

Northridge Review

7.

Fiction
Poetry
interview
with:
Ray
Bradbury

northridge review

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Awards

The Rachel Sherwood Poetry Award

Rachel Sherwood was a poet who knew and wrote of the mysteries of the afternoon and evening. On July 5, 1979, at the age of 25, she was killed in an automobile accident.

Rachel Sherwood studied and flourished in her art at CSUN. In memorium, an annual poetry prize has been established here in her name.

Poets honored with the prize receive fifty dollars from the university and are noted alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood, who was deprived of sufficient time to be the recipient of such honors.

Award winners are selected each spring by the *Northridge Review* staff. The selection is made from poems appearing in the spring and fall issues.

The Helen Helms Marcus Short Fiction Award

This annual award was established by Helen Helms Marcus to encourage writers of short fiction to pursue their art. The award was first given in 1986, with the sponsorship of the University Women's Group.

Writers honored with this award receive one hundred dollars from Helen Helms Marcus and the University Women's Group. They are selected each spring by the *Review* staff, again drawing from works appearing in the spring and fall issues.

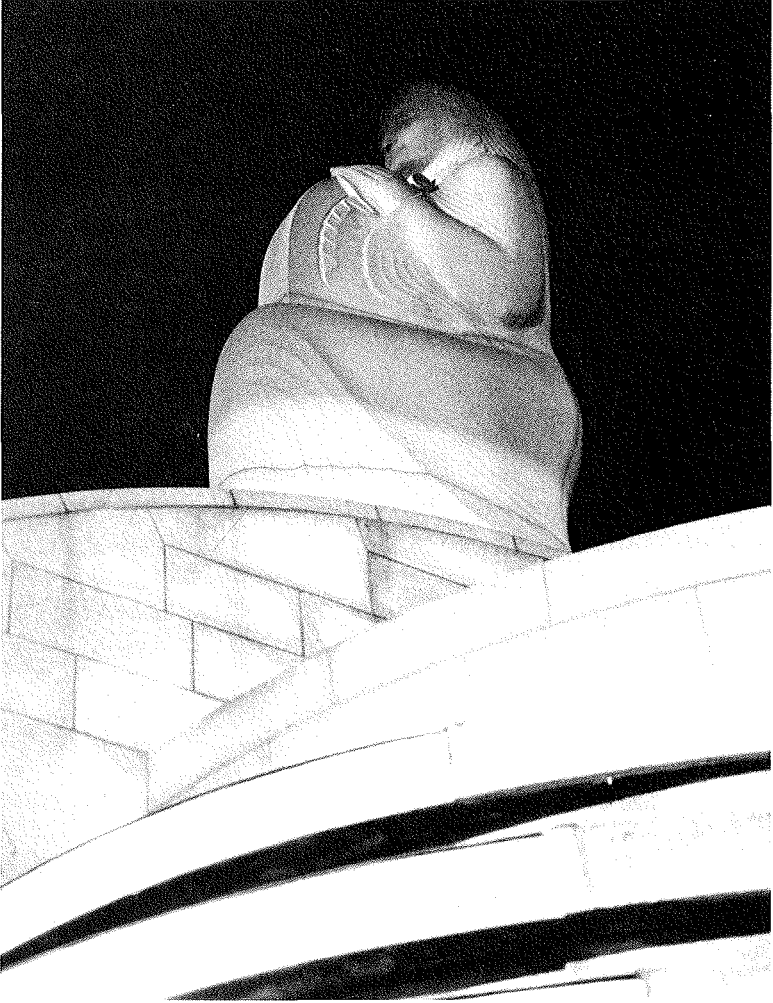
The cover photograph was taken by Brian Rosenbery. It was selected as the winner of the *Northridge Review's* first cover art competition. Finalists are selected by the staff from black-and-white art contributors and asked to submit color work for the contest. The winner's work is printed on the cover of the *Review*. The *Review* hopes to be able to present future winners an award that will more fully express our gratitude to the artist.

Cover design is by Victoria Potts.

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richard buller

To Flame Without Burning
Revisiting Brideshead, West Egg

Asia magazine annual, 1927:

Through a megaphone darkly, the 1920's.

The Cover: brown, Decoéd beauties,
anglophiled and alluring,

like chocolate Flappers in the heat of day,

Where Deneuve in *The Last Metro*

("The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet black bough")

Goes back a war, to wear,

look on page 63,

pink and silver gauze.

Hear the harp, tenderly plucked:

Nostalgia of sleep.

There! on page three,

Julia and Charles

in a yellow coupe:

smoking,

speaking soundlessly

of bat-squeak sexuality.

Sebastian is there, too,

on the rough outskirts,

ever the outsider looking in,

always watching,

always hoping.

"Though hast nor youth nor age

But as it were an after dinner

sleep dreaming of both"

Gaze more at the book. See page 326:

A gentleman!

Standing at the crowded summer shore,
sporting blanched Gatsby slacks,
a tie tousled by breeze
(do I spy a postage-stamp design?).

Our gentleman looks away,
Not taken by the mob-beach,
Parasol vanity.

Here, he thinks, the ultimate:
Flapper holocaust.

All, all a feral seasick circus.

Look beyond the illusion,
observe the horizon.

See from your fedora perspective
the flawed gardens of what is not.

The tragedy of a dream:
how the waves want to devour everything;
how you look one way, the wind blows another.

The sunbathers cry their throaty chant:

How dare you stand alone!
Do not — hey listen you! —
do not look to the water.

You must never turn away.

Play! Play! Play!

All is created for enjoyment —
why be obtuse?

“I have left behind
illusion . . .”

See page 148: a party!

Apparition of Flaming Youth
(Now burnt-up used pocketed
passages hidden deep in once-
read folios).

Take heed to the book:

“Gay blue seas of the south . . .
rippingjazzrhythms from far-away orchestras . . .
Don’t travel this winter . . .”

The far-off murmurs of niggardly
warnings deeply tendered.

But we are young!

RIPPINGJAZZRHYTHMS!

Let us sing! dance!

Where the manual on
How to Flame Without Burning?

Hear the fading celluloid rattle:

The sky is too Pink;
The sea is overly Turquoise;
and these Men have no faces,
only Masks of an age long-vanished.

The striped beach towel may
hide aging, but it will
pale, like the yellowed rattle;
it, too, will be discarded.

“Here . . .
I began to be old . . .
Here my last love died”

To page 237: a War Hero!
selling automobiles.

A hero, certainly a chap,

— but the memories of war too quickly wither,
and reputation dies with the fickle pompous soldier
who sick-wallows with the sick—

Who is this man, this relic of death's grotto,
who poses to sell Packards?

His eyes sparkle green:

the motto of the modern world!

Freedom in order to sell more.

Do you hear Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen?

Then move on! To page 1043: a night club.

The Café Noir—

coffee house of misplaced youth.

See how smoke swirls round the cabaret clown;

see his white pasty grin,

thick with closeted sensuality.

He mourns for wounded birds:

As far as sparrows are concerned,

I am a dove.

Enable us to fly!

“So we beat on,
boasts against the current,
borne back ceaselessly into the past”

You have noticed my wounds?

Perhaps that is dust you detect,

but it is the talc of humanity,

a pure lethal powder that once was my heart,

crushed pharmaceutically by

time,

squandered passion,

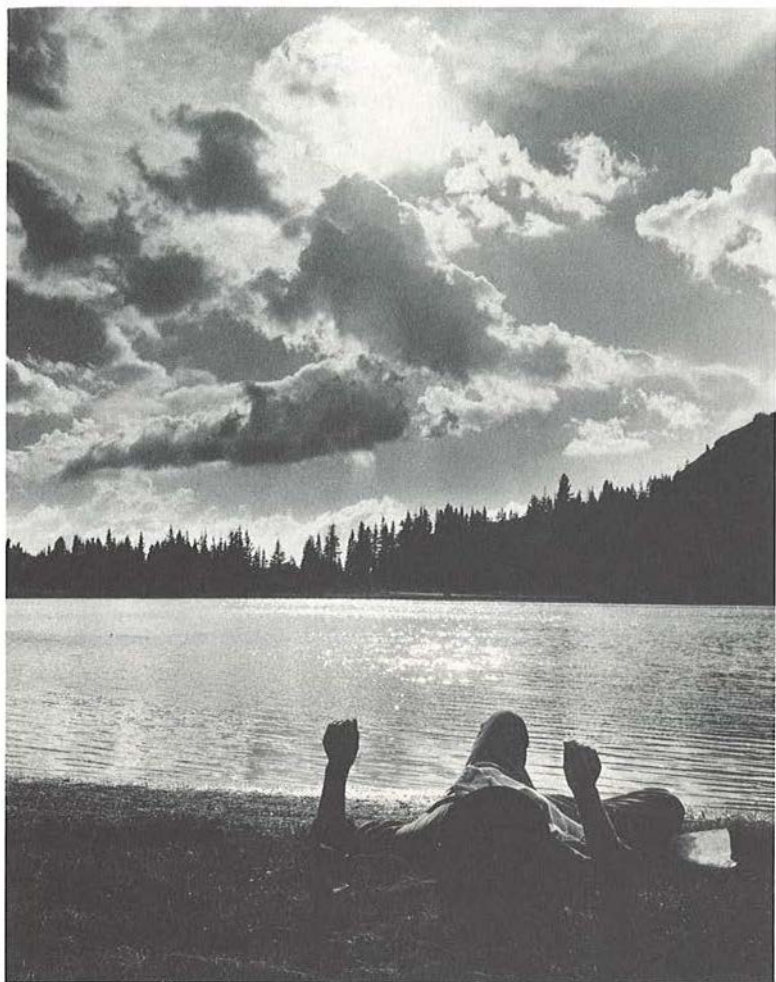
and You:

Lustrous . . . animated . . . overdressed.

“Nowhere, beloved, can
world exist but within”

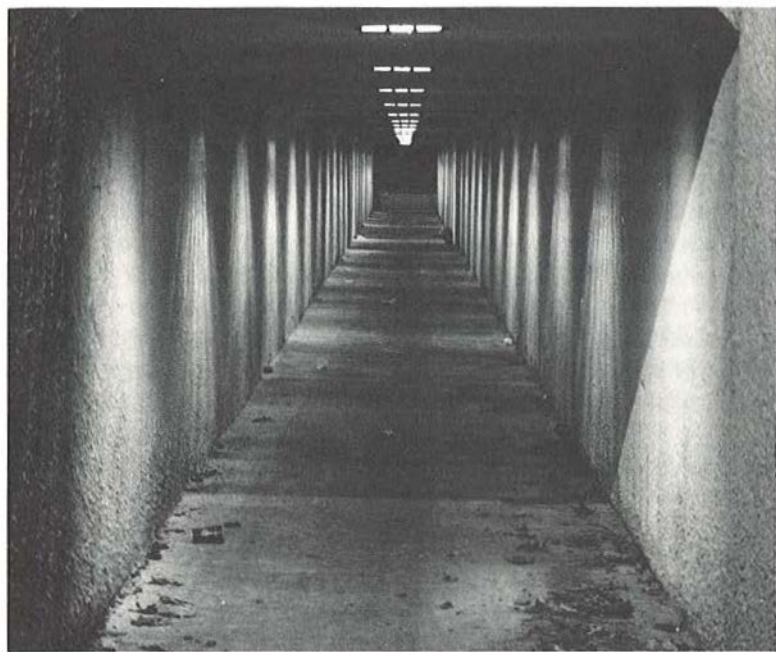
The houses perch on the hill
like roosters, with their roofs
comb-red.
The streamers, bright unnatural ribs,
rake the buildings with their crisp
precise arcs.
Later, they're tattered and limp
as drunks.
The lazy mariachi beat
unravels through
the window.

Scattered on an urgent wind
A host of seeds
Falls randomly
Outside the cherished rows.
Some find sweet sanctuary
In the earth
And with Demeter's breath become
Striving progeny
So tiny
A thousand
Cling to the heavy hoe
That gouges them from the soil.



Sometimes
my mind
stops going
yakity yak.

Golden white
symphonies
of love
flood through.



he speaks and her chin
sets
automatically
crystallized
by years dripping
hard water

the cave that once
was her mouth
returns his stalagmites

no comfort in hard places

One-Part Invention

The Music Building of Cole College is built of precise and dust-colored bricks, and it has dignified Iowa for one hundred and sixteen years. The seasonal metronome: its walls are swathed in brittle leaves, snowdrifts, forsythia, and voracious greenery.

Fall, winter, spring. A beat, and it is early summer. The foliage sucks up oxygen, replacing it with vegetative steam. The building might as well be packed with leaf mold, hot with decomposition. Her door is ajar again. She hopes, with a newcomer's optimism, to coax the dead air to life. If he cared to, he could tell her it is hopeless.

Music flows from her studio down the hall to his. There is a stack of staved sheets on his desk, straightly aligned as dog-eared corners, shredded edges, and coffee-rippled blotches allow. So many of the students associate sloppiness with an artistic nature. But he is not grading papers from Theory of Contrapuntal Forms I. Instead he throttles a coffee mug with both hands, a death-grip. She can't even stick to her own damn Romantics. She plays HIS Bach. HIS Scarlatti. Katherine Avery is an extraordinary pianist, and Michael Owens quite simply detests her for it. He hurls the mug at the wall; it ricochets and bounces toward the door intact.

"Owens? You all right?" Michael looks up. Smoker hulks in the doorway. He is slouched against the jamb, rubbing a grey-stubbled jawline with his rawhide thumb. The other hand is loosely clasped on the front of a worn leather vest. His boots are scuffed a dye-less flesh color. Even his Levis are regressing to a natural state, mellowed almost-white with the barest grainy suggestion of blue. They mold comfortably to his body.

Smoker nudges the mug with the toe of one scruffy boot. "Lost your chops, man — shoulda broke."

Michael twists a pencil in his fists, nods to the trumpet man, "Smoker."

Smoker raises lazy eyebrows and dips his head in the direction of Katherine's studio. Salt and pepper hair brushes his collar. "The lady cooks, and that's a fact."

Michael pictures her, hard and angular, swaying on the piano bench, touched by the same stream of scorching dust-motes that batters the potted plants on the window sill into submission. There is a scowl on her mannish young face. She is attacking the keyboard with an athletic grace — all the finesse of a woman bowler — swearing like a teamster when displeased with her fingering.

Michael shudders. This, for music that requires a fine opposition of abandon and control: impassioned objectivity. And yet, the phrases flow at Katherine's touch as crystalline and pure as thoughts from the mind of God. It is intolerable.

"The music is excellent. It's a fact," Michael replies. Fact: he barely knows her. Fact: he longs for the feel of her surprisingly elegant neck under his fingers. The pencil snaps in his immaculate, big pianist's hands.

Smoker focuses. "Hey, hard day, Owens?" There is an edge of curiosity to his fuzzy indifference.

Michael flings the pencil pieces into the wastebasket. Nothing Smoker would understand. On the contrary. Smoker has invited Ms. Avery to join the experimental improvisation group, OMS: Owens on keyboards and miscellaneous, Mason as percussionist, and Smoker on horns. The jazz man has it all figured. They can change the name to SOMA. Hah. Any connection between Katherine and euphoria — nothing could be more ludicrous. Nothing more repugnant. His skin crawls.

He refuses to think of her. It pleases him, this evidence of mental discipline. He is proud of his ability to expunge trivialities from consciousness simply by making a rational decision to do so.

He eyes Smoker. Even propped against the door-frame, Smoker is weaving, his usual nonchalant manner, if possible, more pronounced. Approaching unconsciousness. "Thought you had a class, Smoker."

The trumpet man grins. "Yeah — Fundamentals of Jazz Technique. At Papa Juan's."

For an instant, Michael sees "Papa Juan's" in pink neon script. A favored spot for faculty gatherings. Smoker's lair. Michael shrugs and says, "It's your ass if anyone ever complains about you holding classes in a bar," and hopes that "It's your ass" sounds natural.

Smoker waves the caution aside. "Kids dig it — they're cool."

"You're crazy," Michael shakes his head. "I don't know how you get away with it."

But he does know. Smoker is a jazz musician; he's supposed to be crazy — a sometimes messy obligation, to Michael's mind. Smoker either disregards or is unaware of the untidiness. He has an innate drive to excess anyway. And such persistent non-exercise of control intrigues Michael. Fascinating to watch, like a tightrope walker. "One of these days," Michael tells him, "you're going to self-destruct."

"All the time," Smoker smiles from behind half-closed eyes. "I'm a phoenix, man — THAT'S a fundamental jazz technique."

Katherine's music pelts down the hall in a crashing run. It thins to a trill, skips lightly over an eighth rest, and flowers in a final chord sustained, after it dies from the piano wires, in walls and bones. The two men are suspended in humming silence. Then they hear the faint knock of hollow wood; she shuts the lid to keep dust from the keys.

"'Bout time. You coming, Owens?" Smoker swings towards the hall.

Michael wills his taut muscles to ease. He shifts his shoulders under the sticky white shirt and mentally arranges

himself for another insipid faculty meeting. Droning details. Enforced camaraderie. The thorn in his side.

He smooths his hand down the nape of his neck. The sandy hair is cut close and neat, but a longer wave in front has fallen onto his forehead. He can feel it trembling against his skin. Years ago, when they first dated, Dottie called the effect "boyish." He doesn't push it into place.

Katherine is ahead of them, almost at the far end of the hall already. Her studio is closer to the stairs. She holds herself very straight and walks with a long deliberate stride. Her skirt is short, inappropriate, and even with the lingering California tan, her legs look pale, glowing in the interior gloom like the Cheshire-Cat's grin. Michael's mouth twists in disgust.

Smoker, head cocked back and to one side, eyes her speculatively and says, "Bless her raunchy little soul."

From the jazz man, it is predictable enough. But the comment is unsettling; it prods something terrible that is expanding within Michael. He sneers, "You're crazy. The woman has no soul."

Behind, he hears Dottie Hall's geisha walk, a distant rapid pecking of high heels. Ahead, Katherine descends the top four stairs in two steps, the play of muscle in thighs and calves clear before she disappears down the stairwell. Michael frowns. "No mystery. Too hard, too..." He is tempted to say "impure." He bites the inside of his lower lip.

"Nice ass, though," Smoker muses. He is not talking to Michael Owens. One knuckle rasps back and forth across his chin. "Strong legs." The trumpet player is smirking to himself, sunk, no doubt, in some barbarous reverie. Michael remembers a childish put-down and without thinking mutters, "Give it up, Smoker. All your taste is in your mouth."

The phrase amuses Smoker, who slants him a look and chuckles, "Yeah. I can handle that."

Michael feels ill. It's the heat, the midwestern swelter. Summer in the jungle. It is worse this year somehow; unreasonably, he burns to lay that at Katherine's door. Rationally, he sees he is undone with the heat. He has been walking too fast, which accounts for the blood pounding in his head and the smothering shortness of breath. And finally, little as he likes to think of it, he's not getting any younger. He forces himself to slow down. He saunters. Smoker shambles. There is no further conversation as they make their way downstairs to the faculty meeting.

The department chairmanship rotates in three-year terms. Currently, the post is held by the "little old lady." Gage, the chairman, is not old; he is, in fact, fortyish, of an age with Owens and Smoker. Nor is he female — he sports a pencil-line mustache and a pointed little beard, like a foppish grandee. He IS slight, however, even petite, and fussy. He possesses an infinite wardrobe of munchkin three-piece suits.

When Michael enters, Gage is sitting behind a table at the front of the staff room. He has doffed the jacket, and his vest hangs loose, unbuttoned, a rare lapse of his habitual nattiness. But it's hot, and everywhere order melts around the edges.

Michael heads directly for Katherine. He has at his command an aloof presence almost theatrically imposing. And there is his stature as an international authority on Baroque tempo conventions. These attributes are drawn about him like cassock and alb.

He stops in front of her and bends, says softly under the general chatter, "The Scarlatti this afternoon? Almost perfect the last time through."

"Oh." She hesitates. Smiling warms and softens her face. "Thank you."

"But the Bach — "

"Yes?"

"Rather overdone." He is polite but firm. "It is not Beethoven, you know. One doesn't ATTACK the *lento* — it must build. The passion is there but hidden. '*Pianissimo*,' remember? '*Dolce*,' right? '*Mysterioso*,'" he throws in on his own. "The sweet, mysterious spiritual tension — you need work on this."

She is staring. Kindly, insincerely, he adds, "You'll get it eventually." He rejects the impulse to pat her head.

The hurt and confusion in her eyes is gratifying. Then she flushes, and her lips and jaw tighten so he knows she is angry. He wants to laugh out loud. Both the Bach and Scarlatti were so exquisite. He could dance for joy.

Smoker has taken a seat nearby. He regards Michael with bleary intensity. Satisfied, Michael smiles, sits next to Smoker. He reserves the empty seat on his other side for Dottie Hall.

When Dottie slips into place he is expansive, generous with congratulations: her protege's senior recital was "masterful, sensitive." Further, "one is gratefully reminded of the versatility of the bassoon, the wide range of literature available for it" Dottie teaches the double reeds — oboe and bassoon. On the whole, interest in double reeds is not staggering.

So her heart-shaped face lights up: young Lillian Gish in shy ecstasy. She draws back warily when Smoker leans across Michael to remark, "Heard him. The kid's OK." Dottie is frightened of Smoker. The praise, however, so excites her that she giggles and winks. Michael cannot imagine Katherine giggling. His exultant mood begins to dissolve.

Gage is tapping his mug of tea with the sugar spoon. "I suggest, ladies and gentlemen, that we commence. I'm sure none of us wishes this to be an unduly protracted affair." He flashes his prim smile. Michael suppresses a grimace.

Gage is calling for the Official Opening Joke. Smoker grunts: he is no longer allowed to contribute jokes. A suitably puerile story is offered by Mason. Michael manufactures a courteous titter at the punchline. It will all be

written into the minutes, including “(Laughter).” Leaning forward, he catches Katherine in the corner of his vision. She has not bothered to laugh; she’s brooding. He could dance.

Gage’s voice penetrates his euphoria. It nettles him. Lately, something about Gage’s precise, urbane manner annoys him increasingly. In all fairness, he has found that same manner restful and congenial for thirteen years. Nonetheless, now it grates. Somehow.

A window is just beyond Katherine. The view is not soothing. The building’s entire first story is ensnared in ivy which, before its annual trim, encroaches even upon the windows. Suckers adhere to the glass; the sun beats through translucent young leaves, silhouetting the palmate veins. Underwater lighting. Stifling.

“... most recent addition to the staff, having completed her first semester at Cole: Ms. Katherine Avery.”

Friendly applause. The most recent staff addition has one careless leg slung over the other and a skirt riding two-thirds of the way up her amber thigh. Pointedly, Michael directs his gaze— a calculated blend of scorn and boredom — at her hem. There is a certain grim pleasure in sensing her ire, feeling her seethe until suddenly she pulls the skirt lower with a defiant jerk. Again he ignores her.

“... establish some guidelines in response to complaints about loud music.” Not Katherine’s practicing, unfortunately. This is the Music Building: someone is always practicing or giving a recital; the Opera Workshop has begun rehearsals; the Concert Band is polishing a program for summer tour; in the music library, the eccentric librarian sets the record player’s volume at HIGH, playing passages for the students, filling in with Cab Calloway— “Minnie the Moocher” wails through the corridors daily. No, something more flagrant is required to generate complaints. Michael looks at Smoker.

Smoker is slumped in his chair, arms folded and legs stretched straight out. He is glaring at Gage. It is Smoker’s

intimidating aspect. The room is very quiet. Dottie is fidgeting, patently uneasy and fearful of one of Smoker's rages.

Gage, however, continues placidly outlining an abstract problem and its generalized solution. No names. There is a new rule: the huge concert speaker/amplifiers will not be moved without prior departmental permission.

The intention, specific though tacit, is that Dr. Smoker will not detail a squad of students to wrestle said equipment into his Music Appreciation class, and, most specifically, he will not then blast through them, full volume, E. Power Biggs on four organs simultaneously, playing Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor so the walls shake, the windows rattle, and people two floors above have difficulty conversing in the same room.

Katherine is making a spectacle of herself. Legs re-crossed, head thrown back, she is laughing in the silence. "I'm sorry," she chokes to Gage, waving her hand in the air. "Something just struck me —." She glances at Smoker, who gives her a narrow-eyed scowl ferocious enough to turn a body to stone. It merely sets her off again. She claps one hand over her mouth.

Beside Michael, Dottie is rigid, waiting for the explosion. He is angered to find her timidity lacking in charm, then wonders what would make Katherine afraid. Which only angers him the more.

On the other side, Smoker squirms in his seat, then mumbles, "Shit," and begins to snicker.

Katherine and Smoker are laughing. Almost everyone laughs. Apprehension is washed out of the room in a flood of good humor. Not laughing are Michael, who coils inside himself, and Gage, who is waiting with a patient, pursed smile for order to be restored.

Someone has a key. There is a key in Michael's back, and he is being wound tighter and tighter. He has hit upon Gage's flaw: that damned ever-lasting composure. He longs to shake the man until his tiny neck snaps, bellow in his prissy face, "For God's sake, be a human being!"

“Bloody pompous little prick,” he hisses beneath his breath.

“WHAT did you say?” Dottie is goggle-eyed, has her chin tucked back into her neck. Abruptly, Michael is ashamed of his disloyalty. There is no rational basis for his agitation. It does not exist. Nor does the formless threat he has fancied prowling within and without. He will not allow it to exist.

Dottie is ideal. Delicate, feminine. Soft and rounded, with no hard edges. That much he did discover before they mutually consigned their relationship to a platonic plateau. Like himself, Dottie prefers to deal on an intellectual level. Coarseness alarms her.

The choral director has the floor and is whining on about the problems involved in this summer’s Opera Workshop production, *Gianni Schicci*. At least Verdi, the lucky dog, hadn’t had to deal with amateurs. The student lead, for example, is unsatisfactory: too stiffly self-contained, insufficiently roguish to sing the con-man title role.

“Do you sing, Dr. Smoker?,” chirps Katherine. There is some laughter. Michael is in control; he does not react. Smoker grunts, but it is a mock glare he sends her. For all his often surly approach, Smoker loves women. He has married several.

The orchestra director, also involved in the opera, backs up the choral director, attempting a duet. Suavely, Gage derails them both, appointing them the *Gianni Schicci* Committee, meeting times to be arranged. It’s almost finished. Thank God.

And Gage . . . Gage is not a bad sort, not bad at all. Perhaps the responsibilities of being chairman emphasize his least attractive qualities. Or maybe the poor little jerk is having a mid-life crisis. Definitely Michael has been too much on edge. At any rate, he now wishes nothing so much as to be done with it. Escape.

Dottie clutches at his sleeve. Behind her hand, she whispers, “The parking spaces.”

“What?,” asks Michael.

"The parking spaces: they're too small. You promised you'd say something."

Michael sighs. He faces her and tilts an eyebrow. "Dot, I want to go home. The parking-space question will keep. It's hardly worth making a big to-do over, is it?"

Gage is declaring the meeting adjourned.

"Christ," says Smoker.

Dottie is piqued. "No," she says, "a big to-do is unnecessary. It's really very easy: just get them to paint the lines farther apart. Nothing could be simpler— provided someone raises the issue."

Smoker has wandered over to talk with Katherine.

"Perhaps," Michael says to Dottie, "you'll get a chance to bring it up at the next meeting." Soft and round and bewildered, she stands pouting at him.

A heavy hand claps him on the shoulder. "Papa Juan's, man. Let's hit it."

Michael laughs and shakes his head. "Duty calls, Smoker. While you're lighting up the night in a blaze of glory, I shall be home slaving away, correcting papers and catching up on my reading. Frankly, I can hardly wait."

"Who's going?," Dottie inquires of the jazz man.

"Just us cool people, baby." Smoker grins at her expression. He is in a manic phase. Up from the ashes and ready to fly. "Katherine's gonna stop by in a while." He turns to Michael. "It's about SOMA, Owens. We're having, like, an informal planning session. You gotta be there, man."

Michael is off-balance. If he doesn't show up, she will think she affected his decision. Yet he wants to go home. Tangential considerations radiate out in all directions; the complexity of his needs is unfathomable. Somehow. Someone has the key.

Idly, he looks to the strangled window. If they don't clip it soon, he will personally begin ripping the ivy away with his bare hands.

"All right, Smoker," he says. "Papa Juan's." One thing is clear: it is imperative he be there to display the extent of his indifference. No mystery there.

When the Wolfsbane Blooms

Even a man who is pure at heart,
And says his prayers by night,
May become a wolf when the wolfsbane blooms,
And the Autumn moon is bright.

-- *The Wolf Man, 1941*

Standard modern definitions of attractiveness do not speak favorably of extensive amounts of hair growing all over the body, or oozing open sores covering most of the skin. The disadvantages are self-evident. Yet, imagine being subject to a death sentence merely for acquiring these afflictions. The inhabitants of Europe in the Middle Ages not only could be put to death for such offenses, but often were. They were put to death for being werewolves.

Legends and myths concerning werewolves and other were-animals are some of the most culturally universal beliefs that mankind has ever known; but why is the idea of the transformation of man into animal such a compelling and horrifying topic, even today? The answer may stem from our past. Some of our richest historical accounts are associated with this sort of transformation or with similar accounts of human-like animals.

The myths begin with Romulus and Remus, brothers who were abandoned at birth, but grew up to be the founders of Rome. It is what happened between these two events that often escapes the pragmatic historian. Romulus and Remus were said to have been weaned by a *she-wolf*. Acting as mother and protector to two human children could certainly be considered human-like for such a wild animal as a wolf. The comparison between this she-wolf and other animals with human qualities ends with her benevolence. Were-animals are not usually this friendly. For example, there was a certain group of warriors among the Norse Vikings that

were known as *Berserkers*. They ordinarily appeared as normal Nordics; however, upon going into battle they would whip themselves into a savage frenzy, or go berserk, and transform into bears.

The explanation for this probably stops short before the realm of magic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the etymology of the word *berserk* as "bear-sark" or "bear skin." This may explain why the Berserkers were perceived as bears. Their opponents didn't want to be known as cowards, so they told all who asked that the Berserkers transformed into murderous, unbeatable bears, when all they actually did was wear bearskins in battle.

Dracula is another early example of a man-into-animal legend. Dracula and other vampires were said to have the ability to metamorphosize into bats, leopards, rats, and of course, wolves. Dracula is often referred to as having hair on the palms on his hands. These days, we would say that this was the result of autoerotic behavior; in the Middle Ages, misplaced or inordinate amounts of hair were telltale signs of a werewolf in human form. Dracula was a real and horrifying image to the inhabitants of old Europe. He was the first recorded *lycanthrope* or werewolf.

Like the Berserkers, the Dracula legend also has a basis in reality. Dracula's probable role model was a Transylvanian prince known as Vlad Tepes, but also as Vlad the Impaler. Some of his atrocities include: Inviting 5,000 peasants to a feast at his castle and, after trapping them inside, burning it to the ground to prevent an uprising; nailing hats to the heads of foreign dignitaries who refused to remove them in his presence; and eating meals of human flesh while watching the strugglings of people he had impaled on nine-foot-long wooden stakes in the ground. Vlad could impale these people in such a way that it took them two days to die, earning him his name, and a place in the nightmares of generations to come.

It would not take much for some of Vlad's subjects to exaggerate these acts into bloodsucking, contracts with Satan, and metamorphosing into a wolf. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* couldn't be far behind these exaggerations.

One of the most overlooked werewolf stories is that of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Think about it; a wolf *plots* to kill Red's grandma, *thinks* in order to outwit Red and has an intelligible conversation with our heroine— a seven year old girl (something most humans only wish they could do). These are all very human-like activities, as the name werewolf or man-wolf implies.

A great many cultures have a transformation or man-like-animal legend akin to *Red Riding Hood*. Men transform into tigers in Burma, leopards in Africa and eagles among the American Indians. The Egyptians had their Sphinx, who was part man, part lion, as well as the sun god *Ra*, who had the body of a man and the head of a falcon. These were-animals usually represented some fearful or punitive element, but as the legend of the Japanese were-swan proves, this is not always the case.

It turns out that in most of these instances, the transformation from man into animal was the result of some societal taboo. In Serbo-Croatian legend, for instance, werewolves were often thus plagued because of sexual relations with their mothers. Other activities that caused a person to become a werewolf in the Europe of the Middle Ages included being born with teeth, born out of wedlock to parents who were born out of wedlock, and being weaned before time.

The most terrifying taboo, and most common reason given to explain a werewolf, was arguing that a fellow villager signed a contract with Satan. This was the most direct way for a werewolf to make evil work in his favor. Within this variable, the werewolf has control over his own metamorphosis.

Outside these taboos, the avenues to becoming a werewolf become more varied and less logical. There were certain "sure fire" methods to determine who was a werewolf

based on distinguishing characteristics. If those under suspicion had long fingernails, lots of hair, or eyebrows that were linked at the bridge of the nose, there was no doubt that they were werewolves. If they shied away from light, had a wolf-like gait, had wounds that matched a murderous wolf's, had *any* excessive wounds (presumably from running around the dark forest at night and bumping into things), or behaved like a wolf in any manner, that was a dead giveaway. Paranoid villagers put scores of people to death simply because they had these characteristics.

If an actual wolf went on the rampage killing a farmer's cattle, a shepherd's flock, or even humans, the villagers simply found the one of themselves who most resembled a wolf. When this person was killed, but the wolf's rampage continued, it was obvious that they had killed the wrong werewolf. The only thing to do at this point would be to find another wolf-man and put him to death.

Unfortunately for the victims, these killings were probably not solely based in superstition. There were probably more villagers who fit the werewolf bill than previously thought possible. A Dr. Lee Illis has written a thesis entitled *Porphyria and the Aetiology of Werewolves*. In it, Dr. Illis discusses a now rare disease known as porphyria. The affliction manifests itself in several suspicious symptoms. The victims of porphyria, a congenital recessive-gene disease, suffer from numerous open sores over their entire bodies, and light is intensely painful to their eyes. Dr. Illis contends that any superstitious villager plagued by wolf attacks during the Middle Ages would more than likely mistake these symptoms as direct proof of being a werewolf. Considering that wolves get open sores from running around the forest on all fours, and that they shy away from light, what other conclusion could be drawn? And as if these poor porphyria sufferers didn't have enough problems, the disease often caused their teeth to become a deep red color, obviously from biting their prey. Those who had contracted porphyria didn't stand much of a chance against bloodthirsty wolf hunters. Dr. Illis concludes

that because of the frequent outbreaks of porphyria during the Middle Ages, these villagers probably had more werewolves to contend with than they could possibly kill.

So what could be worse than a disease that made a person look like the human version of a wolf? How about a disease that made a person look like an actual wolf. There is an even rarer medical condition known as *hypertrichosis* that causes hair to grow in excess all over the body. Those who display hypertrichotic tendencies have hair on their foreheads, cheeks, and almost anywhere else imaginable. They have more recently been displayed in circus side shows. Even though this condition is extremely rare, it would (and did) only take one or two instances of it to perpetuate any fear in the likelihood of werewolves.

Other phenomena that may have bred werewolf paranoia include rabid wolves and dogs, feral children (those raised by wolves), and *lycanthropy*. Lycanthropy is a mental disorder that causes its sufferer to behave like and imagine he is a wolf. Any of these instances alone, or in unison, could be used as rationale for putting an innocent person to death.

The bizarre combination of these diseases and defects may be slightly detached from our superstition-free existence. Even so, we still pump millions of dollars into seeing werewolf and vampire movies. We still observe Halloween, a holiday originally created to scare away evil spirits like those who contributed to the existence of werewolves. We are not as detached from our predecessors as we might like to think. Just remember to pluck those hairs between your eyebrows and bandage any open sores before going out on a night with a full moon; you might be considered a scapegoat in wolf's clothing.

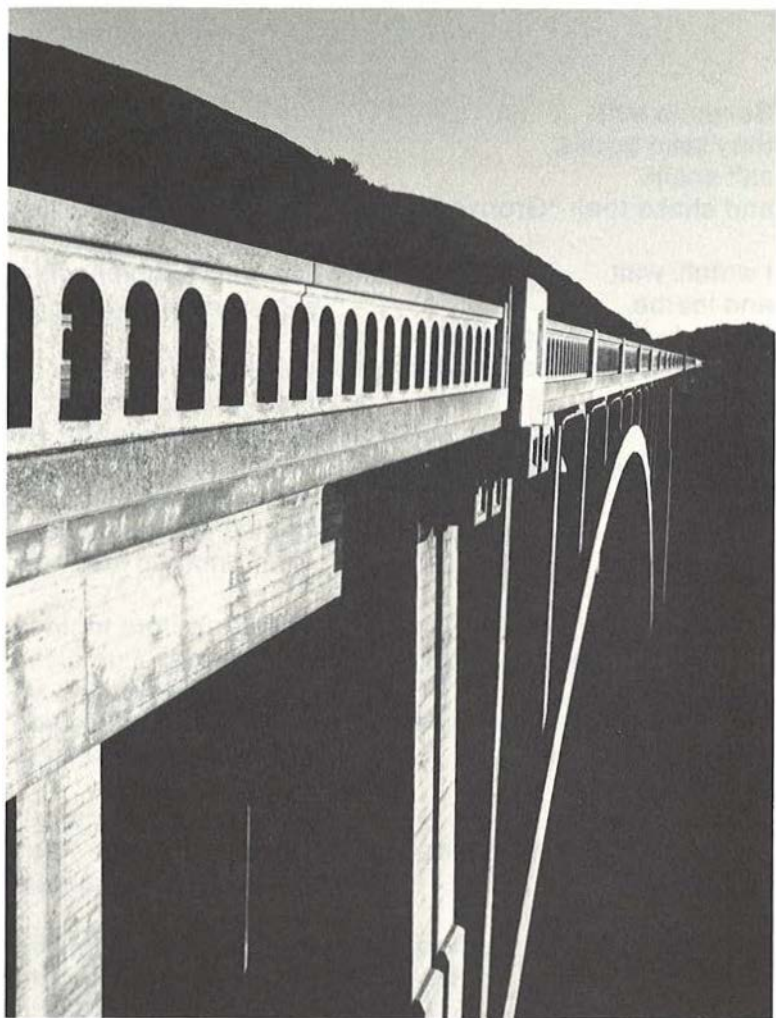
Kafka's Bar Mitzvah

"... one can never be alone enough when one writes... even night is not night enough" (Kafka, *Letters to Felice* 156).

As if a spirit had descended and said
This is the kid of a friend of mine:

They brought out fine bone china.
All the wives of Prague's Old Town helped
with the cooking, their husbands offered toasts
to an eternal adolescent's manhood./ Applause
crowded K.'s ears. He twisted in his chair
with indigestion./ What should have been done silently
in Prague, this city of pogroms, broke
into gaiety and joy./ When called to speak, K. burst
into his dream, where the chandeliers were swirling,
chains being lifted and dropped through the roof
danced the infinite figure-eight. He dove for them
through the dark just over candle flames.

Legs tucked, afraid to plunge into the party,
K. hung on— a bat clutching to the shadows
of the ceiling, sinister with eyesockets
foretelling his sister's deaths./ He hid his face
in the fabric of his wings, hoping to vanish
completely in a night blacker than night.



Between acts
they read books,
salt snails,
and shake their "Groove Things."

I watch, wait
and loathe.
I swim in the background of
countless Japanese movies.

marlene pearson

***The Preacher Meant What He Said/
I Saw The Spit Fly Out His Mouth***

1.

The year I got saved
I was in the 3rd grade
we lived in LA
a small house with ice plant
dripping over the fence

on saturday my mother with shears
trimmed the juicy plant
my father watching the lizard scamper out
stabbed it with a shovel/its head and front legs
ran away from its body
I asked why/he said they're no good
they don't belong here

at night mother listened
I said my prayer: "now I lay me down to sleep"
mother added
lines and I said them: 'God bless mommy and daddy
and make Marlene a good girl'

on sunday at Bethel Temple
I saw spit fly out the preacher's mouth
his waving hands/red eyes

he explained how Jesus died for me
he told how many nails they used
how long/how wide/how blunt
how Jesus longed to cry
but he was dying for me
because of my sins
what did I do wrong?

someone stabbed his belly with a 6 inch spear
Jesus nearly bit off his tongue
from the pain
his father made him do it
and he wanted to

so I wouldn't have to die
when the preacher called come down/confess
accept salvation/I ran to the altar

a fat woman followed/she smelled
of deodorant and gardenia/she wrapped
her arm around me/waved another in the air
and halleluahed for 15 minutes/! couldn't
stop crying all the way home in the car until
mother tucked me in bed and kissed
me good night/when I closed my eyes
to sleep I knew I was good enough.

WOODS FROM THE TREES

A bluejay
spots me but
is not alarmed.

As I watch,
it fills a knothole
with acorns, then flies off.

I get a notion
to take one back to town
and I am angry with myself
for the thought.

Looking at the sky
heavy with clouds I think
if I stand here long enough
everything will be white.

A WINTER SCARECROW

This evening
I have given my shadow
to the fainter birds.

Now that the wind
has my heart
a branch beats there.

These children
have brought mittens
for which I have no hands.

DOLOR'S NATURE

As I open a window
the sun rises.

A great web as if stretched
between the worlds illuminates;
tears blue-white as stars explode
outward from the center of a tree.

How beautiful
after the rain —
the spider's grief.



Clarence Campbell was balding, slightly portly, and, in all of his forty-two years, twenty of which he had spent as a CPA for a semi-prestigious, middle-sized firm located in a semi-obscure section of Beverly Hills, he had never broken the golden rule. Aside from not ever breaking the golden rule, Clarence Campbell had never broken any rule. As a child he always did as his elders wished and everyone loved him. Thirty vacuous years later only his wife, two lovely children, and dog loved him. The cat was indifferent. To everyone else, Clarence Campbell was someone who arrived at nine every day, did some work, ate his lunch from a brown paper sack, did some more work, and went home at five. He never bent the rules, angered the boss, or spent long minutes chatting and flirting by the drinking fountain. Clarence Campbell was happy in his conformity and no one minded. In fact, no one cared. But one day, a Thursday to be precise, this would all change.

On this Thursday Clarence had a hard day at the office. He had to cut his lunch hour back twenty minutes to complete the day's prodigious workload. But that was to no avail. For the first time in his life Clarence left the office after five — five fifty-three to be precise. And Clarence didn't like that. He wanted to get home swiftly so that his dinner, which his wife always had ready at the stroke of six, wouldn't get cold. To do this, Clarence pushed down on the gas pedal of his generic, blue Buick a little harder than usual, and drove, for the first time in his life, four miles over the speed limit. But as always, when one is in a hurry on the highway, something is bound to get in the way.

In the way this time, an old lady was driving forty-two miles an hour in the far-left lane, affectionately known by Los Angeles speed freaks and the rest of the world as the fast lane. Clarence followed the old lady for several miles, hoping she

would change lanes and let him speed by. She wouldn't. Finally, Clarence couldn't take it anymore: people behind him were honking, it was already way past dinnertime, and he knew he already had a good chance of missing *Wheel of Fortune* if this went on any longer. Emotion took over where reason had always ruled. Clarence swung his Buick into the lane to his right, pulled next to the old lady and her battered, puke-green Toyota, then swung sharply left. He clipped her hard enough to force her out of control, out of the lane, and to a fiery death. The fast lane was clear and Clarence sped towards home, his adrenaline pumping.

But soon, very soon, the adrenaline stopped and Clarence realized what he had done. The horror! The horror! He killed a woman for no other reason than driving slow! Had anyone seen him? Surely someone was now calling the police. Or perhaps there had been an officer in his blind spot who would now drag him in for murder. What would Marge say? He would miss the dinner she had lovingly prepared for him. What would his children say? What would they do with a felon for a father? Surely now, their futures were ruined. No decent college would admit the child of a crook. Clarence didn't know what to do so he turned up the radio and continued north on the Ventura Freeway as if it never happened.

When a horn sounded to his right, Clarence almost lost control. The police! They witnessed the whole act! Clarence looked, expecting the worst, but only saw two young men in a fiery-red, convertible sports car. Earlier Clarence had seen them in his rear-view mirror. Now they were next to him, smiling and gesturing thumbs up. The passenger raised his arms and clapped his hands. Clarence smiled, gave the two young men a polite wave, then faced forward. The sports car accelerated and vanished into traffic.

"Those two young men approved of what I did," Clarence thought, "I wonder if anybody else noticed?" He looked around but all the other drivers were absorbed in their solipsistic motoring.

Clarence remembered the traffic report on the news station so he flipped the dial on his radio and listened, dreading mention of the 101 Freeway. None came. The announcer talked about an overturned truck in Santa Monica and lots of other accidents in places like Fullerton or Monrovia. He never mentioned the San Fernando Valley. "Maybe it's too soon for the news," Clarence thought as his exit swiftly approached.

At home, Clarence sat for a minute in the garage to regain his composure. He didn't want Marge to think anything was wrong. He wanted her to be happy. Once composed, Clarence left the car, crossed the lawn, entered his house, patted the dog on the head, and greeted his wife with a kiss and a hello.

"You're late," she said.

"Uh, yes . . . I had some extra work at the office. I was going to call but I didn't think it would take so long."

"You must be hungry then. Your dinner's in the microwave. The kids and I already ate."

Instead of eating in the dining room, Clarence positioned himself in his chair and watched the news. He watched until eight then read his evening paper. Nowhere was there mention of the old lady's fiery freeway death. It was as if no one noticed, or no one cared.

That evening Clarence had a hard time getting to sleep. For the first time in his life he broke a rule. Not only had he broken a rule but he committed a felony. His conscience bothered him. He contemplated turning himself in but he couldn't do it. He and his entire family would be disgraced. And besides, Clarence couldn't stand to miss work for a trial and jail sentence. He felt that the firm needed him. Maybe the morning paper would make mention of the accident. Maybe the police would think the accident was just that, an accident. Then he wouldn't be hunted like a common criminal. To be arrested in front of the neighbors would be terrible. Maybe it was all a bad dream and it would be over in the morning.

But Clarence knew it wasn't a bad dream. The car had dinks and scratches from the Toyota and Clarence knew it. He saw them in the garage. Clarence knew it wasn't a bad dream and in the morning scoured the paper in search of any mention of the accident. He didn't find anything, not even a word.

Friday, at work, Clarence couldn't get his deed off his mind. He had committed a felony and no one noticed. No, someone noticed. The two young men in the sportscar noticed but they didn't care. They found merit in what he did. Friday, at four fifty-nine, Clarence slipped a stapler into his briefcase and took it home with him one minute later.

Monday morning Clarence sent the office boy to the supply room for a new stapler. He didn't question Clarence, he only did his job. No one in supply came by to ask what happened to the old stapler. Nor did his boss come by and tell Clarence to find a new job because he wouldn't tolerate his employees stealing from the office. It was the most dreadful eight hours Clarence spent in one place.

After work, away from the rush hour traffic and on the side streets by his house, Clarence drove thirty-seven miles an hour instead of his usual thirty-five. And once, only once, he didn't make a complete stop at a stop sign. No one noticed, no one cared. Clarence started thinking.

Tuesday, during his lunch hour, Clarence went to Rodeo Drive and picked out a fancy-looking store. He went in and looked around. Racks and racks of fancy merchandise filled the store. Fancy ladies in fancy clothes looked through racks and racks of fancy merchandise and fancy clerks took fancy credit cards from the fancy ladies. Clarence looked at a fancy price tag and felt dizzy. Did anything here sell for less than three figures? Clarence thought not as he made his way to the men's department. There he looked at fancy ties, fancy suits, fancy cologne, and fancy accessories.

He was startled by a clean-cut, fancy young man who approached him from behind. "May I help you, sir?"

"No, I'm just . . . uh, yes, you can." In a glass case lay a gold and platinum pen and pencil set. Clarence pointed at it. "I'm looking for a birthday present for my son. I was thinking about that." It was the third lie Clarence ever told in his life. He enjoyed it.

The young man glided behind the counter, opened it, and pulled out the pen set. "A good choice, sir. This is one of our finest." He placed it on the counter for Clarence to inspect. On the PA someone was paged and the clerk looked up. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "that's for me. I'll be right back."

Clarence was alone at the counter. His palms were cold and sweaty. He looked around. The fancy ladies were still flashing fancy plastic at the fancy clerks and no one watched ordinary Clarence. He looked back at the fancy pen and pencil, looked around again, then, in a moment of great fortitude, slipped them into his pocket, and calmly left the store. No one stopped him.

Outside, Clarence felt as he did after he hit the old lady. But no one died this time. He went back to work and contemplated his deeds. How long could this go on? How long would it be before the police caught him and took him to jail? Eventually he would be caught. What would happen then? Clarence didn't want to think about it. Back in the office he hid his booty in the bottom of his bottom drawer and finished his work in his usual, nondescript manner.

He also tried to live his life in his usual, nondescript manner. But on Wednesday he went to a drugstore and managed to slip three ball-point pens, two ace bandages, and a package of prophylactics into his pocket before he left. No one noticed, no one cared. Even Clarence didn't feel the guilt he felt earlier. In fact, Clarence was beginning to enjoy his little life of crime.

Clarence was beginning to enjoy his life of crime so much that he never noticed the beginning of the changes. Thursday morning he tightened his belt one notch tighter than it had been tightened in the last seven and a half years. He attributed it to clean living and the health food kick Marge had been pushing on the family the past month.

Thursday before work Clarence committed what he considered to be his most daring crime to date. He went to a gas station, not his usual Mobil in the Valley, but a Chevron near Olympic in West L.A. He took care to pick a station devoid of customers. When he found this particular Chevron he edged his blue Buick next to the pump and filled his tank. The station's attendant was busy in the office reading a magazine. "Probably a Playboy," Clarence thought as he pumped gas. When he finished, Clarence got into his car and burned rubber onto Olympic Boulevard without any intention of ever paying for his twelve gallons of unleaded. "I bet he doesn't even read the articles," Clarence thought as he headed to work.

At work, Clarence took an hour and five minutes for lunch and even spent several minutes between accounts chatting at the drinking fountain. Several people were amazed, but it wasn't earthshaking. Not yet.

Friday, Marge asked Clarence what he had done to his hair. "What have you done to your hair, Clarence?" was exactly how she put it.

Clarence looked up from his granola and toast and said, "What was that you said, dear?"

"I said, 'What have you done to your hair?' Have you been using a new shampoo?"

"Why do you say that, dear?"

"Because it looks darker and fuller. It makes you look younger."

"I didn't notice."

"Well, I like it. Maybe I should use whatever you're using."

Clarence buried himself in the front page of the newspaper. "It's not a shampoo, dear. I think it's all that healthy food you've been serving lately."

Marge clapped her hands together in glee. "Oh, I knew it would do us some good. I'm so happy. Mrs. Smith at my bridge club says . . ."

Clarence stopped listening and read with interest an account of two youths who robbed a liquor store. "I wonder

if I could do that?" he thought. He thought he could. He looked up from his paper. "I might be home late tonight, dear, the boss wants me to do a special presentation on Monday and I want to do a good job."

Marge left the table to go to the kitchen. "That's OK. I'll keep your dinner warm. Just don't get home too late."

"I won't, I won't," Clarence thought.

And he didn't. After work he drove east on Wilshire, into Hollywood. In Hollywood he found a small, dingy liquor store and went inside.

"What'll it be?" the small, dingy clerk asked.

Clarence put his hand in his jacket pocket. "I'd like a fifth of Cutty Sark." He pointed his finger inside the pocket. "And all of your money."

The clerk, who had his back turned to get the scotch, was caught by surprise. He couldn't reach under the counter to get the forty-five he kept there for occasions like this. Most people who robbed liquor stores were poor teenagers or junkies in need of a fix. "Anything you want, sir."

Clarence remembered something he had seen on television. "And keep your hands above the counter. I know you have a gun down there. You can't fool me. Put the money in a bag."

"Anything you want, sir." The clerk started scooping nickels and dimes into a paper bag.

Clarence motioned threateningly with his pocketed hand. "Start with the twenties, I don't want spare change."

The clerk jumped, then shoved paper money into the sack. "Put the booze in there, too." Again he motioned with his hand. The clerk did as instructed. When everything was in the sack Clarence grabbed it with his free hand and swiftly backed out of the store. Once on the sidewalk he darted around the corner to his car and raced home.

In his garage, Clarence hid the sack in the trunk and went back to being a suburban husband and father for a while.

On Saturday morning, when the kids were off with friends and Marge was off playing Bridge, Clarence got the sack from his car and counted his loot: three hundred and twelve dollars and fifty-five cents. Plus a bottle of Cutty Sark. He drank and contemplated what to do. Finally, he decided to go to the mall.

At the mall Clarence shopped for a new suit. Lately, many of his clothes didn't fit well and it was quite a long time since he had bought a new suit. Such a long time that most of his clothing was far out of style. He looked and found, on sale, a pinstripe suit by one of the more popular designers. When he tried on the pants Clarence found his waistline had shrunk several inches. He found a new pair that fit, then looked at himself in the mirror. He could not believe that the man who stared out at him was himself. Not only was this man more thin and fit than Clarence had been in the last twelve years but he had a full head of dark hair. Not the salt and pepper gray with a few stranded wisps on top Clarence was accustomed to. Clarence pinched himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He wasn't.

And Clarence wasn't dreaming when he bought, for the first time in his life, a designer pinstripe suit. He wore it out of the store, feeling stylish for the first time in almost twenty years.

Back home, Clarence fixed himself a sandwich, drank, and thought about what to do next. He wanted to do some real crimes. The kind that got onto the ten o'clock news. He thought about robbing a bank. But no, that was too heavy, too big for now. Maybe a savings and loan. No, that too would have to wait for later. Clarence decided to practice on some more liquor stores and small establishments before moving on to banks and savings and loans. Yes, he would wait until dusk then go down to Hollywood and do some crimes. He would tell Marge he was going out to see a movie. Her PBS special was on television so she wouldn't mind him leaving for a few hours.

When Marge got home she commented favorably on Clarence's new suit. She told him it looked stylish and this annoyed Clarence because he already knew it looked stylish. He told her he was going to see a movie after dinner and she told him it would be fine because her PBS special was on and she didn't like to be disturbed while it was on. This also annoyed Clarence because he already knew her special was on PBS and she didn't like to be annoyed while it was on.

What didn't annoy Clarence was the pleasure he got later when he went to Hollywood and robbed four liquor stores, a gas station, a restaurant, and three people who just happened to be walking by at the wrong time. When Clarence got home that night he had more than a thousand dollars stashed in the trunk of his car.

Over the rest of the weekend Clarence found suburbia closing in on him. He found it too tame for a man of action and intrigue. First thing Monday morning he would do something about it.

First thing Clarence did was not go to work. He called in sick. Instead he went to Hollywood and looked for an apartment. After several hours of searching he found a small, one-bedroom place off of Fountain and Vine.

Clarence decided he would also need a moll. All the gangsters in the movies had molls, so why not Clarence? He was ready to go to the big time. But a problem arose. Clarence didn't know how to go about getting a moll. In the movies the pretty girls always seemed attracted to the hero. Nobody had been attracted to Clarence since he began his life of crime. He needed to think, so he went out for lunch and a walk. On Sunset, inspiration struck. Actually, Clarence looked up and saw a billboard advertising classified ads in the Los Angeles Times. He decided to advertise.

First he would need a phone in his new apartment, his hideout. He couldn't have beautiful young women calling him at home. What would Marge think? Work was also out of the question because people would get suspicious if his

phone kept ringing. The only person who called him there was his wife. Clarence went first to the phone company then the newspaper building. By the time he was finished, the rent, phone deposit, ad, and basic necessities for his apartment, took most of the loot from Saturday night. Clarence knew he needed more money. It was time for the big stuff.

He thought about robbing a bank — he would need a note and he would have to keep the teller from pushing the silent alarm. He wanted to make it fast and efficient.

Clarence spent Monday night in his apartment and Tuesday morning called in sick from a nearby payphone. His own phone would be turned on before noon and calls should be coming in from his ad. He would have to be back before twelve. That only gave Clarence about two hours.

The first hour he spent looking for an appropriate spot. It would have to be a bank far from the busy main streets. At eleven-ten he found his bank.

Clarence went inside, waited in line, then presented the teller with a note he had carefully written the night before. It read, "This is a stick-up. I have a gun. Do not touch the silent alarm or I will be forced to shoot. Please put all your money in a sack and hand it over quietly. Thank you." The teller read the note, looked at Clarence, then did exactly as instructed. Clarence's mother always told him as a child that if you can't be anything, at least be polite. It would always get you somewhere. Little did she know how her advice would be used.

Clarence left the bank in a fast walk, ran to his car, and drove back to his apartment. He had pulled his first successful bank job. It was a thrill unlike any he ever felt before.

Clarence counted out his money and waited for the phone to ring. His take was mostly in ten, five, and one dollar bills with a few twenties sprinkled in. This dismayed Clarence. It wasn't as large as he hoped. Next time he would specifically request larger bills. In the meanwhile he still had several thousand dollars.

At one-forty the phone rang and shattered the silence of the room. Clarence jumped. On the fourth ring he answered it.

"Hi, I'm calling about the moll job," a female voice said.

"Yes, this is the right place."

"Is this serious? Not just a publicity stunt for some studio or something?"

"No, no, this is a real job."

"It's not a prostitute job? I don't do that stuff."

"No, no, I'm a married man."

"That doesn't stop a lot of guys . . ."

"Don't worry, it's not that kind of job."

"So are you conducting interviews or what?"

Clarence gave the caller his address and arranged to meet in about two hours. At three-thirty Mary Ann Magruder arrived. Mary Ann was a pretty blond who had come to Hollywood from someplace in the mid-west. To be in the movies was her childhood dream and when people asked her what she did for a living she told them she was an unemployed actress. What she didn't tell them was that she waited tables to pay the bills. She was sick of shuffling food. Clarence's ad looked like an interesting lead. He offered her twice what she was currently making and she took the job.

"So what do I have to do?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing much. Just be a moll."

"Just be a moll?"

"Yeah, I'm going to be a big gangster and I need a moll. A life of crime can be a lonely one."

Mary Ann almost wrote Clarence off as one for the loony bin right then and there. "I don't know about this," she said.

Clarence told her his story, from when he had run the old lady off the road to his bank robbery.

"How much did you make?" she asked.

"Almost four thousand dollars."

"Four thousand, huh?"

"Yeah, I hope to make even more."

"When do I start?"

"Uh, how about tomorrow? Maybe about noon."

The future moll grabbed her purse and coat. "Oh, good, I always like jobs that let me sleep in."

"See you tomorrow, Mary Ann."

Now alone, Clarence felt pleased. He had a hideout, a moll, and enough money to keep him for a while. He knew he couldn't rob too many banks too often. Clarence felt on top of the world.

Wednesday, at noon, Mary Ann started work and for the next two weeks she and Clarence lived a life of excitement and adventure. But soon the excitement wore off. Robbing banks wasn't as thrilling as it once was. Neither was robbing savings and loans. Liquor stores ran dry. Drug stores became a let down. Restaurants became a stale idea and the gilt was peeling from fancy department stores.

One day Mary Ann showed up looking excited. "Clarence," she said, "I've been thinking."

"That's good." He was counting the money he stole from a McDonald's earlier.

"Clarence, have you ever done coke?"

"Sure, I've had Coke many times. I like it much better than Pepsi."

Mary Ann giggled. "Not Coca-Cola. Cocaine."

Clarence stopped counting. "No, I've never done anything like that."

"Look, Clarence, in this town cocaine is it. If you want to make a lot of money you sell drugs. Everyone in LA does coke and they gotta get it from somewhere."

Here was a crime Clarence had never thought of. "Tell me more," he said.

"Look, we got a few thousand dollars, right? Well, I know this guy that could set us up with some primo stuff. I also know people that would buy it from us. It's a lot easier and a lot safer than robbing banks. We could operate out of your apartment right here."

Clarence pondered. "OK, Mary Ann, let's do it."

They did it. On their first deal they bought a kilo of cocaine. Clarence was excited and intrigued by the white powder. He found it hard to believe that people could be so gung ho about it. But he did believe because the first kilo went fast, in almost three days.

With their second large shipment Clarence found himself rubbing elbows with Hollywood stars, producers, and famous members of the rock and roll industry.

A week later Clarence was having the time of his life and Mary Ann was making more money than she ever imagined. One night Clarence found himself with Mary Ann on the couch. They had just completed a big sale. The drugs and money brought out something base and primeval in them. The two kissed and smooched for a while then Mary Ann rolled on top of Clarence and grabbed the lapels of his shirt. She pulled and buttons flew like bullets. Mary Ann worked her way down, removed Clarence's pants, and squealed in delight. Clarence's hair wasn't the only thing that had grown.

Until his wedding night, Clarence remained a virgin. On that momentous occasion he made tender, bumbling love to his blushing bride. He had slept with no other woman until now. On this momentous occasion he made wild, passionate love to his ecstatic moll. Clarence completely forgot the job and family he long ago abandoned. He didn't need the mundane world anymore.

Soon Clarence was supplying half of Hollywood with their blow. Life for Clarence was better than it had ever been. But little did he know it wouldn't last long.

One day, a Thursday to be precise, while Clarence was busy counting Wednesday's profits and Mary Ann was busy measuring out the latest ten kilo shipment into ounces and grams a knock came on the door. Clarence answered it and two men burst into the apartment. Both were wearing sunglasses, pinstripe suits, and both were heavily armed.

The shorter of the two pointed a sawed-off shotgun at Mary Ann. The other pointed the largest handgun Clarence had ever seen at him and said, "Are you Clarence Campbell?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Good," the man said, smiling, "there's someone who wants to see you."

"Here?" Ciarence asked.

The shorter man laughed. "Nah, you're coming with us."

"What about me?" Mary Ann asked.

"You too. C'mon, let's get going."

Where they went was a palatial home set far back from Sunset Boulevard in Bel Air. There was a guard at the gate and behind the gate a brick driveway at least a quarter-mile long.

"Who are we going to see?" asked Mary Ann.

"You'll see."

They saw. The two were hustled into the house, up a flight of stairs, and into an enormous study guarded by two men who had suspicious bulges under their jackets. Behind an enormous mahogany desk sat a powerful-looking man, respectfully graying, who wore an expensive black suit. He bore an uncanny resemblance to Marlon Brando. Clarence and Mary Ann were shoved in front of the desk. The man looked at them, puffed on his cigar, then looked at them some more. Finally, he spoke. "These them?"

"Yeah, boss," one of the gunmen said.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked slowly and precisely.

Clarence was sweating. He wanted to loosen his tie. "I think so."

"Good." His cigar went out and someone was immediately by his side to relight it. "Do you know what my business is?"

Clarence's clothes felt tight. "Cocaine?"

The man leaned forward. "Among other things." He leaned back. "I make a lot of money off coke in this city and you two have been cutting into my profits."

Clarence felt like he was suffocating. "I'm sorry."

"I don't like it when people cut into my profits."

A button popped off Clarence's shirt, then another. "I didn't mean to cut into your profits, sir."

"A lot of people get away with a lot of things in this city but when someone treads on my toes I find out."

Clarence's hair was falling out. "I promise I won't do it again." He desperately wanted to go home to Marge and the kids.

The man smiled. "You shouldn't count your chickens before they hatch."

One of the gunmen giggled.

Another button popped. More hair fell out. "I promise I won't ever do it again."

"I know." The man looked at his henchmen. "Take them away."

Clarence and Mary Ann were hustled out of the room but before they passed through the doorway the man in black said, "One more thing."

Clarence turned his head. "Remember this," the man said: "Crime doesn't pay unless you're me."

"Thank you, sir," Clarence said before he was hustled down the richly furnished hallway and back into the car.

"Where are you taking us?" Mary Ann asked once they were on the road. Night was falling over LA.

"You'll see," one of the gunmen said.

But as fate would have it, they didn't see. On the Santa Monica freeway something attracted the attention of a passing police car and seconds later they flashed their red and blue lights at the gangsters. The driver pulled over.

"What are you doing?" his partner asked.

"Don't worry," the first gangster said, "he's probably just gonna give me a speeding ticket."

The officers strutted over, shined their flashlights over the car's occupants, then asked the driver to get out.

"Don't say a word," the remaining gangster told Clarence and his moll. Clarence didn't. Neither did Mary Ann.

Clarence didn't intend to say anything. Every second ticked by like an hour as he watched the police conduct their business. They could save him from certain death but they didn't seem to notice. They didn't seem to care.

Suddenly, the police handcuffed the gangster and came back to the car for his partner. More police cars arrived and everyone was taken to the station.

Clarence was thrown into a cell where he secretly prepared himself to confess every crime he ever committed, from the day on the freeway to his latest dope deal. After several dismal hours, a guard opened the door and let Clarence out.

"Mr. Campbell?" he asked.

"Yes."

The guard led Clarence down the hall. "Your wife's coming to get you. It's a good thing she filed that missing person's report or we would never have captured those kidnappers. They might only have gotten a speeding ticket."

Worries of incarceration exited Clarence's mind. "Yes," he said, "it is a good thing. It's terrible to think that a law-abiding citizen like myself should have to worry about people like that."

The guard heartily agreed.

Out on the sidewalk, Mary Ann sat on a nearby bus bench. The rising sun was beginning to warm the air. Clarence sat next to her. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

Mary Ann stared at her shoe. "I don't know. I think I'll go back home to the mid-West. All those movie people we supplied and not a single one of them offered me a part. Not even extra work. What about you, Clarence?"

Marge drove up in the familiar Buick. The dinks and scratches were fixed and the car sported a new, bright, blue coat of paint.

"I'm going back to my family," Clarence said, "and my job, I hope."

"Good luck. And keep in touch."

Clarence stood and went to his car. "I will, don't worry." He got in and closed the door forever on his life of crime.

bobbie r. coleman

Even Superheroes Get the Blues

Male Caucasian
athletic-type
mid-30's
mild-mannered
interests include
walks
on the beach
travel
truth justice
and the American way
wishes to meet
intelligent sincere
non-smoking
woman
not afraid
of flying
muscular men
or aliens
for fun
and meaningful
relationship.
Turn-offs are
arch-villains
Kryptonite
and quiche
contact C.K.
The Daily Planet
Metropolis



The Last Galleon

I see this rock
tilted — with its bow facing the sky
its sides are worn rough
plank lines diving in the deep
white water
shades of blue
mournful murmur
of water breaking over the sides
embedded, last anchorage
noble mast turning to earth
maiden head long gone
pride in every line, memories
a wrenching inside



Twilight in Brooklyn

I watched
He popped the
brown ball
into basket
after basket
to an audience
of red bricks
and me
sitting in the window
on the 6th floor.

The ceiling fan
whirred and chopped
the air over the bed.
I thought

back to an old Brooklyn.
An old friend. The
thick, sticky air
sat on our shoulders
like little demons and
filled the room.
So, we slept on thin
blankets on the
rooftops and the antennas
shadowed giant crucifixions
he and I laughed as long
as those hot nights

in Brooklyn
a summer rain
would creep in cat
quietly with a fast
wind, swift and cool
over our moist skin.

Then the moon
would wring out her gray
laundry and hang it up
to dry. The sky
dripped all over us.
and we let it.
He changed

as fast as
that weather
or like the basketball.
bounced through,
hit rims and always
landed back
in my hands.

In the corner of
that window, twilight,
I felt the wind roll again.
The player bounced
his ball inside
and I let
the hot rain
cool everything down.

*After an Involvement
with Her Professor*

He ejaculated, "You're a rare student" as
the elevator doors slid open.

She sank into a misty yellow fog
of last summer when
naked, he breathed
"I want you."

He said "See ya later", she said "sure,"
sinking deeper into wormhood,
falling into stupidity,
into pain,
into out-of-it-
ness.

She walked dizzily down the hall
past the room where, last spring,
he was God, the father,
the protector, the perfect
man she had to
have.

She descended the stairs while the walls
hideously laughed and
shot bullets. The
intellectual ice
bled into
tears.

She found a shattered bottle on
the asphalt, took the
driver's seat and cut the
olive skin till her life
dripped all over
Emily Dickinson.

He fell back in his swivel chair,
behind wire-rimmed glasses,
with a smile of relief
that his co-workers
didn't suspect
a thing.

I.
The mirror
In which
I
See the world

II.
The window
through which
The world
Sees me

In days gone by the art of verse
Was not enlisted just to curse
Or let it all hang out.

The poet's task, indeed his duty
Dealt with goodness truth and beauty
Or subjects thereabout.

However since the time of Freud
Another tack has been employed
Call it what you may

Rhymes that I consider too blunt
Are applauded now as "up front"
I am "blown away."

Defecation, menstruation
I detect a slight fixation
On the author's part

Some aspects of copulation
Seem best left to imagination
What became of art?

Love was once the muse's watchword
Its replacement is an f-word
Told in bold parlance

I consider such devices
Unauthorized by poetic license
Give me back romance.

Sit Like a Lady

The brown dog, fast asleep, blended in with the pale dirt in the middle of the town square. The square never had grass this time of year, or for most of the year. A few bright green blades tentatively poked out at the beginning of spring. But the square was a direct line of access to any point in the town from any other point, and new grass was quickly trod to dust.

Marina spit a peanut into a bed of closed-up morning glories at the side of the steps. She ate from a bowl of M&Ms on her lap, and had accidentally put a peanut M&M in her mouth. She swore silently at her mother for mixing the two kinds together, the plain ones she liked and the peanut ones the rest of her family preferred. "I'm twelve years old," she said aloud, "old enough for my own bag of M&Ms." Twelve . . . and old enough to start Junior High in three more weeks, a thought that scared Marina, and thrilled her at the same time.

Searching through the candies, she picked out five yellow M&Ms. She stared at the dog while holding them in her hands, biding her time to see if she could make the candy melt in her palms.

The dog yawned and so did Marina. Janie had piano lessons and her mother would not allow her to play with Marina on Wednesday afternoons because of those lessons. Marina was bored and annoyed at the prospect of a long, hot afternoon without her best friend.

She ate the yellow M&Ms and picked up green ones, squeezing her fingers around them. Junior High. She saw the Junior High girls every morning, as she walked past to her elementary school. They were tall and pretty, they dressed like grown-ups, wore stockings and shoes with little, feminine heels. Marina wondered if, sometime in the next three weeks, she was going to look grown-up, too.

Marina squinted at the dog and saw that, with the right amount of tears in her eyes, the dog took on the shape of a tiny hump of dirt. If she walked toward him, keeping her eyes like this, she would trip over him, wake him up. Then she could say, "Oh sorry, dog. I thought you were a pile of dirt." She thought this sounded funny, like Alice in Wonderland. She wanted to be Alice. Last summer she spent her days searching the fields, looking for a good size rabbit hole to jump into. This summer she knew better, but liked to imagine the boring life in town as if she had gone through a looking glass and what was normal and everyday was odd, unusual. . . . queer, as Alice would say. Marina liked to say "queer" a lot last summer, until her brother Bobby laughed at her and told her it meant being a fag. Marina had only a vague idea of what a fag was, but she knew that Alice meant it differently.

The M&Ms had melted to a gloppy green and chocolate mess on her palm. Marina licked it off and wiped her wet hand on her knee.

The front door behind her opened, slamming against the wicker chair, and Bobby ran out, followed by Hank and B.J. They leap-frogged over her, and took off after the dog. It quickly ran to the safety of a nearby porch. Marina stuck her tongue out at her brother's back. And at B.J., but not Hank. Hank was the cutest guy in Junior High, and she had secret wishes that when she was there, looking all grown-up, he would notice her, ask her to dance with him at the Friday noon dances, maybe even walk her to school.

The boys fled the square. Marina put the bowl on the cement step and went over to the spot where the dog had been. She walked around it once and then sat down in the slightly indented dirt. Trailing her hand through the dirt in spirals, she drew wiggly lines all about her. Like a moat, she thought, or a witch's secret circle. Pretending that the tiny ruts offered her a protective shield that made her invisible, she laid down, curling up in the same position as the dog. She closed her eyes and tried to think of what the dog could have been dreaming. With her eyes closed, she felt the sun

heating the left side of her face, and the right side was warmed by the hot dirt. By laying so still, she could hear the sounds of kids playing in the field behind her house. She could hear the rumble of the big freezer at the side of Hanson's grocery store, and she thought of the fudgcicles and sidewalk sundaes waiting for her inside, behind the frosted, freezing glass door in what Mr. Hanson called his frozen foods department. She thought of the neopolitan sandwiches he had there, the little, three-flavored, ice cream sandwiches. She would eat one and imagine she was a romantic Italian girl, riding in a gondola in the moonlight.

She heard voices coming from the Weston house, and then the light, hesitant sound of a piano. That was Janie, practicing, for her mother, to be the world's greatest pianist.

"Marina! Get up!" Her mother stood over her, casting a shadow on her hot cheek, "What in heaven's name are you doing? Look at you, you're filthy. Come with me!"

She yanked Marina by the wrist and pulled her toward the house. Marina tried to keep up with her mother's long strides but was pulled along, her heels dragging in the dirt. She was dragged up the porch steps, through the entryway, up the staircase and into the bathroom. Marina stood limply as her mother undressed her and ran water in the bathtub.

"Oh my!" gasped her mother, looking at Marina, now standing naked in front of her. Marina's indifference vanished and she looked down at her body.

"What's wrong?" she asked, searching for some terrible mark, something that signified cancer or some other killer disease.

"It's your breasts. They've started to grow. Take a bath and then we are going right over to Aunt Clara's store and buy you a brassiere. I can't have you walking around with those showing!" Her mother slammed the door behind her and yelled back, "Don't take all day!"

Marina got in the tub and looked at her chest. She'd been waiting for breasts, but what her mother noticed were two little bumps. Nothing she thought of as different. They

weren't in the way or anything. And she wasn't sure she wanted a bra. She'd seen Bobby at school, running up behind a girl and snapping her bra strap on her back. "Nancy's got tits!" he would yell and Nancy, or whatever girl was his victim, would blush and look frantically for a place to hide. No telling what Bobby would do to her, once he knew she was wearing a bra. Maybe she would let her mother buy one, then never wear it. Obviously, Mom never noticed she needed one until she saw her naked.

Marina sank down in the water, until her eyes were half in and half out. She imagined that this was how a dolphin saw things — the clear, real world on the top half of hereyes, the little sloshing waves as a dividing point and the murky, grey-blue underwater world. She put the bar of soap in the water, and maneuvered it like it was a ship. She compared the bright white top with the mysterious looking hull that bobbed under the surface.

"Marina!"

"I'm almost done," she yelled back, and quickly soaped and scrubbed herself, got out and poked her head out the bathroom door.

"Mo-om. I need something to wear."

A hand reached in and offered a clean t-shirt and shorts. Marina dressed. She didn't want to wear a bra, but she was anxious to have one and see what she looked like in it. She imagined that she would buy a pretty lace-covered one, and that she would put it on and stand in the little green dressing room at Aunt Clara's store and look at herself in the mirror. In her daydream, her mother and Aunt Clara would discreetly wait outside while she admired her now-sexy body. Her breasts would miraculously fill the bra, and her waist would be slim and curved like the high school girls at the town plunge, where they sunbathed in their bikinis. Forgetting the possible torment of her brother and his friends, she thought of lazily strolling through the school playground and having all the cool boys drop at her feet. She saw the envy in the eyes of other girls. She was a woman and they

were still children. Marina preened in front of the fogged-up bathroom mirror, pulling her t-shirt tight across her chest, trying to picture the barely discernable bumps as large and voluptuous. Objects of desire, she thought. That's what she wanted to be, an object of desire. It sounded so foreign, so French.

She heard her mother pacing in the hallway, so she combed her hair and left the bathroom.

The limp cotton bra was no match for the lacy one of her dreams, and to make matters worse, Aunt Clara kept calling it a training bra. Marina tried to figure out what it was supposed to train. Would her breasts grow only if she wore this itchy, elastic thing? Did it train breasts to be bigger? There wasn't even a chance to admire the bumps of white cotton, because Mom and Aunt Clara stood on either side of her, pulling and tugging on the straps and the elastic that went around her chest.

"I think it's too tight, Clara," said her mother, indicating the red welt already appearing on Marina's back.

"Nonsense. We'll just loosen the hook one notch. If we go bigger, the cups will bag on her."

Marina grimaced at the word cups. What an ugly way to describe a bra. She remembered the phrase from Sunday School . . . cup runneth over. And wondered if they were talking about a woman with big boobs, the kind she saw in the magazines that Bobby hid under his mattress.

Aunt Clara told her to put her t-shirt on.

"Much better," said Mom, and Clara nodded. Marina saw no difference in the look of her breasts, but was dismayed to see the obvious tell-tale line that went across her back.

"Marina, you're a young lady now," said Aunt Clara. "No more rough games with children."

"And you must learn to sit like a lady," added her mother, "with your ankles crossed."

"Heavens, yes! Be very careful not to expose your under-pants! You must never sit with your legs up."

"I don't think you should spend your time in the fields looking for rabbit holes, either. A proper young lady doesn't play in the fields. And certainly isn't found curled up in the dirt, right in the middle of town!"

"Oh my, has she done that?" asked Aunt Clara, a hand clutching the lace collar at her bosom.

"Today! Would you believe I found her that way just this afternoon? Thank God I'm the one who found her. You can imagine the gossip around here if someone else saw her like that."

Marina left the dressing room, not wanting to hear about her potential for disgracing the family, which she thought was already thoroughly disgraced by Bobby. She wandered through the store, picking up delicate perfume bottles that she wasn't allowed to touch when Aunt Clara was watching. She sprayed herself with a mist of something called Evening in Paris. The smell tickled her nose and almost made her sneeze. She didn't like the heavy odor, but she imagined tall, elegant people strolling down the Champs Elysee, with the Arch of Triumph and the Eiffel Tower in the background. She held out her hand to an invisible suitor and sashayed through the store aisles, nodding to the dresses on display as though they were acquaintances standing at sidewalk cafes. In her fantasy, she and her handsome gentleman friend would take a seat at a cafe and order croissants. She said the word aloud, trying her best to make it sound like "kwasahn," as it did in the commercials.

The perfume became too much and she decided she needed fresh air.

"Mom! I'm going outside!"

"Don't get dirty," came a voice from the back of the store.

Marina walked out of the cluttered store and into the square. She felt the sun as she stepped from the shade of the blue awning. Imagining that it highlighted her golden blonde hair, she chicly tossed her head sideways, to make her ponytail bounce and sway against her back. Miraculously, her thin, limp ponytail became full and luxurious. Marina

stood straighter, and thought that maybe, with this bra, her chest was growing, just a little bit already. She felt that her long and gawky legs were now long and lean, that she was now worthy of being in Junior High. She would wear a hint of blush across her cheeks, a bit of pale coral lipstick on her womanly lips. She continued her grown-up, sashay walk through the square.

Bobby, Hank, and B.J. came running from the shade of Mr. Hanson's store.

"Outta the way, bozo, we're in a hurry." Bobby yelled, pushing past her.

B. J. slowed down long enough to say, "Pee-uu, you smell funny!" and raced after Bobby.

Hank skimmed by, setting Marina's heart thumping. Her heart beat faster when he stopped and turned and looked her over. He looked at her slow, from head to foot, then smiled, and said, "Are you getting uglier, or did I just forget how ugly you are?"

Then he cackled and ran away.

Marina yelled after him, "You're too ugly to know anything!"

"Shoot," she said to herself, "boys are so stupid." She reached her front steps, tired, hot and uncomfortable. Standing in the shade of the porch, she realized that the constricting feeling around her chest was her bra. But it wasn't just a weird feeling she'd have to get used to. With nothing to keep it in place, the bra had slid up, until it was digging into her underarms. She wriggled her arms inside the sleeves of her t-shirt, found the hook on the back of the bra, wriggled out of it, slipped it out the sleeve of her shirt and threw the thing over to the white rattan chair. It fell behind the chair, and landed in the pot where her mother sprouted avocado pits.

Marina sat down on the steps and reached for the bowl of M&Ms, dug out some orange ones and threw them all in her mouth. The brown dog came back to the square and lay down in the same spot he was in before.

“Object of desire,” Marina thought, scornfully, “lace bras, acting like a lady. Heck with that. I’d rather look for rabbit holes.”

The dog rolled over on its back and scratched itself by rolling in the dust. Marina wiggled, imitating the dog, sighed, and accidentally tossed a peanut M&M in her mouth.



An Interview with Ray Bradbury

Northridge Review: You have been outspoken in your advice to aspiring writers. What would you say in this respect to readers of the *Northridge Review*?

Bradbury: It all depends on what you want from life. Do you want a car and a rich apartment and nice clothes? You can't have them. Not now, anyway. I took a vow of poverty to become a writer. Which means I sold newspapers on a street corner for three years, from the age of 19 to the age of about 22, lived at home with my folks, had no car, few clothes, and made about ten bucks a week all those years. Gradually, I began to sell stories to pulp magazines for twenty dollars apiece, and then finally forty dollars apiece. All the material you find in my books, like *The Martian Chronicles* or *The Illustrated Man*, was sold to pulp magazines for from twenty to eighty dollars a story!

Is that pain to you? Is that hard? It wasn't for me. I knew where I wanted to go. Do you? It wasn't hard for me to give things up, for I never wanted a car in the first place. I had had too many friends killed by cars. When I was 27 I was still living at home with my folks, to save money, so I could write. Would that be pain for you? Not for me.

I got married when I was 27 and moved into a thirty-dollar-a-month apartment in Venice, California with my wife who worked and made about forty dollars a week, while I made around 38 dollars a week, selling my stories. We ate hot dogs and went to the Penny Arcade nights to have fun. We went to cheap movies. And we were in love. And then my wife started having babies, which scared the hell out of me, for our income was cut in half. But God was watching and said, Ray old bean, you're a good chap. I'm going to raise your pay to eighty dollars a week. And that's what happened. So my pay kept going up, to \$100 a week by the time I was 32 and \$130 a week when I was 33. After that, I began to get

screen work on occasion and my income jumped. But you can see I got what I wanted gradually. And I got it out of love, doing what I wanted to do.

I guess I can only suggest that you find something that you love madly, and do it. And whether it is being a writer, actor, painter, or computerologist, as long as you love it, do it, do it, do it. Nothing to stop you except fear, and in the doing the fear vanishes. To sum it up, if you want to write, if you want to create, you must be the most sublime fool that God ever turned out and sent rambling. You must write every single day of your life.

I've always been deeply in love with writing. It's never been any work or any problem. To those of you who don't care enough about writing to write, I just say, cut it out and go away and do something else. You've got to find something you love that drives you to do it. Otherwise, it's not worth doing. If you have to force yourself all the time to do it, you'd better find another career.

N.R.: What is the relationship between reading other writers' material and one's own writing process?

Bradbury: The more you read, the more ideas explode in your head, run riot, beautifully collide so that when you go to bed the visions color the ceiling and light the walls with wonderful discoveries. I fell in love with books when I was five or six, and I still use libraries and bookstores, years later. The meat of writing must be found and fed on in every library you can jump into and every bookstore you can pole-vault through.

N.R.: What are your own reading preferences?

Bradbury: I may start a night's read with a James Bond novel, move on to Shakespeare, dip into Dylan Thomas, make a fast turnabout to Fu Manchu, that great and evil Oriental doctor, ancestor of Dr. No, then pick up Emily Dickinson, and end my evening with Ross Macdonald, the detective novelist, or Robert Frost.

N.R.: How would you assess yourself as a writer?

Bradbury: When I was a boy, I collected Buck Rogers comic strips. People made fun, so I tore them up. Later, I said to myself, "What's this all about? These people are trying to starve me. The greatest food in my life, right now, is Buck Rogers!" And I started collecting comic strips again. For I had the great secret!

If I had listened to the taste-mongers and critics, I would have played a safe game, never jumped the fence, and become a nonentity. The fact is plain: I am an amiable compost heap. My mind is full of moron plus brilliant trash. I learned early that in order to grow myself excellent I had to start myself in plain old farmyard manure. From such heaps of mediocre or angelic words I fever myself up to grow fine stories, or roses, if you prefer.

I am a junkyard, then, of all the libraries and bookshops I ever fell into or leaned upon, and am proud and happy that I never developed such a rare taste that I could not go back and jog with Tarzan or hit the Yellow Brick Road with Dorothy, both characters and their books banned for 50 years by librarians and educators.

I have had my own loves, and gone my own way to become my own self.

N.R.: Are many of your ideas taken from real-life?

Bradbury: All the ideas you find in my books are based upon a little piece of something I saw in our society. For instance, 32 years ago, Senator Joseph McCarthy was beginning to make lists of certain books. I didn't like that. I don't like it when anyone or any group tells me, "Here's a reading list, go read these books— and only these books."

So I wrote *Fahrenheit 451*. I want us all to move very freely through our society and pick up all the information we need to make wise decisions.

N.R.: Which of your books are you most fond of?

Bradbury: *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is my favorite book, for me my most delicious book, because I wrote it with one purpose. I wanted you to read it late at night with a flashlight under the covers. If a book isn't that good, it's not worth reading.

N.R.: What is it that you hope your writing career has achieved?

Bradbury: I stared at all the books in my library once and said, "My God, if I could once in my life write *one* book that would wind up on the shelf there," leaning against Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, or . . . you name one of your own favorite books out of the past. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, to mention one of my favorites, the *Oz* books, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Robinson Crusoe*, all the books of Jules Verne. Beautiful books. I've been reading them the last five or ten years and they're better today for me than they were when I was twelve years old.

If I could only create one book that would finally, at the end of my life, live on that shelf with those lovely people. They're the people who are going to live. Most of the stuff that's read today will fade away, and *Alice in Wonderland* will go on for centuries. I want to be with these heroes of mine, Twain and Dickens and Stevenson.

N.R.: What are your views of the course that science-fiction and fantasy writing has taken since you published your first book, *Dark Carnival*, in 1947?

Bradbury: If you went into an average library in 1932, 1945, or 1953, you would have found no Edgar Rice Burroughs, no L. Frank Baum and no *Oz*. In 1958 or 1962 you would have found no Asimov, no Heinlein, no Van Vogt, no Bradbury! Here and there, perhaps one book or two by the above. For the rest, a desert. What were the reasons for this?

Among librarians and teachers there was then, and there still somewhat dimly persists, an idea that only fact matters. Fantasy even when it takes science-fictional forms, which it often does, is dangerous. It is escapist. It is day-dreaming. It has nothing to do with the world and the world's problems. So said the snobs who did not know themselves as snobs.

However, the children, hungry for ideas and dying of starvation, sensed, if they could not say, that fantasy, and its robot child science fiction, is not escape at all, but a circling of reality to enchant it and make it behave. The children guessed, if they did not whisper it, that all science fiction is an attempt to solve problems by pretending to look the other way. So the children cried, "Enough! Let there be fantasy. Let there be science-fiction light."

Everywhere we look are problems. And everywhere we further deeply look are solutions. The children of men, the children of time, how can they not be fascinated with these challenges? Science fiction becomes scientific fact. Thus, science fiction and its recent history.

So it seems we are all science-fictional children dreaming ourselves into new ways of survival. Instead of putting saints' bones by in crystal jars, to be touched by the faithful in following centuries, we put by voices and faces, dreams and impossible dreams on tape, on records, in books, on TV, in films.

By osmosis, the Industrial Revolution and the Electronic and Space Age have finally seeped into the blood, bone, marrow, heart, flesh and mind of the young who as teachers teach us what we should have known all along.

N.R.: Then you believe that science fiction actually applies more to the present than to the future?

Bradbury: This literary process can be described as Perseus confronted by Medusa. Gazing at Medusa's image in his bronze shield, pretending to look one way, Perseus reaches back over his shoulder and severs Medusa's head. So science fiction pretends at futures in order to cure sick dogs lying in today's road.

N.R.: What is your opinion of current American fiction in general?

Bradbury: Whenever new, modern, American novels come out, I go read *Rumpelstiltskin* again, because I think the modern American novel is bankrupt of imagination, wit, style, idea on any level. I am a language person. I've loved poetry all my life and my favorite people, whom I visit at the library again and again, are William Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw, and G.K. Chesterton and Loren Eiseley. People with ideas. People with images. People with language. People who romance me with death, and excitement, and make me want to go on living.

N.R.: What is the role of fantasy in every-day life?

Bradbury: I happen to believe in fantasy. I happen to believe we survive by our wits, by our ability to fantasize, and without it we couldn't exist in the very real world. The ability to fantasize helps us make our futures. I don't care what you dream; it's honorable if you love it.

The *Northridge Review*, the literary magazine of California State University Northridge, is published each semester. This edition contains poetry, fiction, photography and non-fiction by the following authors and photographers:

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The *Northridge Review* is also pleased to present an interview with science-fiction author and poet Ray Bradbury, conducted by Richard Buller.