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## On The Old Ocilla Highway

(There's Power in the Blood)

Mornings mixed with sunshine and drizzle,  
nothing new to the old Ocilla Highway.  
A welcomed wetness confines flies, gnats, and livestock odors.  
Men with fair, leatherlike faces pause,  
see the sun with itchy palms:  
There's power in the blood,  
40 acres to plow 'fore dinner.

Once a 4 a.m. ritual of hitchin' mules  
to a one row wood-and-iron-turning plow  
begins these days at 6:30;  
keys fit ignitions of Massey Fergusons, John Deeres,  
all iron, aluminum, and rubber,  
power made nimble by power steering, power-take-off,  
and 12-14 ft. harrows;  
Strength inherited from leather reins  
appears in black diesel smoke,  
felt in vibrations knocking dew from a wet morning seat.

(We Will Gather at the River)

Men baptised in day-long sweat  
draw strength from 18 forward gears  
and a ton-'n-a-half of peanuts to the acre.  
They know almanacs, the 6 o'clock news from Albany,  
Sunday sermon signs and fertilizers,  
marry women named Effie Jo, LaRue, and Irene  
who are man-strong with no fingernails,  
who birth stout sons and big-boned daughters;  
all are obedient,  
all are baptist.

They have put in a day  
when angus bulls bellow in heat  
and trees stand shadowed.  
Lights die early after appetites;  
days begun with diesel power  
rest with the Lord  
on the old Ocilla Highway.

— Ken Vance

## Counter Girl in Dayton, Ohio

Dayton was no place for a song like you,  
eyes of black wheat  
burning the netherlight of escape.  
Yet, the stitches of your perfect teeth  
made small affairs  
with mechanics and curb boys,  
they dreaming of the Cincinnati Reds  
and you of Chicago's bigness.  
You never made the tickets  
that must have crossed your mind;  
beyond the tall stacks of Dayton,  
treeless streets full of upturned collars,  
endless corn in summer, snow in winter.  
Now you wait with others motionless  
watching the postcard rack turn,  
breathing diesel that fills the roadhouse,  
selling your days like stamps.

— Keith Melton

## The Guest

Robert sits in our one unwounded chair,  
the heirloom rungs climbing up his back.  
We sit, our stomachs stuck to the table edge,  
while I stare at the dewy centerpiece  
and leave Robert unstared at. His eyes,  
one glacier blue, one disappointed rut,  
watch his fork move like a crane from mouth  
to table to plate to mouth. My brother  
speaks to the natural disaster landscape  
of his face. The smooth and unembarrassed  
Promised Land of that face matches the rest  
in a blush, but the stretched mouth smiles.

My father pats my shy, inoperative hand  
telling me I am artlessly pretty  
(he owns stock in my physiognomy)  
but I want to scratch and rip at my face,  
set fire to the civilized curls of my hair,  
make a liar of him. Our chandelier gloats  
its pure symmetry with too much light.  
The tug of Robert's smile reminds him;  
the hinges of his drooping facial shutters  
are showing. My sister touches his shoulder  
and I want to see a new arm, a look,  
a smile again. She told me  
about the other face that faces in.  
With a yelping, lost-boy beauty, I think.

— Kitti Smith

## Almost A Love Poem

It is morning  
The sun has just risen  
Trees still glow from an overnight frost  
No one is alive yet,  
But me

I am in a car driving through Kansas  
I am the car  
My wheels roll beneath me, uncontrollably  
I like the feeling of movement  
But the road wears me thin

The smell of the air is cold  
Chilling  
If I thought I could see  
I would open my eyes  
But it is still cold

I listen to the sound of the wind  
As it storms by  
Bringing with it clouds  
Renewing my acquaintance with rain  
I dance through, between the drops  
Escaping untouched

The road goes on forever  
But forever is a state of mind

The sun pours down like honey  
I can see it warm the road before me  
The trees smile  
Tipping their branches  
They know that one day  
I will write a love poem

— James Harding

## The Invalid

She teases me  
with her coughing, convenient,  
like silk threads in the corner,  
invisible mostly, but sometimes seen  
in a sudden light; as if she knew  
that, for a moment, I had forgotten  
her failing beauty in the chair  
so like the spider's web.

— Gary Simmers

## The Rahway Station

The train plowed  
Through dead fields  
Of snow-covered towns  
And stopped in Rahway

Where soot rises  
From red brick boxes,  
Scattering ashes  
In the air.

Children disappear,  
Laughing behind  
Chinese dinettes,  
And watch

The train dissolve  
As the night bares  
Its ugly teeth  
To swallow us whole.

— Sue Jordan

## The Catkeeper's Wife

Even when you are not here  
There are the cats you leave behind  
To continue the vigil,  
To stare.  
There is the black one that loves me  
Curled here by my side.  
There goes the white one that hates you  
Waltzing from your room.  
I curl up on the couch for a nap  
And when I open my eyes I see  
Framed and papered on the walls,  
Cat eyes, cat eyes,  
The eyes of cats.

There are the two in the bedroom,  
My big one and your little one  
That sit side by side on my vanity  
With their backs to the mirror.  
Their eyes watch the bed.  
Four red eyes shooting in the dark  
To your eyes then my eyes  
And back to the mirror.  
There is the one that's you  
And the one that's me,  
The black one and the white one  
And the gray one that is us.

And even when you are not here  
In our bed that without you  
Has room for the cats and me,  
In my dreams  
I close my eyes to see,  
Cat eyes, cat eyes,  
The eyes of cats.

Each one a memory  
Of days we have patiently endured,  
Like cats ourselves  
We lick our separate wounds.  
"Try to maintain. Try to maintain,"  
I whisper to myself while wondering,  
"Which one will it be?"

## ambivalence

thoughts drifting  
some days after  
our dance of rebellious  
intrinsic laughter  
before we parted from the script  
sailed a separate ship  
and you started to pretend  
love's death defines an end  
of all  
thoughts drifting  
somedays after

i was holding  
strong  
unlimited ideal  
you retort  
"only what is seen is real"  
yes while standing in your blind  
words as shots  
precisely timed  
and not a moment to reflect  
vain spaces you protect

thoughts drifting  
some  
days after

great infidel witch  
rebellious bitch  
set the tone  
to live  
alone

— Edward L. Donato

## Let Him Speak Now

(a hypothalamion)

Please go on.  
I am nothing.  
Only words

will bracket  
and hold  
the struggling

litter of  
real things  
you are to spawn

and damn you  
with the faintest  
of phrase —

but please go on.  
I am nothing,  
only words.

— *T. J. Tyson*

## Fable From a Grady Intern

In an empty room a doctor will laugh  
Loudest because he thinks it more humane  
That way

the other day with James Dickey  
Drying out and drowning in Thorazine  
Or drinking from the wellspring of  
His mother's imagined death since  
The real one was too dry

the doctors would  
Ask him for his DT autograph would  
Ask him

of the president or inquire  
About his Zodiac in pidgin Dutch  
But never of his cactus smile  
Smiling the thorny dreams away  
Inside square plaster walls

the unemptied  
Students who weren't yet the laughing doctors  
Asked for

his nightmare signature on their  
Test-lab opossum since it wouldn't dry  
Without at least a Cheshire grin  
A feline wet consuming smile  
Curving space about him.

— Scott Wilson

## Wearing Johnny's Shirt

Sweat-softened khaki  
with the eighth set of buttons  
passed down from father to son to son,  
hand to tractor to college  
(I can only sense grand-daddy's era)  
Do shirts realize their destiny,  
is cotton like wine,  
do they age similarly?

It saw FDR, public works, and was brand new,  
it knows a variety of cuss words beyond my recollection,  
it fought for life and another washing in stock pens,  
stitches prove it.

Hanging outside a nineteen-year-old's britches,  
it heard a fumbled proposal on Saturday afternoon  
in May of '46.

It was wrapped around an 8 lb. 6 oz. boy  
on Wednesday morning in February  
when the light blue blanket was not enough.

It listened to love songs from one  
who had learned that the world was more than boys,  
and it reads these words over the shoulder of this generation  
with no real surprise.

— Ken Vance

## Gravitational Pull

Old as the Bible, bent and palsied,  
over years she succumbs, yielding  
and yielding, nothing denied,  
generous maid to a lover.

Ardently she grubs for tubers  
with nubs for limbs  
certain her beginning  
lies somewhere to the core

so bone by bone she bends at the waist  
till she touches the soil with the flat  
of her palms, tugs at her hem,  
picks at the grass

scraping away summers, an aeon of winters,  
the debris of a lifetime,  
nights and days, days  
and nights, in endless supply

O me, she sighs, blinks,  
a century passes beneath her brow.  
They build a town around her ankles;  
at her heel a man kneels offering

a prayer:  
*She is breaking as she bends,  
Lord! Our tree is dying.*

If it means break in two,  
she's willing.  
She reaches for roots,  
she bends toward earth.

She splits in half.

— Anicia Lane

## The Old Wife

Moon set on the hoar grass,  
    melting,  
under the wind's pass ...  
Come spring the old wife sings,  
    old wife don't sing such things.

Whispers limb the courting trees,  
slipping flowers find the bees ...  
All spring the old wife sings,  
    old wife, don't sing such things.

Sawdust strays along the ground,  
all once let their hair shy down ...  
Crazy my old wife sings,  
    hush, wife, don't sing such things.

Twilight and a quail's call,  
the senseless drifting of the dew fall.  
    ... old, old wife, don't sing such things.

— *John Thomas White*

## Sunrise Over Coffin Mountain

Head rising up out of the slime  
like a great bubble  
in some primordial soup.  
Limbs that follow heavy and slow  
as though gravity was tearing  
at the bowels they carry.  
Thick breath that comes and goes  
like a separate entity,  
a sluggish bond between the creature  
and the space it disturbs so artlessly.  
Eyes dropped into the skull,  
twin diamonds in a burl of rotting cypress,  
glittering and many-faceted,  
a thousand prisms for the thin light.  
Turns its perfect gaze on another  
day of stone; nothing has changed  
or ever will. The creature's mouth  
evolves from beneath two shining orbs:  
a bright gash, raw as liver,  
wide red door to the internal.  
Screams its anger out through the air  
to set the atoms jangling,  
hurls its red sound arching over the earth,  
blood melon on molten lead.

— Pamela Grimm

## Deductions

The dunes were not prepared for this snowfall:  
Wild, winter geese squawked in the hollow of the storm,  
Gathering in grumbling bunches on the strand.  
Miniature drifts accumulated on the shanty's sills  
Where dried caulking had peeled from the panes,  
And I inched my chair closer to the Indian stove,  
Closer to the malemute, squirming, aching in his sleep  
For winter-bound mountains, the long nave of trail,  
For standing by the booming lake, smelling  
The cabin's birch smoke weaving through oak and ice  
When the wind was right.  
For the valley where we played Wolf and Hermit 'til the rose of dawn  
Erupted through the notch,  
Spilling over the crackling, melting snow.

I left that silent vault of forest for winter quarters,  
A beach where wild geese gather.  
But one can deduce the seas from a single wave,  
A life of loneliness from a single, solitary night,  
And a mountain winter, one to awake longing and mystery  
In the hardest of hearts,  
From an unexpected, whistling snowstorm.

— Ben Klein

## Reed Quadrangle

Bright December sunlight through my windows  
pulls me out of bed and doors  
to enjoy the unexpected warmth of an April.

Walking barefoot into town on sunlit sidewalks,  
I hear raucous bird flocks  
and corpses of leaves rattling in a neuter breeze.

Looking past their fronts, I see the intriguing backs  
of old white houses, and now  
the starlings switching trees in gusty movements.

Pigeons perch on the rain gutter of a church,  
a quarter moon hangs at noon,  
and still people in coats look oddly at barefeet.

After Lou tells me how to see Nutcracker free,  
on a brick wall I decide  
to go bask on the grass of this poem's title.

— *Chan Thoroughman*

## Christmas at Hilton Head

The beach is cold in  
the winter. People scurry collecting  
shells. Their dogs bark at  
the white as its sprays  
lap hard against the sand.  
Bloody jellyfish leave imprints across  
a path strewn with feet.  
It is barren.  
It is winter.  
Looking out above the sea  
the water wears a veil.  
Sparkles shimy, bangle sequins glide.  
It is winter.  
It is fury ...  
The people walk with their  
heads down. The dogs run  
away. The sea sounds gloat.  
Tourists shake skin and look.

— *Teresa Layden*

## The Cry of the Poultry

*"You need not have carved him in faith,  
They say he is a capon already."*

— John Webster

Today I was not forty-six. After a hot shower I stood in my cold bedroom in front of my mirror. My nipples were high. There was even the slightest hint of muscular striation under the hair.

I am always awake at five a.m. I keep Ben Franklin hours. Last week my wife asked me if I had any speed. She wanted to watch Carson.

"Does he still have grey hair?" she asked.

"As far as I know," I said. I haven't seen the man in years. My wife goes to sleep at ten. I follow in about ten minutes. I seem to dream about birds a lot.

At five I need eggs. I eat them alone while I read a boxing magazine. I am a scrupulous cleaner and a filthy eater. I smoke a Camel and stump it out in what is left of my fried egg. Then I throw everything away and put things in perfect order. I put on the clothes of the day.

I always look the same in the morning. My nose is really amazing. I still get a pimple now and then. I can't really be forty-six.

In the morning I'm pretty sure that I'm going to live forever. I'm going to be the first one.

My wife gets up about an hour after I do. She never reveals what she wants to eat. Sometimes, after a long questioning session I get her to admit that she wants toast. (Getting this information is like getting Audie Murphy to talk about his troop's movements.) I once told someone about my wife's breakfast habits. They said they used to live with someone who only took a crap once a week.

When I was in college I was called Skip. My real name, Bernard Schnieder, never sounded like it described me. It sounds even now like it belongs to an accountant or some damn salesman. Skip Schnieder sounds like the way I really am.

I have had a reasonable life up until now. I went to good schools and got good marks. During the summers I worked at hard "character building" jobs. Once I dug graves at a place called Calvary Cemetery. The other guys there used to drink at lunch, but I would have none of it. After a single cold glass of orange juice I was always ready for more shoveling. The head groundskeeper knew that I was going to amount to something. He was right.

I got a good job right after graduate school and things have just kept getting better and better. I paid off my loans, my parents died, I got married. Then I bought a house, had a daughter, and bought a better house. Then I had a son and bought a still better house. Now I'm at the point where things can't seem to get any better. In my business I'm one layer away from the top. My house sits on a four acre lot in an A-one suburb. Everything I own is insured for more than it's worth. My life is insured for a hundred thousand. The accuracy of the figure is not important to me. My death is none of my business.

I'm not going to be there for it.

I've managed to see two pretty complete death scenes while I've been here. My dad went a little nuts. He started doing things like grabbing people around the neck and not letting go. People said that he wasn't acting like himself. My mother got in a lot of pain so they gave her a bunch of drugs.

The only other possibilities are sudden. Car crashes or heart attacks. I'm not thinking about it because it's none of my business.

These days I only work about twenty hours a week, mostly calling people or eating lunches. My biggest worry is deciding who is going to take my place. My son and daughter are teenaged. The girl looks like my wife used to look. The boy is getting a gut. He's inordinately fond of Butterfinger bars. He had a double hernia last year when he fell off his bicycle. He doesn't like football. He plays hockey with other rich boys after school. Two years ago I sent my daughter to a dermatologist to take care of her pimples. Today she doesn't have anything that even faintly resembles a pimple. Rick Lewis told me that my daughter would have turned out the same even if I hadn't bothered with the dermatologist. Lewis is a doctor who knows the dermatologist and dislikes him. I tell Lewis that I don't really care that much about the money. I make my stance clear to everyone I know. I am well liked.

Almost no one calls me Skip anymore.

My wife, who did not know me until I was twenty-six, calls me Bernie. Lately my kids have occasionally referred to me as "pop." This bothers me slightly, but I haven't mentioned it.

I have a moderate pot belly, but large menacing forearms. I don't know how I got them. I certainly didn't "develop" them or anything.

I don't read very much anymore. My wife wanted me to try meditation once. I did but I didn't feel tranquil or anything. Whenever I shut my eyes to concentrate on my mantra, I kept thinking of giant moths and tiny Japanese girls with shrill voices. After you meditate, if you walk outside, the people look like assassins.

A couple of years ago I decided to become a heavy drinker, but my body was not up to the task. How can anyone drink a lot two days in a row? The intestines scream, the hands shake in protest, the brain rebels. The experience gave me a new respect for winos. Those emaciated exteriors hide a constitution of iron.

Last year, after my wife decided to go to art school, I stumbled on to my true calling. I am a preparer of flesh.

I started out with simple things but swiftly progressed to culinary exoticisms. Food is not interesting to me as a craft to be learned, but rather as an academic discipline. I once spent a delightful evening reading about the internal organs of cows. It was a lot more fun eating the inside of a cow after I'd been there.

Today I sit with a dead chicken. It is a fine bird, headless and a little blood-specked, but all in all rather attractive. My wife does not understand the aesthetic qualities of a carcass. She is off in another part of the house looking at pictures of ruined old buildings. Sometime in the future I know that she's going to come to the conclusion that I'm not capable of understanding her and her artistic nature. I'll drive off that bridge when I come to it. Right now I'm going to truss this bird.

My wife enters. "The dogs took dumps all over the deck. I think you should have a talk with them."

I go over and tell the dogs to cut it out. I think they understood. I get busy with my shovel. I'm still an excellent shoveler and a fine young man.

Dinner has gone well enough. My wife wanted to know why I put out cigarettes in the remains of my food. I told her that I really didn't know, but I do. It's the hiss that comes when I stick the cigarette butt into something moist. The hiss from an egg is the greatest hiss of all, but chicken flesh is acceptable. I just love the hiss. I can't explain.

It is bedtime and I am going to tell my wife a sad story. We are lying in bed as I begin.

"I heard this story today I wanted to tell you." She looks over, not interested but polite enough to pretend. This is fine with me. For my purposes even a minor degree of attention is sufficient.

"There was this kid, an eight-year-old boy from Arkansas, I think. Any way, they found out that he had completely inoperable leukemia. So they told him he was going to die and asked him what his last request was. You know what he asked for?"

"What?" she asks. She is genuinely interested.

"He wanted to have a statue of a little boy with wings put on top of his grave. Kneeling and looking up. That's what they did all right."

"How do you know?" she asks.

"They had a picture of the grave in the paper."

"Then he's already dead," she says. I knew the story would have an effect. Her face is no longer bored looking. "That's so sad," she adds. I believe I can see the faintest hint of a tear in the corner of her left eye.

"I just wanted to tell you," I say reaching for the light.

I fall asleep almost immediately and dream of birds: a long line of crows walking slowly across a brown field.

— Frank Gannon

## Aunt Lou Nell's Divorce

"Mae, I'll swear these services get longer and longer every year. A thirty-minute invitation hymn? Why, you could hear stomachs growling in time with 'Just As I Am.' That preacher could wear down any sinner, if you ask me. And if it's all the same to you, I believe I'll skip church tonight."

"It's your soul, Lou Nell." Mama, in the front seat beside Daddy, looked straight ahead as we drove home that sunny Sunday. But I knew, even from my usual place in the right-hand corner of the back seat, that her face was stern and set. It wasn't Aunt Lou Nell's remarks about church that had made Mama mad, although that wasn't helping any. Mama was mad at me, and she could stay mad the longest of anybody I knew.

Last night I had asked her, "Mama, do you think passion is important to a marriage?"

Her face turned beet-red. "Where on earth did you pick up a nasty word like that, young lady?" She didn't wait for me to answer.

"It's all those filthy books you've been bringing home from that library. Don't you dare try to deny it. I ought to tear up that library card, and I will if I ever hear another such word pass from your lips again!"

"Mama —." I started to protest that I hadn't seen the word in *Little Women* or *Betsy and Tab*, but she already had me on my way to the bathroom and to the familiar taste of Lifebuoy soap.

The memory made me shift uneasily in the crowded back seat. Aunt Lou Nell was beside me and she must have known what I was thinking, because she smiled her understanding smile at me and patted my hand. My sister, Patsy, was on the other side of Aunt Lou Nell. She shot me her best there's-no-hope-for-a-heathen-like-you look. Patsy was very good at taking up where Mama left off. She didn't think I was turning out to be nearly so good a Christian as her and she often called me a heathen. Once I looked it up in the dictionary and read it was "a person regarded as uncivilized or irreligious." I had gone into the bathroom, bolted the door, and pleaded with God that if I tried to be more religious, would He please show me how to be more civilized? Since then I'd gone to Sunday School every Sunday with no complaints and I hadn't tried to act sick once to keep from staying for church. But she still called me a heathen every chance she got and the look she was giving me then told me she didn't think I'd gotten a bit more religious or civilized.

The old, gray DeSoto finally turned into our driveway and the five of us filed silently into the house and went into our usual Sunday routine. Mama changed from her good Sunday dress into an old cotton one, rolled her stockings down to her ankles and went into the kitchen to fry a chicken. Daddy took the paper to the front porch, and Patsy went to her room to study her lesson for Baptist Training Union that night. I hurried to get out of my starched dress that had scratched the back of my legs till they were red and sore. I knew Mama would be calling me soon to set the table and help with dinner.

This Sunday was a little different from the usual routine, though, a little brighter, because Aunt Lou Nell was there. She was staying with us for a week while Uncle John was on one of his business trips out West.

I loved Aunt Lou Nell's visits. She had very dark brown shoulder-length hair that Mama was always telling her she ought to cut. (Mama's hair was brown, too, with a lot of gray in it. She cut it real short and put a hard-to-hold Toni in it so it was

in tight, little curls.) But Aunt Lou Nell never paid her any mind and kept fixing her hair kind of soft and loose with one of those fluffy, movie-star pompadours on her forehead. She wore short, short dresses with high shoulders, and beautiful high-heeled shoes with open toes. I'd heard Mama tell Daddy that the way Aunt Lou Nell dressed was a disgrace to the family. (Mama said a lady always covered her knees, and her print dresses always did.) Aunt Lou Nell wore rouge and mascara even if she wasn't going off, and she put on bright red lipstick with a little brush. I thought she looked just like Joan Crawford.

Aunt Lou Nell and Uncle John were always flying on airplanes or going to football games and concerts, and out to dinner. Uncle John worked for a big insurance company and he went to a lot of different cities. Since they didn't have any children (That's another thing Mama didn't approve of.), Aunt Lou Nell usually went with him, but once or twice a year she came to visit us instead. I looked forward to her visits so much and I felt real bad that I'd made Mama mad and upset the very first day of Aunt Lou Nell's stay.

After I got out of that starched dress and into an old, soft one, I decided to go and set the table without being told, hoping Mama would appreciate it and get over being mad. Mama had been chatting almost gaily with Patsy when I came into the kitchen, but she hushed and got her face back in its stern position. When the two little lines between Mama's eyebrows were knitted together and the corners of her mouth were turned way down, it was best not to say anything to her, so I didn't. Patsy was mashing the potatoes and I stole a couple of looks at her as I set the table.

I couldn't help wondering if she'd ever found the *True Story* magazines Mama kept hidden behind the washing machine in the basement. That's where I'd read about passion. While I was washing my sheets Saturday morning, I had found that the June issue had been added to the stack. The cover said that they had taken a poll of 2,000 married women to see how important passion was to a marriage and how they kept it in theirs. I didn't read the poll because I got interested in the \$500.00 story, "His Eyes Possessed Me," and before I could finish that I'd heard Mama's footsteps on the basement stairs and I had hurriedly replaced the magazine behind the washing machine. I probably wouldn't get a chance to read the passion poll until next Saturday morning. But I never should have let my curiosity lead me into asking Mama about it, I thought, as I put ice in the glasses for the tea.

Over the fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans, and biscuits, I talked to Aunt Lou Nell about movie stars and radio programs. She always seemed interested in whatever I had to say.

"How's your friend, Frances?" she asked.

"Oh, she's just fine, Aunt Lou Nell. She's going to learn how to play the flute next year and she's going to summer camp for two whole weeks." (I had pleaded with Mama to let me go to camp with Frances, but she had stood firm and claimed I'd be too homesick.)

Mama dished up the banana pudding after the other dinner dishes were cleared away.

"Are you and John still planning that fancy cruise next Christmas, Lou Nell?" she asked.

"Mae, I don't know that John and I will be making any kinds of plans together any more." She suddenly looked so sad that I felt very worried. Could Uncle John

be dying? Last month there was a \$2,500.00 True Story, "How Can I Plan to Make His Last Months Happy — When I'm just Waiting to Marry His Brother?"

"What do you mean, Nell?" It was Daddy talking.

"Oh, Bill. We've gotten so we fight so much, it just seems hope- ..."

Mama cut her off fast. "Lou Nell, little pitchers." She nodded toward me.

Aunt Lou Nell went back to her banana pudding without another word and I pretended I hadn't heard any of it.

After the dishes were done we headed for the front porch. Aunt Lou Nell and I got the big swing that hung from the ceiling, me with the Sunday funnies and she with the want-ad section and her cigarettes. (Mama had already given Aunt Lou Nell her usual "talking-to" about how a woman smoking cigarettes looked like a tramp. I always wondered and wondered about that, because every picture of a tramp I had seen was an old man with whiskers, a battered hat, and a cigar butt, not a cigarette. I was planning on asking Mama about that someday, but I had done enough asking for one weekend.) Aunt Lou Nell hadn't changed clothes or shoes after church and as she stretched out her long legs to get us swinging higher I noticed the gleam of the silk stockings that she never rolled down to her ankles.

Daddy had disappeared to his basement workshop where he spent most of his time when he was at home. I really wished he wouldn't go down there, especially on Sunday. I was afraid Mama would start in about work and sin on the Lord's day. But Mama didn't seem to notice Daddy's absence. She brought out a straight-back kitchen chair to sit in while she read her *Baptist Home Life* magazine. Patsy went to her room to learn her Bible verses for the Girls' Auxiliary meeting later that afternoon. She was working on her Queen step and she had to learn an awful lot of verses. I was holding my breath, afraid Mama might remember that I should be memorizing the names of the Home Mission Board for my Maiden step. I'd been working on it for two years, during which time Patsy had gone through Maiden, Lady-in-Waiting, Princess, and now to almost Queen. It all seemed kind of silly to me. How could knowing the names of the Home Mission Board help my immortal soul? But Mama didn't say anything to me about studying for Maiden. I guess she had given up on me and decided that Patsy's getting to be Queen would have to do.

I was hoping that there might be some continuation of the conversation that had started at dinner so I could figure out if Uncle John was dying or if Aunt Lou Nell just didn't want to take a cruise with him because of the fighting. I was hoping hard it was the fighting, because that could be fixed. People were always word-fighting in the movies, sometimes even hitting each other, but they always made up in the end.

"Did you notice that practically purple finger-nail polish Edna Lathem had on at church this morning, Lou Nell?"

Aunt Lou Nell didn't look up from her paper. "Mae, I don't know Edna Lathem from Adam's house cat."

Mama flipped a few pages of her magazine, then turned to Aunt Lou Nell again. "I wonder if Bill knows, being a deacon and all, that the Ramseys don't tithe? I saw Ned Ramsey drop a quarter in the offering plate this morning and I know he must make at least \$35.00 a week."

Aunt Lou Nell lit another cigarette and kept making red circles on the want-ad page.

My curiosity finally got the best of me. "What are you doing that for, Aunt Lou Nell?"

"I'm looking for a job, honey."

"Whatever for?" Mama wanted to know.

"Mae, you may as well know I'm not going back to John. I've left him for good and I've got an appointment with a lawyer tomorrow to start a divorce. Our marriage is just no good. We fight all the time and we just don't seem to want the same things anymore. I'm not going to stay in a marriage that is just making me miserable." Aunt Lou Nell got all this out before Mama could remind her about little pitchers.

"Lou Nell, I'm not believing my ears. There's never been a divorce in our family. How can you even think of such a thing? Why, Mama would turn over in her grave."

"Mae, I don't want to hear one of your sermons. I don't believe Mama, rest her soul, would want me to be unhappy."

"Well, she'd want you to keep your marriage vows. 'Till death do us part'."

"That's enough, Mae. My mind is made up. This has been coming for a long time. Now the subject is closed."

Aunt Lou Nell stubbed out her cigarette and took my hand. "Come on, honey. I want to show you the hat I got in New York last month. It's from Paris."

We went inside, leaving Mama staring at the yellow marigolds in the front yard as if they were responsible for Aunt Lou Nell's divorce.

I could hardly wait for church to end that night because I knew I'd have a chance to get some more information about Aunt Lou Nell and Uncle John. There was only one way for me to know what was going on in our family — by crouching under the window of Patsy's room. (She stayed for Young People's Fellowship after church.) The window overlooked the front porch where Mama and Daddy sat on Sunday evenings until time for "Inner Sanctum." Then they'd come in and turn on the radio and I'd stand up and stretch my cramped legs and go listen, too, since it was summer and there was no school to go to bed for.

Aunt Lou Nell had gone to have supper with an old school friend and she wasn't back yet, so I figured I could count on this Sunday evening's conversation being about her. Sure enough, I'd barely gotten comfortable under the window when Mama told Daddy about Aunt Lou Nell's divorce.

"She's moving back here and she's already looking for a job and an apartment."

Daddy didn't say anything, just sort of grunted, and Mama went on. "I told her before she married him that John would never give her anything but grief, but do you think she'd listen to me? She was always so hard-headed nobody could tell her a thing. Well, she'll have to give up all that high-falootin' living now and get a job at Woolworth." (That's what Mama always called Woolworth's.)

Daddy was still silent. The smoke from his pipe drifted through the open window. I knew Mama was getting mad. She always did when she couldn't get Daddy to agree with her. She tried again.

"Did you know that John can't do it any more?"

Now she had his attention. "For Chrissakes, Mae, how would you know that?" He sounded really mad.

"Don't take the Lord's name in vain, Bill. Eunice (That's Mama's first cousin on her Mama's side.) told me Lou Nell practically told her so. That's how I know!"

"Eunice! That frustrated old biddy! Lou Nell wouldn't tell her anything so personal no more than she'd fly to the moon! You and Eunice and the rest of your tongue-wagging family had better mind your own business and let John and Lou

Nell work this out!" Daddy slammed the screen door to the living room. He turned on the radio. And it wasn't even time for "Inner Sanctum."

The next day my friend, Frances, and I sat under the chinaberry tree in my back yard, trying to think up a new game to play. We were way past dolls and Mama had put an end to "Church" which we had invented last week. One of us would be the preacher and the other would be the sinner coming down the aisle to be saved during the invitation hymn. Mama had been hanging out clothes and heard me saying, "Praise the Lord for sending this lost soul to us today," and she threatened to call Frances' mama. She said it was blasphemous and that God was frowning down on us. So, this summer morning we were bored and restless.

"Have you asked your Mama to tell you about 'M' yet?" Frances asked. We weren't sure how to pronounce "menstruation" so we just referred to it as "M," or, sometimes as "falling off the roof."

"I told you I asked her three weeks ago and she turned red and said I didn't need to know such stuff till I was 13." I was irritated because Frances always hinted that her mama was more modern than mine. Her mama had told her about "M" a year ago.

"Well, some girls start as young as 11. She can't be sure you won't till you're 13. And anyway, you'll be 13 in 11 months and 2 weeks."

Frances was always logical.

"I think I'm fixing to start," she announced proudly.

"How do you know?" I demanded, feeling my envy and anger rise.

"Cause I've been having awful cramps, here." She patted her belly, looking triumphant.

"Huh, that's probably just all those old crabapples you eat." I was jealous, but she did eat a lot of crabapples — green ones.

"Well, Della says this is just how you feel when you 'fall off the roof.' She even got me a belt and a box of Kotex. I'll show you next time you come over."

Della was Frances' sister. She was sixteen, a year older than Patsy, and about a million times nicer. One time she even let us try on some of her lipstick when I was over at Frances' house. It was called "Fire Engine Red" and I pretended, as I peered into the mirror, that I was Linda Darnell, getting ready to make a movie with Tyrone Power. But I had to be very careful to wash all the "Fire Engine Red" off before I went home. Mama was uncanny about noticing a tinge of lipstick.

I wished Patsy could be more like Della. I could just see her getting me a box of Kotex! And if I dared ask her about "M," she'd say it was another sign of my heathenism.

Thinking about Patsy stirred the meanness in me, and since I was anxious to change the subject anyway, I had a suggestion for a way to spend the rest of the morning. Mama was at her Baptist Ladies' Circle Meeting, Aunt Lou Nell was looking for a job, and Patsy was at a Vacation Bible School Teachers' meeting.

"Let's go look in Patsy's chest of drawers."

"Why?" Frances asked. "Has she got a diary?"

"No, but she slipped in the other afternoon through the basement with a paper bag. I know she's been saving her allowance up for something and I'm about to die to know what she bought."

Frances looked bored, but she finally agreed.

Patsy's room was neat and clean. Her Sunday School and Training Union Attendance Awards covered one wall. (I never could figure out why they gave anybody awards for coming to Sunday School and Training Union. Didn't they know their

mamas made them go?) Her white Bible with the “For God So Loved the World” bookmark was on her desk beside her Girls’ Auxiliary Handbook. The picture of Jesus on top of the chest of drawers made me a little uncomfortable, but I was determined to find that paper bag. There was nothing in the first three drawers except Patsy’s neatly folded underwear, blouses, and sweaters. I was just about ready to give up because I was getting more and more nervous, with Jesus staring down at us. But, in the bottom drawer, from behind a stack of more Sunday School Awards which Mama hadn’t gotten around to getting frames for, I pulled out the paper bag. Hoping that she’d bought some lipstick or eye makeup, I dumped the contents onto the neatly-made bed.

“What are they?” I asked, holding out one of the two pieces of round, pink foam rubber for Frances to inspect. I poked the middle of it with my index finger. It sank in, but popped right back out.

“They’re falsies!” Frances whooped. “‘Miss Priss’ has got herself a pair of rubber titties!” She held them up to her chest and paraded around the room till we both collapsed laughing.

About 5:30 that evening Mama and I were in the kitchen fixing supper when Aunt Lou Nell came bursting into the room. Her face was pink with excitement and she grabbed me and whirled me around.

“I got a job, Mae! A wonderful job! I’m going to teach dancing at the new Arthur Murray Studio. Ball room dancing, jitterbug, everything! And it pays \$40.00 a week!” Her eyes were sparkling and she looked so happy I hugged her hard. She smelled like roses.

Mama dropped the biscuit cutter on the floor and put her flour-covered hands up to her face. She didn’t seem to care that the flour was getting in her hair. She acted like somebody had just told her about a bad accident.

“Oh, no, Lou Nell! You couldn’t —, you wouldn’t work at a place like that. Dancing and carrying on? You know the kind of people that go to those places — they’re nothing but trash!” The pot of peas boiled over on the stove, but Mama didn’t even glance at it.

“Oh, Mae. Don’t be so old-fashioned. There’s nothing sinful about dancing, no matter what the Baptists say. And don’t worry, I’ll *just* be dancing at the studio — I’ll wait till after work for the ‘carrying on’.” I could tell by the twinkle in her eye that she was teasing Mama. I wondered how she had the nerve because the two little lines between Mama’s eyebrows were as knitted as I had ever seen them.

“Lord knows, Mae, with the war and all, people need some way to forget their troubles.”

I guess Mama could see there was no use in trying to talk to Aunt Lou Nell any more right then, because she hushed and turned to the peas. But I knew that she would ask the people at Prayer Meeting on Wednesday night to pray for Lou Nell’s soul.

“I saw an ad in this morning’s paper for an apartment that sounds just perfect for me,” Aunt Lou Nell said. “I’m going to run take a look at it right now before somebody else grabs it. Don’t wait supper for me.” She sort of balleted out of the kitchen, humming a waltz.

That night I had a beautiful dream. Aunt Lou Nell was gliding across a polished dance floor with a tall, handsome man in a blue uniform, with medals on his chest. When I woke up I lay in bed and thought for a long time. It seemed to me that Aunt Lou Nell was very happy with what she was doing — getting a divorce, a job, an apartment, and starting a new life. Even though I had always liked Uncle John, I

loved Aunt Lou Nell, and if being away from him made her happier, that was what I wanted for her.

The next morning when I got up Aunt Lou Nell was putting the last of her things into Daddy's DeSoto. She had taken the apartment she looked at and Daddy was helping her move into it.

"Hi, honey. I'm glad I got to see you before I had to leave. As soon as I get my phone I'll call you and we'll go to the picture show, o.k.?"

I nodded, hoping Mama would allow it.

"I've got to run now. I start my new job tonight." She quickly pressed a little white box into my hand. "Here's a little something for you. See you Saturday." She kissed my cheek and was gone.

I stood there for a moment staring after her. Then I remembered the box in my hand. I hurried to my favorite private hiding place, under the dining room table. The tablecloth hung to the floor all around and made a cozy tent where I often read my library books or *Little Lulu* comics. I opened the white box and, there, on a piece of snowy white cotton, was the tiny gold locket I had seen Aunt Lou Nell wear so often. Once she had opened the locket and shown me it held a tiny snapshot of her and Uncle John on their honeymoon at Niagara Falls. But when I opened the locket now, there was a picture of Aunt Lou Nell all alone, smiling and beautiful.

— Sherry Shaulman

## Carnival Glass

“Yes, I’m one of the few Chumbley’s left,” Dora told the cab driver with an enthusiasm that made her carefully placed hat bob. “Just me and my sister Constance — she lives in Atlanta, Georgia — and neither one of us has seen the other since our brother Brian died. Well, it’s been close to seventeen years. Just imagine! Seventeen years!”

Dora remembered her brother’s fancy funeral which she still felt had been too expensive. “That’s why I decided I’d go and visit her, seeing as how we’re both getting up in years. I sent her and Thomas, that’s her husband, a post card and told them when I’d be coming in.”

“Tell me, how old do you think I am?” she prodded the cabby, breaking his concentration on the heavy traffic. Dora smiled as he glanced into the rear view mirror.

“Uh, fifty-seven?” he asked as he turned the corner sharply and threw Dora back against the plastic covered seat.

“Fifty-seven?” Dora cackled, gleefully, clutching the front seat. “Why, I’m a good ten years older, sixty-eight on my next birthday,” she added confidentially, but she felt worry furrow her forehead. “Sister Constance will be seventy-one come September and she’s going fast. That’s why I decided to visit her. You see, she’s got this carnival glass punch bowl and cup set and I don’t want it to get into her husband’s family.”

Her lower lip quivered slightly as she confessed, “When Aunt Clara died back in ’42, Constance got the punch bowl set and I got the dinnerware. But it’s no good not having it all, you know.”

Dora sat silently while she gathered her thoughts and belongings and put each in its place. The cab pulled up in front of the bus station.

“Here you are, lady,” he announced as he squirted a stream of spit on to the pavement. He got out to help Dora with her two old yellowed shopping bags from May Cohens. He seemed half-afraid to pick them up. He waited and pushed his hat back on his head in an easy, familiar motion.

“How much do I owe you?” Dora inquired tightly.

The cabby cast his eyes upward, half-closed his right eye, and said, “\$8.40,” but he leaned on the car door and checked the meter to be sure.

“\$8.40?” Dora threw her head back so that her hat bobbed. “Why, the last time I came out here the fare was only \$4.60.”

“Lady, that must have been fifteen years ago. I’ve brought you half-way from Starke and that’s a good twelve miles. I’m telling you it’s \$8.40.”

Dora took out her wallet and ferreted out seven one dollar bills. Then she shifted to her coin purse and counted out five quarters, one dime, and a nickel. She was careful not to include a tip. If only the bus stopped in Starke, she wouldn’t have had to pay a taxi to take her all the way into Jacksonville.

Dora gave the cabby his fare. She noted that he didn’t offer to help her with her bags, but she wasn’t about to ask his aid or anyone else’s. Dora Chumbley could manage by herself. This meant taking a little more time, but it was worth the effort.

She gathered up the two shopping bags and the huge purse she affectionately called “the monstrosity” and entered the station. Once in line to buy her ticket, Dora checked over her belongings. Her hand first went to her hat which she touched gingerly, glad to find it still secure. She then looked deeply into one of

the bags and discerned the rusty outline of her first aid kit. Reassured (one could never tell when accidents might happen), Dora took out her wallet and change purse again to have her money at hand.

“One way to Atlanta, Georgia.”

“\$23.15,” the man told her as he punched out the ticket.

Dora knew it would be useless to argue over the price after her bout with the cabby. She counted out the money carefully. She had thought the bus ticket would be \$15.90. She had meticulously planned her trip around that amount and now she was \$7.25 short on the bus ticket and \$3.80 on the cab fare. That was a total of \$12.05 over what she had expected.

And here she had only \$45.00 with her. And \$31.75 of it was spent. With only \$13.25 left, she realized she didn't even have enough to buy a return bus ticket. Oh well. She'd just have to explain things to Constance and Thomas and they'd have to give her the extra money she needed.

Ticket in hand, she confronted the waiting room full of strangers and felt very small and frightened. She had seen on TV how mobs of people could suddenly break into violence and rape, plunder and pillage, and generally annoy peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Dora looked over the crowds of milling people.

There were quite a few collected in the cafeteria, but more were over by the pin-ball machines. She eyed the young ragged men who gyrated to the lively noise and flashing lights of the games. Those were the ones who caused the most trouble. She had seen them on TV.

She turned and looked at the people huddled in the plastic chairs with their luggage crowded about them. They seemed silent and ominous; cats who waited for the mice to emerge, cats who only feigned sleep and disinterest.

But Dora knew better. Didn't she watch the evening news every night without fail? Sometimes she would even stay up until eleven just to watch it again. Most of the time the stories were too incredible for Dora to believe. But here she was in the middle of the Jacksonville bus station, surrounded by all manner of strangers, and she now knew that all she had seen was true. Something could happen to her. Right there.

Dora shivered at the thought. Then she realized she didn't know what gate to go to. She retraced her steps to the ticket counter and asked the man at which gate her bus would board.

Fortified by the words “Gate 5,” she made her way across the sea of cigarette butts that littered the floor. Waves of people passed her and got in her way. Ripples of strangers sat and waited for their bus to be called.

Dora shuddered and inwardly gasped for breath as she settled her bags amidst the litter on the floor. She began to have second thoughts about her trip. It had been many years since she had been confronted with so many people. She longed to be back in the solitary comfort of her small apartment, surrounded by her beloved antiques. But, no, there was the carnival glass punch bowl set awaiting her at the end of her journey. The thought strengthened her.

“Gate 5,” Dora repeated to herself as she watched the backwash of humanity flow through the bus station. So many people, people she didn't know, didn't care to know. Ugly people. Dora was glad she had spent forty-five minutes that morning putting on her make-up, a procedure made all the more difficult because she seldom wore it. Just the fact that she had it on made her feel better, because Dora knew it separated her from these dirty, dilapidated strangers.

Dora's thoughts went back to the cost of the trip. She couldn't get over how ex-

pensive things were these days. "Humph," she said toward the monstrosity, "Constance had better be sick and dying, all the money this trip is costing me."

"Now boarding for Lake City, Valdosta, Tifton, Macon, and Atlanta at Gate 5," broke through her thoughts. Dora smiled as she moved herself and her belongings to Gate 5 and got in line, ticket in hand. A man looked at her ticket, but Dora could tell from his uniform that he wasn't the bus driver.

She boarded the bus. She was disgusted and horrified by the numbers of blacks there. She noticed that the greatest concentration was at the rear, but that quite a few were scattered throughout the middle and one up towards the front.

Dora wedged into the front seat behind the driver after she first disposed one shopping bag in the rack above her. The other one she straddled while her purse she carefully positioned on her lap. Settled, she sat back and tried not to breathe in the dank, musty, used smell of the bus and the strangers it carried. Dora tried to think about the carnival glass punch bowl set she would bring home.

She was discomfited to note a black bus driver climb into the seat after everyone had boarded and ease the bus out of the parking space. Dora gave up and breathed deeply, relieved to find that at least she had a seat to herself.

Dora sat up and craned her head to see who was seated across and behind her. A young white serviceman, hair cropped short, sat across the aisle and was engaged in earnest conversation with the bus driver. She pursed her lips, unable to believe they could be so interested in football. Her eyes flitted to the signs at the front of the bus and stopped at the one that said "UNLAWFUL TO TALK WITH DRIVER WHILE BUS IS IN MOTION." Dora raised one side of her mouth slightly as she looked back at the serviceman.

She took the purse off her lap and put it on the seat next to her. She pretended to search for some article so she could peep at who was in the seat behind her. She snapped "the monstrosity" shut when she saw it was a young black man. Dora leaned back in her seat and took out her handkerchief and waved it briskly in front of her nose. She looked out the window at the rows of pine trees fenced in back from the highway. "Just more and more pine trees," she whispered, and turned to thoughts of her antiques.

Her mind went around her sitting room, piece by piece. She saw her old Victrola with the water stain on the top. It had belonged to her father and Dora estimated its value at \$250.00. She smiled as she thought that that was one thing Constance hadn't gotten. Then she came to the china cabinet with all that lovely carnival glass dinnerware — probably worth about \$175.00 now. And besides that, Dora was collecting some Fiesta ware and would soon have a complete set. She fondled her purse as she thought of its worth — \$75.00 now, but in a few years — who could tell where Fiesta ware might not go? Dora closed her eyes at the thought, and her smile widened.

She dismissed the few Franciscan pieces she had, knowing full well it would be quite some time before they were worth anything.

Her mind traveled on around the room and stopped in front of the stack of shelves that went from floor to ceiling. "My hearts!" she thought, clasping her hands together. She saw them glisten and sparkle as they did when the light from the window caught them.

Dora had collected hearts since she was fourteen and her father had given her a heart-shaped candy box he'd won at the county fair. He had eaten the candy. She saw the box in the middle of the center shelf, saw it surrounded by glass hearts, candy hearts, hearts carved of wood, heart-shaped vases, and hearts of papier

mache. But Dora liked the glass ones best because they sparkled and threw prisms on the wall when they caught the light. Dora leaned back in the seat and sighed. She couldn't even begin to estimate how much her collection of hearts was worth.

Dora was hungry by the time the bus pulled into Valdosta. She reached into the shopping bag at her feet and took out an egg salad sandwich she had prepared the night before. As she unwrapped it, she watched with interest the new passengers who boarded the bus. Perhaps some nice woman she could talk to would get on. But Dora didn't spot anyone that looked likely and was relieved that they kept moving on towards the back of the bus.

She had just finished the first half of her sandwich when the last passenger came on. She noted the dirty blonde hair, the faded print dress that was too tight, and the bad teeth. White trash, Dora thought, and placed her shopping bag on the seat next to her. She looked harshly at the girl who paused beside her in the aisle.

Dora knew that she was right about the girl being poor white trash because she went and sat with that black man in the seat behind her. At least she knew her place, Dora thought, and didn't even bother to ask a quality white woman if she could sit down.

She settled back in her seat and lowered it a few notches. She was surprised to hear the two behind her already in conversation. She couldn't quite make out what they were saying, but it seemed that they knew one another. Dora didn't see how that was possible.

And Dora couldn't see how that slut, even if she was white trash, could just go and sit with that black man. She figured the tramp was too poor to own a TV and so probably knew nothing of current events. You'd think she'd be smart enough, Dora thought, to realize that black man could rape the whites out of her eyeballs right there in the seat.

Dora knew. She watched TV. All black men wanted to rape white women. And if that white girl was to scream for help, who would come to her aid? Certainly not the black bus driver. Maybe that white serviceboy? Dora leaned forward in her seat and looked across the aisle at him. She didn't see how he could be that much help though. Not against both the bus driver and the black behind her.

Dora leaned back in her seat and listened. She couldn't quite make out what the two talked about, but after straining a few moments, she caught bits of the conversation.

"Let me show you something," the black man said in a deep voice.

Then she heard something unzip and the white girl exclaimed, "Oh, how wonderful! Would you mind if I held it so I could get a better looked at it? It's not every day that I get to see something like this!"

Dora released her seat and sat up straight. She trembled at the indecencies of a world gone mad. She tried to rid herself of the mental images the conversation had brought to mind by interesting herself in what the bus driver and the service boy were saying. But they still talked about sports so Dora looked out the window and thought about the carnival glass punch bowl set.

Dora woke suddenly to the screams of a little black baby held in the arms of its mother. Dora realized they wanted to sit with her and wished she hadn't awakened with such a start. But there wasn't any use to pretend she was asleep now.

She carefully removed the shopping bag from the seat and set it on the floor.

The black woman sat down. Dora didn't miss the icy stare the woman sent her way. Dora just lifted her chin slightly and turned her head toward the window. She took up her handkerchief and held it to her nose as the smell of the baby's diaper winded its way to her. Dora inched closer to the window. She wondered what city the bus was stopped at.

As the bus returned to the expressway, Dora read the billboards and learned she was in Macon.

She was intensely aware of the woman seated beside her and found it hard to breathe. The baby's cries had subsided into whimpers punctuated by hiccoughs. Dora wiped perspiration from her forehead with her handkerchief and tried to position her legs more comfortably. She wished she had placed both shopping bags on the rack above the seats.

Dora shifted in her seat. She realized she needed to go to the restroom. She had inherited her daddy's kidneys. She leaned forward and asked the black bus driver when the next rest stop would be.

"In about an hour, when we get to Atlanta," he informed her. And as if he sensed her discomfort he added, "There's a restroom in the back of the bus, ma'am."

Dora smiled weakly and, handkerchief in hand, stood up to pass by the woman next to her. Once in the aisle, she placed her purse under her left arm and put her handkerchief to her nose and looked to the rear of the bus. With her right hand she clutched the top of the seat.

She hoped her shopping bag would be safe while she was gone. She thought about taking it with her but decided she just wouldn't be able to manage if she had to carry that and her purse.

As she passed, she noted that the white slut and black were looking at some pieces of bone with carved pictures on them. Dora glanced away quickly and continued on back unsteadily. Probably dirty pictures, she thought.

Finally, she came to the restroom door, unlatched the handle and went inside. Dora made sure the door was locked.

As she prepared to leave, Dora caught sight of herself in the small mirror over the wash basin. Much to her dismay, she saw that her make-up had melted and slipped to one side. She had to admit that it made her look half-crazy.

She washed the smeared make-up off and patted her face dry. She opened her purse and took out a small cosmetic bag. She reapplied the powder and tried to redo the lipstick, but the bus swayed unsteadily. After a few more attempts, she decided she was presentable and returned everything to its place in her purse.

Dora took another look in the mirror and shivered to see how old she looked. Even the bright red lipstick did not help. She sighed, unlocked the door, and prepared herself for the return trip.

She found it easier this time and was soon at the front of the bus. She climbed back over the woman and settled once more into her seat.

She noticed that traffic was heavier and knew that she'd soon be in Atlanta. She hoped Thomas would be there. She didn't like to wait.

Several minutes later the bus pulled into the terminal. Dora waited until the black woman and her baby left before she began to collect her belongings.

Dora exited the bus and entered the waiting room. She had thought Jacksonville was bad, but Atlanta was much worse. She was surprised, though, that it wasn't more noisy.

After she had carefully scanned the waiting room and not seen Thomas, she made her way to a telephone, parcels in tow. She put her bags in front of her and searched through her purse for her sister's number. She dialed it slowly and added the ten cents to the running total of the cost of the trip.

She listened and waited until the phone had rung six times. No answer. She retrieved her dime and deducted the ten cents.

She gathered her belongings together and went over to an empty seat she spied across the waiting room. She sat down with a sigh of relief. A nice middle-aged woman was seated to her right.

"I don't know where my brother-in-law could be," Dora told the woman. "I wrote him a note to tell him when I'd arrive and now he's nowhere to be found."

The woman got up and left.

"Well," Dora said, "of all the nerve!"

She searched the waiting room for Thomas but did not find him. "Maybe he had trouble finding a parking space," she whispered as she gazed through the glass door at the front of the bus station. It was dark outside. She had heard on TV that Atlanta was Number One in rape, Two in murder, Three in aggravated assault. She wondered if the walls of the bus station could hold out the crime.

She returned to the telephone. She tried the number again, but still no answer. She began to fret that they had not received her post card.

As she put away the dime, a young boy ran into her and almost knocked her down.

"Really, young man, have you no smattering of respect?" she spat out at him as her hand automatically went to her hat.

He said nothing, just waved his hands in front of her face and ran off. Scarlet at such insolence, Dora fumbled with her purse before she looked up, afraid of further contact with the strangers in the bus station.

When she did look up, she found that Thomas still had not come. She searched out another seat and shuffled over to it. Again she was surprised by how subdued the bus station sounded. The noise was so muffled that it seemed as if the sound were locked up in another room.

She sat down and positioned her bags close beside her. The young woman next to her, neatly dressed in a skirt and blouse, nodded.

Dora nodded back and told her, "I'm waiting for my brother-in-law to come pick me up. I don't know where he could be. I've tried to call but no one answers. I'm getting a little worried, but maybe he's on his way."

The young woman nodded again.

"Don't you just hate to wait?"

The young woman nodded. Smiled. Nodded.

"I don't usually get out much but my sister is sick ..." Dora faltered as the young woman's smile got broader. "I ... I think I'll go try to call again."

She picked up her bags and returned to the wall of phones. She looked back and saw that the young woman still nodded.

She hurriedly dialed the number once more. Again it rang and rang, but no answer. She went back to the rows of plastic seats and sat down. Her eyes circled the room, unable to focus. Handkerchief hot in her hand, she looked at the clock above the ticket counter. 10:30. She'd been waiting an hour and a half.

Dora decided she'd certainly give Thomas a piece of her mind when she saw him. She thought about taking a cab to her sister's house but decided that it was too far and that rates were probably even more expensive in a big city like Atlanta.

She looked up to see a nicely dressed man standing in front of her. He smiled and held a card out to Dora. She took it from him and read: "We are deaf-mutes, on a trip to Washington. A contribution will be appreciated. Pray for me."

Dora looked up at him again. Sweat beaded on her brow. Her eyes flitted across the sea of people and saw the hands rise and fall. Cascades of hands rippled around her noiselessly. With a fluttering wave of the hand that held the card she realized that the majority of the people in the waiting room were deaf. She quieted the desire to scream that tightened in her throat.

"No," she said loudly and slowly, shaking her head. She got up and pushed him out of her way and returned to the wall of phones.

Her hand shook as she took the receiver off the hook. Slowly she dialed the numbers, numbers worn into her memory, one last time. Every number seemed to echo in the vastness of the unhearing waiting room. Dora saw her hands dial the numbers, but they were huge, magnified. She wished she could do it more quietly. It seemed as if she were hearing for all those who could not hear.

No one answered. No answer. No one.

She hung up and walked over to the ticket counter. She dragged the shopping bags behind her. She felt the eyes of the deaf record her every step.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I've been waiting for my brother-in-law to come pick me up. I've called and called and no one answers. What should I do?"

The man looked at her and said, "Take a taxi, lady," and turned away.

"No, no," she gestured to him, "you don't understand. I don't have money for a taxi."

The man turned back towards her. "Well, I guess you'd better call the Salvation Army, ma'am. They take transients in."

Dora froze at the counter. The Salvation Army. She brushed a wisp of hair from her forehead. What was she to do? She turned back towards the silent strangers. They were all looking at her, accusing her. "But I don't have enough money for a contribution," she whispered.

Did she have enough money for a taxi to her sister's house? You could never be sure. And what if she got there and no one was home — she wouldn't be able to get in.

But the Salvation Army? She thought of reformed drunkards and dowdy women dressed in black singing "Bringing in the Sheaves."

She shuffled back over to a seat and sat down. The Salvation Army? Dora gazed out at the dark streets. Then back to her hands fingering the clasp on her purse.

She started to get up. Her legs stuck slightly to the seat of the chair. Dora looked back to the ticket counter and then over to the row of phones.

Slowly she crossed the room, clutching her bags to her chest. She set them down in front of the phone. She reached for the directory, opened it, and thumbed towards Salvation.

— Mimi Holmes

## A Party This Weekend

Her knees angled sharply out, her rump and skirt flew skyward, as the old lady began plucking imaginary threads off the already immaculate green sculptured carpet.

"No," she wheezed, finally righting herself. "No! I won't have that God-awful woman in this house! I've made a home for you and my poor Raymie, and that whore will not cross this threshold while I live!" Her great breasts heaved; she lurched into her bedroom, and the picture of Jesus, hanging in the hallway, jumped and slid sideways, at the slamming of the door.

Ray's hands trembled as he lit another cigarette and swallowed the rest of the beer from the sweating can. He carefully lifted his lean frame out of the chair. Cocking his head as though sightless, he watched Raymie playing with his mud-brown forelock with one hand, and scratching his face with the other.

"Take your pill, Raymie, and go lie down. I have to go to the airport and get your mama."

Raymie immediately leaped up from the sofa, began running in little circles, waving his stumpy-fingered hands in jerky, fan-like movements in front of him. "Raymie wanna go see Mama! Raymie wanna go see Mama," he chanted.

The knot in Ray's stomach tightened; his scalp tingled. "Go lie down, Raymie. Go lie down!"

Raymie stopped running and wiped his nose with the back of his hand. "Can I go lie down with Gramma, Daddy-Ray? Can I Daddy-Ray?"

Ray, moving to the kitchen, took another beer from the refrigerator, and mumbled without looking, "Go lie down with Gramma; go lie down with Gramma."

Hands fanning the air again, Raymie ran off to his gramma. Ray let himself out the back door and into the carport.

Two blocks from home, Ray regarded the can of beer that sloshed half-empty, in his hand, and pulled into the Fast-Stop-Store. He bought two six-packs quickly, and headed east toward the airport. "One for Marcella, and one for me," he hummed, almost smiling, to himself.

He was early for the plane. After a moment spent regarding the sun-bleached glaring runways, he coughed a little, and moved jerkily down the hallway to the Fly Away Lounge. He swung the heavy glass door wide, and then suddenly lost his grip on it, and had to thrust all his elbows and ankles and extremities quickly into the room to keep from being hit as the door sighed shut. He knew that the three or four customers and the bartender could see all his discomfort, and he stood uncertainly for a minute letting the warm dark bittersweet smell of a hundred days and nights, and a thousand different thirsts, fold over him like a familiar blanket.

He regarded himself in the backbar mirror. Strange, how his father's face looked back at him. He tilted his glass at the reflection, in a silent salute of remembrance. It was his father who had taught him to drink beer, and nothing stronger, so he wouldn't be an alcoholic. And then gazing at his face, he suddenly had a new fear. It had been seven years since he had last seen Marcella, seven years since their divorce. Marcella had always laughed at him; would she laugh at the few grey hairs and the lines he saw in the glass? Almost too briefly to be recognized, the thought flickered across his mind — what would Marcella be like? But then he knew what she would be like. The same. The same as always.

Outside, peering over the gate, and over the heads of the others waiting, he

saw her almost at once. As short as he was tall, small and round as he was angular, and then his eyes filled up and he couldn't see her face. The sweat ran down his sides and beaded on his lip. He shook with the inside cold. He couldn't get to her, but she was pushing through from the other side. He caught her, and pulled her through and tight to him and, Oh God, he could feel the skin and hair and the softness of her, and he began to cry in earnest. The embrace lasted only a moment and Marcella pushed his face out of her neck, and wrenched free of his fingers, already cupped around her breast.

"For Chris'sake, Ray! Can'chu wait 'til we get to the house?" And then playfully, "Besides, I need a drink. That tea they give you on the plane — yuk! Or pee." She began to chortle at her own humor, and repeated, "Tea or pee! Tea or pee!" She turned and scuttled into the building, Ray loping after her.

Raymie awoke to the sound of his grandmother's voice on the telephone. The family had a tendency to repeat things, and she was repeating now, enunciating each word carefully and slowly, and loudly. "You come and get her. You got to come and get her. They'll be here any time now, and you got to come and get her, because I won't have it! I won't have it! I will put your darling daughter in the street where she belongs. I'm not a well woman, but God will give me the strength to throw her in the street where she belongs."

Raymie wondered whose darling daughter Gramma would throw in the street — he wasn't supposed to go in the street. At fifteen, he couldn't remember which light meant go and which light meant stop, so Gramma said he'd better stay out of the street altogether. Stroking Gramma's blanket, he drifted back to sleep.

It was after midnight when Ray pulled carefully into the driveway. He was always careful when he'd had a few drinks, and he and Marcella had had more than a few. She had fallen asleep on the way home, and he sat for a minute, feeling the small pressing of her head on his arm. Listening to the sandpapery sound of her breathing made the tears well up in his eyes, and the tightness in his throat and chest made him cough a little. He shifted slightly sideways and tried to take her in his arms. Perhaps he could even pick her up and carry her into the house and into the bedroom and Mama would never know it! At least not until morning. But Marcella snorted and cuffed at his hand as he tried to encircle her waist. Sighing, he released her, then cautiously laid one hand on her thigh. Feeling the sudden warmth, Marcella moaned a small high sound and tried to thrust her body toward the sensation. Startled, Ray recoiled sharply, banging his bony knee against the steering column. Pain and confusion brought the tears again, and he laid his face against the cool window and tried to decide what to do.

Ray woke to a strange gargling sound. It was Marcella, muttering, "Oh God, oh God, oh God." She was lying on the floor of the car, her head on the seat, her eyes open and glazedly fixed on his right leg. Such love and tenderness and hunger overcame him so that he couldn't speak. He never saw the doughy, mottled face, the matted hair, or smelled the foulness of last night's liquor and cigarettes. He only saw the elfin girl he'd loved and married all those years ago. He only saw that she was sick and helpless and alone, and that she needed him. Leaning over, he tried to pull her onto the seat, but her dead-weight and his sudden nausea combined to make it impossible. With the ghastly feeling of being disconnected from himself, he sat up, wiped his sweating upper lip, and thought about the ways he might get her out of the car. Finally, with stiff fingers, he opened the door, pulled

## Thursday, April 13

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1:10-2:00 p.m.

Reading  
Larry Rubin  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts Building

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2:30-4:30 p.m.

Reading  
Student writers published in *Aurora*  
Rebekah Scott Reception Room

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8:15-9:15 p.m.

Reading  
John Yount  
Gaines Chapel  
Presser Hall

## Friday, April 14

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11:30-12:00 a.m.

Reading  
Josephine Jacobsen  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts Building

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2:10-4:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion of poems and stories  
selected for *Aurora*  
Nathalie F. Anderson,  
Josephine Jacobsen,  
Larry Rubin, John Yount  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts Building

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4:30 p.m.

Awarding of Prizes  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts Building  
Genyne Long, Editor of *Aurora*

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The Festival Committee wishes to thank President Marvin Perry, Jr., for his support of the Festival; Eleanor Hutchens for funding the Newman Prizes; and the Georgia Council for the Arts & Humanities for a grant which helped to make possible the visits of Josephine Jacobsen, Larry Rubin, and John Yount.

1978

AGNES SCOTT  
WINTER FESTIVAL

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