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NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

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Northridge Review invites submissions between September and May. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address, telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. *The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.* Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be sent to: *Northridge Review*, Department of English, California State University, Northridge, CA 91330. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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Two awards are given annually in recognition of exceptional writing. The Rachel Sherwood Poetry Award, given in memoriam of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes the best poem published by the Northridge Review. The winner receives fifty dollars from the university and will be noted alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood. The Helen Helms Marcus Award established by Helen Marcus, is given in recognition of the best short story published by a CSUN student. The winner of this award receives two hundred dollars. Award recipients are announced in the Spring. Poetry and fiction from both the Fall and Spring issues of the Northridge Review will be considered.

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Grant Cogswell

Paris in '73

I

She left him in Paris in 1973, in a Metro station that sat directly three hundred feet under the Seine, just where it curves south of the Hotel de Ville. I was six years old at the time, and I can remember that if you looked from our apartment window maybe a quarter of a mile down the street you could see the rim of the trench the river flowed in. The river always stank and always was brown, and it moved sluggishly as if just waking between its stone and concrete banks. I imagined the bottom to be hard cement too, and it was not until much later that I realized this was impossible.

The Metro station was under reconstruction, perhaps because of the river. There were holes gouged in the smooth tile, through the walls and even into the wet black dirt of the ancient riverbed itself. There were pools of water on the platform, streams dripping down from pipes, thick tile dust moistening into sludge and still more holes, and cracks, everywhere.

My mother and father were yelling at each other, at first

during and over the bursts of jackhammer noise but after a while pausing angrily, waiting and looking around at the cracks in the walls before it was quiet again, and then the shouting would resume.

The French were rooting for her. She was young, tall, American, and a brunette. My father was (and still is) a stout Kansan, bald and blond-bearded, looking Bavarian and possibly violent. I was learning as we traveled that the Germans hate the French and the French hate the Germans (or anyone who looks German). So now the French stood back, commenting and jeering and watching my mother and father yell. I stood between my parents, closer to my father because it had always been that way. When I think of my teenage obesity, the places my father and I went together and where we are now, the rainy August night in Oxford when I rolled in the warm grass with a barmaid whose name I did not know, but whose mouth I explored with my own and whose birthmark I found in under five minutes, I think now of the way my mother stood at the edge of the yellow line, her arms out at her sides, with my father several feet back from the tracks, and how as the train arrived I instinctively stepped back away from the gust of wind and bumped my head on my father's belt buckle.

He turned and looked down at me and grabbed my wrist tightly. His big, red fist reminded me of the one I had seen on posters around the university that spring, posters I didn't understand the meaning of, only the rage. "Some people are angry and desperate," my father had said, "and they need to feel strong."

She hesitated a moment and they were both quiet in the rush of bodies that moved around us. Then she stepped onto the train and sat down next to a long-haired blond boy in a green fatigue jacket. The doors slid closed and we watched her run her hand over his hair, pulling one strand out and high towards the top of the window. The train moved and she dropped the hair. We watched her shift in her seat closer to him and place her hand on his smooth

neck. I next saw her thirteen years later, in the Greyhound Bus terminal in Murfreesboro, North Carolina.

II

With my mother suddenly gone my father hired a German art student named Helga as a maid and sort of live-in babysitter. On the wall of her room, which had been my room before my mother left, there was a poster of Castle Neuschwanstein with big white letters along the bottom that read DEUTSCHLAND. Helga was blonde and slimly elegant like a ballet dancer. She stood with me once, looking at the poster with a glass of white wine in her hand, and said, "It does not need to say 'Deutschland'. It is Deutschland."

"It's a picture," I told her.

"You are an American," she said to me later, sauteeing her Swiss-battered carrots, a recipe she knew by heart, "and you should be like one. It is not right that you should grow up here." She often drank at the cafes with the American students and had picked up their expressions. "You don't speak like an American. Say 'grovey'."

"Gravy," I said.

"Americans say 'grovey'. You should know that."

Under our apartment was a shop which sold gas heaters. To the left as you entered was a cafe with a big red and white striped awning and lots of outside tables. To the right was a gourmet restaurant, this one with a green awning. The restaurant gave away little lead figures of two hand-painted frogs, one mounting the other, to amuse the customers. I did not understand why two frogs would want to do this, and I asked the manager of the restaurant. The manager had one missing eye, and he left the empty socket uncovered. But he laughed at my question so hard that the blind socket began to ooze, and I ran out of the restaurant and only

returned on the nights when we all ate dinner there.

After that I spent my time at the newsstand, the cafe with the red and white awning and the bench beside the big oak tree, where almost every day a man brought a guitar and an accordion and played for the coins people tossed into his velvet-lined accordion case. Sometimes, my father says, I danced and got money too. The man played songs all mad with flowery torrents of words, announcing them in a thick Scottish brogue: 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', 'Fishfly Stomp', 'Buttertown Stage', 'Blinded By The Light'. I'm starting to remember, I think, that it was the crazy lyrics of the songs as much as the notes of the guitar or accordion that made me whirl and leap like I'm told I did.

In the summer my father would get home long before it was dark, ambling slowly up the sidewalk and swinging his heavy leather briefcase. As I ate raisin cake at one of the outside tables or picked through the grate at the bottom of the oak tree for lost coins, he would cough loudly and come over to me and gather me up out of my activity and onto the stairs. Then the three of us would eat together, looking out the windows at the traffic, the afternoon light, the nuns from the seminary eating hot dogs across the street. Helga and my father would drink wine and stay at the table until long after it was finally dark and I was in my bed next to the cobwebby airshaft.

Sometimes on those nights I could hear them talking, if the wind was right, quiet and low like old, old friends, about the mountains of Germany and the plains of Kansas, and, I imagine, about my mother, and about the strange events of their lives of the kind that people talk over on warm nights with a bottle of wine between them.

I picture her telling him her idea. "I have made a film, a movie, and in it I have pictures of people in Frankfurt, and of the Black Forest and gypsies—near Heidelberg I found them—and it

closes with a picture of Neuschwanstein. I want to sell it as a travel commercial." He would smile and she would continue. "It does not say 'Deutschland' in it anywhere. It shows it. That is what is important. No narrator, no one says anything."

"Subtle," he says.

"Ja, subtle."

Later he would tell her, "My aunt came back from the dead."

Helga is thinking she heard him wrong. "Back..."

"Back from the dead." He pulls out another cigarette but does not light it, setting it on its end and turning it over and doing the same again and again. On a night fishing in Puget Sound, my great-uncle Ray had told my father about the time he saw his dead wife. My father was seventeen. It was dusk, and that boy could not see his uncle's face clearly, but the man gestured wildly with his big, hairless hands ("Uranium prospectors' hands," he said of them) and told his story in the twilight.

My father says, "Aunt Rachel died in 1945. She was an assembly worker in a shipyard up in Seattle during the war. A riveter's gun slipped off the metal and put a rivet right through Aunt Rachel's windpipe." Uncle Ray was downtown at the bank, three days after the funeral, about to withdraw his wife's account, when he saw her face in the window of a city bus. "The bus went right by, and there she was, dead a week and staring right at him." Then he walked two blocks, found a bar and drank whisky shooters until he passed out. That night he was treated for shock at the Yesler Way Mercy Clinic.

She says, "It must have been someone who looked very much like your aunt."

"No, it was her. I don't know how, but she was. My uncle believes it, but he doesn't believe it, if you know what I mean, and so do I." My father had placed his young hands on his Uncle Ray's hairless ones and sworn to never tell anyone. But Uncle Ray had

died in 1971, the winter we moved to Paris, and now he could talk about it. "It's true, it really happened, I know it did."

My father did not tell her he too watches bus windows for dead relatives as well as live ones, like sometimes his wife.

Sometime she must have told him about her uncle, this one a Gunther, who crawled into her bed one morning just before dawn when she was seven years old, "His age," she would say, looking sideways towards my bedroom. "I loved my Uncle Gunther and I trusted him, so when he said, 'I want to be with you,' I opened the covers and he crawled under." Then he began to feel her chest, looking for the ghosts of breasts that were not there yet. "It scared me very badly," she told my father. "Scared of men and of life and of everything." I see her fumbling with her wineglass and looking down, saying, "He was a molester, but it felt like..."

"It was rape," my father says.

After more stories they would pick up the dishes and wash them in the tiny kitchen, their laughter echoing off the tile and the sound of the wine bottle slamming down after a swig onto the counter, the cutting board, and finally into the trash, coming loud through the walls. After that they would both go to their rooms. My father would come into our room quietly, closing the door behind him. He would lay down awake for a long time, and then get up and go to the bathroom, and come back, and still be softly washing the room with his awake-breath when I fell back into sleep.

It went on this way until fall, when the days got shorter and often it was raining when my father came home at night, in the dark. Helga studied a lot then, and after dinner she would go to her room, studying math and French while I leafed through her big books and looked at the full-color prints of the Renaissance paintings. Things slowed down, were less alive, and my father and Helga were waiting. She rushed through her assignments towards spring, when

she would bring her degree with her back to Frankfurt. He was waiting for word on a job he wanted with Rockwell in London. The television stayed on in the evenings until we went to bed.

When word from London finally came, just before Christmas, no one seemed to notice. At the dinner table one night my father said, "It looks like I got the job."

Helga, looking down at her butter-sauteed carrots, her masterpiece, said, "That is good. You will like London."

And so, we went to London, where we lived until the summer after I first got drunk with my father and he told me that he and Helga had been in a strange kind of love.

At the airport Helga kissed me briskly on the cheek and forehead and hugged me tight, and smiling with wide wet paths on her face turned to my father.

"I have met a man," she said, grinning.

"Oh, good," said my father, and they kissed each other on the mouth, twisting themselves as if in a struggle, for what I could not tell.

"Watch out for his dentures," I said.

My father kept the job with Rockwell until twelve years later, when cancer was found in his lungs and he had to quit. He was remarried, two years after we left Helga in Paris, to a woman he had known as a child in Wichita, also separated, and burdened with a child and looking for someone to carry her into middle age.

"It was supposed to be like 'The Brady Bunch'," I told a friend much later, when I began to see what actually had happened. "We pretended for ten years or so that we had been together all along, with no acknowledgment of our differences, no attention paid to the missing parents." It didn't quite work, but it got us a long way in relative safety.

Helga graduated with her art degree, returned to Frankfurt

and kept in touch for a couple of years. Her last card, which we received just before Christmas of 1976, told us she was working for an advertising agency, struggling, but would sleep on the streets before moving back in with her family. "Good for her," my father said, and pinned the card up on the bulletin board next to our Girl Scouts of America Bicentennial Calendar.

I was sixteen years old the first time I got drunk with my father. "I could have made love to Helga, but I didn't want to spoil things for you," he said. "She was beautiful, she lived in our house and she was alone. But I never slept with her. We loved each other, though. Through you, mostly."

I was never aware of this at the time, but I suppose I had it half figured out by the time he actually said it, having heard some of the things they said and having to imagine others, knowing that at some time they must have been told, it seems like the right way for things to have happened.

III

I grew up fat, lost weight, ran track in my senior year of high school, and once went into the bathroom with a pack of razorblades and a bottle of my stepmother's favorite bourbon with intentions of killing myself on the toilet, getting drunk, cutting my wrists and letting my blood flow out. All of us, my father, my stepmother, Helga, myself, seemed to be reaching for something lost, something just out of our grasp, that if found would make our lives whole again. It seems that as the years go by, sometimes we come upon times that make our pasts more our own, that, like the Talking Heads song says, give us back our names. Fiddling with our big old French radio we kept in the guest room when I was sixteen, dialing through the stations from all over Europe, I suddenly heard something familiar. It was in French, a language I had forgotten almost entirely by the time I entered junior high school.

It was one of the accordion man's songs and I half-whisper-sang it, not understanding what the words meant, but remembering their sounds, and the story they told of the fisherman's drowned sons.

Also there is the more recent thing that makes me remember Paris, for the first time making me feel as if it was me who had been there; a month ago I took a bus to Murfreesboro, North Carolina, and I met my mother and three-year-old half-brother I did not know I had until I got off the bus. He looks like me in the dappled light that falls through the trees that grow in great stands around Murfreesboro, and there is a way he turns his head as if cautious, that makes me want to protect him from all the crazy shit the world has in store. His father is gone, on whatever device it is which pulls people from their natural obligations. It was a strange and wonderful week I spent in Murfreesboro, and I feel very different now than I ever have before. But that is a different story, and also one about a strangely physical kind of love.

Jennifer Wolfe

Love Poem

I want to move to New York with you
for the summer, I want to explore you,
to explore this fascination with your
lardy flesh; sit on a fire escape in
lower Manhattan sweating humidly
my cotton shift sticking to my thighs,
crawling up the crack of my ass. I want to
watch you walk through the door of our crowded
apartment still angry from a day of
blaring horns, other people's sweat and
vinyl seats and see the relief cascade
over your face that it is me here, not
a stranger who wants nothing from you but
transportation, me and I want every-
thing, even the things you've forgotten.

Stephanie Mark

Like Moss And Dandelions

I hate makeup. All kinds, especially mascara. Waterproof mascara. I think it is useless and can't think of a single time in my life when I've wanted to look beautiful while crying.

I have very few friends so today at Norman's request I had lunch with his partner's wife, Suzette. Suzette and I could have become friends, we really could have, but then she laughed. She also wore mascara, which I might have been able to overlook, if only she didn't laugh. You see, there was nothing funny. I had made up a joke with no punch line, which I often do and told it over coffee and dessert. I remained silent and watched her lipstick crinkle as she giggled.

"You really are quite the little comic," she tittered and dabbed at her eyes with a napkin.

I sat up very straight in the booth and fixed my eyes on her lavender eyeshadow. "Perhaps Suzette, you might explain the joke?"

I saw the lipstick tighten as she fumbled with her snakeskin wallet. "Check please, waiter." She overtopped.

I know it wasn't fair but I have to protect myself. Lots of people are not what they seem to be and it could be dangerous. Like last week when I found out about my husband.

It happened when my car ran out of gas. Now, I have sometimes wondered who in my life would help me if my car ran out of gas. I knew someone would help me if I was choking in a restaurant. They would have to. But who did I have in my life that would help me with just a stalled car? I had to know.

"Sorry to keep you on hold Nordis, but I was with a patient," he tapped a pencil against the phone receiver. There was some static on the line.

"Norman, I have run out of gas." I paused and so did he. I counted the number of taps until he spoke. Thirteen.

"Jesus Nordis, I've got a full load today and Stein is out sick. Can't you call one of your girlfriends? There's a hysterical mother breathing down my neck. Both her children have chicken-pox."

"I have run out of gas."

"Alright look, go shopping or something, and I'll try to pick you up later. Buy yourself a new dress for the convention." Tap, tap, tap.

"I don't need a new dress." Just then a truck whizzed by and two men leaned out the window and whistled. I pulled my turtleneck sweater higher on my neck. It now covered my chin.

"Please Nordis, just go shopping and don't call back until at least six, okay sweetie?"

I felt the phone booth grow smaller. I let my hand drop down and touch under my bra. It felt like the lump had increased in size.

"Let me understand," I said, "you are not coming to help me?" It was a question but not really. There was a long silence without tapping during which I heard him nod.

“Just so I understand correctly,” I said. The static cleared and we had a good connection. I heard him smile at his nurse. When I hung up I got my quarter back. I took a taxi home and as the cabbie prattled on, smiled to myself. Like a scientist who has suspected that saccharin causes cancer and has finally come up with the proof. That is how I smiled.

I have a small child at home. I love to smell her hair after I have bathed her. It’s like moss and dandelions. Norman has never commented on it, but it is nothing like the perfume he gave me last Valentine’s Day.

“It’s Arpege. All the women are wearing it,” he said and unwrapped the bottle for me. I found it curious that he had sniffed women’s necks but never smelled his daughter’s freshly shampooed hair. But then, Katie has never had chicken-pox.

I was about to thank him when the telephone collided with my reply. I answered it. It was his nurse. She has always called me Mrs. Spect but insists that I call her Barbie.

“Here, talk to Barbara,” I said and handed the phone to him delicately.

“Honestly Nordis,” he shook his head which caused his gold chain to rattle.

I smile at this memory and try to hold the smile as I walk into the elevator of the office building. I am going up to the seventh floor. The elevator is crowded.

On the third floor, the doors open and I glimpse a mother yanking her child by the arm down a hallway. “When I get you home. . .” The elevator doors close. On the fifth floor, the doors slide open. A grey man using a walker scuttles toward the elevator with a hand held up. The doors close when he is three feet away. On the sixth floor, I lose half my smile and the doors do not open. I get out on the seventh floor in time to see a woman embrace a man and her mascara staining the shoulder of his white shirt.

I walk into the office and print my name on the sign-in

sheet. I have stopped signing my name ever since handwriting analysis became popular. Too risky. I print in even letters, Nordis Spect.

I take a seat and stare at the framed pictures of eyes on the walls. They stare back at me. This reminds me of the box of raisins that has a picture on the front of a lady eating a box of raisins. And on that box, there is a picture of a lady eating a box of raisins. And on that box there is a picture of a lady eating a . . . Someone has just called my name. I get up and follow the voice into the other room.

“I cannot touch my eye. Oh sure, I can touch my eyelid or my eyebrow, but just thinking about touching my pupil makes me all squishy inside. You know, my stomach churns. Kind of a silent retch. It’s been like that ever since I was about five. Once, I had an eyelash stuck for three hours...”

“That’s just fine, Mrs. Spector. I’ll have you wearing contacts in no time. It’s easy, and it’s fun. See you in one week.” He winks, but not at me.

“Thank you, doctor.” My eyes water as I take the prescription from him. I want to reach down and check on my lump, but I can’t do that here.

I walk through the pastel reception lobby. The receptionist wears a pink sweater and blots peach lipstick onto a napkin. She returns to her typewriter, unaware that she clashes with the room.

“Bye now, Mrs. Spectrum.”

I squint in the bright sun and hold my breath as a diesel truck drives by. I wait for a safe count of twenty before I breathe again. There is the shopping to do. I must buy Saran Wrap and pick up the dry-cleaning. My stomach retches even though I am not thinking about my lump so instead I think about Norman who is the reason for my having to get contact lenses.

Last night, the three of us were sitting on the couch. Norman, watching 60 Minutes, Katie on my lap, and me doing my

three bear voices from Goldilocks. Except for the “Who’s been eating my porridge?” part, which Katie likes to do herself.

Norman turned to me during a commercial. “About my convention, do you think you could wear black?”

“And who’s been sleeping in my bed?”

“Nordis. Listen to me. About your glasses, do you think you could go without them for that one night? I’m making a big speech and I want you to look good.” He had started to sweat and when he moved his arm to punctuate his sentence, it stuck to the plastic covering. All our sofas are covered in plastic.

I put down the book and looked at him. Katie tilted her head upward to see why I had stopped reading to her. I could smell her hair. I took my wire-rimmed glasses off and tried to focus on Norman.

“Mommy, what big eyes you have!” I squeezed her shoulders and squinted at Norman. He was blurry.

“Get yourself some contacts, Nordis. And I’m certainly no expert, but I think you could use a little blush.” I left the room then, because all the oxygen had been sucked out from the air.

So now I stand here holding this contact lens pamphlet. Norman is a doctor, I really should try to tell him about my lump. Tonight I will tell him. I try to think of a good opening sentence.

But when tonight comes, I end up showing him. We are in bed and he says, “By the way, did you get your contacts?”

“I went down today but it will take a week.”

“Good,” he reaches his arm over to pat me on the shoulder. I take it and think, either his hand is cold or I am very hot. I flinch when I move his hand to my breast. He balls his fingers up and pulls his hand away. I pull it back. We used to have this struggle when we were dating, only in reverse.

“There is a lump, Norman.”

“What?” The hand is gone, the light is turned on and he seems very tall sitting up in bed like that. “Jesus, how long have you

had this? Honey this is nothing for you to fool around with. You'll have to get it checked tomorrow. I'll send you to a specialist." His eyes are clouded, and he looks as if he has had a long day. He hugs me tightly.

"I mean it Nordis," he continues, "I won't sleep a wink until you get this thing looked at." Ten minutes pass and I fall asleep to the sound of his snores.

In the morning I get up early and dress. He comes into the kitchen, kisses me and reminds me to take his suit to the cleaners. He slips me a card with a name and address on it.

"Is that a new dress you're wearing? It's pretty." He is out the door before I answer. It's a dress he gave me for my birthday two years ago.

I hire a babysitter and pretend to leave, slamming the door loudly. I quietly sneak back inside to make sure this sitter really is qualified. But everything is okay and she is giving Katie a grilled cheese and a box of raisins.

I drive down to the specialist's office. There is no elevator so I take the stairs. The specialist's secretary gives me a long form to fill out. She has long hair.

I am led into the specialist's office. It has a lot of wood in it, including wood filing cabinets. Norman's office has metal. My lump feels like it may have gotten smaller.

"Hello Mrs. Spect," the doctor walks in and sits down in an easy chair. He smiles fully at me and I'm able to return half of one. The other half quivers.

"You can tell me if you're nervous." He leans forward in his chair. "Are you?" He's acting like I am his only patient. So much attention. I think for a while and then decide to go ahead and do it.

"Dr. Feltman, would you like to hear a good joke?"

He nods. There's a flicker in his eyes. Perhaps he wears contacts also.

“A man walks into a store and orders thirty dollars worth of groceries. The clerk says ‘I’m sorry, but you’ll just have to wait your turn like everyone else!’ ” I pause for effect, then chuckle and finally burst out in laughter. I feel a little dizzy.

He is silent, thinking it over. His phone buzzes and he makes no move to answer it. “I’m sorry, I don’t see anything funny.” He looks unrested but his eyes are clear. He sighs a little and asks, “Is it me? Have I missed something? Why not tell it to me once more.”

I push my glasses firmly on my nose and am able to smile fully at him now. “Doctor, do you think that there’s a chance that this lump might be just a lump?”

As I listen to his detailed answer, I imagine him at home, tucking his small child into bed and leaning down to smell her hair. Like moss and dandelions.

Cathy Comenas

Mari's Backyard

That sunday your parents went away
we lay on a raft in the pool
dark sunglasses and bikinis
my cheek resting on your bare shoulder
you told me how your backyard held memories of fairies
how you used to fly a plane
as you swung on that wooden swing
tied to a big oak tree by two chains
you spread stuffed animals
on the green grass
served them tea
then put them in the trees
threw rocks at them
until they tumbled to the ground
that's when you brought out
your grocery store medic bag
and fixed them up
sometimes you slept out here

in summer with your sister
sleeping bags and cookies

If your parents could see you now
with me, so close
they'd shoot me and bury me
way back where your yard
turns into a cement wash

I jump every time I hear a car outside
until I fall into the water with you
we take our tops off
and dance arms around each other
breasts touching

A person could get lost
in your acre of childhood
with all its green

The Way Home

Drunk again
on my way home
her face spins in car wheels
as night turns to morning
a light rain makes the air ripple
I think it's her
so I slide the bus window open
stick my face out
and catch her
on my tongue.

Janice Pocengal

Opposite Directions

The timer had been ringing for almost twenty minutes when Sherry could no longer stand it and got up to turn it off. "I hate buzzers," she told Jeff later on the phone. She picked at the splintered edge of a toenail that had been scratching the next toe all day. "My mother uses them all the time."

"I can't hear you," said Jeff and Sherry moved the phone closer to her mouth. Outside it rained turning the pavement into an asphalt mirror of the city. A man jaywalked across the street. His feet made slapping noises in the water.

Sherry lay talking on a piece of rug salvaged from a neighbor's garage sale, the telephone pressed hard between her ear and shoulder. Holes in the linoleum exposed the black glue underneath, except where it was covered by the rug that cushioned Sherry's spine. Sherry lifted her legs overhead and lowered them slowly because inches could be lost, they said on television talk shows, the ones Sherry watched before she dressed or combed her hair, if you did it every day. The phone slipped from Sherry's mouth.

"I haven't any money for the bus and I have to go to work,"

Jeff said. "I can't be late again."

Sherry lowered her trembling legs slowly and counted before her heels touched the floor. "Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-five," she said, mouthing the words. Then when Jeff paused she said, "You don't think I'm too fat, do you Jeff? Sometimes I say, 'Oh God, what if I turn out like Edward downstairs.' You know, he told me he eats Oreos for dinner because it's too hard to cook for one. I've seen him through the window."

"I thought you were anorexic or something," Jeff said.

"Don't go to work, Jeff. You can call in sick," Sherry said. "We can go someplace and talk. My mother will be home and start with the buzzers. She times everything." She glanced at the clock and walked a circle heel to toe. "You'll only miss a day," she said.

Outside the rain stopped and sun filtered in through the drapes. They were sheers, designed to keep the sun out without blocking the view, but they didn't seem to work that way.

"I have to go," said Jeff. "Last time when I didn't it was the worst day of our lives together."

That was before he moved into the trailer. All that day they had talked in the room without any windows. Jeff was always moving, he said he liked moving, and wherever he went his blue Naugahyde sofa went too, adding a personal touch—a symbol of continuity to any place he lived in. Sherry told him she had fallen in love with a scientist, though she knew she hadn't, and Jeff just sat on the sofa and Sherry tied his shoe laces in knots and tried to untangle them. But she had never told someone that she loved somebody else and didn't know where to begin.

"This scientist," she said, and mocked Jeff's voice, "he's crazy about me." His shoe laces were old, faded and dotted with black where they ran through the eyelets. Jeff said she hurt his feelings and that he had them too and then pretended it was all over.

So now Sherry thought Jeff would say "forget it."

"Forget it," Jeff said. "I can't meet you today. I know you

think your mother's mad."

"Mad," Sherry said, "her turtles are dead but she won't believe it." They've floated in a bowl of water on her dresser for days. She feeds them but they never move."

"I like your mom," Jeff said.

Sherry envisioned Jeff's face close up while he continued talking. Not attractive, she thought. They both had chicken pox together only Jeff got the scars because his itched more. Pock marks on his left cheek still stood out, at least when he had just shaved. Sherry used to wish she could pull them off and put them in her photo album for safe keeping. When she had kids she would show them. "Pock marks," she would say. "Jeff's," when they looked at her questioningly. Then she would talk about love and what it really meant. The same lecture her mother gave her when she turned twelve, only a new and improved version.

Sherry's legs fell to the floor and she groaned. "Just come over Jeff," she said.

"I can't," he said.

Sherry stood then said, "You're ruining my life." She carried the telephone into her mother's bedroom. The turtles floated beneath a removable palm tree that was bent sideways as if hit by wind. "We're going to have a funeral," Sherry said, "we're going to do it right." The water was cold. She took the turtles from the bowl and shook the water off one before holding it to the ceiling light. Her mother's room stayed dark most of the time because the only window faced into an air shaft. A few things her mother kept were below the window, scattered on sewing machine cabinets she had pushed together to form a table. She protected this table with plastic and under the plastic kept some comic strips cut from newspapers. She also had the usual things, plates from different states, a locked jewelry box, an electric razor and winter gloves. "They pulled their arms and legs in, otherwise they look like perfectly good turtles," Sherry said to Jeff. Then she took the

gloves from the table and put the turtles inside.

“Don’t treat her like a child,” said Jeff. “I’m leaving now. I’ll stop by later,” and he hung up, leaving Sherry feeling indignant and hopeful at the same time. She set down the phone and waited again on the couch that doubled as her bed at night, with the turtles and a National Geographic magazine from the library.

Her mother walked in when Sherry knew she would, wearing the blue wool coat she got when her best friend from high school died. Sherry watched her go set the buzzer for the reverend she always watched on television, often with the sound turned down.

“Come with me, mom,” she said. “Don’t take off your coat. I promised Jeff I’d bring you over for dinner.”

The woman made no remark but set the timer on the stove at thirty-five minutes. “Mom, we promised we’d be there,” Sherry said.

“How do I look?” said her mother smoothing down the coat and brushing a few bangs aside that had strayed from her red scarf. It was secured around her head with a pin and painted like a peacock.

Sherry picked up the National Geographic and the glove with the turtles inside. The library cards fell out of the magazine and later Sherry remembered she had said something about stopping at the cleaners that day. But now Sherry hurried her mother out the door into the damp air and to the car. She knew her mother walked slowly and Sherry was glad no one was around to stop and talk. They walked to the Oldsmobile without saying anything. It wasn’t pulled forward completely and the back of it hung out of the stall. Sherry still didn’t say anything when she saw that Jeff walked towards them from the opposite direction.

She helped her mother into the clean, preserved, vinyl interior. The car smelled clean because it had rarely been used. It was a gift to her mother from one of her friends that could no longer

drive. Sherry's mother was lucky that way. Jeff had been standing there for a while, noticing something about the car's paint when Sherry finally said, "What are you doing here?"

"I want to go with you," he said reaching for the door handle and sitting down in the back seat next to her mother. "Hi, Mom," said Jeff, he always called her that, and patted her knee covered by support hose that shined. Sherry got in the front and looked over her shoulder at the two in the backseat grinning at each other—her mother never caught Jeff's eye. The thought of the turtles coming back to life inside of a dark glove bothered Sherry and she let the car into reverse and backed out of the stall. Her tires sounded like tape being peeled off a box when the car rolled out of the wet parking lot.

"Do you know where you went today, mother?" Sherry asked when they stopped at a light.

"Did my mail come?" her mother asked.

"Jeff, you're going to be fired again."

Jeff rolled down the window and let his arms hang down the side of the car. "It sounded serious so I came," said Jeff. The pine tree air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror spun in circles from the wind.

The glove lay still beside Sherry. The fingers were flat, the palm large and round, like a pregnant hand, she thought. Then she said, "She can't remember."

Just past the light the beach was empty and Sherry pulled up by a meter knocking the back tires into the curb several times before the car parked parallel. By the time Sherry walked around to open the door for her mother Jeff was already half way across the sand leaving Sherry to watch him from a distance, from the rise that descended down to the waves.

"It's a surprise," she said when her mother asked her about dinner. They crossed the sand to the water then her mother said, "Sherry, I'm cold, take me home. It must be time."

Sherry's hair twisted behind her in the wind. Jeff found a stray dog he could throw sticks for. Its hair was matted and wet from jumping in and out of the waves.

"Don't be angry," Sherry said, holding the glove upside down.

"The ballet is coming to town," said her mother. She always loved the ballet and Sherry usually made a point to take her. It was the only thing her mother remembered for any period of time. Sherry knelt on the sand and wrapped the turtles in a sheet of the magazine, saving the glove.

"We can't keep the turtles anymore," she said and folded the paper over them and made a hole in the sand with the heel of her rain boot.

"They're in the paper?" said her mother, shutting her eyes and looking away.

"Yeah," said Sherry. She placed them in the hole and covered them with sand. The wet matted dog ran by kicking sand up behind it, some got in Sherry's face. She wiped it with her arm and tasted salt and felt the abrasiveness on her skin. Then she said, "I bet there are whales out there. Bigger ones than trains or anything. All those waves there," Sherry pointed in front of her panning the waterline with her finger, "they make them, kicking with their tails and swimming."

Her mother clasped one hand around the back of Sherry's neck and feigned indifference. Sherry almost said something, but forgot what it was before she said it.

"Jeff," Sherry screeched down the beach, but her voice was blown back toward her and he didn't answer.

They walked until her mother said, "I smell roses," sniffing the air. Sea gulls swooped down, landing on the rim of a trash can, one went inside. "Where's that come from," she asked. She turned and looked back in the direction from which they had come.

Sherry stopped too and then her mother walked back.

Sherry continued in the opposite direction. A green bottle showed through the sand and Sherry picked it up, shaking the sand out. It was non-refundable. She felt hungry, like eating spaghetti or something, but then Jeff would want Big Macs, her mother wouldn't want anything. And if they did decide on something to eat they'd get it to go and then sit at the same table in the same kitchen, and discuss for the third time Jeff's new opportunity for success. "I gotta get a place," he'd say and look for somewhere else to move where he didn't have to pay his first and last. Sherry carried the bottle down the beach for a while then threw it out of the waves where it would be swept back and forth, along with the turtles, soon.

Eloise Klein Healy

Roofs

Roofs. Now which color wins?
Red shows best, but if I wait
then there are many green ones
and mine is the newest.
Mine is new but plain.
The old green one down the hill
is laid on with a scallop design
so it looks like a fish-
net or mossy old carp.
Another one, maybe its garage,
swims alongside it, pointed upstream
toward Silverlake Reservoir.
When I think about it,
my house is on the bank
and not swimming away.
You could tie a boat to my cypress.
You could think you were in a painting
in this light, this time of day,
ready to fish.

Nick Campbell

Summer School

In June we carved branches
into whistles, testing the sound
so that, when winter came, we could
bring down the cigar box and breathe
a little easier.

Summer taught us a song,
what we touched we remembered,
careful to carve a place for each finger.

Scott Sandler

Neighbors

I guess the most curious thing about him is his eyes. It's the only thing Pam and I don't agree upon. The lids go way down. Past the pupils—like they're half asleep. So, it's hard to see exactly what color they are. I say his eyes are dead like the lids. I think they're a cold brown like two dirty pennies. Pam says I'm wrong. She says if he looks directly at you, they're like flashbulbs. They take your picture. Pam's never seen him late at night but she bet me that they glow in the dark.

The rest of it we both agree on. He sits all day at the bus stop outside the Fotomat but he never catches a bus. He wears an olive green raincoat and occasionally puts up the hood. He never talks. He wears a Swiss watch but he never gives out the time and no one asks him for it.

Pam says maybe he's related to the lady at the Fotomat. She's got droopy lids too. "Maybe it's some hereditary thing," she says, "only he got the worst of it." Pam dares me to ask her and I do.

The lady stops thumbing through the pictures, turns and looks at me like she's insulted. She says she's never seen him

before.

I cup my hand around my mouth and whisper to her, “Aren’t you scared? He’s weird. He talks to himself. He looks down at his watch all the time. I see his lips move. He looks just like he’s waiting for a bomb to go off or something.”

She spits as she talks. “Well, maybe I’m a little scared. I don’t know. I mean, I’m all alone here and who knows what a guy will do when he’s all junked up.”

“How do you know he’s all junked up,” I ask her.

“You can just tell,” she says.

The next day, Pam and I skip Mr. Damell’s Horticulture class and we hang out at the old elementary school. At the school, I tell Pam the lady’s theory and Pam tells me that the lady doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She bites into a peanut-butter-cream cheese-banana sandwich and says, “You don’t really buy that crap, do you?”

“Where do you think he got that watch? You think maybe he traded some junk for it.”

“He’s not a dooper,” she says, rolling the sticky pieces of banana on her tongue. “Maybe the watch is a present or maybe he worked for it, you don’t know.” She sounds mad. Pam pulls out a twinkie from a brown sack, tears open the plastic with her teeth and gives me half. The playground is pretty quiet, except for a bunch of kids behind us playing White Duck, Yellow Duck. A kid with greasy hair walks around the circle—white duck, white duck, yellow duck. He slaps his hand down hard on someone’s head and Pam and I watch them chase each other. No one else seems to notice us. No one seems to know about this guy either, or at least no one else talks about him. I look at Pam and it’s like it’s our secret.

He is wearing his hood, even though the sun is out. A girl in a plaid skirt and dark braids sits at the opposite end of the bench

and is pretending not to notice him. Pam and I sit across the street, looking out the Fatburger window and we see he is counting to himself. We also notice that he is holding in his hand a grape soda. His hands are wrapped tight around the bottle and then he lifts it up and swirls it around like a beaker full of chemicals. He lifts it up higher and for a minute I think he's making a toast. If his lids open up, he can probably see the sun change the purple color into pink. Pam is tapping on the tabletop.

"How do you think he got that soda," I ask Pam. "You think he actually got up from that bench and walked all the way down to the liquor store by himself."

"No, he never leaves that spot," Pam says.

For a moment there is silence, a gap. No one talks. Pam's just chewing and I'm looking at her chew. I'm looking at her hair and how the sun turns it a burnt orange. I'm looking at the peach colored strap that slips off her freckled shoulder. She makes noises as she chews. She looks up at me and I've got nothing to say. I come up with, "Well, maybe we should meet this guy...say hi, or something."

Pam looks up at me and smiles.

It was Pam's idea that we write him a letter and she did the writing because her printing is better. In the letter we ask him questions like what his name is and where he lives. Pam tells me she came up with the idea, so I have to give him the letter. I say I don't want to. She says one of us has to.

"What if he's junked up," I say.

"He's not," she says and hands me the sheet of paper.

The piece of paper is in my hand, folded up four ways. I cross the street. I am hoping that my sweaty palms don't smudge

the ink and then I say to myself, well, maybe it would be better if he can't read it. I edge over to the bench and I see the lady from the Fotomat. Her grey head fills up the space in the window and she's looking at me. This is the closest I've ever been to this guy. His hood is down and I see his matted black hair. I sit down on the bench next to him. I see the initials V.I. stitched with light green thread in his collar. He's looking down at the sidewalk and the dead lids make him look asleep. My heart's beating fast. I ask him for the time and he doesn't answer. He just continues to look down at the sidewalk. I ask him again if he knows the time. He still doesn't say anything, only this time he holds out his arm. I look at the dark band, at the Roman Numerals and then I slip the paper in his outstretched hand. As he looks up, I look down. Now, I'm like him, looking down at the sidewalk.

This is the exact letter he reads:

Dear Sir,

We've noticed you for a long while now and we would like to meet you. We were wondering if maybe you could tell us your name so we would know what to call you when we pass by. We're also curious about if you live around here. Maybe we're neighbors. That would be neat. My dad works at the Van De Kamps down the street and if you want we could get you some free desserts.

Yours Truly,

Pam Sharp and
Joseph McAuley

I look up at the man and am looking for an expression on his face. The man sticks the note in his pocket.

"My name is Joseph," I say and hold out my hand.

The man's thin frame bends down and picks up the grape soda bottle. He holds his head back and drinks the last few drops

of the, now, hot juice. He coughs and then in a deep hoarse voice whispers, "Leave me alone." I look across the street and see Pam staring out the Fatburger window. I stand up and slowly cross towards her. I hear a rumbling behind me, a screech and when I turn around he is gone. The bus is turning down the corner and all I see now is the thick cloud of black exhaust fumes.

Pam's mother honks the horn and I get into the back of the Sedan. Pam rides shotgun. Pam doesn't say it, but she hates me. She looks at me and in her head she is yelling. She is yelling at me. Saying how could you have let him get away. Pam's mother is adjusting her rear view mirror and is humming along with the tune that is on the radio. It is dark outside and I look up at the moon. It crowns the Fotomat, Fatburger and the entire city. When Mrs. Sharp pulls out onto the road, the moon follows. The moon turns with every turn of the road. It disappears every now and then behind a building or a billboard, but it always reappears.

I picture him. He is on the bus, holding on to the metal bar in front of him. He is sitting alone. The bus is fairly empty. He looks out the window and behind the blank face and dead lids, he is looking at the same moon and for that moment we are connected.

Pam turns around and says, "Did you at least see what color his eyes were?"

I shrug my shoulders and mouth the word, "No."

"Whose eyes?" says her mother above the music.

"No one," Pam says and turns up the radio.

Margaret Ritchie

his house

under the oak we plan
his house. i imagine the door
where the small patch of grass is;
the windows for branches.
you feed me anise seeds
waiting for my wince, you
the engineer of this space,
maybe my kitchen where inside
i might stew vegetables,
the garden set aside
as an afterthought.

and like plumped red peppers
we sit in the sun our faces wet
and tender with expansion
and any sound startles us
out here
on your land even beyond the oak,

we play until dark;
shooting arrows or making love
and i ask about a child
but you are building a house
with room enough for guests.

we are not only lovers of the land or trees
yet sometimes we sit in the shadow of the oak
the sharp brown leaves a picnic blanket
where we eat and plan
building these rooms

nana

guts the turkey, the liver
staining her thin fingers poking
at its behind with severity
her small hand finally driven
past the tailbone into the open cavity.

i remember the dentist
trembling as he pulls back my lips
exposing my pinkish gums.
i know the age spots on his head like the planets.
i know that red round globe from a moveable chair.
and his probing was painless
his fingers longer,
sour and softer
than my breath.

nana boils water in a tin pan
for tea, sets places for the three of us:

papa, her and me and i watch her
at the cutting board, her hair white
as the porcelain sink, carving
a cooked chicken.

it is this-
the time she takes now
that makes me cry,

those lovely fingers.

Steve Hetland

City's Edge

I live at the edge of L.A., at the smoggy end of the Valley, where the grass grows brown and the mountains are rising. In Sylmar.

Every day I walk with my dog, Allen, in the fields and hills behind my house. I take my camera sometimes in case we see anything but mainly so my parents think I'm still working at it, taking pictures and submitting them. Usually we don't see anything anyways, the same half-buried station wagon that I once tried to renovate or a rabbit sometimes. Though less of those now than a year ago, before they put in the landfill. They started with the road, which took them a week. It connects to the main road about two hundred yards south of my house, runs straight across the field, turns right to climb the hill and left to disappear over the top. Since then the trucks have been coming and going all day long, the ridge on the hill has grown a hundred feet in grassy, green steps like the Andes, and the rabbits have become few, thin and rat-bitten.

One day when Allen and I were starting out on one of these walks, a blue glint at the foot of the hill caught my eye. We made

for the glint on a path that led in its direction. Allen walked alongside but off the path a few feet, where he could catch more burrs. We passed the station wagon with the green patch still visible on its roof. The renovation ended there ten years ago, put on hold until a new can of green spray paint could be bought or found. We walked further and Allen stirred up a rabbit. They both bolted but the rabbit was too near its hole. "Knock it off," I yelled and Allen trotted back, his tail wagging spryly.

Once over the slope that had partly concealed it, we could see that the blue glint was a car. We left the path and made our way across the field and its thin, dry bushes until we reached the car, an upside down 'seventy-three or -four Chevelle. Its sides were wrinkled and its roof compressed so that on the passenger's side there was only six inches or so of window. It tilted forward so that the front of the hood touched the ground. I looked up the hill. The divots started all the way at the top where the road turns left. A bright white dump truck was climbing the road just now. Its pistons hammered the air with cartoonish volume.

I walked around the car once then put my head in through the driver's side window, which had about a foot and a half left to it. The upholstery inside was torn and cigarette burnt. The dashboard had lost its glove compartment and radio. The last ones to drive it had turned the air on cool and the fan on full blast. It must have been a warm ride. I saw their mistake. They were recirculating the air instead of drawing it in fresh. It's hard for the brain to think on recirculated air.

I pulled my head out, called Allen, who had wandered off somewhere, and we left the Chevelle, but not before a final look. It was strange to see, with its dark, complicated underside skyward, warming in the sun.

Walking back, I remembered something. I remembered waking up the night before to a rumbling and thinking for one disoriented moment before falling back to sleep that the hill was

erupting.

The next day Allen beat me to the car. When I got there, I found out why. The smell of rotting flesh nearly knocked me over. I ran to the rear of the car and tapped the trunk. I ran around the car once then stuck my head through the window. I reached in for a lever just above the steering wheel. I pulled but nothing happened. I got up and ran around the car once more. Trying the lever again, I pulled until it gave and I heard behind me the trunk slap the ground. I stood up and went to the back of the car, moving slowly now. I peered around the edge into the trunk. It was big, dark but empty. A beer bottle rolled across the ground away from it. I looked up the hill a little ways where Allen was sniffing and pawing a dead rabbit.

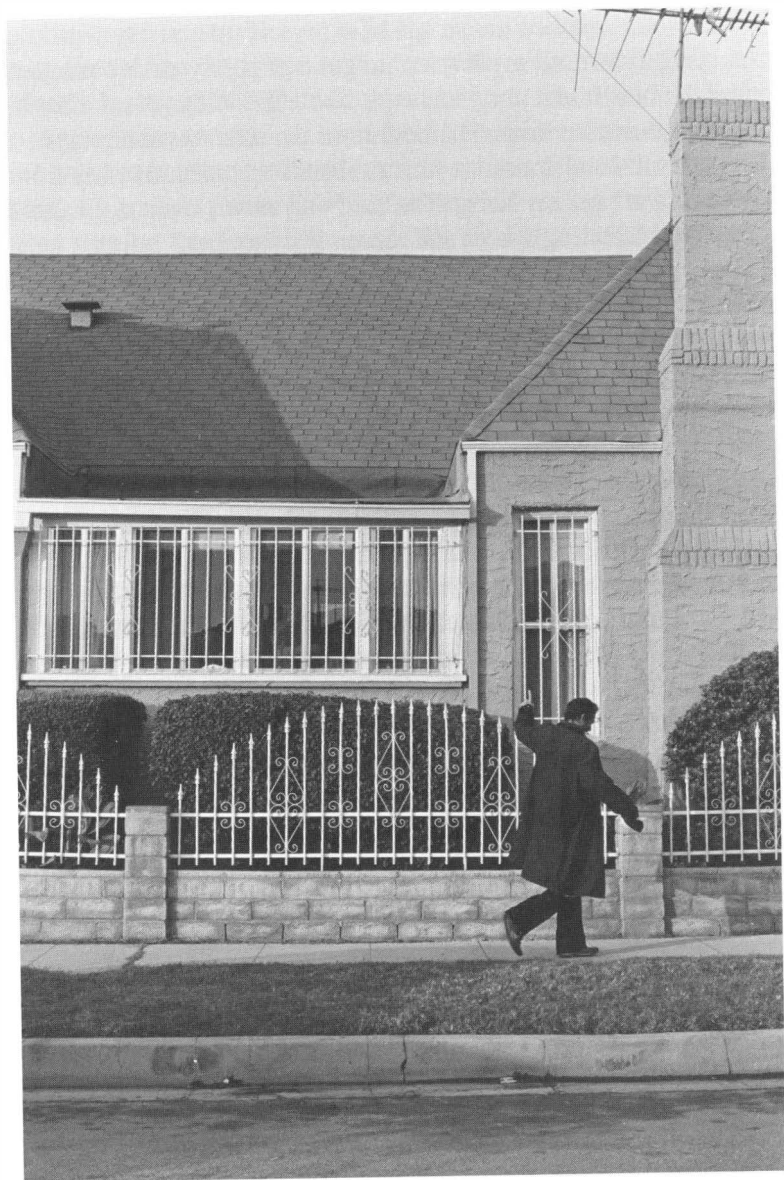
On the third day I brought my camera. I took pictures of the car from every side. I took pictures of the car with the hazy valley in the background and I took them with the hill in the background, while bright white and yellow dump trucks climbed the hill. One I took while Allen sniffed the bug battered grill and one I took from up the hill a little ways where I could get the entire bottom of the car. Afterwards I sat down and rested a while but I couldn't pull my gaze from the car. The dents and scrapes on it that at first had seemed so random now didn't seem so. They seemed designed, as if each mark had to be just where it was. I got up and took more pictures, most of which were duplicates of ones I had already taken, except for a few of the interior.

On the next day I experimented with different lighting. I woke up early to get a few with the sun rising to the car's rear and orange on the bumper. Then I came out later, as the sun was setting and reflecting blue off of the metallic flecks in the car's paint.

On the fifth day a Santa Ana was blowing. The sun was bright and the wind dry and sharp with sand. I couldn't keep my eyes from blinking as I crossed the backyard. This time I had along a tripod and a hand held shutter control that connects to a cord. From

our backyard, we stepped into a field covered with trash as it usually is on Santa Ana days. We walked past the wagon with the green splotch. I stopped and focused my camera on it but I didn't shoot. It was doorless and hollow, as if the fifteen years alone in the field had eaten at it, turned it into bones. In another fifteen the dust and wind will probably have finished burying it. I walked on with Allen at my side but two feet off the path. We arrived at the Chevelle and I set up the tripod. I tested a couple angles before settling on one, low from near the front tire aimed at the driver's window. I connected the cord and satisfied myself one last time that the focus was correct. I straightened up and looked off at the valley. The sky was smogless but a bit tan at the edges with dust the wind had blown in from the desert. I yawned and stretched. The wind caught my hat, blowing it to the ground. I turned around and gazed at the mountain. A bright pink dump truck was climbing the road. Over the ridge a truck must've just dumped a load from a school or something because the wind had just caught a flock of papers and had sent it over the edge. I laughed. It looked gaudy like a movie set of Krakatoa or Vesuvius erupting confetti. I picked up my hat, straightened my tie and got into the car. With just a foot and a half of window on the driver's side I had to squeeze. I kept crawling until I was cleanly in, my head at the passenger's side. The air inside was still, even stale like any other old car which yet surprised me somehow. I felt broken glass on the back of my head and a jagged wrinkle of the roof on my shoulder blade. I bent my knees to get my legs out from under the steering wheel, then raised my feet to the car's floor. With my feet still up, I slid my torso along so that I was vertical under my feet in the driver's position. The blood pressed against the inside of my head. The wind whistling over the car's bottom just above me seemed loud. I took a moment to catch my breath then I reached out the window with my left hand for the shutter control, which the sun had warmed. After another pause I heaved up with my arms, straightening my back at the same time

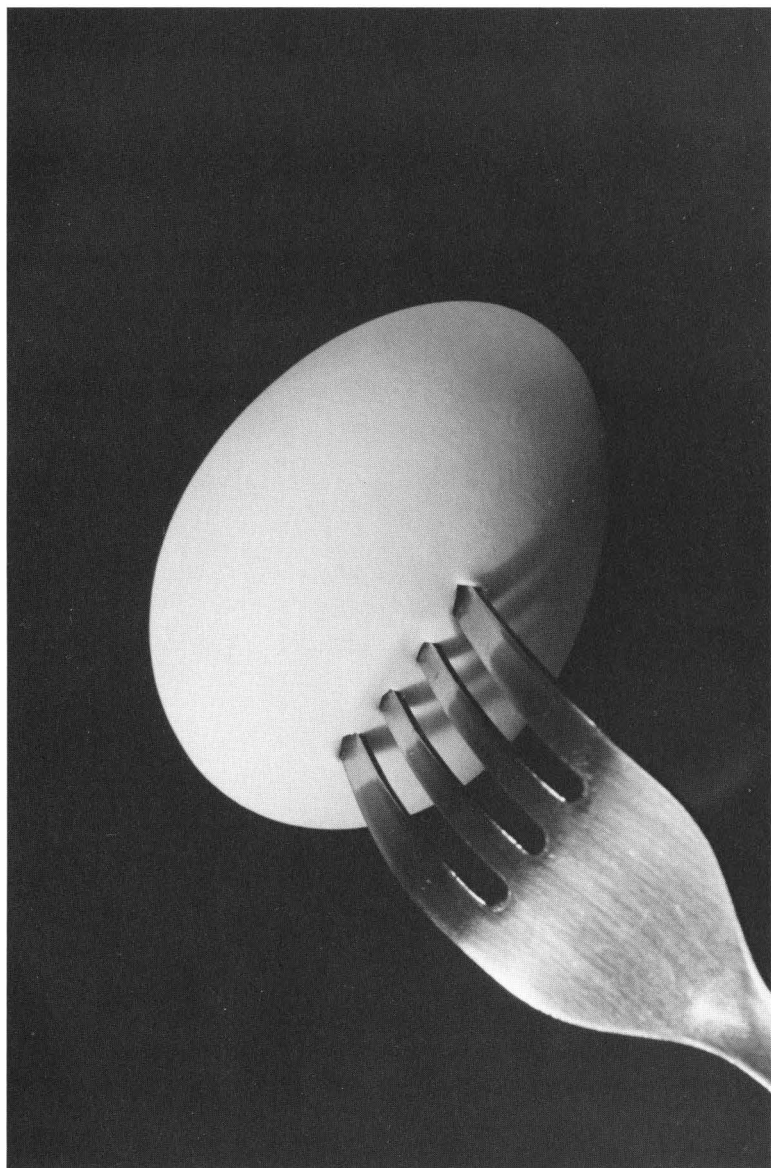
until my butt touched the seat. I held myself up entirely with my trembling arms until my legs could get a grip. My ankles reached under the bench seat and pinched it like a kid's legs do to a bar to hang upside down from. The bottom of the seat was sharp against my ankles. I slowly raised my hands, brushing pieces of glass from my palms off on my shirt. The tie hung down over my face. I gripped the steering wheel and turned my face until bulging eyes focused on the camera lens. I smiled. Something clicked, then cracked. I slammed into the roof as the seat had pulled loose from the floor, my legs still pinching it. My neck was kinked so that my head was pressed into my shoulder. I could no longer see the camera but judging from the slack suddenly in the cord I guessed that it fell over. I squeezed the button several times, taking pictures of what I wasn't sure, the ground maybe or the sky or the back of my head scrunched below my body. I let the shutter control go and tried to move but decided not to, thinking I'd wait just a little while instead. I felt weak, not exhausted or hurt really, just weak. I closed my eyes and listened. Far away a truck shifted gears. Yes I'd wait a while, I decided. I'd just wait until someone found me.











Photograph Credits

Stephen A. Katcher Fairfax District #1

Ermin Nazarino untitled

Jeff Pantaleo The Night Before Halloween

Rebecca Hay untitled

Tetsuro Sato Fantasy

Hart Schulz

Taking Pictures

The jeep hurdles train tracks and jolts us. It's dawn, and coastal fog is a smoke in the orange trees. Something has turned over a truck full of them—now, of course, it's quite empty. But a few stubbornly have found nooks in the rusted concave of the truckbed. They are inside half-a-tunnel. Others spew their seeds to a road. We'll find some later, seeds, wedged into the tread like limp nails, at the South Lake Tahoe motel. They will have held on for four hundred miles of gravel and dirt and pavement. This may be a new way for orange groves to propagate. They'll have to drop out somewhere. My sister once sprouted a lemon seed in a paper towel stuffed into a waterglass on a windowsill. When water hits them, they're like popcorn in hot oil. Alongside the road people are hurrying for free oranges even before the sun. It is like a battlefield. One man has the face of a raisin. He has worked the longest and hardest and probably will get the most oranges. The jeep keeps rolling as if it knows. We have a long way to go, little rest ahead of us, and no time at all for oranges. For a moment we are tempted—oranges would be perfect when the desert pounds into the convertible around noon—but we go on. Later we will wish we had taken a picture of the bright oranges in the grey air on the almost

black road with its fluorescent, bloody spine. Two years hence, I will pride myself that the smell of orange blossom is a reminder!

My best friend Trig has climbed up on the white monument to pose for a photo. This place is a graveyard, and the photo is unfortunate because shadows have hidden his face. Just the same, I use the jeep as a tri-pod and it crosses my mind that the heat of the engine, of the sun on the metal, may harm film. A lizard has found the shade of a wheelwell. There is no expression on Trig's face because it's blank with the darkness. Behind him two things loom—jet-black Japanese letters that climb up the chalky needle, and the grey angles of the Sierra. Neither of them are in the shade, but Trig is. Manzanar is the graveyard for interned Japanese-Americans. There's real cause for concern about barbed-wire, rusted and hidden just below the desert dust. Neither of us would want to change a tire! We're looking for the lake. Even though it's over one hundred shining degrees, the water is cold. They used it to drink. When you jump in, you worry about your head. It's possible to have a stroke! And there's broken glass on the bottom too. Kids from Bishop, kids who don't know about bad luck, come here to get drunk. Looking through the camera, you can follow a trail of junipers and sagebrush, green and purple, that creeps like a line of hair to a navel, to the shallow, blue reservoir. It makes a nice picture. But you have to watch out for rattlers—they're everywhere. And a man with a camera is easy prey.

It's a good place to sleep, and juniper fires burn long and hard. Mountains become the black froth of land or a headstone for the flat, historic desert. Trig has seen a ghost in the underbrush. But it turns out to be a quick, slanted field mouse. There may not even be underbrush. This is a desert, a place of empty cans and skeletons. The sand is an old mountain that died. All this is too much so we are in the 31 Flavors in Bishop. They really only have 27, and 3 to

5 are specialty ice creams. Tonight High Sierra Caramel, Root Beer Nut, and Bar-B-Que Chicken. A small blond catches Trig's eye. She is another angel in the crowd. The girls at work wear chocolate dresses with strawberry and vanilla bibs. They are required to wear hats too. And scooping ice cream is serious business. At 10pm, one of them will polish and scrub on her knees in the empty store as we watch from the jeep outside. There are three people now lapping ice cream, and I'm worried about my seatcovers. They are new and cost \$50 each. The lighted storefront is a nighttime desert jewel, and the people inside are like animals captured in a funny kind of picture zoo. The blond is saying, whispering, that she likes ghosts and can't believe Bar-B-Que either. She calls 31 Flavors "B and R's" because she's from Backeast.

Our friend Royce has a picture above his television. It is his brown-faced father in a sunny kimono and holding a samurai sword. There are other men, and maybe they were drinking when the photo was taken. To a little kid, the photo doesn't make sense. Behind them are the Sierras in the winter. There is thin snow on cardboard boxes. These are their buildings. There is a tiny woman with a broom too. I am only fifteen and when I go to his house to play guitar I feel uneasy. I can't help it, and nobody talks about it. Royce teaches me everything he knows about the guitar. He plays and shyly sings "Sweet Baby James". It is the sound of an angel. James Taylor's eyes are like cameras. Everything in the black and white photo is black or white. "The Birkshires seemed dreamlike on account of the frosting—With ten miles behind me and ten thousand more to go."

The angel in the crowd has pulled her sleeping bag down below bare breasts and sat up. Her hair looks like the jeep in the wind. The sand behind her is blond too in the morning and the little lake is thrilling! All this makes a good photograph. Her breasts are

small and point outward, away from a flat, hard place. She was sexually abused by her father. Two days later Trig will mention her perfume on his sleeping roll, and we'll destroy the photo because she's only seventeen when she said eighteen. Trig stretches his arms out at the sky and suggests we all take a picture at the monument. The auto-mechanism trips the camera off the tri-pod and scratches the jeep on its way down the desert. The girl has climbed to the top of the needle wastefully. It is the work of a Japanese prisoner.

My body is a corkscrew and I'm driving a golfball into thin desert. We don't know how they got enough water here to keep it green. I've taken off my shorts and Trig is taking a dramatic picture of me with Mt. Whitney in the backdrop and this golf course with tiny white flowers in the rough. We are playing golf naked. A car rolls by and honks. Cottonwood blossoms drift about like butterflies. It's hard to tell the cottonwood blossoms from the ball as it hovers high above an artificial oasis. Someone has planted alfalfa and it's growing like mad! We have hit two balls into the thick, green swamp. Our ankles are muddy but the smell is cut hay. At the 15th we are completely nude but for bulky, black cameras dangling from our necks. 31 Flavors has sponsored one of the benches, but its shining, tin banner is too hot to lean against. At the 18th I lead by one stroke and am just off the green. Trig is 250 yards from the hole. We are poor boys playing a rich man's game. His driver glints in the sun. He has hit a billowing ball. It flies beyond the reach of fragrance and into an invisible jet-stream. It is so high I have time to aim my camera, to put on a sun-filter. Trig's ball is waiting to fall onto the green! The feeling is eerie. It feels like there's war and there's been a stop in the action. It has travelled 250 yards in the desert. If I look away the ball will fall and roll into the hole and I will lose. So I stare down the golf ball and become its captive.

I take a hit on 18. To my right the guy with the cigarette draws a 4. The woman to his left is wearing a Hawaiian print MuMu. She's had three twenty-ones in a row, and this is her third mai-tai in 25 minutes. The room is a cloud of sparkling, silver smoke. To my left a suited man is waiting for me and counting cards. His long, black lips move automatically and silently. He looks at me like a bad memory, the look of scorn. But I draw a deuce and I have beaten the dealer's 19. Trig is playing slot machines with a cowboy he met. The cowboy's truck has a bumper sticker that says "Shit Happens." Trig wins a great deal of money in a short time, so we leave. "I may be ugly, but I'm not stupid," the cowboy says. He's not a real cowboy, but he wears a tall hat and calls his pick-up Bessie. At three in the morning I awake to hear him puking in the bathroom. Nevertheless, the three of us are smart gamblers. And the big lake beyond the shining casinos, with the moon in its heart, seems to be waiting.

This is Northern California and the deer have come down to our camp. We are laughing at the starry sky. Would it be funnier to get up and piss on the other's sleeping forehead with or without his permission? It's clear it would be funnier with his permission. The darkness is a hole we've climbed into willfully. We are walking, feeling the dome of the road with our feet, hidden from the moon by the canyon. Neither of us can sleep so we're off to find my swimming hole. I'm leaping off a cliff into warm, black air, then into the lock of cold water. My forearm scrapes the gravel at the bottom. I have never felt so free, this being like a trout inside the stream. If I could take a picture it would be a deep, black swirl. Trig loves the pool too and we are overcome with euphoria. At the bottom of the pool, I dream of someone I once knew. Each night my mind fills with pictures of her dying of cancer. First it is a walnut at the base of her back; then, she falls onto a hard kitchen floor in slow motion and loses her eyes.

Lynn Marsh

Flying Low Into Salt Lake City

You might imagine that a neatnick
designed this place.

One with a predilection for velvet,
a penchant for nubby textures.

It's starkness contemporary.

But grounded now we see the field
abutting the landing strip has runway daisies
bending over its edges,
and bare spots further out
where sundry weeds are going about
their dry business.

Impressionists at some time flew
low into Salt Lake City.
Don't worry about the fuzzy expressions
in their work,
or close how the images seem
to bleed into one another.

Alice Allen

October

For William Carlos Williams

Half awake at dawn
I thought that golden poplar
was the sun itself
streaming in my window
so bright against
the shadowed mountains
and all day that
flame-shaped tree
has flickered in my mind
demanding celebration.

I want that poplar
and that particular light
to linger in my poem
the way a red wheel barrow
stays in yours:
forever fixed and colorfast.

October's such a fragile month—
next week it will be gone.

Glenn Dwiggins

Suzy Q

This is what probably happened. Vera looked out the window the following morning, watched the gray stormclouds withdrawing from the sky like curtains. She then might have seen the blinding pinpoints of light from the drops on the tomato vines that clung to the trellis leaning on the shed. She may have also noticed the wet shaggy-dog smell of the morning as she followed with her eyes the silvery slime trails left by the retreating snails, which felt the air warming. All this she would process into one sentence:

“Suzy Q got wet last night.”

The hell with Suzy Q, would be what Silas, that’s her husband, thought.

“The heck with the damn car,” he would say. That’s the way he was, and most likely still is. He would verbally echo his every thought. You could tell by the way he talked that he thought in short, relevant sentences of five words or less. He would think, there go the chickens, and a second later say, “There go the chickens.”

Whatever really happened that morning, at least one thing was different. I was not there. Neither was Suzy Q. Silas did not

know that yet, but Vera did. She knew of a lot of things that Silas didn't.

There is the matter of the car. Suzy Q, a fire-orange Jaguar E-type with a chrome scowl, one good eye and a tear in the top, became a device for communication for Vera and me, the live-in household maintenance-man. When Silas was in town making cabinets or something, Vera watched me as I tuned each carburetor until the motor purred softly. During the three months of dry and warm and dust that settled on Suzy Q's smooth curves, Vera and I would wash it, dressed in our swimsuits. That was before last night's rain.

The car was hers by inheritance. He hated it. He thought she loved it more than him. This wasn't true. I knew that more because of what she didn't say about him than what she did say. That's how she was, and most likely still is. People don't change overnight. Anyway, she gave him her love, and last night, as the rain fell, she gave me Suzy Q, proving me right, and Silas wrong.

They had a garden—he had the garden really. My main duty there was insect control. Silas liked to think he had everything but spareribs growing in it. That's what he said, like this:

“Got nearly everything growing in there. But spareribs.” He was quite proud of it. He said so. He never let me go into the garden alone, unsupervised, when he was home. When I went in to get some herbs for Vera, he'd say, “Don't cut too much. Got to grow back,” and then follow me in. On hot days, sitting on the black soil, I would forget the heavy heat and the drops of sweat forming on my forehead and under my shirt, sliding like bugs crawling down my back. I was drunk with those moist, dense smells: the mint, the rosemary, the marjoram, the parsley. “People misunderstand parsley,” Silas once said, “Try it on a burger, for lettuce.” I said nothing, sat there stewing or marinating in the warm odors, and pulled leaves

off the tomato vines. Out there in the garden, even with Silas's droning commentary on his thoughts about herbs and vegetables, and the frequent low-flying buzz, it was always silent, calm, even quieter than in my bed at night, where my amplified breathing and the crickets' racket receded only when I entered my loud dreams.

I once watched Silas gently lift a damaged patch of basil I had accidentally stepped on, combing it up between his thick fingers, spraying it with water, until it stood up again on its own. "You just knocked it unconscious," he said. He sighed. "People don't understand plants."

Vera was looking out the nearby kitchen window, smiling and squinting in the sunlight. "Where's my marjoram?" she said.

"Come get it yourself," Silas said.

"In that filth?" She laughed and closed the window. Silas flung a soft dirtclod quickly after. It hit the glass and made a sort of 'thupff' noise. Vera stuck her tongue out.

"She's some woman," Silas said. I said nothing. He was right; he often was, except of course about him and the car, and which she loved better.

I stand now at the edge of a cliff overlooking the countryside, watching the sun rise and the clouds retreating like curtains. Somewhere down there, among the mixture, a house here, a barn there, there a church, next to an industrial plant or a drunken checkerboard patch of farmland, is Vera, probably looking out the window in her bathrobe, not so carefully tied around her body, talking about her car like a pet, and of course Silas, talking about it like a scrap heap. "What's wrong with the Chevy?" he might be saying.

She is also probably wondering where I am, for unlike Silas, she knows I am not there, for unlike Silas, she was there when I was on my way out, on that rainy night. I was at the kitchen door, sliding on my leather jacket, when she came to me, in the same bathrobe, her perfume almost completely worn off. I liked that

faint-flower smell almost as much as that of the garden. As she approached, bare feet making a soft slapping sound on the hardwood floor, I could tell she was finding ways to stop me from going, formulating questions and arguments. As I was about to put on the helmet to the motorcycle I rode here, she said, "It's raining. Take the car. Here's the keys." I looked at her. The robe hung loosely on her body. I had never seen that much of her before. She was probably aware of this, but she only said, "Don't worry. Silas won't miss it. I'll tell him that I don't care to get it back." I was getting hot in my jacket, so I said okay, some sort of thanks, and left.

I think now about Vera, how she was that night, even though the flowers along this cliffedge are daisies, not lilacs, the scent of her perfume. I think of how she made me feel, particularly inside my jeans, when she smiled at me over the chromed engine of Suzy Q, and when she handed me the cold, shiny keys last night. I look at the car, the orange splashed with gray-brown mud, and remember how Silas hated it, his wife's most valued possession. I wonder about love. I think about what it is not, like logical and predictable. I remember that time in the garden, how Vera and Silas looked at and talked to each other, as if they shared a secret, in which I seemed to be involved, but was never allowed to share. I remember the smell of mixed lilacs, gas and grease as Vera and I took Suzy Q out for trial runs, her in the passenger seat, long brown hair slapping against the seatback, the three of us winding along the curvy mountain road, myself, Vera, and . . .

Suzy Q had taken in quite a bit of water already. The dry weather had lulled us into neglecting to cover the car at night. The leather seats were wet and had that wet-leather smell.

As I drove, the road was fast turning to slippery chocolate, and I had only the one headlight and my memory to guide me along through the rain, which fell hard. My face was constantly getting

wet from the water coming in through the hole. Then the sensation came to me, a feeling that Vera was in the car with me. Looking over at the empty seat only strengthened the sensation. I noticed the lilac-scented “Chippendales” air freshener. I knew it was there, but I’ve never been in the car alone before. I drove into the night, sensing her presence as strongly as I did her absence. The rain grew unbearable. I saw a sign with an arrow flash ahead of me. It said, “Vista Point.” I pulled over and fell asleep, with my jacket covering the hole in the top.

Birds are now flying overhead, some squawking in pleasure over discovering snails which didn’t find cover in time, others just happy that the rain has stopped. Some of the farm machinery has been started up, and the growling, burbling sounds are occasionally sent up by the breeze, blowing up the face of the cliff like waves.

I walk back to the car, knowing that the feeling that Vera is in there will be gone. As I start the engine, which speaks for itself, I think of Silas, who once told me, “A perfect garden takes work. Time and work.”

Deborah Williams

I Used to Watch Westerns

I used to watch westerns
But I just don't anymore...
Actually, it's gettin' hard to watch anything

Like trying to watch luchas on Saturday night
Papa's hollerin' 'cause he's out of beer.
Mama yells go get a job.
My ruca called three times to tell me she's had no period for
three months. And I'm leavin' out the door to find someplace
quiet
just when Mad Dog Cortinas hammerlocks that white guy Pretty
Boy George.

My pants slide onto the sheepskin
pointed patent leather toe spurs
my short into a canter
through the barrio.

I pick up my carnal, standing on the corner.

He's packin' — A holster.

He says, "hang left on Soto/park back/Danny's Doghut/
E Street clicka rounding up chevys."

Mad chevys with their eyes on glaring us down

My carnal says he could use a little music, turns up KRLA

He says, "Jimmy turned Jesus/brother killed/couldn't take it."

Little Richard wants his baby back

I can't find a cigarette

the vatos are getting out of their cars

Little Richard lays on the soul "oooooooooooooooooh Babeee..."

Orale mama, they done it again. A 38 right into my chest.

Lucky, I keep a spare to bite on

when County Hospital is cutting a hole for a plastic hose
saves my collapsing lung.

A week later

my carnal and I turn south on Brooklyn

to the tattoo parlor

past cringing houses, smoking like teepees

to hang safe with the homeboys

drinking, talking war

My carnal says, "we're tough"

and I say,

"Ya, real tough."

But I don't think I say it right.

Mark Mann

Fractions

So my roommate Kogan comes in and says, "Look at this," and he drops half a classified section on the table, and I say "What?" and he tells me to look in the upper right, but I still don't get it so he gets tight and taps hard on it a few times and then I see that it says "Free Greyhounds" over a telephone number.

"Maybe they only have three legs," I say, but Kogan doesn't think it's too funny.

"I'm calling," he says.

He talks long enough to write down the address and the time he should come. When he hangs up he says, "It's not that far. After dinner."

"I thought we're going into Nogales tonight."

"We are," he says, and snaps a beer off its ring. "We are."

"Where're we going to put a dog that big?" I say, but Kogan hasn't figured that out yet.

"Maybe we could sell it," he says. "I mean, they're free, so let's go over there and check it out."

"If they're worth money, then how come they're free?"

"Don't ask me," he says. "Ask the guy who's giving them

away.”

On the way there we stop off at Skaggs to pick up a couple six-packs. We finish two cans each before we find the right street. The light is fading but we finally come to the place, a rusting trailer out in a field at the end of a dirt road. Most of the field is fenced off. There's a truck behind the trailer, the kind with slots to carry dogs, and angled up beside the truck is a '69 Goat, gun-metal, mint.

A woman, sitting and smoking on an old loveseat by the front door, watches us approach. She looks young by the way she's dressed, a white halter and white jeans, and by the way she wears her hair, pulled back tight on her head into a short tail that curls to one side.

We get out of the car, but the woman doesn't get up. She keeps watching. Her nipples poke out through her shirt, but she's not as young as she looked back there. She has the feet around the eyes and the pudgy, pitted flesh on the backs of her arms. Still, she looks pretty good for someone who's maybe forty-five.

Kogan says hi to her, and she takes a long hit on the cigarette. She looks us over some more, then she says, “You're the one who called, I bet. You're here to get yourself a free dog.” She says this like she knows something, and the corners of her mouth aren't pinched as closely now, rising lightly into a grin.

“We'd like to take a look,” Kogan says.

“Bill,” she yells at the screen door, “they're here about the dogs,” but nobody answers. She pushes herself up from the loveseat and disappears into the trailer, the door clapping behind her. I hear her say, “Will you come on,” and then a man puts his head out the door and says he'll be with us in a minute. He's from the country or the south, maybe Texas. He has an accent.

Kogan reaches into the car and pulls off two beers. We drink and wait a few minutes before the guy, Bill, comes back out. He's tall and thick with a big round beard, and when he turns into what's left of the sun the light picks up the red in it. The woman

returns with a fresh cigarette and falls back on the loveseat. She draws her legs up and splays them along the cushion. She doesn't seem to care about anything one way or the other.

"You wait here at the fence," Bill says to us, pointing. "I'll bring them on out."

A few minutes later he comes out of a long tin shed with about ten greyhounds following him. They follow him on the other side of the fence to where we are. All of the dogs are muzzled, but they're beautiful anyway, especially the blacks. They're excited and weave back and forth in front of us, a single current making passes at the fence, heads up, ears back. Every now and then the ears twitch forward. After a while they calm down.

"They're good-looking animals," I say to Bill.

"Sure they are," he says.

I ask him if I can touch one and he collars a brindle with a choke and parks it sideways along the fence. When it looks over at Kogan, I can see the white crescent of its eye. Its head keeps close to Bill's knee, and he closes his hand on its ear so that the top of it drops out of his fist like a flower from a vase. The coat is smooth and cool. I can tell it's outside a lot from the coolness of it, the cool air that gets inside a coat.

"How come you're giving them away?" I say.

"That wasn't my idea," he says. "This lady down in Tuscon heard about it and got me to give her a couple weeks to see if she could find people to take them. She took one herself. She put the ad in the paper."

"Heard about what?" Kogan says.

"Don't get me wrong now," he says. "I mean, I'm in business here. I race these dogs, and if they can't turn the fractions, then they're no good to me. Too much to feed. They gotta be put down."

After this sinks in I tell him that it seems a little rough, and I see him tighten all over.

"What's that mean," he says.

"I don't mean anything," I say. "Forget it."

He shrugs it off. "Okay," he says. "Forget it. They never see it coming anyway, they think it's dinnertime." And as an afterthought: "If I can find the time I might just go ahead and unload them all down in Mexico. They run them slower down there. It's a pain in the neck, though. Some of those Mexican boys are slick as owl shit."

Kogan says, "Sure, I understand."

I pet the dog again, and Bill lets go of the ear. "Well, what do you think?" he says.

"I don't know," I say, looking up at Kogan. "We live in an apartment."

Bill rakes his beard a few times. "They're fine if you run them good," he says. "Takes the edge off when they're good and tired."

"We can take turns," Kogan says to me. "Change off every day."

"I don't know."

"Come on," Kogan says. "You can sit in the park and let it fly around on its own."

Bill puts the muzzle back on and lets the dog loose. "You know they been coursed, don't you," he says.

I don't know what he means. Kogan pretends that he's chewing something so he doesn't have to answer. Bill knows that neither one of us knows what he's talking about, but he waits like a teacher for one of us to ask.

"What's 'coursed'?" I finally say.

"You seen my track out there," he says, jacking his thumb over his shoulder. "They been coursed for racing. Trained on rabbits. Once you sharpen up the instinct like that, once they get the taste, they'll go after just about anything small that moves. You don't have a cat or anything, do you?"

I shake my head.

“No small dog or a small kid around your place?”

“No.”

“Then everything oughta be fine if you keep it leashed. Whyn’t you guys talk it over.”

Kogan and I go back to the car. “Let’s roll,” I say. “This guy’s jerking us.”

Kogan looks dismayed.

“I’m not living in an apartment with a dog who kills small things that move,” I say. “Let’s go.”

“We could sell it down in Mexico like he said he’s going to,” he says, but he knows it’s hopeless.

“We’re gonna think about it,” I yell across to Bill. “We’ll call you.”

“By Sunday,” he yells back. “Sunday’s the last day.”

We should be in Nogales in less than an hour. Kogan’s driving over the limit because he’s buzzed. It’s too late to get any of the free shots of tequila or mezcal the storekeepers pour for the Americans who cross over for the day. I guess they figure if you’re not drunk yet you’re not the kind who’s likely to spend much money regardless. I prefer the cantinas anyway, especially the ones with patios on the street. I saw a good fight at a place like that once. This little Mexican, no bigger than me, worked over some heavy-muscle type from Phoenix who had been bouncing off people all night. The Mexican was very fast, and it was beautiful the way he took that guy apart.

Kogan pulls off on the shoulder to piss. It’s very dark and bugs are flicking through the dust in the headlight beams, which break when Kogan cuts through them. I look out on the desert for anything there, anything solid to fix on, a big Saguaro maybe, but we’re nowhere and it’s dark and empty and no matter how hard I look it doesn’t lighten up. It’s like chasing something you always

used to catch but now it's always up ahead, just out of reach, and you don't even need to see it anymore, you can taste it in your mind so it must be a memory.

I light a match over my wrist to see what time it is. I hope Kogan gets on with it so we can get the hell going. I hit the horn and it lets out a hard, shattering note which should juice him good, which should crack through his bones. Things break in on you, zing, just like that, even when you're looking out. You get to a point and you don't even know it. You're somewhere else, and then the time comes.

Ron Pronk

Turtle Parable

This tom day
I came upon a turtle upside down
swimming the breeze.
We talked for awhile.

He told me about the hill.
“Unnegotiable,” he said.
I nodded. “I, too
work for a living,”
I told him about the city.

“Give it up,” he said
and we turned each other over.

Five-Day Dance

A strand leaps wind free
from the tight bale
and skip tumbles for the barn door.

The last school bell
taught us to straw dance
around the cartwheeling sun.

Kristina McHaddad

Dinner

It might seem absurd,
this inability to stand up
from where she is seated on the kitchen floor.
Suddenly
there is nothing strong enough to keep her
to hold her up at the stove
where the pot of tomatoes and onions and herbs
boil inside out,
wound with dark stains
the white linoleum.

Ken Siewert

Coffee in a Styrofoam Cup

It's Sunday morning and I scrounge through the kitchen looking for something to eat. He is up and sitting in the big green chair and Grandma has already gone to work. She opens up the cafe every Sunday. Monday is her day off and she does the washing on the old ring washer on the back porch. God, she cusses my blue jeans and his overalls. Once she got her arm stuck in the ringer and she probably would have killed him if she could have got loose, him standing there laughing and all. Sunday is his day off, her being gone, and when he ain't feeling to bad we go to the chicken fights. I got me two fine roosters and I made tote boxes for them in wood shop at school. Teacher wanted me to make something pretty like a cedar chest, but I just hunted up some plywood from the woodpile behind the house and them chicken boxes didn't cost nothing except for the hinges.

About the only thing I can find to eat is corn flakes, so I open up the refrigerator and smell the milk. I got in the habit of smelling milk before I drink it, especially around this house. Sometimes it smells sour, but it isn't, so I take just a bit on the end of my tongue to make sure. It only takes two or three times of spitting a big mouth full of sour milk all over yourself before you

get in the habit of smelling milk. The milk's just fine, but I wish I had a banana. I like bananas in my breakfast food.

I take my bowl into the front room and sit down on the couch across from him. He has a cigarette kind of dangling from his mouth and he's just sort of staring off into space. I eat my cereal and try to figure out what kind of mood he's in. He looks kind of skinny sitting there in his underwear with his game leg stuck out in front of him. He bends down and reaches between the floor and the bottom of the chair and wiggles his fingers until he feels the neck of the bottle. When he sits up his face is red and the big old scar on his hip is real white from the effort.

"Don't tell Gramma I got this," he says as he unscrews the cap. "Nothing like a little snort in the morning to clear the phlegm from your throat. Here you want one?"

"No thanks. It don't go good with corn flakes."

"Well," he says, "It goes real good with milk. When I had my ulcer the only way I could drink was with milk. You just have to remember to add the whiskey to the milk because if you pour the milk in the whiskey it'll curdle and look kind of like cottage cheese. I'm going to the cock fights today, you want to ride along."

I never tell Grandma about his bottles, but then she finds them all over the house anyway, just like I do. When I find one of his bottles in a strange place I steal it. He doesn't know whether Grandma found it and poured it out, whether he drank it, or if I got it. He don't bother to ask anymore. He just sort of grumbles about everybody lying to him. It don't matter much though. If he can't find something around the house to drink he will just go to town and buy another bottle. Grandma don't give him any money, but he gets a little pension from the Army for his leg and when that runs out he just steals a little from her purse now and then.

Hank spends a lot of time sitting in that chair. It's a cloth chair, but the arm rests are so slick from car grease and spilled gravy that they look almost like leather. His knuckles get white and his

biceps flex up real big as he gets to rocking in the chair working up the momentum to stand up. It's real funny to watch him do it when he's drunk. Sometimes he don't get enough momentum going and he falls back down in the chair and has to get started all over again. Or he over does it and he pops from the chair and his legs get to hopping and scurrying trying to keep up with his body.

Hank hobbles through the kitchen to the back bedroom to get dressed. I get up and open the front door to go get my roosters. It's a fine spring morning. The sun is warm on my back and the breeze is cool and stirring up the apple and pear blossoms. It smells real sweet. By the time I chase down my birds and put them in their little boxes Hank is waiting for me in the Chevy. I put my chickens in the back seat and he don't say nothing, but I know he don't like me taking them to the fights. I don't think he likes my chickens riding in his car.

Hank likes nice cars. He says his Impala is almost as good as a Cadillac. He has a little thing mounted on the dash for driving at night that makes the lights dim automatically when another car comes. Sometimes when he gets too drunk he lets me drive. I ain't legal yet, but I drive real good. He has a fresh fifth of whiskey in a paper bag between his legs. Hank don't go nowhere unless he's got cigarettes and at least a pint. I like to watch him drive. His face gets real serious and he has all these holes on the back of his neck that just fascinate me. He got all those holes in the back of his neck when he was a kid. He had this boil and the doctor lanced it when it was too green and it turned into a bunch of little boils and they left all them holes. That was real useful information cause I had a string of boils all last summer. I had one on my face next to my nose and damn if it didn't look like I had two noses for a while. Anyway I let it get real ripe and then I pulled the core myself instead of going to the doctor. This guy I worked with last summer on the turkey farm told me to go out and buy some raisins and keep eating them and my boils would go away and sure enough they did. So I told

him about this big seed wart on my hand and he told me to put a dish of vinegar in the window sill and every time I walked by to put a little dab on my wart. So I did that too. One day I went to put some vinegar on my wart and the dish was dry and so I looked down at my wart and it was gone. I didn't like that guy very much but he was about the smartest guy I know.

Anyway, Hank don't never talk about his hip so one day when he was kind of in a good mood and kind of drunk I just asked him. He told me he was wounded in the war in some place called Bastogne, in Europe. The Germans had him surrounded but him and his men didn't give up. He said he was a lieutenant because he got a battlefield commission, but he didn't like it much. He said he was real lucky because out of a company of fifty men there was only eight of them alive when it was all over. Then he got real quiet and wouldn't talk about it anymore. When he did start talking again he told me all about Paris. Hank likes women a lot, but he said in Paris he got real tired of women. He told me how they would come up and sit down beside him and try to get him interested. He said if he ignored them they would reach over and grab his crotch and he would just have to follow them home. He said he had to be careful though sometimes the women would have three or four big French men waiting there to take his money. He said he got to where he didn't even like to go to the Paris taverns anymore. I can't imagine Hank not wanting to go to a bar. Anyway one of these days I'm going to Paris and Bastogne.

We're getting real close. Hank's driving real slow and I'm looking for an old brown gunny sack thrown over a mailbox or fence post. He looks kind of funny when he drives with the seat way back for his leg and he leans forward to peer out the window. Everyone knows that a gunny sack on a mailbox on a Sunday means there's a chicken fight here. Even the police know. When they need a little money they drive out here and collect some of the fee for themselves and if they don't get paid somebody goes to jail. I ain't

never been in jail, but Hank has. He gets to drinking sometimes and gets real mean. The Army paratroopers taught him how to fight and I saw him thump on three men at one time with a short little stick. I thought all three of them where going to cry. He ain't never laid a hand on me and he's only beat grandma two or three times. Not real bad mind you, except maybe once when her face swelled up kind of round and she took to wearing dark glasses for a while. Everyone knew why she was wearing dark glasses. I don't know why she bothered.

Hank and I both see the gunny sack at the same time and he turns down the driveway and parks by the barn. My chickens rustle in their boxes a little bit as I take them out of the back seat. Hank tucks his bottle in his shirt under his coat. Not that they care about him bringing in a bottle, he just don't like to share much. Hank don't have no chickens—he comes to the chicken fights to bet, drink, and sometimes for the women. He just got his check so he's got lots of money. I got a few dollars from picking strawberries and I bet a little, but I come here because I like to watch the chickens fight. I know Hank is in a real good mood cause he paid a dollar at the door for me to get in.

On the outside this barn looks like any other barn but on the inside they got it fixed up nice. They got bleachers all along one wall, three fenced fighting pits and even a little place off in one corner where they're selling coffee and hamburgers. I know the girl who is cooking food cause she goes to school the same place I do. She is real popular and too good to talk to me. She saw me but she won't look me in the eye. I go up to her and buy a cup of coffee right off the bat. She asks me if I want cream and sugar. I tell her I'll drink it black. Coffee is real bitter stuff and at home I put lots of cream and sugar in it, but I don't want her to know that. I had this thought that if you put enough sugar on anything it would taste good and that worked o.k. with coffee. When Hank had his ulcer grandma did a lot of cooking with curry powder. I swear I believe a pinch of curry

will taint a hole bag of white sugar.

Someone has eased up behind me and grabbed my ear, scared me so much that I jumped and spilled half my coffee on the sleeve of my shirt. With my free hand I reach up and feel the cold steal hook of an artificial hand pinching my ear. My ear hurts, the hot coffee on my arm hurts and the touch of cold smooth steal in my hand makes me feel like I have a snake crawling up my back. Elmo's been doing that to me every since I was a kid. Once he found out his hooks scared me he was always sneaking up. I don't like him much and I think he feels the same way about me. When I was real young and would sit and wait for grandma to close up the cafe, he would torment me to tears, snapping his claws and swinging them back and forth like a crab. He was kind of sweet on grandma. They were neighbors when they were kids and they use to play together. One night he was being real mean and I told grandma he scared me and she told me he scared her too and then she got angry and called him fool and he hasn't forgiven me since. For a long time I thought he was some kind of pirate like in the movies, but grandma told me he lost both his arms when he was a young man working in the saw mill ripping green lumber. The saw took both his arms off above the elbows. She said he was about my age when it happened. People used to do a lot of things a whole lot younger back then. As soon as he let go I spin around and gave him such a glare it would make the hackle feathers of a chicken stand on end. He just smiles and without saying a word turns around and walks off.

I walk to the back of the barn to throw my coffee away and find a place to wash my hands. I think I'll keep the cup though. It's real neat and white and your fingers don't burn. I go around by the back door looking for the bathrooms just in time to see Hank, arm in arm with some woman and his bottle leaving for one of the little cabins out back were the field help stays. Hank is a real ladies man. He has a pretty face with soft brown eyes and a little nose. I don't know what he tells them, but damn he can make the women laugh,

except maybe for grandma, but then she don't laugh much. Grandma said he was real handsome in his uniform with shiny black boots and black hair and little ribbons on his chest. Once I asked her why she married him and she said because she felt sorry for him. It made her cry so I didn't ask her what she meant. I never tell grandma about the other women, but then she knows about them anyway, just like she always knows when he's got a bottle. It used to make her real mad but now the only time it makes her mad is when one of the other women come up to her and tell her about it. The first time that happened she came home and tore into him like a she devil. That's the only time I ever seen Hank lose a fight. Every once in a while he tells somebody about that fight and his face lights up and he seems to get real happy.

I'm getting kind of hungry so I think I'll go have miss popular make me a hamburger. I've caught her looking at me a couple times, kind of glancing out the corner of her eye. I know it just galls her that I got something on her. Gossip spreads real fast at school and popular girls don't cook hamburgers at the cock fights. She sees me coming and she looks the other way hoping maybe I'll disappear. I get a real pleasure knowing she's got to fix me a hamburger, so I ask for everything on it, lettuce and tomato, cheese, mayonnaise, catsup and pickle. I hate dill pickle but I figure I can pick them out and throw them away when I get some place where she can't see me. She does a real good job and wraps it all up real pretty and gives it to me with a smile. I tell her I won't tell nobody at school that I saw her here. I thought that would make her happy, but she just gets this funny look on her face and her smile goes away. I don't know what to say next and my face starts to get real hot so I leave.

It just as well that I leave because they're starting up the first chicken fight. It must be about eleven o'clock. The sun has come up a little and it's starting to filter down through the spaces between the shingles on the roof of the barn. The little streaks of

light make the dust in the air sparkle and every once in a while someone will exhale a plume of smoke and the color of it'll change from foggy grey to a bright blue as it passed through one of the little beams. The bleachers have gotten real full. The men with the first two chickens that are going to fight stand up on potato boxes and start taking bets. One of the two men standing there has a fist full of money and he's yelling and screaming like a regular Sunday school preacher and his deacon is right next to him writing names and taking odds. I don't think I've ever seen or heard of so much money before in my life. I got caught up in the excitement myself and decided to make a two dollar bet. The scribe don't want to write it down in his little book, but I don't feel like it's official unless he does. He can either stand there and argue with me or he can write it down and get on with his business. So he writes it down but the thing that irritates me is that I bet on a chicken I don't even know.

There is a lot to know about chicken fighting. Right off the bat you got to know what kind of strike they got. If they got a long strike you got to put short spurs on them. If they got a short strike you got to put long spurs on them. The reason is if you put short spurs on a short strike chicken the most he will do is fluff the feathers of his opponent. If you put long spurs on a long strike chicken he'll drive them spurs all the way through the other chicken and most likely get tangled up because he can't pull the spurs out. Meanwhile the other chicken just keeps on hitting and punching him full of holes until he hits something vital. The first chicken to die loses. They'll leave two wounded chickens in a fighting ring all day if need be until one of them dies.

The men that were on top of the potato boxes climb down and enter the fighting pit with the first two chickens. Their seconds put the spurs on while the owners pet their roosters. The ground in the ring is real hard and kind of damp like clay. You can sweep it just like concrete and when it gets warm it makes a fine white powder that takes to the air when the chickens start fighting. One

of the chickens is white and the other's brown. The white one is a little bigger but that don't mean much. The two men start pulling on the chickens heads to make them mad and then they put them real close and let the chickens peck at each other for awhile. When they get the chickens all worked up they just back up and let them loose. Both chickens stretch their necks out real far and get real sleek like an airplane and they spread their hackles so their necks look as big as their bodies. The brown rooster is real fast and moves across the ring and is in the air before the white one. The brown chicken jumps up and tucks his feet in and gives a good kick and catches the white chicken square in the breast with both spurs. The brown one kind of does an awkward sommersault and lands on his feet. The white chicken lands on his side and he doesn't get up.

Chickens aren't real smart and men can trick them real easy. Any old chicken around the barn yard will fight and collect his hens, but when they fight they ain't doing it to kill. Sure, they get bruised a little, but mostly just scared off by the stronger chicken. Once they've been fitted with spurs the fighting is for keeps. The trouble is they just don't know it. Once or twice during the day they have slasher fights. Slashers are like razor blades about six inches long. Slasher fights go real fast, four or five minutes and both chickens bleed to death. I saw a man once get hit by his own chicken with a slasher. It cut all the tendons in his arm and he walks around to this day with is left hand all curled up in a ball.

They ain't a whole lot more to chicken fights than that. I don't know what there is about them, but I can sit all day and marvel at them. Each bird is a little bit different, he fights a little different, he dies a little different, and every once in a while one will do something you ain't never seen before.

There is a big commotion going on by the back door. I know what it is. When Hank gets real drunk he can't make his bad leg work and he falls down a lot. He won't let a stranger help him up. If they try, he gets real mad and starts yelling at them to leave

him alone. I got to go back and pick him up and help him out to the car. He'll be o.k. after he sleeps for awhile.

I was right. He's laying there in a big pile on the floor with his leg sticking out. As soon as he sees me he gets this big smile on his face and gives me his hand. I get him up and he puts his arm around my shoulder and I start walking him to the door. I wouldn't mind so much, except when he gets drunk he calls me son and then he'll start singing. I don't know what he's singing about because his words get real funny when he's drunk. Miss Popular is watching me and Hank and she's got a big smile on her face. Shit, she ain't got nothing on me, everybody knows he's a drunk. I ain't his son but I still ain't going to leave him in a pile on the floor. It's not my fault he's a drunk and not my fault I got to live with him.

I lied when I told you I had two real good fighting roosters. At the end of the day I take a gunny sack and go out behind the barn and fill it with dead chickens from a fifty gallon barrel and take them home and pluck them and clean them up to eat. So far I found two that were still alive and I nursed them back to health. One of them chickens is a blinker. He's blind on one side and ain't no good for fighting. The other's got a game leg kind of like Hank. I wrote my name on my chicken boxes and I carry them here just like everybody else. I built a little door on the top of my chicken boxes so I can open it up. Those roosters like to stick their heads through the openings and look around. I don't have enough money to buy a good rooster, but one of these days I'll buy me a hen and raise me a whole bunch of fighting cocks and they will be real good because their daddies are survivors. That's what counts in chicken fighting.

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Cover Artist's Statement Instant Extinct

It is the contrast between the planning of art and the results of the spontaneous action of creating it that interests and intrigues me. The finished artwork is like life, i.e.; as hard as I may try to plan things out, the results are never quite like what was expected.

With each piece of instant print film, I previsualize what I would like to create, how I will execute it, what props are needed, and how to arrange them. Yet, because each artwork is created in total darkness, there is an inevitable link to random chance.

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-- R. Scott Horn



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