NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

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SPRING 1989

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Northridge Review invites submissions continuously 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.* Please limit submissions to three short stories and/or five poems. Photography and graphics are to be in black and white, and there is no limit to the quantity of these submissions. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be sent to: *Northridge Review*, Department of English, California State University, Northridge, CA 91330, or dropped into the basket marked "Submissions" on top of the faculty mailboxes in SAT 710. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Awards

Two awards are given annually in recognition of the best works published in the Spring and Fall issues of *Northridge Review*. The winners will be announced in the fall issue.

The Helen Helms Marcus Award, established by Helen Marcus, is given in recognition of the best short story published by a California State University, Northridge student. The winner of this award receives two hundred dollars.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award,** given in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes the best poem published by *Northridge Review*. The winner receives fifty dollars from the University and will be acknowledged alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood.

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Poetry

Mary M. Harris

Swallows

Each March the swallows return,
glue mud into a hive-like nest
beneath terra cotta tiles.
Droppings splatter onto flagstones;
I take up arms against trespassers.

Waiting until the birds leave for food,
I reel out the hose with jet-spray nozzle
and shatter the clay mound into shards.
Mud walls melt. Straw needles stick
out of the torrent, clutch air.

I had not known there were eggs until
babies, barely bigger than embryos,
tumble down deflated. Nearly dry,
the stucco wall is crumbly as cottage cheese.
I sweep the rubble into the gutter.

The swallows reappear, circle the yard
like hawks after prey, accusing.
I shut the door against their screams.
Their cries ring through the oak door
like iron bells in an old mission.

Two Wives on One Sofa

His ex-wife and I
sit side by side
on a loveseat at Christmas.
I know her as well as any friend
but we will never be closer
than this breadth between us.

I know the size of her diamond,
how her bangs cover a scar
on her forehead where
she was scalded as a child.
Her voice is familiar,
her walk, her adamant signature
that endorsed child support checks.
We share the same surname,
spoil mutual grandchildren,
have gone to the same hairdresser
who gave us similar styles once,
but we are wary as teenaged girls
wearing identical dresses at a dance.

If we were ordinary women
not appended to one man,
we might meet for lunch
and confide in each other.
I would tell her about the time
he called me by her name,
how I cleared their closet
of her discarded clothes,
the bald styrofoam wig stands
that accused me of violation,

why I resent her for being first
in his life, for intruding on mine,
but it is not my place.

So we sit on this sofa,
silks and sweats juxtaposed,
pumps and Reeboks aligned
parallel but never touching
and discuss how much
snow fell in Saugus.

Balboa Island, 1961

for Linda Lee

The summer we were nine, we inhabited
the island like sea animals in shells
confined between the landing and the bridge.
Glass bottles in the cottage window glowed
like gems in a jeweler's display case: topaz
and emerald, ruby, sapphire, amethyst.
Days, wading into the bay to our knees,
we mounted rafts and paddled on our bellies,
skin plastered to the plastic and our scalps
imprinted with grooves by rubber bathing caps.
Your father uncovered treasure coins in the sand
while building castles, and we scoured most of
the beach before we guessed he'd buried them.
Nights after dinner, we strolled to the boardwalk
where we bought frozen bananas skewered
on sticks and dipped in chocolate, rolled in nuts.
We sketched the *Bay Queen* from the dock and took
a strip of photos of ourselves in a booth.
Now standing on a distant shore before
another ferry carries us home again,

we have abandoned our shells for stonger armor.
Pressed against my ear, a conch shell still relays
the message like a bottle cast to sea;
pink chambers echo with memories that fade.
Now you and I cross time's reef to a place
where we were nine and freckled, frivolous,
each morning swimming farther out to sea.

Ron Pronk

Silent Winter

Forget the wolves.
They only roam in packs
for food.
You have all you need on the shelves.

Even so, each pine cabinet looks empty
doesn't matter what you put on the table, either
always sparse winter, feeding from these woods.

Farther down
a lone wind through your gut
where no one hears
how the hungry quiet
makes you bay.

Patti Scheibel

Not Another Apology

My memory leaked out
Like oil spots on the road somewhere
Between Sunset and 3rd.
Someone must be waiting
But a woman like me
Is dangerous behind the wheel;
I might forget where I'm going,
I might forget what I'm doing,
I may drive on
As far as this road goes
Never seeing the exits
Just following those broken yellow lines
Windows down
Night air and the
Steady hum
Of the engine
No me
Just the hum

Adele Renault

Lonely

She is old
like the telephone line
she uses
to call on.

A new neighbor
has moved in
and I should
take interest,
she says,
as he is of my race.

Her son has
left her for
a younger woman.
Men like money
always leave her.

She knows
nothing about
the sixty million
dollar lottery.

Life is a
dangerous
open safety pin
somewhere loose
in the house.

I break the line
with feeble excuses.
She calls back
with fables
of her own.

James Leishman Etchison

At Home Alone While My Wife Visits a Dying Old Man

He smoked Chesterfields.
He blew big ZEROs of smoke
Punctuated with pieces of pink.
Lung.
Hack hack hacked up with tired eyes.

fathers are for catching

He calcified for that long time in his
Laz-E-Boy.
He stared at The Machine,
Vacant as a sea squirt.

fathers are for saying
"Run and fly! I will catch!"

He squinted at his guests occasionally
Through the dandruff on his glasses.
He would say, "You want Lucy or Jackie Gleason?"

fathers are for setting you
one-handed on the gold-flecked kitchen table
neverminding dusty Ked-prints.

He kept his fishing gear ready to go,
In the trunk of his wheel-less Olds '98.

fathers are for coaxing you,
arms strong, callused,
ready to catch you,
fathers can be trusted.

He grew on his arms patches of corpuscles like purple cabbage.

fathers are for catching.
you can run arms-out—a jet fighter—
you can fly.
you can trust a father for a soft landing,
if you are very young.

Jeannie Chang

A South Korean Woman's Song

It was in the early fall of 1950
Before the cold winds blew from Bakdusan
That the elders of my village whispered
Among themselves
News of soldiers in mustard yellow suits
Marching down from the north on hillsides in groups
Rampaging villages and killing people for treason

One morning before the dew was lifted from the ground
I woke to the noise of my mother
Preparing rice cakes in the open dirt square
As I dressed by the escaping darkness I yelled,
"My spare clothes are missing from their hooks"
Not knowing they were outside my rice paper door waiting
Wrapped in heavy purple cloth tied in a knot
My mother drew me to her side and gave me
One of the hot cakes and stroked my hair
Be good to your brother and look after him
You're the mother now, don't get in the way
Of your uncle

Just as the sun reached the top of the apple blossom trees
My brother and I departed with another family
On the road headed south

My mother waved but I couldn't tell if she was
Smiling or crying, her face wrapped in a woven muffler
My father carried my brother on his back
Walked us as far as he could
Before paying the man who would take us south
To my chicken farmer uncle
My father's lying cheerfulness is what I remember last

Now, two years shy of forty years
Since the day I saw them last
I have not forgotten
They are vivid as a flickering fluorescent lightbulb
On and off trembling
I lie still at night remembering
And yearning for the day when
I'll be with them forever in my village
My village of white pebbled brooks
And apple blossom springs

Lois Shimazaki

Photograph of my Father

There you are in yesterday;
face snuggled against the arm
of the couch like a child's
heavy head on its mother's
welcoming breast. There I stand
giggling as Anne slips big
blue cookie monster under an
unsuspecting right arm.
We both act like a couple
of bandits who pulled off
the greatest bank robbery.

I focus the camera
with nervous anxiety, an
actor performing on stage for
my audience of one.
The heavy Kodak camera
fumbles in my child-sized hands.
Cautiously Anne steps away
and I capture you there on
the sofa unaware
of my favorite memory.

Bobbie R. Coleman

Washday

"Hang out the wash!" she bellows,
passes me a basketful dingy white and dripping.
I scrape caked bird shit from rusty clothesline
bend down to reach
for laundry, wringing wet:
Socks, hankies, t-shirts,
my father's underwear mysterious and lewd
I almost blush to handle it.
My friends are at the movies,
flirting at the beach,
practicing the latest dance steps,
while I clip clothespins to corners of cloth,
precise as Rockettes,
and wait for a wind to carry me
away with the sheets.

L. Swansen

Shorty's Song

beyond midnight
outside the liquor store
with enough rope
Shorty tethered
a shivering gray pup
to the lampost

inside, a bottle
of muscatel glowed
like a fetal ember
in the new brown paper sack
"To keep me warm,"
he urged, toothless

"It'll snow damned sure,"
a voice returned
surgically counting
the change
and added,
"Goodnight Shorty—"

Jennifer Wolfe

I Call My Mother Every Day

Mother
what do you do at night
when you want no food
when you have no books to read?
Crouching on the couch clutching your pipe
wrecking violence on the cat for no reason
and willing the phone not to ring
but I call, I always call
I love you
Mother
what do you do
while I am on the phone
telling you of this thing and of that thing
no one thing intersecting with your mind
smoking with short vicious puffs
pacing, carefully placing your foot
within each square of the checkerboard floor
willing me to hang up
and I do
but not before I tell you that I am fine
because what would you do if I weren't
Mother
what do you do
lying in your bed in the dark

lying to yourself
waiting for the daylight
for something to do.

Underneath the Wrapping

You tell me that I am a gift
you could unwrap for hours
and I smile
thinking of all the gifts I have
received
and how long it took to open them.

You've given me all the easy ones,
ring boxes waiting to snap open,
candy boxes where the box
is the thing to keep
and the wrapping is on the inside,
flowers which don't even
come in boxes and later
have to be thrown away.

Your presents are easy to accept,
easy to forgive for not being
worth more than their price tags.

It wasn't always this simple,
I used to think a gift was
something I had to survive
or couldn't return
like the ability to be hit
and not cry out or the way
I can stand with my eyes squeezed
shut to make my words go away.

I don't have to worry
about these things anymore,
I can cry, scream, laugh.
I suppose that this is your gift.

For Erich Fromm

You've been saying lately about
how you love me, it's frightening,
you expect me to complete the
ritual. There are any number of
ways I can echo you but I can't
picture you old or imagine
ever giving up something I
wanted so you could be happy.

There is a failure of love. I
see you looking at me when you
think I'm not paying attention.
You look like you want to swallow
me, fit me inside of you and
keep me safe from drafts. I'm grateful
but that's not what you want to hear;
if you were a woman you would
be selling yourself for nothing.

This is all I have to offer
you: I think about you,
I think about you all the time.

Carol M. Spizman

Jimmy's Gone to Tucson, AZ

Driving from Tucson
Desert insects splash on my windshield, the
red, brown and yellow remains
blur my vision.
Hollow-breathed pipe music hangs
crackles and fades in the dry air as
I leave the range of the station.
It's hot. The desert, though it looks tough
is really a very fragile terrain.
Wheel ruts from wagon trains that passed
100 years ago have not yet healed.

I have left my best friend in Tucson.

Jimmy says
Tucson has mountains surrounding it
and sunshine 360 days a year
and sky and sky and sky and
desert sunsets and Dairy Queens.

It has cactuses and it has Jimmy

Still it has no right to curl up
and nestle like a scorpion

under my consciousness. For
500 miles back to L.A. I drive
reading about Tucson in a guidebook
balanced against my steering wheel.

Ventura Blvd

for Scott

"Give me a dream."
you said because you had
insomnia. I thought
"Ventura Blvd." because
that's where I was headed.
"No," you said "I
want to get away from here."

Well that's funny, I thought driving,
Ventura's so clear tonight.
All the way up and in the mirror
there are no headlights, no tailights
only neon lights lining the road
with motels and sushi and waterbeds.
Everything you need to dream on up to a point
in the distance.

But you want a dream of green fields
or the sea or country-fresh
hills. I suppose I can see wanting
that—I mean not wanting to be
unreasonably irritated at streets
like Zelzah for stopping at the freeway or
to miss streets like Edward Everette Horton Lane
completely because they are cul de sacs.
I want the same things as you:
no anxieties.

But if you keep looking down the streets
that way you can see the shapes of the
land curling under the roads and buildings
suggesting themselves in the rise and dip
of streetlights and you can relax flying
over *those* hills, dreaming the speed;
a mighty fine sensation at 2:30 in the
morning unless of course you are
asleep at the wheel.

Jeffery Jivey

...and Red Wine.

The next poem I write will have long
Walks down yellow leaf-lined streets.
There will be loud music—The Rolling Stones and
Bach. There will be dancing—mad, uncontollable
Twirls and jumps. Cigarettes, open windows and Wanda
Singing on the fire escape at 4:00 am. There will be lazy
Sunday mornings spent in bed—the newspaper, strong
Coffee and opera. Exotic fruits, black roses and glances
Between strangers across smokey, dimly lit rooms in
New York City. There will be nudity—bare flesh—and
Flickering candles...
There will be you and me, driving the
Streets in your AMC Pacer, listening to AM radio,
Hands—your right, my left—clasped tightly...

Natural Selection

i hear you moving about in the kitchen
just after sunrise
you go outside in your tiger-striped bathrobe to
turn the sprinkler on the brown yard

i stand nude on the back porch and watch
you untangle the hose and wrestle it to the ground
as you step over rotten lemons that have
fallen from the tree

i make tea in the chipped blue mug and crouch
down on the back steps.
a bird, so tiny it could fit in a spoon, lies
dead on the patio
"It's natural selection," you say,
"the weak ones always get dropped."

i dress and check my reflection in the bathroom mirror,
the whites of my eyes have turned red.
"Be home early," you say as i grab my car
keys off the dresser, "I want to see a movie...."

Later, on the freeway in stop-and-go traffic
i push the select-o-buttons madly and smoke cigarettes,
glad to be away — safe from
your pawing hands and kneading.
i hang on to the wheel like a vile jungle animal and
hum along to the Joy Division song
on the radio.

December

The first time we
meet in New York
City it will be
snowing. No
one will stop
to take a picture

of us as we stand
inches apart and
shake hands on a
busy street corner.
Taxicabs will continue
to pass, splashing dirty
slush onto our wool
coats. We will walk
in silence to a Cafe
where we will sit for
hours sipping espresso,
fingering sugar packets, and
sharing glances. The
smoke from your cigarette
will rise and hover
around your head like the
mist in a graveyard that
might cover a tomb-
stone at dawn, making
the epitaph barely
readable. Just after mid-
night you will lean forward,
your face — pale and
thin — emerges from
the haze, your eyes like
green marbles, and slowly,
unnoticed, we will kiss.

Daniel Fogg

i'm standing at the sink
when i become lighter
than air. first, i'm washing
dishes, then my hair is
getting tangled in the
blades of the ceiling-fan
and it startles me and
i drop your favorite
mug—the one with the
rhinoceros. the fan
lets me go when i start
to lose my form. i spread
out and meander like
smoke through our apartment.
i waft through cracks in the
plaster and get into
your closet and the towels
in the bathroom.

when you come home i feel
you move through me and through
the apartment like a
human, noticing my
absence and adjusting,
slowly claiming the things
that were mine as yours.

later, you bring in a rug
doctor and wash all your
clothes with lye soap. you slap
paint on the walls, but you
forgot to fill in the
cracks. i'm still here. i can

still move things now and then.
sometimes i'll tickle you
under your arm with a
memory, or drop a
dish or tip over the
garbage, or i may just
drip from the bathroom tap.
but mostly i just fill
the room up with my scent and
watch you without me.

for wanda c.

i want to be like you
in that i want to read
from two plastic-covered
books with my name in bold-
face letters along the
spines. i want to say the
words my publisher and
not be lying.

must be nice having a
name and hearing people drop
it at parties like crab
dip not knowing you're

standing right next to them
hearing a stranger say
yeah, wanda n'me, we're
tight.

i guess i want to know
what being hip feels like.
people think you see the
light. i don't know. i just
think they're impressed by the
black turbans. anyway,

you're so articulate,
you don't sculpt sentences
or give birth to poems,
you write them, L.A. and
the spires of Watts Towers
notwithstanding, it's just
you and blank pages that
wait for your touch.

Kristina McHaddad

A Different Moon Poem

I want to pinch the moon from the sky,
two weary fingers on that thin secret,
that wry smile,
that purely false light;
I want to grind it into a million pieces
against some gray flint-like stone
and throw it up to the ceiling
to cheapen this room
still smelling
but so distantly
of you.

Following a Storm

We watch for night to come
with the windows thrown wide open,
the waves and the clouds
heavy with the light they hold,
and darkness comes late
moving through
those dark gray storm-filled clouds.

Through the night
I cannot distinguish
which is rain and which is waves
and you and I are surrounded
in loud water
I sometimes do not hear.

In the morning,
light skims across the water
like shaved ice.

The Garden of Two Women

Somehow I know
without being told
that two women live in this house,

the two pairs of shoes
set side by side in the garden,
the two lounge chairs
close to one another,
close but not touching,

close but not touching
like you and me that night
wrapped in December clothes,
our bodies not even as close as those two chairs
but closer and so much more
touching without touch.

Chaney Holland

My daughter on the Cyprian island

The almond trees that were salmon in the spring
moonlight are bared in July. Farther down the road,
the dust shimmers along the banks of the dry canal.
Fourteen trees, one for each year I have spent here.
In other seasons, the sounds of boys splashing
in the dusk. Every year, one or two never returned.

I miss my children. Years ago, my daughter climbed
those branches into the sky, from the public swimming
pool into the blistering heat and sick every year
from the ragweed that tormented her. She was glad
to leave us.

Now I dream of her childhood, finger-paintings of
blue corn and suns, a morning when I spooned
a miniature silver cow from my cereal bowl. Am I so
old that I cannot recover her willful and innocent face?

I am not ready yet. My child like a Teraoka wood-block
print, one world draped over another and through the
folds, secrets and temptation. You who are so sure,
daughter, of where you lead, who are these women
who claim you?

At night we said grace together over melon and olives,
and laughing she walked backwards with me through the
garden of scattered almonds.

I am a man of faith but I know my sight was dim. The
child who returned in the evening along the dusty path
was not mine but a long-drowned boy.

I cannot welcome these epiphanies. Though her mother
loved her so fiercely, it was I who wept and pleaded
with the thief who robbed me of my first miracle.

Howard Schwietzer

Tristan and Isolde

He named her: green meadow
She named him: new Hermes

He named her: uncle's prize
She named him: the ferryman

He named her: bards' delight,
potato lass, bright Sun,
beguiled, life saver,
serpent's reward, beauty

She named him: minstrel,
honeyed voice, brave,
heart's bane, life,
dragon's death, soul's remedy

He named her: the sea shines
She named him: surf's foam

He named her: love then,
love now, love always
She named him: misery

He named her: the soul's balm
and life's meaning
She named him: God's gift/curse.

Charela Durham

¡Escuche Y Viva!

I wake with song of the sun—bleeding the horizon—a voice as sweet and solaced as the nuns of my parish—My face, a wrinkled brown onion—I comb my black hair generously streaked with silver—I look at my mouth—my tongue, my teeth gold pebbles in a gray, pink bowl—My back like my teeth refuses to straighten—My kitchen plumbing reeks gray water on the floor I cover with newspaper—walls gray in a cloak of shadows and light of one waning light bulb—dark, damp—the belly of a whale, perhaps the one who swallowed Jonah

> and I remember the day I came here/ fleeing a banana farmer/ my betrothed/ a hunchback thing whom Papa owed money/ came coyote/ paid a keg of cerveza and a stroke of my youthful breasts
>
> "Quiero buscar amor."
>
> waitressed downtown near Olvera Street/ met Charlie/ a tall, thin man with coal black skin showing only the whites of his eyes/ but I loved him/ married the day Roosevelt died in a 4th floor tenement off Normandie/ Charlie played Bessie Smith on the old victrola/ he was drunk/ he took me in his arms/ he went to war/ I conceived a lump

in my belly like a possum hanging from a tree/ I read *Mein Kampf*/ hated Hitler and you wrote of Mussolini's music/ blood bathed trenches/ bodies strewn about like peaches rotting in a southern sun/ VROOOM! overhead/ dragons in the sky that vomit their fire breath on the petrified people below/ you told of drunken bouts/ poker in the barracks—the stench of war in your sweat/ nightmares.....you are headless/ torpedo through your neck/ you congregate with coloreds—just like home you know your

place

awake on a whining bed thinking of you, an ocean away in the arms of an Italian prostitute/ and when you peaked that mountain....I hoped you cry my name/ funny eh? V-Day came, but you did not

"Ando Sangrando"

I bore Coco your only legacy

"Quiero buscar amor"

Daughters like mothers more than they know/ She lovered a tall, dark man and one evening evaporated—her sick daughter behind that I must muster into woman

I now return to the God of my mother—mass on Sundays—always—pious in the pews a praying mantis to Our Lord—One can not blame God nor others for the fate one chooses—when tossed rags, sew quilts

"Nana," a small voice chokes and severs my thoughts, "I can't

breathe. I can't breathe."
(and neither could I, My heart whispers)
"Silly girl, forgot your medicine," I say.

her nostrils snuff the magic stuff—her tight chest loosens and raspy breaths subside—she falls in my arms, eyes closed—I wipe the sweat glued hair from her temples—I strain to hear above the snatches of Mexican market women through my window. I listen to the rise and fall of life in her chest—back and forth like the leaves of the palmetto trees and the shores of Belize I watched as a girl.

Fiction

Patti Scheibel

Accident Prone

Today Mother cut her finger with a knife. She was carving lettuce. I am tired of blood.

She comes out of the kitchen with a soaked potholder wrapped around her hand. She holds it limply like a small dead animal. Her mouth is pursed up into a tight line, but her eyes are big and white, like in a cartoon. Papa stands up fast, and his newspaper flutters to the floor.

He says, "Cory, are you all right?"

She nods yes, but the potholder slips, and her blood spurts on and off, on and off. She just stands there bleeding onto our new cream-colored carpeting. Papa and I watch her trying to stop it with the soggy potholder.

He has to take her to the doctor. I want to come too, but they say no. They leave me here alone. I study the new stain. It is a picture, but it is not very clear. In school they would tell me what it is.

Now Mama's finger is wrapped in white.

"Four stitches," Papa says, almost proudly.

Mama holds her hand away from her like it isn't really hers. She keeps scrubbing at the brown stain in the carpet. Every day I come home from school, she is scrubbing. I sit and eat animal crackers while she scrubs. At night I come downstairs, frightened from some nightmares, and she is still scrubbing. I tell her I dream of someone's face on the body of a long, skinny insect. She keeps

scrubbing.

Papa once cut his foot with an axe. He hurts himself with power tools but usually not badly. That time they had to sew on his big toe, but it was dead and it didn't take. He walks funny now.

He buys Mama a throw rug to cover the stain. It is dark brown. I push it aside and look at the stain sometimes. It is lighter from all the scrubbing, but there is still a picture hidden there.

At school Miss Lisa shows me how to make a clay dog. The clay looks like a big wet rock, but you squeeze it in your hand until it is warm and it wants to be something. The boy who sits next to me makes a horse, but it looks like a camel. It has a big lump on its back. My clay looks like something strange to me, but Miss Lisa says it looks like a dog. So I make it a dog. We can paint it any color, and I pick blue. Miss Lisa laughs and hugs me. I name my dog, but I can't remember what. I drop it walking home, so it doesn't matter what its name is. I pick up the pieces off the sidewalk.

At home I show Mama the pieces. She rocks me in her lap like I am a little baby. She throws the pieces away and tells me to draw her a blue dog instead.

I don't. I draw Mama scrubbing at the stain. I don't show it to her though. She does not like it when I draw her.

I put the knife down the garbage disposal. It makes huge grinding noises. Mama runs in, screaming at me. She doesn't turn it off, she just reaches in. I shut my eyes.

Scott Sandler

Custer

Grandpére. It's French for grandfather. My grandfather's French. Actually, I wouldn't have to tell you he's French. You just look at him and you can tell. He's got the classic goatee. He wears a beret. He looks like a struggling artist. As a matter of fact, he is a struggling artist. Scratch that. He is an artist, a painter, but he's not struggling.

Most of the time he's sitting back in a gray reclining chair and he's eating strawberry yogurt off of a tray. He crumbles graham crackers into his yogurt. He has to eat soft food. Hard food hurts his teeth. Because of this, my mom usually winds up making two dinners. One for Grandpére, and one for my brother, who often complains that he is tired of food he can't chew. Dad says two dinners are a good idea—it makes for variety. "Besides," he says, "there's no reason we should suffer just because he can't eat right." The last time Grandpére tried chewing hard food, a crown came out. He didn't realize he'd lost it until after dessert. My mother had to dump all the trashbags on the kitchen floor. She was rummaging through the empty cereal boxes, leftover turkey, cans of dog food, and cans of orange and pineapple Crush, when my dad came in. He said, "Look at this mess." He said, "Jesus, how could you lose something straight out your mouth and not notice it?" I was going to stick up for Grandpére. I was going to remind everybody about how I lost my glasses and didn't realize it until fifth period, when I couldn't read the assignment on the chalkboard. I was going to say

this. Grandpére would have smiled and said, "You see." Dad would have said, "That was fifty dollars." And Mom would have said, "Why bring that up now, can't you see your father's upset?" My older brother would have given me a dirty look.

It doesn't matter how I would have reacted, because I didn't say it anyway. I always find myself saying things to myself, practicing what I should say, or must say, and then never saying a word. When I don't say anything, I stare off into space, turn on the TV, and don't exist.

My grandfather exists because he's got a goatee. He's French. He's got a trademark.

My dad's got a trademark, too. His anger. You always know when my dad's in the room. Even if you don't look at him, you can feel him. Just a few weeks ago, he threw Grandpére out of the car because he refused to wear his safety belt. When Grandpére came home an hour later, out of breath, coughing, and smelling of gasoline, Dad was already asleep. Grandpére still has the cough, and Dad has never apologized.

My brother exists as well. He, like everyone else, has a trademark. His name. Custer. Like the general. He meets people because they walk up to him and say, "Custer? Is that your real name?" My dad named him Custer after watching "They Died With Their Boots On" on KCOP.

Errol Flynn played Custer. Dad says that our Custer is just as handsome as Errol Flynn, even more. My mom was upset. She said Custer was a murderer. Dad said that he was a general, and that's what generals are supposed to do. Mom said that Custer was a loose cannon, out of control. Dad said that's what he likes about him. He likes him because he was out of control. People out of control get things done. They get noticed, get in history books. He told Mom that Custer, our Custer, would be in the history books, like Custer, the other one, was. He will get in the history books, and no one will fully understand him, because he won't be simple, he will be out of control.

Dad says that Custer and I are like the north and south poles and maybe he's right. I don't have a clever name like his. My name is Matt. I don't do funny things like Custer, either. Custer asked

Grandpére if he knew how to French-kiss. Grandpére laughed, said he was too old. Custer demonstrated it to us on his girlfriend, Julie. The whole family gathered around as if he were doing some sort of magic trick. Julie's face was red. Dad was on the floor, hysterical. He thought it was so goddamn funny that he was going to tell Karl at work tomorrow.

I'm not out of control, like Custer is. In my dreams, however, I'm a maniac. Like one time, Custer was slapping Julie around. I could hear her screaming, so I broke the door down, gave Custer a black eye, and kicked him in the nuts. Another time, I pulled her out of a fire. Another time, I saved her from a bullet, and got shot myself. She stayed with me in the hospital all night, brought me flowers, brought me candy, said she loved me. Most of the time, though, I have falling dreams. Y'know, the kind where you're falling, falling, and you never, ever, really hit the ground. I've heard that if you do hit the ground, you die. But that's not true, because just the other day I hit the ground, and nothing happened to me.

Grandpére is mixing the graham crackers in his yogurt when the phone rings. He is listening to Django Reinhardt. Django Reinhardt is a French guitarist. He has a trademark, too. He is missing two of his fingers. I think that his two missing fingers are more exciting than his guitar playing. Grandpére is listening to the music, smiling, and ignoring the telephone. For a minute, I think he's enjoying the ringing as though the telephone were just another instrument, playing accompaniment, adding to the sound. I pick up the receiver, and Grandpére says, "Can you get that for me, Matthew?"

I say, "hello," and Grandpére turns around and looks at me. His brown, copper colored eyes are magnified behind the horn-rimmed bifocals. He says, "If it's for me, I'm not here."

It's not for him. It's about the dog. She's gotten into the neighbor's yard and is digging up the lawn. I get Ruby and put her in my room. I shut the door so she can't leave. She whimpers. I pick her up and put her on my bed. I lie next to her and, hooking her neck with my arm, shove her head on my chest. She is growling. I clamp my hand around her nose and she is whimpering again.

Everyone is asleep when I wake up. I stare at the small green digital numbers—2:38 a.m. I turn on the lights, and see that Ruby has found a new spot, near the clothes hamper. She stretches her paws out, exposing her dirty nails, and then readjusts herself into a curled position.

I open my door and head out to the living room. Although I have lived in this house over ten years, I still feel uncomfortable with it. It's dark, but I can tell where each piece of furniture is: the four wicker chairs surrounding the parquet table, the counter with the liquor bottles lined like books in shelves, and the many pictures which my grandfather painted. My favorite one is "Tigers in Red Weather." Grandpére painted it after reading a Wallace Stevens poem. He says it represents imagination. He sounds like a teacher when he says this. The red weather looks like fire to me. It is the fire I pulled Julie out of, and it is the fire which burnt off Django Reinhardt's fingers.

I feel like I am in the middle of some museum that has been shut down for the night, and now, more than ever, I feel like I don't exist. I turn on the kitchen light. White linoleum is spread out before me. Stepping on the floor in bare feet is like stepping on a bar of ice. By the time I reach the pantry, my feet are numb. I pull out the Raisin Bran, only to find that the box's empty. I settle for some Spoon Size Shredded Wheat. I read the back of the box—"no added sugar, no added salt." It seems to take ten minutes to read the back of the box in order to get everything possible out of it. I look up the word "riboflavin" in the dictionary, and then go to bed again.

When I wake up, Custer's standing above me.

"Wake up, ya little shit. I need you to hold the ladder. I know you're awake, ya little shit. Wake up."

It's past noon and I'm holding the ladder for Custer, who overshot the hoop (and even the chimney). "I got it," he yells, and bounces the ball on the roof. As he is climbing down, ball in hand, I think I could kill him, couldn't I? I could pull the ladder out from underneath him. He would fall, crack his head open, and then I would exist. I would be known as the one who killed Custer. I would be thrown in jail, be wearing stripes, spit and swear a lot. Dad wouldn't want to mention my name because it would hurt too

much. I would be known as the black sheep of the family.

Custer hits the bottom rung and says, "Thanks, schmuck." I should have killed him when I had the chance. So many missed opportunities. He wouldn't have died, though, even if I had pulled the ladder. He would have instead made a fall-away jump-shot in mid-air, and he would have never hit the ground.

As Custer shoots from half-court, Julie pulls up. Julie wears her hair in a pony-tail, and looks younger than she really is. Custer bounces the ball to her, and she misses a shot. He laughs, rebounds, and lets her try again. She misses again and he laughs again. He walks up to me and says that I put on too much cologne. He says, "You smell like a girl." Julie says I smell nice. "He still smells like a girl," Custer says and grabs Julie by the waist. He starts to French-kiss her, and I go back inside.

Grandpére is sick. His face is all red and he is shivering. Mom gives him a glass of water and his bathrobe, which he pulls tight around his body. Dad goes to the store, gets a bottle of aspirin, and I watch as he gives it to him.

Grandpére spits the chalky, white, saliva-filled pieces of aspirin into his hand, and says, "I can't."

"Swallow, don't chew," my dad tells him.

Grandpére rinses out his mouth and tries again. He reluctantly puts the tablet on his tongue and takes a drink of water.

"Hold your head back," my dad tells him.

He holds his head back and, in a matter of seconds, he goes into his, now tiring, series of convulsions. He jerks his head back and forth like a cat does when it is plagued with fur balls. He spits into his hand again and his voice shakes when he says, "I can't."

Dad reaches for the bottle of Anacin. "I can't and I won't," Grandpére says.

"Fine," Dad says, and throws the bottle. It ricochets off the freezer, misses Mom's head by inches and hits the floor, scattering tablets all over the white linoleum. "Then you'll just have this goddamn flu forever, that's all," Dad says and goes into the living room. When he comes back into the kitchen, he is wearing his coat.

"Pick those up," he says, pointing to the floor. He storms out the back door.

Mom is on her hands and knees, picking up the aspirin and crying. She mutters something underneath her breath. It is at this moment I realize something. Mom doesn't exist either. I think Mom stopped existing when she gave in to the name Custer.

Steve Hetland

Antarctica

Many years ago, sitting in my fifth grade classroom, I would watch as my teacher, Mr. Slatner, covered himself with chalk dust. The lips of his pockets, his chin, his hips, all through his stiff, granite-gray hair, everywhere he put his hands became white with chalk. As his skin got chalky, he began to scratch. And during each day, as time wore on and as Mr. Slatner got whiter and whiter, itchier and itchier with chalk, I would find myself falling away again into daydreams. One daydream in particular I went back to time after time, filling in details, changing particulars, refining images. But the situation, the outcome and the girl never changed. They came as inevitably as Mr. Slatner's fingernails came for his chalky skin.

The girl was Farrah Fawcett. Her limo always pulled right up to the front of Cobalt St. Elementary. She poked her head into the classroom and with a toss of her hair asked for me, shattering the drowsy trance Mr. Slatner and his multiplication tables and spelling rules had cast over the classroom. Sometimes I stood up and followed her out the door. But other times I went to the back of the room for a chair to set by my own, saying, "Have a seat, Farrah. It will only be a few minutes more until recess."

She liked that. She liked to stay and watch me play kickball at recess. The bench around her was always crowded with kids asking for autographs. Farrah was polite to most of them, except for a few like Mitchell Millman. I told her about how he hit me once on the back of the head for no good reason. He hit me so hard that I became

dizzy and fell over. I hated him.

But eventually, Farrah got sick of all the people. She wanted to be alone with me.

"You know, William," she would say. "I've got this quiet place on the north-east coast of Australia, and a boat waiting at the Marina to get us there."

Sometimes we drove to the Marina in the limo, sipping drinks, watching T.V. and playing cards on the way. But other times we were just as quickly drifting on the South Pacific, already tan and drinking tea on the deck, already gazing around us at the perfect blue Pacific. But it wasn't perfect. I pointed it out to Farrah. Her forehead wrinkled. A tiny dot of blankness interrupted the northern horizon. It was disturbing, I couldn't take my eyes from it. It was like a lapse in my imagination, like a memory that can't be completely recalled, left blank at an important part. But it was small, only a fraction of the world around us. "Come on," Farrah said. "Let's go swimming." And we dove in.

The water was warm. Farrah liked to splash around the boat, playing with the dolphins. She had such a way with dolphins. I liked to swim deep, trying to touch the bottom. I pointed my head straight down, and swam with my right hand extended in front of me, anticipating the bottom. I swam that way for miles, until the water got cool and dark, until I gave up. I let my limbs go soft and I hurtled further down a few feet from momentum, before the water slowly turned me over and started pushing me to the surface. I rose for miles, until I could no longer feel the water rushing past my face. The light above me slowly got brighter and brighter. I had been so used to the darkness of the deep, that at the top, it seemed as if the water was bursting with light, as if each drop of water were a star. And then I would see the bottom of the boat and through the underwater observation bubble, Farrah, already dry. She waved at me before setting her cocktail down and reaching over to change cassettes on the stereo.

Standing on the deck, dripping water, I stared at the blank spot. It had grown. I feared then that it wouldn't stop until it had devoured my Pacific, Farrah, and the boat, leaving me only a dream of blankness.

"Come," Farrah said. "I've made you some iced tea." I turned and watched Farrah walk from the cabin door to a towel she had laid out on the deck. She was wearing the very swimsuit she had worn in one of her posters. I followed her and sat down on a lawnchair next to where she lay. I took the iced tea. The sun was bright and Farrah closed her eyes. I leaned my head back and let the sun's fingers penetrate my eyes. They lingered a moment on my tired retinas before moving on to my brain, which was as tight as a knot, maybe even tighter.

Hours passed, though it's silly to call them hours. There were no hours really, only the rise and fall of the ripples on the sea. They formed a chess board sort of pattern; white rose, black fell, black rose, white fell, in a rhythm as precise as a clock. And after a long time of staring I realized that that was exactly what I was looking at, a clock. After even longer staring, I realized that it was no more a clock than light is a star. It was time itself. After still longer, Farrah screamed, I yelled and we jumped overboard. We watched from below as a big, black, oily hull devoured Farrah's little boat. By the time we resurfaced her boat was scraps and the blank spot now interrupted the southern horizon.

We climbed onto a floating plank, ten square feet that had been the roof of the cabin. With our weight on it, the plank sunk a few inches so that water ran over the top of it. If you had seen us from a little ways off, you might have thought we were standing on the water.

Weary from seeing her boat destroyed, Farrah lay down.

"I'm sorry," she said, falling asleep. "I'm sorry."

"It wasn't your fault," I said, lying down, resting my head on her stomach. I watched the sunset. Every time Farrah took a breath my head rose and fell and the water tickled the back of my neck. Later I fell asleep, though it wasn't sleep really, just not thinking.

The next morning—though it wasn't morning really, there were no more mornings or noons or nights, only a sunset—the next sunset I awoke. The sky was orange with streaks of red. The sea in every direction reflected orange with streaks of red. And the sea was very calm. You would have had to run bounding hemisphere by hemisphere to catch a single ripple on that calm sea. As I stood

the raft tilted, sending a little crest of water racing from the raised edge of the raft to the lowered edge, where I stood. As it splashed Farrah, she opened her eyes. Moments later it splashed my ankles, then it disappeared over the edge of the raft, into the deep, warm Pacific.

"I'm sorry," Farrah said, the night before seeming to come back to her.

I walked to the edge of the raft and looked into the water. Looking straight down, the surface wasn't orange, but a transparent black. Deep down I could see thick-lipped fish, darting from spot to spot, leaving from each spot they had been a brilliant chain of bubbles rising to the surface. Far to the south I thought I could make out the icy cliffs of Antarctica.

Behind me, Farrah was mumbling something.

"...It's always been you, William. It's you. I've always been fondest of you..."

I wanted her to stop. I pointed South, to the Antarctic.

"You know," I said. "I've always wanted to carve a home out of an iceberg."

"Oh no!" she said. "An iceberg is no place for a home."

"Why not?" I said, realizing just as suddenly that there was nothing I wanted more than to dry my feet.

"They're dangerous, always melting and freezing and crashing into ships."

"You don't know. If you don't know about something you should just keep your mouth shut."

I turned to face her. She was sitting down, hugging her legs and resting her forehead on her knees. I watched as slowly her shoulder blades began to quiver. Soon she was sobbing out loud. Trying to console her, I put my hand on her shoulder and looked into her face. Her lips wrinkled and her eyelids clenched shut. Her sobbing became louder. I walked to the other side of the raft, trying to ignore her. But I couldn't. Her sobbing was the only sound I could hear. It was probably the only sound anyone could hear. It probably ruined an otherwise perfectly wonderful sunset for many people, from Anchorage to New Delhi to Perth. I walked back to Farrah. I could no longer feel my feet they were so soggy from the water.

I watched Farrah's head quiver a while, then I hit it. I didn't hit her hard, just so she would stop. And she did. She turned around and looked at me with the very betrayed look I had been expecting. She swayed a little to each side, then slowly tipped forward into the water. She sank away, into the transparent black, past the thick-lipped fish, glowing as she went.

Alone and in silence then, I drifted on that orange sea. Time, the slow southern current below me moved imperceptibly. And I drifted on it forever, until the jarring bell of recess rang, when Mr. Slatner suddenly glanced down at his chalky clothes. Flustered, he walked slowly to the side of the room, where he patted himself off while looking at the trees out the window. And then he uttered softly, as if he had been betrayed, "Dismissed."

Glenn Dwiggins

Sign Down

Part One—*A Sudden Flush of Nostalgia*

When the billboard that said, "Gil's Bar and Billiards-Open Sunday" fell, there was only one there to see it. He was riding his bicycle. The wind is what knocked it down. The boy had watched the way the wind pushed and pulled at the sign so that it tipped forwards and backwards, creaking on its supports, until finally it broke free from the ground, like a tree pulling its roots up from the soil, and fell flat forwards, blocking one half of Edge of Town Road, the incoming half, the half that passes through New Regensburg on the way to Las Vegas. It was at the moment when the sign had pulled free that the boy felt some type of fear, for the sign had made kind of an attempt at freedom, to walk away, like a monster might, but it was only a sign, and this was only a windy day in New Regensburg. But the boy was nine, so for a moment, a long few seconds, the sign had walked, but it, the monster, now lay dead. Reginald walked out to it to make sure. He studied it carefully, kicking it gently here and there. It made some shuddering moves, but he was sure that, at least this time, it was only the wind, the same wind that made his bike fall over clattering just now, so now it was dead, too, one wheel still spinning reflexively, like dead fish he had seen.

He remembered how his father would gut dead rainbow trout with a large knife, and he would have to hold them down to keep them from jumping around when he cut into them, even though they

were already dead. Sometimes his father would show him a head, and Reginald would be scared when the mouth would still move, and his father would pretend to talk to Mr. Fish, and say, "Nice day Mister Fish, isn't it?", and the fish would say, "I'm just a head," but that was just his father talking for it. He was an expert in throwing his voice. He would laugh like crazy at this. Reginald would just be scared.

Now Reginald, a little older and braver, said, "Nice day Mister Sign, isn't it?", and the sign answered, "I'm just a billboard," but it was only Reginald, the skinny blond boy, me, throwing my voice, the best I could.

There wasn't much in the way of traffic on Edge of Town Road, since the airshow was over and the strangers had left, but I felt obligated to stay by the sign and guide traffic around it, as I had seen done on trips with my father along the highway, watching the workers allow first ten northbound cars to pass through, and then ten southbound cars. So I stood there, in the windy sunlight, waiting for my first time, keeping the sand from my eyes by squinting. But I knew I couldn't stay there forever.

When a child enters a bar, it becomes suddenly louder and lighter, and the air becomes somewhat thinner. I know this, not because that child that entered the bar those years ago was me. I wasn't aware then of what I was doing or the consequences of my appearance, and even if I was, I wouldn't have given it a second thought, as I was driven by purpose. I do know this happens because it's happening now.

People are paying attention to this boy coming in now as they must have paid attention to me, half-secretly trying to hide in the vanishing privacy of the smoky darkness, but really tying their attentions to the anticipated words of the foreigner, whose face is set with that seriousness planted in the small gap between his eyes that says, "Listen to me," before even one word has been spoken. I saw myself, how I was, in that hard space, just under that smooth forehead of his. What's he going to say? To whom is he going to reveal his secret, the driving force that sent him into this cavern of curiosity and fear? Why hasn't the father said anything yet, or even

called to the boy?

I think about myself, how I felt in that moment. I was out of breath after riding against the wind the whole way here, from where the sign lay rocking as if in a sleep near the end of Edge of Town Road, fighting sand blown in my face, squinting as I rode along the streets, and almost running straight into the always cold and grey Hegel Family statue standing in the main intersection of town. Duty had blinded me from road hazards I was accustomed to avoiding reflexively, but I finally reached my destination.

Entering the bar was a conflict between purpose and confusion. It was dark and sober inside, and I was still too young to handle such a jolt from the bright drama outside. I almost willingly forgot what I had come in here for, but I didn't. Now that I think of it, I probably handled that part of it better then than I do now. The dark came upon me like a monster then, breathing sweaty smoke, and I concentrated on my purpose. I advanced on it like a knight advancing on the enemy, and I could see no one, so it was just me and the huge darkness. When someone chuckled, it resonated low and deep inside my head, like a beastly growl, a menacing part of the darkness, and my face hardened as I continued on bravely, prepared to face whatever came my way.

But now that I am older, and come here regularly, I just pretend it's not there, and I am sure I have the look of insecurity just the same, without the shield of purpose to counter it. I think about these things now, as the boy, whose eyes must have adjusted to the light by now, marches straight over to a booth near the pool tables, his face stern, where a dark form of a man sits, staring hard into a large mug, half-full of beer. Or he might be half asleep, the way his head is hanging, his shoulders and neck making a silhouette like a mountain. When the boy came in, it seemed his head sank further, so he is surely awake. The men at the other tables continue to watch this boy, and when he passes by close to their tables, sometimes bumping into them, they recoil and look the other way. It's that distinctive little-boy smell. That's definitely not what these men come to this bar for. Some of them are married and get enough of that at home. Maybe seeing him makes them feel guilty, like they should be home, too, with their families. Maybe they are thinking,

after this one, what next, mine? If my boy came in here, I'd.... Maybe it's that.

The boy isn't aware of this; that's for sure. When I came in, looking for Gil, whose sign it was that had fallen down, I wasn't aware what they were thinking, but I figure that, if there was a time between when I stepped into the bar, my small body making a silhouette in the sunlit doorway, and when my father recognized me as his, that he—my own father, who had shown me how to clean fish and who would later bring me here on my twenty-first birthday and buy me my first legal beer and not be happy until I was drunk and throwing up behind the building, and who was always trying to get me to notice the girls on the street, and who would offer to make the trip to the drugstore for me anytime I wanted (but only when I was eighteen)—*my father* —would in that moment quickly deny that he knew whom that form belonged to, and would even pray, which he hardly ever did, that it wasn't me there. *Lord, let that kid not be mine,* he might, must have thought. But it was his pessimistic nature that probably told him the truth before he could even make out my face clearly, because he turned away and faced the wall with all the colorful bottles, and then stared down deep into his beer before I could make out his face, but I recognized his shirt anyway, and Gil was looking at him in a way that I only later recognized as an expression of sympathy, for *he* did recognize me, and understood, which was his job.

That was before they heard what I had to say, of course. Who would care what a boy of nine had to say, except, of course, the father? What did it matter to us? Why did he have to come in here to bother the rest of us, to disturb our peace? Didn't the father raise his own kid right? My father was probably thinking these same things before he finally decided that it was me, and no matter how long he looked at the shelves behind Gil, the identity of the approaching child would be as likely to change as the labels on the bottles, or their contents.

The bottles are still there, although mostly because they have been replaced as they have been emptied, but Gil shows me a clear, half-full bottle that's been around since my first visit, some fifteen years ago. I think he is showing this to me to distract me from the

scene at the table, where the father and son are talking. This is obviously a private matter, because they are talking quietly, although the father doesn't seem to want to talk at all. "It's from Greece. It's called Ouzo," Gil is telling me.

I am confused, distracted. "What?"

"The drink. People around here don't seem to go for it much. They've always pretty much been the beer and gin crowd."

I tell him I was noticing the pair at the table. The father's voice is still mostly steady, and his eyes are lit up, but the boy's insistence is unflagging. What could he want from his father? That he should leave the bar, to join his family for a change? That mom says he drinks too much, spending all his time and money in this bar, and when is he going to take him and his sister to the zoo? I wonder where his mother is, and if she is the center of this discussion. Maybe she is waiting outside, not daring to go inside a place where she might get stared at in such ways as women get stared at in places like this. She may have simply said, "Go in and get your father," or maybe something not as simple or as nice as that.

Gil is pouring the Ouzo into shot glasses. He says, "This is on the house." It smells of licorice. He says, "I tried years ago to add a touch of ...what's that word? Oh, yeah, cosmopolitan...to this place, but all the people want is beer or gin, as if that's all there is in the world." He has been waiting for all these years to tell me this, I guess. I wonder if he feels a special bond formed between us because when I came into his bar back then, I came, not to speak to my father, but to him, to tell him about the falling of his sign. The appearance of this child today must have given him such a sudden flush of nostalgia, as his face has turned red and he raises one of the glasses in a toast, smiling, almost laughing.

"To childhood," he says.

Part Two—*The Easter Parade*

The boy Reginald had come, and now they had to do something about the sign. They couldn't just leave it there, lying over the road. It might cause an accident, or worse, it might get broken. The billboard meant something to the town. It, more than the green signs placed there by the state that said, "New Regensburg, so-and-

so miles," said something about the place people would be entering. It said, come in, have a drink, relax. It told of the friendliness of the area, that strangers were welcome. It was their persona, their front door. It showed, in the way it said in small lettering at the bottom that the bar was less than three minutes down the road, how the people there think in terms of time, not distance. It was them talking to the stranger before they even met.

But now it says nothing. It is down, and the only one to have seen it that way so far is the small boy Reginald, and he has gone and told Gil, and Gil has told the men in the bar that if anyone were to help him that drinks were on the house for the rest of the evening, and closing time would be an hour late tonight. He didn't need to make this offer, really, and he knew this, but he did anyway because of the way he was. He loved to celebrate, and he figured the resurrection of the sign would be a special occasion, something sort of like Easter.

It is, after all, Sunday, he thinks.

So here they come, the men, pouring out of the bar, approaching anyone on the street in jeans, with Reginald leading them along on his bicycle, circling around and back in front of the pack, as they walk, mostly sober, if not somewhat dazed at first by the brightness outside, and the wind.

They are excited. "Come on, Gil's sign is down," they yell at neighbors they meet on the street. "We're gonna set 'er back up again. Get a rope, find a shovel, bring a six-pack." Some are singing, some are laughing, telling jokes, mostly ones they had heard before in the bar, but they are funny all over again in this new environment. The butcher next door to Gil's closes up shop early and joins the group with an armful of sandwiches.

Schmidt is running to catch up with the group with a wheelbarrow and sacks of cement. He is thinking, we might as well do it right this time. He was there when the sign was put up the first time. He remembers. He told Gil, "You gotta do it right the first time. Dig 'er deep, and put 'er in cement."

But Gil wouldn't listen to reason. "I can't hardly afford the spot she's gonna be standing on," he said, "much less cement. I haven't even opened shop yet, so maybe she shouldn't be permanent

anyway." Gil didn't believe this part, that the sign shouldn't be permanent. He was sure that his bar would work. It was just what the town needed, and this crowd today, marching to the edge of town with only one goal, the raising of the sign, is proof enough for anyone, he thinks. He marches along, and gets a strange, lifting feeling inside when he sees all the others around him, the numbers growing, mostly men, but now there are some women, although not so many. Among them he recognizes the Thursday Afternoon Pool Cues. He smiles when he thinks of them in his bar, making the men uncomfortable with their high voices and their ability to beat any of them at the billiard table, even when they are drunk.

Right now they are marching along with the crowd, the wind blowing their hair around, and Gil realizes that this is the only time he has seen them on a day other than a Thursday. It is also the first time he has seen most of these people in broad daylight. They look different out here, he thinks, definitely paler, but all the same more complete. It is out here that they do more than sit and drink and talk or play pool. Out here is the rest of them, the rest of their lives, their homes, their families, where they work. It is all out here, and his bar is inside the dark building that is disappearing off down the street and around the corner as the group, Gil's Easter Parade, moves down Edge of Town Road as one, towards the end of town where the houses are low and sparse, and where his sign lies waiting for them, felled by the wind that now is blowing against them and whistling in Gil's large ears. Gil, looking back, sees Schmidt and the cement and thinks, today is my day.

Gil and Schmidt talk as they walk on the side of Edge of Town Road. Gil, still in his big white bartending apron, is mostly listening to Schmidt, who is wearing blue denim overalls covered with mud and paint and grease stains. He is pushing his wheelbarrow, talking about water-to-cement ratios, hardening times. "Got to make the feet shaped so that they'll stay in, too," he says.

"Like a 'T', maybe?" Gill suggests.

"Something like that...," says Schmidt. Inside he is feeling good, like the one in charge, the expert, the Chief Engineer. Today his word is gospel. Gil is listening to him now, to everything he says, paying close attention to every syllable that would help raise

the sign and make it stay up. "...though not exactly," he says.

The wind is blowing, making fierce noises and when the band reaches the spot where the sign is, it is causing the dust to whirl around in the air, making fast moving clouds and some small funnels around what looks like the body of a large, injured flat beast that flaps and bounces around, fighting death. The people stop and stare at it for a moment, shuffling around. Reginald notices that it has moved a bit from where it originally fell, and for a second is afraid. But only for a second.

Schmidt starts staring at the holes where the sign was once planted and at the broken remains of the legs, both in the holes, and on the frame of the billboard, and then all of the others are looking at him, waiting for him to say something, to tell them how to begin. His face wrinkled from fighting the wind or from figuring things out, he takes a tape measure from one of the many greasy pockets in his overalls and starts.

Some people start digging. "We want 'em real deep and wide. We ain't plantin' Begonias, you know," says Schmidt. Others start to cut and reshape the feet of the sign and pieces of two-by-four. Schmidt says, "Now follow my markings exactly. Don't get creative." The cement is mixed with water from a nearby fire hydrant, and Schmidt is yelling, "Not too much water, or we'll have soup. We can always add more water, but that's all the cement we have." Reginald stands on the road, ready to guide traffic. Schmidt gives him a red flag and an orange sign that says SLOW. He holds them, one in each hand like weapons, looking both ways. Schmidt says, "Good job, son. Just keep a lookout."

There is hammering. More nails are bent than are actually used and the nurse in the crowd has almost run out of bandages and aspirin. He calls himself the nurse because he is the only one who was prepared in case anyone got hurt. The people know him to be a hypochondriac, but they are glad that he is here just the same.

The sign eventually will be set up. Deeper holes will be dug, cement will fill the holes, and the reconstructed roots of the billboard will be set into the cement as the crowd pulls from both sides on ropes attached to the top, balancing the large, shuddering

board against the wind, and many of these people will pretend to be pirates, tugging at the sail's sheets, holding off the collapse of the ship against a storm. The winds will blow this way and that, and they will shout words like "Ahoy!". For the most part, they have never been on a sailboat, or else they might have known that in such a storm one lets the sails down, lest a strong wind blows the boat over, drowning most of them. When the cement hardens around the feet, they will bury it and pack the dirt hard around the legs, and they will be inspired to repaint the sign. They will go for sparkling-white paint. Schmidt will pretend not to be satisfied. "We'll be lucky if she holds for six months," he will say. Reginald will have guided nine cars safely around the work area. He will think, nine cars, nine years old. This must be my lucky day.

There will be a huge party around the sign. Kegs and bottles will be brought around to the spot, and people will bring paint, brushes and musical instruments. Most of the people will still be dressed in their digging or hammering clothes, dirty, but won't care. They will sing and drink and think, look. Look what we have done. They will have taken pictures of everything from one of Schmidt looking into the first hole, one hand on the small of his back, the other on his mouth, in which they can almost hear the picture say, "hmmm," to one of the last brush stroke on the billboard, made by Marcy of the Pool Cues, who has a half-full bottle of beer in her other hand, and an expression on her face that makes her look like she's painting for the Louvre, her friends will tell her.

The party will go on until dark. There will be a slightly drunken argument. Gil will insist on paying Schmidt for the cement.

"Ain't no way you're giving me one red cent," Schmidt will say.

Gil will answer back, "You tried to sell it to me two years ago, and now I can afford it, so I'm paying you for it."

"I told you I ain't taking your money."

They will settle it. Gil will give Schmidt his only bottle of Ouzo, and they will shake hands. The next day Schmidt will taste it and return it in exchange for a bottle of gin. This will not surprise Gil.

In this way the Easter Parade will break up, and the only sign that something took place there that night is discovered in the flash of a car's headlights on the green sign at the border of town, which originally said something about how many people lived there. Now instead it says, in glittering white letters, "NOW ENTERING NEW REGENSBURG POP. GOES THE WEASEL."

Mark Goff

Fanfare for the Common Man

You are in India. No, you're in Indiana. You've never been here before and you don't know if you're actually scared to be here in the Midwest unknown or if you're glad to be here. You are sitting in the living room of a 108-year old farmhouse that hasn't changed since Roosevelt died. Farms, you discover, are nothing like in television or movies. You can't smell television, you don't itch at the movies. Nothing could prepare you for all the cows. You are sitting in a LaZBoy across from your old distant third cousin, Harvey. He is large and his head is covered with a fine grey fuzz. He wears eyeglasses and at first you hope him to be the educated gentleman farmer he appears. You immediately abandon this idea when he shifts his weight to one side and farts. "Ducks," he says, looking out the window into the night. He smiles, showing you a wide corn-eating mouth. You can't look at him anymore so you start looking around the sagging living room. There are photographs of cows on the walls adorned with ribbons that have faded to purple. His wife enters the room. She's the same old, ambiguous age as Harvey. She has been doing the dishes with her daughter Amy who is also quite large. You immediately determine that the American farmer is at least not starving. You get up to shake Amy's hand, you say you are very pleased to meet her. Her entire white face turns red. She leaves the room to go to her trailer out back that has been specially towed in to make a portable newlywed home for her and her fiancee Cliff. Harvey's wife brings you a coke. It's warm but it gives you something to do. Harvey reaches for his fly

swatter and proceeds to crush any of them that come within a four foot radius of him. He flicks his kill onto the beige carpet. You ask him where all the flies come from. He says, "Cows." Perfectly logical, you conclude. Harvey slaps the red plastic swatter on the arm of his chair. Another kill.

"We are awfully sorry to hear about your grandfather," he says. "We didn't know him all that well but we sure liked what we saw. Matter of fact my neighbor up the way met him the last time he visited us and he thought he was a real fine gent." He smiles. You nod your head. Your grandfather was an asshole. Your entire life of seventeen years has, as far as your grandfather was concerned, been a conflict between love and contempt. You've summarized that the only way you can be true to yourself and what you believe in and what you base your entire moral standing on, assures you that you should take his ashes back to the funeral home and seal them away in white granite and glass. But you think of your grandmother who you love dearly and would die for and who you promised that you would carry out your grandfather's (her husband's) final wishes and distribute him through the rolling green hills of Indiana, where he was raised as a boy.

Harvey has been talking but you haven't really been listening. Your eyes slowly rotate back towards him. He gets up out of the chairs twisting his body to the left and right until gravity finally gives way and releases him. He motions for you to follow him into the kitchen. He tells his wife to go fetch his photo album. You sit at the kitchen table where carefully placed in the middle are cookies and loaves of white bread and Ding Dongs and Doritos and Cheetos and Fritos and a chunk of butter that the flies have captured and are raping. All of these packages of food you recognize but you are not used to seeing them all together in the center of a century-old farm house surrounded by cows, surrounded by Indiana, wrapped in black sky, and they don't seem like food to you here, more like brightly colored torture devices.

His wife brings a big brown worn photo album. Harvey's lip curls as he opens the cover and he prepares to explain every photo to you with the expertise of your favorite bartender announcing last call. You think about your grandfather who was a flyer in the

Second World War. He killed Japs and reveled in it, the true warrior class. You remember when you were six and on Sundays he would snatch you from your parents and take you in his Chrysler out to La Guardia Airport. You would sit by the huge windows on the heater vents. You marveled, even at the age of six at how these multi-ton hulks of metal can lift themselves from the steel grey runways out over Manhattan. He knows everything about the airplanes. He explains how the take-off pattern is amazingly complex and how one screw up in the tower could cause a crash. He tells you why some of the jets have four engines, some six and some only two. He explains to you the physics of the jet engine and rotary steel blades. You press your skin up to the glass. You can feel the warm air rushing to your face, causing the glass to fog up until you can no longer see clearly outside. You write your name with your finger through the fog you have created on the huge windows. Your grandfather puts his hand on your shoulder, it's time to leave the airport.

Harvey gives you a friendly swat on the arm. He points at one particular black and white photo on the page. Underneath it written in script is the name "Tepa Tora Island 1944". Harvey is young here, his body not as fat. He is wearing his T-shirt wrapped around his head like a Sikh holy man. He is standing next to a native who is naked, much shorter than Harvey, but in possession of perhaps the largest testicles you have ever seen. There is a picture next to this one with three natives standing, their testicles vary in size but are all amazingly large, they hang at least down to their knees. Harvey stares intently at the photo. "Now these colored fellas here had the largest balls we'd ever seen. I believe it's called Elephantitis, you know, things grow real big on the body." Harvey's wife leaves the kitchen with a bag of trash to be burned. Her bleached hair is clumped and erratic, a huge slab of it bounces with each step she takes. The screen door slams behind her.

"This was in the Pacific," Harvey says. He tells you how he used to be an engineer in the Army, building quonset huts and setting up mess halls. Best time he ever had in the world, he tells you. You look back again at the natives with the big nuts. For some reason this amazes you, the logistics are confusing, but you are

amazed. He turns the page.

His wife comes back into the kitchen followed by their two sons, Dee and Dwight. They are dressed in overalls, wearing yellow Caterpillar caps. They immediately go for the refrigerator and pull food from it. Dee sits at the table with us and opens a fresh Ding Dong. Harvey introduces you to them, first Dee and then Dwight. Dwight ambles over from the refrigerator and puts his hand out. You look at his face and notice that he is missing an eye. You say hello and hope you're not staring at his vacant socket for an unusually long time. Dee is your age, Dwight is slightly older, but exactly how much older is not revealed. It seems that Indiana chronology is based on what is here recently, anything before that is just older. Harvey explains to you that most of the ribbons you might have noticed in the living room were won by Dwight at the County Fair when he was in grade school. Harvey goes on to say how Dwight knows every cow out there personally and has names for most of them. Your mind reels with the connotations. Dee finishes his Ding Dong and reaches for another one. Dwight carefully spreads butter on a piece of bread. Harvey explains to the boys how you are a third cousin twice removed and your grandfather who died recently had been out to the farm before. He goes on to say how you brought your grandfather's ashes in an urn all the way from New York City and it is your intent to carry out your gandfather's last dying wish and sprinkle his ashes right here at the Teeple farm. The boys nod cohesively.

Dee is curious. He asks you how many people live in New York City. You tell him around ten million. Dwight's one eye goes wide and he whistles through his teeth. Dee says, "Biggest town I ever been's Fort Wayne. They got eight story buildings there." Harvey seems pleased that the conversation is going well, he puts his photo album under his armpit and announces that he's going to bed. He tells you where your room is at and that fresh towels have been laid out. Dee asks you if you like music. The question seems vague and safe so you answer yes. You follow him up to his room to look at his new stereo set he picked up in Fort Wayne. His room, the first one to the right of the stairs, is very dark. You see at the top of the stairs, three pairs of high rubber boots caked in mud and cow shit.

Hanging above them are faded yellow raincoats and hats. The hooks are black iron. You go into Dee's room and he puts a record on the turntable. He turns it up real loud while he changes his shirt. Dee says, "You know, there's a band playing at Stinky Jack's tonight. Supposed to be a lot of girls there. You wanna go?" You ask him if there is anything else to do. He doesn't quite understand what you mean because he tells you that all the chores for the day have been completed. You agree to go to Stinky Jack's with Dee.

You are flying along a two lane highway sitting next to Dee in his pick-up. Fifty gallon aluminum milk tanks are sliding around in the back, crashing into each other like madman pulling the bells in the church. You ask Dee if it might be a good idea to slow down a little, the speed and the milk bottles are making you a little nervous. He laughs, says something about him driving since he was four years old, and you ask yourself why you are in Indiana doing this. Is it because you have respect for your grandfather and grandmother? You think that the least you could do after all they have done for you is to be a man and handle the funeral. All you have to do is sprinkle the ashes first thing in the morning. Just open the urn, tip it over and let the old man's remains filter into the cold wind blowing down from Canada. You haven't planned to say anything as you perform this ceremony. This could be a problem, you think to yourself. Aren't you supposed to say something?

Dee snaps you out of your trance. He tells you how him and his buddy Charlie were out in the field shooting ducks and throwing cowpies at each other. Dee noticed some mushrooms growing underneath the cow shit. It was summertime and the rains had just passed. They ate them, hesitantly at first. They figured it wouldn't kill them though so they kept right on chewing. Later they broke their rifles and carried them over their arms, discarding their unused shells. He said that he had never looked at his father's farm in the same way since that day. He never loved cows again as much as he loved them that day. The way they would stupidly sway left and right, fat with milk and meat, noses drooling mucous, hip bones sharp. Sometimes, though, cows just annoyed the hell out of him. At night, while they stood about to slumber, he and Charlie would get a running start and throw their bodies into the sides of the cows,

causing them to tip over before their brains would wake them up. That was always good for a laugh. Dee fills his lip with chopped tobacco and tosses the cannister onto the dashboard. You light a cigarette as the pick-up pulls into the parking lot of Stinky Jack's.

Everybody knows everybody. You, of course, know no one. You're on the outside again, but you don't sense hostility. Dee becomes a celebrity; you meet people, you laugh with people, your preoccupation with leaving the state forthwith hides itself somewhere. There are plenty of girls in Stinky Jack's, some of them rather good looking for some reason. You notice, however, that all of the girls have huge butts as they dance with each other tentatively. You ask Dee what's with the big asses. He laughs and says, "A diet high in calcium, I guess." You grab another mug of local beer, which tastes a little nuttier than most beer, almost like Irish ale.

You're seventeen but can pass easily for twenty-three. Your grandfather once took you to McSorley's, the oldest bar in North America. The Supreme Court, after years of litigation, had finally passed down the order to force McSorley's to accept women as clientele. This doesn't seem like such a bad idea to you but this bar is not from your time. You drink three quarts of dark ale with your grandfather, who is cursing at a large photograph of Kennedy on the wall. He curses Communists and Japs and welfare and sex on television. You've never seen your grandfather drunk and it frightens you. You can't imagine him out of control. You leave the bar; it's Sunday afternoon and Manhattan's financial district is void of people. Across the street from McSorley's is a very old graveyard. Your grandfather studies a subway map while you climb the wall that contains the raised graveyard. The tombstones are tipped with black soot, some are bent and broken. The largest one you see is James Madison's. You see other names you recognize from drawn-out history classes. Your grandfather yells out that we have to take the "A" train, get off at 86th Street or we'll wind up in goddamn Harlem, then onto the "F" back to Queens and off at 28th Avenue. You climb down from the graveyard, your grandfather folds his map and is now looking for the light of the subway station.

One girl, with obvious nudges from her friends, approaches and sits next to you at the bar. You buy her a drink. She seems very honest and sincere and asks you questions about where you're from and what you do for a living. You make up something about being a motion picture director from California and she buys this so easily that you suddenly wish you had told her the truth. Although she has a big butt, six beers and the fact that she is so nice and smiling with amazingly clear eyes, you overlook and perhaps get turned on by her large hips. She moves closer to you, touching your arm, leaning into you. While she is looking away you glance over at her friends who are giggling to each other and looking at you. With everyone involved you feel like a kid forced into a meeting that maybe you wanted to be forced into all along. She tells you she wants to go outside and play or something like that and before you know it you are on your back, horizontally planting seed into the open arms of the dairy belt.

Suddenly you are very tired and you pass out, feeling short cut fingers tracing your scalp and your nose; your feet are hanging out the window. In your sleep you are on a beautifully pleasant Southeast Asian holiday. You're driving along in your Land Rover like Marlin Perkins bouncing up and down, the thin dirt road that you can see ends at a vertical bluff overlooking a blue Pacific, a blue that you have never quite seen before. You never knew blue could be so damn blue. Natives clad in sarongs wave to you, smiling, happy. Children run along beside your Rover, shouting and whistling. As you make a left turn you realize that a cow has wandered into your immediate path. You brake hard and swerve to try and avoid hitting it, but to no avail. You knock the cow over and run it down, its bony black body becoming entangled beneath your Rover. You immediately remember that on this particular island cows are held in the highest religious regard, saints or something. You panic, shifting the Rover into reverse, then forward, trying desperately to flee from the scene of the massacre. The tires grind over the body of the cow and you hear the sickening sound of bones breaking and flesh ripping. Suddenly, natives rush the Land Rover, smashing the windows and body with lava stones. Their faces are filled with rage and contempt. Someone burns an effigy of you.

Throughout the carnage you hear the bovine beneath your vehicle "moo" its last breaths. It's a frightening, haunting "moo" that grows louder and louder until you cover your ears and begin to sob as you can no longer stand to hear it. You wake up.

You are in the downstairs bedroom of the Teeple farmhouse. You grab for the covers, clutching them to your wet body. There is safety in the bed. You hear it again, a deep throaty "moo." In panic, you wheel around to your right where you see a black and white cow's head sticking through the open window. It looks at you and moos again. You remember that cows can't climb through windows and seldom open doors so you throw a shoe at it and shut the window.

You go out into the kitchen, there is no one there. It is morning, only eight o'clock but the sagging old house is deserted. You look out the window and it is a good morning. The sun is shining through fleeing rain clouds, things are dewy outside. In the morning light you can see the green fields bordered by white gates rolling on forever. Last night storms back into memory. You look into the mirror at your clumped hair and neck lesioned with hickeys. You smooth your hair back as Harvey enters the room. In the light of day he seems much pinker, his eyeglasses covered in mist. He takes them off and wipes them on his overalls. He says he heard you had quite a night. You nod, there's not much else you can do. You sit at the table filled with dirty dishes. Harvey's wife shuffles in and begins to clear them away, smiling at you and scraping food into the sink. She asks you if you would like her to fix you something to eat. You barely hear her as last night's chest of drawers is opened up. She brings you a large glass of orange juice anyway and it occurs to you that today is funeral day.

After showering and putting on fresh clothes you go out to your Hertz rent-a-car, open the trunk, move a suitcase out of the way and retrieve your grandfather's ashes. Dee pulls up in his truck and asks you how you're feeling. You don't know. He tells you to get in his truck, he'll take you to a place where you can drop the ashes. You reach back into the trunk and pull out an old edition of *Life* magazine, dated 1948. Tucking it under your arm you get into the passenger side one-handed, holding the urn in the other carefully.

You and Dee drive for about ten minutes, up over a hill and into a short valley. He pulls off the dirt road and into a meadow and drives until you can no longer see the road. "This looks pretty good," you say. He stops the truck and you both get out, leaving the doors open. Dee goes back into the truck and turns the key that powers a cassette deck in the cab. He pops a tape in and turns it up full blast. It is classical music. By the time he reaches you the music comes up, filling the air. You look behind you to where the truck is in the middle of kneehigh grass, behind it a rolling bluff. A breeze blowing over it cools the back of your neck. You're glad there is a breeze. You suddenly recognize the classical music playing. It is Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man." Dee tells you how it was his grandfather's favorite. You half smile at him and open the *Life* magazine, turning to the page you have marked. It's an article run years ago titled "A Father's Prayer for His Son," by General Douglas MacArthur. It is really the only thing "possibly fitting" that you could think of. You begin reading as Dee carefully examines the down side of a nearby cowpie.

"Build me a son O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat and humble and gentle in victory. Build me a son whose wishes will not take the place of deeds; a son who will know Thee and know that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail."

You set the old magazine down and pick up the urn. You clear your throat and your eyes well up and it feels as if some beast is tugging at your esophagus. You don't know why. You don't know anything. You hold your breath and open the urn. Holding it away from your body you slowly tip it over. The fine ash falls and is caught by the confused wind. You keep your mouth closed and your eyes tight as the ash swirls around you. You don't breathe, not wanting to let any of him in until the breeze picks up and the last of the ash is gone and through your clamped eyes you can no longer see it.

Hart Schulz

University Girl

You're falling off a cliff and you reach at the last minute for a twig of a branch. It snaps as soon as you touch it. That's what it's like. You can never get as much as you want. They make the perforations especially weak on purpose—the cheapest kind, single-layer wastepaper-tissue! That's the feeling. You need it. You grab it. It just breaks off in your hand. You just splatter on the bottom. For what? To save a few bucks? Jesus Christ in heaven. And that token lock on the door too. They were out of tokens today. Really. I saw that shiny circus coin thing behind the counter—that's what he keeps the tokens in, Gonzales, under the register drawer. He snaps them out with a flick of his brown thumb, then holds one between two fingers, "Yes Ma'am, this will get you into the door," he always says. Gonzales has his picture on the wall here, "Manager of the Month." Jesus fucking Christ.

"Hey, I told you last week you don't use the restroom anymore. Got that, derelict? Why you think we *put* those locks on the fuckin' door, hey?" Gonzales has a little gold spot in his left earlobe. He cups his big hand behind his ear and says, "You like fries with that BigMac, mister?"

I get my tokens from the paper rack outside the Kentucky Fried though—that's why I can sit here now. You take the butt of your strong hand and rap the top of the rack in the middle hard. Meantime you pull the lid up with your weak hand and shake the hell out of the whole box. Slugs and coins drop out all the time!

Gonzales really is out of tokens today. You can see in the little windows at the bottom of each coin cylinder. But stupid Gonzales just keeps flicking his thumb on it, like trying to get water from a rock. Where's his little hat and his little circus monkey on a leash?

That University Girl is back, sitting alone in *No-Smoking*. With the double spaghetti straps on each side of the bumps of her collar bone. Skin like a brown pool table, and thin and boney. She gets Fillets with extra tartar so I watch her teeth, her long blonde hair with a strand or two sticking to her lips. Last week she saw me too, with a large coffee and a Winston Gonzales gave me so I'd leave. Man, she gave me a look! A University Girl. They used to think I was a Kerouac-*Dharma Bum*—now they just look away quick.

Gonzales has no idea I'm in here. Really. I could grab her, pull her right out of *No-Smoking* and through the slit in the door like a ray of sun. I could do anything I want to her in here. If she screamed I could break off some more of this stupid, cheap toilet paper and stuff it in her mouth and Gonzales wouldn't hear a thing. He doesn't even know I'm in here for Christ's sake. I got the token from the Kentucky Fried rack. I could have that University Girl right here in the head and then stop to finish my cigarette too. Fuckin' Gonzales still flicking away out there for big ladies with fat on their shoulders.

He is standing at the end of Malibu Pier watching below him the tiny tongues of sea chop, golden glowing on one side and the pale color of fish on the eastern side. They are for him a parade of shining stars near dusk. And he can look directly at the sun, west and just above the lines of waves at the point, the glistening black-rubber surferboys there. With its rings of city smog and canyon dust, it looks like the planet Saturn, broke out of orbit to approach earth. There is an urgency about its position in the sky, about the way the seabirds hover motionless in a steep ocean wind. The men around him are old and bundled, and the small fish they catch lay beside their boots in tiny droplets of blood. The old men don't know about the hazing tonight and they don't care. He imagines them tending their lines obliviously as the wave of coeds rushes up the pier, out over the end. Perhaps they would look up when they heard

the splash below, he thought, but not at the thin naked legs shuffling behind them at midnight. No, that kind of attentiveness is the exclusive province of younger men, an immutable primal thing. One small, flat fish contorts one last time beside a silver bucket, and on Pacific Coast Highway an array of sirens sever the monotonous hum of traffic. Seabirds accelerate in unison and slant away from the scene. He can see in the distance beyond Alice's Restaurant and near the row of fast-food establishments a commotion of lights and sounds—megaphones and the filtered, electronic noise of police-band radio.

This distraction is an annoyance. He thinks quickly back to the hazing. And with the way the mind works, its webbing of miraculous segue, he connects the hazing to this commotion. The cold water below him is blackening. A young girl could be pushed against a barnacled piling by the surf, cut or knocked unconscious. Or she could succumb to hypothermia. They would find the girl's naked body in the sand below the pier the next morning, cordon off the entire area with yellow police tape while they conduct an investigation. He would lean over his office desk at the university and see out the huge plate-glass Malibu below him with police cars and ambulances and fire trucks all buzzing about like tiny asteroids in the space of land just after dawn, before classes. Heather's face would pale when he queried his eight a.m. Freshmen Astronomy (unless, of course, it was Heather whose body lay in the sand!). "A sor-or-it-y girl," she would say, her eyes probably down around his shoes as is her shy way with him. "In a haz-zing," her way of breaking syllables, teeth clenched tightly around the "Z" sound. "There is nothing sex-i-er than a young teacher," she had told him in that same office. With his back to her he could see her reflection in the night-darkened window, her marvelous bare shoulders like an inverted coat-hanger, the defined, chocolate divots between collar bones. "In *The World According to Garp*, Heather, there is a terrific line. Do you know it? 'There is no sexier word in the English language than eighteen.'"

For a moment he feels within himself a surge of panic. If there *is* an accident and a commotion he might be discovered here! How would he explain? I was on the pier to watch the stars when

suddenly a dozen or so of them, these young women, completely undressed, came running, full-speed, to the end of the pier and over into the water. These men were fishing...Momentary fear is usurped quickly by what got him where he is in the first place, his "am-a-zzing" penchant for the rational. Heather would have to come forward to say she had mentioned to him the hazing. This would not happen (especially if it is Heather who meets with tragedy tonight). So he pulls over his ears his woolen watchcap that snags momentarily on an earring and plunges his hands into twill pockets locking his elbows, and he waits stiff-armed on Malibu Pier waiting for the University Girls to arrive.

If Heather comes in tonight I'm gonna act like nothing ever happened. All I said was "Studying stars and planets isn't gonna teach you anything about real life." And, hey, I mean that. She doesn't think much of me for all the wrong reasons. She thinks because I work *here* I'm not any good. She thinks you have to be a University Guy to be something. It's a cultural thing when you're Mexican, you know. My grandfather used to say, "Do what you do and do it well." It means you work hard at a job. That's what I do and that's why they made me manager, that's why my picture is on the wall too, you know. It's not like I like doing this. She thinks you have to like what you're doing. The fat women that come in, that fuckin' derelict, it's a lot to do. There's a buzzer supposed to tell you when the fries are ready only works half the time. So the employees get upset because they burn the fries. Then the customers get upset, you know, and I get upset. That's the way real life is. It's like this coin dispenser. You flick it and the coin comes out. Simple. You do one thing and another thing happens. As a result. You get what you work for, you know. When I was a kid in southern Texas there was this guy with one of these things at a circus peep show, the kind where they'd have midde-aged women doing live sex acts, you know. They don't allow those anymore. And I remember this guy flickin' at it to get change for the men lined up with big bills. He'd flick at it and quarters would pop up 'cause he had it upside-down on his belt. He'd catch the quarters in one hand and took the bills with the other. So sometimes he'd drop one or

two, and in the noise and all of the circus, you know, we'd be down at his feet on all fours pickin' up the coins! And from there you could look right under the seam of the tent where they were having this peep show. So a few months ago we all took a bus to Vegas and I found one of these old cylinder dispensers in a pawn shop there, and with us goin' to quarter-sized tokens for the toilets and all, I got it. That's the way life is. That's the way I've always learned about things, you know. I mean I went to college for a little while and I just couldn't hack it. Does that make me *unfocused*? All I said was, "Studying stars and planets isn't gonna teach you anything about real life."

What I did with Heather though is I screwed up. I mean she comes in here every weekday afternoon for two weeks and smiling at *me*. The thing about her is her shoulders and her blonde hair. The first time she just kind of laid one little hand on her collar bone and kind of looked embarrassed I think because I was staring at her. "I know, I shouldn't eat junk food," she said and rolled her head back over her shoulder. It was really exciting because she looked right at me. People don't look right at you. And then later she asked me about being a *Latino*. Nobody uses that word anymore. I really screwed up because I knew she was a University Girl and I shouldn't have come off like I knew everything about everything. I shouldn't have said, "Studying stars and planets isn't gonna teach you anything about real life." She just looked me right in the eyes and said, "Is that supposed to be the world according to Gon-za-les?"

Half the time I didn't know what she was talking about anyway. And you wanna know the truth the whole thing pisses me off royal. And if she comes in again I'm gonna act like nothing ever happened, like I don't even want her. Even though I still do. How could a guy not want her. I'm gonna give her the cold shoulder.

The University Community was shocked at what happened. The quaint, benign coastal town had been a sleeping monster, a tragedy in waiting. News releases featured the archetypal photos of the romantic old pier draped in a pleasantry of thin, shining fog. Never do these show you the vacant lots where the homeless sleep,

the cheap rendezvous motels, and the simple architecture of a row of, of all things, fast food joints. Malibu residents prefer to keep these undercover. But to the good mind, there could have been no surprise. One must only have studied the elements of the story. It has to do with a mixing of differences. There is an incompatibility about the facets found here. The have-nots cannot be expected to live in harmony with the haves. And this event irrefutably is a culmination of a series of causally related, even predictable events, don't you think?

When parents send their young girls off to college shouldn't they think of such things? Shouldn't they at least take the time to visit the location? Their young, bare-shouldered daughters set loose upon a town where homeless men awaken in sleeping bags to stare. Or would the University Girls better relate to Malibu's working class, those who live each day here with a festering resentment and a violent sense of alienation? And shouldn't parents inquire about the itinerary of the University Ethics Committee? How often do people misbehave in Malibu, especially those who grow old behind huge desks and intellectual spectacles?

And assuming they had not to worry about their daughters becoming victims of assault, shouldn't they have been concerned about the predictable, well-documented behavior of adolescence? What happened in Malibu can quite simply be accounted for by the tendency toward rebellion. Behavior manifested by this tendency is often symbolic of the need to break out of mold, or perhaps to avoid a sense of impending doom. In any case, these factors all were there, and they still are. Meaning that the University Girl story could repeat itself quite easily. When random forces fall into place in a predictable pattern. Don't you think?

You're sleeping on the beach and you can forget all about the commotion and all about the damned University Girl and all about stupid Gonzales. And none of it makes any damned difference. There's just the sand and the water and the birds and you. Or me, I guess. And you can do anything you want. I'm picturing myself as the Saint Teresa bun in *Dharma Bums* all holy and righteous. I still carry it around with me and read it all day, even in Gonzales's

McDonalds. I'm reading from that first chapter, the dream and sitting on the morning beach with Kerouac in Southern California.

> *How many human beings have there been, in fact how many living creatures have there been, since before the less part of beginningless time? Why, oh, I reckon you would have to calculate the number of grains of sand on this beach and on every star in the sky, in every one of the ten thousand great chilicosms, which would be a number of sand grains uncomputable by IBM or Burroughs too, why boy I don't rightly know* (swig of wine) *I don't rightly know, but it must be a couple umpteen trillion sextillion infideled and busted up unnumberable number...*

That pier is striking out to sea like an American picket fence. If it weren't for the yellow tape and chalk lines, you'd never suspect anything could be wrong at all. Not on this beach this morning. You don't have to do anything at all, just sit here. Later I'll head up and check the dumpster behind Kentucky Fried, maybe get a paper and some quarter coins. By then this moring magic mood will be broke for sure. There'll be traffic and noise and sirens, and maybe some stupid headline on the paper. Maybe they'll interview stupid Gonzales. They won't find me to interview, that's for sure. I'll just be reading my book. Some headline it'll have probably. University Girl.

Stephanie Mark

Hair in My Eyes

It happens most often at work. Especially on the day after. My hearing becomes fine-tuned, really sharp and I don't miss a sound. Sometimes I make a game of it. First I look over the customer, evaluate his hair, then guess what kind of noise it will make. I'm pretty good. Curly hair is the easiest, it almost always makes a wire-like noise when you cut it, kind of like a Slinky. Red hair sounds like sizzling bacon, or biting a carrot. I have red hair so I know this is true. Brown hair can be a little trickier to guess because it varies, depending on the shade. Dark brown is like the noise windshield wipers make on a clear day. Light brown can be tinfoil being ripped on a serrated edge.

It's shaggy blondes who are the sneaky ones. By that, I mean their hair doesn't make any sound at all. But it's not really silent, either. Not really.

My first customer this morning has gray hair and this throws me off completely. He's a drop-in, which means he doesn't have an appointment. I'm the one who usually gets these people because I haven't been here long enough to develop a following. Suzette has a following. She's always booked up right through lunch. Always on a diet, that one, so she skips meals. Some of my drop-ins even ask for her once they get a glimpse.

"Who is that thin blonde over there?" they'll point. "Is she available?"

But by then they're already in my chair and I've got them

anchored down with this heavy robe which sounds like steel weights clanking together at the gym. So they stay with me, but sometimes on the way out, I overhear them booking their next appointment with Suzette. She's always booked up right through lunch. But then I haven't been here to develop a following.

I hold the scissors exactly like I've been trained, on a slant above his head. This man has dandruff though, so I close my eyes. I'm one of those people who gets queasy fast. Not from actual things, but from what actual things remind me of. Dandruff reminds me of chalk dust, like the day when Mrs. Gibbs wrote math equations on the board after lunch. Sherry Ann had spaghetti in the cafeteria and then hung upside down from the monkey bars. I had to close my eyes when she threw up long strands of red by her desk. The smell was very Italian. So now I have to close my eyes around spaghetti and chalk and I guess, even dandruff.

I cut the first strand of gray with my eyes closed, but it's okay because I'm a pretty steady hand. My eyes open when I hear a loud clatter like pots and pans banging together. I smile down at the wisp of hair on the floor. I wasn't too far off really. I guessed the sound of a blender grinding ice. Both are kitchen noises.

"Just a little off the sides," he says.

"Don't worry," I say, "I'm quite good with my hands." I've been saying this to all my male customers to see what their reactions will be. Besides, I think flirting is how you develop a following.

"I won't worry," he says and looks at my left eye in the mirror. He has eyes that slant down like my husband's. My husband's hair isn't graying yet, so there's no real resemblance. He's not at work today, so it's important I work overtime. Drop-ins don't usually tip that well, but this one seems receptive to me and my scissors. He doesn't even remark about my closed eyes.

I hear the sound of a xylophone and turn to see Suzette laugh and wind a roller in her customer's hair. The customer nods as if she too, understands the joke. I almost smile but remember my gold crown and cover it with my tongue.

"Got a toothache?" my customer asks. I guess he's been watching me in the mirror. That's the bad part of this job. Even

when you think you're behind somone's back, you're really not.

"Are you a dentist?" I ask. He doesen't answer and I'm sure he thinks that was one of those sarcastic questions. But I was only curious.

I notice his eyes are already slanting toward Suzette's station. Why can't these drop-ins ever be fatihful? So she diets and it shows. Who cares? You have to be in a good frame of mind to diet, otherwise everything upsets you and makes you want to eat. I know this is true because last night, after my husband and I fought, I went to Bob's Big Boy and ordered a hot fudge sundae. Not directly after, because I was still kind of queasy, but a couple of hours after.

The waitress was polite and didn't even stare so I knew I would tip her well. She was in a white uniform and set the plate down so quietly it sounded like a pillow. The ice cream and fudge made soft aquarium sounds like in the dentist office. But the cherry did not belong. It was like a hard marble or something. It was okay though, because I knew she was trained to put it on top. I know about training. I left her two dollars and the cherry wrapped in my napkin. A good tip can change your day.

When I got home, Nathan was already asleep and when I looked at my eye in the mirror I was surprised to see it wasn't noticeable hardly at all. Nothing to stare at. I put ice on it just the same.

Next to Suzette's station is a manicurist and next to her, a makeup artist named Charlene. Charlene bends over a woman with a red pencil. The woman purses her lips. Charlene draws a thin line not quite as full as the woman's real lips. I know a lot about makeup even though I don't wear it myself. She stays just far enough from her so it doesn't look like they're about to kiss or something. Maybe Charlene has bad breath. You have to be careful about things like that in our business. Or you never develop a following. She finishes up her lips and smears some white cream on her eyelids. I touch my own eye.

"Got a problem with your eye?" I imagine my customer asking.

"Are you an eye doctor?" I would ask and he would know I was not being sarcastic. None of this happens though, instead he throws

off the gray robe. It crashes to my feet like a cymbal.

"That's enough," he says and half runs up to the cashier with hair cuttings on his collar. They talk in quiet tones and glance back at me. I smile, forgetting my gold crown. I assume they are discussing how much of a tip to leave me.

I sit in an empty chair between Charlene and the manicurist and watch carefully. She is doing the eyeshadow now. The lady has small eyes and I know enough about makeup to see that Charlene uses bright colors like peach to make the eyes appear larger. It has something to do with the light and reflection.

The lady's eyelids quiver and Charlene steadies her hand on her shoulder so she doesn't goof up or make a smear. I smell a strong odor and turn to see the manicurist shaking a bottle of nail polish. Red. She applies it to the young girl's left hand until her nails look just like five cherries. I feel a little queasy. A woman comes in the door and the bells overhead sound like the ice-cream truck. She looks like a drop-in and I see the cashier point her finger at me. I motion with my hand and the woman comes my way. She wears a white uniform and has blonde hair. There's no use guessing about any noise, I think. Unless she's not a real blond which is possible these days. I like this idea. What kind of sound would hair with dark roots and blonde ends make? I am thankful my job is challenging in this way. She's real polite and looks kind of familiar. The moment she sits down she notices.

"Oh, what happened honey? Did you have an accident with your eye?"

I think for a long time in my head, but really only a minute passes before I answer her. "It was stupid. I bumped it on that blow dryer over there," I point. "Earlier today when I did a customer."

"Oh," she says softly, like whipped cream. My eye is only slightly swollen and I'm surprised she noticed. The appointment is over quickly because she only wants her bangs trimmed. She leaves me five dollars and a marble wrapped in a napkin. A good tip can change your day.

At lunch time, people start to gather their things and make plans to go out. Even Suzette pats her absent stomach and says, "Oh what the hell, some vegetable soup couldn't hurt." I hope she orders ice

cream instead. She leaves with the cashier and the manicurist. I am left with the young girl who sweeps the hair up into a dustpan.

She sits on a stool, her knees grasp the broomstick and blows a bubble. I will her to look at my eye but she doesn't.

"Do you mind watching shop?" she says and the bubble snaps.

I look at the shampoos and curlers. "I'll watch shop," I tell her. The bell over the door rings like the man who stands in front of the Thrifty Drug. I am alone.

Instead of going to my own station, I sit down at Charlene's. There is an array of eyeshadows in all colors, not just bright ones. There is blue, brown, bronze, voilet, and a purple shade. I pick up the little brush and rub it over the purple container. It smooths on my left eyelid easily like satin. I pat a little violet around the sides, extending toward my cheek. Then I mix in a little blue until I get the exact shade. I do this carefully and slowly. Not too much, but definitely not too little. There can be no question. I blend the edges so all the colors run together on my eye. I add some black shadow, which is only supposed to be used for contouring but is quite effective here. Black and blue. I keep blending with a cotton swab until it doesn't even look like makeup anymore. It looks like what it is.

I put small samples of the shadows in my purse. I will need them for later, after I have taken my shower. I may want to do my jaw for when Nathan wakes up from his afternoon nap.

I imagine him sleeping on the couch. When I walk in the door, I'll see a package with a note sitting on the coffee table. "Sorry about last night," the note will say. Underneath it will be a box of See's Candy with a big red bow on top. Chocolate covered cherries.

I will stand perfectly still and wait for a noise, any kind of noise. The sound of breaking glass, a dog howling, or yelling. Any kind of sound. But there won't be any because Nathan will be asleep on the couch, his shaggy blonde hair silently splayed out on the pillow.

I look away from the eyeshadow and toward the cutting shears at my station. I think for a long time in my head, but really only a minute passes before I say aloud to the mirror, "When is the last time Nathan has had a haircut?" Then I pick up my purse with the samples inside and head toward home. He is long overdue.

Ida Ferdman

When Autumn Leaves Don't Fall

I'm thinking again, and my brain hurts. Sometimes I think about old women gumming Zwieback in front of televisions. They eat nothing but Zwieback for days because social workers only come once a week, and no one else visits. There is no one else. Other times I think about shopping bag ladies whose husbands have died, and left them with nothing. They have no children to fall back on because of God's will or just bad luck. And sometimes I think about old waitresses who push carts to serve food because their hands shake and cannot hold the plates. Their orthopedic shoes barely shuffle them along and they listen to customers talk about children and grandchildren. They wonder what life would have been like.

Danny makes coffee downstairs. I can hear him searching the drawer for a spoon. I can smell the warmth of the steam. He hopes he will stop me from thinking by brewing a pot of my favorite coffee, Irish Cream. Sometimes he does; most of the time he does not.

When we were younger, before we were married, Danny and I used to walk down the long dock to the lake. Sometimes we would swim naked at night in the cold water. But most of the time we would walk down the grey-splintered boards, and sit on the edge, and dangle our legs off the side above the water. We would kiss and talk about the future.

I remember one evening in autumn when we had walked to the

edge, and it seemed like no other time before. The leaves had colored and begun to fall from their branches. The air was crisp, and the wind blew leaves and grass in circles. The lake rippled and each lapse of its waves brought the scent of winter where we sat. We watched the sun set behind a grove of orange splashed maple trees. I stare out the window, and cannot think about coffee right now.

The tree outside has turned red, yellow, and orange, while green leaves try to hold their hue a little longer. Soon the leaves will begin to drop. I've watched this tree change color, lose its leaves, and grow green again every autumn and spring for the past five years. It always acts this way; I expect it always will. But sometimes I look out the window and think how out of sync the cycle would be if these autumn leaves stopped falling, and stayed on their tree.

I don't think about maternity wards, nursery schools, or Mrs. Crater's morning sickness.

As I enter the kitchen Danny extends his arm toward me with a coffee mug at the end. I push past him, slamming the screen door shut behind me. I imagine him standing there, staring into the middle of my back. He calls my name.

Wouldn't he like me to turn around and come rushing into his arms? Wouldn't he just like that?

I hear him again as I reach the end of our driveway. I remember he calls me Daphne because I remind him of the bad witch in some old movie he's seen on the late show. It does not make me want to turn back.

I pass the Crater house, and Mrs. Crater waddles up the path toward me. I don't want to talk to her; I don't even want to look at her.

"Hi-ho," she sings to me as she arrives with her eight-months-along stomach coming first. I ignore her; she waddles faster, and plants herself in front of me. I close my eyes, but when I open them again she is still there. "I've been setting up my baby's room. It's all pink because I already know the baby is going to be a girl. Amazing what modern medicine can do, huh? Don't you think it's amazing?" I want to tell her that I think it's amazing that anyone

as stupid as her could have gotten pregnant in the first place. But I don't say that. Instead I walk away. She says I am a bad neighbor.

I want to tell her that she is the bad neighbor. But I don't say that either.

I can see the orange street sweeper grinding its way down our block. Its round brushes rotate fast beneath its lumbering metallic body, and make a swesh, swesh, swesh sound. I love the orange street sweeper, and always watch it clean our street on Thursday afternoons. It comes every Thursday, except when it rains.

It passes by, and fine mists of water spray my bare legs. I go through this ritual every Thursday. I know its time and rhythm better than I know my own.

Mrs. Crater watches me from down the street as if I were crazy. I can count on her to look at me this way, just as I can count on the sweeper to come every Thursday, and the tree to drop its leaves in fall. I can count on these things more than myself.

I watch the sweeper until it rounds the corner out of sight. The street is wet along the edges next to the curb. The wetness fringes the street like a ribbon on a package. It's sunny, so steam rises from the moisture, and curls upward until it evaporates into the air.

The wet asphalt smells as bad as a long-haired dog after a bath, but I like it and don't know why.

I stand on the sidewalk a while longer and watch the steam rise, and inhale the warm, moldy smell of the wet street. I will have little else to get me through the night.

On Thursdays when it rains and the orange street sweeper does not make its rounds, I stay in my room and think.

I don't want to think about the orange sun-splashed maple trees or that evening at the lake. So instead I think about old age homes, and cardboard boxes with pillows and blankets for sleeping at night.

I lie on the couch and watch the maple move in the breeze. Soon it will rain. When the tree is completely bare I can look through its straggly branches toward the lake. But I don't always like to think about the lake.

I remember that evening on the dock when Danny asked me to marry him and have some babies. The wind and water stung my face, and the trees surrounding the lake looked orange on one side and shadowed on the other. I did not like to see the trees halved the way they were that evening. And I don't like to remember them that way. But I do.

That evening as Danny waited for me to answer I watched another couple on a dock across the lake. They looked like our mirrored reflections, and I thought they were probably planning their lives, just as we were making plans we would never complete.

Sometimes I feel like a tree whose leaves won't fall.

Danny knocks on my door. I don't answer him. I can't. This is not a talking room; this is a thinking room.

Talk. He wants to talk, as if that will help anything. As if that will make me stop thinking, or think about something else. But he doesn't know what I think about.

I think about Mrs. Crater. She talks too much; all pregnant women talk too much. They are confident, and think just because they hold life within their uneven bulges they have something to say about the true meaning of everything. And they all want to tell you about it.

He'll go away soon because he can't talk to himself for much longer, and he won't force himself into the room.

I look out the window and see Mrs. Crater squatting over a cluster of crabgrass, grasping it between her pudgy fingers. As she tugs loose the piece she totters a moment then falls on her back. She cannot get up, and I don't feel sorry for her.

He knocks again, and I want to say I'll be o.k. It's just a phase. But I don't.

And besides, this is not a talking room.

It's Thursday again, and raining. These are my worst days when the wind pushes branches against my window. In this wind most of the leaves will be on the ground by morning. The lawn will be covered with color instead of the dry straw it now has. When I was little I used to rake leaves into piles, and jump on them. Then

I would roll through them and listen to the crackling of their brittle skins, and watch their flakes swim through the air. Now I let the gardener rake the leaves, and burn them. I promise myself I will never rake leaves in autumn.

I also promise myself I will never ask women when they expect to get pregnant and never drive past the school yard at three o' clock in the afternoon when children come pouring out and run up to their mothers and kiss them and hand them lunch boxes and show them scraped knees.

I promise myself I will never walk down the baby food and diaper aisle at the market; they keep Tampax in the same place. When I need a box, I send Danny.

I will never call my period my friend.

The leaves are gone, and small buds poke out. Soon new leaves will sprout, and the lake will disappear again for another year, and clusters of fruit will hang from the tree in the next yard.

When I was little we had an orange tree that would not bear fruit. My dad pruned and fed it, but it never gave us one orange. Every year it grew bright green leaves, and bloomed large white blossoms with yellow centers. But they would wither and fall away. One year he tired of the tree, chopped it down, dug out its roots, and packed the hole with fresh dirt. A week later he planted a new one.

Mrs. Crater had her baby last week. I heard her and the other Crater get into their car at three o'clock in the morning. I heard her groan, and rolled over and went back to sleep.

When she came home from the hospital she invited me to see the baby, but I would not go. So she brought the baby to me, as if it needed my approval. I have not seen her since.

I told her the baby looked like a gargoyle and smelled like dried urine, and she left.

I don't think about maple trees or orange street sweepers anymore.

I think about buying a white convertible. I will tie my hair in a ribbon, put on dark glasses, and drive to the desert. I could drive

in the desert for miles without really getting anywhere, and without changing anything. The sand covers all in the desert. And lizards with bumpy skins, and cacti with needles don't know about clocks or calendars.

I would keep a canteen on the seat, and stop to watch the Joshua trees bend their outreaching arms to heaven. Their harsh forms would seem to plead against a background of pale beige sand and washed-out blue sky.

The desert would be dry and quiet, and heat would move across my face like sand across the dunes. And it would scrub loose the thickness built-up on my brain.

I think about buying a white convertible and driving out to the desert. But I don't.

Instead I stop going downstairs on Thursdays, and buy a shade to cover the window.

At the lake that evening when Danny proposed I said yes let's. And as the last bits of sun sank below the grove of maple trees, casting them forever in shadow, I felt frightened. But I did not know why. Now I know.

I take off my clothes and let the breeze move over me, and watch the shade glide out and back, out and back.

I close my eyes and slip back into my white convertible. Soon I am in the desert: just me and the sand and the lizards and the Joshua trees. I start driving at sunset, and don't even stop when the lights are about to go out.

I hear a knock on the door and the first crackle of thunder, and see the wind play with the shade and droplets of rain splatter on the pinewood floor.

But I only think about the white convertible, and the bending Joshua trees.

James Leishman Etchison

Because Before the Wind There Was Wandering

From above, the desert makes Leto's trailer look like a tiny turquoise dot which occasionally billows smoke. On every side the desert stretches wide, without interruption from trails or roads.

Leto steps off the corrugated aluminum step to watch the sunset. The sun bronzes the west side of the afternoon with a fine patina: the windy tree, the East mountains, the trailer, the barbecue, Leto's gray eyes. Besides a few bushes and Gila monsters, that is all there is.

Leto sees the windy tree was long ago blown by the wind. He knows well it's gnarled trunk, stooped and bent for the east, branches pointing westward like a hand out of the grave. It has taught Leto that many years ago this desert was blown with a constant mighty wind, and the windy tree still remembers it.

Now the desert is still, like a sunning snake. Some days he stands tall and stiff, unshaven and brown from many such days, arms straight out with fingers licked and pointed in search of the least trace of what the tree remembers. The quiet never disappoints him; he only waits.

Seven years ago, Leto towed his trailer beyond the farmland, the irrigation pipes, the electric wires, beyond every trace of man but two. He cannot escape the last two.

One is above him. The haphazard zig-zagging of jet planes across the sky stitches a seam of vapor trails in the perfect blue which Leto cannot escape no matter how far he takes his small

turquoise trailer. The other sign is the clouds on moonless nights.

Where Leto had grown up, the word for cloud meant "sky mountain," and now on moonless nights the mountains in the sky glow like nocturnal eyes. The glow reflects from the streetlights, stoplights, and the twelve hundred windows lit by the twelve hundred televisions of West Basin. The golden blue reflects off the clouds and into Leto's face. One of those lights, he knows, lights the face of one woman in West Basin whom Leto once loved. She was all he knew until the wind blew him east. Now, she watches the blue light at night alone, and Leto gazes into her reflection in the glowing sky mountains.

Day or night, Leto watches the clouds to see which direction the wind is blowing. When he lived in West Basin, the spirituous wind would often deceive him unless he stayed very still. A quick glance at the clouds and he would think, "The wind is blowing south west," but then he would take a slow, long look and say, "No, he blows north." Now Leto is always still and slow, always sensing the wind high above him.

On the ground, though, there hasn't been wind for seven years.

Leto looks again at the silk knuckles of the East Mountains, marvelling at the hand which had carved each crevasse and ridge. The sun's bronzing effect on its side fades into purple and gray. Leto steps back into his trailer.

The postman is coming tomorrow, and Leto wonders if he should talk to him. Leto doesn't like to talk. Words form on his mouth like mildew, slow and unwelcomed. It isn't the English language that weighs down the words, even though English was extremely difficult for Leto to learn. As a child in his far away home Leto said very little. The most noise Leto ever made was when he played the oboe.

Inside, Leto looks on the tiny aluminum windowframe where his oboe sits in its case. He hasn't taken it out to play since he moved to the desert seven windless years ago. The desert doesn't listen to oboe playing.

There were listeners once, but not in the desert. In his far away home he played before thousands. His oboe led him around like a master sergeant. It led him onto the plane with those three other

woodwind-playing men. It led him, on long night flights of sewing those vapor trail seams, to talk to the tight-lipped bassoonist about their home and romantic love.

"When you find it," the tight-lipped bassoonist always said, "hold on for dear life."

He did find it, he thought, in West Basin, but the wind blew and now she is a dreamy glow in the clouds at night. Leto now reserves his love for the hand that carved the mountains, the windy tree outside his trailer, and the wind itself.

Leto watches as the little plume of dust approaches from bluffs between West Basin and Leto's desert. It grows larger, and as Leto expected, it is Mr. Guthals. Mr. Guthals is the postman, and Leto knows that his name means "good neck" but when Mr. Guthals drives his jeep up to Leto's trailer and steps out, Leto notices that a small goiter has developed, causing Mr. Guthals' neck to swell to unusual proportions. Leto says nothing.

"Don't mind the neck," says Guthals. "It's from the low-salt diet my wife had me on last month. It doesn't hurt and the doctor says it will go away."

Leto smiles and nods.

"Got a few things for you today," he continues. "Here's the whole box." He hefts a box from the back of his blue jeep and as he sets it down next to Leto's corrugated aluminum steps, dust shooting out from beneath it. "All the usual stuff. Plus the rope you ordered."

"Any junk mail I could have?" Leto asks, his voice hoarse and dry.

Mr. Guthals smiles, his chin overlapping the goiter so he appears to have no neck at all. "Thought you would ask that," he says. "I got some right here." He pulls out a stack of sale catalogues that people left sitting in the mail chutes at apartment houses. "Nobody seemed to want these, so I guess you can have 'em."

"Thanks." Leto takes them.

"Well that's it," says Mr. Guthals. "Guess I'll head back. See

you in a couple days, Leto."

"Bye." Leto sticks his hand straight up to wave him goodbye, his eyes scanning the junk mail Mr. Guthals had given him.

The dust plume from the jeep goes back around the bluffs to West Basin, and Leto flips through all the catalogues, scanning the names on the white address labels in search of one particular name. Lilly. He is not sure were she lives now, and although Mr. Guthals thought he used the junkmail to burn, Leto also searched through the white labels, sifting out the "occupants" in search of Lilly's new address. He flipped through them all, but once again he did not find her name among them.

Leto wanted to write her and bring her back to him. He wanted Lilly to live where the wind had blown him.

He had ordered thirty feet of half-inch rope, and Mr. Guthals had given him exactly that. Leto took one end of the thirty feet and threw it over the crook of the lowest branch in the windy tree. Leto felt that thirty feet would be just long enough, but that the rope might as well be infinitely long—so long that it only has one end. A rope that long, he thought, could only lead to God.

Leto ties a loose cinch around one end and feeds the length of rope through so that it is tied securely to the branch, and a full twenty-two feet hangs down along the tree's trunk. The bottom is a foot off the ground.

Leto stops and looks east for a long time. He licks his finger and stands in communion with the tree, feeling the windless air. Then he ties a loop at the bottom of the rope big enough to wrap himself in.

Leto steps back to his trailer and looks again at the tree. "It looks like a hanging tree now," he thinks.

Leto gazes at the blue sky from the East Mountains all the way toward West Basin. There are no clouds, so Leto steps into his trailer to get out of the sun.

Leto sits on his wobbly, plastic-backed, steel-legged chair staring at his oboe case. He is perfectly still. Flies crawl on his face and into his ears and nose but he doesn't move. He just stares at the

case lost in its memories. There had been a purity to his music once—a purity too divine to speak of in any church. For as little as he could communicate with his mouth, his oboe would communicate that purity with a passion. It was in West Basin that the passion left him. It left him and then he had nothing. Just the wind that would leave his lungs, pass through his oboe and out the other side. Meaningless wind. He will never go back there, for fear of losing even the little wind that is left.

He stares at the oboe case a moment more and stands.

After seven years he opens his oboe case. It is still inside, perfectly preserved, ready for him. The small double-reed is inside a sealed plastic container and to Leto's surprise the reed has not cracked with age. He carefully puts the reed into his mouth to moisten it and begins connecting the sections of the oboe together.

Then he hears it.

Leto always thought that he would first be able to see or feel a sign of it. A movement in the higher branches of the windy tree, a low cloud moving at high speed, or a coolness on one side of a licked finger, but he never expected to hear the wind first.

It is a low rumbling, far away, at the base of the East Mountains. Leto quickly puts together the instrument and steps outside to see. A giant cloud of dust speed towards him like water from a burst dam. It is more than a wind, he realizes, it is a Spirit movement.

He runs to his tree, alarm in his steps, and slips the rope around his waist. He puts the oboe to his mouth and waits. The wind approaches so fast that it will push by him and pass straight through West Basin in less than a few minutes. The tree would save him, though.

First he feels a tiny breeze, and he begins to play.

Although it has been seven years, he plays virtuously and with the purity he had once lost. The wind hits him with full force, carrying the sound of his oboe out and away so swiftly that he can't hear what he is playing.

The trailer begins creaking and is torn loose from its cement footings. The wind is so loud in Leto's ears that he cannot hear the crashing as the trailer rolls end over end toward West Basin. The Windy tree bends low, and the rope is taught. The wind pushes Leto

westward with more force at his back than he has ever felt.

The tree holds him fast, the mountains stand resolute, and the trailer is lost in the cloud. Leto continues playing. His music passes through the dustcloud, with the wind, through the loud desert air. Leto hopes that it passes into West Basin, and into the ears of a dark-skinned woman named Lilly. The oboe sounds with passion, pure communication. It says, "come back, come back."

Contributors:

Jeannie Chang graduated from CSUN with a BA in literature. "A South Korean Woman's Song" is her first published poem. **Bobbie R. Coleman** teaches English at CSUN, is a freelance sign language interpreter and plays the part of a monger at the Renaissance Faire. She doesn't know if she ever wants to grow up. **Charela Durham** is a senior in Liberal Studies at CSUN. "¡Escuche y Viva!" is her first published poem. **Glenn Dwiggins** just graduated from CSUN and is currently looking for a job, sort of. He dedicates his *New Regensburg* stories to his grandfather, Don Joseph Dwiggins, for reasons he will never know. **James Leishman Etchison's** favorite author is Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., his favorite movie is *Blade Runner*, and his favorite breakfast cereal is Post Toasties. **Ida Ferdman** has had two poems published in previous issues of *Northridge Review*. "When Autumn Leaves Don't Fall" is her second story published in the *Review*. She is now teaching at CSUN. **Daniel Fogg** lives in Silverlake now and is very happy. **Mary M. Harris** is a senior in the writing program at CSUN. She has been previously published in *Northridge Review*, *Amelia*, and *Blue Unicorn*. She has won the Rachel Sherwood Award twice, in 1987 and 1988. **Steve Hetland** just graduated from CSUN. He's not sure what he's going to do now that he's graduated, but he'll see which way the current takes him. "Antarctica" is his second published short story. **Kristina McHaddad** has been published in previous issues of *Northridge Review*, *Manuscript*, and in the *American Poetry Anthology*. Now she wants to live in northern California. **Adele Renault** has been involved in writing workshops and extention classes at LACC and UCLA. "Lonely" is her first published poem, and she has an upcoming book of poetry called *Intimate Textures*. **Scott Sandler** is a senior in the writing program at CSUN. "Custer" is his second published story. **Patti Scheibel** is graduating hopefully this Spring. She received an honorable mention in the 1988 Academy of American Poets contest. Watch for her novel. If you find it, please contact her, she seems to have lost it. **Lois Shimazaki** is a senior in the writing program at CSUN. **Howard Schweitzer** is a graduate student at CSUN in the writing program. "Tristan and Isolde" is his first published poem. **Carol M. Spizman** has graduated from CSUN with a BA in English and now pushes coffee. Jimmy's back from Tuscon. **Jennifer Wolfe** is a local Northridge poet who has given readings at Bebop Records, Beyond Baroque, and the Contemporary Valley Poets series. She has also self published a clapbook of poetry entitled *Almost Free of the Mirror*.

Biographies were not available at presstime for the following: **Mark Goff, Chaney Holland, Jeffery Jivey, Stephanie Mark, Ron Pronk, Hart Schulz, L. Swansen.**