



aurora

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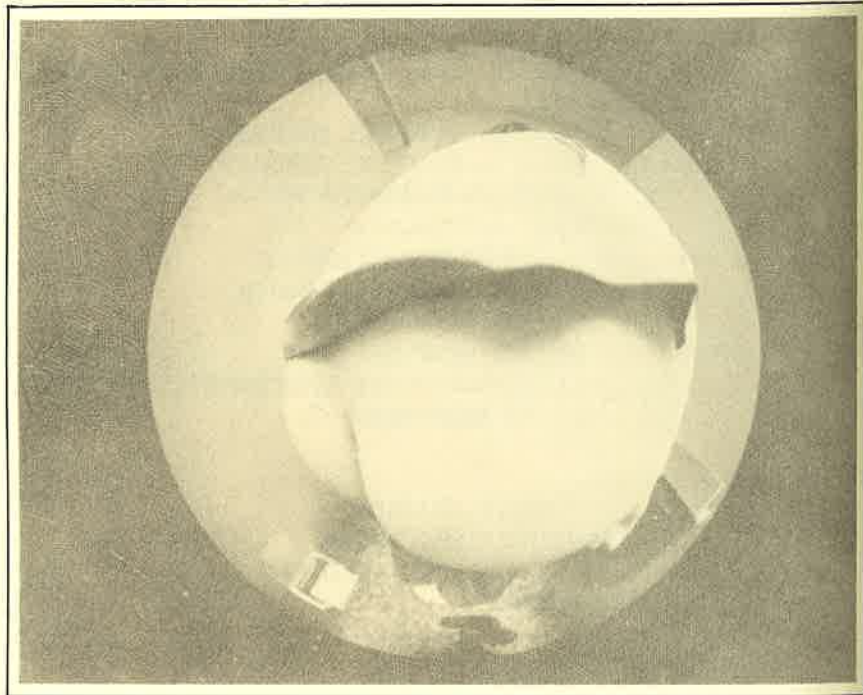
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Georgia Peach — *Mary Praytor*

The Idyll

*for the upstairs bathroom
at Callanwolde*

I feel singularly welcome
in bathy bathrooms
high in ceiling
lots of legroom
bulbous faucets and
buxom white sinks.

There I could really
scrub my teeth
return at evening
secure in the knowledge
that my brush stands firmly
implanted in its stone-like cradle
my soap in its deep round dish
no shiny metal here.

I could find myself in such
a wholesome haven
cloud deep in a thick tub
that stands out from the wall
on its own four feet
a proper Walden.

— *Jayne Greenstein Durham*

Fantasy Involving a Concert, Three Poets, and the Dawn of Man

Out of several violins playing Mozart
At seven o'clock one evening
Before the sun went down
Came Mesopotamia.
The riverbank trees grew up
With fronds curled
Like the heads of the violins
And shimmered through the haze of history
Like a tremolo.

In the middle of the rivers,
Among the peacock-eyed plants
Lay the king, killed for playing
Tiddlywinks with his fish scales,
Casting them in runes,
Two by two.

Waiting and watching for the ripe fruit to fall
Sat his successor;
Unwary of his own watchers
Sat the waiting king's successor;
Those who got the others
Will get him too.

High above the rivers
Like heat waves in the sky,
Engraved were the circles
Drawn by bones in the air;
Discerned through prisms
And delivered into images.

Like blind white grubs
The circles lay curled in air,
Diminuendos of imagination.
Beneath, suspended cellophane-thin
Between the tombs of kings,
Mesopotamia hung like a hammock.

— Kathleen Carroll

Daphne's Regret

Pricked by Cupid's
love-quickenning arrow,
Apollo follows
Daphne's windwild fluid form
through woods where Daphne's
feet find home. She,
love blunted by Cupid's bolt,
lifts limp limbs
heavenward,
begging for a bark house.

Unraveled feet grown graveward,
tangled hair woven to a green shock,
breasts boarded up —
the loveless body is buried
in an attic trunk,
leaving Apollo to
waste wild kisses on wood.

But oneday,
when time has driven that
leaden, love-deadening poison
from the laurel veins,
deep beneath the roughened hide,
Daphne's pulp-smothered heart
will feel
the windwaves, the sunflush,
and out of time with the airtide,

Daphne will shudder
to think
how Apollo's lovewarm breath and sunbroad arms
might have clothed and housed.

—Marta Powell Harley

The Honeymoon

Leslie Armsby

"Where are we going?" It somehow seemed an irrelevant question, because they were somewhere in the suburbs of Paris and he had been walking, unflaggingly, for nearly two hours, in the rain and the dark, obviously lost in his own reflections and memories. Pretty soon it would be too late for the metro in case they wanted to return to the lights and populace of the boulevards. Though very possibly they would end up walking there, if he felt so moved. She was fairly bitter.

"Well, we can take a hotel anywhere along here, you know. I just saw one, 'At the Four Corners'; there couldn't be very many people. They're bound to have vacancies." Another empty statement. They had just spent last night in such a flea-bag, not too far from here, in fact, and had been the only clientele. Jean-Louis had spent over an hour discussing various trite things with the aging lady behind the counter, whose husband emerged briefly from the sports match on local TV to say hello. What a dump — an ancient breakfast-room with two or three tables covered in plastic on one side and a grandfather clock next to the Office; the clock had belonged to her grandmother, or maybe her great-grandmother; Helen didn't give a damn. Anything would seem cozy in such an all-permeating downpour; it had rained steadily from five o'clock on, yesterday.

Jean-Louis looked like a human mushroom, the more you thought about it. He positively sprouted in the damp; his eyes grew rounder, his pasty skin turned paler, and he began to talk about his childhood, thirty kilometers south-east of Paris. Helen would never ever believe that conditions were any better or worse thirty kilometers south, east, north or west of Paris. Indeed, in all likelihood they were exactly the same. Grey buildings, grey people, grey thoughts. She could scarcely hide her scorn. As though she had married him for his stupid family farm. As though he had married her for her rustic innocence. What the hell was this anyway?

"And so what do you think, dear?" Jean-Louis was rambling on again, oblivious to the driving rain, the grim and deserted *rues de banlieue*, her own fatigue, and the utter absurdity of it all.

"That's fine, my love," Helen had no notion what he had been talking about. Her thighs and feet had given out somewhere between the exposition of France's past and its current government. Maybe Jean-Louis was superman. Maybe they would be attacked by a gang of thugs between one suburban hamlet and another. Unfortunately for her American consciousness, the juvenile delinquents had apparently decided to spend the night a little closer to urban lights and activities; Bois-Colombes, if that was where they were still, was as deserted by man as by God.

Jean-Louis stopped suddenly and blinked back drops of moisture from his wide-open eyes. He grabbed her arm.

"Let's try this hotel, dear." He sounded penitent. Could it be — but no, this was one he had known in his youth; the *patron* remembered him, and while Helen carried up the suitcases by herself, they began to reminisce over long-lost friends and girl-friends. She was panting as she reached the landing and fumbled with the key. She kicked at the door and it opened invitingly into a well-heated single room with double bed. Well, damn it, this was nice. She parked the suitcases and ran her hands in the hot tap water. There was a reassuring smell of old linen and clean cotton drapery. The room was small, made to size. She wished it were hers. She hung out Jean-Louis' shirts, and two dresses, then stripped and lay down in the bed. No one could accuse her of not being a good wife. All things considered, Jean-Louis hadn't made such a bad deal. They were doubtless talking about it now. She closed her eyes and dozed.

The rattle of the door woke her from her half-sleep. Jean-Louis entered, grey suit, restless eyes and all. The Big Man. He undressed spasmodically and slipped into bed with a worried frown.

"You know, beloved, M. Cartier down there never thought my father would come to much. He predicted my family's ruin fifteen years ago. Just think . . ."

"But darling, you're making more money than any of your friends. And your father has been dead for ten years now . . ." In her heart of hearts, she was hoping to irritate him, get him to admit that he *was* the disloyal son. She didn't give a damn, but she felt some sympathy for the unknown and clearly ironic M. Cartier. Long live the proletariat! However, Jean-Louis merely grunted and rolled to his side of the bed. His final comment: "Turn off the light." No 'please', 'thank-you' or any such courtesy. Totally self-satisfied. She obliged, and stiffened on her side of the bed. She felt like chuckling. Hypocrisy revealed! Good for M. Cartier!

"Just think . . ." muttered Jean-Louis again, pounding his pillow and rolling over into somnolence. Helen began to doze again, utterly depressed. What incredible conceit!

The next morning Jean-Louis was off before sunrise, one of the much-extolled advantages of their "honeymoon in the city" being that he could catch a train from any point within the circumference of Paris, go to work, and then rejoin her at the rendez-vous of his choosing. Helen had volunteered to pass up the honeymoon altogether, but he wouldn't hear of it, and she had no illusions — Jean-Louis *liked* to tramp endlessly through the most deserted points of the metropolis. He also liked to change hotels every day, though they all resembled each other like grains of sand in the ocean. When you got right down to it, Jean-Louis was merely postponing recognition of his newly married state for as long as possible. Yet it was he who had insisted on the marriage. Of course, Helen noted pleasantly, fingering the flowered pattern of the bedspread, she hadn't had to accept.

She wondered what to do with the suitcases today. They were to meet that evening in the train station, and it might be nice to store them there until six o'clock and then go into the city until the appointed hour. She sighed. She was really tired these days, and she didn't have anything to do in downtown Paris except wander around some more. There was less to see here, but the air was fresher. After some half-hearted deliberation, she carried the bags downstairs and told M. Cartier that she would come back for them later. M. Cartier eyed her with considerable respect, and Helen twiddled her ring self-consciously.

Well . . . there was always the hairdresser. These bourgs invariably had one or several, and the ladies delighted in pouncing on her thick curls and transforming them into the latest fashion plates; they did it with such offhand ease that most often she came out of the beauty parlors tense and white-lipped, clutching the remnants of her shattered ego. Today was really not the day, she decided.

As usual, she ended up directing her steps toward the conglomeration of cafes that surrounded the town square, with the train station at one end and the *mairie* at the other. She didn't like to think about *mairies* too much — not since the wedding day, with Jean-Louis sweating beside her in the overheated office, and a number of solemn-looking old men in blue coats who had officiated. For one wild moment she had had the impression that they were being booked for a crime that Jean-Louis hadn't explained — then it passed. The cafes, however, remained her great source of moral strength, then as now. At the sight of a particularly large and busy one, Helen felt her heart leap in her throat and immediately succumbed to the temptation to go in and order something.

It was not just the booze, she knew, as she sat sipping her *express* that morning, though the existence of all that alcohol, freely dispensable, warmed her Puritan soul. It was rather, her mind groped for the words, a sense of belonging, of participating fully in the life of the country. Here no one cared where you were from and you could listen undisturbed to the most intimate conversations of your neighbors, and even add a word, or exchange pleasantries with the waiters in an off hour. Most of what she had learned about the French had been acquired from sip to sip amid an endless array of zinc-coated counters and mirrored wall-supports, spanning Paris more thoroughly than the subway. In the early months she had spent up to seven hours a day in different cafes — almost considering them her personal office. But it was expensive; and she was hardly one to reproach Jean-Louis his ambulatory habits. She smiled wryly, and got up to leave, lingering to catch the diatribe of a red-faced worker complaining about his daughter's morals. It was probably less expensive than a psychiatrist, on the whole. And good for the healthy maintenance of national values.

She came out feeling cheered. Across the street, an equally inviting cafe-bar beckoned anew, but at this hour of the morning . . . Helen caught herself,

had to remember that she was a married woman now. Finished, life's small joys.

If only she knew how to knit or something — the proposition was immaterial, because there was no place to knit tranquilly. She wondered how Jean-Louis would react, when he found out she couldn't knit, or sew. Not that she gave a damn how he did react. He must surely have an inkling already, anyhow. French men knew they couldn't marry Americans with impunity. He could consider himself lucky if she found a job. She kicked at an empty cardboard box.

Then she noticed the young man staring at her. He was thin and brown, with curly hair and tight pants, and protuding round eyes. Eighteen or nineteen, she judged. He had on a bead necklace that contrasted oddly with his flamboyant sports shirt and jacket. Paris was full of them. She smiled politely.

"Excuse me, Madame. You seem unhappy. May I offer you a glass of something?" A month earlier she would have refused categorically. Jean-Louis, then, had been a faint moral justification. These concerned strangers were frightening, neither more nor less. Today she was struck by his whimsical appeal; whatever his ulterior motive, he was laughing at himself as well as her. His starved, skinny frame was no longer threatening. Perhaps she could help him. She accepted.

She sat down in the cafe with a new awareness of her marital dignity, her ring, and the confidence of a woman of twenty-five. She was good-looking and she knew it. A bit on the small side; she certainly looked much younger than she was. He stared at her with a vague bitterness.

"I know you are married. I see your ring. Are you happy at least?" She explained her nationality and her recent marriage. He relaxed visibly.

"American? So." He hesitated for words. "I have a cousin in America. He wants to get married over there." His voice dropped. "I like the Stones. I have taken drugs, too. I want to be a photographer." She smiled at him, softened.

"It's not so hard. You seem very nice." He blushed deeply. As if summoned, the waiter appeared and took their orders. Helen asked for a beer. It wasn't ten o'clock yet, but her companion didn't seem to mind.

"Do you like Paris?" She nodded. "Have you seen Les Halles?" When she stared at him blankly, he continued, sotto voce: "It's the newest thing. It's really in. I'd like to live there someday. You know, they're tearing down the ancient market quarter. Nothing there but a big hole-in-the-ground. They're going to build a super-market and a parking lot. High time, too. Too bad for the old folks. You should see it — it's really incredible." Her face must have appeared attentive because he jumped up, paid the waiter and beckoned her to follow him. Almost giggling, Helen acquiesced in the purchase of train tickets into Paris. His name was Didier; he didn't seem disagreeable at all. On the contrary — he was delighted to have company. Unlike Jean-Louis, he didn't take himself at all seriously.

Les Halles was a great place — not only was it old, it was obscene: numerous strip-tease joints, most of them closed at lunch-time, but what a place to visit after dark! She surmised that Jean-Louis would never have the nerve to take her there for dinner — though, as elsewhere, there must certainly be a lot of his old friends around. Hardly realizing, she linked her arm in Didier's and laughed willingly at his outrageous jokes. He seemed genuinely surprised and pleased at her command of French.

The only unconvincing part of their morning, Helen decided, was the view of the Great Hole itself — it really wasn't anything but a large construction project, which, granted, looked a little bit like a lunar crater in the midst of the Paris skyline and the uncompromising grey border on all sides of it, but it hardly justified the psychedelic cross-walk that had been built across it, or the throngs of people busily snapping pictures of it. She immediately informed Didier of her view, which appeared to make him uncomfortable. His jokes ceased and they had a somewhat taciturn lunch in a small, Arab restaurant, which pleased Helen enormously with its lively music and decor. She restrained her enthusiasm with difficulty but it was Didier who finally broke the silence.

"You're happy with your husband, then?" He seemed suddenly morose.

"Why, yes." Her wondering tone confused Helen herself, who could not help ask herself where yesterday's cynicism had disappeared to. Or even this morning's reflections. Didier eyed her gloomily.

"He sounds to me like a bastard. And an idiot." Then, as if he had said too much, he relapsed into silence. Helen stared at him, astonished. Finally she mustered,

"But Didier, he's my *husband*." Didier continued with an air of conviction.

"He's a dirty bourgeois. I'm sure of it. Otherwise —" he actually glared at her — "why would he leave his wife at the mercy of a bunch of hotel-keepers?" She had unwittingly confided the peregrinations of their honeymoon. Frantically, she tried to redress his opinion.

"Well, he is older than I am, Didier, and maybe I don't understand him perfectly yet, you know, however . . ." Didier's lifted chin and tragic eyes bespoke the martyr.

"Listen, do you see that hotel over there?" He gestured across the street. She nodded without looking. "Well, I know the proprietor. He'll give us a special price. Do you want to try it?" He spoke almost savagely. Helen's jaw dropped.

"Didier, I — I like you a lot, you know, but. . ." searching desperately, she finished with a weak grin — "but we haven't been married that long — not two weeks yet. It's too early to tell. You may be right of course . . . naturally I'm not an excellent judge of character, but I really think, nonetheless . . ." Didier raised his hand majestically; his face, wiped as clean as a slate, registered only indifference and a faint condescension.

"When you wish, my dear," he said grandly. He then rose with dignity and paid the waiter for everything except the wine for which Helen insisted

on reimbursing him. He left her his telephone number, part-time, since he only worked three days a week. Inspired, Helen declared,

"You must come and visit us, when we get an apartment."

"Maybe," said Didier enigmatically, and shook hands formally as soon as they reached the sidewalk outside. Then he disappeared.

She immediately headed for a cafe and another cup of coffee. After all, Jean-Louis *was* a lot older than she, and, in contrast, Didier appeared refreshingly young. She could hardly be blamed . . .

"What will you have, Miss?" the waiter said, breaking in on her train of thought.

"A cup of coffee," stammered Helen, blushing and thrusting her ring finger into her coat pocket. Maybe the hair-dresser hadn't been such a bad idea after all.

Strolling back in the direction of the northern suburbs, she found herself wondering what had been going on in the United States since her last letter from home. Her parents were almost reconciled to the marriage — they had been expecting it, her mother confided. Nonetheless, she felt very alone and cut off. No telling what chain of reasoning they had adopted to explain her unusual conduct. "Our daughter the student who was in reality a nymphomaniac and ended up marrying a Frenchman, you know how they are . . ." She had slept with Jean-Louis for some time before the wedding, and had not hidden the fact. Another possibility: "Well, she *had* to get married. Contraceptives aren't legal over there, you know . . ."

A child crossed her path. He had large, dark eyes like Jean-Louis; maybe her children would look like that someday. If she had any. It was actually pretty hard to imagine having Jean-Louis' children. Ensnared off on some farm, knitting a blanket and stirring pots from her rocking chair — and in ten years what would she be! She would have forgotten how to speak English, maybe, and she would converse in laconic monosyllables like all the old ladies she saw working in the cafes. Maybe she should have taken Didier up on his offer. Adultery was probably the most effective way to break the monotony around here . . . like Madame Bovary . . . With an effort she tore her thoughts away from this depressing conjecture and tried to focus her attention on the beauty around her. The dome of Montmartre rose gleaming from the vista at one end of the Rue Lafitte; along the Boulevard Sebastopol, the avenue was lined with majestic old buildings. Old was the word. Before, she had thought in terms of dignity, permanence. Now it took on another side — decay. Living decay. No wonder Les Halles was a popular place to visit; Parisians themselves must find the sight of a great, raw hole-in-the-ground very refreshing. All around her now were the seedy bazaars of the poor; the hostile, lost faces of Arab workers, queer little women hawking cheap wares in shrill, persistent voices — candy, puppets, souvenirs of Paris that made a travesty of the actual living bodies crowded around the jukeboxes and pinball machines, playing on American toys and pathetically trying to imitate Elvis Presley's twirling hips. The boys, too skinny, the girls, too fat, hairdos out of

the 1950's. Not all of them of course — a couple of beautiful creatures whose indolent poses betrayed their profession. And then the flocks of tourists, mod, hip, elderly, queer, mothers and fathers and sons and daughters, and none of them seemed to notice, to see, even, the twisted forms around them worn with the implacability of age beneath their variegated exteriors. Glimpse the Middle Ages behind the boy nervously jerking at his "Gauloise," the horrors of war behind the slow-moving matron with the shawl. Decay-dignity-permanence — were they necessarily incompatible, after all? Didn't the one highlight the other, decay become the condition for permanence?

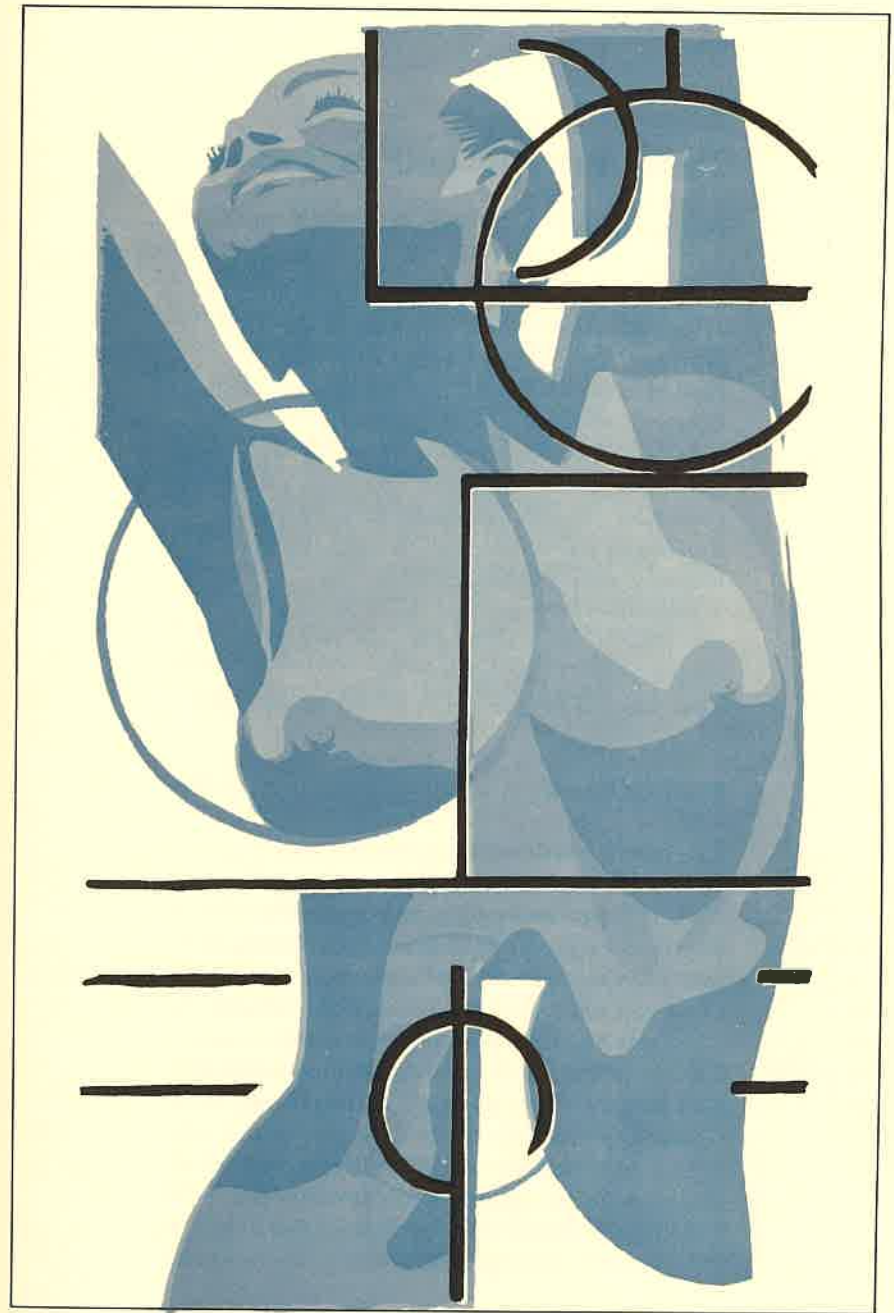
Helen hurried toward the Gare St. Lazare, trying to flee her speculations. She suddenly saw the population of Paris gripped by the rows of imposing edifices, bent by them, reduced to gay hysteria in the face of their solemn magnificence, bearing down with the weight of age.

A streak of sunshine outshone the ominous onset of the evening downpour. It was not too cold yet, thank goodness. She leaped up the steps of the station, scattering the pigeons. Pigeons — pigeons all! Stool pigeons before the might of time; time would win out. She was out of breath and flushed before the ticket counter, as she bought her passage for the suburbs. The train was just about to leave, and she stood panting as it pulled out.

"You mustn't exhaust yourself, Madame," said an old lady in a blue straw hat. "It's bad for the lungs in this weather." Helen wanted to snap a reply, but instead grinned shamefacedly and sat down. Time. She was tired already, with no one but herself to blame. They reached the hamlet, and she realized she was a half-hour early. So she went into the toilet room and combed her hair. Her face seemed to her a little drawn and sad. The incident with Didier? More likely, just the accumulating cares of matrimony. It occurred to her that she hadn't brought the suitcases around yet. She let her head sink wearily into her hands. It also occurred to her that she had not asked Jean-Louis, not *once* since they began this aimless existence, to spend the evening quietly in the hotel. Yet she had thought of nothing else.

He was coming towards her now, his broad shoulders shoving past the people climbing out of the metro. His face was expressionless.

"Jean-Louis, I forgot the suitcases. We'll have to go back to the hotel to get them. And I'm — a little tired this evening, aren't you?" Without a word he slipped his arm around her shoulders, and they set off again together.



Untitled — Becca James

Times Present and Passed

Pen in Hand

I kept your never typed letters because
 Who else would advise thinking of the end
 Of *The Grapes of Wrath* to manufacture
 Instant tears? Who warned me against centaurs?
 Because (no matter how egocentric
 You became) I still signed my name with 'love',
 You ranked me with those you most admired:
 Paul Klee, Dustin Hoffman, Elvis Presley.
 You made me believe that Kandinsky and
 Debussy were the heroes of my life,
 Your exuberance seemed never ending.
 But now, if you will forgive my letters
 Which periodically intrude on
 Your life, I'll forgive yours which never come.

Bouquet Garni

The rain is washing away the traces
 Of our presence on the cool riverbank.
 (And did you really call me Peaseblossom?)
 The crumbs of our feast buried in the mud
 Lost even to the long waiting sparrows.
 (You had never had rye bread before then)
 And who but I would bake a sour cream cake
 That hopelessly crumbled at the first touch?
 The aromas of the other meals linger on
 Haunting me in unexpected places, —
 As I turn the corner by the bus stop.
 (Polish sausage, saurkraut, and rose)
 Till now, even the smell of fresh coffee
 (Has it been so long?) makes memory weep.

On Your Return at Spring Break

I would venture to think that when you came
 Late-eveninged with trunk, box, and suitcases,
 You did not suspect the consequences
 Of your abduction of my radio
 Or my Number One best-seller novel.
 It was fortunate you didn't know that
 The only other thing you might have done
 To reduce me to utter distraction
 Was to have taken the jar of coffee
 (Blessed caffeine) and flushed it down the john.
 There is, though, a question deep in my mind:
 If you had known what your actions would do,
 Would you have taken my radio and/
 Or my Number One best-seller novel?

5:15 p.m.

It might have been the early evening news
 From Chicago's only fine arts station
 And the fact that Sartre is confusing
 In English but impossible in French,
 That brought this seldom seen point to my mind.
 On considering the thinking process
 I'm sure the thin grey rain influenced me
 And also the unlikely time of day,
 Which for those who ponder time's true meaning
 Was a quarter past five. But not wishing
 To become enmeshed in chronology
 What I had thought, a time ago by now,
 Is that I don't require or even want
 Eons of love, just a steady supply.

— Kate Kussrow

Make That Two Busted Lusts To Go, On Rye

To hear your feet,
moving towards me in the hall,
swallow space
with the arrogance of broken treaties,
To sense the weighty Nepal
legs they hold,
To picture light
splashing over alleys
hidden by their night,
and then —
to have you sit
so far away,
is like lusting
after Mermaids.

— *David Silverstein*

Homecoming

Robert Carl Giles

At first, it seemed ironic that our church should choose to announce its ecclesiastical funeral, as our former pastor had called it, only a few days after Christmas. More disturbing was that we were calling it Homecoming, and everyone who had left the church when the neighborhood around it became filled with black folks was coming back to have one more crack at the good old times which would have still been there if they hadn't moved away.

With a genuine college diploma resting securely on my closet shelf, I felt qualified to make the necessary moral judgements on this despicable state of affairs and in fact had done so to my own private satisfaction. So when wrinkle-cheeked old Reverend Hart climbed the pulpit for the last time with tears in his eyes and prayed out that today was a beginning, not an ending, I felt uneasy, like times in classes when I'd nearly blurted out foolish answers but held back and then sat in silent embarrassment as the right answer was given.

Our whole family went to the services that day. Mama was working on the fried chicken for the dinner on the grounds, so the responsibility fell to me to get Mary Ruth up. She was awake and staring lazily at the ceiling when I came in. I rolled the covers back and gingerly slid her legs toward the side of the bed. She watched me with detachment, helping by thrusting herself forward with her hands.

Once at the bed's edge, she paused for a moment, feet-dangling, then slowly lowered herself until she was standing unaided on the floor. For ten seconds she stood before her legs made a brittle snapping noise and crumpled under the weight of her body. I grabbed her under the arms, stopping her fall, and automatically began to pat her soothingly on the back. I carried her to the bathroom — she's light, well under a hundred pounds — and when she'd finished there, I led her into the television room where she eased down into my father's billowy red easy chair. One of Mary Ruth's weaknesses is her TV watching habit; "turn it on" she ordered me, waving her hand carelessly at the small set as if she were brushing bothersome bread crumbs off a table. I did as she commanded and fixed her breakfast, too.

Mary Ruth is the central figure in our family. She is three years younger than I am and not like the rest of us. As she was born, she didn't receive enough oxygen, Mama explained when we were first old enough to ask, and that had caused brain damage.

In her early days though, Mary Ruth always seemed normal enough to me except than once she started talking, I couldn't always understand what she was saying. Mama usually could though — she'd interpret and confide that Mary Ruth was "just makin' up a new way to talk" and that after a while,

I'd catch on. Once I caught on and got to know Mary Ruth a little better, I came to the conclusion that she'd purposely held her breath the day she was born, the air in the hospital not to her liking or some such obstinacy. In Mary Ruthese I am Ra because she cannot pronounce the *b* in Rob.

She began to have epileptic type seizures when she was six, terrifying the members of our family much more than they did her. She'd have them usually when she got too tired or hot, both frequent occurrences because she was a perpetual motion machine, often responding to our warnings that she'd "pass out" if she didn't slow down by politely, or gruffly informing us that she didn't care; she was going to have her fun.

Being an audience to one of Mary Ruth's seizures is a shaking experience, but they are harmless enough unless she falls and hurts herself or her tongue rolls back and inhibits her breathing.

As a little kid, she could run very fast and really whack a baseball. Once I discovered the latter, I began to try to convince Mary Ruth, a natural righthander, to try switch-hitting. She resisted until I dared her and told her she couldn't anyway and that's the only reason she didn't want to. Duly riled, for it isn't in her to shrink a challenge, she stomped bat in hand to the rock that was home plate and positioned herself on the left side of it. She pushed her anger aside after a bit, then looked at me with what I took to be amusement and said "I can" in a soft authoritative voice, considerably higher than usual.

Amused in turn at her utter confidence that she could do what she'd never done before and would do it if I'd hurry up and throw that damn ball, I stood immobile for a few seconds until she commended me sternly in Mary Ruthese to "frow it." I lobbed an easy one to her, as it was her first time and I didn't really believe she could do it despite her firm assertion.

I had to scramble to get out of its path as the ball whistled past my ear at quite a number of times the speed it had gone in.

"I can!" she shouted, triumphantly grinning and raising the bat skyward with both hands, and I believed her. She didn't do a whole lot of switch-hitting after that, except occasionally for a lark. I didn't push her about it, but she'd always graciously give me the credit; "Look what Ra show me how 'a do."

As a freshman at the state university, I saw the movie "Charley" and started thinking about Mary Ruth during the days and weeks that followed. At first, I railed out at the unseen powers that had conspired to make her what she was, forever unable to enjoy her birthright as a living breathing one of us. Then I got crazy. Crazy thoughts would come to me about Mary Ruth being just as she should be — the rest of us were the abnormal ones. I dreamed of what she would be like had she been OK: still special, I thought.

I'd go to movies alone and come out wondering where in the inscrutable cosmic picture did Mary Ruth have a place. I offered to make deals with God: trades of anything I had or could do for Mary Ruth's becoming one of us, even to the point of my taking the brain damage and aching legs, if only

He would give a sign that the terms were acceptable. It was then I learned, or rather relearned, that ole God don't make them kind of deals no more. I remembered a similar streak of craziness had run through me when I was ten or so.

When we got ready to leave for church, she grabbed my hand and leaned on me for support on the way to the car; her legs "ain't too good no more," she explained. I was flattered that she'd chosen me — usually she went to Mama — and remembered how when she was ten or so, she'd insist on piggyback rides and I'd give them and feel like I imagined big brothers ought to feel.

I helped her into the back seat and slid in next to her. She sat there confidently, as pretty as I had seen her in a while. It had gotten to the point that I'd forgot that she really doesn't look like the rest of us either until my blond-haired niece or my eight year old cousin who wants to be a prima ballerina came over to play with Mary Ruth. Kids had always been attracted to her and, I think, a little awed by her.

There are times when she looks pretty: when she intently plays her records or eats spaghetti, her favorite dish, or unwraps one of the numerous anonymous gifts she gets every Christmas. Folks from around the neighborhood and teachers and students at the school where Mama teaches who know only that she has an "exceptional child," one of the few educational euphemisms I've ever known to fit, visit and leave "a little something for Mary Ruth," and very seldom something for anyone else. It has become a Christmas morning game for us to guess the donors of the mystery gifts as Mary Ruth sits happily unwrapping them next to and on top of small mountains of glowing wrapping paper. She was a Christmas morning pretty for Homecoming Day.

When we got to the church parking lot, Mary Ruth leaned on me again for the trip across it until we turned the corner around Fellowship Hall where the sanctuary comes into view. A small pig-tailed girl of four or five stood holding her mother's hand, and Mary Ruth couldn't resist. Wobbly legged Mary Ruth was suddenly sprinter Mary Ruth as she covered the fifteen or so yards as quickly as she might have when she had been the little girl's age, stopping directly in front of mother and daughter. "Hey," she greeted the girl, now mesmerized by the meeting with this childlike grownup figure. The child responded by raising her free right hand, as if she were waving to someone far away from her.

I watched the solemn ceremony from a short distance, then moved to support Mary Ruth, who was getting wobbly. The girl's mother is my age, married and divorced already, and we were supposed to know each other. We didn't of course, but pretended as if we did and exchanged pleasantries on that basis.

Mary Ruth and the child deferred to us, speaking with one another softly while the mother and I talked. Sensing our common grounds for conversation were rapidly becoming exhausted, I broke it off to head for sanctuary. She decided to stay outside and have a quick smoke; Mary Ruth and I moved on. I looked back to make one last stirring comment about the weather, but she had already turned to shield her match from the slight wind that would jerk it out. The little girl however was still gazing at Mary Ruth and again raised her right hand to wave. Mary Ruth returned the signal as we went in the sanctuary door.

The moment we sat down, Mary Ruth took an interest in the hymnals, because she knows they are the books people use when they sing. She opened one randomly, nudged me with her elbow and, having my attention, said casually, "I know dat song, Ra." It made me chuckle: she couldn't read the words or the music but was trying to stoke the fire of a running argument we have between us. Any song Mary Ruth heard at any time from any source, she claimed to know. I'd say "you never heard that one before," she'd say "I ha' too" and would usually win in the face of all odds because she is more stubborn than I am about what she knows.

She also has a habit which I don't contend against of making up lyrics to songs. In fact, she uses very few words belonging to the original composer, preferring instead to mix in some humming, some of the song's original words and a few of her own chosen by a selection process mysterious to me.

Nothing in the service except the songs spoke to Mary Ruth until the deacons began passing the Communion plates, grooved on the bottom and with high sides so they could be stacked on one another. As the silver dish with the pillow-shaped bread pellets came down our pew, each person snapped one up and popped it quickly onto his or her tongue, as if something might waylay the bread from dish to mouth.

Mary Ruth watched in anticipation as the plate jerked from one pair of hands to another toward her. Flanked by my mother on the right and me on her left, she leaned forward, watching and nodding rhythmically to some unheard music as many children like her do when excited. She wanted to make sure she knew what to do when the plate reached her, I thought.

By the time the dish was almost to Mama, I was worried Mary Ruth might hit her head on the back of the pew in front of us, she was rocking so. But the dish touched Mama's hands, and Mary Ruth slowed down, grew calmer. Wiggling minnow bones on Mama's hands stood out as she gripped the dish. Her mind was intent elsewhere. She held the plate a bit longer than the others had, then reached over Mary Ruth, as if she did not see her — Mary Ruth was still now — and handed the silver dish to me.

That seemed to confuse Mary Ruth for a minute or so. She had prepared herself to take and eat a piece of bread, but being skipped dropped a shadow in her head — it took her longer than other folks to move her thoughts back directly into a light so she could verbalize them. She isn't the kind to let herself be abused, so I expected her to protest the treatment.

Leaning down, I pulled back the hair covering her ear and sang as tunefully as one can in a low whisper, "Zippety-do-dah, zippety-a, my oh my, what a wonderful day!" That was one of her favorites; she grinned reluctantly for a second, then her face settled into a half smile, half scowl, and she sat sternly with her arms folded, determined not to be dealt with so easily.

The music was moving through her, I thought, because a moment later, she was rocking away again, slower this time and more gracefully; she was floating. The bogus wine — our church used Welchade grape juice — was coming.

Only when the silver dish again touched Mama's hands did Mary Ruth stop floating. She suddenly sat up straight in the pew with her back against the wood, a movement which lifted her feet off the floor and left them dangling. She sat stoically prepared, peering at the wine dish by dropping her chin to her chest and turning her head as little as possible.

While Mama passed the juice in front of Mary Ruth and as I took it, she didn't or wouldn't move. She let me finish my grape juice, then tugged urgently at my sleeve. "Why?," she demanded and not knowing, I shushed her.

She glared at me with a steely piercing look reserved for those occasions when she felt an injustice had been foisted on her. For the rest of the service, she was uncommunicative except during the hymn and the elaborate choral amen when she enthusiastically made up new lyrics. We didn't stay for the Homecoming dinner because Mama said Mary Ruth looked tired, the way she did at times right before she passed out.

Normally Mary Ruth enjoys the motion and scenery inherent to car rides, but the trip home didn't seem to perk her up much. Once home, she announced that she b'lieved she'd go play her records, which she did until early evening, only coming out for a late dinner with the family about three o'clock and then going back to her room and shutting the door.

I went in once to tell her dinner was about ready and asked if she wanted me to listen to a quick 45 rpm job with her — she often invited me in to hear a new record — but she declined for the present, saying "dat awright, you can a-night."

"OK, 'member now," I said, shaking my finger in schoolmarm fashion, "we gone hear one t'night. It's about dinnertime — one more an'en come on."

"Awright," she promised and with that secured, I left her room.

Dinner was uneventful. Mary Ruth commented sketchily between mouthfuls about her records and the dubious performance of her record player which she claimed was wasting away with age.

She never eats great quantities of anything except spaghetti, but she is always the last to leave the table because she eats so slowly. Ten minutes after everyone had finished and left the table, Mary Ruth was absent-mindedly nibbling at a small square of cornbread and making slurping noises with her ice tea, a luxurious breach of etiquette she allows herself only when

she is alone. She finished up shortly and teeter-walked past me in the living room, remarking in passing that she'd be in her room playing records. She also reminded me that later we'd listen to some of her music together.

That was the last I saw of her until that night after Mama and Dad had gone to evening worship. I was washing my hands in the kitchen sink, getting ready to prepare my Sunday evening pregnant woman's meal of pineapple sandwiches and tomato juice when she ambled in and plopped down in Dad's chair at the table. She was wearing her "I been done wrong" look, so I expected her to ask a lot of questions about "you 'member this" and "you 'member that" and then another "why" that would simultaneously point up the injustice and demand an explanation from me.

Instead, "I know what wrong," she said, pouring some tomato juice from the can for me into the glass I'd taken out.

"What then?" I really wanted to know. Gliding into my seat, I deftly slapped some mayonnaise on a piece of bread, spread it out, tossed on the pineapple then added another piece of bread to make a sandwich. Mary Ruth can no longer move quickly herself but still admired precision movement by others and watched me closely, I knew. "Want one?" I asked.

"No, a l'il half a' yours," she replied, meaning she wanted me to cut the one I'd make into two parts, one slightly bigger than the other, and she'd take the smaller. I did so and slid the plate with both "halves" on it to her. She took the little half. "You eat dat big one," she instructed.

Remembering that I'd thought I would be eating alone, I offered her some juice. She accepted, which surprised me a little because she doesn't usually care for it, but she does like to be accomodating to folks she knows. So I got her a glass, poured it full, and we sat together munching little halves and big halves and slurping tomato juice. After a time, I asked, "What wrong?"

"Huh?" Her mind was on pineapple sandwiches.

"You said you knew what was wrong."

"Oh, dat. I 'member. Nobody love me."

"You KNOW that ain't right," I sparred with her. "If I dint love you, would I have made you them pineapple sandwiches and give you that tomato juice? Would I?"

"I 'ont know," she came back, "sometime you might." Then, a pause. "Ra, you love me?"

"Now I done tol' you and tol' you, chile: you know ah do."

"Den why you not let me drink all dat stuff and eat all dat stuff at 'a church?"

"I 'ont know," I admitted. She had me. She sensed that victory was near and pressed her advantage.

"Nest time den, you gone let me ha' some too? I nee' some too," she said, edging closer.

Solemnly, I raised my hand to her: "Yeah, nest time I give ya some." She'd been waiting. "Tank a lot. You wan' a hear my new recor'?"

Easy Daybreak Blues

You remember my toy paths
 Meandered through the wood folk
 Who swayed in tall bay wind.
 I remember winter muds
 Who silenced those loud hued leaves
 Who chattered at every step.
 You recall those sleepy mornings
 Of chase, hunt and bloody chase;
 And I remember the nights
 When moon hung up light to see
 Just what devils angels be,
 And I, fetid in stiff clothes —
 Camp smoke and fired bacon grease —
 And those easy daybreak blues
 Peaking with the sun's sun eyes
 In fat morning dew dropped gems,
 Who sank into our smudged garb
 On that race to Dishpan Creek.
 We knew those lives in Woodland
 Who tripped around breathing dusk,
 And the swallow beamed sand flat —
 Where we saw some Bob-cat's tracks —
 We stood on shrinking barely
 From piqued saws of a large owl
 Who loomed in the tallest pine
 In afferent forest dark.
 And wood folk live forever . . .
 And together we made pictures,
 And I recall tears of leaving
 Wringing my heavy chest somewhere.
 Now you are happy down my paths,
 Wandering long, playing in night,
 And muddy with yourself and days;
 And I remember when I left you . . .
 And am lonely.

— R. Fain Williams

Clouds On A Starry Night

Episode 1: Neophyte and Adonis

I.

Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 Willingham had been a cad, a less than noble rougeish lad.
 In his short life he'd never once thought of a wife;
 For as long as he'd been — as long as he'd sinned, he had
 Only known love to last through the night.
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon
 While aroving merrily, drinking, and luvsting
 He met Hope Dieu Prie whose passions weren't free;
 And he swore by his heart, "She is love everlasting."
 — Or at least as long as the heart may *beat*.
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 Divesting sundried black habits, he sought to divest her one;
 But, how does the philanderer marry the uncertain nun?

II.

Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 A lily white week then passed with him in retreat close by
 Without her wearily spurning the ho-hum sanctums of sanctuary.
 No bawdy women, tobacco, or wine — he thought he would die!
 But, "Damn, he'd be pure enough to marry before being buried!"
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 He'd waited two weeks each day at the gate,
 Then, lo and behold, his unavowed novice there bowed out.
 "Ah, 'twas fate," His destiny met, Dieu Prie set the date,
 For they'd found appalling perfection appealing without a doubt.
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 The two of them woo'd, coo'd like doves — lib'rated doves
 Too long in the coup — truly the two were in love

Episode 2: Connubial Disapproval

I

Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 Wishful first, blissful second, and miserable third —
 Will's nupt'ls bloomed full, then wither'd to nothing at all
 When the meanderer abandon'd her without a word,
 Though Hope, the deserted dear, cried, " 'till all the stars fall
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon."

He left . . . left her bereft and plighted to light in the sky;
 And 'lone as she slept, she kept his cherish'd unborn,
 Unblemished memory, infatuation and fidelity,
 For she was a lily, sincerely in love despite the season's scorn
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon;
 Thus Hope's unadult' rated marriage to errant Will
 Defied abhortion, treason, or any runious ill.
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,

II

Alas, the villainous phynque slipp'd silent as darkness.
 Cool as a robin with a frostbitten breast,
 He went West on the wing of a frivolous lark, thence
 Discover'd the justice that irony heralds for her innocents
Not adrift on advent as advent advances anon.
 When braving the cold from out of the warm,
 He nurtured regrets in the wilderness.
 'Though, yet unperturbed, Will pursued his just harm
 Trudging the dearth through snow, nearly freezing to death
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon
 When chill number his senses in the gelid bold spate
 Showing his Fate's rather blind — if you don't glance behind
 until it's too late.

Episode 3: Resuscitation

I

Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 Inspired on impulse — quite impuissant — he on his
 Rude sojourn, "à la romance," winced — purged of persistence,
 Scourged at that instance, while blizzarding winds revilingly hiss'd
 (Serpentine mean bearing bitter apples of circumstance
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon);
 Ill, he lay sifting breath from snow drifts. Snuffed
 Was his venture, burnt was the murmuring flame of desire;
 Extinguish'd and drowning, he'd suffer'd enough
 And barely suspiring, enkindling Will failed to fire.
 Then, advent adrift as advent advances anon,
 Providence offered him sudden assistance,
 And he was saved on an Indian girl's insistence

II

When the savage Eve found him, nearly perished,
 Wilted and dying, but belying his frozen flesh;
 She kissed his cold lips, breathed pulse in his wrists

Embracing his chest, depriving the soul its due death
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon.
 In a comatose sleep, lost in a feverish dream,
 Will, rue enraptured, was ravished by passion and furs
 Unfurled by Eve, there nearer than nigh with nothing between
 Her and the mystery pure nature secures
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon
 As Eve wrestled unending departure and finally won.
 Then, having wean'd her strange creature from suckling end,
 Eve bade him fare future papoosed to a pony's back end.

Episode 4: Redemption Meanwhile Back At the Ranch

I

Adrift on advent as advent advances anon,
 Seeming to sense his destination, that civilized horse
 Sought civilization, returning in the same direction
 From which Eve Heathen purloined it; of course
 Proceeding, as license coins it, via fluid divination;
 Adrift on advent as advent advances the poem,
 Soon salvation had come on a horse's ass
 As it tromped barn-ward to the water trough at last;

II

'Twas here that folly gave rise to Knowledge;
 For Will arose from the grave of compulsion
 To comprehend compunction — the ethereal pledge
 To bright promise alleged in a soul's good conclusion
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon
 In the consummate hands of Constance LeGlace,
 The saint salient women who took Will'ham in —
 Feeding him innocent tastes of sour assurance
 The bitter-sweet fruits of that piquant place — Heaven
 Adrift on advent as advent advances, advances . . .
 While he slowly recover'd, Will, feckless still,
 Learn'd to respect Constance's impregnable areckless will,

III

For he tried to seduce her with concupiscent thrills
 But found it no use with a soul so staid —
 He'd mutter 'bout, "Most sincere longing,"
 She'd reply, "Willy, nilly, silly Will, really?"
 So he stayed and he stayed and ne'r misbehaved;
 Then once Constance beckon'd on a star scatter'd night
 Plaintively saying, "Will, stay by me always, always stay here,

And I'll sleep with you Darling, 'neath eternities light,"
 (For Constance, like Eve, grieves an empty life's fear)
 But, I'd rather pass on knowing what had been mine
 Adrift on advent as advent advances anon.

Episode 5:

Then, stilly in the tranquil blue, burst in that swelling blight,
 He gazed gently at the gleam reflected in her sight —

Tears cascading, escaping from their prism eyes,
 His cheeks wrought rippled furrows like cloudy skies —

What venomous moments tear in fury from surly men
 More neutral moments surely can get back again —

So Constance, say adieu — for 'tis so very true
 That treasures — kept or lost — are forever few

And I, you see, discover'd one a memory ago
 And now, have wandered lost long enough to know

That I am just a shadow cast, which may not stay;
 The evanescent visage shown by one fleeting ray,

I'd better heed the light that I have got
 Than seek in vacant darkness light I've not

For if, now, I do not listen to faith's distant call
 Then all the stars above us here will fall."

So Constance wish'd him speed, saying, "Go to her
 Upon this snow white steed, but do remember,

Will, your Constance knew your certain sorrow
 And sent you on the hour searching out tomorrow —

That, quicksilver Will, is what you must remember
 Of the steel ice anneal'd in time's melting ember."

Since then four weeks fell deep upon the ground,
 And Will, nearer Hope, on the sousskirts of town

Saw Polaris poised, on Christmas Eve, above his new born
 Who, warm, would lay in his arms by early morn.

So, he rode, rode steadily, steadily anxiously on
 As steeples toll'd his story, ringing in the dawn.

The chimneys puffed billows that piled like pillows
 Wrapt 'round evergreen and stream strewn willows.

And the nearer he drew, all the more that he knew
Amour is a river, forever tranquil, forever blue —

Blue as the heavens, true as the stars
Though love like the rill will flow near and far

And he flew through the streets on slippery slush
Passing the shops on Mercuric wings in a rush.

He rode to his door step, then lept in the air,
Then in despair learn'd that Hope was not there.

He found only a note referring visitors
To go to the convent and see the Superior.

So he went to the place with the greatest of haste,
For after so long, he had no time to waste,

Addressing himself to a sister of faith, — "Please wait,"
She said, "I'll tell Sister Blanche who stands at our gate."

As he stood all alone, surrounded by eyes, surrounded by snow,
He felt like a demon — come up from below,

Then a kind wrinkled matron waddled outside
with a small swaddled babe pressed to her side —

"Before your wife went in child-birth, before she lay still
She christened your daughter and said give her to Will.

So, my son, my faithful one, 'tis plain to see
God's traded Hope for your

CHARITY."

— *William Bahr*



Afterlife

a tall
slate
fish spine
with ribs disturbingly
slanted is
crumbling
and climbing still
in crippled
crosses ladderlike
through the blue
mists,
dying
picked clean of
greengrowth
and rising still
in the greenlush
forest life fed
on the stripped limbs;
hollow-veined and
hovering,
the deadlife yet
claims the landscape
piercing the sky
a frail
unfailing
shadow

— *Marta Powell Harley*



Untitled — Mae Logan

Grandmother

She sits on weathered steps, pondering
 Her grandchildren galloping a toy horse
 Under the maple. She drifts back
 To when she was that age,
 Bouncing in the creaking wagon
 Behind Buck and Tom, the two rank mules,
 Running along Shoal Creek
 Nibbling sugar cane she gathered for them.

She canes up, calling
 To her babies to come
 Hear about something
 They may never see.

— *J. Bruce Voyles*

A Trip into Space

Angelynn McGuff

He mused that he had known the new chewing pink ulcerousness of isolation for a long enough time; he had walked on padded feet in the thick, white, snow-covered forest, where the trees were always tall and straight, and the people were only nice; there were no coarse jeering bluejays in those trees, but only fuzzy, two-dimensional sparrows. He could say hi and bye and didyouowellonyourtest and didyoulikeyourdateminewasneat and boydoIfeeltiredtoday in competition with the best of them. He would be there, a little black dot in the center of the landscape's sheet; the straight walls of snow would gently suck away from the trees and slide down on him, padding and freeze-wrapping him until he felt nothing until he usually stared out with wide-open expressionless eyes like the eyes of a cellophaned fish in a box. The expressions came rarely over his eyes (which were gray); the expressions came like isolated weather balloons over the winter sky (which was gray,too); they were acceptable expressions, but he did not belong to them; he was quite sure that he did not. He believed profoundly, more profoundly than anyone can imagine, that he could not stand it anymore. He needed deeper, grayer pits for the amoeba-like legs of his mind to search; he craved inner space, thick, protoplasmic, stretching plastic inner space.

To a trifling extent his hands were too white and pink, but they were flexible and apt and equipped with long, narrow, tapering diplomatic fingers. He examined them carefully and thought, they have gotten white with the snow of isolation, candy-pink with frost. He knew beyond doubt that he was a natural artist. Flinching with semi-delight at this thought, he carefully wrapped the secret fecund creative portion of his mind with thick bandages of snowy relaxation.

Then the girls next to him passed him the clear-cut squares which contained the universe. His throat seemed dry-sticky, like syrup which had been spilled on a table and then left there to dry. His square was sweet and white. He carefully permitted the universe to melt onto his tongue. The two girls beside him cast quick, dark glances at each other, indulged a ritual giggle; then they munched. He waited for the tug, the gentle, insistent stretching at his mind.

He decided to watch the rhythmic pulsing seconds on his arm. The long needle swung in a rigid gold arc, swung all the way around, swung and swung again, three times, and then a whole bunch more times than three. Beside him a black-and-white striped pillow slowly, gracefully and yet a little creakily, writhed into sure life; then it collected itself and settled back down again. The couch pillows glowed in various technicolors, very definite colors tently refusing to become one. But then the yellow bent, gently and stur- a bow; the red began moving out of itself in blots or clots, he could not

decide which. Now green was minty in taste and smelled like clover, the kind of clover which has red heads bobbing beside roads in sunshine. Orange was lollipoppy, not quite sharp until he bit it and tasted the jaggedness of the edges.

His mind meandered along in clear but grainy streams, stretching out until they became nice roundish teardrops at their ends. He followed one of the streams knowing it would lead somewhere, he knew not where, perhaps to a place in books which he had gelled into life. He reached the end of his stream and leaned over the edge of its teardrop and fell.

He found himself in the bottom of a glass beaker. He was a fetus and was pink and was without life; although he was lifeless, he was at the same time six months old perhaps, he did not know, it did not matter, for he was very certain of his pinkness, and he basked in a jagged rain of colors and the swaying movement of brutal bitter alcohol and warm rosy saline fluid.

Then he grew up as a young man, walking into a garden with flowers like those on cigarette commercials, flowers which make the cigarettes cleaner, flowers with petals of tough velvet which will not tear easily and with great yawning dark centers like black-eyed susan centers or far-off caves. He put his arms around the universe; by him flowed the universe, black and dark as water.

He came into a place where rainbows hung in tattered strips; even the biggest ones were shredded and soggy. Immediately, a whole rainbow uncoiled, towering men acingly over his head; that rainbow was full of colored teeth carved from jagged glass fragments. It wrapped around him, at first gently, then very firmly, then choking choking choking, so his breath turned into solid ice and nitrogen-purplene in his throat. The rainbow suddenly sighed and relaxed; all the rainbows straightened into solid thick brown planes; wood, and many windows were before him.

Luckily, he picked the window, the window the window to life, and felt rapturous that he had picked it for himself. He stepped into blueness, deep as a chimney, cool caressing blueness which warmed his soul as if his soul were red meat. His glide was sleek and magnificent through clear, untrammled space, toward the blue stars; and it was because he had leaped through the window. With his clock-mind he measured each level of deepening blueness; and something was sidling gently up to the edge of his being, cuddling around his edges; and he suddenly stopped being white and pink and became stoic; and it was because he had leaped through the window.

There was a silence and houses stood very straight and calm in it. There was a piece of moon, thin, and mere as a broken fingernail with light coming through it. There were some lit windows; each hung lopsided like a square brass badge of the night. There was a muffled metallic up-and-down crooning and moaning sound. Far away, a slick bullet-rush of aluminum came closer, ever so much closer and closer, its top orb shining and turning like an apple which a child gives his teacher, who turns it around and around in her hand. The apple bled freely into the night.

The Death of the Mother

for Bonnie G. 1920-1962

The Scottish song
about the lass
who lies over the sea
my father sang to me
a child whose strength
lay in not knowing.

Ebbs in the space
night creates above a bed
a voice whose
current is age.

The dead have a way of rocking with us
back and forth on chairs
where fathers come to little girls
for the sound of the conch
ripped from the sea.

— Jayne Greenstein Durham

Father and Son

Theirs were the same blue eyes
flashing fire from the roots,
theirs the heavy grinding in the throat.
My son grew tall,
grew strong as the sun-browned farm hand
who came to work hay each year,
and his hair was as gold as the hay
out by the barn
with a round moon on it.

I was a wild, laughing girl,
fifteen and pretty,
wife of the man with the big farm
down by the river;
A dwarf of a man he was,
a man of God's law,
a man whose heart couldn't dance
in the barn at Hay-cutting.

*Those gold-fevered nights
when I left his bed to dance!*

There were quiet nights by the fire
when the hay was all cut.
I would watch them, my son
and this man of my father's choosing,
would watch them for years
while the lie settled in my wild heart
like Georgia river mud.
A dark, quiet bit of a man he was
beside my son, my son
with the moon's kiss in his eyes.

*Those gold-fevered nights
when I left his bed to dance!*

One day they went into the forest early,
him swinging the sun-sharp axe;
"Back after dinner," he said.
"Enough wood to burn out winter."

I watched them walk away side by side,
 my son in his sixteen years
 and a dark little man
 no taller than a farm hand's shoulders.
 I watched them sink into the forest
 black as a lie.

There beside the roughing Chattahoochee,
 quick, aloof as old Indians,
 the axe fell again and again;
 And there he lies, dogwood-mangled,
 hands twisted in ten awful questions,
 the ground stained there, the sun-golden head
 hewn from the oak of my boy.

He did no wrong.

A wise Baptist-preaching southern man,
 he saw in my son's proud trunk
 his crookedness mirrored to death,
 saw the nights of magic and barn dance
 and all the cheap silver of my betrayal.
 Like a god in the anger of his genes,
 he righted all wrongs to him,
 made the lie holy and whole,
 carved my son in his own image.

— Diane Kistner



Inferno — Mary Anne Bleker

Red Dust

Blue Argo

The turtle shell was white against the parched, cracked red clay lake bottom. The lake had shrunk into a huge scum-covered mud puddle at the end nearest the dam. The willows hung limp and were coated with a fine red dust as if they had been sprayed. The two corrugated metal drainpipes by the dam stood naked six or eight feet above the water which lapped at the base of them. Hollis kicked the shell roughly with the thick rubber toe of his sneaker. It rolled over and the stained white bottom lay face up toward him. At least it didn't have a bullet hole in it. It shouldn't have because they had only shot the turtles the week before and this one was old, parched white by the sun. He felt relieved. He knelt down and placed his hands upon the shell, feeling the smooth flat plates that fitted together like a patchwork quilt before the pattern flaked off. It was clean; no rotten meat left clinging to the thorny bone spikes inside. Clean and white and baked by the sun. He shivered and ran his hand across his sweaty forehead, under the short thatch of rusty blond hair. The raw white bone of the turtle shell looked too much like a skull.

Hollis got up and loped across the dried mud. The lake bottom looked like the aftermath of an earthquake viewed from high up. The top veneer of mud had parched and split into thousands of tiny patches which curled up at the edges. He could hear them crunch under his feet. The late afternoon sun glinted off the water and hurt his eyes. He slowed down. It was too hot to run. There was another turtle lying at the edge of the water just in front of him. The back portion of its shell just above the tail was missing. Gnats were swarming around the turtle's head and a stream of ants were entering and leaving through the mouth and empty eye sockets. White maggots squirmed in the blackened grey gap where the tail had been. He wondered whether it was he or his father who had shot the turtle and whether it had died then with the bullet ripping out its guts or whether it has swum or crawled, dragging the empty hole behind it. For the first time he wondered if there had been any pain. He shrugged to himself and decided not to think about it anymore. He had done what he had to do.

* * * * *

Hollis sat on one of the swivelly bar stools at the counter of the snack bar of Pryor's Walgreen Agency Drug Store, halfway under the breeze of hot air circulated by the four-bladed propellor fan hung from the ceiling over the entrance way on an August morning in Bethel, Georgia, and watched out of the corner of one eye the demonstration in front of the Post Office across the

street, and out of the other eye one of the Bethel High cheerleaders who worked every Saturday behind the snack bar counter of Pryor's. She was well packed into a tight black skirt and a white frilly apron that hung from around her neck and swelled over her breasts and down across her flat stomach and thighs; and last fall Prentiss Butler had laid her regularly once a month on special days after football games in the back seat of his jacked-up Chevy with the help of plastic bags to protect the seats and towels for afterwards. Prentiss said she was a good lay but you had to go steady with her first. Prentiss hadn't really wanted to go steady with her because she came from white trash, and everybody in town knew what the name Peavy meant. She'd gotten cheerleader because she'd let a couple of the football players fool around with her some.

"What you doin in town today, Hollis?" asked the cheerleader. She giggled self-consciously and handed him a large cherry vanilla coke with crushed ice.

Hollis felt a warm rush of blood spread up his cheeks as he raised his eyes from the frilly apron to her face. "Awh, nothin much. Just wanted to see the action in the big city. There wasn't much to do out on the farm."

"Oh," said the cheerleader.

Hollis peeled the wrapper off a straw he'd plucked from the glass holder that had once been a sugar pourer but now had no top. The cheerleader shifted her weight to one foot and continued to stare at him.

"Football practice starts in about two more weeks, don't it, Hollis?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said, "August twenty-fourth. It's gone be God-awful if this heat didn't let up some. Did you know that it's sposed to git to ninety-eight today?"

"You don't say!" said the cheerleader and ran her tongue along her upper lip. "It's already hot as you-know-what in here. Don't know as I can stand it if it gits any worse. It's the humidity, you know."

"Yeah," said Hollis, and bent over his drink.

She stood uncertainly in front of him, still on one foot. Hollis didn't say anything, so she pulled a damp cloth from under the counter and ran it in semi-circle swipes across the linoleum top. Hollis watched her absently as he stirred the coke with his straw. Already plump beads of perspiration were spilling down the sides of the Coca Cola glass in the heat. He put the glass down on the counter and propped his elbows beside it, cupping his chin between his hands. He mouthed the peppermint striped paper straw. A long black spotted mirror stretched behind the counter and he watched the cheerleader from behind. Every time she took a swipe across the counter he could see her hemline rise far up the back of her white thighs in the mirror. He cleared his throat and swung half way round on the stool until he was looking out the open door toward the picket line marching back and forth in front of the Bethel, Georgia Post Office across the street. The hot air from the fan over the doorway struck him directly in the face. The dried-up grey

haired lady from behind the cash register gave him her best tight-lipped smile, and turned to stare out the door, too. The fan made frizzy little bits of loose hair stand out like writhing serpents all over her head. The cheerleader finished with the counter and threw the damp cloth in the sink. It made a soft plop.

"What you reckon them people over yonder think they gone git accomplished, Hollis, marchin back and forth like that?" asked the cheerleader. "Ain't nobody studdin 'em."

"Hope they all git sunstroke," said Hollis.

"They're all outsiders," said the cheerleader, pushing back the white blond hair from her forehead. "Yankees and uppity niggers. Tryin to stir up trouble, every one of 'em. Ain't nobody from around here gone git mixed up with the likes of them. We got too much self-respeck."

"They done already stirred up the niggers, though," said Hollis. "Did you know my ma said that Hattie, our maid, called up th'smorning and said she couldn't come to work today cause her sister was sick? And that ain't all. Ma's already talked to Miz Campbell and Miz Bailey, and their niggers ain't shown up neither."

"Thass bad," said the cheerleader, "real bad." She narrowed her pale eyes to slits and shook her head; then leaned across the counter until her face was only a few inches away from Hollis'. "And confidentially," she said, "We most nelly didn't open up today."

"That so?" asked Hollis.

She nodded her head yes and lowered her husky voice to a whisper. "Las night they busted up a couple of plate glass winders down at the hardware store and one at the Diana Shop right after a meetin at their Baptist church where that colored religious leader who claims to be so peaceful was preachin."

"I hadn't heard nothin about all that," said Hollis. "Seems kinda funny to me that they'd bust up winders of stores that'll serve 'em. Are you sure you got your story straight?"

"Straight from Mr. Pryor," she said. "It's true. I seen 'em myself! And what with all that vilence and with the police chief askin all the decent folks to stay home today, we bout didn't open up a'tall."

"How come you did?" asked Hollis.

"Well, Mr. Pryor said that with all these shenanigans and such goin on, some people are likely to git hurt and might need some medical supplies. So he opened up anyway. And you know Mr. Pryor. He itn't gone pass up the chance to make a dollar!"

"I'm surprised your ma let you come work today," said Hollis. "Lots of stores are closed up. I ain't seen hardly ennybody I know up town."

"You really ain't got no business bein up here, yourself," the cheerleader said. "You know what the police chief said."

"Yeah, I know," he said and shrugged, "my pa would probly whip me if he knew where I was. But I ain't gone let that stop me. I'm not gone

let these outsiders have the town all to theirselves. I got a right to be here. I live here."

"Have it your own way," said the cheerleader. "All I know's if I didn't have to be up here, I sure wouldn't be. Mamma wutn't gone let me come today; but when I called up Mr. Pryor th'smorning to tell him so, he said he needed me real bad, and had a little talk with Mamma and she finally said I could come cause he promised to take good care of me."

Hollis looked around the drug store. There was no one else in the store save himself, the cheerleader, the grey-haired lady behind the cash register, and Mr. Pryor back in the prescription department. It was almost dark inside compared to the glare of the sun on the street. There was a row of red vinyl booths behind him, separating the snack bar from the rest of the drug store. A long white sign over the mirror had "Drink Coca Cola" written in big red letters and then in smaller black letters were listed all the foods, ice creams, and drinks and their prices. Hollis noisily slurped up the last of his coke with his straw; then turned the glass up and crunched on a mouthful of ice.

"Well," said Hollis, and stood up, "I got to be gettin along now. Be seein you."

"Bye," said the cheerleader.

Hollis paused for a moment and twirled the red vinyl top of his stool around with his finger. "You doin anything tonight, Sue Ellen?" he asked the cheerleader.

"Why no," she said, "not a thing."

"Would you like maybe to go to the show or something with me?"

"Well, sure, Hollis," she said, "I'd love to." Her blue eyes were open full upon him.

"Good." He could feel himself blushing again. He was glad he was sun-tanned. "I'll pick you up about eight then. Is that okay?"

"Thass fine. I git off work about six, and that'll give me plenty of time to git ready. You know where I live?"

"Yeah," said Hollis, "See you then."

He turned to walk over to the cash register holding himself erect and flexing each muscle because he knew that she was watching him. He felt a silly burst of pride flood the pit of his stomach knowing this. He wondered what she was thinking, if she was noticing how straight and muscular his legs were, stretching down from his cut-offs, or how wide his shoulders were under his white T-shirt. He hoped she was; but then he realized that he must really look ridiculous strutting that way. He suddenly hoped that she was not noticing. He was acting as vain as Prentiss.

Hollis dug into his pocket and pulled out some change. He placed a dime down on the smooth plastic tray in front of the dried-up cashier.

"How you doing, today, Hollis?" she asked.

"Just fine, M'am," he said. He was looking past her, out the door into the bright glare of the street.

"Ain't this awful?" she said, clicking her tongue against her teeth. "To think of this happening to our peaceful little town."

"Yessum," he said, still staring past her, "It sure is."

"I know what Chief Henderson said, that everybody ought to stay home so's nobody'd git hurt," said the cashier, "but it sure is good to see a familiar face. I'm sick to death of all these strangers. They're not from around-here. No manners whatsoever. Even our Negroes have enough sense to have manners."

"No M'am," murmured Hollis, "They sure not from around here."

"Well, Hollis, I won't keep you." She smiled her tight-lipped smile, and Hollis could see her yellowed teeth between the parched lips which resembled more a crack in pasty clay than a smile. "I can see you got things on your mind. But tell me 'fore you go — How're ya'll doing? How's this weather affecting your daddy's crops?"

Not too bad, yet," said Hollis. "Everything's wiltin — specially the corn - but there's still enough water in the lake to keep things watered. But even that big ole lake's dropped six or seven feet. It's just a big mud puddle, now, full of turtles." He jangled the change in his pocket. "Turtles're eatin all the fish, too. Why just last week me and pa and Prentiss shot thirty, forty of them from the dam, and there's at least twice as many more left." He paused and looked back out the door. "Well, I got to go. Nice seein you again, M'am."

"Bye Hollis," said the cashier, "You take care, now."

Hollis walked under the propellor fan and out the doorway of Pryor's into the brilliant south Georgia morning. It was perfect weather for a Saturday. The sky was postcard blue, and the blueness stretched unbroken over the low red brick buildings of the town except for one or two cotton boll shaped clouds which seemed to singe against the shiny aluminum water tower at the far edge of town. Hollis could feel the heat rising from the hot sidewalk through the bottom of his thick rubber soled sneakers. He stood for a moment, shifting his feet uncomfortably, and watched the picketers across the street in front of the Post Office. The air just above the asphalt of the street and over the hoods and windshields of the parked cars shimmered and danced in the heat like a live thing. There were about thirty picketers, he guessed, marching in a continuous oblong in front of the granite steps of the Post Office, blocking the sidewalk with their slow procession. They were outsiders, all right. Niggers walking right along with white folks, as if they didn't know any better. They were chanting something that he couldn't make out; and some of them were holding up signs written with magic marker on poster-board and tacked on white pine poles. It wouldn't do any good to let them see him staring at them. Attention was what they wanted, and Hollis was determined to ignore them. They had no business being there. They upset the natural order of things. All because the local niggers had decided to boycott the stores. He thought it was really pretty silly and pointless. The local niggers knew they weren't allowed in certain store — mainly the ones they couldn't afford, anyway — and in the ones they were allowed in, they knew

they couldn't use the white folks' restrooms and drinking fountains. It was a time-honored tradition. And some of them wanted things changed. Hollis didn't really mind colored people himself. It was mainly for the protection of the women that things needed to be kept the way they were. Why, he worked out in the fields with niggers out on his daddy's farm all the time and they were always laughing and joking and singing, and he'd grown up playing with some of the ones that lived in the tenant houses when he was little. Most of them were pretty nice; they just smelled worse than white folks and were a lot dirtier. That's why the women shouldn't have to associate with them or drink after them or sit on bus seats after them. It made Hollis want to laugh to think of all those yankees pouring into town after the first burst of publicity, thinking they could change things. No way. No sir, they wouldn't stir up anything but resentment and red dust. You just couldn't change life like that.

* * * * *

He found himself at the corner Gulf station in the broiling noonday sun alongside Prentiss and a group of local men who liked nothing better than to stand around talking idly, smouldering in the sun. Prentiss was glad to see him. He was glad to see somebody up town with some sense for a change. He was really getting put out with the course of events. Yes, Hollis knew all about the niggers busting up the plate glass windows the night before. Probly the yankees and that black bastard who claimed to be a religious leader had put them up to it but just didn't get caught. No, he hadn't heard that they'd clapped that black bastard into a jail cell. "Good riddance," someone said. "Ought to never let him out again. Save'm the trouble of catchin him next time." The fat, balding gas station attendant with his oily face glistening mentioned as how this same so-called Reverend had incited the local colored folks to violence by telling them that they was as good as white folks and that they had a right to go in any store in town and be served. A man in shirt sleeves said that was ridiculous. Prentiss threw back his big dark head and said he just wanted to get his hands on that nigger. They all claimed to be non-violent — but what do they do? Soon as they leave the church they go bust up expensive plate glass windows, that's what. The double chin of the gas station attendant quivered with indignation. It's the Fedral Govment giving the niggers ideas. Whoever heard of white and colored children going to school together? Why, it'd lower the standard of education! A high school boy said that his little sister had been in the eighth grade the year before and that there was a little nigger gal in her class, black as the ace of spades, who told them that the NAACP was paying her family fifty dollars a week to send her to the white school. How about that? When they already got the newest schools in the county? Hollis said he found that a little hard to believe. That bit about fifty dollars a week. Where was the NAACP sposed to get all that money from, anyhow? From the Fedral Govment, that's where. Several men nodded their heads in agreement. The idea of them thinking they can boycott

the stores! "Times are bad," said the gas station attendant, wiping his sweaty forehead with the sleeve of his greasy blue workshirt. Two large blue wet-spots circled his armpits and his shirt front clung darkly across his belly underneath the red and white embroidered name tag on the pocket. "They'll be back just as soon as they start gittin hungry."

Hollis was beginning to get tired of all the useless talk that made them all hot under the collar but didn't get anything done. At least the niggers did something, he thought, but he didn't say it.

Prentiss looked up at the sun and shook his dark head. "Things are gittin out of hand. I'm so mad, now, I don't know what to do. It's a good thing them agitators're on the other side of town cause if I was to meet up with one right now, I'd be likely to beat him up."

He'd do it, too, thought Hollis. Prentiss was hot-tempered, and big enough to take on anybody. He stood about half a head above everyone else in the group. Hollis was almost six feet tall, himself, but Prentiss topped him by a couple of inches.

"Now calm down, boy," said the gas station attendant, "You better go on home fore you cause any trouble. We got enough as is."

Prentiss glared down on him. "You go to Hell."

The sweat trickled down the slick, oily face of the gas station attendant and he seemed to melt down a few inches. "Now, I don't mean nothin, Prentiss, you know that. It's just that I seen the truck from the TV station in Albenny roll past here just a little while ago, and I don't want 'em to git anything bad on the local folks. You know. We already got half the country down our necks for not lettin niggers go in stores where they ain't got no business bein in the first place, and I don't want to give 'em anything else to gripe about. This heat just puts a body on edge."

"Yeah, it does," said Prentiss, "Sorry."

Hollis felt a little rivulet of sweat run down his backbone and into his waistband. He noticed that the short black hairs on the back of Prentiss' neck where they swirled in a two-pronged pattern down into his collar were glued wetly to his skin. From somewhere inside the darkness of the station a radio was playing. Hollis could just make out Johnny Cash's voice over the noise of the men and the cars that revved their motors while waiting for the light to turn green. "I fell in to a burning ring of fire," the voice said, "and it burned, burned, burned."

The light changed color and a dirty white Ford with a dented front fender rounded the corner of the side street beside the station, beside the group of flushed, sweating white men standing there; and as Hollis glanced up, he saw a dark steel blue barrel jut through the open window of the car, and he saw the flash of orange at the tip at the same moment he heard the earsplitting roar that hung in the air like blue-grey smoke. He turned to the group of blank-eyed men staring at his feet, and he followed their invisible gaze to the sidewalk. He felt the scream swelling in his throat, and his mouth swung open involuntarily, but no sound came; only the whine of the dying song

from the radio in the aftermath of silence. Then came the voice of the radio announcer crackling like raw electricity through the hot, still air, switching the men into sound and action and movement.

"Christ!"

"I saw it . . ."

"Prentiss, oh my God . . ."

"Two niggers . . ."

"Somebody call an ambulance . . ."

"The tag number, did anyone . . ."

"Two Goddamn niggers . . ."

"Police, call the police . . ."

Hollis stood numb, frozen into immobility. The sounds merged and became one long muffled howl inside his head. All he could see was a small blood red sun shimmering up at him from the puddle at his feet.

* * * * *

The night was velvety, soft and warm. The moon was full and bright, shining in the back seat window of the car at the Sunset Drive-In. Hollis sat with his arm around Sue Ellen, cradling her head against his shoulder. He had pushed the front seat forward and propped his feet against it. The colors floated across the screen far up ahead of them, and the lips on the faces moved and spoke, but the voices came from a small box hung on the front seat window. Sue Ellen said in a stiff little voice that she thought this was funny, that the voices didn't come from the moving lips up ahead, but from the little metal box in the car. Hollis said he's never thought about it like that before. It was kind of funny if you thought about it, though. That was exactly the way he felt right now, that everything was small and distant and separated from its source, like looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. It was funny the way he couldn't feel anything; not one thing. It was all a dream and he was wrapped in a warm invisible cloak, and he could see out but it was all very still and far away, and no one could see in or touch him. There was nothing right now; he could hear his voice, sounding as if it came from a little metal box. It didn't belong to him at all. He couldn't feel a thing and he could talk about it as impersonally as if it had happened in a book. He heard himself comforting her, because she had been His girl, because he had been His best friend. It was all an accident. He had been standing right beside Him when it happened. They had shot Him in the head. It could have been anybody — any one of them. He was just taller than the rest of them and had gotten hit. It had all been an accident. If only they hadn't been standing there, if only they could take back the hours and do it all again, this time it would be different. We've got to stop thinking about it, he told her. It'll only make things worse. He remembered the year before when he'd broken his arm playing football and the bone had stuck out of the skin. He hadn't felt a thing until after the doctor had finished with him. But when the pain set in,

it was worse than anything he had expected. It was fine as long as he couldn't feel anything. He had to keep it that way.

He said she had pretty hair. The moon made it silver-white, made it look like silk. He ran his fingers through it and feeling the surging strength of his masculinity, he turned her face to him and gently kissed her lips. He reached for the hand in her lap, and grasping it, let his own rest there against her body where her legs joined her torso. He squeezed her hand ever so slightly, feeling the heel of his palm against her. He could feel her legs relaxing and he knew she wouldn't resist. His lips fluttered like moth wings against her ears, her eyes, and almost without surprise he found her blouse unbuttoned and his lips fluttered down her soft white neck, and down. He moved like a dream walker in a world without time. She moaned softly against him and he glanced up through veiled eyelids at her face and flaxen hair silhouetted above him against the moon. Her eyes were closed and her lips lay parted slightly, unmoving. Her face was back and bathed in a white wash of moonlight. And his half closed eyes saw her face still as in death, and the flesh wither and turn to dust until only the bare skull remained; clean, white, and sterile.



Contributors

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Writing Festival Calendar

Thursday, April 18

2:30 p.m.	Discussion of Student Fiction	Rebekah Reception Room
8:15 p.m.	Reading-Lecture by Hollis Summers Reception	Presser Hall Rebekah Recreation Room

Friday, April 19

11:30 a.m.	Poetry Reading by Larry Rubin	Maclean Auditorium
2:30 p.m.	Discussion of Student Poetry	Rebekah Reception Room

Larry Rubin is a Professor of English at Georgia Institute of Technology. He has published two collections of poetry, *The World's Old Way* and *Lanced in Light*. In 1973, he received the annual award of the Poetry Society of America.

Hollis Summers is a Professor of English at Ohio University. He has written both poetry and prose, including a collection of short stories, *How They Chose the Dead*, and a novel, *The Weather of February*.

