scrambled from the couch in the den to the kitchen. Why they had never put a phone in the den was something she would never understand.

"Hello?" She was almost shouting, trying to sound awake, as she wiped the fresh sleep from her eyes.

"Jennifer? Francis Lippitz. I'd like you to..."

"What is it? What's wrong? I tried to get in to see her, but that old witch at the desk wouldn't let me. What's the matter?" Jen was frantic. She had shifted her voice into high gear.

"Slow down. I'd prefer not to talk about this over the phone. Can you come down to the hospital today?" His voice was calm, almost soothing.

"Today? Yeah, sure. When? What time is it?"

"It's four-thirty. If you could be here around, say five o'clock, that would be fine. I can meet you in Emergency."

"Five. That's fine. What happened?"

"We'll talk about it when you get here, ok? Just calm down. Everything will be fine." She knew nothing would be fine. Nothing would ever be fine.

"Ok." She hung up the phone and grabbed the keys to the Cressida off the hook.

-19-

John stood at the oak bar in his office, toasting.

"Here's to you, Al Schaffer, you fat old sonofabitch."

He drained the glass in one go and poured himself another. It had been a profitable day.

-20-

Jen arrived at the Highland Park Hospital Emergency room at a quarter to five. Francis Lippitz stood in his tacky white doctor's coat, waiting.

"What's the matter? Is she alright? Tell me!" Jen was out of breath, her face still red from the outside cold.

"I've been trying to get a hold of your father all day, but his secretary keeps telling me he's in conference whatever that means." Lippitz remained sedate, pragmatic.

"It means he's sitting in his office getting drunk." Jen was blunt. She half expected the young doctor's jaw to drop open. It did not.

"I figured as much." It was Jen's jaw that dropped, even if only slightly.

"What I have to say to you is extremely serious and probably won't be the easiest thing you'll ever have to hear. Why don't we head up to my office?"

"Ok." Her voice was small again, resigned. They walked in silence down what seemed to Jen to be miles of corridor until finally reaching one of hundreds of identical metal doors. Lippitz opened the door and led Jen into a tiny office. File cabinets dominated one wall while an enormous wooden desk filled most of the rest of the room. Two small orange chairs like those in the waiting room sat empty in front of the desk.

"Please sit down Jennifer."

"Call me Jen, ok?" She sat.

"Sure. Well Jen, like I said before, what we have to talk about isn't going to be the easiest thing in the world to hear and, frankly, I'd rather tell both you and your father together, but under the circumstances, I can't do that and probably wouldn't even given the chance. I don't like your father all that much, Jen, but it's not my place to say so. First of all, Jen, I think we both know that your mother didn't end up here because she fell down any flight of stairs. That's none of my business either, I know that. Anyway, as I said to you when you first came in, your mother sustained quite a bit of physical damage and I did all that was possible to stabilize her condition. As I also said, she went into a coma which was most likely due to stress combined with the sheer amounts of damage she has taken. In short it was like her system shutting down for repairs. Earlier today something else happened and this is going to be very hard for you to swallow, so let me start by saying that it is by no means permanent. Do you understand?"

Yes I understand. Please just tell me. I just want to know what it is. I don't care how bad it is. Just tell me." Jen sounded tired. Too tired for any eighteen year old girl to be thought Lippitz.

"Ok, I'll be honest with you. This is the first time I've had to deliver any what might be called bad news." He made quotation marks in the air with his fingers as he said "bad news".

"I'll be blunt. Jen, earlier this afternoon your mother experienced what is technically known as a myocardial infarction or, in everyday terms, she had a heart attack. Now I'm not going to play any games with you. It was a relatively big one. Her heart stopped beating completely for a reasonably extended period of time and she failed to respond to any external stimulation we could provide. We did all we could do to revive her, but it was just no use."

"Are you telling me she's dead? Are you actually sitting there and telling me that my mother is dead?" Her voice was angry, almost threatening.

"She's being kept alive on a life support system, but tests have shown that she sustained some substantial brain damage and, frankly, that's not good. The damage could repair itself and as I said, this may or may not be a per-

tenant condition, but there's really no guarantee that the damaged areas will change at all. I'm not quite sure you'll want to hear this, but there's no guarantee that she'll ever be able to live free of life support. I wish I could say more. I'm sorry."

"Jesus." Numb, Jen put her head in her hands as the tears flowed effortlessly down her face. She looked up towards the ceiling eyes searching for something, anything through the tears.

"Oh, Jesus. This isn't happening. Oh, Jesus."

-21-

John Keller toasted Al Schaffer for near the fiftieth time that evening as he forced down another murky swallow of whiskey. The Schaffer account was a big one and he had "Closed 'er rightup." He stumbled over to the bar and poured himself the last of the bottle.

"To you Al!" He bellowed to the empty office. He downed the whiskey and proceeded to fall face down on the rug. He was snoring in less than five minutes. It was almost ten.

-22-

It was Sunday when Jennifer had finally mustered up enough courage to return to Highland Park Hospital. Lois Wallace sat calmly behind her reception desk. She recognized the young woman approaching the desk, her chin up, eyes bright. Lois braced herself for a confrontation.

"I'm here to see Barbara Keller please. Room I-405." Jen was calm, confident.

"One moment please." Lis punched up Barbara Keller's file on her terminal and pushed a thin, shaky smile Jen's way while the two waited for the terminal's reply.

"I'm sorry miss. Mrs Keller isn't allowed any visitors." The statement had lost any firmness it was meant to possess when Lois Wallace had finished with it.

"Here." Jen slapped a small laminated card down on the desk and pushed it along the smooth formica to Lois' guant hand.

"It's from Doctor Lippitz." Jen said impatiently as the seemingly ancient receptionist studied the small card.

"Just a moment Miss Keller." Lois stabbed at the telephone with her pencil and waited for an answer.

"Yes, Doctor Lippitz? A young woman is here and...Yes Doctor Lippitz. Sorry to bother you sir." She replaced the receiver in its cradle and looked weakly up at Jen.

"I'm terribly sorry about the inconvenience miss. Go right ahead." She slid the pass to Jen, who proceeded to march off toward the row of elevators at the end of a long, sterile white corridor, humming softly as she went.

-23-

John walked quickly, arms loaded, from the kitchen to the TV room. Tomczack had just scored on a quarterback keeper of eight yards to put the Bears up by six over the Lions just three minutes into the game. John sat, with a grunt, dropping his booty: a one pound bag of Ruffles, French onion dip, two jars of olives and a cold case of Coors Light, onto the coffee table. He popped open a Coors and the first jar of olives and dove right in. John had always loved Sundays. A Bears game and a beer was all he ever needed on a Sunday. Even when Jenny was little, he had always watched the games. She would sit on his lap and root for the then hapless monsters of the midway as he had. He would try to sneak her sips of his beer through Barb's almost constant scrutiny. Jen had never much liked the beer then, still didn't as far as he knew. It was on Sundays that John often wondered what it would have been like to have sons. He and Barb had talked about having other children but had never really gotten around to it. John had been to the hospital yesterday and had spoken with that snot-nosed little Jew doctor for almost two hours. Who did the little kike think he was anyway, feeding John all that technical bullshit? On the tube, Wilber Marshall intercepted Chuck Long's pass and would return it some thirty yards before brought down on the six. Suddenly, John had forgotten all about Francis Lippitz. He tipped his beer to the television.

"Atta baby Marshall!" He chugged the remaining three quarters of the can and popped open another. John had always loved Sundays.

-24-

Jen stood quietly outside the yellow door to room I-405. She stared at the brass doorknob not wanting to turn it. Knowing she would have to sooner or later. Jen preferred later but it was late enough already. She paced back and forth nervously in front of the door, her penny loafers clicking on the sterile whiteness of the tile. Sure, she had seen all those movies with some guy hooked up to a machine, but this was no movie. This was her mother. Jen had not seen Barbara Keller since checking her into this same hospital—some eight days ago. Then, she had been little more than a corpse, a veritable collection of blood and bruises. Now, Jen shuddered and pushed the images out of her mind. She took a deep breath, and turned the knob.

-25-

John was through half the Ruffles, all the dip, a jar and a half of olives, and thirteen Coors by half time. The Bears were up 24-3. He finished the beer in his hand and dozed off in the warm glow of the sun. He had always loved Sundays.

-26-

Jen looked around the small hospital room darkened by drawn shades and dominated by machinery. It was not just one simple machine registering a constant blip like in all the movies, but at least five or six different hunks of machinery, each more technically complex looking than the last. The electric smell of ozone filled the tiny room. Jen let her eyes wander around the room until they fell onto the bed. Barb Keller lay motionless, plastic tubing jutted rudely from her nostrils and something that Jen thought looked like a snorkel was propped into her mouth, feeding another smaller tube down her throat. The mechanized breathing sounds coming from it reminded Jen too much of Darth Vader. The machines were doing the breathing for her. Without them, Jen knew, she would be dead. Her face was still bruised almost beyond recognition, but the bruises had shifted from their blood filled purple to a sickly yellow making Barb appear jaundiced. Her right eye was still swollen com-

pletely shut (he just grabbed the ladle and started in). An I.V. snaked down its post into her left forearm supplying hazy clear nutrition. The machine directly next to the bed displayed its two green screens proudly, spitting out a thin-print out of Barb's controlled heart rate.

"Hi Mommy," Jen whispered half expecting her mother to sit bolt upright and throw her yellowing arms around Jen's neck. She did not. Jen fell slowly into the wide, plastic cushioned chair holding the limpness of her mother's cold, bony hand, and cried.

It was November twenty-second.

-27-

John was snoring peacefully in his drunkenness, a veritable mountain of beer cans in front of him when Jen arrived home from the hospital feeling drained, empty. The Bears won 37-10. Jen gathered up the cans and jars and bags and the empty tin of dip and deposited it all into the garbage cans out in the garage. She clicked the remote control silencing John Madden's wrap-up and trudged upstairs to start her homework. It was Sunday. She had school in the morning.

-28-

By the onset of December, little had changed in the life of Jennifer and John Keller. John worked and drank and worked and drank. Mostly drank. Jen cried. Just cried.

-29-

"Mrs. Ralph is probably a perfectly good person, Garp thought;she has a child, and she no doubt loves him. She is no doubt serious about wanting to do something with her life. If she were just more careful! Garp thought." Jen sat in the hospital room and read aloud from "The World Accoring to Garp." She read over the constant hum of the machinery to the deaf ears of Barbara Keller. It had always been her mother's favorite book. Jen marked her page; one-seventy-five, and set the book gently on the bedside table.

"I think that's enough for today, ok mom?" There was, of course, no reply. The bruises had faded from Barbara Keller leaving only her near transparent skin stretched over the bone underneath. Jen looked down at the figure

on the bed thinking it looked more like a corpse than her mother. She scooped up the fish-white hand and pressed it against her face. The hand was cold and clammy. Jen held the hand tightly within her own, encompassing almost all of it.

"Oh, Jesus Mom." She put her head down gently on her mother's chest and began to cry. It was December eighth.

-30-

John sat in the Shrimp Walk, loosely holding a Jack Daniel's and water. With him were Al Schaffer (vodka and tonic), Mark Edgar (Seven and Seven), and Phil Rosen (Scotch, rocks). They sat sharing what Mark had called a little "holiday cheer" as well as two baskets of butterfly shrimp. John threw back what was left of his drink and immediately ordered another round.

"Jeez, John. We just got this one." Phil was only half joking.

"Who're you Phil? My fuckin' mother? C'mon it's Christmas." They all laughed. It was only December twelfth.

-31-

December twenty-third.

Highland Park High School had let out for Christmas break almost an hour ago. Jen was approaching the reception desk of the hospital.

"Hi Mrs. Wallace." Jen carried her books under her arm, her Walkman headphones rested around her neck. She started toward the elevators.

"Jen, there's something you should know before heading up." Lois Wallace spoke tentatively.

"Nothing's wrong is it? Nothing happened?" She spun around, dropping her copy of "Henry IV."

"No, nothing like that sweetie. It's just that, well, your father's here." She particularly spat the last words. Jen felt the sting of them as she stooped to pick up her book.

"He is?"

"Arrived about an hour ago."

"Is he..."

"I think so." Wallaces' face was unsure, downtrodden.

"Oh." Jen gathered herself and headed for the sliding glass door of the exit.

"Aren't you going up?"

"I can't Mrs. Wallace. I just can't." The doors slid behind her.

"I know." Lois said to herself watching the plume of Jen's breath against the December clouds.

-32-

John looked at his wife of twenty-one years for the first time since he'd beaten her into a coma, now nearly a month ago.

He had been at Rainbow's for about an hour before working up the nerve to come to the hospital at all. Drinking up the nerve was more like it. Barb lay motionless on the bed, her pale flesh stretched thin over her once sturdy frame. John had always loved that about her, the fact that she was so solid a woman. He had stopped at Henry Weiland's and picked up some roses on the way. He set the flowers on the chair and turned away.

"I love you Barb." He muttered to himself, shutting the door behind him. He needed a drink.

-33-

Jen sat, asleep, sitting in the chair. Micheal Bolton belted out "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay" through her headphones. In her hand she still clutched the skeletal claw that was once her mother's reassuring hand. The tears had dried on her cheeks and chin. It was New Year's Eve.

-34-

The annual New Year's office party had gone well, as usual. John felt the cold morning air bite into his cheeks as he slid behind the wheel of the Jag. He glanced at the dashboard clock, it was four-thirty a.m. He turned the key and the XJ6 started rightup. It was a good car, John had never been anything but pleased with it. He dropped the shifter into drive and eased the car out of the parking lot onto Landwehr. The traffic lights blinked unconsciously, red one direction, yellow the other. He weaved uncontrollably across the two lanes of Landwehr until he had reached the entrance ramp to the Edens. He jerked the Jag onto the ramp and floored it. The car was approaching seventy, then

eighty, then ninety. He leveled it off at about ninety-five and weaved into the "hammer lane". The ride was uneventful, and John was drifting. He flipped the radio on so as not to doze off. That would be all he needed. Where the hell was everybody anyway? It was New Year's Day. At five a.m. John pulled off onto the Lake Cook exit ramp. He didn't need to get stopped on Clavey again, fuckin' cop. He took Lake Cook east to Green Bay and hung a left. He brought the Jag up to about sixty before letting his foot off the gas. Frank Sinatra was singing "I Did It My Way" on WMAQ. John Keller sang right along with him.

"But mos' off all...I did it Myyyy..." Glass exploded as the rust Jaguar slammed broadside into Pamela Keele's silver Chevy Chevette. Miss Keele was thrown almost ten feet through the passenger door into the street destroying most of the left side of her head. She was killed almost instantly.

-35-

John Keller swam through the tempest towards wakefulness and whoever was knocking on that damn door. Cotton mouthed he stumbled down the stairs and ripped the front door open.

"This better be fuckin' important! It's fucking ten in themorning." He screamed into the face of a thin man with a brownsuit. Behind the man stood two uniformed policemen.

"I'm afraid it's very important, Mr. Keller. My name is detective Robert George." The man flashed John a badge and an I.D.

"May I come in, sir?"

"Yeah, sure detective. Is there any problem?" The blood had clotted and dried on John's forehead where he had hit the steering wheel as well as on the pant leg surrounding his knee. His face was unshaven and heavy with shadow.

"I'm afraid there is, Mr. Keller."

"Oh? Please sit down." John fought desperately to remember the events of last night. He could not.

"Frankly, I'd rather stand. This won't take very long." The detective took out a small pad with some chicken scratch across the top.

"Sir, are you the owner of a rose-colored 1986 Jaguar XJ6 license plate number JK-1?"

"Sure, that's my car, but it's not rose. It's rust. It's in the garage if you'd like to see it." John didn't see what his car had to do with this.

"No sir, that car is six blocks south of Clavey Road on GreenBay. Mr. Keller, I think you should get dressed. You'll have to come with us."

"What? Are you arresting me? I haven't done anything."

"I'm afraid you have sir. I am placing you under arrest for reckless driving, hit and run, and vehicular manslaughter. Now if you'll get dressed please sir." Suddenly John was brutally aware of everything.

"Oh, Christ." John Keller started to cry.

-36-

January third. Jennifer sat in her mother's hospital room reading the Highland Park News. As she thumbed through the Arts section all she could think about was that her father had not come home last night. Probably passed out at the office she knew but, still, he usually called if only to babble something and hang up. She tried not to think about him and glanced briefly at the new Trend page the News had decided to add to its repertoire of generally useless articles. She flipped the page and dropped the paper. Her mouth went suddenly dry, her heart beating one hundred miles an hour. John's smiling face stared up at her from the page. Above it stood the headline;

WOMAN KILLED IN DRUNK DRIVING ACCIDENT. LOCAL
BUSINESSMAN TO STAND TRIAL.

Jen bent and picked up the paper. She read the article aloud, unbelieving.

A local woman identified as Pamela J. Keele was found dead near her home at 427 Green Bay Rd. early this morning. Her body was found near the scene of the car accident which claimed her life.

Mr. John G. Keller, a prominent local businessman and driver of the car which was found abandoned at the scene, is being held in custody pending his trial set for February first. Mr. Keller has been charged with counts of driving under the influence of alcohol, reckless driving, hit and run, and vehicular manslaughter.

Jen closed the paper and looked at the still figure of her mother lying on the bed.

"Well, Mom, what're we going to do now?" She didn't realize then that she already knew the answer.

-37-

John had arrived at the police station at eleven the morning of January first and had been allowed a phone call. He had called Irv Mayer, his lawyer. Irv had arrived some forty-five minutes later. He looked John square in the face.

"No way John. No fucking way." His voice was flat, defeated.

"No way." John wanted a drink at that moment more than anything in the world.

-38-

Jen stood over the lifeless form that had once been her mother, the tears streaming freely down her face. The red handled sewing scissors reflected off the room's machinery in her hand. She slid the scissors smoothly under the twin plastic tubes which dominated Barbara Keller's nostrils. The words of Francis Lippitz rang through her head making it throb.

"There's no guarantee that she'll ever be able to live free of the life support."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry."

"There's no guarantee that she'll ever be able to live free of the life support." Jen tightened her grip on the scissors, throwing the copy of the Highland Park News down hard on the bed.

"There, there's nothing for you to come back, come back for mom. I'm sorry. I tried. I really tried to love him Mommy. I really did, but I can't. I just can't. Oh Christ, I'm sorry Mom." She choked on the words through the tears as she squeezed the scissors shut over the tubing. The tubes pinched but didn't separate.

"Oh, shit! Shit!" She released the tension on the blades and slammed them shut again, severing the tubes. Jen's stomach rolled as red viscous liquid seeped from the tubes. She moved her scissors to the snorkel mouthpiece which fed a tube down her mother's throat.

"I love you Mom. I'll always love you." The scissors bit down into the tough plastic of the mouthpiece. Jen had to try three times before the two halves finally separated and, all at once, the screens went blank, the formerly constant blip became a steady tone. It was done. Jen set the scissors softly on the bed and turned to leave.

"I love you Mommy." She pulled the door shut behind her. The tears had subsided.

