

NORTHRIDGE REVIEW



NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

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Frederic M. Tinampay

Sonnet

Honorable Mention, 1984-1985 Academy of American Poets
Competition

Jim Glaeser

Five in the afternoon, sometime in May
and hot. I'm listening to the Dodgers
play the Mets, while I read an anthology
of Spanish poetry. A left-hander's
pitching for Los Angeles, and the Mets
are starting a rookie from Tidewater.
I follow the game and read the poets
between innings. Vin Scully, the broadcaster,
calls the play by play, the way Vallejo
might have done in another circumstance
with poets and major league pitchers so
similar, that you can't tell the difference
between Fernando Valenzuela
and Federico García Lorca.

Windchimes

Ron Johnson

The ice cream man arrives with the wind.
His bells punctuate
dull twilight
and puncture thoughts.
Children chill.
Lovers stop hugging earth.
Two Czechs fold
an unfinished game of chess.
Lonely men gather around
leftover charcoal.
The ice cream man, neck snuggled into chest,
like pigeons, shoves his cart through the wind.

Woman with Hat and Rings

Ron Johnson

Shielding her from storms of commuters,
hiding eyes that stare
into October drizzle,
a limp hat.

She thinks, Why does it rain
the one day I must be away?

When the child ahead of her
twists around and smiles,
she waves her rings
as if to say

See what I have! Someday,
you may be as lucky as me.

She pulls the cord. When the bus
stops, she limps through the aisle,
hands grabbing each rail,
and the child sticks out her tongue.

The Coffee Poems

(for Voltaire who drank 40 cups a day)

Jordan Jones

1

What is the difference between drinking coffee
and being coffee?

2

Cups are not wide as fields to hold lives
lives are not narrow as skulls.

3

And it's easier now
what with automatic drip.

4

Steam rides from blackness
to nostrils all across America.

5

There are the qualities of emulation and choice.
Which thing will be artist, which insomniac?

6

It's 2 am. Lori's moving her mouth over steam
like some puppet or physics experiment.
She says the word *Alaska* but neither of us know
this sentence's beginning.

7

My stomach's a-jumble. Mind's blank but dusky.
Cafés should have couches.

I am Asking You to Trust My Memory-Wheel

Jordan Jones

1.
The interior of my ear
hurts in pulses, memories
of your explanations for lateness,
each time more inventive.
You began with flat tires and cracked pots, I could believe it.
Then that stray cat along the shoulder you had to catch.
It scratched you. Where was the scratch? Where was the cat?
Next, I thought, aliens will be stopping traffic
for smog inspections and Rorschach tests.

2.
Each time you lie you displace me.
I am a refugee wandering a strange country
sifting a dark new language. You have your wheel and clay
I have the heat of your kiln. I will keep your letters
and pottery, the sleek lines of your flat hands,
their enthusiasm. Don't worry about my memory
and don't send me letters when you're gone.
I must be alone in a room with my *own* wheel
turning a bust of you out of wet fresh memories.
If you arrive as you are now, not were then,
even on paper, my fingers may poke through the eyes
and form a ghoulish of you instead of who I remember.

She Wears Glasses To Bed

Charles Klein

She would live with a congregation
of cats if she wasn't allergic.
She used to read a lot more
but the light finally affected her
so now she wears coke bottles with contacts
and saves for a big magnifying glass.
Aunt Hanna taught her to knit so even though
her dresses have seen better days
she has some outlandish sweaters
students have yet to laugh at.
Style had never been her strong point.
Although she can't add two numbers together
she can recite Euripides in clarinet tones
and knows Prince Hamlet personally.
Her cousin from upper state wishes
she would move to a safer building
and even has a man, finally, for her.
She told him, ". . . but she has a wonderful personality."
But anywhere else is too far from the museums
and her other catacombs.
Across the street they sell the New York Times
and she enjoys correcting the cross words.
She's heard Merv Griffin has a lovely voice
but he's on far too late for her.
She's gone by 7 o'clock
having eaten her cold salmon and watered the cactus
and fallen asleep with Thoreau.

For Mack and Peterbilt

Susanna Davidson

As the midnight geese
chortle overhead
a congregation of
speeding trucks
overtakes the highway.
The spray of rain
lifts from their tires,
luminescent;
a hint of dawn in
the misting taillights.
Massively they slip
in and out of timid traffic
like ancient gods,
the moonlight scattering
on their backs.

Spitting Off Seeds and Mangoes Reflecting Sky

Dortha Westerbeck

Placed the universe can be
within a cement circled cover
or a grate straight
unsmiling as mistresses shunning
sheets

those clouds reflect cement
medallioned sky catching ground

there is a literalness in things that overwhelms me

I do not know where to pick the beginning
hope
too much for chalk rising dances and
someone left a 3 poised in an infinite triangle
,there, by your right, not left, hand
and through looking at the extension of your index finger
you saw its unmuted point wink more than fictive
things at wincing widows
+ blinked

the worry of cars
hover
a cement shrouded
sky to silence
ready to thunder

my eyes have been bathed blind
past the reinking of sight
I want the poetry of Dove soap boxes

brimming boxes bringing
settling hope
immaculate as warm girls
with souls penanced for god

spaced cars form on curbs

holding your hip
its curve filling my palm
I'd like to pull forth a child
from a bit of bone

sleep warmed waked
to elaborate rain
turn
slowing tubs
sprout intimacy + avowal

shoes hold feet
Rise Rise
steep from sleep
sweep + weep at once
once past slipping
is on

*

Laura Hite

Alica Yoffa, I'm with you in the past
where you sit in front of the T.V. set and watch cartoons of
Mighty Mouse
where your mother carefully washes your long dark hair in the
tub
where you stand in the dark hallway behind the half closed
door in your
nightgown watching your father at the table, his tall body worn
tired and thin
his long beard his bright robes his eyes red and wet
where you sit at the window and watch the bright blinking
lights of the big
green tree within the house across the street
where you stand in the parlor of a white hallway with people
dressed in black
bloated faces grab your hands while your mother lies broken
against a chair and
your little brother runs by chugging like a train
where you sit behind a book trying to hide the hooked nose on
your face from
the blond Aryan boy across the table
I'm with you in the past
where hard rocks fall like sand against your skin and your back
and your face and
words that spear your smile determined with dark eyes

I'm there pulling at your sleeves telling you to stop
I'm there afraid in the corner
I'm there where you stand up.

The Clock Struck

Laura Hite

The room is dark. The lights are off and the sun is dropping in the sky against the white of the wall. The sun falls, and the room turns black. It twists black. Did you hear me? I said it twists black, and my mind twists black with it. I feel it in round dark eyes that refuse to stop. The curtains don't move because there's no wind. It's hot and there's no sound. I'm sitting here on an old grey sofa watching darkness twist on. All the lights off.

I'm jello head. My mind a raspberry mold that sits on Thanksgiving dinner tables waiting to be digested. Every few moments we add more water to my sloshing red pail. My brain is 59 celebrating funerals every weekend, cellular destruction.

The room grows darker. The lights off. The room is small and gets smaller and twists. The old grey couch bleeds styrofoam where scissors are stabbed in its stomach. The chair in the corner lies against its broken leg. A dead plant seeps from the sides of its cracked shell. The lights are off and no one who breathes, but me, sees or feels.

But the ground was so close. I supposed I was small. Definitely small. And I laid in the dark till you hoisted me up. And we peed on a dirt road, and took shots of vodka and lime at the bar. Your questions flew into an empty cup I annihilated with my fist which bled a red entrance star which they stamped on my thigh which I washed off during my a.m. bath. I scrubbed with oatmeal soap. Morning poked a blunt puncture. I still couldn't stand. I was sure my teeth were falling out so I looked in the mirror. I was too young to see you there.

Across from the old grey couch is the mirror. I can see its length from where I sit, and my face in the dark mapped by your tracks. I reach over the arm of the couch, pick up the clock and hurl it at the wall. The hardness whimpers. The hands are dead at one o'clock. Your face broken.

And we took turns on the nitrous tank. It was like, I could see my face from another point of view: the twisted thick smile, the large nose, the face with sunken eyes, and the past, and my face, and my eyes, and you, and if I could see your face again I'd cut it with a knife and pop out molasses-colored eyes like burnt bread stuck in a toaster . . . but I'm only a worn woman eating the dust of memories. Licking yellowed thoughts.

And the room is always darker. I have a splitting headache. I think I'm atomic. I feel like I'm going to fall. But not as bad as yesterday. I'm complacent. They've plugged me into a typewriter, but what they didn't know is that my parts are defective and my warranty expired. I continually type periods

Dark-eyed man, I used to own a cell of your company stock, and every so often it went off like a slot machine in Vegas and I thought I was going to hit the jackpot. But it never came. All in my imagination, perhaps? I lost all my money.

Now the clock's broken. I'm scared. I try to revert to egg form. My plates and glasses are all smashed against the wall next to the mirror. And my stuffed friends are laying all over the floor. Legs and arms . . . black shiny eyes and big smiles looking up at me. I sink in their sound. None.

And the sun fell on the afternoon, and on the dry dust of "Ottos." Bikes in grove sat by the door, and shone their bright metal against the air and through eyes. Those in leather and jeans hugged us and smiled. Everyone and their family sat in the large field behind "Ottos." Me and you held hands and picked yellow and brown flowers in the wide but full round circles within the tall grass. Once a year as years smoothed by we sat, talked, and laughed till night and the grass grew cool.

Long ago, after you died, I drove plastic shopping carts against slowly burning markets and ate hormonal ham on Sunday evenings after services I pretended to hear. But it doesn't mean that myself nor the woman next door, who invites her husband to sleep over after Uncle Gary, Uncle Tom, Uncle Steve, Uncle Dick, Uncle Bob, and Uncle John have left to watch wide screen football in the local bar, and drink cocktails with the bubble-mouthed blond who slurps like a guppy, care. Why? Are we supposed to? Am I Am I?

I'm only an old woman on an old couch that doesn't move, in a room that's twisting a dark shade, which is as dark as Theda Bara's lips and your eyes. And sometimes I wake up screaming, in the middle of the night, on the floor. And it's so real. Like someone's next to me. Someone standing and watching. Someone breathing . . . I smell familiar cologne. . . not really. But sometimes I wish.

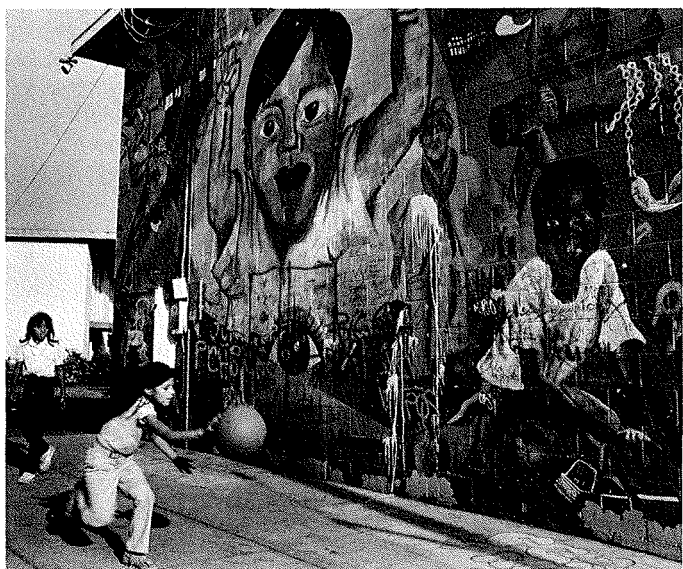
Actually, the walls are white and mute. They cannot whimper. No response, but the soundless screams of me slightly reverberated in my brain. My whimper.

I've lost control over sequence. I've lost control over thought. If my fangs were longer I'd gouge myself . . . this . . . there's . . . none . . . control . . . I'm the old woman hid, sometimes knocking on the sides of my box, within feeling your lips somewhere traveling the width of my stomach, the length of my body, somewhere, before. But I'm alone. They are afraid they may get it. They will.

I want to go to sleep. My skin's dry, and it cracks, and it breaks. "Good night, Teddy." His plastic eyes never close.



Candice Chaves



David Blumenkrantz

El Monte, California

First Place, 1984-1985 Academy of American Poets Competition

Wes Hempel

At the Pentecostal church on Arden Drive
my father moves through the sanctuary
quietly arranging chairs while I lean
on the green sill in the Sunday School room
gaze across irises and tall grass
to the parking lot of the Ball Canning Factory
that mass of corrugated building
I always thought was abandoned

That morning in our kitchen a milk bottle
slipped from my mother's grasp
and shattered on her foot
a bright flood opened from her instep
My father carried her to the bathroom
cleaned and wrapped the cut

I am talking about my father
the woman in his arms
and twenty years in El Monte

Sometimes I think I could get in my car
and go back to that town
to the church my grandfather built
our house on Allgeyer
the alley behind the dairy
where my brother and I played ball
before he went away

I could drive across the railroad tracks
by the Coffee Shop on Tyler
next to Five Points Bowl
the back to back phone booths
in front of Arrow Auto Sales

where a girl in a white dress walks
after class with her hand in mine
When it begins to rain we dash
into the booths, call each other up
pretend we're secret lovers

I could follow the concrete curve of the wash
north to the Palm View Trailer Court
those sloping vacant fields
where I walked alone the morning after graduation
and found an abandoned desk on its back
all the empty drawers stuck out
among weeds and grass into the sky

On Leave

Wes Hempel

David didn't say anything. That was typical of him. At least that hadn't changed. He stood in front of the fireplace in the den and smiled as everyone took turns posing with him. I watched Aunt Louise wrap her fat arms around his uniformed chest, sidle up as close as her large frame would allow.

"Kiss me you big handsome military man!" She laughed and everyone laughed. The camera flashed as David bent to kiss her cheek.

I saw all of it from where I was sitting in the living room. I didn't see what there was to be happy about, why everyone was laughing and eating and drinking like it was a celebration.

"Okay, Janet," my mother said, "It's your turn."

When Janet stood up the room quieted. David waited by the mantle, looking at her and smiling, his hands in his pockets. She smoothed her dress, tucked a strand of short brown hair behind one ear, and leaned against him. He didn't kiss her but put his arm around her waist as the camera flashed.

I didn't like Janet. David, I guessed, was in love. He spent practically every minute of his leave with her. Every school day of those two weeks I rushed home, got out the bat and gloves, hoping he would come home before dark. As the sun was setting the day before the party, I lay on my bed with his mitt over my face. I closed my eyes and breathed in the dark richness of the sweat-stained leather. I remembered how it used to be before he met Janet. He had never broken a promise to me before.

I hardly recognized him. Everyone kept saying how handsome he looked in his uniform; I thought he looked odd. It was so meticulously pressed that it looked flat, two-dimensional — as if he were walking around holding it in front of him instead of actually wearing it. And, with his hair gone, he didn't look like my brother. His head, practically shaved, looked like a peach, a cap of fuzz, not unlike the dead clump, the unfledged sparrow we found under the eaves two years before.

I was seven. It was the same year our father asked him to move to Colorado. David decided to stay with us, I think mostly because I begged him to. We shared the same upstairs room. The sparrows hatched almost directly above my head. I had positioned my bed, in spite of mother's protests, under the window where I could watch the progress of the nest. Each day I kept tabs on them,

waiting for the eggs to hatch, excited with the prospect of watching the babies learn to fly.

I woke one morning, just after they had hatched, to silence. I looked up but could see no sign of them. David was already out so I rushed to get dressed. Before I finished he came in. He didn't say anything but waited for me to put my jacket on, then led me outside. Scattered among the tall grass and irises were the remains of one of the babies.

After school we buried it in a band-aid tin beside the white pales that once enclosed our rose garden. The backyard had become wild and overgrown, but we cleared away a plot. David made a cross out of popsicle sticks and a rubber band; I adorned the mound with honeysuckle and clover.

The next morning I remembered waking in the night and seeing his bed empty. I looked out the window and saw him by the grave, his white terrycloth robe the same shadowy blue in the moonlight as the overgrown calla lilies next to the fence. I planned to ask him about it at breakfast but forgot. Later I wondered if I hadn't just dreamt it.

I watched him now as he sat on the couch between Aunt Ruth and Janet. He didn't seem to mind that everyone was fussing over him. Mrs. Piper, our next door neighbor, sliced him a piece of the cake she had brought over, then sat on the piano bench to watch him eat it. She was the only parent in our neighborhood that had children my age. It was an old neighborhood of white clapboard houses, and mostly retired people lived in them. I didn't like Wanda and Alice Piper too much. I never played with Alice at all, but sometimes I'd go roller skating with Wanda if things got desperate enough. They had come to the party with their mother. Through the sliding glass doors I could see them on the patio, feeding cake to Alice's doll.

David, who was being extremely careful not to drop any cake on his uniform, had managed to smudge chocolate frosting on his chin. I noticed it even from where I was sitting. He had very fair skin, almost the same color as the calla lilies in our backyard. He was also overly modest. Though he had wide shoulders and a strong build, he rarely took his shirt off. Practically the only time I saw him without it was when he shaved. Before he joined the service he let me sit on the edge of the tub in the morning and watch. Outdoors he had to be careful. If he was in the sun longer than a few minutes he would burn, like he did the day he taught me to swim at Black Rock Lake.

We had planned to go fishing at Purdy's Trout Farm in the foothills north of town. It was a good hour's drive. When we got there that morning the farm was closed. I tried not to let my disappointment show. He suggested we drive up to Black Rock Lake where he camped when he was in Indian Rangers.

It was called Black Rock Lake because of the slate and black silt that surrounded the area. The lake, bottomed with this silt, was also black. The surface was like a mirror. David rolled his levis up and waded along the shore. I went in in my underwear. We were the only ones around.

"Don't go out too far," he said.

I was fascinated by the sky and the green pines on the surface and the rippling effect caused by the movement of my body. I felt the black mud between my toes though I couldn't see my feet. As the disturbed silt rose from the bottom, brilliant gold particles flickered underneath the surface in the shafts of sun against my stomach. When I stopped moving and the water became still, I looked at my reflection.

That was the last thing I remember before it happened. I was staring at my face and thinking I looked strange, like someone I had never seen before. There were birds circling on air currents above the lake. I watched them swoop down. I must have moved forward. My feet slipped out from under me, and I found myself thrashing in over my head. My mouth filled with water as I tried to call out. The sky swirled blue and green and black. Then I felt his arms roughly under mine, chafing against my ribs and chest as he hoisted and pulled me through the water.

I lay on the shore; he sat next to me, his knees drawn up supporting his elbows, the butts of his palms on his forehead. I could hear the hard release of his breath, see the water drip from his hair and nose.

After a few minutes, he took his wet clothes off and spread them over a rock. Then he dove in, swam the width of the lake and back. I watched his white shoulders move cleanly and powerfully through the water.

As he neared the shore I heard him calling me. "Come on back in," he shouted.

"No," I said, "I don't feel like it."

He moved closer, stopped in water up to his waist and looked at me. "It's important, Jeff. I won't let anything happen to you."

Later, driving home, we sang songs he had learned in Indian Rangers. He didn't like to talk but had a strong singing voice. I listened and watched the skin on his face and neck deepen redder and redder.

"Jeffrey . . .," someone was calling me. "Jeffrey, your father wants to talk to you." It was Janet. I looked up. David was in the den holding the phone toward me.

"I don't want to," I said. David stood, looking surprised, still offering me the phone. My mother put her cake down and came over to my chair.

"Jeff, your father is calling from Colorado and he's asked for you."

I noticed how quiet it had become, how everyone was looking at me, waiting for me to get up from the chair and walk over and take the phone from my brother. I don't know why that simple act seemed impossible. My father rarely called, usually on birthdays and holidays; I always enjoyed talking to him. So it was as surprising to me as it was to everyone else when I simply repeated: "I don't want to."

I stared at my arm on the arm of the chair. David, who I'd never heard lie before — said something into the phone about me not feeling well. I'm not sure he lied then.

When the phone was hung up, my mother tapped me on the knee.

"Go and stand by Davy," she whispered, "I want to take your picture."

"I don't want to," I said.

"You don't want a picture of yourself with your brother? He's going away tomorrow; you may not see him for a long time."

I stared at my arm. For some reason it was impossible for me to move. Then David grabbed me by the elbows and dragged me across the room. I felt the same rough chafing against my ribs and chest. But I struggled to get free this time. I kicked as hard as I could and yelled: "I don't want any picture. I don't care."

He held on tight. "Sure you do," he said. "Anyway, I want one with you. You can send me a copy when you write to me."

"I'm not going to write to you," I screamed. "Let go of me." I wriggled one arm free and hit him on the chest and shoulders. I didn't understand why I was hitting him or why I was yelling. I struggled as hard as I could to get free and when I couldn't, my eyes blurred and I screamed: "I hate you!" He let go, and I ran down the hall still yelling, "I'm glad you're going away. I hope you never come back."

In the dark attic, I stood before the crosshatched wires of the vent. The sun was low in the sky. Yellow leaves from Sweet Gums and Walnut trees blew along the sidewalk. I looked out across the rooftops to the yellow fields, the row of eucalyptus trees that ran along the alley behind the dairy. There were already a few chimneys started. I thought soon the streetlamps would blink on.

When he found me he had the gloves and the bat. I saw my glove come flying at me in the dim light and reached out to catch it just as it hit me in the stomach.

Walking to the field, I wanted to say something, to tell him how sorry I was. I wanted him to know how I really felt about his leaving, how I felt about him. But I was afraid if I tried to talk, nothing would come out.

I think he must have known how I felt. Perhaps he knew then even better than I did. As we walked, he ruffled my hair and began talking idly about baseball, about the wind. I remember wishing

we would never reach the field, that we would just go on walking like that forever.

It was late when we got started. He pitched underhand to me. The red sun threw shadows like spears from eucalyptus leaves across his broad teeth and cocked arm. I hit one, a long fly, and watched from the center of the field as he moved away toward the mountains outlining the twilight sky.

Quaker Prayer

Mike Lawson

When Grandma said
Thanksgiving grace
I listened

to the ballgame
turned down.

When Dad asked
to join hands
in silent prayer,

eyes shut,
I smelled green bean steam,
heard Uncle Don wheeze,
held his hand
for the first time;
prehistoric sagging skin
on small bones,
moist palm,
a counterpoint pulse.

I squinted a look.
Staring at me,
he stuck out his tongue.

Dad said, "Amen."

Rear View Mirror

Mike Lawson

I drive a Z.
Rubbed and shining,
it's a scarlet sequin
on a grey flannel freeway.

Downtown,
it dances
a slow boogie,
moves like a woman in black pumps,
smells like a man,
but never sweats.

It's my best outfit,
a symmetrical crease
that fits tight
around my ass,
so I can't carry a wallet,
but then,
it is my ID.

It's eye contact,
the come-on,
the bulge in my pants,
erection
I can show
everyone.

Grandstand Play

Mike Lawson

Neikro slipped a scroogie
past Sax
for a strike
as a boy let it fly
from the second deck.

Flaps up,
it caught an updraft
of cigarette smoke, hot dog steam
and enthusiasm.

Neikro saw it,
and being a pitcher himself,
admired the balance, location
and thrust.

Vinnie announced it.
Forty-thousand, cracking peanut shells
watched page forty-three
of the program
hover over first base.

It floated silently,
white
against outfield green.
Murphy charged it,
settled under it
and squeezed.

Neikro adjusted his cup,
licked his fingertips
and returned to work.

The Night Agnes Caught Fire

Cathy Comenas

After work at the bra factory
and a blood thick steak
Agnes and Mari, twins from birth
sat on yellow vinyl recliners
in front of a black and white Merv Griffin

Agnes smoked a Marlboro
complained about being thirty,
the daisies she gave her supervisor Alice
wilting two days later
and Elke Sommers' husband
not letting Elke race the Italian Grand Prix
She talked about how Mari don't need no man
to take care of her
Agnes would do that for her

Mari thought about dying her hair blonde
losing weight, how she wished she were married
but couldn't leave Agnes all alone
and the two Mars bars in the refrigerator

During a commercial break
Agnes put on her new pajamas
while Mari retrieved the Mars bars

The candy anchored in her stomach
Agnes lit a Marlboro
but this time her pajamas seemed to explode
as she jumped up from a burning recliner
she screamed that she was on fire
ran out the front door into the street
Mari behind her yelling for help
she couldn't put her sister out

One Day Roy

Cathy Comenas

1.

One day
Roy kissed a boy
he came home one night and said
 mom, dad I love Danny.
mom cried and said
 I knew it.
dad threw him against the wall
Roy thought of Danny's boy lips
dad hit Roy in the eye
locked him in the coat closet
where Roy saw Danny's body
float down from dark ceiling
and lay on him
a blanket of warm leaves
just in from sunbathing

2.

One day
Roy said
 I'm going to New York
 I didn't take acting in school
 for nothing you know.
mom said
 If that's what you want.
dad said
 You'll be right at home with
 all those fags
dad's voice hot coals in Roy's ears
and his fat hairy hands
grew in Roy's pupils

3.

One day in New York
Roy discovered men's bars
safe dark closets with light shows
A man asked him if he'd like to be a star
Of course Roy said
 That's why I came to New York.
So Roy became very good at sex

4.

One day
Roy was bad
just like when he told mom, dad
 I love Danny.
he bought himself
a leather jock strap with silver spikes
and found a teacher in a leather mask
who taught him that being bad pays

5.

One day
Roy woke up crying
he had a headache
and called a friend
who came to shoot a pain killer
through his virgin vein

6.

One day there was nothing to feel
Roy made and spent lots of money
he dreamt of swimming
in a pool of the whitest sand
and woke up to bleeding blisters
that made his bed sheets red

7.

One day
Roy became a skeleton
doom hiding in his veins
a black slug with a dog's head
barking to be fed
lack of cash beached him

8.

One day Roy's mom
sent him a letter
it came back
no one could find Roy
somebody said
 He got so skinny he
 just disappeared.
but nobody knows that I saw Roy
talking to himself
in a bus going towards the Hudson
a finger gun to his head
he pulled the trigger a hundred times
and then the bus driver said
 Hey boy, this bus don't
 go no further.

At the San Francisco Greyhound Bus Terminal

Cathy Comenas

There's an opera star,
pink curlers in black wire hair,
skin the color of crow feathers,
her feet safe in fluffy slippers,
singing in the Greyhound Bus Terminal restroom

Her voice echoes through the hollow room
as she makes up her own foreign language
The toilets listen while sinks drip

A toilet flushes
a pale woman
in a flowery dress
enters the stage area on high heels
she washes her hands and smiles
 You have a wonderful voice.

The opera star shows yellow teeth
 Have you ever put your
 fingers up your nose and
 sneezed? Was it as fun as
 killing an infant with a fork?
 I hope one day you eat a black
 man's insides and spit them out
 on Sammy Davis, Jr.

Woman in America

Joi Weston

Being a woman in America means
not being able to joke with
the guy in the liquor store
when you're buying your tampons, or dr. pepper, or cat food
because he might follow you home.

At best it's just the menacing beam of headlights behind your car,
turning when you turn
pausing at your house
and then the loud suggestion out the car window
which you ignore as you plan the best route from car to house door.

At worst he rapes you
(or, I suppose, at worst he rapes you then murders you,
but let's not even think of that)
while you kick and scream and shout and struggle
(because you're a well-read feminist who subscribes to *Signs*
and you've read Pauline Bart —
but this time it doesn't work).

And when he comes up for trial
(since, good victim that you are, you memorized
his face, his car
and left deep scratches on his back)
he'll plead you wanted it.

Because,
after all,
you smiled when he laughed at your joke.

*

Gregg Eisenberg

the axe wasted in the clutter
once i abandoned it.
chucked in the bushes i let the screen door
slam behind me.

now i walk the streets

stopping to hear
 the noise of a room — touch my palm to the cool bricks

i have watched my hands turn soft
and pale in the artificial light,
 no more hacking away at logs by lamplight
 no splinters in the dark

but a weak feeling as i wander

for the house is not sealed
 and the beams not secured
 and the tools rusted in the yard.
children peruse my house
when i am not in
approach and touch its corners

 peek through the rattling window
 see my dishes on the floor
and the sandpaper and the buckets to catch
 leaking rain
 bruise themselves on protruding nails
 and scatter when i appear —
following familiar markers in moonlight
 (boots dragging in the dust)

Dec. 23, 1983
Ann Arbor, MI.

On a Tight June Afternoon

Stephen Collins

Me and Henry and just about everybody else used the trick. You see, you bring the brown paper bag up to the neck of the bottle just enough to hide what you had. Of course, this never fooled nobody, but at least it hid your brand. Me and Henry drank Muscatel. Others drank Thunderbird or Ripple, but we didn't much go in for that kind a crowd. Those Thunderbird bums lived up in Griffith Park under the Hollywood sign or around the observatory; they payed no rent and had the extra change for the smooth stuff. I heard that they'd catch stray dogs and have a regular party roasting them over their camp fires. Sometimes late at night from clear down on the city floor just beyond the foothills we could hear their laughter and yelps a joy echain' off the cavern walls from deep in the park. Me and Henry would just look at each other shakin' our heads.

The other trick was tryin' not to get too tight in the mornin' or you'd fall asleep at your bench and somebody'd go through your pockets. When Henry was alive, I didn't much worry because he gabbed all the time except when he was shakin' his head, and I could never fall asleep. A while back he crawled into his abandoned Impala on Kingsley with a quarter bottle a Musk; said his stomach was upset. Two weeks later the smell got so bad I finally called the cops. I didn't want to rat on him, but what could I do? Now I keep to myself mostly and nobody much pays attention to a white haired old drunk. That suits me fine, but I have to try extra hard to keep straight in the mornin'. Besides, if I slept all day I'd be up all night when there's nothin' to look at. I try to watch myself, but I just get so damn thirsty.

One late mornin', in the easy heat of early summer when the sun looked just like one a those strawberry daiquiris they serve over at "Little Steve's," I did get too tight though; that's when I needed somebody to talk to. The Ethical Drugs Store was stuck in the bottom floor of the six story San Marcos Apartment buildin', and my bus bench sat just in front of its orange wall under the "Herpes Cure — BHT" sign. White and grey laundry hung from all the open windows upstairs. I muttered to myself there watchin' all these people walkin' quickly by, steppin' over pigeon droppin's, givin' me these queer looks. Traffic snarled like a soft rain shower and my eyes kept fallin' shut and poppin' back open. He waddled over to me and got me completely by surprise. Normally I would have spit

at him or yelled at him or asked him nicely to go away, but like I say, I was too tight in the mornin' and I thought talkin' with him might keep me awake.

His arms stretched past his thighs, and he walked hunched over kind a bouncin' his head like a gorilla. He sat by me, reached out this mammoth sweaty hand, and rubbed an ear into one shoulder. I took his cold palm, before I could think otherwise, tryin' to see his bloodshot pupils through those thick horn-rimmed glasses. He pouted his lips and stared hard.

"My name's Wenard." He bobbed my hand up and down.

"What?"

"My name's Wenard."

"Wenard? Oh, Leonard, Leo. Thrilled to the hilt to meet you." He slurred his speech, but so did Henry. We got along; we spoke the same language. He kept bobblin' my hand up and down with his cold cucumber fingers; almost shook the sucker right off, but I pulled it away in time. Little balls a sweat made his glasses slip down to the point a his nose.

He was about twenty-eight, I guess, judgin' from the light red stubbly shadow that started on his chin and raced right up over the back a his head. He could pro'bly have done well in the third grade. So I felt a little superior to the idiot, moron, what's the word? Retarded? Yes, retard. Somethin'. We could be good for each other bein' that he could pro'bly keep the hoodlums away with his lobster hands. Henry would have liked him.

"I'm gonna see them ambuwinces today." He honked like a goose, a sort a sour whine. Then he pushed up his glasses with his first finger and pouted. "My mom said I could."

"Oh."

"My mom said if I took out the trash I could go." His forehead was thick above his eyebrows like a caveman. "They weally wike me there. All the dwivers say I'm good luck."

"What makes you think I care, Sonny?" I said.

"My mom said if . . ."

"What makes you think I care?"

"I don' know."

"Well, why you hangin' around then?" He didn't move. He just looked at me with his sad pink eyes, droopy cheeks and cauliflower ears. "Well, have a drink then." I stuck out my paper bottle.

"My mom says I'm no allowed."

"Your mother? Hell, does your mother tell you everythin'?" I kept on.

"I don' know."

"What do you know?"

"I don' know."

"Have a drink." He studied the bottle. "Go on." He tipped my Musk straight up in the air an took a huge gulp. "Hell with them 'ambowinces' or whatever you said, come with me. We got things

to do." I stumbled up and managed to balance myself on my feet; the retarded gorilla took another swallow, got up and followed about two steps behind. I stopped and waited. "Come on," I said, "I can't talk to you like this. Get up here." He waddled up next to me and we set out down the street.

I had it in my mind to make the rounds. Actually, to get to "Mr. Enchilada's Burrito Palace" would be plenty. Two blocks can be murder on the corns, you know, not to mention the hemorrhoids. We walked slow; I didn't want Leo to get lost.

The sidewalk was gettin' hot, burnin' my feet through the holes in my shoes. I did need some cardboard to stuff in them but settled for some balled up trash that made me limp. The cars passin' honked and blew out smog. All those faces with their copper eyes on fire seemed to look at me, then drive by. Behind those faces were dreams, a hundred of them, each one a piece of broken coal half burnin', half ash. Most just ended up a clump a white cinder.

"You ever have a dream, Leo?"

"A dream?" He thought about it for a second. "I'm gonna kiw the Mailman."

"Kill the Mailman? You mean one of those guys in the cute blue suits who spray mace on all the dogs? Those guys with the thin blue ties and slicked hair? Kill the Mailman? What he ever do to you?"

"He don' wike me. He won' bring my ambuwince magazines. He a bad man. My mom says so. She say she ordered it, he won' bring it. It's his fault. I'm gonna stwangle him." He laughed twistin' his hands together ringin' an imaginary neck. "First I'm gonna tie him up, then I'm gonna stwangle him." He twisted his beefy hands again.

"Nice dream," I said. "Dreams are good to have. I always wanted a dog." As we walked along, me limp in', him bouncin', cars kept honkin', and I could see people crossin' the street ahead gettin' off our stretch a sidewalk before we got to them. They were all goin' home, I guess.

"Where do you live, Red?" I said.

"Over dare." He pointed somewhere; I wasn't payin' attention. He started to giggle every now and then so I took my Musk back and took a little swig, just enough to wet my gums. The sun with one tiny cloud blockin' a corner of it looked like a half-eatin' apple; it made me hungry. That apple hit its peak in the sky shinin' in my eyes makin' them water. Nobody should have to be up that early in the afternoon.

"Why do you cwuy?" he said.

"I'm not cryin'."

"Yes," he honked at me.

"No," I said. "Yes. Maybe. I don't know." I wiped the sun from my eyes and the sweat from under my arms. "I live over there." I pointed down the block and looked in his face while he tried

uselessly to stuff his oversized hands into his pockets. He had Henry's eyes, drunk as a brewer's fart all droopy and flushed. "Mrs. Kingstead keeps me up; room and board for the price a my S.S. check."

"S.S. check?" His glasses slid down his nose.

"Yeah, Social Security, you know. All my money for a space with just enough room for me and maybe a dog. It's too much dough; anythin's too much for that war lord." He giggled and belched into his lobster hands. "Can't hardly buy a good bottle no more, or even a bad one; have to look for quarters on the ground. She won't let me have a dog; just a little one, I say. No pets, says she. Not good for me, not clean. Bitch. Afraid of a few fleas, the mutt. She pro'bly would get along well with a little beast."

"Kiw her," he said pushin' up his glasses bouncin' along side a me.

"Kill her? Never thought of that. No, no. Should fight her though; should show her what clean's all about." I scratched my head. I couldn't figure out why Kingstead didn't like me. She was just like me far as I could tell. She spitted and farted just like me, only she did it when my back was turned; I did it to say hello. "Just a little dog is all I want. Not much to ask."

"Then stwangle her and get one." He twisted his cucumber fingers out in front a him.

"And ruin a perfectly good dream, no chance. I spent too much time thinkin' about this one. Then what would I do?" A dog sounded nice, a little one to jump on my lap and lick my dirty face. I scratched my head. Yes, that's a good dream to have, a dog with half its tongue hangin' out a its mouth drippin' little drops a spit.

We were gettin' close to "Mr. Enchilada's."

"Ever eat here?" I said.

"My mom won' let me."

"Is your mom here?"

"No."

"Take another drink." I stuck out my paper bottle; he drank down two big gulps. "Whoa, save a drop for the old man." He giggled, reached over and scratched my head. "We'll eat here; it's on you."

"My mom onwy gave me five dowars."

"That's enough." I went up to the order window. The place was owned by a Chinese couple raised in Mexico. They spoke Spanish good, far as I could tell, but they spoke English with their tongues twisted like they didn't know if they was supposed to be Chinese or Mexican aliens.

"Is Mr. Enchilada here?" I said.

"No, Mista Enchilda not here," said the tiny Panda bear behind the counter. Her brown jelly bean eyes were stuck in a thick doughy yellow face. Greased black hair clumped atop her head pushed inside her ears and bunched in little tufts in her chin, framin' that face. I wanted to mold those puffy cheeks a dough,

squeeze them in my fists, then leave a thumb print. "You have money, Mista?" I showed her Leo's five, and she gave me a crooked smile with three black teeth and a whole lot a yellow ones. Her white shirt was grey as a rat's hide and had red and brown blotches and drip stains runnin' down the front. I liked her; we had the same tailor.

"What you order, man?" I ordered a taco burger, a bean and cheeze omelet, and chili fries then moved back to one a the two red, white and blue benches. Some Mexican woman and her little boy moved away from the bench just then leavin' me alone. She said somethin' in Spanish to the air with a hard look on her face, and the little boy was holdin' his nose. I was glad to get the table. A big cockroach with long brown whiskers ran out in front a me, stopped, looked around then shit on the table. It was such a pretty thing; I squashed it and flicked it away with my finger.

"What you order, boy?" Mrs. Enchilada pointed to Leo with a chewed pencil and bit-off eraser. He honked out his order, sound-ed somethin' like a tofu burrito, and his glasses slid to the tip a his nose. She had a good hard time tryin' to figure out what he was sayin'. Course, he didn't much know what she was sayin' either. He told her about his dreams ringin' his hands together, chokin' an imaginary neck. She looked pleased and showed him all her bad teeth.

We sat to eat while the place started to fill up. Leo's glasses were just about to fall off his face. "Here, let me get that before you hurt yourself," I said pushin' up his glasses for him.

"My mom won' let anyone touch my glasses. Says they'll get broked."

"Did I break them?"

"No."

"Well, there you go."

"Yeah," he said laughin', "There I go."

Most people huddled at the other end a the stand far away from us. They were mostly Mexican but some slants and blacks came. The place was always open, everyday, all day, and at least one a the Enchilada couple was always there behind the counter takin' orders. They took turns, one worked the other slept; pro'bly hardly ever saw each other. I never knew them to take a vacation, and they been here goin' on ten years. They owned the stand and built it from nothin' to what it was today. They weren't finished though. They could never make enough or work enough; they just kept on makin' it what it was.

As we ate Leo chomped up and down on his tofu burrito, chewin' each bite about a hundred times, finished his food even faster than me. Course he didn't get much after what I got. I scratched my head and wondered if his mom taught him how to eat. Kingstead always chewed like that except she was never eatin', just chewin'.

Mrs. Enchilada screamed out some orders, and I heard seventeen different people talkin' at once, all these different languages goin' on about what they plan to do or what their kids plan on doin'. Leo was gigglin' after every bite really enjoyin' himself. He took one last gulp a my Musk and tossed away the polished off paper bottle. My head started to clear, and I felt hot and wet, flustered from that burnin' copper sun, like a meltin' penny in the sky. Just then this big ugly black hooker came up swingin' a little purse with her first finger and sat at our bench. She wore scarlet spiked heel shoes, black leather pants, and a bright blushin' halter that squeezed the blood from her body up into her real red lips. She had a large chest pushed way up high like she was ready to fight with it and supertracked arms with small rosey purple bruises a joy. Her eyes were big oil drops alive and beatin', surrounded with green welts she pro'bly got in a brawl with some john. She couldn't feel those shiners, not through that snow she shot in her arms.

"Hey ol' man, what chew up to?" she chomped on too much gum.

"I'm up to no good. What else?"

"Yeah, like I figured. Who's the gorilla?"

"He's my friend, Leo."

"Pleased as punch, Leo," she said strokin' her black head.

"My name's Wenard." He stuck out his big hand; she just looked at him.

"No tanks, Leo," she said. "I had enough squeez'n big thick sweaty things today." His lobster hand stayed stuck out there in the air, his pink face droopy with his lower lip pushed out and his eyes red and puffy. Her jaw worked the gum, and her head bobbed back and forth. She looked at his sorry face., "All right," she said shakin' his hand, "Have a thrill." He laughed like a happy goose.

"Takin' a break?," I asked.

"Oh yeah, don't chew know it." She spoke so fast I could hardly understand her; I was gettin' annoyed. "I just scored some super-blow for me and my ol' man over on Beverly, a little sugar candy for my peace a mind, you know. Gett'n damn expensive for a rock now-a-days." Leo stared hard at her with two cucumber fingers in his smilin' mouth.

"Slow down, will you," I said. "Jesus." She didn't hear me.

"Yeah, that stuff's my bread and water lately, you know what I mean."

"Damn it," I said. "Will you shut up?"

"No man. I'm talk'n, I'm talk'n," she said.

"Yeah," Leo said. "She talkin', she talkin'." Hell, I just let her talk; what could I do? It wasn't so bad.

"Everyth'n's gett'n expensive now-a-days," she went on. "My ol' man he says to me last night, he says, 'Girl, you better bring in some more dough else I whip your ass.' I says to him, I say, 'Look nigger, you want it so bad, you get on your back, or stick your ass up in the air,' I says. And you know what that nigger done? He beat the shit out a me. Said someth'n about a dream to get out a this shit hole

before he turn fifty. I say I'll give the sucker fifty cent right now and he be gone. But I'll never leave him. Can't. He my ol' man."

A lot a the customers looked over at us blustered and embarrassed because the hooker was talkin' so loud and wavin' her hands. We were causin' quite a scene with Leo laughin' and me belchin'. Mrs. Enchilada looked out from behind the counter with her hands on her hips and her head cocked to one side, mad as a wet rooster.

"Hey, you sista," she yelled over at the hooker. "You go away from here."

"Oh, up yours," said the hooker flippin' her off.

"We don't want your kind here."

"Tell it to the Mayor." Mrs. Enchilada went into the back for a while because she couldn't do nothin' with the hooker. Then she came back to the counter and it was business as usual. The hooker went on about her man and her johns, and I sat back watchin' her. She bobbed her head and chewed the big wad a gum sometimes nibblin' it in her front teeth. She waved her hands, pointed at Leo, pointed at me and stroked her black hair. Her big mouth was movin' fast, but I couldn't hear what she said, and I couldn't hear Mrs. Enchilada callin' out orders. I just saw those real red lips workin' faster and faster. It was pretty funny, me sittin' there with my arms folded like I was payin' attention so close. I started to laugh, first just a little giggly, then out loud until I was clutchin' my belly and wipin' my eyes.

"What chew laugh'n at ol' man? Don't chew laugh at me." I gasped a little and caught myself.

"Oh don't get your dander up," I said.

"Don't chew laugh at me. Nobody laughs at me."

"I'm not laughin at you. I'm just tight."

"Well, you go drink some place else."

"Yeah," said Leo.

"You be laugh'n at me," she said. "I don't go in for that shit." All the chuckle went out a my belly, and I sat holdin' on to a smile while she went on talkin' just to Leo. He layed his big hands on the table and pouted his happy flushed face at her.

Just then, I saw this little runty dog scamper by the front a the stand. Half his white red tongue hung out the corner a his mouth drippin' tiny drops a spit. Its brown skinny body hurried over to the trash can a few feet away and pushed a long snout into the scraps on the ground around it. Flies buzzed about, some crawlin' into his ears. I watched the dog chomp down on a crusty old bun and thought about Henry and that wrecked car he called home. He wanted a small dog just like me, one that could sleep in the back seat on top a the stack a newspapers. I thought about Kingstead too, bitch. I never really asked for much, but she could never give in. I started to feel sober thinkin' about her.

While the hooker went on yappin' I all of a sudden heard this little cryin' burst a siren comin' down the street, just enough to get our attention. Leo jumped up at the sound, jerked the table, and

started screamin', "Ambuwince! Ambuwince!" The hooker stopped gabbin' real fast and turned to look. When this clean black and white pulled up I saw that Leo wasn't too happy that it wasn't an ambulance. Mrs. Enchilada stood behind the counter with her crooked smile pasted back on, rubbin' the tuffs a hair on her chin.

A salt and pepper team got out and got their billy clubs ready. The white cop straightened out his pretty blue suit, pushin' the knot in his tie up to his throat. He smoothed back his slick hair, then put his cap on. The black dude motioned for the hooker, so she got up and strutted over to them. I didn't move and only heard a little a their muffled voices over the traffic. Pretty soon a crowd started formin'.

The black cop said somethin' to the hooker and pointed up the street. She put her hands on her hips.

"I don't care what you say," she said. "You got the wrong information." The white guy butted in with somethin' smart, and she got pissed. "I don't care, Honky. You can't do shit." There were some more words mostly from the white cop. "No. No, you're wrong, man. She's full a shit," she said. "I don't care who you talked to. You fuck with me, you better be wait'n for some serious trouble, man. I got connections."

She turned to walk away, but the black cop grabbed her, twisted her around, puttin' her cheek hard on the squad car's hood. He held both her wrists in his one hand behind her back.

Just as the crowd saw about as much as it could with a lot a people stoppin' and rubber-neckin', Leo came crashin' through the bodies and grabbed the throat a the white cop twistin' it with his cold cucumber fingers. Then there was a whole lot a commotion and people were yellin' and pushin' close, and I had a tough time seein' them wrestle Leo to the ground while the hooker kicked and scratched. Before it was over, they had both Leo and the hooker handcuffed and stuffed into the back a their squad car, and the hooker was screamin' somethin' about injustices and police brutality.

That squad car drove away with them both, leavin' me to sit alone with nothin' but my thoughts and dreams. The crowd a people was gone and Mrs. Enchilada was back to normal business. The customers still huddled on one side a the stand away from me even though I was sober now, my head achin' behind my eyes. I rubbed my forehead and wished Henry were here to drink with me.

I looked up and saw the sun was like a tired red fist cocked in the sky. It sort a looked like Henry's cracked bloody knuckles after that brawl we had at "Little Steve's" back when we were respectable. They threw us out on our asses. That tired fist dripped blood from the sky and shot pink daggers a light into my eyes. It was makin' them water, and I couldn't stop wipin' that sun from my face.

The runty dog was still diggin' through the trash pantin' with its pink tongue. I got up and patted it on the head and was just about to leave when he licked my dirty wet face, his tail waggin'. I picked

him up and his tongue gave me a good work over glazin' my cheeks with a thin film a doggie spit; he was such a pretty thing. Hell with Kingstead.

As I walked away with the little runt under my arm, tiny drops a sweat ran from behind my ears and raced down my neck. About half way down the block, I looked back. In the street the traffic snarled with horns honkin' and smog blowin'. Mrs. Enchilada was screamin' out some orders, and all those people were huddled around the window screamin' back. I wiped the sweat from the back a my neck, scratched my head, and kept goin'.

A Candle In The Window

Laurel Dewey

Matt Calver's old man knew the facts. It would only take one night where the temperature dropped to an even 29° to ruin the orange crop. For three years in a row it was the same story, the same waiting game and the same smudge pots that would burn throughout the night, trying to hold off the freeze. It was also a time for the same ultimatums. "God, if I could just know that I was gonna have one good crop this year . . ."

"It's a damn no-win situation you got here!" Roy said as he cradled his hands around his coffee cup. "Seems like you put out and put out some more, and it gets to the point where you think that it's finally gonna be your year to make a few bucks, and then this! Damn freeze! You know, it gets to where a fellow shouldn't care no more!"

All the other men sitting in the diner nodded, but said nothing.

Pat came around with a fresh pot of coffee. "How 'bout if I warmed up your coffee, Roy?"

"I'd rather you'd warm my heart, Pat," said Roy, reaching over to grab Pat's waist.

"You can top my cup off, Pat," said Jay, keeping his eyes fixed on the table.

"How 'bout you, George? Need a refill?"

George didn't answer. His concentration was focused on two burnt wooden match sticks he had discovered on the table. For the past fifteen minutes he'd been rolling them between his thumb and first finger. The friction had already worn the edges round.

Roy spoke up. "Hey, George! If you're fixing on starting a fire with those sticks, you're gonna have to rub them a whole lot harder!"

George looked up and broke into a soft smile. He tossed the matches aside and drank down the last of his coffee. "No more for me, Pat. I promised Mona I'd fix the flue on the fireplace. It keeps snapping shut when the wind picks up."

"You tell her 'hi' for me, George."

"Will do."

"And you tell that boy of yours that if he doesn't show his face around here before he goes away to school . . ."

"I'll give him your regards . . ." George said softly, with a wink of his eye. He lifted his jacket collar and headed for the door.

"Hey, George," said Jay, "you think you're gonna be out tonight?"

"Don't know. Depends how far it drops."

"You call me if you need any help, you hear?"

"You bet."



George stepped out of the diner and into the crisp morning air. He snuck a look at the diner's outdoor thermometer. A thick crust of frost clouded the glass. With his knuckle, he etched off the ice. 37°. He checked his watch. 7:05 AM. Give or take a degree or two, he figured the temperature had only risen a few degrees since dawn — not a good sign for tonight.

Letting a long husky cough fill the air, he crossed to his pick-up truck. A sharp wind snapped around the diner as he pulled the bill of his navy blue baseball cap closer to his forehead. George's squat, round figure didn't budge with the sudden uproar. He moved like a man who always had a place to go and knew how to get there. Lately, his stomach had begun to pour over his belt which threw his weight forward when walking. His hands and fingers were small and plump with a great mound of calloused skin on each palm which made it impossible for him to close his hands without a gap appearing at some point.

George was born to the land. He knew the soil better than he knew himself, and he was able to tell a prime field without touching the dirt. He was most proud of the fact that he was able to make his way with his instinct for the seasons — when to plant, when to hold back, and when to pick the oranges so that the juice would be at its peak. They were simple snips of knowledge to an onlooker, but to George, they were the means that had sustained his family for over a hundred years.

As George turned onto the dirt road that led to his grove, he had to quickly shift his truck to position the tires into the ruts that were worn deep into the ground. In the Spring, the weeds and wildflowers would cover the flat width between the tire ruts so that the bottom of the truck would skim the heads of the flowers, catching a few of the taller ones.

Mona was outside the front porch, struggling with a heavy roped rug. Each time she tried to lift it in the air, the weight of the rug would pull her down, leaving a soft dust cloud behind her.

George parked the truck and headed toward Mona. He grabbed one side of the rug and changed places with Mona. "Here, come on! You yank on that side while I shake it over here."

Mona held on tight and turned her head while George lifted the rug up and down several times.

"All right, that about does it for this one," George said as he spit a wad of dust toward the porch.

"I'm glad you came home when you did. I'd be buried in it by now!"

"Why didn't you get Matt to help you?"

"He's busy collecting his books for his trip. He can't find that one on the Civil War."

"Did he check up in the barn loft?"

"I think that's where he is now. Oh, listen, George, I figured out how we can keep that flue open in the fireplace . . ."

George wasn't listening. His eyes wandered toward the barn loft.

"George?" Mona said, softly.

"The flue . . . yeah, right . . ."

"Are you all right, George?"

"Of course. I just thought of a place where Matt's book might be. You better get in the house. It's freezing out here."

George proceeded toward the barn and started in when a bale of hay fell from the loft, landing a few feet in front of him. He looked up to find his son perched upon the barn's cross beam, frantically digging through a mound of discarded hay.

"You almost did me in, Matt!"

Matt turned on his heels. "I didn't hear you."

"You find your book?"

"How'd you know I was looking?"

"Your mom."

"Oh." He continued digging.

"You look over by the chicken coop?"

"It wouldn't be there."

"How come?"

"Because I only read about history in the loft."

"Oh . . . What do you read about by the coop?"

"Economics."

"What about the shed?"

"Chemistry."

"How about Agriculture?"

Matt didn't answer. He'd had just about all he could take of agriculture. Every time he turned a corner or opened a door, there it was — AGRICULTURE, staring him in the face. There wasn't a word that he had read in all of his books that could describe how much he loathed it. All those acres of fine-tilled soil had robbed him of any individuality he could hope to find. He was always "George Calver's boy," and he had stopped counting how many times the locals had asked him, "So, Matt, when are we gonna see you sitting tall in your Daddy's tractor?"

There would be no tractors, no groves. He was going to a place where he would become something grand, something, perhaps,

that no one before him had ever dared to become. And he would finally be proud of himself, and in that moment, he would become whole.

Over the long, tense years, Matt had come to the conclusion that he and his father shared nothing in common. The sight, for example, of a plump, ripe orange did not move Matt the way it did George, who could spend hours discussing the merits of one crop. Deep down, there was no thread, he thought, no binding that brought them together as father and son.

George was well aware of the awkward gaps that separated him and his son. At times, it had made George angry because his pride for his land ached for respect. The only time George had ever laid a hand on Matt was five years back when Matt pronounced that all farmers had to be "ignorant cretins." George had no idea what a "cretin" was, but if it could be colored "ignorant," it was slander.

All this hostility had burned a hole inside of George that grew larger with each blow. But, lately, unknown to anyone, including Mona, George's thoughts were in turmoil. He had begun to wonder if perhaps he was that "ignorant cretin" who didn't have the sense to come in out of the rain. How could one man watch a thriving orange grove turn black and dry from too many nights of sub-freezing temperatures and not get out while he could still get a fair price for his land? All around him, his neighbors were packing up, grabbing their kids and leaving town. For those who refused to face the hard reality of "losing it all," there was a piece of rope and a barn beam. For some in George's district, suicide had become a viable, if not welcome, alternative. But George could never have taken that final step — there was always something that held him back, something inside that pulled him to his groves where he was able to dish up another serving of optimism. The optimism was getting harder to find, though, and each time he would have to dig down deeper to pull it free.

"It's not here!" Matt announced. "I don't know where in the hell it could be!" He turned his lean body ninety degrees and jumped off the beam. He landed firm, feet planted like a gymnast after a dismount. He strode across the barn, picking the thin prickles of hay out of his shirt.

"It looks like it's gonna be a cold one tonight!" George said, as he flicked his fingers against the barn's thermometer.

"It never fails —" Matt said with an air of indifference.

"The guys down at Pat's Kitchen were taking bets this morning on whether the pots were gonna have to be lit tonight."

"What's the consensus?"

"Fifteen 'yes,' six 'no.'"

"Another fun night —" With that, Matt turned and left the barn.

George didn't follow. He dug his heels into the dirt and felt that hole inside of him cut deeper.



By late afternoon, the wind picked up, bringing with it an icy chill that whipped through the groves and encircled the tiny farmhouse. Pockets of green fruit thudded to the ground, imprinting tiny craters in the dirt. The barn thermometer held at 40°. An unsettled stillness filled the gaps when the wind was not blowing. Tight, unbending tension lay over the groves as the afternoon moved into night.

Matt had holed himself up in the attic, deep into the world of a favorite book. The cover had been torn off years before and some of the pages were missing, but none of that could stop Matt from sinking deeper into its spell. In his books, he found reverence. They were like a beacon in the dark — a place he could go to that would hold him securely and tell him that everything would turn out all right.

By nightfall, George had gone from the house to the groves a dozen times. Before returning to the house each time, he would check the barn thermometer for the latest drop in temperature. The winds had subsided a bit, but in their place, a frigid layer of air was settling upon the groves. A light frost started to form on the leaves and the oranges began to take on a dry, opaque tint.

"You planning on calling Jay about coming over tonight?" Mona asked George as he returned to the house.

"Can't say. He offered. But, he's got his own to think of —"

"That's never stopped him before —"

"The freeze could break anytime."

"But, if it doesn't, you can't work the pots *and* the wind machines —"

"I can't even say if I'm gonna put the damn things on!!!" George stopped. He turned away from Mona and got control of himself. Carefully, he spoke. "I need . . . to know."

Silence.

Mona started toward George but he moved to the door and left the kitchen. He slammed the door so that the square panes of glass echoed as it shut.

Several hours passed and not one smudge pot had been lit. Mona sat asleep in the family rocking chair nearest to the fireplace, one hand hopelessly trying to prop up her chin. Only the crackle of a few dead embers in the fireplace could be heard throughout the house.

Upstairs, Matt went over each registration pamphlet as he had been doing every night for the past six weeks. It didn't matter that he knew them verbatim — it was more a calming tool than another lesson. A biting wind suddenly picked up, smashing the branch of a tree against Matt's bedroom window. Startled, he let out a slight yelp and hurried to secure the window. Rolling an old towel lengthways, he stuffed it along the bottom crack of the window.

Matt tried to examine the tree that did the damage, but it was too dark outside to even see an outline. His eyes wandered toward the direction of the groves. Black. He put his hand flat against the window pane and a freezing chill burned through the glass. He looked toward the groves again. Coal black. How many times had he stood at that window and watched the tiny flickers of light fill the groves? For as long as he could recall, the simmering pots were a symbol of Winter's wrath and a testament to his father's will for holding off the freeze.

But, tonight, there was only darkness.

Matt started to pull back when his eye caught a tiny point of light coming from the barn. It was so faint that he had to strain to make sure it wasn't a reflection cast by the moon. He donned his overcoat and decided to investigate.

Snapping the porch light on, he creaked the screen door open a few inches and leaned out into the yard. The light from the barn was a little brighter now. He considered the cold, and, pulling his coat around his chest, crossed to the barn.

He leaned into the large barn door. The dim light was shining from a small lantern that was placed at an angle on the work bench. His father's back was to him, bent over the work bench. Matt stood silently for a moment, waiting for his father to turn. Somehow, the silhouetted scene sent a shiver through him. He waited for his father to make the first move.

Nothing.

"I saw the light," Matt said, more as a question than a statement.

"I found your book," his father said with an eerie strain to his voice. His back remained to his son.

Matt became uncomfortable. "Yeah?"

His father looked up and pulled the book from in front of him. He closed it, marking his space with a discarded strand of a lantern wick.

"You can read it if you want. I mean, it's no big deal. I just have to have it when I —"

"You like this barn?" George said, getting up and crossing away from Matt, back still turned.

"The barn? Sure . . . It's —"

"Quiet. It's very quiet," his father said softly, letting his eyes scan the shadowed walls. "It's very peaceful." He paused and his smoky breath filled the air. "I can see why you read your history in here. Of all the walls on this land, these hold the most history. Sometimes if you close your eyes and listen, you can hear all the words that were spoken on this very spot. All the plans that were made, the deals that were struck, the hopes . . . the love. And they didn't judge one move . . . they just listened . . . and somehow, they believed." George turned to his son, his eyes hoping for understanding.

Matt saw the fear in George's eyes. He tried to think of something — anything, to say, that would wipe out the fright, but his mind drew a blank.

George crossed a few steps toward Matt. He moved his round palm against the wood bench. "You know, in all my life, for as long as I can remember, I only wanted one thing — a candle in the window. Some small light in the distance that would tell me I was gonna be okay. Some security. Something that would tell me that I wasn't stupid and that I could still be proud of what I've built. I need to know, Matt . . . Everyday, I need to know if it's still there . . ." He dropped his head.

It all came too fast for Matt — the light, the book, the words. He stood very still and waited for his father's next move. Always, *always*, George made the exit and delivered the verdict. Now, there was only a tired, sad man, bent over a dim lantern.

Matt spun around and started toward the house. He threw open the kitchen screen door and grabbed onto its aluminum frame. One foot lay firm on the concrete step and one was planted in the soil. His knuckles streaked white from the pressure on the door. With one angry swoop, he swung the door closed. Taking long, determined strides, he crossed to the power box that was hidden behind the shrubbery. He snapped up each light switch using quick, even strokes. The yard became flooded with light. When the panel switches were all up, Matt ran to the shed and lifted the metal arm which released the large beams that poured into the groves. He ran to the center of the yard and stood, eyes directed toward the barn.

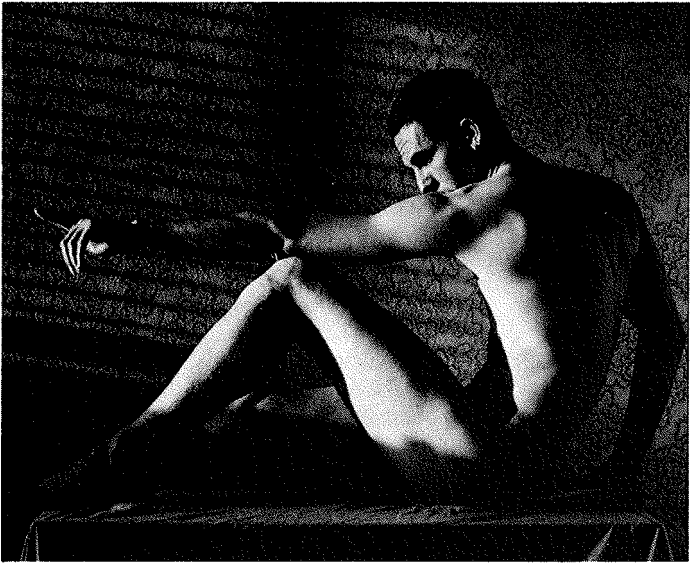
"It's still here!" Matt bellowed, reaching down into the pit of his lungs. "You hear me? Your damned groves are still here! And you will die before they do!" He took a breath. "Are you gonna die tonight?" He stood, letting out quick fogs of air.

Matt ran toward the groves. In a thrusting assembly line fashion, he ignited each smudge pot. The huge wind machines came next, each one joining the former in a loud hum that grew with intensity. The grove exploded with light and sound.

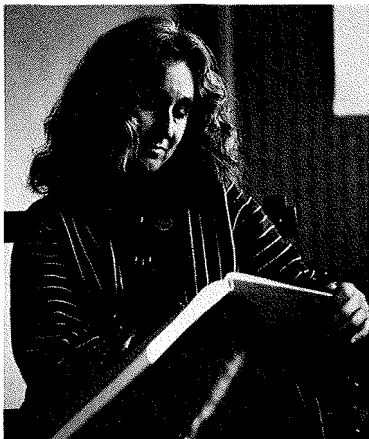
George stepped into the light and watched as Matt, poised upon a fence post, aligned a wobbling wind machine.

Matt jumped off the post and stood solid, whole and proud.

George moved to a pot and carefully adjusted the grid. Tiny candle points poked through the metal. He turned to his son and for one brief moment, they were one.



Ragia Barody



Hella Hammid

Deena Metzger: An Interview

Virginia Webster

DEENA METZGER is a writer who also leads writing and journal workshops. She developed HEALING STORIES as a therapeutic means to address issues of creativity, personal transition, physical illness and life-threatening diseases. She works primarily with autobiography, life history, storytelling, myth and fairy tale. In 1980 she co-led a workshop in Greece recreating the Eleusinian Mysteries. She was on the faculty of the Feminist Studio Workshop and founded the Writing Program at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles.

She is the author of several books: SKIN: SHADOWS/SILENCE (West Coast Poetry Review, 1976), THE BOOK OF HAGS (published on cassette by Black Box, Washington, D.C., 1977), DARK MILK (Momentum Press, Los Angeles, 1978), and THE AXIS MUNDI POEMS (Jazz Press, Los Angeles, 1981). In November, 1981, Peace Press in Los Angeles published two works in one volume: THE WOMAN WHO SLEPT WITH MEN TO TAKE THE WAR OUT OF THEM (a novel in play form) & TREE (a diary novel). TREE documents Deena's struggle with breast cancer and the relationship between creativity, community, and healing.

Her poetry, prose, and articles are included in journals and anthologies including *Chrysalis*, *Semiotica*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *A Casebook on Anais Nin*, *Rising Tides*, *The Streets Inside: 10 Los Angeles Poets*, *Love Stories by New Women*, and *Pleasures*.

As a dramatist and activist, Deena co-wrote and co-produced the hour-long documentary film *CHILE: WITH POEMS & GUNS* in 1974. Her two plays, *NOT AS SLEEPWALKERS* and *DREAMS AGAINST THE STATE* have been performed in 1977 and 1981 respectively.

In 1975 Deena was awarded the First Academic Freedom Award by the California Federation of Teachers. Her work has been supported by a residency at Yaddo Artists Colony and a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1982 she was awarded the first annual Vesta Award in Writing from the Woman's Building, in Los Angeles. Deena lives in Topanga Canyon, with her wolf, Timber.

Breakfast Letter

For Dick & My Poet Friend, Eloise Klein Healy

Deena Metzger

It's not a proper name for something which flies the wind: A turkey vulture, looking for prey, swoops overhead. My friend speaks of China where the dragon and phoenix entwine as here the serpent and the eagle have been known to mate in the cylindrical air. There is heat pulsing up from the earth. The dark geyser leaps to the sun. Everywhere I look, the twining snakes rise up into the cone of light. It is not only in the heart, but in my back that I feel love, this knotty spine of caring one step at a time, an impossible ladder pulled this way and that in the wind of muscles, on the shifting ground of uncertain feet and instincts. Still we climb it, and I who am afraid of heights watch the vulture and talk to my friend of foreign countries where there are no rooms for everyone to make love and people marry late, while about my house the squirrels mate when their bodies are ready. There is no law or moral code instructing their tails to fold between their legs in tiny broken feet. The turkey vulture finds the stairs, the ramps, the trembling foundations of wind and rises on the air. But first we see its beak as it dives almost to our eyes. There is a fire in its head feathers. It's in my territory before it glides brazen up what I can not see. Do you say there are no gods here? Everywhere, I am surrounded by the invisible, hearing more of what I can not hear than what we say. I am unable to speak. What joins us is under language, is the air under our tail feathers. I sit the afternoon with a poet friend. We speak of China, the dragon and phoenix intertwining while by my feet the rattler and the turkey vulture seek to mate. It's the same fire. I don't speak of this to her. I'm not a girl, still the fire rises through me toward an old fire bird in dark plumage who makes his nest in the air above my bed. We're only human; we can only come at dawn, we learn the movements, the spiral up the spine, the joining of snake and bird, the double helix of heat. It's taken me so many years to master this. The phoenix and dragon are so old, old as China or the beginning of the world. And they still burn? Now there's a fire! Lift me to you with your red beak.

Northridge Review: In the Foreword to your book, *The Woman Who Slept With Men to Take the War Out of Them*, Barbara Myerhoff says that as a writer you attack the most obdurate structures of society: Ideology, Culture, and Authorities. Do you consider yourself a controversial writer?

Deena Metzger: Yes. The controversy is everywhere, and it is the kind of controversy or rebellion or revolutionary attitude that comes from great attachment and affiliation. There are things that I really, really care about, and I am compelled and impelled to speak about them. I do feel that the controversy occurs because there is an innate conflict in the society between values and behavior. So when you live in an essentially corrupt society, and you care about human feelings or dignity or love, you're bound to be seen as controversial because you're challenging the privileges that come from corruption.

NR: You're speaking about the conventional patriarchal society?

DM: I'm speaking about a war society, a greed society, a self-interest society, an unaffiliated society that is disconnected from nature.

NR: Do you feel that being controversial has helped you or hurt you as a writer?

DM: That's not an interesting question to me because it implies that one adopts a stance for certain strategic purposes. Maybe, when I was younger, I had a rebellious personality because that's what you do when you're younger. But at this point I don't think of myself as having a rebellious persona. I just say what I have to say, and then people respond how they respond.

NR: How do they respond?

DM: Lately, I think they are responding with great attention. There are groups of people around me that care a lot about my work. But I have also noticed that in the public world people are beginning to deal with my ideas. Whereas, in the past, I think they would have preferred to dismiss them.

NR: How do you feel about censorship?

DM: It's terrible.

NR: What about pornography, violence toward women? How do we make distinctions between what is acceptable and what isn't?

DM: Who is to say what ideas should not be in the public world for consideration. The place where I think we can have impact is in the responsibility of those of us who care about things not to support certain philosophies that we consider heinous, and to make sure that we live in a society where a wide spectrum of ideas can be expressed. For example, theoretically we have a "free press," but of course, that is completely absurd. Most of the challenging ideas do not get expressed in the general press, and it costs so much money to put out ideas that we no longer live in a free society at all. As long as you have to gather nickles and dimes in order to express a point of view, then you are really living in an essentially censored society.

NR: You recently contributed to an anthology entitled *Pleasures*, a collection of women's erotica edited by Lonnie Barbach. Dr. Barbach's goal, as she stated, was to create a book based on women's real erotic experiences to provide material that could increase women's levels of desire and also to document new areas of female sexuality. She then says that embarrassment and vulnerability affected so many of the contributors that one-third of the writers chose to omit their names and forego credit for their work. Do you see this making some kind of statement about the relationship of women to the erotic?

DM: I don't think it's a statement about women's relationships to the erotic. I think it is a statement about society's relationship to the erotic, society's fear of the erotic. Society denigrates women who carry the erotic. It makes me feel sad.

NR: Audre Lorde makes a statement that seems similar to the ideas you express in *The Woman Who Slept With Men*: "The dichotomy between the spiritual and political is false, resulting from the incomplete attention to an erotic knowledge. The bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic . . . the passions of love in its deepest meaning." How does this statement relate to your own philosophy of the erotic?

DM: It's exactly my philosophy. In fact, the idea that I have been working with in the last year that is becoming more and more obsessive for me is the idea of the Holy Prostitute. I see my work for the next five years or so as trying to revive or create an archetype of the Holy Prostitute, and I see it as particularly necessary in the nuclear age. It has to do with the manifestation of the powerful feminine using love and everything that comes with love, including sexuality and Eros in its larger sense, as a force in the world. When I think about the Holy Prostitute, I think about Ada in *The Woman Who Slept With Men*, whom I didn't know was a holy prostitute when I wrote the book. But after writing the book, I read about the

Holy Prostitute and realized that before Christianity, and at the time of the beginning of Judaism, women devoted themselves to goddesses, Hathor or Ishtar or Aphrodite, giving at least a year of their lives as priestesses. One of their most essential tasks was to cleanse the men of the blood from their hands, cleansing them from war. When a man went out to war, in order to come back into the society, he had to visit the Holy Prostitute because she was the link to the Divine. She was the link to the Divine because she carried both the spiritual and the sexual. That was not disconnected. We've got to connect it again or we're going to continue being in this mess that we're in. If you cut off the sexual from the spiritual, you're also cutting off nature from the spiritual. That creates a mind/body split, and nuclear war follows from that automatically.

NR: Did you coin the phrase "Holy Prostitute."

DM: No. I read about the Holy Prostitute first in Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman*. She was called the Qadishtu, which meant the undefiled one.

NR: *Tree* is the journal you kept while fighting cancer. Did you write *Tree* with the intention that at some point it would be a complete work which you would publish, or did your decision to publish it come after the journal completed itself?

DM: I intended it to be a public book. So when I went to the hospital I kept two journals, one private and one public, which, it turned out, were almost identical.

NR: Were the decisions you made in dealing with cancer related to the process of writing? Did you have some idea of how you wanted the book to end? At any point did you think it might be a book about dying rather than surviving?

DM: Though it occurred to me that I might die, it never occurred to me that *Tree* could be a book about a woman coming to grips with dying, though it is a journal about a woman having to deal with death. That may be another way the book kept me alive. That's a fascinating question because this is the first time that has occurred to me. How wonderful!

NR: So what you write motivates your actions?

DM: Well, apparently!

NR: *Tree* presents cancer as a metaphor for the internal oppressor in contrast to *The Woman Who Slept With Men* which deals with the external oppressor. The external oppressor is overcome

through integration into the woman's own body which relates to the idea that one must love one's enemy before true harmony and completeness occur. Yet with the internal oppressor, cancer, victory is gained not by integrating it but by destroying it, having it surgically removed. Having dealt with cancer in both literal and metaphorical ways, do you think it could ever be possible to love cancer as the internal enemy in the same way that we must love the external enemy?

DM: It's very clear that cancer is attacking the body. On the other hand, it is also clear to me that cancer is both the enactment in the body and/or the psyche of a political situation as well as a personal response to intolerable conditions. In this sense, I think cancer is a metaphor, disagreeing totally with Susan Sontag. I think that the idea that cancer *is* a metaphor is the most healing idea that exists around the idea of cancer. I not only know this from my own experience but I have worked with dozens of people who have cancer. There is no question in my mind that cancer comes when the body and the psyche can no longer live in the way that they have been living. Cancer says, "Change your life, or I'm going to kill you." So one has to integrate it because it is a friend on many levels. It's a terrible, terrible friend. It's like that Buddhist Master who slaps you to wake you up. I do have to say that in all the ways I've dealt with cancer, either with myself, or with individuals, or with groups that I work with for cancer patients, I have never yet met someone who with very little prodding didn't get the idea. They may not have been able to change their lives, but the moment you get the idea that cancer is telling you something, then you know that it is exactly true. People may not be able to get to what cancer is saying specifically because it is too terrible to face what they have to change. But you can see it in their eyes, the recognition. There is no other disease like it and I think that's part of its terror because we know that change is the message that comes with that disease.

NR: Who do you perceive as your reading audience? Can you make a generalization about the kind of people who are influenced by your work?

DM: I think my audience consists of those people, men and women, who are thoughtful, and who want to live their lives in very authentic ways and who are ready to wrestle with meaning in one way or another. In a more specific sense, my audience is women who are interested in what it means to be a woman, political people who are interested in the depth of what politics can be, people who are connected with Eros, and an assorted group of rebels and revolutionaries.

NR: Do you have a sense of a disproportion in your audience? Are there people who you wish would read your work, but don't?

DM: Everybody. I would like a larger audience. I do think that I don't have it because people are told by the commercial publishers and the media that they don't want to confront their lives, it's not that they really don't want to. Everything is set up so that nobody confronts their life. So most people pick up books for the sake of entertainment. And my books are not entertaining. They may be interesting, but they're not entertaining.

NR: You have a short prose piece entitled "The Woman Who Swallows an Earthquake Gains its Power." How is the woman-who-sleeps-with-men similar to the woman-who-swallows-earthquakes?

DM: They both have to do with women taking in power and what it feels like. When you're a woman you sometimes think you're just a body and you're small and really you may be trying to do something very large which may be something as simple as writing a poem. When you're writing a poem and you're at the edge of what poetry *is*, you're performing a very large act.

NR: You seem to be saying in your work that women's power comes from their erotic capacity. Is that women's primary source of power? Are there other sources?

DM: Anything can be their source of power. But I do think women have a special facility for the erotic, in part because I think, historically, the matriarchal societies were erotic, and I don't mean sexual. The energy that has to do with really caring about the world, with being engaged in the world, it is the energy of magnetism, and it is not the energy of ego. It's not the energy of being cut off and separate and distinct. It's the energy of being part of.

NR: You also do work as a therapist. How does your writing relate to the work you do in therapy?

DM: So much of what happens in therapy is coming to understand something about the world which I might use in the therapeutic process and then use in the creative process. When I'm working as a therapist, I'm working with Eros. I'm working with reaffiliating people with the life force, reconnecting people to the meaning of their lives, reconnecting them to values.

NR: Do you use your writing in therapy?

DM: On the outside my therapy might look very traditional. There is a client and there is me, and we are talking. But I think it is what we talk about, and the context in which we talk about things in relation to my value system and attitudes that makes it different. I do workshops which I call "Healing Stories" which are based on the idea that every life is a story. Disease is an interrupted story. If you find your story then you find meaning. If you find meaning, then you find health. Rather than seeing oneself as a victim of external circumstances, one can really see that one is living out a story and the story is some interaction between the cosmic story that has been given to one, and the personal story that one creates. If you can see that story, *and* you are a writer, you can see where it is going, where the necessity is, and you can also see where you are manipulating the story, you can see where it is inauthentic. Because you can also see where it is going if the conclusion is not good for you, you may want to change the ending, you may have to change the narrative.

NR: So you consider yourself more than just a poet dealing only with aesthetics?

DM: Poetry as aesthetics is totally uninteresting to me. Poetry has to have that, but to me the poet is a seer, a witness, a holder of consciousness and values. Just to do literary pyrotechnics, which seems to be so much of what poetry is, reduces poetry to ego and masturbation.

NR: When you look at a poem, do you look at it for form or for content? Is the spiritual content the most important?

DM: No, because then you can get into junk, into sentimentality, into babbling at that point. There is a place where content and form are one, the rhythm, the tone, the language, the beauty, the energy of it. If you're just looking at content you are just looking at ideas. I look to see if the experience of the poem moves me. A lot of my response to literature has not only to do with content and form but has to do with the person in whom the content and form sit. For me there has to be an integrity between the words that are put out and the life that is led. When I come across an absolutely gorgeous poem and the behavior or action of the poet is in conflict with what's being said, the poem doesn't mean anything to me. The author is very important to me.

NR: Many of the modern literary theorists want to completely detach the writer from the work so that the work stands as itself without the author behind it.

DM: That kind of thinking is awful. Not only that, if one has any spiritual sense, one knows that is not true. One knows that there is an energy that informs a work. That energy is from the body and the life of the person who has created it. That energy goes with the poem. It can enhance the poem but it can also destroy it if there is a conflict. Poetry is about seeing the world. If you are just pretending, saying that you are seeing this when in fact you are seeing something else, you're just lying. I can't imagine anything worse than lying in poetry.

NR: Do you see things in your poems which aren't developed and then you go on to develop them later?

DM: Definitely. Mostly what I find is that I've been writing about the same thing for twenty years over and over again — trying to get deeper, trying to understand it better, forgetting that I was thinking about it, looking at it in another way.

NR: Is rewriting myth important to you?

DM: It's alive for me. Myths are very real things for me. I live in the dimension of the dream.

NR: Myths seem to appeal to the subconscious mind. Do you know where you're going when you start a story?

DM: Never. I don't have a clue. With *The Woman Who Slept With Men* I really didn't have a clue. All I had was the title, literally. I went away to write it. I had a ream of paper, 10 weeks, and the title.

NR: Eloise Klein Healy has a poem which she thanks you for inspiring. She heard a message you had on your answering machine. You always have a poem or special message on your machine. Do your phone messages ever reach the printed page?

DM: No, they don't. But I did once do a short piece for *Dream-works* which they did not publish. Maybe they thought I was writing them a letter instead of sending them a piece. I often put my dreams on the answering machine. And one day I took down some dream messages and sent them off. I thought that would amuse them. That was the closest I came to putting them on paper, though they do get in my journal.

NR: It seems a shame to lose those messages.

DM: Well, in the last few months I've been trying to write them down because people have been saying, "thank you for the poem," and I didn't know it was a poem. So I thought maybe I should start paying attention to what I'm putting on the machine.

NR: Would you talk about your experience on the Isle of Lesbos.

DM: I taught as part of the Aegean Women's Studies Institute which was on Lesbos one summer. It was wonderful. It is a beautiful island. I taught a writing course and a course in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

NR: Did you get in touch with Sappho?

DM: I didn't. But other people did. Despite my attitude toward patriarchal society, I also miss and need the masculine. Sappho doesn't give me a buzz.

NR: In *The Woman Who Slept With Men* the chorus tells Ada that if she joins with the women there would be only love, only good, and she wouldn't have to confront the negative other. But Ada says no.

DM: I'm always interested in the other, in opposites. I'm fascinated by it and I'm also aware that something happens in me when I'm in contact with the other that does not happen in me when I'm not in contact with it. So I like men and foreigners and animals and women who are different from me.

NR: You were also recently involved in a cultural exchange program in Nicaragua. What did you experience there?

DM: You also have to know that I was in Chile in 1972 right before Allende was murdered. I was in Cuba in 1973 at the time of the coup in Chile. When I came back from Cuba, I was devastated and heartbroken by the coup for political as well as personal reasons; I had many dear friends that I had met in a short time in Chile, and they were the finest human beings and they were being tortured and murdered by my government. I became part of a collective and we made a film about Chile. It was the first documentary that came out of that coup. So I went to Nicaragua in 1984, 11 years later. As a friend said to me, "You haven't been in love since then." Going to Nicaragua was going to see whether there was anything there of what I had seen in Chile, because Chile had given me so much hope, then so much despair from its destruction. So Nicaragua was very moving for me. I saw some of the things that I had seen in Chile, the sweetness of the people, their generosity, their extraordinary commitment and energy. There are people there literally

working 20 hours a day, and they are so young. Because of conditions in Central America, because so many people were killed by Somoza, this revolution is being made by kids; they are children.

NR: What did you see there in the way of artistic expression?

DM: What I saw in theater was very interesting. I was with a theater delegation and we went to a theater festival there. Their theater is naive. It is often simplistic. It's not necessarily well developed or intellectual. But it is so alive, and it has so much meaning for the people who do it and for the people who see it. The idea of doing theater that matters instead of theater that doesn't matter is incredible.

NR: How do political environments influence artists? How is art in Nicaragua affected by the political situation?

DM: Totally. The purpose of their art at this point is to explore and present their reality. They have never seen reflections of themselves before. No one had ever considered the issues that were important to them. It's like when Baldwin wrote that he had never seen an image of his face anywhere in society. That was the underbelly of what Ralph Ellison was writing about in *The Invisible Man*, those early books that came out of the Black Movement. The same is true in Central America. Now they are not only talking about issues that really concern them, they do their own theater about those issues. What happens for the most part is that theater workers go into a community, get together with the people in the community, ask 'what's going on, what do you want to explore, what do you want to think about?' Then all together they do a play about what's going on. Then the theater workers leave but they leave a theatrical community intact. One of the most exciting things that I heard about was a play which was done about alcoholism. The town alcoholic was the one that they got to play the alcoholic. Who else? Certainly his consciousness changed by doing that play.

NR: *The Woman Who Slept With Men* is written in play form. Has it ever been performed? Is it meant to be performed?

DM: Yes. It has just been performed in Canada and it was meant to be performed as a stage dream because I was interested in whether I could write a piece that had a public voice and a private voice at the same time.

NR: You write in virtually every literary form, plays, novels, poetry. Do you find that ideas generate their own form or do you start with the concept of a form and shape ideas into that form. How do the forms differ in the way they express ideas?

DM: They are very different. Something comes to me and I know it is a novel or a play or a poem. I'm working on a novel now. I have a thought about making it into a screenplay. As a screenplay it will be totally different and the experience of it will be totally different. In the novel I can go back and forth across time, back and forth through consciousness. I can have living people and dead people very easily without it being surrealistic. In a screenplay, I have to write a story that makes sense in action. The screenplay will be the exterior form of the interior novel. I have to finish the novel first because I don't want to be influenced in any way. Screenplays are always influenced because they are collective productions.

NR: What is the novel about?

DM: The novel is called, *What Dinah Thought* (pronounced "Deena"). It is about a contemporary woman named Deena who feels that she is invaded by her name, that her name is a live entity and has been alive since the name was born 3,330 years ago. The events that occurred around her name, which became a part of her name, are continuing events in history. She has a sense of wanting to go back to Israel, to the town called Shechem, which is now Nablus, which is the center of Palestinian life on the West Bank, to that place where Dinah was born. She goes to live out her story again so that it will end differently.

NR: That relates to the story as healing process again.

DM: Exactly. So it is a novel about healing history. This is a book in which there are dead people and living people and they all co-exist very easily in the novel. I don't think there is any problem in the novel with the layers of experiences that are being talked about—political, spiritual, personal. I'm talking about the feminine, I'm talking about patriarchal religion. It goes all over the place very easily and I can't do that in a movie. If I do it in a movie I'm going to tell a story about Israeli/Palestinian relationships and how they are embedded in a story that happened 3,000 years ago and how that story is still alive in us and how we have to transform the original end to that story.

NR: What have been your experiences getting published? Have you had a problem being published due to the nature of your work?

DM: Impossible. I've been curious to see what is going to happen with this novel because I do feel in some ways that it is a major novel.

NR: It's still difficult for you to get published?

DM: Yes. But I don't pay a lot of attention to it. I don't send my work out a lot. I send it out when people ask me for work.

NR: What kind of advice could you give to new writers who are having a difficult time getting published because their content is not commercial or entertaining?

DM: You've just got to write. Then you'll find ways to get it out. I was very lucky because when I was a young writer I had a friendship with Anais Nin. I met her just before her diaries came out, when she was still an underground writer. It was quite clear that her work has an enormous influence on people even before the diaries came out. I had a model of an underground writer and a writer of enormous integrity. So the advice that I can give to other writers is that first you have to write the work that you have to write. Because if you get published and it's not important to you, there's no point to it. And if you write what you have to write, it is going to reach whomever it has to reach. It does not have to be hundreds of thousands. We are being destroyed by the inevitable escalation of media. I have a very deep sense of an audience. I think it would be marvelous if *all* women could read *Tree*, but I don't think that a week goes by that I don't hear from someone who has been really moved by something I've done, not a week. So when I'm sane, like I am in this conversation, I'm not greedy. But sometimes I'm hysterical.

NR: How have you made money?

DM: Teaching, therapy, doing workshops. Before that I was a switchboard operator, a terrible typist — anyway I could. It depends on what your ambition is. If you want to be poet — and in that sense I also mean a novelist or a playwright — then you can't think about the marketplace. It's nice if you get paid, but they are not related. I sometimes look with great sadness at those people who won't give themselves to writing because they can't get paid for it. Originally, going to college had nothing to do with earning a living. A person went to college to be educated. To try to make a living as a poet, and then only write what you can get paid for is a violation. Which is not to say the poet should not be supported, quite the opposite. The poet should be supported. So should the shamans and witches. All the important people should have life stipends.

NR: Whose criticism of your work do you rely on? Friends? Reviewers? Literary critics? How do you balance what other people say about your work with what you feel about it?

DM: I have extraordinarily gifted, intelligent, and honest friends in a variety of fields. I go to them for critique. I get the best and toughest critique that I can and I use it as well as I can. After that, I don't care what anyone says. A review is strategic. If you get a good review, someone is going to buy the book. It doesn't mean anything else. It's rare that a reviewer will write something that tells me something about my work. At this point, I know what I'm doing.

NR: How do you develop that kind of confidence as a writer?

DM: At some point a writer has to become a fabulous critic, but a generous one. You can't be the critic that destroys the work. So many of us live with that critic on our shoulder, the one who says, "that's terrible, you'll never do anything, you're really stupid, you have no talent, etc. etc." That's not the kind of critic you should be. You should be the critic who is very ambitious about excellence, about your doing the best you can do.

NR: How do you manage to maintain the healing connections in your life and still maintain the privacy and isolation that you need to be a writer?

DM: With struggle, and I'm not always successful. But I need both of them desperately. I go back and forth. You're talking to me at the most balanced time of my life because I'm just about to give up teaching and being a therapist for an indefinite amount of time just to write. For the last year in my workshops we have been dealing with a series of exercises. 'Imagine that you left your life for a year. Imagine that you were living in a city alone and you spoke to no one for a year.' Suddenly I've found myself saying that I'm really going to do that. There is also an increasing need, as I've gotten older, for solitude. I used to live a very embedded life with lover and children and friends and family. Now I live alone. The first time I went off with myself and a typewriter for a weekend was when my kids were three and four. I spent three days alone speaking to no one. I have a great hunger to be in solitude.

NR: What is the importance of the tree symbol to you, especially as they appear in the *Axis Mundi Poems* which are predominantly about trees?

DM: Trees represent everything to me — the tree of life, the world tree, etc. Also I love them as trees. I bought my house because I was sitting on the couch and looking at the eucalyptus trees outside. I

don't need to go out to talk to them, but sometimes I do talk to them. I do need to look at them.

NR: Are you interested in painting? Do you work in other forms of artistic expression?

DM: No. I wish I could paint. I wish I had the skills in the other arts. The aesthetic environment is very important to me and visual artists are doing something very different from what I'm doing. I'm very interested in that difference. What we're working on now in one of my workshops is creating the biography of a "consummate artist" who works in a field or genre that the person doing the biography knows least about. Most people choose either musicians or sculptors. I'm trying to have them find out what the creative process is by watching that kind of artist very carefully — watching them as they work, watching them in their studios, watching them take walks. Then I ask what is the first moment in which they discovered that form or saw a shape for the first time. I'm very interested in what the musician thinks or how the visual artist sees. One of the most exciting times in my life was when I was at a writing retreat and I took a walk while I was stoned. I suddenly saw the landscape as Franz Klein would see it. Then I saw the landscape as Cezanne would see it. Then I saw it as Picasso would see it. It kept shifting in front of my eyes. It was marvelous.

NR: Will you ever have a sense that your work as a writer is complete?

DM: I can't imagine that time. I'm certainly not ready now. But I feel that had I died earlier and just left *The Woman Who Slept With Men* and the poster I did, that I would have felt good about my work. Those two works are ones that I feel particularly good about. Now, I certainly will not feel good until I finish this novel. I have about five years of stuff to do now. I never know what idea is going to come next. I think there is a part of me, like Henry Miller, who hopes that somewhere around 75 or so I will be blessed with the ability to paint. I suspect that I will never have my life dream which is to be Martha Graham since it is unlikely that not having had the facility to be a great dancer that that will ever come. That has to wait until the next life.

Divorce

Awarded 1984-1985 Rachel Sherwood Poetry Prize

Marlene Pearson

He knocked on my door with iron knuckles and a plaster smile,
explaining:

"I'm leaving/ marriage ruining my job/ you never do what I/
can't keep my bushes trimmed in the yard/ and you know
how I need sex/ got to divorce."

I shook my head. It turned bruise green realizing something.
It fell off and landed on the desk near my typewriter.
My right arm flew out the window in rage.

"sell houses/ you half/ we'll split dishesheetstv couch —
grubby anyway/ stuff you never would replace."

My stomach became stone, dropped to the floor,
rolled down the hall and out into the street, resting
in the cool trickle of the gutter.
An ear left my severed head and began typing poetry.

"I'm keeping/ investments important to me/ don't touch
my profits/ But Anna is —"

The other ear joined and they typed louder.

"my main concern/ lovely child/ support
one year/ that's all."

Spiders poured from my vagina down to the floor
weaving secrets in red, then crawled away
and hid among the books in the case.

"I can't stay/ so you go — final decision/
I speak calmly/ expect you to do the same."

My feet stood there, just toes stiffening
like I'd been standing on ice for a long time.

The newly typed page began chanting sounds
he had never heard before. He listened.
Smoke rose from his ears, mouth, privates.
He fell in a heap of ashes.
His head rested like a dull marble on top,
glazed eyes looking up.

My left arm slammed the door. My head yelled:
feed the cats when you get up,
they're scratching at the window.
They've knocked over your geranium.
I went to gather up the parts of me.

This may be a Court Hearing but What I hear makes More Sense

Marlene Pearson

This is not a game
I will not lose my head
without a damn good fight

One more night may be all I have
before my world blows up

until I cockroach across sand
until I crow-tumble through air
thick with lead obscenities
and plastic phallic symbols

This is not a game
I'll not *Bleak House* next Thursday
I'll come out shitting purple
Alpha Bits and butterflies
with rent receipts in their jowls
or else discard such useless language.

I'll huddle, a defiant dragon
brown blanket pulled over my shedding scales
brew herbs to dress my wounded armor
read candlelit tarot

Pale smoke will spiral
thin pencil line
from my nostrils to the ceiling
designing new map from ancient legend

Some dusty lawyer may blue his knuckles
knocking upon my door
yelling his defunct words
through my key hole
but I will not listen
forest-deep in search
of my own tinder and a match.

Feminist Books are Giving Me Ideas

Marlene Pearson

"For each of us as women, there is a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises."

Audre Lorde

She began from behind my eyes
peering at the book while I was reading.
I am not only a casualty,
I am also a warrior.
She chanted the lines
I am who I am,
doing what I came to do. . .
marching out the words inside my brain.
She was giving me a headache.

I tried to sit her down
told her to keep still
not stretch out her limbs so.
I warned her other people out there
would cut them off.
She paused a moment, and listened.

Then she shook her head
reached for my hand
lifted it before my face
and pointed at similarities
in my own fingerprints.
She stroked my hand
reminded me that this may take a while.
I did not resist.
We both understood.

She leaned her arm on my eye socket.
Her hands pushed my lids open wider
and she has been reading ever since.
She will not stop.

I spend nights climbing in and out of words.
She repeats chapters like a teacher in my sleep.
She turns pages like an exercise.
This morning my cover hung from the curtain rod.
When I reached for my watch, it was gone.
We live on her time now.

We stay up till dawn
deciphering possibilities
deciding her next step.

I offer money for books.
She reaches into my pocket
and takes all she needs.

She sits at the table when I eat
planning meals bigger than I am used to.
She says we need the energy.

She repeats titles like a cadence
while I walk the dog.

She cleaned out my closet.
I cheered as she threw my last pair of heels
out the window. We dress for comfort now she says.

She tells me when it's time to get on the road.
I drive the freeway — observing signs, speed limits.
She grabs the wheel, coaxing me to be still.
She would race the air till she flew off the world
except the scent of familiar books has caught her attention
again.

She turns off and we find ourself a place
with pages full of new air, drinking it in like vitamins.
I smile. We breathe deep, stretch wide
and flex new muscle.

Some Days it is Necessary to Change the Sky

for Wes

Marlene Pearson

Someone has turned on a light.
I do not like what I see.
I am in a place of boundaries.
You are here.
Some door has been locked.
It is getting difficult to breathe
cement walls/locked windows.
I know neither of us can stand much of this.
But sparse good byes are best in this atmosphere.

I remember how we talked up on the roof
swallowed poems mixed with tuna sandwiches and yogurt
laughed at dispersing clouds
ordering them another way.

Remember the day you moved the sun?
When Jack came you stopped the wind
and since he was from the midwest
and not had the experience
you ordered a mild earthquake.
Such gods we were.

When it rained and the lakes formed (where the roof top sagged)
you simply did your Jesus trick and walked on water
until it seeped through the holes in your European shoes—
soggy reminder of our mortality.

We'd find ourselves a room where we could have talked all night
looking at our words floating out
fragile clouds so tame we held them in our hands
peered into them like a crystal ball
saw the dense growth from where we both had come.

We seemed to have grown from the same seed—not bad
but the climate was all wrong.
Cruel gods with their threats of thunder
and there was too much rain.

We cannot always stop the day.
Burnt sky comes unpinched at its edges—
not good for a poet's mind.

And what is that key you have in your hand?
You say you must unlock your door
count trees of another jungle
go to a world where spun silk weaves new skies.

Yet you wonder about days there—
if there is not a roof
will you be tall enough to reach
the clouds with your fingers
and push them back where they belong?

Remember Jack will be there. Just tell him.
Then watch—he's learned to move whole skies
from one world to another.

When you go
turn off the light
but leave the door open
I need to watch you disappear.

The First of One Hundred

Richard Coleman

The window held a clouded image of the tree strewn yard, close-set elms, oaks, figs, walnuts, peach, orange, lemon, pomegranate, avocado . . . she pronounced the syllables, av-o-ca-do. They were fine syllables, fine words, fine trees. And beyond was the plain, the buttes, the thunderheads, the last eight years of her life. The ruined remnants of truth, life, love and the sensuality of the unknown.

It was supper, again. His palm softly on the door. "Dear, maybe tonight you'd like to come out, to see what you've been missing." Not realizing that she did know what she'd been missing, those eight years. Those years of regret, of pain, of migraine headaches and stalled cadillacs. This wasn't some game. It was a fixed playing of the dice, the only real bit of soul she could manage to contain. It sat on her dresser; it hovered about the pictures of high school and the desperate years; it was in the tone of the radio when the old songs played; it was her destiny forsaken for the ease of love and payment.

Supper was easily missed. He was easily missed. His paunch, his sedate qualities. His observance of life like a steady film. Nothing unexpected, nothing too grand, too unique. It could be explained, understood, but not appreciated in its swollen mystic nature. The plains rattled with the shock of thunder and bolts of electricity. She dragged her nails across what remained of her youth. "I don't accept this," she said. "I've no reason to. I can see out this window into the garden, the yard where my dreams act out their silly dramas. I can kiss Aunt Kate and the uncle she married, but never loved, each morning, here in front of my mirror, here on the dresser of my past age. If the night is heavy with static, the humidity oppressive, if the lightning manages to stab a stray, hulking butte, then I can recall my high school years in vivid color, with all my loves alive and the heartaches fresh and uncontrolled. I can smell supper simmering below. My favorite again. He tries, but he has no strength. He is the sorrow of novelists, the uninspired artist of the new wave." And here she turns her gaze from the door back to the black and blue stillness of the past, to the squirrels that despite the impending storm still rip the green walnuts from the trees and toss them on the roof.

After he's left for work she unlocks her door. The heat is unbearable. Summer is pale and blistered. Weeds sprout where nile lilies should be. A hummingbird has built a nest in one of the low slung branches of a young tree. The sun, a muddy silver, stands treetop and bathes her lost and lonely legs in its sometimes-light when not wrapped in a thunderhead catafalque. Her mind is light and dizzy, the everyday expression of release, that room now silent and reflective above.

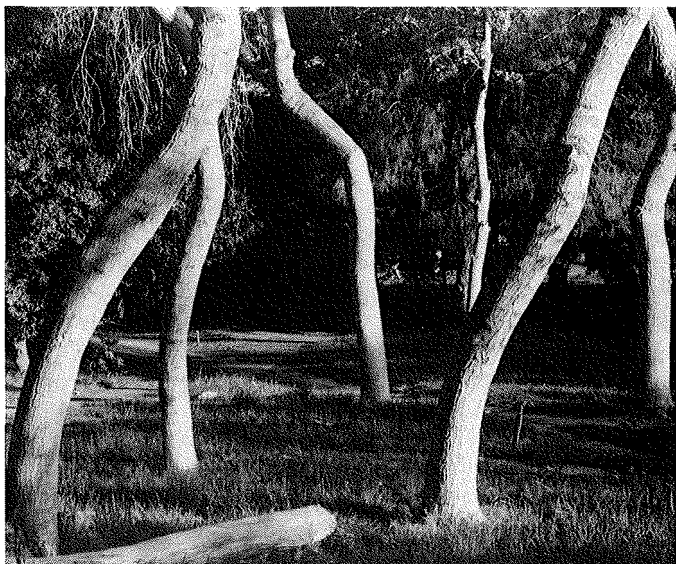
She wanders the garden, its green perimeter a patch of parasitical nature on the surrounding desert. Here is her life, this square of insignificance amid the barren stretches of the common. There is no harshness in her looks, no hatred in the stirrings of her fingers as they ply through unkempt hair. There are no seasons of triumph or dismay, no mortifications of the spirit, no internments at midnight when the moon has perched itself on the breaking cliffs. Here, where the healing aloe grows, there is only breakfast before ten and supper. There is finesse and lace to wear. There are small dreams that become demons in the night and run scowling across the plains. There are her pets, and the husband who returns every evening with the same haunted look.

Inside, the kettle is whistling and the oatmeal has foamed past into the spitting range. She lifts both, still hot and screaming, into the sink. The steam sets the fire alarm buzzing and the house becomes what it seems, an asylum, a reverberating den of sound and mania. Her eyes wide, she plays the part of the madwoman, finally sitting on the porch to watch the mailman deliver the latest adverts, the paper with its blackened heart, and the monopoly of lottery bills.

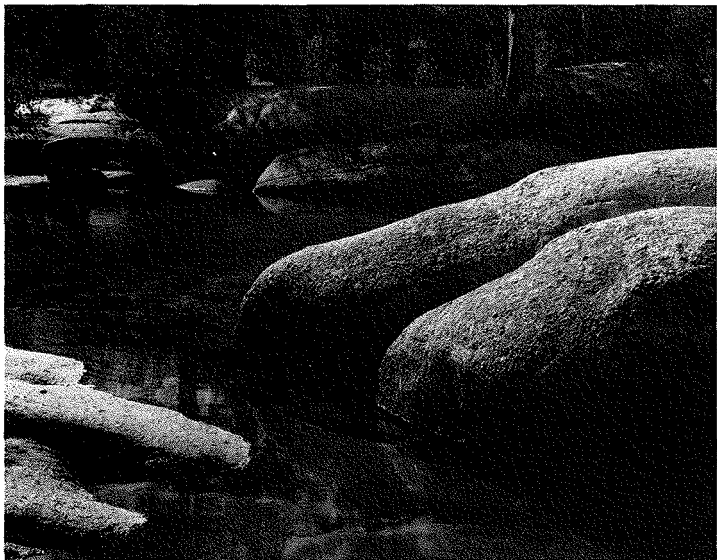
He says to her, "Mornin', missus." And she hears more than this. She hears his heart a hundred paces away. She tastes his sweat in the humid heat. She feels the tenseness of his legs as they lift his body. She hears her own breath as it inhales, exhales, inhales, exhales, pauses. As it sucks the world dry of oxygen, as she removes from this planet her bit of forgiveness, as she waits for the skies to fling open and someone almighty to end the dilemma. She is not an easy woman to love. She knows this and says, "Good morning." And the world is set right once again, if only for this fragmented instant.

This day, as she calls it, is spent in the repast, in the fixing and mending of fences, in the avoidance of the past. She works around the dirt and seizes upon the breeze of distant, blackened earth to recline in the chaise as the patterned movements of god's reckless sperm travel the world's open width. She unties the lashed front of her blouse and guides her breasts to the sun and shadow's face. In the heavy, weighing scent of heat, the drops of moisture slip brow to breast, stomach to groin.

She says, "I don't ask for much. I will just lie here and enjoy the sun, and the rain if it falls. I will pretend that at five-thirty no one will be coming home, that I am not as aged as the latest layer of sediment that now builds in the creek bed, that I have willed my life this way. Contentedness is not a multiple of enjoyment or adventure. It is a prime number. It is what some search for." She recites poems and practices the advocacy of Darwin upon the animals, higher and lower, that enter the fenced yard. She watches the sun paddle to stay afloat and imagines that this is survival, and once again she has managed to keep up with the ancient reptiles.



Steve Wolf



Franz Brown

Feeding The Animals

Jodi Johnson

i.

Every night Gene fills the hummingbird feeder
with red sugar-water.
During the day the birds hover
sipping with long tongues like straws.
Sun flashes blue and green beads at their throats.
When one flew through an open window,
I trapped it against the skylight; it barely filled my hand.
Outside, it burst away on wings sheer
and thin as a dragonfly's.

In early spring, other birds, bright yellow,
that I don't know by name, feed there too.
They cling to the narrow glass tube, bend over
and drink near their feet. When they fly off
the feeder swings crazily; the hummingbirds
bob with it like pendulums.
The bigger birds scare them away;
they poke in the spines of the bottle brush.
During the winter the hummingbirds almost disappear;
they are gone so soon
we think perhaps we imagined them.

ii.

My grandmother would take my sisters and me
to San Juan Capistrano, where we fed doves
at the mission. We bought seeds from a machine
with nickels she gave us and birds
fell over us like snow. They sat on shoulders and heads,
ate from our hands. My grandmother took pictures of us
dressed in white doves. When we ran out of seeds,
they filled the air with clapping wings.

Later, at her house on a bluff over San Clemente,
we watched the train go by below. From where we stood
the palm trees swayed on their stems
like dandelions. If I leaned over the edge
I might catch the wind in the sail of my ribs,
float down towards the ocean where whitecaps
tipped the water, a thousand doves.

iii.

I was five the summer my father built the house.
He took me along to gather scraps of wood
for the fireplace next winter. He gave me an apple at noon;
I sat in the street, juice running over my chin.
The first bee landed on the apple, but the next ones
found my face: I could feel them there,
feathered legs, tongues uncurling on my skin.
When I opened my mouth, they picked apple from my teeth.

After we moved in, my father wanted to smoke the nest.
He tucked his overalls into tall boots, his sleeves into gloves,
wrapped a cloth over his head.
We closed the windows and watched from inside.
Bees rose in a cloud when he pushed newspaper in the hive.
Thin smoke was stringing into the sky
as my father began to dance, leaping and jerking;
we waved to him when he waved to us
and we thought he was celebrating,
in a halo of bees.

iv.

We woke often in the morning to the cat
killing something on the front porch.
Sometimes we got there to see her
crack a skull under her teeth, sometimes
it was still alive. Once it was a young rabbit,
one eye torn out, and we raised it in a wire cage,
taught it to walk on a leash. Still, to catch it,
we had to sneak up on its blind side,
lift it by the back of the neck,
its legs raking the air.

One summer we had a gopher named Lucky.
He rolled in his clear plastic hamster ball
in the livingroom, bounced off table-legs,
got stuck under the couch. He ate sunflower seeds
from my finger. After he bit Lisa's thumb,
we quarantined him for rabies.
My father let him go and still put bait on the lawn.
I avoided the cones of dirt.
He also paid us a penny apiece for snails;
we hunted them in the dust-smelling ivy.
I watched as he poured salt in the bag
and shook them like popcorn.
Later I missed the silver threads
weaving the leaves together.

v.

On our way to June Lake, we stop at the hatchery
to see the long white sheds with trays of eggs,
then trays of transparent new fish.
We walk up the rows and the fish get bigger;
they lie on the clean fiberglass and grow.
Their fins wave in and out.
When they are big enough, they go outside into a pond
that is paved with their dark backs.
Twice a day, when the feed trucks come through
blowing fish pellets over the water, they rise,
and the pool swells with them,
the water lifts in ropes.

We get up before dawn the next morning
and walk to the marina. The lake smells of gasoline and moss
where it cups the underside of the dock.
We start the engine. My father lets me steer
and we head for the south shore, near a spring,
where we cut the motor, dropping our anchor
fifty feet out and slightly down-wind of the dead pine.
We don't even bait the hooks. They throw off gold sparks
falling through the column of shadow under the boat.
Then I pull up a fish, twist the hook from its throat,
thread a line through its mouth and gills.

I drop the bare hook again. In an hour
we have twenty trout and go home.
Back at the cabin, before we clean them,
my father wants a picture. I grasp both ends of the string
in my eight-year-old hands. Some of the fish
are still flapping. Their tails shine in the sun.
They throw their scales like coins at my feet, like eyes
that wink in the grass, watching me.
Smile, my father says, so I do.

vi.

The dog almost died tonight, eating poison
I put out for the rats. They had a nest
under the washing machine; one ran over my shoe
as I was folding clothes. I would lie awake
waiting for the trap to go, sometimes twice a night
with peanut butter and walnuts.
The dog killed one in the kitchen, another
drowned in the toilet. Then the cat arrived
and slept all day on the coffee table and the rats
stayed out. Now, at two in the morning,
the dog is suddenly straight, her uncut Doberman's tail
a stiff column of bone, her head
arching backwards almost to her spine.
Her eyes stay open. She doesn't breathe.
All the way to the vet's, I knead her sides,
pushing the air in. For the first time
I hear the ticking of my heart, feel my blood
eat the oxygen out of my lungs.

vii.

Friday evening I drive across the canyon
to feed the horses. Their chewing pulses in the dusk.
The Arab looks ready to foal. Once, a mare surprised me,
dropping a filly two weeks early in the rain.
I came over in the morning to find it
in the gelding's corral; it had slipped through the fence.
The filly wouldn't nurse, so I milked the mare
and fed it through a turkey baster. When it sucked my fingers
I guided it under its mother. Still, I sometimes saw it
nuzzling the flanks of other horses in the field
while the mare grazed steadily in a far corner.

I come home smelling of alfalfa and oats.
The cat threads through my legs. The dog
puts its front feet on the window and looks in.
Gene is asleep when I go to bed.
I fit into the rhythm of his breathing. Outside
the dog barks at coyotes as they drift by.
In the morning I will see their droppings on the driveway,
full of manzanita seeds and grass.

Gene brushes his hand sleepily over my arm.
The blood is puddled and warm in his fingers
and I think at any moment it could leak through his skin,
in the gaps between molecules.
I wonder what it is that holds our cells together,
so we don't dissolve
or absorb things that we touch, each other;
I feel my own body porous, diffuse,
atoms orbiting out of me to feed the air.

a way of life

Mike Burns

1.

set above the flood plain
McKinleyville and Arcata straddle the Mad River
only farmers and their cattle
use these muddy lowlands

verdant green after the runoff.
before the flood, I climbed the train trestle
ran across, skipping tie to tie
the freight does not run North anymore

Union Pacific ripped up the old tracks
people built houses in the right-of-way
and Mr. Scarborough used the gravel bed
for a driveway

log racks scarred by chain binders and sloppy loader operators
a yellow and white '63 Peterbilt
sat in front of his red garage, with its leaky roof,
most the winter.

after school, we sat out front
Donny, Dave and I
perched on the round spool-like mill ends
watched the sun slip between clouds

we used to wash and wax his truck
Marine Corps shine
if the sun came out
his basement rootbeer was the best.

I drove through town last week.
from the overpass astride the new concrete ribbon of Highway
101
in the brief moment
before rain closed the sky

I could see the yellow fenders
but weeds grew
where the tires should have been.

2.

a broken gravel road
drifts through Magdalena
the wind stirs up dust clouds
that fan out
fill the cracked adobe walls

in the folds of a brief oasis
peasant grape vines
crouch, like wizened old men,
low against the rust hillside.

lone saguaro cactus
limbs heft upwards like Atlas
they keep the sky from collapsing
onto airless sand.
lizards and snakes and mexicans

live in this heat, on this edge
sun sharpened wind honed
razor to trim your beard
scrape the moss from your tin horn.

3.

I watched a fisherman cast his line
beyond the shore break.
a wave rose against his boulder perch
his figure obscured, for a moment,

by the mist.
a thousand feet over Mugu Rock
silver dish pushed into the sky.
a matched set of Navy choppers

spun above the storm waves kicked up by North Westerlies.
the current ran out his line
drop his hook on snag
that pulled like a 100 pounder.

4.

it's spring
before the first mosquitos
even before the mud begins to settle out
of the rivers and lakes
Chuck fries catfish in cornmeal batter

serves it up beside wilted spinach,
winter greens
and pie, baked with berries
gathered beneath the stone pilings of a trestle bridge
washed out

by the little Ohio in '64.
the sun sets early
and we finish the pie by kerosene lamp
hung from hooks
that will carry the mosquito netting in summer.

on the breeze

Mike Burns

two cats
sit in front of the window
their noses pressed tight
against the glass,
a distant mewing
penetrates the noon-day air

lifted on the breeze,
the same breeze that wakes my nose
with the sour smell of chicken shit
lifted from poultry ranches
tucked into the folds
of red clay hills,

and it reminds me to feed the geese
before the neighbor's shrubs
are picked bare, shredded by clapsnapping beaks.

and mom and pop goose
laugh in their peculiar nasal way.

feel the rhythm of the wheels, thumpbump

Mike Burns

there is a bridge in Vallejo
stretched across
the full arm of the east bay
pulled like a thin strand of tinsel at christmas, branch to bough.
the brackish sea that ebbs through these straits
mingles with the water
of the rock peaks in Desolation, water passed through
dry cotton plains of Bakersfield and Arvin
its murky tidal wash
carries the brown silt of flooded fields
and farm yards, top soil
of last year's lettuce.

from above, I peer through the steel girders
taut green cable webbing
shivers in the northwesterly breeze

clinging to the banks away from the tidal reach, fishing piers
cargo wharfs held tight
by tar soaked pilings driven deep

the floor boards in my Chevy growl, heavy rumble caught
in the throat of the ravine
welling up out of mud-brown waters
sustained in the erector-set-genius of the bridge
its energy surges through concrete flooring
as truck and I lurch forward
thump bumpthump bumpthump bump
suddenly aware of height, feeling the cold water in my boots
I remember washed out trestles
hovering above the Eel River.

*

Jeannette Svoboda

I hike slowly up Rocky Peak Road
it is seven on a summer morning
one hundred and thirteen degrees,
there's a snake laid long
across the middle of the dirt road
I throw small pebbles
near its shiny black and yellow skin,
I throw small rocks
on its spread strength,
it won't move
it is fat and full of night mice
I throw a big rock
it hits hard thickness,
muscles twitch, slowly it pulls itself
into the crackling dry weeds.
when I get home, hot,
I grab the shiny green hose by the neck
turn on the pent flow
stick my face in the cold water
and stay all afternoon

*

Jeannette Svoboda

a blackness
shoots past my small kitchen window

a shot from a gun
it smashes into the ground, exploding

into bird sounds
shoots back up, into the air, toward the front yard

...
I run to the front door
the falcon on the driveway, crouching

it jumps down hard on its talons, small bird
squeezed between

I like to watch this pursuit of food.
keen eyes do not rest

his and mine, we both watch, intent
he peers up and down

ready for an enemy
I peer straight ahead at that need

that I want

Effie's Wing

Blaine Halley

Last summer I returned to the hills on the banks of the Ohio River. When I saw the turnoff to grandpa's I experienced the same sense of excitement I had known as a child. The difference in this last trip and the others was the insight gained on a way of life sheltered and so very different from my own.

Every morning bird-song awakened me and breakfast was ready before my feet hit the floor. The eggs gathered before I got to the table were always served with cornbread or biscuits hot from the oven.

On this trip, I was determined to learn about the country people sometimes referred to as hillbillies.

On the third morning, Arley Patterson, a tenant on my uncle's land, arrived to discuss shoes for a pony. Arley comes from a big family. His father had three wives and twenty-four children. I learned Arley's brother, Harley, once traded one of *his* kids for a pickup truck. No one could remember the year or model truck. After my uncle settled the pony shoe question, Arley called my uncle to one side and confessed he didn't want to talk much in my presence because I might be from the FBI.

Later, my uncle asked if I would like to go out and see Arley's and Harley's sister Effie. Effie lives in a small cabin with her grandchildren, Arley, and her absent husband's brother named Junior.

My aunt told me Effie was a woman of few words. However, one day Effie told my aunt how she'd learned to tell if Junior wanted anything special. Effie said, "When Junior lays his backside up against me I can tell he wants *somehin'*."

Arley, said to be a mama's boy, lived with Goldie his stepmother before he came to live with Effie. Goldie lived so far back in Modoc Holler that when she got sick the only way Arley could get her to a doctor was to cut down a tree, nail her rocking chair to it, hook it up to George the mule, and drag Goldie five miles to the road for an ambulance to pick her up. Goldie did not survive the ordeal. At the funeral hall Arley, grief stricken, passed out and didn't make it to the funeral. He stayed sick until Effie rented the cabin and took him in. The rest of the clan moved in as circumstances guided them to seek protection under Effie's wing.

On the way to Effie's cabin my uncle let me know I'd never be invited in. The cabin is reached only by a foot path, and as we came near, Junior and Arley met us and had us sit down beside the path. I brought along a six pack of beer and as they were emptied they were tossed to the dog. Junior told tales about all the kids and the dog while they jumped and hopped around and over me.

In a sudden quiet, Effie came from the cabin with a baby in her arms. She approached in silent dignity, her presence putting a hush upon us all. She greeted me with nothing more than eye contact and seated herself in front of my view of a red rooster strutting in the garden. Effie accepted the beer I offered her and sipped it slowly until the baby in her arms began to cry. She pulled the baby close to her breast, rose, and returned to the cabin, leaving her silence behind.

Far beyond the strutting red rooster, the garden, and the green and rolling hills—I saw the Ohio River.

Three Rivers

for Jerry

Virginia Webster

Long roads boil in hot sun. Everyone has seen that, the way horizons wrinkle and quiver. I never understood why that happens. I used to think maybe someday I'd meet a scientist-type who would explain to me wavelength distortions and optical illusions. I never have met a scientist. I just keep driving on roads in heat waves, while my car folds into the wrinkles.

I am alone today. I'm alone most days, though now I'm pretending to run away, otherwise known as going on a vacation. I've felt variations in aloneness. Sometimes aloneness is a nest, quiet, safe, comforting. Sometimes aloneness is a cancer, slow, hungry. Sometimes, like now, aloneness is a shadow, separate and attached at the same time, but painless.

I think I can feel my car as I drive. I can feel gasoline move through an artery and explode in pistons.

I'm driving to King's Canyon. I've rented a cabin there. I imagine that I'll be trying to "find myself." I'll look at the trees and the mountains and think about my insignificance compared to natural wonders. I'll think about the meaning of life, and I'll look into the night sky and think I'm nothing more than an atom in the toenail of some grocery clerk living in a dimension where galaxies are molecules.

Sometimes I'm too profound for words.

I wonder if people in Porterville think about these kinds of things. Porterville's not bad really, not if you can stand this kind of isolation. Given a choice of isolations, though, Porterville does not strike me as the hub of insight. This is a pit stop. I eat lunch and I fill up the car with regular. There are lots like me here, refueling.

People seem to think it's odd for a woman to travel alone. I'm not in a position to judge myself odd. I want to go to a cabin in the mountains, that's all.

I confess. I've just broken up. Is that the right phrase, "broken up?" It sounds so rigid, outdated by at least 20 years. John Travolta and Olivia Newton John break up. What is it that I do? What I'm doing is more like an escape act. I wonder why it is that when you split from your lover it's breaking up. When you split from yourself it's breaking down. Which am I doing? Running away from him or from myself? I know what I'm running away from is the kind of aloneness that's a shadow. So the only way I can get away from it is by changing the direction of the light.

Breaking up is actually a pretty good word to use for David. It suggests rigidity and brittleness. That's what he was like. He was spartan. The walls in his house were completely empty. There was nothing extraneous in his life. He possessed only the basics: a desk job at AT&T, a couch, a TV with VCR, a microwave oven (no stove) and a waterbed. Did I leave out myself? Of course. I too was one of the basics in his life. I was what we mutually referred to as "copulatory relief," CR for short. He would only see me on Friday nights, his sex night. He said he was a writer and he had to keep his weekends free for writing the script that would make it big. When we met he was working on a movie about a scientist who had discovered a way to make dogs pee gasoline. The economic implications were enormous, of course. David said the script was really an attack on oil companies. Really, it was his philosophy of life. David only thinks in terms of commodities. That's what he was making me do once a week — pee gasoline.

I'd come over to his house about 6 p.m. At 7 we'd go to the Sizzler. It was always the Sizzler. We'd both have steak and malibu chicken except that he'd have fries and I'd have a baked potato. Then we would rent a movie and go back to his house and sit on his Herculon couch while watching the latest acquisition from Video King. Then we'd go to bed. His moves were always the same. I would sometimes feel like a 45 rpm record. Every time his stylus would touch me it would follow the same grooves and I'd make same sounds. Like a top 40 hit, at first he couldn't hear enough of me, and he'd play me over and over again, and my sounds were full and clear. But the stylus was getting worn and my grooves were getting tired. I could hear the static, like being married.

There was one extraneous item in David's house. It was a plant. A former CR in his life had given it to him when I met him. He never watered it. I could see the stages of dying every week when I came over and saw that plant. I think he threw it away when it died.

I loved David. I'm not sure why. He used to tell me I had nice breasts.

It's hot today. I should have left earlier. It's noon now, 100° at least. I am compulsively watching the temperature gauge on my car. I imagine what it would be like getting stuck out here on this desolate road. All I can think of are vultures.

At 2:00 I reach the entrance to Sequoia National Park. If possible, it's even hotter here. I hear the rangers saying it was a record high today, 107° in the shade at Three Rivers, just outside the park. Right now all I can think about is the sticky air evaporating from my face, the salt taste seeping into my mouth. I've been fantasizing about cool mountain air, redwoods, clear streams, the whole John Muir package. Instead I feel like I'm paying the entrance fee into some Inferno. A mother with her family is paying in the car in front of me. She's taking forever. What is she talking about?

"How far to the Giant Grove?" I hear her ask. Not satisfied with the answer, she asks where the nearest open campground is. The ranger points and waves his arms. Is he giving her directions? There's only one road for God's sake. How complicated can directions be? I feel beads of sweat trickling down between my breasts. I don't want to look at the temperature gauge on my car. I've looked at it a thousand times already. But, of course, I do look. The car has been idling too long. The gauge is creeping up, slow, slow, moving. I'm holding my breath, wanting to move. When I finally get through the entrance gate the gauge is three quarters of the way to meltdown. I stop looking, thinking it's my eyes, the force of my pessimism pushing the needle higher. Half a mile up the hill I can't ignore it. My car is overheating.

I pull over to the side of the road, turn off the engine and open the hood. Obviously a hose has exploded. The engine is saturated, steam rises from the crevices.

I console myself that it could be worse. The ranger station is only a quarter of a mile back and my car can coast down the hill. After I tell the ranger what happened, he calls the auto club for me. I wait.

Now I'm just passing time, agonizing over the circles of the second hand on the clock above the ranger's desk. I'm writing in my journal, I'm reading Anais Nin. I'm listening to my walk-man. The ranger explains to me that it's the Memorial Day weekend and there's only two tow-trucks for the entire park. Because of the heat, no doubt, there are seventeen calls in front of mine. More waiting. One of the ranger's friends comes into the station. They make jokes about the weather.

"You'll never guess what Larry saw today," the friend asserts joyously.

"No. Tell me."

"I can't believe it, but he saw a, are you ready? He saw a Western Meadowlark!"

"My God, where?"

"Just outside Grant Grove."

They shake their heads in disbelief and awe as though they've played some special part in the Second Coming. I'm shaking my head in disbelief as well. What must it be like to be so utterly affected by something that leaves other people, like me, so utterly bored?

I look at my watch. It's 5:00. The ranger is taking down the flag outside. I'm not going to be able to stay here much longer. When he comes back in he tells me the tow-truck is outside. The driver tells me not to worry, that it's only a broken hose. The gas stations are open until six o'clock and a hose shouldn't be hard to find. I crawl into the dingy cab, sandwiched between the driver and his helper. I can tell they've had a long day. We are like cartoned animals in here, our body odors mingling and there's nothing

offensive in the exchange, simply because no one cares. A Virgin Mary is affixed to the dashboard. Her troubled face catches the undulating shadow of a crucifix swinging above her head.

They take me into Three Rivers and deposit me at a Mobil gas station. By now my mind is numb. I'm just going through motions, wanting my ordeal to be over. I wish I had never taken this trip. I feel as though my hands are being slapped for trying to get away, for trying to forget. I'd rather be anywhere than here, signing AAA forms and wondering where in the world I'm going to spend the night. I know there's no way I'm going to make it to King's Canyon tonight. The sun is puffing out its last spasms of heat as it hovers over the mountains.

I'm afraid of driving in the dark.



"Where are you from?" was the first thing he said to me. He was bent under the hood of my car, releasing the clamps on the exploded hose. I was resting my head on my hands propped against the left fender, watching him.

"Los Angeles," I answered, not expecting any significant social discourse with this man. He lifted his head to look at me. He was testing me with his eyes, trying to figure me out, I could sense that.

"Are you up here by yourself?" he continued prying.

I responded with a terse, yes. It wasn't that I found him unattractive. I was mostly struck by a sense of the utterly unexpected, like a Western Meadowlark. I was abrupt only because I was off guard. My hair was stringy from perspiration, my face strained from the long drive. I could feel wet spots beneath my arms. My most unappealing T-shirt quietly stated, "Life is hard, then you die." In short, I was not out to catch a man. He must have known that, he must enjoy coming in for surprise attacks.

"What's your name?" he continued.

"Veronica."

I began sniffing him like a dog.

"My name is Tom."

My battle shields went up. It's not that I'm a man-hater, it's not that sex is always a war. It's just that sometimes it seems that way. Whatever it is I brace myself for it by encasing myself in a shell. I deflect arrows with my liberated uninhibited sexual openness. I'm easy — and that makes me hard.

So I smiled at him. We exchanged John Donne eyebeams. He wasn't my type really. He was one of those guys that seemed to have gotten lost somewhere in the sixties and never came out. He had brown hair and a full beard that dropped onto his chest. But his

body was lean, a long smooth muscle. I stared at his crotch. I thought he understood.

I didn't expect to like him. I didn't want to like him. I wanted to fuck him. And then I wanted to leave him. There was nothing to him except the smell of convenience. I needed a place to stay for the night. I was nursing the wound David had wielded, I wanted to punish David. I was lonely. And here he was, the opportunity, a raw invitation smiling at me.

He continued the ritual. He asked me what I did. I hate these introductory amenities. I should carry around a tip sheet. The dialogue is always the same, "What do you do?" "I go to school." "What do you study?" "I study English." "What are you going to do with it, be a teacher?" Normally I'm too tired to explain myself, and not wanting to seem totally without direction, I usually respond with a yes to end the tedious line of conversation. But now I felt especially annoyed at being asked if I were going to be a teacher.

"No," I responded, "I'm a free-spirit really. Which means I don't know what I'm going to do with an English degree, let alone my life. My career is not how I make money." I knew I sounded defensive.

His eyes dropped away from mine and focused on the new hose he was clamping into place. "I'm a drifter too," was all he said.

His arrow had slipped in. But it was so quick and so clean that I didn't even know I had been wounded.

"I like to write," I ventured, trying to remove the edge of defensiveness.

"Really? What do you write?"

I hesitated. Writing, like everything else, best serves itself as a mask for me. I tell people I write so they can't tell that I do nothing at all.

"Poetry, mostly," I said, hoping I sounded sufficiently lofty.

"What about?" He seemed interested. A gas station attendant in Three Rivers, California, fixing a rubber hose, seemed interested in poetry.

"Death," I said.

He gathered his tools, wiped his hands on a rag and closed the hood of my car. "I don't meet many women like you here," he said.

We looked at each other, still testing. Still uncertain.

"That will be thirteen-fifty," he said. I gave him a credit card and he went into the office. I watched him in there. I noticed piles of dead mosquitos in the window sills. Something told me I had lost him, though I didn't quite understand why. He came out with my receipt and handed it to me. We were silent, waiting, hesitant. I

knew it was a mistake, expecting sex from him, thinking he was interested. I dropped my shields again. I was ready to make my retreat. Thanks was all I said and I opened the car door, ready to slip away.

"I get off work now." I imagined him as a man throwing his last chip on the table. He couldn't seem to tell that I'd do anything he wanted me to. The door of my car was still open. "It's been hot as hell today, and I've got a swimming hole behind my house. Would you like to come over?"

The man was a master at catching me off guard, an artist really. The war was still on. "I didn't bring anything to swim in," I coyly dissented.

"You've got shorts, don't you?" He was playing the game.

"Yeah. I guess so." I conceded. "Okay, I'll come."

There was a distinct look of surprise on his face.

"What's the matter," I asked. "You didn't think I would say yes?"

"No. No. I didn't think that at all." Clearly he had. Counterattack successful.

He said he walked to work, his house was just down the road. He got into my car and pointed north.

As I am driving I am thinking how glad I am that I've found a place to sleep tonight.

His house seemed lived-in. Which is not a euphemistic way of saying decrepit at all. There were no pretensions, yet it certainly did not emulate David's spartan domicile. The walls were paneled with wood, the furniture was old but well-kept. Wood carvings were scattered around the room.

"What do you think?" he asked, holding up a half-finished carving that was set on the kitchen table. What he had done so far showed intricately etched designs, perfect geometry. I hadn't imagined wood could ever be molded into those shapes.

"It's beautiful," I told him. I was sincere. He smiled and pointed to the array of carvings and wood sculptures in the room.

"I made them all," he said. "Maybe it's something like writing poetry."

My only response was a smile. Vulnerable. Guarded.

"Do you want a hooter?" he asked.

My hackles raised. "What's that," I demanded.

He looked at me incredulous. "Where are you really from?" he asked. "You don't know what a hooter is?"

"No." I guessed I should have been embarrassed.

"You know, grass, weed, marijuana."

"Oh!" I said in a drawn out tone, feeling stupid. "Sorry that I didn't understand. The word hooter isn't used too frequently where I come from."

"You need an education," he said. "Who knows what else you've missed out on in L.A."

"I've missed out on swimming holes," I said. "You're the first person who has ever asked me to a swimming hole."

"And the first person to give you a hooter," he said as he passed me the joint.

"Only by name," I said as I accepted.

I found myself slipping into a state of complacency for a moment. I wondered what it would be like living in a town like this, living with a man like this. Unfamiliarity scared me. He was unfamiliar, a different breed. I couldn't let down my guard until I had figured his angle. I was waiting for his move, wishing we could just couple like beasts without ritual.

"The bathroom is in there," he said, pointing through the bedroom, "if you'd like to change."

I grabbed my shorts and followed his direction. The first thing I noticed in there were perfume bottles and makeup. Next to the mirror was a woman's necklace. I didn't feel jealous. After all I had no intentions of staying with this man, of feeling anything for him beyond the limitations of tonight. I couldn't care less about another woman. What I felt was more like confusion and a sense of violating someone else's space. I didn't belong here. There were signals.

I put on my shorts. In the mirror I saw him in the bedroom outside, taking off his shirt. His back was brown and hard. I turned away.

When I came out I asked him quite directly, "So do you live with someone?" The question didn't surprise him. He knew what was in the bathroom.

"Her name is Marilyn," he said. "She lives here sometimes. But she's married to some guy in Reno. She's with him now. She left about a week ago. She'll be back soon, though. She always comes back. This is where she stays when she can't live there." I understood. I wished I hadn't asked. This wasn't a part of my life.

He took me outside where I expected to find the infamous swimming hole. What he called his yard was no more his yard than the swimming hole was a swimming hole. Trees grew all around a dirt path that led to the back, insects buzzed furiously, vines grew on trellis's and lizards scattered where we walked. He showed me a pail with swarms of baby fish in it.

"What are those," I asked.

"Minnows," he said. "I use them for bait."

The swimming hole was not a hole but a river, undoubtedly one of the three rivers the town was named for. Just up the river I could see a small set of rapids. He led me to a bridge where the water

flowed smoothly. He had tied a long thick rope to the bridge. He grabbed onto the rope, stepped back and took a flying lunge into the river. The rope swung in a loping arc and his bulging arms strained to hold him. He gracefully skirted the water and dropped back onto the bank. "You try it," prodding playfully. Who was this man I was with, smoking hooters along the edge of a river, watching swallows nest along the bridge, swinging from a rope into a "swimming hole?" When he finally convinced me to swing on the rope I took a hold of it and ran out into the river raising my legs. I had no idea my body would weigh so much and I couldn't hold on long enough to complete the circle. I let go and crashed into the water, closing my eyes as hard as I could, bracing myself for the shock, expecting my back to snap on an immersed rock. But I splashed safely and emerged to see him laughing at me. He wasn't making fun of me. He knew I was safe. I swam closer to shore and he came into the water. We swam together, had a water fight, laughing, splashing each other like dolphins.

I had never swum in a river before. I had never felt the strong tug of a river current. As we swam together I reveled in the pull, imagining that the water on my skin was pulling me through time. He was treading water further down. I relinquished myself to the pull while he resisted, waiting. And I let the river pull me to him.

We swam to the shore, rose out of the water, looked at each other. My T-shirt was clinging to me like a grape peel. My nipples were hard points. I was wondering what he was thinking, wondering if I should be making something happen. We sat down. The sun was gone now; light was grey slate. He lit a cigarette and offered me one. I said no. He hadn't touched me yet, not with his hands. A swallow was frantically searching for his nest. Quiet.

He found his way in. He knew he was inside.

"What do you think of zipless fucks?" I asked softly, knowing he wouldn't understand. I just needed to find my way in.

He looked at me strangely. "What in hell are those?"

I laughed. "You haven't read Erica Jong."

"Never heard of her," he replied. "I don't read much."

"A zipless fuck is a one-night stand, only ideally it's purer, no names, no connections, no ties, just two bodies needing each other." Now he was the one off guard. He looked away. "So they've got a name for it," he reflected. "Sometimes I need them. Winters get long up here."

"I feel like it's always winter where I live," I said. "Someday I want to write a book about it, living in a winter where there doesn't seem to be a spring. It seems the best I can hope for to keep me warm is an occasional piece of wood. And even that burns up before I've felt the warmth."

He seemed to understand. "I usually pick up girls in Visalia," he said. "I always tell myself there's something else there before I take her home. But there never is. Then I start feeling that it's my fault. It's just that sometimes there's an urge, and then that's the only thing I seem to care about." A car rumbled on the bridge. "I'd like to read your book when you've written it. I dream of things like that too, opening a wood shop, people paying me to do carvings for them. Sometimes I hate being a shade-tree mechanic; it's like the feeling of taking home a girl from Visalia. Every time I do it I wish I hadn't but I have to do it to keep alive." Another long pause. I was treading somewhere in the silence. I stared at the red ember of his cigarette, not sure where else to look.

"I wish we had more time," he said.

"We have tonight," I suggested.

He smiled slightly, still not looking at me. He took the last draw from his cigarette, then pushed the butt into the sand, pounding the small white stub long after the ember had smothered. "You know, those girls from Visalia," he said, "there's something about them. Somehow I never care when they leave." Finally he turned to look at me. "They're not like you. That's not why you're here."

"Why am I here?" It was all I could think to ask. I couldn't tell if his answer was a question or a statement.

"Because you want to be," was all he said.

As I walk out the door I wonder where I'm going to spend the night. It's so damn dark in the mountains. He seems to understand. He tells me there's an inexpensive motel about a mile down the road. He tells me to ask for Maggie and tell her that he sent me. I don't entirely understand what's happened here. My head is telling me I've been rejected. I wouldn't have said no to him if he had asked. I could imagine his sleek brown body moving like a piston, tiny explosions in my body.

We aren't saying much to each other. He opens my car door. I get inside. He closes the door. There is a shield of metal between us now. I roll down my window.

"Thanks for fixing my car," I tell him. "Knowing this wreck I probably won't get very far though." I'm trying to ease the tension.

"I hope you don't," he says with some sincerity. "I should have jimmied your car when I had the chance. Otherwise, I'll never see you again."

I couldn't find anything to say.

"We could use an English major up here," he says, looking as though he wishes what he is saying were true.

I start the engine and put the car into reverse.

"I'll send out resumes."

My foot eases off the brake. As the car begins to roll away he bends down and kisses me. He pulls away and walks into his house.

I am driving in the night, feeling pistons.

Northridge Review is the literary magazine of California State University, Northridge. Published each semester, it contains poems, short fiction, essays, drama, and reviews by students and alumni. This issue includes the works of:

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The Northridge Review is also pleased to present an interview with Deena Metzger, author of several books including the novel, *The Woman Who Slept With Men To Take The War Out Of Them*, and two books, *Dark Milk* and *The Axis Mundi Poems*. Deena Metzger also leads writing and journal workshops and is the founder of the Writing Program at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles.