



Agnes Scott College

Writers' Festival

1977.

Thursday, April 7

1:10-2:00 p.m.

Reading
Student writers published in *Aurora*
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts Building

2:10-3:00

Reading and Commentary
Josephine Jacobsen
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts Building

3:30

Workshops for student writers
published in *Aurora*
Nathalie F. Anderson, Director

8:15-9:15

Reading and Commentary
Eudora Welty
Gaines Chapel
Presser Hall

9:30

Reception by Arts Council for
participants, contributors, and guests
Rebekah Scott Reception Room

Friday, April 8

11:30-12:00 a.m.

Reading and Commentary
Guy Davenport
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts Building

2:10-5:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion of poems and stories
selected for *Aurora*
Nathalie F. Anderson, Guy Davenport,
Josephine Jacobsen
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts Building

5:30

Awarding of Prizes
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts Building
Julia Midkiff, Editor of *Aurora*

The Festival Committee wishes to thank President Marvin Perry, Jr., for his support of the Festival; Eleanor Hutchens for funding the Newman Prizes (in honor of her grandparents, Ellen White Newman and William Wyeth Newman); and the National Endowment for the Arts for a grant which helped to make possible the visits of Guy Davenport, Josephine Jacobsen, and Eudora Welty.

aurora

writers' festival issue

1977

The staff of *Aurora* and the Selection Committee for the Writers' Festival dedicate this issue to Margret Trotter, Professor of English.

Spring, 1977

Editor
Julia Midkiff

Selection Committee
Nathalie Anderson
Bo Ball
Margret Trotter
Linda Woods
Aurora Staff
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Cover
Anicia Lane

Colleges & Universities Participating:
Agnes Scott College
Atlanta Junior College
Atlanta University
Berry College
Clayton Junior College
Columbus College
DeKalb Community College
Emory University
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University School of Theology
Floyd Junior College
Georgia Institute of Technology
Georgia Southern College
Georgia State University
Kennesaw Junior College
Mercer University (Macon)
Middle Georgia College
North Georgia College
Reinhardt College
University of Georgia
Valdosta State College
West Georgia College

The Selection Committee reserves the right to perform any necessary editing.

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Send all correspondence to *Aurora*, Box 768, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia 30030.

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Sisters

Listen to me sister, and sister you are,
 Even though you bridle at the thought,
 We travel the same road, oh sister,
 And the end will be the same,
 Remember that; the end will be the same.

You imagine that you're special.
 Your heritage is great, and by its very greatness
 You claim to be unique; you puff with pride and
 Clutch it to your breast or stick it in my face
 As if it gave you virtue. Well, it doesn't.

What a fool you are to think
 That while your mother smeared the blood
 Mine was eating grapes.
 Oh, yours was there, and mine was here,
 But cold will shred the skin as surely as the sun,
 And if the one ground wheat, the other pounded corn.
 And bread is bread is bread.

Look at me sister! And see me!
 My eyes have wept,
 My breasts have swelled and suckled,
 My loins have bled and hungered too.
 So much more alike than not.

Everywhere you go is where I am,
 And where I am is where you have been also.
 Do not strain at gnats of difference,
 Our ends will be the same.
 I am your sister.

— Joan H. Loeb

The Mourners

were ushered from
 March wind into hallway,
 then to faded sitting room where
 the half-light of early evening
 filtered through French doors, and they
 sat silent.

White plaster-cast faces stark against somber clothes.
 Bone china set neatly on waiting tea-cart.
 Too many white flowers before a barren fireplace
 with a too heavy sweet smell that mingled with
 exchange of introductions, thanks, regrets.
 Tea was poured.
 Cups rattled gently
 as they passed from hand to hand
 coming to rest on end tables, arms of chairs, balancing on knees.
 "Please pass," "If it's not too much trouble," "Thanks so much."
 Vaporous streams rising
 from steaming porcelain.
 Petits fours with pink and yellow icing
 still untouched.

A bus passes.
 Heads turn to watch, then
 turn back to stare at
 walls, windows, each other.
 Always vigilant —
 For the clock to chime?
 Another cup of tea? A pink cake?

For him to come back again?

Slowly,
 masks crack, chip away.
 Slowly, quiet talk begins,
 smiles appear, and the flowers smell
 sweeter still.
 As the sun descends behind brick houses
 disappearing into another morning
 voices grow bolder
 letting cake crumbs fall from lips to laps, to carpet,
 where feet will bury them.
 One by one visitors cease conversing to look where
 I sit motionless with full cup of tepid tea.
 Secluded from their vital game of
 "Continuing - to - continue - to . . ."
 A hand brushing mine,
 A face leaning forward.
 "Would you care for a bite to eat?"
 An invitation to play, to
 reconcile myself to life.

— Kathryn Kussrow

Lawton Avenue

The street will tell
 how we search
 and how it all ends
 with the variable men.
 How we scream all night
 and beat out rhythms with our feet
 and in high ceilinged rooms
 with flowers and loose plaster
 wonder how Grandma used to sit on porches,
 talk church, and pick cotton.
 Did she die overdosed
 or was it being
 straddled with concrete
 where once she had children
 that laid her in our flowers?

The neighbors say hard arteries.

They hide and we run for clues
 taking the expressway to the archives
 where in the leaves
 we grant a respectability,
 without a sound,
 to no man.

— Jack Jenkins

The Lesson

Go back and reconstruct the process as I have done, if you will,
and see how time

defeats itself. I came down the coast
to the silent city, wherein the workings of one's life
are seen. If you go there, you must forget everything.
They had driven out the whores, but I was still taken in.
I said I had no money, but they said I could pay later.
I don't know about you. When I thirsted they gave me
a drink, and they fed me when I hungered. One night they let me go,
but I came back. A few nights later they let me go again,
and this time I was ready.

When you go, remember to walk down the streets
with your hands in your pockets. Don't mention my name.
Keep whatever they give you, and try to remember — no,
don't try to remember anything.

Only the path leading down from the hills. Only some girl's hands
and if they give you a chance to rest, that there was something
you have forgotten. Take this to heart. The night that you run away,
the night you are so torn and it reaches your mouth
and it sits on your tongue like a stone and someone is asking you questions—

You will have forgotten everything that I say.

— Norman Finkelstein,

The Long-Lived Death of Karen Quinlan

Pull her plugs, she dies simple as a bug.
She is kept alive by the miracle of medicine
— (did you think prayer?)
Only Maybelline and a crack magician
can restore the blush to what cheeks remain
inside hollows. She has shriveled to the size
of a raisin and rigor mortis has begun to pinch
her toes into permanent points.
Fingers flare outward as if preparing
for a fall. Karen cannot fall anywhere
except to sleep. She lies in the fetal position anticipating death.
Pull her plugs;
she has lain dead long
enough.

— Anicia Lane

the sea is back I feel a breaker coming on

it's been seven years now maybe ten
and the dreams have never lost their patience
they whisper and shout
they paint their pictures for me endlessly
painting seascapes of absolute alienation
painting still life buried in
benign baskets that never come clean of
their placid rot
painting mutilation
(my octopus arms fear being cut off)

my mind holds brushes with the skill of Goya
but my hands are lazy
tanned and flaccid with nails that
shine like seashells
and on every wall around me the shining shells
are mounted like trophies (won
for having tripped over the tide at dawn)
on every wall the shells are nailed
and dried and shining

outside the sea is growing impatient.
with hands as fragile as a calcium casket
I shall paint a door on the least absolute wall
and let her in

— Pamela Rice Grimm

The Morbidity of Transformations

A memory of you vibrates distantly in my mind.
Then, yes — then we might have costumed reality's eccentricities
And indulged in a pronounced taste for angelic intimacy.
But now — now our favorite words are
“However” and “Admittedly”
Meaning “persistent stupidity” and “pink tears.”
The urbanization of our hearts has been completed.
I loved my muddy child-soul better —
When I peered within — all I could see
Were groves of erotic tangerines
Where the orange elves of my imagination played.

— David Boatwright

For Lady Lazarus

Quickening now from a shroud or a caul
of words, a sudden maggotty rising,
bees of white ash in buzzing formation:
a passive universe dully receives you.

(Smiling schoolgirl, teeth white as scrubbed bone,
brain absorbing as dawn absorbs darkness.)

The images rise, swarming, bees of ash
scuttling the moon-grey air over Auschwitz,
circling a universe of carrion,
zeroing in,
assaulting a woman's blank, blank brain.

So you deal again in retaliations,
babies pruned away like petals —
ascetic Madonna, weaving an eloquent curse,
a fierce prayer, an immaculate deception.
Single tree of thorn in a garden of ash:
pink roses, yellow bees drained into stasis . . .
any dream become a stain,
any memory a petty irritation.
So you barter with method and deftness
now, again, rising mutely,
astounding everything outside of you,
eternally proficient and eternally merciless,
armed with weapons you know how to use.

Your message not silly, not thin.
Not answerable the nursery rhyme
you hissed between your teeth,
unnameable the vision dimly resurrected —
only in shadows, phantoms of words —
unspeakable the debt of anger and rotted love,
and the price of a single skin.

— Greg Johnson

Galatea

The youth you would not let me share
with you has slipped by,
pearl-like, on its string
and still in quiet marble shape
I watch you hammer at my hem.
I cannot count the hours
that I have seen you thus, so small, content
with probing piece by piece
and crouching with my dust
upon your hands.
Their fingers have for hours made me wince,
my flesh has crawled from foot to head
and still
the air is pale with falling artistry.
Pygmalion,
you have not once looked up to
see me shiver as you work
or felt my breath upon your hands.
The years slip pearl-like past
my eyes. The lines appear upon your skin,
the dust piles thickly on the floor —
illusion that you are, you still are blind.
One prayer and you would pulse with life as
I who pose here, perfectly, would do
and yet you cannot, sculptor,
let us go.
The years' endeavors hammer on
and still I stand here,
marble-quiet shape:
you drag like death upon my hem.

— Ellen Fort

Letter to Cassandra

(Two blocks down from the
 Pennsylvania Ave. Baptist Church
 Washington, D.C.)

It is dead of winter, in fall,
 And I am embalmed
 In artificial library-light,
 My back ached out of itself,
 I'm witnessing the paling
 Of bright fall leaves
 Afternoon by afternoon
 From the gray window
 In the fifth-floor stack.
 Tonight,
 I'm staring empty stares
 Down the booked lanes
 That trail leaner and leaner
 Like embarrassed laughter.
 Cassandra, are you still having summer
 Without me?
 No, by now Washington
 All mercury has hibernated
 Back to its silver pool.
 Cassandra, how is it
 Not swaying in the heat
 On your front porch,
 Imagining a turned-on radio,
 And not watching boys
 Approach each other, fight, depart
 Like skinny gunslingers?
 Have your unhearing-mother's cries
 Frozen yet
 With winter
 And your own unhearing?
 "Cassie, can't hear
 you, Cassie."
 Is she still
 Fighting deafness,
 Foxholing in her kitchen?
 How are your days, Cass?
 March gave
 Your ironed hair a wavy thrill.
 June mugged
 You and took all your sap.

I understand.
 But has October given
 Mouth-to-mouth?
 Do you know how to be
 In the kind of air
 That celebrates its coldness
 And cleans out your heart
 For winter?

(Cassandra Addams,
 She was fallow
 For my visits,
 Of course;
 First name on the Sunday School roll.
 She looked at me with
 Church-eyes,
 Toughened skin,
 And saw a too-southern
 Summer missionary
 Scratching at her crust
 In an intimate kitchen scene.
 A blue jolt ran through my veins
 At the pumice rub
 Of her palm in mine.
 I was leaving,
 Wincing
 As God does
 At my own tough talk.)

Oh Cass, I loved
 The bursting open of your skin
 (A time-lapsed wonder
 Worth the waiting).
 I don't like
 Living in this false heat
 That warms like a fickle lover.
 I want the heat you're in
 In the picture I have of you.
 You, in the release of a cheap
 Thin summer dress,
 The color of orange pulp,
 The stubble of your puny front lawn
 Glittering in the sun.
 Waving goodbye,
 I call you
 My summer self.

— Kitti Smith

Azaleas: a Birthday Poem, 8 April 1975

I can imagine your mother bent
 over, digging in the Georgia earth
 to secure warm holes for the tiny
 shrubbery, those knobs bound in burlap,
 lined up beside her like little bombs.
 Her rich red hair is tied up
 tightly behind, but several loose pieces
 play about her face,
 catching the sun, turning gold.
 This labor in the heat brings blood
 to glow in her cheeks,
 and water drops from her face to the ground.
 She will bear six children in all;
 the new one, maybe you, is nearby
 or is curled and swelling within her.

Your mother has been gone
 now nearly three years.
 The azaleas were successful.
 Every Easter they burst and bleed so bright
 they fall to the ground very soon after.
 Yesterday, in a letter, your father wrote
 that the front yard
 blazes with azaleas
 and you ought to come home and see them.
 He wrote you the same last year,
 and he'll do it again next year.
 He doesn't have to remind you,
 and he knows it.

— James Starr

Posture

Back straight
 and facing ahead
 is the way to get things
 done efficiently
 conserving motion
 like a long-distance runner
 flowing there fast
 with grace and arms not flung
 but close and tight.

Not like

this sprawling all over a worn-out sofa,
 half-listening to crickets
 rubbing in the night.

— Cheryl Hiers

The Aging Circle

We who dance with death
and bow unnoticed;
Who pass before you
like shadows into shade;
We know what misery blinds
the blueness of your eyes:

the wrinkled skin
that wraps these drying limbs
will too soon come to rest
like time
upon Your hands.

— Michael Popkin

Atlantic City

“May the Lord Bless You and Keep You, and Make His Light to Shine Upon You, Forevermore,” my father used to say just before he passed out the usual meat, mashed potatoes, gravy, lima beans, and corn around the kitchen table. To all six of us. His first wife had had four children: Morton; Jennifer, Razwolde, and Elizabeth. The Stanhope city officials had once taken custody of them for about ten years while their mother was ill. They lived in-and-out of orphanages because the officials didn’t trust my father. His first wife is still a permanent resident at the loony-bin, and his children still visit her once-in-a-while. He hadn’t really wanted to drive her crazy; he just wanted to stay on top.

My father’s children didn’t particularly take to the orphanage way of life. What with no possessions and no privacy! Razwolde told me once that a boy dragged a girl from the lunch line off into a broom closet and raped her, but nothing ever came of it because they weren’t ten years old yet. Anyway, it was no picnic.

The Stanhope authorities finally let the children move back home when an uncle and grandmother moved in. So afraid my father was of their mother’s influence over them after so many years, that he let them have the run of the house. The grandmother was ailing and was run-of-the-mill as a disciplinarian — gas got her! Elizabeth used to say that all of a sudden she’d jump up and scurry along to the bathroom as fast as she could, leaving behind a long, loud trail of vapors. Elizabeth liked to laugh at farts a lot, and she always caught her with her dignity down.

The brother was too old for his age. He slept on the upper bunk; my father had the lower. But uncle Marion kept falling out of bed on his head so much that they had to take him away to a nursing home for the rest of his life. At the home, Uncle Marion would always keep a girlfriend or two in the kitchen or the laundromat; he called them his “bathing beauties.”

Jennifer, who was the oldest daughter and who had won a contest and got to be Homecoming Queen, found my father a new wife, who was somewhere between her own age and my father’s. She was my mother.

My mother was a college secretary then and dated fraternity boys with holes in their socks, greek on their chests, and little on their minds. But they did think she had class, and she typed their papers for a very small fee. She should have married one of them because he became a millionaire. But even after he took her on a world tour, she still wouldn’t marry him.

Anyway, the grandmother died and it must be that she did it on purpose, because she was always praying to God every night to die. She had a beautiful room: a converted sunporch made of glass bricks. I guess all that light must have reminded her of heaven somehow. Some thought the grandmother died to make it more convenient for everyone else. My father didn’t think so. Afterwards he said: “After all that trouble I went to, renting that portable john, her kidneys let loose in bed and she didn’t even notice it. She didn’t even notice what she was doing when we took her to the hospital.”

Jennifer got the marriage up fast. It took five days from the first date to the wedding. But Elizabeth was the one that got all the benefits. Elizabeth got the glass room. The sun shined there all day long. Jennifer left home almost immediately; she married the first boy who would have her, and she wasn’t even pregnant. And it seemed like only a few months until she had four children already. The doctor

had her tubes tied after the fourth one. She cried all day when she had it done. Jennifer's husband was a woodworker and carpenter and didn't work winters except around the house. Jennifer left behind her blond-wood hope chest. Elizabeth got that too.

I remember the beauty contests every year on television, broadcasted direct from Atlantic City. The shows weren't really much interesting, because not many of the girls were talented. One of them did a scene from "Anastasia" where the grandmother finally gives up and believes that her granddaughter is still alive, only she says at the end: "Oh ... and if you're not really her, don't ever tell me!" Then she goes backstage and with her hair in curlers does a Toni commercial with some former Miss America, now married, who asks her what somebody asked her: how she ever got such lovely hair. Things never turned out like you thought they would in the end; the judges always picked somebody else.

Jennifer didn't want another mother, but she got one anyway when her father married her girlfriend. She couldn't understand how a close girlfriend could become her mother all of a sudden. Then she got married and moved in with her husband's mother for a year or two: it was hardly the thing. They didn't see eye-to-eye on the housekeeping. Jennifer always told everybody that one time she had to clean dog-doo out of her son's mouth after he had been playing under the kitchen table in the mother-in-law's house. So she moved out from under that mother, too, as soon as she could.

My mother's name is Annie. She picked it out of a Sears catalogue when she was five years old. That was because her mother and father never could agree on anything, so she just had to come up with it herself. One day she said: "Mama, I want that name; I think it's pretty!" Annie left home later when she found out she could do other things for herself just as well. I don't remember where all she lived, but I do know she married young and had me and my brother and then got divorced when she found out she could have us almost as well without a husband, and then she married Jennifer's father when she found out she couldn't do it alone. My brother's name is Mickey.

After the big honeymoon, everybody moved in together. After the funeral, the wedding, and the honeymoon, we bought a television set, but it wasn't new. Every day we watched "I Love Lucy" and "Beat the Clock" and Burt Parks. And there was "Queen for a Day" where housewives made up lies to get washing machines. It sure was exciting watching the clap-o-meter crank up beyond the top mark, and one of the housewives would win the contest. There were so many wonderful things on television that year that we didn't swim much in the river behind the house. But later, when my father bought a boat and a raft and water skis, we switched to the water. We lived with the water happily ever after, at least for a few years.

** ** *

Most of all I remember the last summer we all spent there beside the water. It seemed like the water was our guts that summer; everything we did depended on the river. It nourished us and we used it every day, every chance we could get. Why, even in March, right after the ice melted and the river was still fast, we went in for a dip, just to see how it was. The best we could manage was to swim to the middle and hurry back to shore. Oh, we only got in once and didn't try again for several months.

Daddy warned us about the polio almost every day. He didn't want us to swim unless the water was absolutely clear; I guess he thought that it was the polio that made the water muddy. Just to spite him, we went swimming when we pleased anyway, but always got turned in by the lady next door. Lydia, the bitch, who had married and buried at least three husbands and was at the present time using up her fourth. She was a strange woman — too clean. "You can't sit down in her house without her straightening up the cushion under you. You light up a damned cigarette, and she empties every ash you drop in the ashtray," Daddy always used to say.

That summer, Daddy went to India, so we stayed on the place alone, except for Mother. Morton had been recently discharged from the Navy, so he moved home to be the man in the family for the summer. Being the first time they had ever met, Morton and Mother became great pals at first; that is, until Morton started in philosophizing. He wanted lots out of life. Morton droned on like this: "The woman I marry will have to be old-fashioned and cook everything homemade. Nothing out of cans or boxes!" Mother would tell him he'd never get married if that's what he thought: he valued such things as true love and virgins. At first, Mother passed it off and just laughed at him, until he started showing more-than-natural interest in Mickey. Morton moved out before the summer was over and moved in with a fifteen-year-old just dropped out of high school.

That summer let loose the seeds of sexual awareness in all of us: sometimes they fell on fertile ground. There was a girl down the street, Linda Barnes, who had no teeth than that were black, but she got pregnant anyway. Elizabeth trash-mouthed her when she found out how it had happened. "You Kumquat," she said, "you can't cut the nipples off of rubbers, you just don't do that kind of thing if you want them to work!" and Linda trashed her right back: "It just don't look right with that bump on the end. Nipples don't look right on peters!" Razwolde thought he was being funny and asked her a question: "If a porpoise and a peterfore got into a race, which one would win?" "What's a peterfore?" said Linda. He smirked as if he had caught her in something nasty and personal and said: "You should know!" Well, she just threw her head back and laughed, showing off her black stubs of teeth.

Elizabeth had a boyfriend named Fred. He cut hair at the Waxman Barber Shop and stayed in town at the YMCA on week-nights. She'd been going steady with him since the tenth grade; she was a senior now and had never dated anybody else. In the winter they'd go roller skating Fridays at the Stanhope Rollerina, Saturdays eating box lunches at the Y-Canteen. In the summer he came over to swim a lot on week-ends and afternoons. He changed clothes in our big bedroom, the one all us boys shared. We'd all be there to watch him take off his pants and shorts and put on his jock strap and swimming trunks. We never had any problem figuring out what she saw in him.

My mother told us about some of her former boyfriends. She had one who was afraid to kiss her, and when he finally did, she said, it was like he was doing her a favor. Then she had another one who was awfully superstitious or something. Once she had to borrow his bluejeans because she had got caught in the rain or something; but then he refused to ever wear them again because she had.

Morton shared the same bedroom with us. On his first night at home from the Navy, we poked fun at him because he was still wearing those baggy military-issue boxer shorts. But next morning, when he got up to piss, he had a hard-on, and

big-as-life, it jumped straight out from between the flaps. Mickey didn't ever miss a trick; he pointed at it and said: "Now we know how the Navy makes its men!"

Mickey had a run-in with Elizabeth one day swimming. We had this big trapeze that hung out over the river. It was a vertible circus act when everybody tried to get on first. One time Elizabeth grabbed Mickey from behind and tried to pull him off, but he was out to embarrass her. "Hey, everybody," he screamed as loud as he could, "look where she's grabbing me; she can't keep her hands off it!" After that, Mother gave him the money to buy a jock strap. Only, when he went to the store, he had to ask for an athletic supporter.

On weekends it was like living on the Thames River. Everybody that lived around there was always out on the water. It was one big circus pageant. There were barges filled with people; there were row boats and motor boats. There was water skiing and boat racing. Everybody always seemed to have week-end guests; they camped out on the lawns and posed in their wet bathing suits. Elizabeth bought herself a Catalina swimsuit that summer to show off her figure. And Razwolde bought himself a pair of reversible trunks with side-vents and no legs. Mine and Mickey's suits were ugly boxer trunks Mother had bought for us. All of us would pole the raft out to the center, and sometimes we'd go over to the big island. Lots of turtles and frogs jumped crazily off logs of driftwood when you'd get near them. The island was made out of coal dust, grass, and trees; and if you'd try to walk on it, you'd sink up to your knees in muck and the dragonflies buzzed around you.

Even in the wintertime, the old place was somewhat of a vacation spot. After the Stanhope Water Department let out the word that the river was safe to use, we'd have thousands of ice-skaters on our hands. We boys sold hot dogs and coffee through our bedroom window and stoked a bonfire in the back yard. The skaters cut up our lawn bad, walking back and forth.

The lady who lived next door before Lydia came to live there used to skate holding a large golf umbrella in front of her. She'd open it up and let the wind pull her along. She'd upset many an ice-hockey game because she couldn't always slow herself down. Her name was Mrs. Littlejohn. The lady who lived on the other side of us always stayed inside and collected salt-and-pepper shaker sets in the winter and in the summer. She had one from the Empire State Building in New York City and even had one from Atlantic City. But most of them were from Japan. Her name was Mrs. Dawson.

But when Lydia moved in next door, she became the star performer, especially in the winter. She'd get out on her porch in spike heels and a baby-doll nighty in broad daylight, looking like the main attraction on a showboat, and waved at everybody on the ice while she swept the snow off her porch. All the neighbors would be scandalized when she'd come visit them because she was over fifty and the mini-skirt wasn't invented yet. She always acted like she was trying to win a beauty contest. Daddy was always one of the judges! "That woman is forever showing herself off. If I happened to look just right, I could see her nipples. George ought to keep his wife off the streets!" Her husband was a medical artist and was always drawing esophaguses and intestines.

Almost the very next day, Daddy went off to India. He must have worried a lot that Mother was going to start doing things like Lydia did, because he always was asking her lots of questions in his letters. Sometimes he didn't even ask, but acted as if he could see us all the way from India. He wrote: "Good friends have been

writing me, and they don't think you stay home enough. Give my love to the children."

It was on one of those big weekends on the river that the whole mess about Atlantic City started happening. Jennifer and her four brats and her potguttied, lunkhead husband came over. Morton and his high school friend showed up, and so did a lot of aunts and uncles and their families. They were all invited: by Daddy, all the way from India.

Saturday was hot and muggy. We anchored the raft out in the middle of a brown river. The river was fast and muddy because it had rained all week. We thought it was like the Congo River; or maybe it was more like being right on the Ganges, and all the pilgrims were playing in the water. Thousands of people cluttered up the river. All the summer houses were opened up, and everybody had as many weekend guests as we did. We had at least twenty.

Me and Mickey were out snorkeling under the raft. We were diving for treasure in the Ganges. There was a big airspace under the raft that was our secret cave. The river was hot with the sun two feet down, but below that it was pitch black and cold and the bottom current was strong. On top, all the stray cow pies and horse biscuits floated slowly down towards the dam. Some of them were sponges and others were man-of-war jellyfish with long tentacles of algae streaming behind like green hair.

Daddy was living in even a better place than we were. Kashmir, he said, was the garden spot of the world; but he didn't like it anyway. He was living with a maharaja on a houseboat that was much bigger than our house. He said the river was always dirty and thought the Indian people didn't have anything better to do than to make babies. "The food is bad," he wrote in one of his letters, "and the people are weird. You can't get a steak; I'm so tired of curry! And there aren't any real toilets." He sent us a few linen-covered matchbooks from some big hotel in New Delhi that letter. Later on, he sent us a plastic model of the Taj Mahal. He sent us no treasure, only those things that tourists find.

Linda Barnes and Elizabeth were sun bathing on top of the raft and talking about going off to Atlantic City together. Linda had already had her baby and was already married, so it was O.K. for her to be seen in public in her bathing suit. Elizabeth had just bought that Catalina swimsuit. They both looked like Liz Taylor on her barge. We were planning to go up and ravish them as soon as we had gathered enough treasure, and then we were going to throw jewels at their feet and then just swim away without a word.

Just then, Razwolde swam up to the raft clenching a pair of sunglasses in his teeth. We would have liked to pretend he was a pirate with a knife, but the role wasn't slick enough for him. Later, when he was all greased up like an Italian, and with his hair slapped back in a pompadour and duck's ass, and wearing those tight reversibles that zipped up the side and wraparound sunglasses, we just said to ourselves that he was a mafioso-type we were working for, and that he was waiting topside with a couple of girls.

After we got up on the raft, Fred swam up. As soon as he boarded, Elizabeth started drying him off with a beach towel from Atlantic City that had a sailor printed on one side. And the sailor was saying: "Here's looking at you!" Fred hung his legs off the edge of the raft, and she snuggled up close behind him and rubbed on his shoulders, chest, and stomach, and then his thighs. He said: "Have you asked your mother yet?"

"She isn't my mother; she's my step-mother!" she replied.

"Well, have you asked your step-mother yet?"

She said: "No, I haven't had the time, but she'll say it's O.K. because I can write Daddy just as easy and ask him. He lets me do anything I want."

"But you still haven't asked her yet?" he was persistent.

"Quit that, Fred; I'll ask her today!"

Linda Barnes finally spoke up: "Well, honey, we have to know soon for sure. If you can't go, I'll have to ask somebody else. We already got us a cabin, and we can't afford it ourself. I didn't know you hadn't asked her yet — we aren't made of money you know!"

"Stop harping and don't worry about it, Kumquat!"

"Where you going to?" I asked as if I already didn't know.

"Atlantic City, you dope," said Razwolde, trying to look chic by looking down over his sunglasses.

"Well, what you gonna do there?" I didn't look back at Razwolde who was probably still acting silly.

"The same thing I'm doing here right now," she snorted.

Mickey was not one to stay out of such a conversation very long, especially if he knew anything. He'd been watching everybody closely, especially Fred, and was waiting for his chance. "I know what you'll be doing, Lizzy! Mama said Fred wasn't no all-American boy."

That's the first time I ever saw Fred blush. He was blonde so his whole body just turned pink. Everybody was staring at him. He did his best to ignore it. "What's she gonna say now when you ask her, huh?" he finally said to Elizabeth.

"Mama knows what's been going on; she says —" but Elizabeth didn't let him finish; she splashed him with a handful of water and said back real quick-like: "You little faggot!" Mickey opened his mouth as if to say something; but he took in a deep, thoughtful breath and just grinned. We all knew that whatever he was planning to say would come out some other time. The talking was over for the moment. The last time someone had called him a faggot, it was Razwolde. Mickey didn't even flinch. He just said back in a low voice: "What was that I saw you doing down in the woods the other day, you and Kipper?"

Everybody always knew exactly what was going on, or thought they did, but usually didn't say anything because it was all in the family. Mickey and Morton had been doing things together until Morton moved out and moved in with that fifteen-year-old high school boy. There was a bit of talk about that, since it was such a big event. Aunt Nell blabbed it all over town. Daddy ignored everything as best as he could and always said: "My children don't do things like that." He kept silent and forgot as best as he could that the boy's mother was a blackmaileress. He kept silent about Mickey and was careful not to deliver any opinions, except that once he called him Mickey Mouse.

Mickey and Razwolde had taken to sleeping together lately, so nobody was eager to add that to the conversation. Linda Barnes was callous to the whole thing; she was just about immune to everything, even Mickey. But she couldn't think of anything to say; she was kind of slow anyway. And since I may have had one or two things to hide myself, I just kept my trap shut.

There was a short silence. Fred and Razwolde kept eyeing each other. All of a sudden, they jumped up and threw Elizabeth into the water. "I'll cut both your balls off!" she screamed at them, but it didn't do her any good.

Having escaped Jennifer's children, and the relatives, and all those crowds of people looking like they were on Coney Island, we were not the model children of responsibility. There were cannonballs and dunkings and lots of pushing and falling into the water. And Linda Barnes and Elizabeth cursed a couple of times. We were playing a game of underwater tag when they called us ashore for supper.

Those summer outdoor meals had by then all gotten to be the same. Grape Kool-Aid mixed with lots of lemons and oranges (the grown-ups got beer) hot dogs and hamburgers and potato salad. I sat on the dock picking the yellow jackets out of my plate and letting the bats swoop down close to my head for mosquitoes.

Fred and Elizabeth were standing over by the barbeque pit talking to Mother; and Jennifer came up and said real loud: "Why in Hell's Name do you want to go to Atlantic City? What can you do there you can't do here?" Mother wasn't about to give her consent or refusal. "I'll have to wait," she said, "until your father calls on Wednesday. This is something he'll want to decide." She was being diplomatic in front of the family. But then she surprised everybody and said: "If it was just me, I'd let you go."

The lull in the conversation was immediately filled up by Lydia, who said she came over to help Mother cook, but really just to nose around. She started telling everybody about how beautiful it was last winter when the ice broke up. The ice always made moaning sounds all winter long, but just before it broke up, there wasn't a single sound. "It was so quiet, quiet as death," she said. "You could tell something was going to happen. You just knew that the winter you could see lying there in front of you was suddenly going to slip away, and everything wouldn't be the same again for a long time. The whole river just exploded twenty feet into the air! I wish I would have taken some snapshots! If George hadn't been at work, he could have painted a picture of it."

We all remembered the day the ice broke apart last winter. When we got home from school, the yard was piled high with huge blocks of ice. We stacked them up like stones and made fortifications against one another and tossed snow-balls until supper. A few days later the rising waters carried everything away.

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The next few days nothing happened much, except we fought as usual most of the time. Elizabeth and Razwolde were a terror with the badminton pucks; they kept hitting the pucks up onto the roof and wouldn't climb up to get them down. When the pucks were all hit up on the roof, the game was over until Mickey and I wanted to play a set. By their design, Mickey and I would have to climb up on the roof before we could play. So we conspired to hide one of the pucks in a shoe for ourselves and let them climb up the next time.

Our strategy didn't work out though; the whole arrangement was discovered right away. Being superior logisticians, not finding the pucks neatly filed away in the box for them, they knew something was in the air. Elizabeth marched boldly into our room and demanded that one of us climb to the roof; "One of you boys had better get that puck you left up on the roof!"

Mickey sassed her: "Climb it yourself, you old bitch!" Well, Lizzy countered by knocking over the chess game we were at. I wasn't in a very diplomatic mood, so I stomped on her toes. That proved to be a big mistake, because she parried instan-

tly and almost pulled my left ear off. It wasn't long before she extorted the whereabouts of the puck from me.

But as she retreated from the room in triumph, I threatened her: "Just wait and see if you go to Atlantic City now — not if I can help it!" I only said that for revenge because I already knew there wasn't anything I could do about it. I told Mother anyway, just in case.

But she wouldn't let me tell on Lizzy. She said: "You've got to learn to stand up and take things more; it'll make you a better person." I didn't believe in her sayings, and I still don't. But I didn't say anything back though. If you let people get a hold on you the wrong way, I always say, it just makes it easier for them to twist the knife a little harder.

Tuesday afternoon we were swimming, just the four of us: me, Mickey, Razwolde, and Elizabeth. I was sitting on the bank washing the black muck off my legs and scaring off a leech with Razwolde's lighter. He wasn't allowed to smoke, but he did anyway. We all did. Anyway, Elizabeth was riding him about his tight swimming trunks. "You might as well not have anything on," she said.

"I'm covered from all sides," he said. "I'd still be completely protected even if I didn't have my suit on."

"How about if you dropped your jock strap? Then you'd be scared to come out, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't," he insisted. "I'd just cover up with my hands!"

"I doubt it," she snickered, "you couldn't cover all of that up!" He got all embarrassed and turned red. He didn't speak to Lizzy at all for the rest of the day.

Finally, Wednesday came around. Daddy was supposed to call at about eight o'clock. Elizabeth had it all arranged with Jennifer to intercede with Father for her about her going to Atlantic City. He always listened to her because she was the oldest. I heard them planning it over the phone; I listened in. They sounded like two school girls giggling over their plots and counterplots.

Jennifer showed up for the big conclave all a mess. But I guess it was alright since an ambassador doesn't have to look good over the phone. She was wearing curlers and not enough make-up. And she had dragged her four little brats and big husband along. They all sat on one side of the room in a line and clashed with the pink and grey walls. The place just didn't look like a conference room at all, unless you counted the linoleum floor.

Morton brought along the fifteen-year-old: the boy sort of resembled Razwolde with his sunglasses, greased-back hair, and all. Morton had brought along his Bible; they were going on to church later if the phone call wasn't too late. Everybody sat still and bored, looking up at the ceiling or out the windows or counting linoleum tiles to themselves — except Morton. He was talking in low, self-righteous tones about a sermon that Reverend Tilson had delivered that Sunday about painted women opening up the Gates of Hell.

"Well," Mother broke in coldly, "I hope I'm not offending anyone's sensibilities (being as how you're a flunked-out seminary student) but I used to go to your church, and I've heard that same sermon you're talking about years ago, and I'll tell you this: That same preacher's wife sat up in the front row, wearing the reddest dress and the reddest lipstick, and when she just happened to spread her legs a little, everything matched!" She was mildly satisfied to see Morton turn a lively green. The fifteen-year-old thought it was an extremely funny joke and almost fell off his chair.

Fortunately, the phone rang. You could tell it was from India from the long-distance way it rang. Jennifer was sitting right beside the phone and picked up the receiver just right before it rang the third time. It gave me a chill the way she started talking and crying at the same time: "Daddy, Daddy, you can't let Lizzy go off to Atlantic City all by herself with Fred! I never got to go anywhere like that when I was at home!"

Elizabeth jumped up and grabbed the receiver and slapped Jennifer across the face. I couldn't tell if Lizzy hurt her or not because she was already crying. Mickey said out loud: "Jenny's just as crazy as her mother!" We were all too amazed to really listen to what Elizabeth said over the phone, except Mother, who was a little angry. We just sat there like wax men, all in a row; Mother listened on the extension and heard it all. Only Mickey knows something about it; he got her to talk, but he's not saying anything. He only tells the juicy secrets when you can be embarrassed by them.

That's how my father ruled us all the way from India: like an absentee landlord, through his chosen representative. We all wrote him politely solicitous letters and told him just exactly what to bring us back from India, but all I ever got was a pull-toy paper mongoose. I was much too old for it. We each got a cheap pair of sandals — they only cost him a rupee or two — he didn't even bring Mother a sari. And when he came back to our river, he hid the white plastic model of the Taj Mahal in the hall closet and wouldn't ever let us talk to him about India.

— Michael P. van Asdalan

And Then There Was One

I kept telling myself last summer that anyone who took five years to get through a high school that gave diplomas away couldn't hang on long to a girl like Jody Turnbull. But she must have seen something in his soft face, his eyes half-shuttered in sleep, his mouth that swore (except for two four-letter words that he thought his little lady shouldn't hear) what he'd do to a nigger if one ever messed with his wife.

Whatever it was she saw now had me on the plane going home to bear the flowers, to be a witness to the agreement which a parade of church suits and hats and a Hammond organ would make legitimate enough for the "Around Town" column in the *Moffatt Courier*. Hardheaded girl, I thought, and reaching for a magazine the stewardess offered, saw it was *Young Bride*, flinched, and chose *Travel* instead.

But the glossy pictures of completely undiscovered spots in the Carribean, of bodies baking on warm sands, only took me back to Twin Lakes of last summer. One of these fishing holes was thought fit for swimming and both were stranded in the wasteland of a military reservation where the army had hired five lifeguards to keep an algae-count, kill a moccasin or two, and watch over any brats whose mothers were desperate enough to drive the six miles through tank crossings and war games. There Jody and I and the other guards sweated out the summer. Killed a few flies. Played canasta. And Jody and I had the old argument, she in the cinderblock cell bathhouse which was dank with kids' piss and mouldy swim suits, a cigarette in one hand and a book in the other and I standing outside, my arms dangling through the check-in window.

"Why don't you go away to school?" I said.

She looked up and put her thumb in the book to keep her place. "You find the money and I'll go."

"Your daddy left you plenty of money to do that." I looked outside at the shiny new Ford LTD that had replaced her father's old Plymouth she wrecked on the way to her one week of community college.

"Some people can't go running off anywhere they want to, you know. Mama can't do anything for herself, you know that ..." Jody saw a fly crawling on the counter and in one swipe had it dead and in the trash can. "Besides, I don't really want to."

Didn't want to. Well, I could have spewed a dozen reasons why she should venture out of Moffatt and try her wings, as the college brochures would say, and just hear something other than beauty-shop gossip, but the words would have fallen dead in the heavy July air.

Midway into the afternoon, Jody would come out from the cool cinderblock cell and sit on the back step, her face towards the lake, but eyes watching the last turn in the road. We'd hear a rumbling near the top of the hill, then a puny revving, and finally, through the sheath of haze that sat on the summer afternoon, we'd see little storms of dust. In a flurry of gravel he would arrive, fling the car door open, slither out, let the door bounce once off his right hand and then shut. He would take one last drag from his cigarette and flick it spinning to the ground where the sole of his tennis shoe squeezed it dead. With a cursory nod and a grunted "hey" to the corporate body of lifeguards, he went straight to Jody, who had not yet moved, put his driving arm around her and steered her down to the pine trees by the big lake.

The three other lifeguards sat cross-legged in the sand, slick and silent, nothing but their eyes following the two until they disappeared, and then swivelling as one back to me. I dragged my towel to the end of the pier and bored my eyes into the words of the paperback, all a blur, thinking, "Always got to have someone to hang on to. Hell, I can't do anything with her."

By half-summer, the neighbors were worn out with Jody and Art this and Art and Jody that, and Jody's mother was afraid that if they didn't hurry up and get married, something was going to happen.

One day in late summer Mrs. Townsend strode over to our house and sat down at the kitchen table while we were canning tomato pickle and said to Mama:

"Carol, I tried to call you just a minute ago but I can't pick up the phone anymore without their being on it — day or night, mind you — the Lord knows what they find to yak about for hours on end. And when I do pick it up, there's either a long ugly silence or one of them says, 'Is that someone listening on the phone?' Like I would want to listen to their little mess. Well, I'll tell you one thing, that boy sure isn't doing her a piece of good." She shook her head for a few beats and Mama entered in time:

"Well, she hasn't set foot in this house the whole summer, not once, not even so much as a 'how-de-do' or 'kiss-my-fanny' from that girl. And there's not anyone on this earth that's done more for that girl than I have —" eyeing and nodding Mrs. Townsend a "the Lord only knows HOW much" and Mrs. Townsend:

"I know, I know, God knows I know," but not looking straight at Mama.

"— I just don't know what's gotten into the girl, ignoring all her old friends — trying to catch my eye and Mrs. Townsend:

"Why, she used to come by and sit, just as grown-up and ladylike and we'd have the nicest chats —"

"She's just not at all the sweet girl she used to be. And her daddy wouldn't have liked this one bit. I don't think all this would be happening if Jimmy were still living ..."

"Well, Carol, she's just lost her mind over this and she's not going to find it by marrying Art." Mrs. Townsend jerked her head away and muttered "umph!" like Mama did when she smelled something rotten in the refrigerator. "Lord, I reckon I'd better be going, Carol. If I'm going to call the girls tonight, I'll have to start early before you-know-who gets on the line."

Mama saw her to the door, still in rubber gloves and calling "Come back soon" after her, and I stood with a dozen Mason Jars left to scald, listening to the finished jars seal with artillery pops. And smelling the green tomato pickle yet not feeling quite so crisp. As the clock neared five-thirty, I almost burned myself hurrying, because if I wasn't ready when Art and Jody pulled up, there'd be some mad squealing out of the driveway on the way to town.

"Mama, I'm going to be late if ..."

"Well, run along then," she said snatching the hot jar and a rubber gloveful of tomato slices. She tried to make her eyes say 'that's a girl, stick by your friend,' but the way her hand jerked the jar from me said 'my own daughter in on it too.' "Go on, now. You've been a real help."

Some help you've been, the crisp flick of the pages of *Travel* seemed to rap out. Went along with them, smiled with them, and laughed at them behind their backs. But the summer had crawled on, the days coming up and going down in a thick and languid haze broken only by the cool night-rides with Jody and Art.

Whether I had been dragged along or had just fled the pickling, I was their regular sidekick, with a frothy grin planted on my face, sputtering my little Millers at Art's bad jokes, and trying to care who was working at the Dairy Freeze enough to cruise around it several times every Wednesday and Friday night.

We covered every back road in the county that summer — Art's dad wasn't a county cop for nothing — we screamed around curves and roller-coastered over hills that made everything inside me stretch up accordion-fashion — stomach, heart, throat, brain — and come back down like a dropped deck of cards. I sat squeezed between Jody and the door, my beer bottle clenched between my knees, hypnotized by the short swatch of road ahead that the car continually ate up. Between Art and me, Jody jounced and yelled, "Slow down, Art! I mean it, now, quit!" until her voice got just strained and edge enough so that he could say "what a bitch" and slow down to about twenty miles an hour, and then nothing was said. I'd search for all my old Pollock jokes and remember that he'd told all the ones I knew. While they took turns glaring out the window, I looked at my watch and said, "What time is it?"

We'd take all the back roads home and Jody would look at me — "I'll talk to you later" it used to mean — but I wasn't sure anymore. Once in the driveway, I'd invite them in, knowing they'd say no and hoping so anyway. I'd come up with last-minute things to make them laugh, hoping I could say "had a good time" before they could ask about next Saturday or next Wednesday but knowing somehow I never could.

And once again, a year later, I could think of no excuse and went home to be there on their day. The letter in October said that after much thought, they had decided to spend the rest of their life together and could I be there for the tying of the knot. To have and to hold, from this day forth and forever and ever, amen. From age eighteen when they said "I do" (thinking 'we already have') until the day they rolled hand in hand into Southside Nursing Home. Or maybe one of them would meet death tragically young, Jody waste away of consumption, gaunt and long-suffering, or Art (more heroically) shot through the heart as he cleaned his pistol at the police station. In any case, 'til death do them part. The letter I had sent back was chocked full of wisdom worthy of the Bible — "Haste makes waste" and "look before you leap from the frying pan into the fire." Unfortunately I did not know that they had already begun to share everything, including mail. The letter that came back in a business envelope was cold and written as "we." It did not rescind my offer to be maid-of-honor. It merely stated the damage done and under "Thinking of you," was signed, stolidly, the corporate union of "Jody and Art."

I got home that night in July and heard nothing but Mama talking about how Jody had done everything from the dresses to the peanuts herself while her mother sat back and moaned that if they didn't hurry up and get married, they were going to drive her crazy. And, despite all Mama had said, Jody had insisted on "Here Comes the Bride" on that little Hammond organ.

The next day was frantic with dress-hemming, the rehearsal, and the dinner afterwards. There I saw among nervous in-laws and scraps of fried chicken, and thought that marriage is the only one of the three you get to practice for. No one warns you about being born. And everyone warns you about dying but you never believe them until it's too late to arrange a good death-bed scene. But as for marriage — everyone in and out of it wants to tell what they know, and with all the stories going around, just to keep things straight, a system of steps and word-

formulas is provided to insure that you're harnessed in good. So it seemed to me that Jody should have more a feeling of "this is it," of leaving the old behind. Because saying "I do" means "I no longer am" so that she can say "we are" and hope never to say "I wish we never were." I couldn't figure out why I was worried. Once it was over, lifetime friend or not, I could wash my hands of it. Anyway, by the time I got home from it all, it was already the next day.

So there was nothing left on the day itself but to go down to Jody's and be with her until the last minute. I wanted it to be elegaic. Maybe I could say the things I'd been wanting to say since last summer, with just the right touching words to sound like the old best friend she thought I was. I imagined how it would be as I drove down to her house: light, cheerful chatter about the times we hid under her dining room table so Mama wouldn't take me home (we hid in the same place every time and giggled) and then the sincere Word as we got ready to leave for church.

But once there, the TV blared and Jody's mother sat in front of it in pink hair rollers and painting her toenails, Jody's half-sister Betty Lou and her husband Tom lounged in the kitchen drinking Coke and eating Ho-Ho's and the phone had just rung.

"Yes, Art, I called two days ago about the flowers ..." Jody had her hand over the ear away from the receiver, and a straight pin stuck out from her teeth.

Betty Lou asked me: "Where is it you're away in college, now, Jule?"

I tried to whisper but the TV had gotten louder.

"Yes, they'll be there about a half hour before we start ... Don't worry, honey. Yes, I love you too. Bye." Jody moved back into the hall where she'd been letting out the waistband in Betty Lou's matron-of-honor sea-green dress. Her husband Tom sat opposite her where he could see half the TV screen, his face perking up or sagging according to how loud the TV got. He then got up, walked around the table and into the living room, never taking his eyes off the screen.

Betty Lou's eyes followed him as far as her peripheral swivel allowed. Then they lit on me. "I sure hope Jody ain't making the same mistake I did."

I decided suddenly yes I did want a Ho-Ho. Would she care for another? "What mistake?"

"I mean, she's awful young and I hope she ain't grabbing the first thing in pants what comes along — like I did," she whispered. "I mean, once you're in, you can't say, well, I really didn't mean it and before you know it, you're pregnant and there's no stopping it. I mean, once you say it, that's it and that's all."

Minus four hours, I thought. "Well, she acts like she knows what she's doing. Enough even to give herself away."

The phone rang a second time and Jody picked it up before we had a chance to move. "Ray's bringing plenty of film ... Everything's already set up for the pictures." She picked at the threads in the dress, oblivious to the rest of us. "No, Art, there's nothing else you can do now."

Tom came back into the kitchen, looked around blankly for something he might have left. He slid the Beetle Bailey comic off the counter and shuffled back to the TV.

"Yes, I feel fine. Yes, I'm sure ... only four hours, I know. I can hardly wait, either."

Dear Lord, I thought, don't let me be sick.

"Bye now. Love you too." Jody turned and went back into the hall.

Tom loped through the kitchen again and stopped at the counter.

"You through with that comic book already, Tom?" Betty Lou asked.

"No, I'm just hungry," he said and took the top off the jar of peanut butter and spread a huge glob on a slice of Wonder Bread. The top of the jar rolled off the counter.

Betty Lou grunted over to pick it up and in a low voice said to me, "He's just nervous. Not used to all this to-do. We were married at the J.P.'s, you know."

I nodded and looked at him stooping over the counter eating the sandwich, the peanut butter making sticky noises in his mouth and I stood up quickly, almost knocking my chair over and said, "Isn't it about time we started getting ready?"

"It ain't but twelve o'clock, honey. What's your rush?"

"Well, I've got something I need to do at home. I reckon I'd better be going."

I walked through the hall to where she was working. The golden glow Hallmark words never came. Just "see you there," which she didn't seem to hear.

At the church, we ran the fan and readied Jody to go on. After planning, coordinating, and directing the whole thing, she was now white as a sheet. Never worn make-up in my life but I said, "Here, put some of this powder on to soak up the sweat." She put it on. "And some blush to keep you from looking like a corpse." She dabbed it on and glanced at me sideways, her face for the first time not calm but drawn and scared.

Mrs. Turnbull sat in a Sunday School chair, fidgeting over which purse to carry in and sometimes looking at Jody with "Oh, my little girl." Every minute or so panting old widows who had known Jody "since she was just this high" wheezed in to say how hot it was and how beautiful she looked and how they hoped marriage would fatten her up. They all wanted to know if I would be next. I just smiled and they slipped out again into the hall where the men were running around getting in and out of place.

When the mistress of ceremonies floated through the door and told us sweetly that it was almost time, Mrs. Turnbull decided on the green purse and Betty Lou, suddenly teary-eyed, engulfed Jody in a fat sticky hug. Jody told us to hurry or we'd hold everything up. We went out into the hall where the whole crowd was fidgeting — all Art's brothers and sisters, his mother with the big soft face and blubbery lips like his, and his father scrubbed in his police uniform, trousers creased razor-sharp and shoes shiny enough for Marine inspection. Last in line were Betty Lou, Tom, Mrs. Turnbull, Art worrying about where he had put the ring, and I thinking there was no stopping now. The mistress of ceremonies eased over to me and said, "You'll have to signal everyone in since I can't tell when one piece of music starts and another begins."

I put my ear to the door and when I heard Mama's arrangement of "God of Our Fathers Whose Almighty Hand" I knew it was time. They all exited on cue, two by two, to prepare the path for Jody. Art was looking all splotchy in the face as if he was going to bust out crying. Going to make a fool of himself for sure, I thought. But his father managed to shove him out the door and down the aisle. The rest followed lamb-like enough, even Betty Lou the matron-of-honor, who wasn't quite sure about the whole thing anyway, but succeeded in flowing grandly down the aisle. Right before my time, with Tom's clammy hands on my arm, I took one quick glance back at Jody, what they were all waiting for. She held her flowers like a two-handed sword and for the first time in months gave me a smile like the one she had the day we were racing around the house, and I tripped, and she had beat me. She nodded slowly for Tom and me to go in. In the battalion of stoic, mostly female heads in the congregation, Mrs. Townsend's was the only one I

recognized and she wasn't even making an effort to look pleased. Probably thinking how Jody sure could've done better.

By the time Tom and I got to our positions, Mama had stopped playing "God of Our Fathers" and began CHUM-CHUM-chum-chummm ... I wondered how many were humming "here comes the bride, doggone her hide ..." Jody appeared, ghost-like and skimming down the aisle, her eyes fixed on Art whose breath was coming in short huffs and whose face was quivering half-way between a grin of rapture and a sob. His father was looking at him as though he wished he could shrink down into those shiny black shoes and stay there until it was all over. If only the congregation would admire the stained glass or the flower arrangements until we could get Art turned around and facing the preacher. Then while the preacher had a few words to say about why we brothers and sisters were gathered today in the house of God, I looked out and there everyone sat, row on row like a mighty army. From the gas station boy to the police force of Moffatt to the scrawny old man who pedaled his bike around town delivering prescriptions. All there to see Jody, to believe in her veil of white, to hear the words spoken, and forget the ones that have been broken.

Finally the part came where we all moved back, parted like the Red Sea and left the dry space only for Art and Jody and the preacher. But right when the preacher got to the taking part, Art started sniffing and then giggling. Jody stared straight down, motionless and still white, waiting with all the patience of winter for what she seemed to know would come. And when Art got hold of himself enough to say "I do" and kissed Jody's calm face with his own red one, I thought the whole police squad down front was going to break into cheers. I could have let out a few whoops myself. Jody just breezed through her part, her voice clear and sure and the whole congregation seemed to relax and to turn to one another with little smiles of relief. And then that was it. Mama pulled the stops out on that little Hammond and even Mrs. Townsend seemed to glow when they half-skipped and stumbled back down the aisle.

As soon as the ginger ale and dry wedding cake disappeared, the church emptied. Outside, bunches of gangly teenage boys had begun to swarm like buzzards, waiting for the newly-weds to come out. I saw Jody go back to the room off the vestibule and my heart started clumping.

Running to the church door, I eased it open to see what was going on. I stood half in and half out, not a part of the gang outside nor the mingling inside, and saw Art's Ford jacked up, minus one wheel, smeared with shaving cream, and with beer cans streaming from the tailpipe. Art came out of the men's room, now in jeans and no trace of red eyes or a splotchy face, and I pointed at the car. He jerked his head for me to come closer and whispered, "Don't worry about that — I've taken care of it." He winked confidentially. "The getaway car is across the street." He hitched up his pants, and, rubbing his sweating palms together, walked towards the room where Jody was dressing.

He wasn't the son of a county cop for nothing. Jody hustled out of the room, in jeans that matched Art's, carrying her bouquet and her little garter thing to pitch to some lucky girl sweating outside in the broiling afternoon sun. She bent down to tie her tennis shoes, handed me the bouquet and said, "Hold this." Still on one knee, she looked up and said, "So glad you could make it."

Right as I opened my mouth, the door burst open and showers of rice and confetti sprayed through, covering the three of us. Art grabbed Jody by the hand and they ran through the churchyard and she looked back once, mouthing

something, and our eyes met. Then since she had to look where she was going, all I could see was the back of her head and the drifts of confetti that were settling around me. They disappeared behind the house across the street, running slightly out of step, and I looked down, and there was the bouquet all sweaty in my hand.

"But — she — hey, wait!" No one was listening or looking my way either, and since there was nothing else to do, I threw it 'way up where it hung suspended just for a moment and then plunged straight into the arms of old Mrs. Harmon, who had been husband-hunting since the Mr. died twelve years ago. She hardly realized what she had caught but when she did, she let out a squeal that sent her flock of widow-friends scurrying over to her and clucking, "Why, I never! Isn't that the nicest thing!" The teenage girls skulked together and glared at me, and then turned their backs into their little groups.

I collapsed inside the vestibule shaking with laughter, and when I couldn't laugh anymore, I opened my eyes and there stood the preacher towering over me. And me, sprawled against the vestibule wall, sprinkled with confetti, and tears running down my face. Nothing about him moved, not his face, not his scorching holy, ice-blue eyes. In silence his eyes riveted mine and seemed to ask had I gotten what I came for. I straightened up slowly and said that I'd better go get washed up, that I was only passing through.

— Joy Cunningham

Conversation Piece

I. Hemingway's Home

Please cross the hallway and enter the next room.

This is the dining room, where Ernest entertained guests. The chairs are 16th century English. Note the iron bar across the back of each chair. English noblemen would lock their swords onto the bar to prevent the possible outbreak of a fight during dinner. On top of the 17th century country French table are newspaper clippings concerning Ernest over the years. Here is an often-reproduced photograph of him at his typewriter; with the caption reading, "Hemingway at work on his new novel." This is erroneous, for Ernest wrote all his manuscripts in longhand. Only when writing newspaper correspondence did he use a typewriter.

Oh yes — overhanging the walnut dining room table is an 18th century Italian chandelier, cut by hand from quartz.

Let us proceed into the kitchen. What — now Princess, you know you're not supposed to be in here. This is Princess Six Toes, the only cat on the premises who was alive while Ernest still lived. During the years that Ernest occupied the house, he had as many as sixty cats at one time. Now we have fifty-two. As you can see, Princess and I have something in common — we're both pregnant. We like to maintain a constant number of fifty-two cats here, so whenever there is a litter, we give the kittens away to whoever wants one. All we ask is that the new owners send to us photographs of the cats periodically, so that we can keep records of their lives. In the garage, we have records of all the cats and their offspring.

Princess Six Toes was so-named because she has six toes on her left paw. Some of the cats have seven or eight toes on a paw; a result of interbreeding. Ernest's first cat was a Persian female with seven toes. Now Princess, out.

When Ernest married his last wife Mary, she had the cabinets and large kitchen appliances raised six inches to accommodate for his size — he was six foot-three, 230 pounds. Ernest liked to prepare his own early morning breakfast and begin writing at seven. A typical breakfast would be salmon or bluefish, eggs, and coffee.

Let's step out into the backyard, and over to the pool. His second wife had the pool built as a surprise gift while Ernest was a war correspondent in Spain. It was the first swimming pool in the Keys. Four pumps maintain a constant flow of saltwater into the pool at a rate of 300 gallons an hour. When he first saw the pool after returning home, and learned of its cost — \$20,000, about twice what he had originally paid for the entire house — he took a penny from his pocket, handed it to his wife, and said, "You may as well take the last penny I have." She placed the penny at the foot of the pool, where it remains today underneath the glass plate. The glass plate has long since clouded from the saltwater, obscuring view of the penny, but it is a 1943 Lincoln-head from the Denver Mint.

II. Sunday Parade

On Sundays, I like to sit out on the side porch of the cafeteria, sponging the sun while enjoying a late breakfast. Dining on the porch is impossible on any day but Sunday because of the unbearable din of the weekday construction next to the cafeteria.

From my position at the metal screen tables, the busiest part of the campus is in

view. Sunday through-traffic slows for the yellow speed bumps at the pedestrian crossing. Bulldozers and heavy digging equipment squat motionless like dinosaurs basking in the sun around the construction site. Across the street, a pathway shrouded by blooming magnolias leads to the quad. A pleasant atmosphere indeed for one to enjoy a second cup of coffee.

At noon, I route my full attention towards the street, for at this time begins the parade of the church-goers.

My college is deeply rooted in the Methodist Church. Benefactors and alumni, most of them quite advanced in years, attend services held in the university chapel, and afterwards, the cafeteria's Sunday noon brunch.

As the service ends, a few church-goers trickle out like the scouts of an army ant column, soon followed by the main body of the swarm. They shuttle down the magnolia-arched walkway, holding onto each other in groups of three and four. Each individual physically comprises only part of a person, and in groups they aid one another. If one is lame, another supplies a leg, and receives an arm or eyes in return. With canes and heavily overcoated, the old alumni hobble across the street and over the yellow speed bumps, sliding perilously on gravel strewn about by construction.

They make their way to the cafeteria's marble steps, which themselves are no small obstacles. I follow their chatter about ailments and the Lord until it trails off as they disappear into the front lobby.

I believe I'll have a third cup, and perhaps a blueberry muffin.

III. Postcard

I sit crosslegged on the pier, squinting in the sun, scheming ways to squelch the fear within me. Fear of people and experience, of loneliness and boredom threatens to cave in the eggshell of my ability to function. Pelicans hop towards me, taking me for a wooden plank, until I scare them away with a sudden jolt.

When I lived in the City I feigned stupidity, forced my intelligence and self-esteem into storage and, feeling that I had nothing left to protect, my fear of the streets dissolved. A great feeling it was to be able to walk the paths of Central Park free of shadows' taunts. But intelligence is, at times, a vital entity to possess, and it became increasingly difficult to dig it up from its locked compartment every time necessary. The thought of burying it too deeply one time too many composed yet another fear, and the others seeped back in.

Two or five miles out in the ocean a dot of a boat floats nearly motionless, taking ing much time to cross from left to right the panorama of my vision. I imagine that a woman sits along the gunwale of the boat, her back to me, while her husband takes a snapshot of her. Lovely photograph — tanned woman in new bathing suit, bleach-white yacht, golden coastline, pier jutting into the bay, dot on pier (probably fishing).

I am a frozen dot on his polaroid picture. My image is to be pasted in a scrapbook and passed down for generations by unknown hands; or perhaps, mailed as a postcard to neighbors back home. I have become part of their panorama and, perhaps only for a moment, fear subsides.

IV. Conversation Piece

At school, does anyone ever ask you about the tornado?
Never. No one even cares. It's as if Louisville doesn't exist.

The other day, I passed by where your old house used to be. The house they built on the lot looks nothing like yours did.

They should have rebuilt it exactly the way it was. That way, when I'm famous, they could show tours of my birthplace.

I kind of like the way they rebuilt it, with the stone mailbox and the greenhouse.

But it's not the same.

Whatever happened to your cello?

It was underneath the piano, next to my records and guitar. The piano's legs were blown off, and everything got crushed. You were really lucky that nothing happened to you. I could just see you flying around on a bed, like Dorothy.

I remember cycling past your house a few days afterwards. The only things standing were the hall closet and the upstairs bathroom door.

I was just about to get my sportscoat out of the hall closet, when my brother called me to the door. I looked out, and in the horizon was a grey wedge of a funnel — nothing what I thought a tornado would look like — and where it touched the ground were little explosions. So Richard and I ran down into the basement, covered our heads, and when I looked up a few minutes later, I saw sky.

The funniest thing was that my parents had just left a few days earlier to visit my sister in California. I called them up and said, Mom, the house blew away, but it's okay because the insurance covers everything. Well, since Mom had been living with me all my life, she was familiar with my tricks and brand of humor, and naturally didn't believe a word I said. Now really, Son, you're kidding. When I finally convinced her that I was being serious, she broke into hysterics. Mom, put Dad on the phone. At least he was sensible.

When did your parents come home?

About three days later. We drove around the neighborhood looking for pieces of our house. All we could find was our garage roof in the next block, and a pair of my jeans hanging in a tree near the expressway about two miles away.

— James Klein

The Long-Legged Horse

We turned off fifty-nine highway, and the green panel truck fell into the first chug hole. Water splashed out. By the time all six cars of the family came through, that hole would be empty.

I was trying to see if everybody had caught up with us when Daddy pointed without lifting his hand from the steering wheel and said, "This is not to be repeated, but yonder in that field is where they say Montine Beckett shot her own Daddy for abusing her mother. You don't repeat that to anybody. One of the best ways to get in trouble is to talk too much."

I sat silent, wishing the story had never been told to me, much less repeated. Everytime I went to Beckett's Ready-to-Wear, I was afraid Miss Montine B. would see in my eyes the "Did you?" And then the blood would rush so fast in my ears that I had to face her to see if I should say "Fine, thank you," or "No thanks, just looking."

Auntie, Daddy's oldest sister and the oldest of everybody, sat in the other seat on Daddy's right because of her bad knee. A. T. and his wife and me and mama sat on five gallon cans of floorsweep in the panel's floor. Auntie pointed her head and cast her eyes toward us but her glance landed behind Daddy's ear. "Well, they never should've married in the first place. They were double-second cousins, you know."

"Mama, that's not right," A. T. said. "Beckett came from someplace off from here. You know he was dark-like, Black Dutch, or Cherokee, or something, but he wasn't a local person."

Daddy's reasonableness smoothed the ripples. "No, the way it was, was this way. He wasn't a cousin or foreigner or anything like that. He was just a man who drank hard and abused his family when he did."

A. T.'s voice was harder. "He could hold his liquor as good as any I ever saw."

Mamma soothed, "Well, it could be a reason no one knows. Maybe he was mistreated when he was a boy."

"You're right," Auntie said. I was surprised that she agreed. Usually the in-laws weren't listened to very much. But then Auntie went on, "His daddy was mean, just like his grandpa on his mother's side. And that grandpa was Montine's mother's grandpa too. They were cousins, like I said."

A. T.'s face was a little redder. "If you want to know the truth of the matter, the blame lies on what happened to Montine. Typhoid struck her down the summer before she shot her Daddy. The fever got so high it snapped her judgment. Didn't affect her business sense, but if you would cross her today, I bet she wouldn't have control of herself."

"You're right, honey," A. T.'s wife smacked out. She pushed in the bulge peeping between the buttons of her dress. Mamma had told me privately that A. T.'s wife was an alcoholic and to be pitied. And Auntie had told me that A. T. had married her in a drunken daze. Of course, it wasn't A. T.'s fault he drank. Auntie said the Army doctors told her that they put him on alcohol to get him off the morphine they gave him when he wouldn't let them amputate his leg. But A. T.'s wife was a different matter. She was just a person with no will-power.

She leaned on A. T.'s arm and said, "Sure hope it won't rain on us tonight or tomorrow." The "tomorrow" lazed out real slow.

Auntie didn't turn around, but she stated, "Well, it will. I've never seen it fail to

rain on the Fourth of July, and I've seen a lot more Fourths than any of you have."

"I'm not worried about the rain," A. T. said. "I just hope there's nobody camped around where we're headed."

I spoke without knowing I was going to. "Clara said there wouldn't be anybody else there."

"I don't reckon she knows for sure." Auntie used the side of her mouth so she didn't have to turn around.

We got to a straight-up hill and I looked through the side mirror to see if the others were behind us.

Clara and her carload was close enough to push us. Next was Cletus and his family. Percy and his boys and wife followed. All the others were behind Annamae and Paul Edward in their 1939 Chevrolet. I guessed Uncle Paul was out on a railroad trip because I could see Paul Edward's red baseball cap on the driver's side. This summer he was a legal driver, but ever since he had turned twelve he drove anywhere he wanted to when his daddy was out on the Coffeyville run. I knew Aunt Annamae was telling Paul Edward to be careful, slow down. At least he wasn't jerking the Chevy the way Aunt Annamae always did. And she always said the same thing as she lurched, stalled, and finally shimmed into third gear. "This crazy car, I don't know what's the matter with it."

When we crested the hill, I could see the creek bubbling over the sharp grey rocks. We twisted into the holler that held Beaver Pond. Sure enough no one else was there. Daddy helped Auntie out of the truck, and then he opened the back door of the panel for us. I could hear some other people up the creek, but they weren't in seeing distance.

Clara stepped from her car and slammed the door with satisfaction. "Isn't this a dandy?" she said, and then answered for us, "Couldn't be better and not another soul in sight. I'm glad nearly everybody got to come. Go get us some wood, and we'll be ready to cook as soon as the groceries are unloaded."

"I wouldn't be in too big of a hurry to unload everything. The rain'll ruin it," Auntie aimed at Clara.

"Sister, nobody said it's going to rain," Clara said. "Besides, I'll bet you I brought the biggest part of the groceries anyway. I'll unload them if I want to. You won't be giving any advice when you start eating them."

The rest of the folks started spilling out of their cars. Everybody was there except Uncle Paul and two of Auntie's grown sons who lived someplace else and my older sister who had moved out of Crawford County when she got married. I knew sometime during the holiday Clara would say, "Isn't it a shame all of us couldn't be here. Looks like they wouldn't want to live way off from home." She expected all the little ones to grow up and live as close as possible in our corner of the community. Right now, the kids were bouncing like dropped marbles. They couldn't wait to get in the water.

I'm not sure if I was 13 or 14 that summer, but the red, red Robin had come a bob-bob-bobbing and I couldn't go swimming. What made it worse was that Daddy was always scared for me to go swimming with other people, and he was always working and didn't have time to take me himself. Now, here was my chance, and I couldn't take it.

In just a jiffy, the kids were peeled to their bathing suits and running to the water. All the big kids but Paul Edward dogpaddled and did back floats. Paul Edward went with the men to set the trotline. Daddy stayed on the creek bank, sit-

ting on his heels and smoking and watching the kids to see that they didn't get out where a drop-off might be.

Auntie sat in a folding chair to peel her potatoes. Clara did the fire-tending and skillet-managing. Lorene kept her legs straight in front of her so she wouldn't wrinkle her creased pants. She looked into the air, watching for mosquitos. Lorene couldn't peel potatoes because she needed her left hand to straighten her hair.

The others did what Auntie and Clara said needed doing.

I walked down to a big rock between my aunts and the water.

Daddy yelled, "You watch out for copperheads."

The tiny blond hairs on my neck began to feel for snakes that might creep up behind me. I glanced around every so often just to make sure nothing was there.

I was glad when Daddy walked a little ways up the creek bank. Maybe the women would talk about something interesting now. One time when Mamma and me and Auntie were riding the bus to Fort Smith and I was sitting in front of them, I heard Auntie say she hadn't lived with Ed as husband-and-wife since his heart attack. And Mamma said she thought it was better to act interested in what the man had on his mind every t-i-m-e, even if you weren't too interested to start with. I was learning what they meant now that the *Ladies Home Journal* was carrying the Kinsey (S-e-x) Report like the Saturday serials at the Bob Burns Theater.

I yelled to the kids in the water every so often so my real aunts and in-law ones would know I wasn't paying any attention to them.

Clara was saying to Auntie, "Now, Sister, I know that she was a Lancaster before she married."

"No, no. That's not right. She was the youngest child of the Wilshires as sure as I'm sitting here talking to you."

"No sir, Sister. I saw her not over three weeks ago at Beckett's, and she said, 'Clara, I'd like you to meet my Daddy's youngest brother, Pete Lancaster. He's been living in California a long time!'"

Auntie's slow voice told me her eyebrows were lifted and that the bags underneath shook a little. I knew her eyes were leveled at Clara's as she said, "I don't care what she claimed her Daddy's brother's name was or what she said her own name was, I know she was a Wilshire."

"Sister, she's a Lancaster. I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut that you're wrong."

"No, I'm not wrong. She's dead and gone now, anyway, and I don't think we ought to be arguing about it."

I knew Clara was standing over Auntie now.

"You're dead wrong. She's no more dead than I am. She was buying a new pair of work gloves when I saw her at Beckett's."

"That don't make no difference. When your time comes, you go, new work gloves or not."

Clara's hand was on her hip, I was sure, even though I didn't turn around. "If she died, there sure wasn't any mention made of it. It wasn't in the *Clarion*. I read the obituaries the first thing. I guess you're the only one in Crawford County that knows about her passing on."

"Me and every body and soul on Rena Road. The hearse came right in front of the house on its way to the cemetary. Now, I'll tell you," (she cleared her throat), "I can't prove to you she died, but I do know they put her in the ground!"

I could feel Clara burning up behind me. But she was quiet except for banging around the skillet. I figured she was making up her version of Auntie's story to tell

to the men when they came in to eat and drink coffee. Then she would tell the old stories that made us laugh every time. Cletus always told the ones Clara left out. But Auntie would tell those the rest of us were too young to remember. No one liked Uncle Percy's stories because of their i-n-f-l-u-e-n-c-e on the kids. He used cuss words, too. And he always got a little tighter as the night wore on. But we kids never saw his bottle, nor A. T. and his wife's either.

I let the sun hit my fingers spread behind me on the rock. The oak shade made dapples on the front of my body and on my legs stretched before me. I looked back at my hands to be sure they were safe from snakes. I could see my elbows flat and straight. Thank goodness. All my early life I had wanted them to have dimples like Auntie's. Hers were now so deep they looked like twin caves you couldn't see the end of.

I heard water slapping and turned to see the men docking the boat. They carried themselves like the time they went out to shoot old Lembo and didn't want the kids to know.

I was a little worried about what might have happened until I saw Clara's husband flutter his right eye as he blew on his coffee.

Paul Edward dried his hunting knife in the fire. He said in an off-hand voice that quavered a mite, "I just killed me an alligator out there. Pretty sure I got him right through the gills."

My mind told me he had seen a big old Garfish. Our place in the Ozarks was clear across the state from where the Arkansas River flowed into the Mississippi. I knew the closest alligator was probably in the Little Rock zoo.

I heard Clara mumble to Lorene, "That's the Stovall in him. Paul and all his folks are nervous people."

Aunt Annamae couldn't add her agreement because she was busy saying, "Paulie, you just stay out of that boat. You never know what could happen out there on that water."

They let him tell the story from start to finish, encouraging him by serious questions. I thought this had the makings of a family-story, but the next thing that happened was the part that was to be retold.

A young man came riding up on a horse, a big chestnut with smooth rippling muscles and a shiny coat. That big horse was pawing the damp earth, like he wanted to charge into the leafy woods again. The aunts' arms searched for absent children to hold back from danger. The uncles looked up and down animal and man.

I slid from my rock and ventured a little closer. What struck me about the young man was the way everything about him matched. His hair was chestnut brown just a little lighter than the shade of his horse. And his eyes as they grazed mine were a chestnut warmed by the sun but fired by an element I couldn't place. His shirt was green like a summer oak leaf, broad at the top and tapering down slender at his waist.

Daddy was the one who spoke to him. "Yes sir, what do you have on your mind?"

The young man said, "We've been having flash floods up here in these parts and I just wanted to warn you that you might ought to get to higher ground. There's a place just a couple of miles up the road that would be better if you want it."

Daddy said, "O.K. Sure appreciate you letting us know."

The young man swept his eyes around once again so they touched mine before he let his horse surge into the woods.

Daddy turned to us. "Get the kids. If you can't pack all the stuff in five minutes, leave it."

Lorene's voice began on Daddy's last sound and tacked over the water, "Ela--ine!" The kids came shining wet out of the water, slowed by the heaviness that held them but faster as they broke free. I thought of puppies coming to life from their birth blankets.

Percy turned on Daddy. "George, you're crazy. That fella just wants this camping spot, and I'm big enough to keep him from taking it even if you aren't."

I knew it was the right situation but not the right time for the argument over whether Percy is really 5' 10" or not. Now that I was nearly a woman's size, I understood why Daddy and Percy never settled that argument with a tape measure. My guess was that Percy was really 5' 9" and Daddy didn't want anyone to know he was only 5' 7".

Sure enough, Daddy ignored the opportunity and used the voice he explained life with. "Now, Percy, that fella wouldn't have rode over here on that long-legged horse if he hadn't been afraid of a flood catching him."

Percy cursed. But he started throwing things in his car.

Daddy didn't allow any agitation to show, but his steps were quick as he went down to the boat where Cletus was straightening some line. He pointed to the sky. And Cletus shook his head in disagreement. But he followed Daddy back to the campfire. A. T. was shoveling dirt on it.

Daddy said, "The flood will take care of that, A. T." Daddy told Cletus to get the cots tied on top of the panel if he could do it quick.

Daddy went to check with everybody to be sure they had their kids loaded, and then he told Cletus the cots were tied good enough, let's go. Daddy led us out of there, and I was really let down when he turned to go back to fifty-nine highway rather than to the camping spot the young man offered.

Not a drop of rain fell on us until we got back to the highway, and then the bottom fell out. We had to stop on the side of the road because the only time we could see was when the lightning filled the sky. The roll and beat of the thunder pounded into us so hard that we were left in our own silences.

I thought of the young man on his horse. I could see him drenched with the rain, clothed with the water, muscles taut under mirrory skin as he plunged on his horse deeper into the woods.

When the rain slackened, Daddy mobilized the caravan. We had to stop four times to re-tie the cots. Every time Cletus got out of his car to help Daddy and every time he yelled louder above the rain, but I couldn't make out his words. I wondered if he was using cuss words.

The rain was still pelting down when we got back to our end of the community so everybody just went in their own houses. I was pretty down-hearted until Clara's husband came by and said that Clara said for all of us to come eat dinner at her house tomorrow.

By noon the next day everybody was at Clara's, even the uncles who had gone back to Beaver Pond for the trotline.

Percy came walking in with his head drawn high as it would go. "George, that campfire is still burning. It didn't rain a drop where we camped, and you nearly killed us all getting us out on fifty-nine."

Daddy used his even voice. "That rain didn't hurt any of us, and it'll be good for

the summer crops. Bet the corn is beginning to swell into life with the sun shining today after the rain last night."

"You just let that fella run us out of there," Percy kept on.

Daddy tapped his cigarette. "There wasn't any way that fella could guarantee us a flash flood, but he did the right thing in coming to warn us."

Auntie said, "It could have swept me away so far as I care. I've had the 'don't cares' ever since Ed passed away."

Clara aimed her eyes at Auntie and shot, "Sister, you wouldn't have struck out running hard as you could go, bad knee and all, if you'd a thought there was the slightest danger of getting drowned. Besides, you can't tell me that somebody didn't pay that fella to get us out of there. They just wanted that camping spot for themselves and offered him a five to get rid of us. Bet they took all the fish off our trotline, too."

Percy said, "Naw, all of you are wrong. More'n likely, he has a little copper tubing business that we was too close to, and he was afraid we would run onto it if we stayed in that particular spot."

"Everyone of you is crazy," A. T. said. "That boy was just rambling around when a stray thought hit him. He just told us a tale to see what we could do."

"That's right, honey," A. T.'s wife spooned out. "But George here does deserve a purple heart." I was afraid she was going to cry.

Auntie took the floor though she was still sitting on Clara's couch. The little kids leaned out further from the bedroom door. Us bigger ones straightened on our chairs the adults didn't like to sit on.

"Now, before any of you was big enough to remember, Uncle Con moved into this part of the country and built him a house on Lee's Creek. A young fella came riding up on a horse and told him the very same thing — that he was sitting in danger of a flash flood. Well, Uncle Con didn't believe him. But one day Uncle Con went to town and his house and everything in it burned to the ground. Whether it was set or not, he never could tell. But I'll tell you this, it's better to take your hints when they come to you."

Annamae tried her version. "He was just a young fella. Probably lonely. Just wanted a place to court a sweetheart."

"No," Lorene said, "Sister's right. It was dangerous to stay there. Now maybe his sweetheart is already married and that's why he wanted us out of there." Her eyebrows were gathered together, but through her Persimmon Plush lips a little laugh who-whoood.

My own lips pursed in disagreement.

Percy started again. "Well, he wouldn't have scared me off like he did George."

"I wasn't worried about how big he was," Daddy said. "He looked to be just about the right-sized man to me — not so big he gets in his own way and not too little to get a lot of work done."

I knew Daddy meant he was about 5' 7", but I thought he was much taller than that, maybe even six feet.

The reason for the young man's visit on his long-legged horse was not settled that Fourth of July. But the rest of the hot summer often found me gazing into the heat shimmers of the fields to reflect on who he was. Even when I was busy, the figure of the young man on his horse would prance through my thoughts.

Summer storms and the sounds of gushing water in the branch under my window brought to mind Beaver Pond. I could see myself seated in front of the young man on his horse, swimming across the deep currents.

As fall came, my dreams in the night held warm eyes that burned into my own as together we plunged into the dark woods where the soft earth waited for the rain.

I never told my dreams. The story of the man on the long-legged horse became Auntie's to tell, until she died, and then A. T. picked it up. The rest of the folks would put in their ideas, and year by year each of us saw whatever meaning we had need of, in that time of our life.

— Angie Benham

Angles

Old black women in rows of plastic seats breathed their patient waiting for the intercom's announcement. Despite a half hour precedent of spinning the dial to avoid every white group to come on the air, a young brother stayed with "You can't always get what you wah-ah-ahnt ..." A young couple — students? — cooed and kissed, leaning across the space between adjoining chairs. On a sidewalk near the station one read, "This sign marks the geographic center of ..." An October afternoon drew unto itself all the undifferentiated particles of life around it, waiting upon reminiscence, regret, perhaps new promise. "... but you just might find ... you get what you need ..."

He had told me I would forget, no I don't mean you will have amnesia, just the impact of our possible ... all of what you had dreamed but we cannot ... well at least I cannot ... will fade. His wife, in my dream that night, sat with me at coffee, observing passersby in the bright street outside: a teacher, a businessman, my father. "He is not strong enough for you," she said each time a man passed. Then, leading me to Lover's Leap, she either kissed me or flung us headlong, I could not recall which, awakening with bad indigestion.

The mute door from station to loading ramp wielded its power over the lobby crowd when, one tired student's having deposited self and knapsack at its threshold, a concatenation of twenty gathered into queue. Old black women ponderously jockeyed baggage into place. Desperate anger masqueraded as alienation on the face of a younger woman with child. All feared to risk waiting the thirty minutes for the bus in the chairs; word had passed of busses arriving already full or nearly full.

Two close friends had laughed at the mythical aspect of it — me, the innocent, wanting to sleep with my teacher. Amazingly, they believed me when I announced I felt no guilt. Sleeping with another woman's man didn't bother me, especially since he was the man; but I sure as hell felt bad about my innuendoes to her about housewives, our pursuit of topics which excluded her from conversation, the not innocent remark about people who didn't keep up with their careers.

My two friends had deplored my inclination to move into a more open relationship with him. Mr. Winston and I had seen each other at parties. Our encounters at lunch had always been accidental, but invariably we would continue to talk at our table, long after our plates were empty, until the thinning of the crowds in the cafeteria made it uncomfortable to stay. "You don't understand men if you think he wants you without your feminine wiles," Betty said by way of dissuasion.

One of the timeless matrons in line asked if I were in school somewhere.

"Yes, Georgia Tech." He has promised himself he will be at Yale or MIT by the time the junior professorship is over.

"That's down South, honey."

"Well, Yankees go there, too."

Another, more knowledgeable, observed, "That's a injuneerin' school, ain't it? A lady injuneer."

"Well, actually architect. I'm in architecture." Master of lines and angles, I am my straight lines, connected by my angles into lean shape, no sinuosity in me.

Subtend a line at such an angle, a triangle; rotate said triangle, my breasts, little cones on a lean angularity.

"Whachu gonna build hon'?"

Emotions permeate those angles, yeah, energy offers itself in a prodigal elaboration of extensions and unfoldings from this tiny lean angular frame. My mind is a cool careful balance of torques and angular momenta; but my soul is a rampant explosion of lines and shapes angulating out, unfolding, unfolding. He insisted I must do my graduate work at the best place. "Your mind," he exulted. But my soul, he is running from his knowledge, but he knows my soul. "Will fade," he dismissed. "Not strong enough for you, none of them," my dream-she said. In real life — the circumstances of how I overheard are not important — she argued with him, "Of course she *meant* to be catty. Do you think it has to be premeditated consciously to be intentional? What makes me so sick of you — and all other men — is how you can be so stupid about women. I don't even *care* if you sleep with her. I mean it. But for God's sake, don't pretend nothing is going on. Jesus!"

The loading pads angled from the station, leading us past the man who checked luggage, to the door of the bus. As I put my luggage check in my purse, a nervous black man arrived, apparently unsure what to do with his friend's luggage. His eyes were too glassy, but sharp and alive. She was a bit embarrassed as he tried to offer a bill to the luggage attendant. The young man of the white couple, unsolicited, explained that the luggage transport went along with the ticket, no tip necessary. Then the too glassy-eyed man was embarrassed too, fumbling the bill back into wallet, wallet into pocket.

Don't you understand, if I want my buildings to be honest, without false fronts covering the buts that make them stand and function and serve their purpose, why should I any more want deception in my life? Betty and Sheila marveled when they realized I really was going to be open. "A man has to think he has the power. If you do this, it will be too clear."

The too glassy-eyed man was in the back of the bus, obviously fond of the woman he was bidding farewell; she just as obviously reciprocated. He began to depart. A tension, two forces at cross-purposes, seemed to develop as, at about this time, the driver, a white pot-bellied good ole boy, entered the bus. The glassy-eyed man swayed a bit as he turned and began, "This is the Greyhound through bus to Atlanta. We will make a thirty minute rest stop in ..."

"He's really doin' it. He's really doin' it," chorused one of the sisters.

"Federal regulations require smoking only in the back of the bus ..."

"This bus ain't goin' streht to 'lanta. It's goin' to Washington fuhst."

His sclerae were muddy — I could see right into them from where I sat — but his pupils still shone. "... no cigars, alcoholic beverages, or, ahem, other drugs. Do not cross the line at the front at any time. There is a rest room in the rear for your convenience. We wish you a pleasant trip. And thank you for travelin' Greyhound."

I posited that they were just being romantic. "Hell, you're the romantic one, if you think you can even give yourself away to a man, even to a man who *wants* you, without first setting him up for the shock very surreptitiously. He'll be backing off quick as you break Sheila's First Commandment, and then what will you do?" Sheila liked words like surreptitiously because they added a flair to her otherwise painfully cuastic observations.

The driver and the slender black man were opposing vectors angulating into me, reconciled, resolved, focussed. The parodied speech had been uttered in perfect white diction until the next to last word, a perfect black travesty of ad slang, "travelin' Greyhound."

Then, those glassy eyes really beginning to sparkle, he added, "Now sisters, somethin' your reglar driver don't give you," and began to kiss the nearest sisters, winking at his departing friend, then seeing me, kissed me quickly on the cheek. I touched his neck, maybe for balance. His skin was rough. Briefly I felt the angle at the base of his neck, where I am told the pulse runs into the head, laughing gaily.

— Rick Whitten-Stovall

My Sweet Esther Mae

Mrs. Lee has an old ball and claw table, the kind that is too small to eat on and too large for any other practical purpose. It hardly leaves room for anything else in her living room. The table is her mausoleum of dead memories and dead people. Its front half is covered with ceramic what-nots and cedar souvenirs — a navy and white polka dotted shoe planter with “Biloxi” painted in gold across the tongue and “Japan” stamped in red on the sole, the cedar trinket box from “Jackson, Miss.” which has lost its latch but not its hoard of buttons, pins, and rusted tin needle threaders.

On the other half rests photographs, some leaning against the faded bouquets on the wall, others slanted backwards on cardboard triangles. All rest on crocheted doilies which are stiffly starched and slightly yellow with age. Mrs. Lee reserves this part of the table for the Departed; that is her favorite word for dead people.

When there is a death in the family, she begins her frantic search for photographs. She is never slow and methodical about it. Death does that to her — makes her busy. Isaac’s Photo and Finishing reproduces the portraits which she distributes to all the mourners. Then Mrs. Lee rearranges her table, removing great-uncles and pushing aside second cousins, making room for a new 8 x 10 in a shiny gold ridged frame from the five and dime which will not even show little brown rust spots before someone else looks out the glass across the doilies at the living.

During Christmas holidays, Mrs. Lee pushes everything back and clears a large semicircle for her manger scene. She enshrines all her sorrows. Her daughter Esther Mae is there. She died in a small, yellow room near the black banks of the Yazoo river. They found her lying naked on the bed, clutching her stomach on the bed where she had conceived her not born, never-be child.

She had known him for twelve months, a long drawn time of virginal anticipation endured through hot Delta nights of damp clinging sheets, nights of mind loves and fantasies of him. Esther Mae slept those nights on the back screened summer porch. She wandered from pallet to screened door and back again, pausing before the fan to see its silver blades spinning, snipping the thick translucent moonlight into patches on her pale chest. What was he doing?

“Esther Mae, quit that prowl’n’ round out there and go on to bed.”

“Yes, Mama.”

“That young man with the car coming here tomorrow?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“You reckon he’d mind much carrying me to Carrollton . . .”

“No’m.”

“ . . . course, I’d pay for my gasoline.”

“Yes’m.”

“Cooler out there?”

“Feels real nice.”

“Go on to bed now.”

“Night, Mama.”

She whispered, “Goodnight, Arthur,” and looked, as far as she could, across the night hushed fields. What was he doing now? Then Esther Mae lay down and heard, without wanting to hear, the locusts scream and pound, drawing her out

there away from him here beside her. She rolled over, faced the peeling paint of the wall, and tightly closed her eyes.

Arthur was in jail when she died and had been for three months, ever since the afternoon when Esther Mae’s mother called the sheriff. As he walked up to the house, the sheriff shielded his heat swollen eyes from the yellow September sun. Mrs. Lee motioned him in with frantic jerks like the nervous fluttering of a hungry bird.

Inside, the sofa stood beside the door, so the sheriff found his seat only one short polite side step into the room. He plopped on its faded chintz and blinked as a dust shower mushroomed up from the musty cushions and settled dry in his nose and on his eyes.

While he listened and nodded, he fingered the starched doily on the sofa arm until the starch crumbled, and the pattern fell limp. Mrs. Lee (in the midst of her not knowing what to do about him, Arthur) noted the limp ruffle that would complicate the next wash day. Until then, the doily would clutter her mind with images of the slate gray aluminum pot full of blue jellied starch or more likely, with memories of that one fallen side marring her well kept house.

Her hand fluttered, and she wondered how many minutes must pass before Arthur could no longer demand her attention. Mrs. Lee hopped to her feet and said, “Go get him. He even promised my baby a new car.”

Of course she suspected him by then, but who would have thought that she’d find that one syllable among all the words said in that house, among all those smiles and Sunday afternoon Coca-Cola’s and torn magazine pictures of shiny new Fords. He said, “This is Archer Whitman.” Only to her, he was Arthur Whitman.

Mrs. Lee heard only one side of the conversation — his side — because he was standing in her dining room with his finger in one ear, straining to hear what someone on the other end of the telephone line was saying. Arthur forgot that she could hear as she stood smiling at her polished china cups and saucers. Mrs. Lee busied herself in the kitchen by rushing in the quiet which his voice cut into slices to satisfy her taste for more. She heard him say it. “This is Archer Whitman.”

She didn’t keep it to herself, just as she didn’t attempt secrets later at the funeral. Everyone knew how many souls lay in the coffin because Mrs. Lee kept nothing inside herself. To withhold the truth was to invite conjecture and pity, so she told everyone: women at the grocery store (who opened their mouths and gently touched their cheeks with fingertips), friends at church, anyone whom she could ensnare in her confidence, could lure into the satisfying grief of a privileged “friend of the family.”

“Bigamy, you know,” she whispered. “Lord, what am I gonna do without my sweet Esther Mae.”

They wanted to know what Esther Mae did when she found out, what she said when Mama and David and Lucy got back from Oliver Branch with the news which could please them only in proportion to its surprising everyone else. Who could know about the large, mostly empty, white house which leaned atop the hill. Up and down it trudged his first wife twice everyday, her work thrown over her back, the faces of her children before or behind her own face, but nonetheless there at the window always, waiting.

There even now at the window as Esther Mae walked around the back porch, almost dancing, sweeping the already clean floor in the room which was theirs —

her and Arthur's — until the chill of autumn would force them inside behind drawn window shades and beneath layers of quilts.

She turned so slowly as if the step belonged in her dance, and she swept still the floor while they told her how the old house leaned just so. When she smiled and turned round, the others watched her whisk and scratch the old broom across the gray painted plank floor. Moving back and forth, Esther Mae smiled an unsure smile.

"He isn't mine." They never knew what she thought about it; she said it to herself. "He wasn't mine — even then."

She walked slowly in measured steps beneath the tall cottonwoods which hung over the yellow Yazoo. As she wound her way along the bank between the high drifts of honeysuckle, Esther Mae left a lingering wake of silent sweet smells. She wished the trees would rain their white down to tickle her nose and her eyes and cover the muddy river. It flowed silently on her right, renewing its reassuring sameness, nothing changing except perhaps the occasional plunk of black earth, and that a ransom to be left elsewhere. She left her heavy train of honeysuckle sighs at the river edge and turned left toward the brick road, toward his apartment.

Bringing only herself out of the white arch to his doorstep, Esther Mae paused there to smell the lavender on her wrists. "I came." "Yes, come in." He quickly pulled the brittle, water-stained shades shut, but the sun found its way through the cracks and glimmered like thick jagged veins to those within, who loved.

Not ever before, Esther Mae lay on the bed, feeling not but the cold dusty touch of one bed poster of the four which held her up. His bed posters looked like rounded muscles, like man arms raising her on an altar, surely, for something. What was it? "Mama's table." He finished.

She walked back home by the river, through the sun sheltered aisle of the cottonwoods. And he watched her go, hoping to see a change in her somehow that would prove to him that something had happened, that Esther Mae had loved on the bed. Had nothing died or come to life to give meaning, reason, or, at the least, existence to what should be perceived now in contrast to the before? This virginity thing ought to be real.

When she died, he was not there. David came to the jail and told him slow and gentle because he figured any man deserved that much. They sat huddled from the cold in the visitors' room on an unsteady, green enameled park bench. No talking, just smoking, together they sat. David tried two beginnings which knotted in his chest before the words finally made cold white puffs barely visible against the mint green of the frosted institutional windows.

"Esther done killed her motherhood and herself."

He thought Arthur shuddered from the cold until he jerked forward to vomit on the floor. He yanked out a handkerchief and pulled it across his mouth. Arthur went back to his cell without even shaking hands. David looked down at the floor, then up at the guard. He squinted his eyes in embarrassment as he thought about what to tell his mother. The truth would never do. At home now, the women were arriving with the food. Bowls of it sat on tables while the women talked on like the whine of a stretched spring before the screened door slaps shut. They were always talking.

His mother was saying, "I knew by the way she smiled — but never mind, I knew

you couldn't trust him, he wasn't that kind of man. Promised her a car, you know."

David stood up to go, not noticing now the cold or remembering his not real brother-in-law. She never should have heard him saying those words.

— Betty Chambers *Workman*

I Love You, Susan Brownmiller

"I love you." I whisper to Buddy through the muddied windows of the express. "I said, 'I love you.'"

Can't what? "What?" He can't believe I'm doing this? I can't believe. 6:45. Late before we start.

"Look, go on home and go back to bed. GO TO BED." I point to my watch.

"I love you, too." Now go on home. Go on home and leave me to my fellow travelers. Hair ratted, cheeks rouged, lipsticked, mesh-hosed — 79¢ from K-Mart — women. And me.

Grandmothers leaving restaurants and stores and rented rooms in Charlotte and Greenville to help with the kids in Gadsden and Huntsville. Daughters whose lovers have left Fort Bragg and Atlanta, dragging kids back to grandmothers in Birmingham and Memphis. The Tri-State Express. No need to hurry, 'cause you're not going to be able to outrun your problems. And me?

6:50. So I can forget about "Fur Elise."

I drum out the melody I won't hear on the sticky vinyl armrest.

What am I doing here?

"You're mad at me, aren't you?" I had locked my door, waved goodbye to his parents, and reached over to unlock his.

"You've chosen the right profession." He got in with a slam.

"That's not what I asked."

"Look, I'm not one of your witless witnesses."

"Your father's with one of the biggest law firms in Atlanta, and you call him 'witless.' Poor Mr. Bhhh-hrumpity, hump, hump, himself."

"That's enough, Sue Ellen."

"Oh, so it's 'Sue Ellen' now, is it?"

"I thought that was your name."

"It's usually 'Baby' to you."

"Hmmpmph."

"That's not quite it. You need more of a 'bhhh' and an 'rrrrr'. Bhhh-hrrump. Sorry, I don't quite have the hang of it yet either."

"You're really being obnoxious, you know."

"I'm sorry. But I say something you don't like, and you cut me off. Suddenly I'm 'Sue Ellen.' It's like if I don't cool it, I'll wake up to find I'm 'Susannah Eleanor.'" I was trying to josh him now; nobody but my mother would dare call me that. I touched his sleeve. "Look, I said I was sorry." I was too tired to argue the 17.3 miles from my in-laws' privately patrolled purlieus to our midtown duplex.

"It's O.K. Actually, I understood how you felt. Only you carried it a little bit too far, Baby."

"I guess so."

"You needn't have brought up rape."

"Me, bring up rape?"

"Do you know what we've done?"

We had regrouped in the kitchen where my mother-in-law Dorothy was plying ice cream on the mincemeat pie. That was a new one on me. My father-in-law continued to explain to Buddy why his Alma Mater should have been invited to

the Sugar Bowl and how they would have won. Only Dorothy looked up, so I addressed her.

"We've sat right through the weather. And I needed to see if it's going to be all right for me to leave for Mississippi early in the morning."

"Well, if it's clear when you get up ..." Dorothy's encouragement trailed off as she studied whether to divide the ice cream evenly, my feminism complicating even that for her.

"But I wanted to leave here at six o'clock; I won't be able to tell anything that early. Oooo, Dorothy, that's too much. There were so many people here at dinner that you didn't see how many black-eyed peas and hogs' jaws I put down — thought I'd need all the good luck I could get."

"Well, I did; that's too much for her, Mother, take some of it back. Or here, just put it on my —"

And Buddy knew I'd rather have had the ice cream, don't even like mincemeat. At home it would have been Mamma's pecan. Still, Dorothy is my —

"You'd never have made it up by six anyway, Baby."

"I would too; I have —"

"And by eight o'clock you can watch the Morning Report."

"I —"

"I don't see what's the rush; New Year's is over, isn't it?"

"It's her niece's piano recital, R. W. ..."

"My only niece's first piano recital. And it starts at four, so I'll have to —"

"Well, bhhh-hrrmp, if you want to know what I think —"

I was hoping maybe he knew a number to call about the weather (I mean, after all, his firm has its own plane) until I saw Dorothy sneak a hand under the table to his knee.

"I don't think the highways are a place for women anyway."

"Well, that settles it. She'll leave at six!" Dorothy has always laughed at her own children's revolutionary tendencies. She has faith. 'Raise up a child in the way he should go', etc ... I guess daughters-in-law were no exception.

"Hell, you've choked her." Buddy started pounding enthusiastically on my back.

I always stop by the law school bulletin board at the end of the day. There, stacking my heavy books on the rim of the white stone cylinder that disguises the trash can and treating myself to a watery Coke and a stale Butterfinger from the machines, I peruse the rows of trivia that can pile up in just one day.

It was there for example that I saw the treacherous white memo from the dean: Winners of the Wymouth Bar Association Competition. First place, Sue Ellen Marshall, prize of, to represent Emory Law School in, all winners please contact the. Good thing I was the last one leaving the library again, because I cried. I didn't want to represent anybody but myself. Oh, a client or two, someday, maybe. But not an institution. Certainly not a law school. They'd succeeded, you see, in teaching me some law, without making me a lawyer. I don't know how. It's supposed to be impossible. Oh, they were worried for a while about accepting us women in such large numbers; but they were soon pleasantly surprised to learn that most of us were so happy just to have a chance to be something that we'd make the damndest lawyers they'd ever seen. *Tabula rasa* and all that, you know. I'd known for a while it wasn't working on me, but had kept it under my hat. So I was the winner, but a failure. And knew it.

After that I was careful to shun the official memoranda for messages hastily penned on the torn corners of yellow legal pads:

Will swap new unmarked Cribbett for Swanson in any condition. Sorry Gloria! Call Tom. 255-8779.

You the Tom looking for any edition of Swanson? Yeah. No, I don't want your Cribbett. Well, sure, I read the note. But you see, I'm giving all my law books away

Single coed has found great attic apt. 2 min. from campus, needs roomie, maybe u. 523-6475.

Oh, yeah, yeah. I really like it. But I was wondering if my uh husband could maybe sleep over — say, once or twice a month?

If you get raped, maybe it's your fault. The rotten truth about rape and other sexual assaults on women is most of them wouldn't happen unless you let them. Served me right for having let another slick print poster sneak into my view. That was one of the proposed ads for the Governor's Campaign Against Women, pardon, Crime, state of Georgia. 1973. My first year in law school. We got it stopped of course.

"That's enough, thanks, Buddy."

"Here, Sue Ellen, honey, have some water. I just hate to do that — swallow ice cream the wrong way."

"... in short a woman who takes a car out on a long distance trip by herself, especially on back country roads ..."

R. W. has a tendency to wind down at the strategic moment. I wondered what effect that has on his juries and took a sip of Dorothy's water before starting.

"A woman who takes a car out on a long distance trip by herself, especially on back country roads, what?" I didn't dare look up.

"Needs to know how to change a flat, Baby."

I knew Buddy was frantically winking at me, trying to get me to stop. I played with my napkin. "I know how to change a flat. You taught me. What were you going to say, R. W.?"

"Leading the witness."

"Shut up, Buddy." That time I did look up.

"Well, bhhh-hrrmp, when a woman repeatedly makes risks like that, it begins to look as if she is asking for it."

"Is asking for what?"

"C'mon, Mom, let's do the dishes. There's no stopping her now."

"R. W., you leave her alone."

"Better tell her to leave him alone."

"I'm still waiting, R. W." What had gotten into me?

"What's your objection, bhhh-hrrmmp, to taking a bus? Buddy and you are always preaching to us about public transportation."

When's the last time you ever rode a take twice as long miss the recital cost three times as because of people like you and their private planes we don't have good public off the track — "My objection? I thought you'd never ask. It's that the bus is one of those unfortunate means of public transportation that actually affords so little opportunity for a really decent rape."

"My bringing up rape, Baby." When he wants to miss my point, he frequently corrects my grammar. I didn't bite.

"I didn't bring up rape. He did. I was merely the one who used the word."

"Well, if you're determined to be a lawyer, you're going to have to learn what people will and won't take. And most people are tired of, make that most American men are not rapists and they're sick to death of hearing the word."

"You're tired of hearing about rape?"

"Yes, I am."

"You're tired of hearing about rape?" I gave him a second chance.

"Yes."

"You want to know the history of someone who is tired of hearing about rape? All my life that's all I've heard. Rape, rape, rape, rape, RAPE. When I was eight years old I couldn't walk under the railroad trestle and three blocks to my best friend's because I might 'get raped' by a hobo. When someone's mother wasn't free to carry us over, we read each other the Bobbsey Twins on the phone. We must have gone through the whole series twice; do you know how many Bobbsey Twin books there are?"

"I think they keep adding more all the time, don't they?"

I wondered if his mind really works like that or if he was asking for it. I supposed the truth would out.

"Not that we ever had a hobo in Athens, Mississippi. I certainly never saw one. And, of course, it was years before I found out what rape meant. When I finally thought I had it (it was from T.V., not Mamma, God forbid), I was so horrified that I stopped accepting Cokes my dates brought me from the drive-in concession stand. Did you ever try to eat a corn dog — that was their specialty — without a Coke, and then sit through the second feature?"

"Baby, I don't think they aired rape that early on T.V."

"I'm not talking about who did what to whom on T.V., or how many G.D. books there are in the Bobbsey Twin series. I'm talking about a curious little girl who spent half her life shut up indoors against the spectre of rape, when she had not the vaguest idea of its shape. So, when I saw someone slip a mickey into someone else's drink on T.V., I decided that was the thing to steer clear of. The thing from which to steer more than clear. Of."

"Baby, I can't follow a thing when you get like this."

"Well, don't listen then. I'm talking to myself. I guess I was still at that relatively healthy stage where I couldn't quite imagine anybody's doing anything to me unless I were asleep."

No comment. Too much drama at any one time had a tendency to make him withdraw.

"That passed. The healthy phase. I guess by the time I knew what rape meant I also believed someone could do it." I sat for a while in silence. "Do you know how many times I went out with the girls (I mean other than sorority meetings, clubs — you know) in four years at Ole Miss?"

"You're surely not going to say 'yall were afraid of a gang bang."

"I'm glad you think this is amusing."

"Sorry."

"Well, do you?"

"Think it amusing? No, but I think you've —"

"No. Do you know how many times I went out with the girls?"

"Once."

I had told him before then.

"No, twice. I remembered another besides the pizza party."

"Baby, I just don't get your —"

"My point being, not that we were always terrorized by rape, but that we were put into a system where there was no opportunity to evaluate how realistic its threat was. We were Southern ladies. Always in the care of Southern gentlemen. You know who I'm jealous of? The girls who weren't popular, weren't stacked, couldn't or wouldn't 'fix' their faces. (I'm still dying to know which. I always thought they must be stupid not to; now I'm wondering if they knew all along and I was the stupid one.) The girls who actually had to go some places by themselves, or at least get themselves home after having been dumped at a dance or two. They must have realized they had a chance to make it without encountering a fiend on every corner."

"Mmmmmmm."

"I'm serious. What do you think I wanted from the Peace Corps, except a chance to prove to myself I might survive on my own? I can see that memo now. *Peacecorpsmen* (sic) were advised that South America was treacherous for American women after dark, and would we please avoid an international incident in tempting these poor Latin men — their hot blood and all that? Back to the Bobbsey Twins; only this time it was my Spanish. Oh, I am fluent. But those two years were gone and I was back looking for a job before I realized that the O.A.S. might not stand or fall on my virginity. Besides, I could have worn black more. Latins didn't have much respect for women, but they did respect death."

"I'm sorry, Baby."

"So, I return to find that teachers' salaries are up. Yea! But that men are flooding the market because of it. Or was it vice versa?"

"Vietnam."

"Oh, yeah."

"And a general dry up of the job market."

"Yeah, yeah. Well, anyway, I can't get a regular position so I start substituting in Atlanta's inner city schools, sure every day that if I don't get it at knife point in the supply closet, I can depend on the alley on my way home. There are always private schools, but I'm philosophically committed to public education. If not rape. So what does a bright woman do if she's committed to public education and a future? She applies to go to law school. The day I find out I got a scholarship to Emory I wax the apartment floor three times. Everybody says, 'It's the year of the woman', meaning 'How'd you get in?'"

"I didn't."

"I know. That's why I love you."

"That's one of the reasons."

"Another is that you'll always hear me out." I bussed him on the nose. We had been back in our driveway for five minutes, but he had made no move for the door.

"I mean, things are going my way, right? I mean, my mail is being addressed to Ms., I'm receiving credit cards by the score, a third of my class is women, and when we're taught that the big question in cases of rape is the plausibility of the plaintiff, we raise bloody hell. I'm top of my class, when I graduate in May I could have any job I want. If I can stomach going back to skirts and hose and 'fixing' my face, I'll be able to face your father and men like him in the courtroom. Face them and beat them unless they have the good sense to start doing a hell of a lot better job on their homework. That's what makes his threat, yes, I said threat, though I'll acknowledge he'd be the last to know it, his THREAT doubly hideous. Deep down

inside, the sickness in him sniffs out the sickness in me. And preys on it. It's his only hope. For life without change."

"I don't think that's quite fair to Dad."

"Oh, Buddy, he's just a convenient way of talking about it. You know that."

We were silent for a long time.

"Don't you think we'd better go in now, Baby? You have a long way to travel tomorrow." He reached for my hand. "You O. K.?"

I wasn't and I didn't want to go in, but I didn't know why until we were lying in bed and the rape scenes of half a dozen old movies began to reel swiftly over the red of my closed eyelids. (Yes, we leave the bathroom light on.)

I moved very carefully, but when I was halfway up, Buddy pulled me back and said, "I checked the door already, Baby."

I squeezed his hand for understanding me but pushed up again.

"You sick?" He sat up.

"Yeah —"

"I ate too much too."

"— in the head."

I heard his relieved ugh as he sank back into the pillow.

"Who're you calling at this hour?" He sat up again.

"Shhhhh. Yes. Do you have a bus for Athens, Mississippi, leaving early in the morning?"

I reset the clock before I crawled back under the covers. "I can make the recital if the bus is on time. You don't mind taking me down at six, do you?"

"You kidding me?"

"Nope. I want to live. And if anybody ever did try to rape me, I'd try to kill him. And then he'd kill me — or so they say."

"Remember *Lipstick*," he muttered sleepily, but his heart wasn't in it.

"My grandfather wasn't a big game hunter. Unfortunately."

I slept fine. Secure in the fact that I had stayed off destruction one more day.

So, one hour late we're actually going to venture out of our safe black berth in the terminal and into as clear a frosty pink dawn as anyone could want. I try being philosophical. It is after all the excavations for the new subway system that have us stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic, cut off from a direct route to the expressway. Another hour?

I am forlornly studying the sun's rise behind Atlanta's latest phallus when I begin to hear my watch tick — and I wear an Accutron.

"I will not, I will not miss the Variations."

Scanning for a telephone booth isn't very difficult at our pace. Reassuring myself that of course Buddy went straight home, is in bed now and will answer and bring me the car comes harder, but I do it, then collect my packages, and lurch down the aisle toward the driver and,

"Let me off, I've been raped."

— Bonna Whitten-Stovall

Margret Trotter

The Agnes Scott Writers' Festival, 1977, wishes to express its appreciation to Margret Trotter, Professor of English and Director of the Writers' Festival, 1972-1974. Professor Trotter has always fostered an interest in creative writing at Agnes Scott. She has taught courses in the writing of poetry, fiction, and plays. She has worked closely with the Southern Literary Festival, with The Academy of American Poets Prize, with the Janef Newman Preston Prize, and the Robert Frost Award for Writing. She has inspired her students and her colleagues to aim for excellence in writing. Her fiction has appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Perspective*, *Georgia Review*, and in the anthology *Georgia Stories* (1963). Her most recent publication is *Robert Frost: Read and Remembered* (1976).

Bo Ball, Director of the Festival

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Participants

NATHALIE F. ANDERSON, Instructor in English at Georgia State University. As an undergraduate at Agnes Scott, she was poetry editor of *Aurora*, 1967-70, and winner of the Janef Preston Prize for Poetry, 1968, 1969, 1970, and the Robert Frost Award for Writing, 1970. Her poem, "Dream Sequence IV," appears in *National Poetry Anthology*, and she has recently published poetry in *Southern Poetry Review*.

GUY DAVENPORT, Professor of English, University of Kentucky. He is a story writer, poet, critic, translator, and illustrator. His translations of Heraclitus, Menander, Sappho, and Archilochos are "for the Greekless." His stories he calls "lessons in history"; his poems, "lessons in aesthetics." His publications include *Flowers and Leaves* (1966), a collection of poems; and *Tatlin'* (1974), a collection of stories. His other stories have appeared in *Parenthese 1*, *Parenthese 3*, *Hudson Review*, *Georgia Review*, and *Mulch*. His work is represented in the *O. Henry Prize Stories, 1976*.

JOSEPHINE JACOBSEN, Poet, Story Writer, Critic. She served as Consultant in Poetry, Library of Congress, 1971-73, and now serves as Honorary Consultant in *American Letters*. She is author of numerous books of poetry, including *For the Unlost* (1946), *The Human Climate* (1953), *The Animal Inside* (1966), and *The Shade Seller* (1974), for which she was nominated for a National Book Award. Her stories and poems have been included in the *O. Henry Prize Stories* (1967, 1971, 1973, 1976) and in *The Best Poems* (1961, 1968, 1972).

EUDORA WELTY, Novelist, Story Writer. She has served as Honorary Consultant in *American Letters*, Library of Congress, 1958—. In 1973, she received the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. Her books include *A Curtain of Green* (1941); *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942); *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943); *Delta Wedding* (1946); *The Golden Apples* (1949); *The Bride of Innisfallen* (1955); *Losing Battles* (1970), for which she was nominated for a National Book Award; and *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). *The Ponder Heart* was adapted for Broadway in

Program

Thursday, April 7

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 1:10-2:00 p.m. | Reading and Commentaries Student writers published in <i>Aurora</i> Winter Theater Dana Fine Arts Building |
| 2:10-3:00 | Reading and Commentaries Josephine Jacobsen Winter Theater Dana Fine Arts Building |
| 3:30 | Workshops for student writers published in <i>Aurora</i> Nathalie F. Anderson, Director |
| 8:15-9:15 | Reading and Commentaries Eudora Welty Gaines Chapel Presser Hall |
| 9:30 | Reception by Arts Council for participants, contributors, and guests Rebekah Scott Reception Room |

Friday, April 8

| | |
|------------------|--|
| 11:30-12:00 a.m. | Reading and Commentaries Guy Davenport Winter Theater Dana Fine Arts Building |
| 2:10-5:30 p.m. | Panel Discussion of poems and stories selected for <i>Aurora</i> Nathalie F. Anderson, Guy Davenport, Josephine Jacobsen Winter Theater Dana Fine Arts Building |
| 5:30 | Awarding of Prizes Winter Theater Dana Fine Arts Building Julia Midkiff, Editor of <i>Aurora</i> |

The Festival Committee wishes to thank President Marvin Perry, Jr., for support of the Festival; Eleanor Hutchens for funding the Newman Prizes