

EVENTS

Thursday, April 3

2:00-4:00 p.m.

Student Reading
The Hub

8:15-9:00 p.m.

Reading
Howard Nemerov
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

Friday, April 4

11:30-12:00

Reading
Josephine Jacobsen
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

2:00-4:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion of Student Work
Presentation of Prizes
Nat Anderson
Josephine Jacobsen
Howard Nemerov

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE WRITERS' FESTIVAL 1980

KSW

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aurora

writers' festival issue

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The Selection Committee reserves the right to perform any necessary editing. *Festival* is prepared by Aiken Composition Service, Inc., 2080 Peachtree Industrial Court, Chamblee, Georgia 30341. Send all correspondence to *Festival*, English Department, Box 915, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia 30030.

Landscape of the Hand

Riding in the car,
Your hand on my thigh
The landscape here
Is different at night.

Your veins,
The tips of roads along ridges,
Winding in and out.

For a moment,
I see faces beyond glass,
The cinema of a pool,
Electric in the moonlight.

Two figures bathe within each other,
Fingers and toes dangling like filaments.

We surface slowly,
Touching each other
With the backs of our hands.
The tide constructs beaches

Along our bodies,
Driftwood,
Removed from the landscape
Of the hand.

—Robert Bradley

Two Women in a Fire

Keep combing your hair
Its still smoke,
Wood unwinding in the stove.

Shut the door.

A woman laughs in a mad way,
Her hand caressing my ankle.
Leg motion
Over the bed
and across the room.

She's fallen in love with her hands again —
Undressing is her only protection,
Her final opinion.
Again and again
These words chase her feet:
"Skip rope,"
"Play hopscotch."
She indulges her particles,
Her Tinker Toys.

"Send me a letter," she says.
But I will never answer.
I'm already asleep on the couch.
My blanket is in the loft.
Bring it down,
Pull it down over your hair,
Over the smoke.

The woman I love is content with her flavors,
making love with me in the fire all night.

—Robert Bradley

The Fate of Arazil

I
 Dim evening fell,
 Dark night blinding.
 Hearth fires woke
 With feasters singing,
 And harpers harping
 Of mighty men
 And deadly blows.
 Soon sleep came
 And took them all.
 Peace kept them
 In their dreamed of halls.
 Night's hard dangers fled.

II

Dragon-fire woke,
 Dark light rising,
 Deep evil rose
 Flying.
 Wings beat,
 And the evil came
 To the mighty walls
 And towering towers.
 Watchers fought
 And death took them,
 Devils keep them in their deepest hells.
 Night's hard dangers came.

III

The dragon's breath
 Has long since died.
 The mead hall waits
 Under open sky.
 And old man sits
 With a broken staff
 Upon the broken stones,
 Blindness in his eyes.
 He thinks of ages past
 And knights who've long since died.
 A solemn rain came falling.
 He cried.

—Joe Capolino

Summer Song

Brown bodies, brown bodies
 baking slowly, aging
 silently. Minds sizzle to tight
 vacuity
 tuned in to the rolling flow
 of the tide; pink
 frothy drinks, chilled, rum laced
 with pineapple;
 wailing of gulls as they sail, sail
 through endless imaginary
 circles. Circling above
 hazed, fazed out minds.
 Brown bodies, tranquil bodies.

—Cynthia Evans

Heart

Grand Central Station. Rivers
of life pass through and
their courses change direction.
broken pomegranate
spilling red seeds of sadness
through its severed skin.
elastic walls of an india
rubber ball bounce back
and back again.

—Cynthia Evans

Mid-Way Through Life's Journey

I see the years fall away like hair
Through my comb,
Yanked away with fierce teeth,
Torn from the roots.
Yet falling gracefully
In a lump, mass of frosted
Brown drops lightly down
To the dusty tile floor.

My eyes (so says the mirror)
Lack the lustre of the years before.
They spread like stagnant pools
Across my furrowed face.
Even wine cannot restore their sparkle.
Alas! Nothing can penetrate
Thick sheets of concave glass.

The children of my loins
Annoy me to no end.
My son swaggers in
(With all his youth-lust glory!)
Already a light beard grows —
Rough down on cheeks and chin.
As I scrape the greying stubble
From my face and watch the sink's
Small whirlpool suck
The tokens of my manhood—
He, behind me, smiles —
Loving grin at his own image,
The teeth of his mother and
Eyes of my youth.

My daughter saunters past
And peers into the glass
Standing on tip-toe
Behind me. She retrieves
Her comb and with it caresses
Those long, thick tresses
Lovingly with each stroke.
As silently as she came,
She wordlessly steals away,
Leaving me to ponder
Her presence (the mystery
Of female adolescence)
As I slick my meager mane
In place.

My wife's voice — shrill —
 Rings through the house.
 Always her voice is in
 My ears, like background music
 Blaring forth from a cheap transistor.
 Always chatting of this
 And that, of him and her.
 (If her voice is the melody,
 I've long since lost the words.)

Words! How I am sick to death
 Of words! I write bad stories
 And worse poems, and essays
 No one will ever read.
 Still I go on,
 And comfort myself with facts:
 Shaw began play writing past forty,
 And Stevens his poems at that age.
 I'm not past my prime —
 (False hopes turn clammy
 Even as I cling.)

Love, hope, faith—
 Sacred triad of the soul.
 As I grow old, age rekindles
 The fervor of faith.
 I never miss mass now.
 I say the rosary—
 Noting each bead
 Soothes me somehow.
 (Hail Mary, full of grace!)
 My youthful cynicism—
 A thick crust that formed
 At age seventeen—
 Dissolves like the wafer-
 Host in my mouth.
 (I grow soft — my mind
 And muscles both lose their tone).

I nap often in the afternoons
 And dream strange dreams
 That float past recall.
 When awake, I read about
 Great men I never knew.

—C.M. Hampton

Metaphors for Menopause

Time tries a smile.
 Once soft sudden,
 Now plasticized,
 Laminated,
 Aggravated.
 (It's hot as hell in here.)
 Hard like the edges of the cheese
 That poked out of the Saran.

Lucky eyes
 Once
 Glowed at a glance.
 Now yellow and scratched,
 Like the finish
 On the linoleum
 In the kitchen
 (I'm old and fat and
 Wouldn't blame you
 For having an affair.)

Hands,
 Now the color
 Of the foam
 Pouring out of the gash
 In the Naugahyde dinette chair,
 Once coaxed
 Held
 Fondled.
 (Jesus, look at that hair growing out of my chin)
 Stroked.

Oh for a present
 (You all hate me)
 Like the past.

—Jenny Mittelman

Blank Pillows

I would prefer blank
pillows to your back.

Where did your voice go
with its hugging words,
its laugh like an envelope,
its resonance of promise,
of lies?

Did it move back
to the living room
to make finger prints
on damp wine glasses,
or stay with our shoes,
their empty toes touching?

I can give a name
to everything in this room:
the Van Gogh print
with its static maze of blue;
my Taiwan baskets,
no two quite the same;
one failing Chinese evergreen.

There are cedar logs lost
In that warm, black
snow of ash,
and the scent of Riesling
stays with this dry cork.

But I cannot find
a name for you.

—Jane Quillman

Uncle Charles

(for my father)

Your brother seldom talks
of the attic days and
the airplanes, all their parts,
sharp as exclamation marks,
kept in the metal box
with the Salmagundi girl on top.
I have it now, stuffed with combs,
dripping grosgrain ribbons.

Twenty years ago,
spitting watermelon seeds
like black tears, I sat
where you sat
twenty years further back,
saying your olive drab goodbyes.

This is the table you made
over forty years ago,
seven coats of varnish
and the corners still as tight
as your brother's heart
when he read the telegram,
four mahogany legs still
as straight as your gaze
from behind thumb-thick glasses
that should have kept you home.

Your brother gives me thoughts
of you like presents,
like stories whose endings
I don't want to know.
How you shrank away to nothing
on stone soup and thirty-hour days,
how you slipped away from
your bones and were lost
with all the rest.

Your brother must have carried
much of you in him,
to give me the features
he loved most in you.
I have your eyes.
I have your hands.
When I was ten
I called you me
in the oval family portraits,
and your brother left the room.

—Jane Quillman

Werewolf

"... for what I would, that do I not;
but what I hate, that do I."

Old legends
and whispered tales.
Perhaps rising smoke
does conceal fire.
Lunar blade echoes misanthropic light,
leaves toxic wound.
The poison works
in all Adam's seed.
Though acrid tongue
replaces razor fang;
odious heart
the dread shell.
I am glad of elegant cure,
so cruelly spilt from crucible —
long ago.

—Phillip J. Rodgers

Beemus Learns the Hard Way

Slouching on the front porch,
sunk in the swells of an overstuffed
easy chair, Beemus spies a beetle
as it flicks its feelers over the edge

of a frayed armrest,
scuttles up on the armrest proper,
and looks up at Beemus from beneath a beetled brow;
Beemus in turn looks down on the miniscule

creature crawling unawares
up the arm of the chair,
and as his thumb begins its decent
towards the beetle's dark, cartilagenous back,

a burst of splintering wood
explodes overhead, the house quivers,
and Beemus looks up through the falling
traffic of savaged wood

at a massive thumb, its metaphysical
presence threatening his suddenly small
form; at a total loss,
his bowels loudly discharging,

Beemus blankly shifts his gaze
from the beetle below his hovering thumb
to the thumb hovering above him,
tucks his into a shaking palm,

the thumb in the roof slowly rises out of sight,
and sunlight and splintery roof remnants
stream in, scattering
over his bewildered shoulders.

Babbling to himself, Beemus stares as the beetle
rises through the roughedged skylight,
small wings whisking,
into welcoming sunlight. . .

—Michael Shephard

The True Romantic

While trembling pretenders to the throne
light the lady's finger
instead of her cigarette,
leave roses with seedy notes
on her next door neighbor's stoop,
or whip out plastic sheets
and a gallon of Mazola
on the first date,
the true romantic is discreet,
follows future lovers
through crowded downtown streets,
is whimsical and rare,
restrained and disarming,
seemingly unaware
of his art.

—Michael Shephard

A Student's Elegy

Lying upon this gray wool rug,
making love to these books and their authors,
feeling that if I do not absorb all their thoughts,
I will surely fail.

I think of you lying in the next room,
and I grow angry at your detachment,
until I walk upon your world,
and you awaken with a kitten grin.

Afterwards
we feast upon oysters and cheese,
and go for an afternoon walk,
and talk about the color orange.

—Teresa Sumrall

Firefighters

The burning, biting pain subsides
 when your voice licks my ears.
 With delicate tongue movements,
 flipping and pressing like down
 from a blue swan,
 play in my ear.
 But bring truths
 to my eyes
 which open
 only
 to see you.
 Speak to me,
 erasing
 the innocence
 of my knowledge.
 Bring my arms to yours
 and let us sit together.
 Be all of me;
 and I, you.
 Don't swim without me.
 Lead me deep
 inside
 heart-dark caverns
 so I can touch
 the blood walls,
 feel the pumping,
 and be pushed
 myself
 through your veins.
 Read my
 confusing
 image-crying poem
 poem
 and lick my eyes.
 Whisper
 who I am.
 Make me learn.
 I want
 the innocence
 to burn.

—Karen S. Webster

Brain Food

Roland and Lizzy sat erect in the truck, the length of the seat stretched between them. Roland's hands were placed equi-distant on the top half of the steering wheel. Lizzy's rested on the black, leather pocketbook that had fallen on its side in her lap. The strap encircled her knees loosely. Lizzy and Roland held their chins level above the little puffs of dust that came through the cloth upholstery each time the bounce of the truck jarred them against the seat.

Lizzy lifted a hand from the pocketbook and wrapped her fingers around the window crank. Her elbow made small circles above the arm rest until the window disappeared. She pushed out her nostrils and inhaled deeply. Her nose tapped the air. "Hmm, honeysuckle. I love the smell of honeysuckle. Makes the whole day sweet."

"Yep, today's the day," agreed Roland. "I got a feelin' we gonna catch Him."

"You think He'll be bitin' today, Roland?"

"He'll have to." Ronald glanced in his rear view mirror. "Can't nothin' stay under water on a day like today. Can't nothin'."

Two caramel-colored poles stretched the length of the bed of the truck and hung over the tailgate. Their tips dipped to and fro directing the traffic that had begun to pile up behind.

"Bout to miss our turn here," said Roland. He flexed his foot up from the accelerator and stuck his arm out the window.

The truck turned slowly over the left lane.

The pines and fence posts passed Lizzy's open window and disappeared in the dust clouds that followed the truck. Ronald leaned into the wheel and squinted. A cloud with a dark center grew larger as they drove. "Well, I'll be," said Roland, as they neared the dust. "They're gratin' the road again."

The grater had smoothed one side of the narrow road and left a large mound of dirt piled in the middle. The truck and the grater met head on. Both slowed to a stop.

"Can't you get him to pull over, Roland?" asked Lizzy.

The driver dismounted from his machine and slowly walked toward them.

"Wouldn't do us any good. I'd have to drive over that mound of dirt for three quarters of a mile. Can't do that. Can't do that at all."

The man's face appeared at Roland's window. Roland cranked the glass plate from between the two of them. He looked pleased. "Mornin'," said Roland, stretching his hand through the open glass frame. Emmitt grasped it hard and shook up and down knocking the funny bone in Roland's elbow against the window sill several times before Roland could pull away. Roland managed a "Good mornin', Emmitt."

"Didn't spect anyone this early, Roland," said Emmitt. "What you and the missus up to?"

"A little fishin'," said Roland.

"Oh yea?" quivered Emmitt. "Where you headed?"

"The New Pond. One we dug last year."

"You mean the hole you dug to get the fill dirt? Why, I've seen my dog drink that thing dry."

"Well," began Roland.

"There isn't a thing in there," interrupted Lizzy. "We just puttin' 'round. Really

just gettin' out a little. Might throw some bait in . . . just in case, for fun, just in case."

Emmitt pushed his lower lip into his top one and nodded.

"Am I going to be able to get by here, Emmitt?" Roland asked.

"Not really, Roland. I'm s'posed to finish this turn down, then smooth the whole thing out on my way back. It'll be a good hour, half hour before I get back up here. I could back her up but you still couldn't get the truck through. Hmm." Emmitt looked past Roland to Lizzy's face peering over Roland's shoulder. "But looks like Miss Lizzy's goin' to go fishin' today somehow."

"How far you reckon it is from here to the pond?" Roland asked.

"Oh," pondered Emmitt, "half mile, 'bout."

"S'pect you could let us ride her back to the pond?" asked Roland.

"Don't see why not. You're more'n likely payin' for it anyway. Ya'll come on out. I'll just finish this half first. Pull your truck on over to the side. I'll take you to that pond."

Lizzy bounced on the seat. Her elbows worked like pistons to launch her departure, then froze each time she descended to fall back on the seat. She slipped her arm through the handle of the pocketbook until the leather strap rested in the bend at her elbow. Emmitt walked around the front of the truck to help Lizzy from the cab. Roland climbed slowly from the driver's seat. Lizzy's door opened and she swung her legs outside the truck. The danglers from the edge of the seat a moment, the tips of her sneakers bouncing lightly off one another. She began to slip off the seat. The bottom of her skirt remained stuck to the seat so that by the time Emmitt caught her and pushed her back into her skirt, several inches of her slip had been exposed.

"Oh, my goodness." She straightened her skirt down and tucked some of the material between her knees. "My goodness. I almost slid right out of this truck. Roland? Roland, I almost slid right out of this truck. Yes, I did."

Roland was sitting on the tailgate trying to remove a fish hook that had caught in his shirt when he retrieved the poles from the back of the truck. "Careful, Mama," Roland warned as he peered under his arm and walked his fingers toward the back of his shirt waist.

Emmitt guided Lizzy out of the truck. She bent quick little bends until she found her balance. She straightened her elbow and flexed her wrist so that the purse fell into the little trough that her fingers made at the end of her arm. "Now I have my handbag." She lifted the handbag for Emmitt to see. "I need my umbrella. And hand me that tupperware tray, Emmitt. We'll need the deviled eggs. I've made some iced tea. Roland likes a little somethin' to drink while he fishes. Yes, he does."

Emmitt grasped the handle of the basket and lifted it from the mat on the floor bottom. Lizzy stepped several feet from the truck so Emmitt could have room to handle the basket and the umbrella. Emmitt cleared the doorway with the articles, closed the door, and started for the grater. Roland and Lizzy followed.

"Let's see," Emmitt began figuring how he was going to arrange everybody. "Miss Lizzy, we'll put you in the seat. I'll stand on the platform with the gear shifts so's I can drive and, Roland, you set up there on that wheel cover." Emmitt braced Lizzy's waist with his hand as she climbed onto the sculptured steel chair of the grater. Her bottom fit snugly into the clam-shell shape of the seat. She tucked both of her feet slightly behind her knees and gripped the square little platform

with the toe and heel of each sneaker. Emmitt handed her the umbrella and she held it perfectly parallel to her body, leaning slightly into and away from the handle to remain erect.

Roland sat on the rear tire. One leg draped along the curve of the fender, the other leg secure on the grater bottom, his hand on the back of Lizzy's seat. Both faced Emmitt who stood at the wheel peering past their faces so as to steer the grater.

Emmitt grabbed one of the metal sticks growing out of the floor. The grater lurched and began to roll backwards.

"Hold on now," warned Emmitt. "Shouldn't be too rough on my second time over but we may hit a few pot holes before we get to the pond." The edge of Emmitt's collar stuck fast to his neck as he moved the gears and the grater rolled faster.

Lizzy's face flushed light pink in the sun. The two thin locks of her hair jumped up to fight each other, then fell to one side. The grater squeezed thin sheets of dust from the road.

Honeysuckle climbed from the ditches; the vines stuffed the wire fences that held them like paper squares in a parade float. Hundreds of little yellow horns trumpeted the grater's arrival with blasts of sweet fumes. Lizzy sniffed and tilted her head toward the vines. Short pines, wedged against the fence, bent towards her and straightened. Lizzy dipped slowly to return their nod. Her fingers raised themselves from the umbrella and she rocked her wrist on the handle to send a wave to the bowing pines.

Lizzy smiled at Emmitt but the gesture struck the crown of his head. The grater lurched again and rolled to a stop.

"Here we are," said Emmitt. "I'd take you down to the pond but I'd rather stay out of the way of that tractor." Emmitt nodded at the machine churning up dirt in the field between them and the pond. "Those Baxley's never stop," Emmitt said as he climbed down from the grater. "He's been farmin' your land for twenty years. I don't know that he's taken a day off yet."

Roland balanced his weight in Emmitt's palm as he climbed down. "We do 'preciate the ride," he said. He turned to help Lizzy down. "Got your umbrella and your purse, Mama?"

"Yes, Roland, I believe I do."

"Let's let Emmitt get on then," said Roland, grabbing their gear from the grater. "And we do 'preciate it once again," he added.

"Sure thing," Emmitt waved. "Hope you catch a twenty-pound cat. That's good brain food, that fish is."

"Oh, we're just puttin' 'round," Lizzy tried to yell over the roar of the grater. "Just puttin' 'round."

Emmitt smiled and nodded before she finished so she knew he hadn't heard her. All three threw up their hands and the grater drove off.

Lizzy and Roland walked out of the dust to the barb wire fence that divided the dirt road from the field.

"Now, Lizzy," directed Roland. He slid their supplies under the bottom string of wire. "You help me. Then I'll help you. Grab this top wire right here. Then this bottom wire right here," Roland demonstrated. "Now put your hand between these knots of wire, right here. Hold on to the smooth part."

Lizzy stepped up the fence and obediently separated the strands of wire. "O.K.,

Roland. Yours is ready."

"Here I come, Lizzy." Roland bent down in front of her. His back stretched parallel to the ground. He lifted one leg over the wire. Lizzy pushed down. She stretched the wire like a bow-string between his legs. Roland raised his other leg. It cleared the wire and landed on the ground. "Thank you, Lizzy. Now you come on through." Roland arranged the wires to form an arch for Lizzy.

Lizzy stooped low and swung her first leg over the wire. Her foot settled on the ground next to Roland's. She pulled her other leg over. "When," she said, and pulled at her dress. Her belt fell from under her bosom down to her waist.

They walked the remaining length of the field to the pond where they stopped at the water's edge and Lizzy asked Roland for the third time if he thought they could catch Him.

"Well," Roland explained to Lizzy. "You're going to have to be a lot quieter."

"O.K." whispered Lizzy. "I'm gonna be a lot quieter. I don't s'pect you'll hear me once all day. I'm gonna be real quiet. Real quiet. You tell me if you think I'm makin' too much noise because I don't want to. Not at all. I wanna be . . ."

Ronald turned to Lizzy. She let him look her in the eye.

"Ooooook." She drew out the O to make the most of her last sound. Her lips rounded again but before she could blow any air through them Roland put his hand over her mouth. "Hush, Mama," he whispered. "And hand me a egg."

Lizzy squatted over the tupperware tray and hummed as she chose an egg from the container. She delivered the egg to Roland, then stood behind him flapping her stiffened arms against her side and taking little, hard marching steps in the mud to free her sneakers from the suction. Roland jabbed the egg into the pointed hook. He dropped the line, raised the rod high in the air, and swung his arms back in a great swoop and then forward. He heard a thud, then his name.

"Roland," whispered Lizzy.

He tried to free the line without looking behind him.

"Roland."

Roland turned around to see her standing quietly with the skirt to her dress over her head. Her slip showed. "Lizzy!" he shouted.

"Don't scream. Don't you wanna catch Him?"

Roland rose to free Lizzy from his line. He baited the hook again and threw the line into the water.

"Where's our bench?" asked Lizzy.

"On the other side of those two rocks." Roland pointed beyond two flat-topped rocks beside the pond. "Board fell off. Wave probably hit it."

"Put it back where it's been bein', Roland."

"Hold this." Roland handed Lizzy the pole. He picked the board from the ground and balanced each end on a rock. "Here, Lizzy." He patted the board.

Lizzy held the pole with both hands and twisted her body. Her eyes fixed on Roland. She took hard, slow marching steps; the pole held high, the worm dipped as she carried it over the water. She met Roland and stiffly delivered the pole to his hands.

Both sat down on the bench. They watched the water. Sat erect when it rippled. Eased back when it smoothed.

"Do you think we'll catch Him?" Lizzy asked Roland, in whisper.

"He's probably dead."

Lizzy and Roland sat up quickly at the sound of a motor approaching. They

looked over the back of the bench and spied the tractor pulling a disk and coming straight for them. A little ripple in the water caused Lizzy to turn around. The tip of her tennis shoe was wet.

"You suppose that was Him?" asked Lizzy.

"No, your sneaker got in the water."

Something broke the water a few feet from the edge. A series of circles grew from the disruption. Before the first circle reached Lizzy's foot she whispered, "Roland, that's Him. I know it is. I saw His lips."

"Let's wait. If it's Him He'll get the worm."

"That tractor's gonna run Him off, Roland. That Mr. Baxley's headed straight for us. You gonna have to tell Mr. Baxley to turn that thing off. If you don't we ain't never gonna see Him agin 'cause next time we come He'll be too big. Mr. Baxley better go home. He better just go on home."

"Now Lizzy, we can't just run him off like that. Maybe he won't stay long."

Mr. Baxley was driving up. Roland and Lizzy hurried to meet him and keep him from coming close. Mr. Baxley turned off his tractor. "Mornin'," he called down to Roland and Lizzy.

"Mornin'," Roland met his greeting.

"Mornin'," whispered Lizzy.

"How you good folks this mornin'?"

"Fine, just fine." Lizzy whispered.

"Sounds like you done lost your voice, Miz Lizzy," Mr. Baxley's voice resounded in the quiet of the farm.

"No, not really. It's this hearing aid I got in my pocket. It's stuck. Turned it up last night like I usually do before I go to bed. You know, to be able to hear when anyone breaks in the house. Thing got stuck. Got to be careful. Stick my hands in my pocket real hard and it'll pert near blow my eardrums out." Lizzy thought she heard a splashing sound come from the water's edge. She fought to keep her face from going into contortions.

"Miz Lizzy, you look worried," whispered Mr. Baxley.

"I am worried. I'm worried about you, Mr. Baxley. Last time I saw someone looked as bad as you was at a funeral. They wasn't dead but little did they know they was next in line. The only color you got in your face is in your eyes and they're pale. I'd march myself home if I was you as fast as I could."

Roland watched the line on the pole and shifted his weight between his two feet.

"Well, I haven't been feelin' real good. Had a little heartburn after breakfast."

"Course you did," encouraged Lizzy. "You better go home. Get something to eat. Let Miz Baxley fix you up." Lizzy thought she heard another splash.

"Maybe I will," agreed Mr. Baxley. "I'll do that." He headed toward his tractor.

"Mr. Baxley," Lizzy forced her whisper to reach him. She gently patted her pocket. He turned to her. "I know you're sick, Mr. Baxley, but if you could walk home . . ."

"Yes, yes, Miz Lizzy, I'm sorry. I won't crank the tractor."

"Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Baxley." Lizzy patted her ears.

"Hope you feel better," Roland sent out after him.

Mr. Baxley threw his hand up and started off.

Lizzy and Roland scurried back to the water's edge. "You think it's Him. You

think it is?" asked Lizzy.

Ronald's foot stepped on the end of the pole. The pole bent til the tip of it touched the water.

"It's Him and nothin' else." Roland's voice raised. He straddled the end of the pole wedged under the bench and wrapped both hands around it. Lizzy stood behind him with her arms around his waist, her right cheek flat against his back. They both leaned back. The pole rose in the air, pulled more and more of the line from the water.

Lizzy fell back on the seat of the bench and pulled Roland down on her lap. "I can't see Him," yelled Lizzy. "Get up, Roland, I got to see Him."

Roland stumbled from her lap. He stepped back. Lizzy joined him.

"Look how He glistens and sparkles, Roland. Gives off a light almost too bright for your ryes, don't He?"

"He's real perty, Lizzy. A fine fish."

"Look when He stretches His fins, Roland. That's silk there."

Roland slipped his arm around Lizzy. "The finest I ever witnessed."

"I'm gonna stay at His tail, Roland, you go up to His head. Wait till His gills open then see if you can see inside."

Roland pivoted. He craned his neck.

"Can you see His brain?" Lizzy shouted.

"Yep, big as life," Roland shouted back. He stooped closer.

"Stand back, Roland," shouted Lizzy. "Give Him some air."

Roland stood back. He picked up the container that held the deviled eggs and dipped it into the water. White bowls of yellow stuffing floated out. He carried the tray back to the spot where Lizzy stood. Roland stooped and stretched his arm toward the ground.

"Watch out," Lizzy shouted. "He's flappin' His fins. He'll knock you down."

Roland jumped back. One foot rolled on its side before he caught his balance. "Wheh!" Roland grinned at Lizzie. "Them whiskers'll trip ya."

"Look, Roland. Look at Him movin' His mouth. He's talkin' to us as sure as we're sittin' here. I wish I could read lips." Lizzy leaned closer. She stretched her lips and face toward the fish. "I can't make out what He's sayin'. Look here." Lizzy slipped back onto the bench and pressed her face close to Roland's. "Now you see if you can tell what this means." She sucked the sides of her cheeks in and puckered. Her bottom and top lips opened and closed against one another. Her mouth relaxed. "Can you tell, Roland?"

"Do it agin," he said.

Lizzy sucked her cheeks in harder and pushed eyes open until her nose flared. She parted her contracted lips wider this time to exaggerate the fish's movements. "Could you get it that time?" asked Lizzy.

"I don't know, Lizzy. Could be a foreign tongue."

Ronald and Lizzy sat by the container until the shadow of the bench worked its way around to their feet. Ronald changed the water every hour and Lizzy dangled worms above the tray.

"Well, it's probably time to go," said Lizzy finally.

"I s'pect you're probably right," agreed Roland. "We have to throw Him back, don't we, Mama?"

"Yep," agreed Lizzy opening her umbrella. Roland joined her under the cover on the other side of the handle.

When they arrived at the road they saw the truck. Both sides of the road were smooth. "Well, that was nice of Emmitt," said Ronald.

"It certainly was nice," said Lizzy. "It certainly was."

Roland and Lizzy peered through the oncoming darkness into the field. A few rain drops spattered the windshield of the truck. They spotted Mr. Baxley's tractor headed around the pond.

"I declare, how does a body work so much?" said Lizzy shaking her head between the rain drops. "Through heartburn and all."

"I don't know," said Roland as he cranked the truck. "I just don't know." Roland pushed the gear stick up so the red pointer on the dash sat on "R". He placed his right arm on the back of the seat. His left hand grasped the steering wheel. Roland twisted at the waist so he could look over his arm through the back window. He pressed the accelerator. The truck began to roll backwards.

"Well," said Lizzy, watching the dipping honeysuckle in front of her grow smaller and smaller as the truck rolled on, "turn on your headlights, Roland. We got to see to get home."

— Donna Adams

The Jumping Order

The window felt cold as he leaned his shoulder against it. From the second floor, all he could see of the people on the sidewalk below him was the tops of heads bobbing up and down, back and forth. He draped his flight jacket over his left arm and crossed the other arm over them. He drew a deep breath and looked up from his gaze on the shoppers. If he sharpened his stare, he could see his own reflection in the glass. His slightly wrinkled face, the spectacles, the greying hair. And if he let his eyes focus further away, he could see the street, the cars, the other apartment buildings, and the massive stone archway that marked the entrance to the park, all of which were being enveloped in a downpour of rain and sleet. He wrinkled his brow and cocked his head to one side. He wondered how the weather was at St. Edmund's field.

The man began to fondle one of the ribbons on the front of his coat. He brought his eyes down to look at it. All those colors. And the medals hanging from them. He held one between his fingers. He remembered receiving that one for the mission over Trondheim. He had had to fly at low altitude to save fuel for the long flight. Started to climb when he saw the Norwegian coast. He looked at the one next to it — Schweinfurt, 1943. Right in the heart of Germany. Both he and his co-pilot had gotten one of those.

He looked up again and out the window. The medal rotated back and forth between his thumb and forefinger. Back and forth, around and around. Suddenly the clasp opened, and he stuck himself on the open pin. He winced and clenched his eyes shut.

Why today, he thought. It had been so long since he'd thought of it. He had thought that maybe the memories were finally at rest in some dark corner of his brain. But he had awakened this morning with a start. He couldn't remember having had a dream, or a nightmare, rather, that could have triggered all these old feelings. But something had scared him so badly that he had sat bolt upright in bed with his pajamas clinging to his back and his whole body clenched in pain.

He slowly opened his eyes, and looked out numbly at the park gate. Why today? Why at all, anymore?

"Jake?" Hannah's voice broke the quiet of the apartment. "Jake? Where are you?"

Still leaning on the living room window, he slowly turned his head toward her voice.

"Want to go with me to get the Christmas turkey?" she said, appearing in the doorway. She bent her head down to put the collar of her blouse over her bright red sweater.

He let another moment of quiet encircle the room before he answered softly, "No thanks."

She quickly looked up. "What's wrong? Are you sick? Don't you feel well?" She rushed over to him, mechanically dodging the coffee table and the gifts under the Christmas tree. "Here, let me feel of your forehead to see. . ."

"Hannah, leave me alone. I'm all right." He caught her wrist in mid-air and threw it back down by her side. He stared at her for a moment before turning again to face the window. He took a long breath and readjusted his arms.

He could see Hannah's reflection in the glass, next to his own. She was staring at

him. He watched her eyes search his face for an explanation for his short temper. She was unaware that he was watching her. Suddenly her eyes dropped to his flight jacket. A look of horror came over her face. She opened her mouth to speak but didn't. Instead she brought trembling fingers up to cover her quivering chin and lips.

Jake didn't move. After a few moments he saw Hannah swallow hard. She cleared her throat.

"You sure you won't go with me, Jake?" Her voice was weak. She laid a hand on his arm. "Please?"

He turned to look at her, then patted her hand. He broke away. "No, he said, putting on his jacket. "I think I'll go get some liquor for when the kids come up."

Hannah was quick to answer. "Why don't I get it while I'm out?" She tried to smile. "It'll save you from having to get out in this awful weather. Rain and sleet. Why, Jake, there's no telling what you might catch. Or you might fall. . ."

"Hannah, for God's sake! Will you let me be! Quit treating me like a damn child!" he screamed at her so loud that she jumped. "I want to go, and I want to go alone." He saw her frail, pale face fall, her head drop, and her eyes close. Suddenly he knew that she realized where he was really going. He paused for a minute, then kissed her briefly on the cheek.

She grabbed the sleeve of his coat and clenched a fist around the stiff leather. She brought her head down and let her forehead rest softly on his shoulder. Neither said a word.

Jake looked down at the coarse, grey hair. He lightly brushed it with his lips. Hannah looked up. Jake smiled faintly as he cupped his wife's soft cheek in his palm. Finally she let go of his jacket, and he walked on past her into the kitchen.

The door squeaked a bit as he opened it. "Drive carefully," he threw over his shoulder. He heard Hannah's faint "You, too" as he was closing the door.

Jake's boots sounded loud and heavy on the stairs outside the apartment. And the wind was cold as he opened the door and stepped outside. It was still raining, and he had forgotten an umbrella. He looked down at the raindrops as they hit the already deep puddles. He speculated as to how to keep dry. Age had not been too kind on his figure. And after these twenty-five years, his jacket would not quite reach around him to zip. So he pulled the fur collar up around his neck, shoved his hands into the narrow pockets, and dropped his head into his chest to guard against the rain.

Every now and then he looked up from his slow walk to one of the store windows, or turned around to glare at someone who had bumped his shoulder.

Suddenly a loud noise appeared overhead. Jake knew what it was before even looking up. He had heard that same sound a million times before — from near, from far, from outside, from inside. Of B-17's, B-29's, B-47's, B-51's, B-52's. He stopped and look up, while people whizzed past him. The plane was hidden by the thick clouds. All he could see was the blinking red lights. The glare of the winter sky hurt his eyes, so he looked away and kept walking. The roar became deeper and deeper. It buzzed louder in Jake's ears. He kept walking, faster.

May Day! May Day! She's losing altitude!

His boots made quick thuds on the concrete. He kept walking, bumping people as he went.

Don't worry about me! It's

not going to make it — only
one engine left. Now do as
I say! Do as I say! Do as
I say. . .

Jake ran to the edge of the sidewalk and darted across the street, oblivious to the screeching cars and blowing horns.

His toe caught the edge of the sidewalk on the other side. He fell to his knees. Quickly he picked himself up. In front of him was the entrance to the park. He suddenly stopped and took a deep breath. He gazed blankly at the pink and grey marble. It seemed to beckon to him.

He broke into a run again, following the stone pathway which cut through the dead, brown grass on either side of him. He took deep, short breaths. Soon he began to pant. The air was cold and made his throat hurt. He made his way further into the park until he saw the war memorial, straight ahead, waiting for him. He stopped running. A kind of relief came over him when he saw it. But the monument also stirred up every fear, every anger, every repulsion in side of him. It loomed ahead, the white marble — solid, still, cold. He swallowed, and walked on, never taking his eyes from the monument.

Standing before the massive stone structure, he ran his eyes over all the carvings, the crevasses, the columns, the names. From Abrams . . . to Young. He swallowed again, and tried to dampen his dry, cracked lips. He stared and stared, unaware that his jacket had been blown half off him from running. He looked quickly around him, back up at the monument. Then he turned and sat down on the corner of the wide, cold base.

Jake shivered and closed his eyes the minute he touched it. The rain, harder now, stung his face. He brought his head down to rest on his trembling knees. He clutched them and brought his arms up to cover the sides of his head. He was shaking, and his heart was racing.

This time was just like the last, though it had been so long ago, so long since . . . They were all the same. The nightmares, the terror, the crippling memories. They never ceased, and they never changed. Damn that war, damn that plane, that day. Everything! Damn myself, me, me, me. . .

"It's useless!" I scream loud enough to be heard above the roar of the engines. I point to the gauges, just barely glowing in the dark of the cockpit. "Look — we're losing altitude!"

Mitchell is seated across from me in the co-pilot's chair. We stare at each other for a moment, our eyes wild with fear. Neither of us knows what to say.

I look back to the gauges, hoping that perhaps while my eyes have been away, they have changed.

The same.

I quickly grab the radio. I push the lever down. "May Day! May Day! This is Phoenix to Blackbird! Come in Blackbird!"

Silence.

My hand begins to tremble. I look at Mitchell again, then back to the gauges.

"May Day! May Day!"

No answer.

I look out the window. The wing's on fire; both engines gone! The glare of the red flames hurts my eyes against the black of the night. I look through the cockpit

and out the other window. Mitchell does the same. "Part of the wing blown off!" he yells.

"May Day!" my voice strains.

Silence.

The Messerschmitt has gotten us. Gotten us good. Hit three of our engines. Hydraulic system out. No radio, low on fuel. Losing altitude.

One last attempt. "May Day! This is Phoenix to Blackbird! Come in Blackbird!"

No answer.

"Goddammit, come in!"

Only static.

I look out the window to see if I can spot the rest of my squadron. Not one other Fortress to be seen. We have fallen too far behind. Must have seen the fire and given us up for dead.

The plane is shaking badly. I can hardly keep my hands on the steering column. The fuel light comes on. It is useless.

I look over at Mitchell. He is saying something to me but . . . can't hear him. I finally manage "What . . . to do" by reading his lips.

Only one thing left to do. My hands tighten around the steering device.

"Tell the crew to check their chutes."

Mitchell's face goes white. For a minute I think he is going to faint, so I slap him to make sure he doesn't.

"Do as I say!" I scream.

He stares at me as he swings his legs around the seat, gets up, and walks out.

The lone engine is sputtering now. And the fire — I lean over to see — it's getting worse. Pretty soon we will either be blown to smithereens or dive and crash God knows where. Are we over land? Belgium, maybe? Or the channel? Too dark to see. Foggy.

Mitchell comes back in. "They're ready, captain," he yells from behind my seat.

I turn to look at him and notice his chute . . . Not prepared for jumping. I turn back around. I motion with a quick jerk of the head for him to come closer.

"That meant you, too, Mitchell."

"But I'm going to stay with the plane! And you, sir!"

"Forget about this plane . . . And about me! We're both done for! Now do as I say! That's an order!"

I don't look at his face and he doesn't try to look at mine. I sit in my chair, very still.

He puts a hand on my shoulder, then turns to walk out.

I grab his hand. "The jumping order," I command. I squeeze his cold, wet hand. Mitchell walks out.

I stare straight ahead, but I can see every face, every man in my crew. Ninety-fourth division. Fourth Bombardment Wing. They all flash before my eyes, like the landscape from a merry-go-round.

Second Lieutenant Theodore Mitchell — high school quarterback in '30 — co-pilot. Sergeant Ed Connally — furniture store, champion chess player in Ohio — navigator. Sergeant Wallace Baldwin — Florence, Alabama — "Southern Comfort" — bombardier. Private first class Curtis Rogers — farm boy — Topeka — front machine gunner. PFC Tom Duncan — blue eyes — rear machine gunner. PEC Billy Humphrey — holds liquor like a barrel — turret gunner.

These are my men. My men! Our twenty-fifth mission. So successful! Due for "r

& r." Dropped the bomb right on target. So successful! My men!

I wipe my face and try to stop my chin from quivering. The wind from the open door is making a strong draft behind me. Feels cold as it bounces off the windshield. Makes my eyes water.

The plane is still rocking. Everything else the same. I know I am doomed. I adjust my seat. I will wait for the moment to come when I will feel the impact of the ground, or the rush of water on my body. When I feel my body crumble, crack, and stop.

But suddenly I think I am dreaming. The fog starts to clear. I think I see land! No — just my mind playing tricks on . . . No! It is true! It is real! Yes — it's land! The cliffs — the white cliffs of Dover! She's going to make it! Only thirty miles inland to the base! Land! I see land!

The engine sputters, jumps, and dies. The plane takes a final lunge forward. It coasts through the patchy fog. She floats in on the night air over England, and I, I alone, go with her.

He awoke with a start. He sat up. His back stiffened. He felt numb all over. If it hadn't been for the fierce pounding in his chest, he would have thought he had died.

It had begun to grow dark, and people were hurrying past him. He watched them and felt the breeze on his face as they went by.

Slowly he stood up. He wiped the sweat from his hands on his pants. He started walking back the way he had come.

It wasn't his fault! He had thought that there wasn't even the slightest chance to

He walked very deliberately, step by slow step.

He had been trained to know that sort of thing! It was his responsibility to make a decision! How could he have known . . . How could he have known that he would have made it?

Do as I say!

Do as I say!

Do as I say!

They didn't understand, these people. He looked at their faces as he passed them. Their heads were bent, their coats pulled tightly around them, their arms full of packages. They were avoiding him.

"It wasn't my fault," he mumbled as a tall man with a moustache passed him. Jake turned and watched him walk down the sidewalk. He waited for an answer.

They just didn't understand. He kept walking. His pulse quickened. They would have done the same thing. Wouldn't they! Yes! Yes, they would have! His step quickened.

May Day! . . .

Do as I say! . . .

Jumping order. . .

Jake suddenly stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and put his hands over his ears. His face clenched in fear and pain.

They're ready, captain!

"Southern Comfort."

Do as I say!

Suddenly Jake screamed out loud, "Don't you see?"

People stared at him as they walked by. Nobody stopped to listen.

"Listen to me!" Jake pleaded. "How — could — I have — known?" He was crying now, and his speech was filled with gasps for air.

He turned round and round searching for a face to talk to. He reached out to touch them, to stop them. But they all just stared wildly at him as they jerked away.

"The plane was shot! Three engines gone!"

Jake jumped from person to person. Nobody listened, nobody stopped.

Suddenly he stepped right in front of a man, and grabbed him square by the shoulders.

"I'm telling the truth! It wasn't my fault!"

The man look frightened, then puzzled. He shook his head. He pushed Jake off him and walked away.

Jake followed him.

"It was the plane! The plane! I knew we were done for!" The man kept walking.

Jake grabbed him by the arm and stopped him. Suddenly the man put a fist right in Jake's jaw.

"Leave me alone, you freak!"

Jake watched him walk away. He brought a hand up to his aching cheek. He watched the man's back move farther and farther away from him.

Slowly Jake gathered his jacket collar tightly around him and started for home. It was all over. Again. He stuffed his hands in his pockets as he passed under the archway and out onto the street. He waited until he got the green light before crossing.

The street lights had come on, and they made the wet street glisten as if it had been coated with wax. Once across the street, he noticed that all the stores were dark, and all the "closed" signs had been put in the doorways.

He passed all the stores and finally reached his apartment building. He walked up the cement walkway, through the double doors, and up the stairs to his apartment.

He opened the door. All was quiet? "Hannah? Where are you?"

No answer.

Jake leaned against the wall and pulled his boots off. He laid them beside the door. He stood there for a moment. His legs ached, his backbone stung from fatigue. The linoleum of the kitchen floor was cold on his sock feet. The leather jacket was soaked from the rain, so he pulled it off and put on the sweater that was hanging on the back of the chair.

He draped the jacket over his arm and started for the hall closet. Passing through the living room, he saw that Hannah had put the Christmas tree lights on before she left. As he brought his eyes away from the tree, he saw the window. He stopped. He stared at it for a minute. He walked over to it. He leaned his shoulder against it. It had become colder since this afternoon, and steam was beginning to gather on it from the warmth inside.

The street glimmered below him and the sidewalk was deserted now. He watched the cars moving to the rhythm of the traffic light. He was exhausted. He leaned his head against the glass and closed his eyes. He took a deep, long breath. He wondered how the weather was at St. Edmund's field.

The Graduation

It was morning, and the first rays of the early sun drifted across my pillow. Today, the first Tuesday after Labor Day, was a very special one for me. I hoped that Doris was still sleeping. I wasn't ready for her usual morning chatter.

"Hey, Carol, you up yet? Beat ya to the bathroom!"

She lay sprawled across her bed, her light, brown hair curling crazily in all directions. She was beautiful. That's what my Father said, and he was an expert. He knew everything about beauty because he was an artist who painted "from life" when he was a very young man at the Art Students League.

"That kid has the face of a Botticelli angel," he said to my Mother. And I heard him, and prayed he would say something about me, too. But he never did.

I pulled the sheet over my head, and the faint odor of Clorox sharpened my senses. I was surrounded by the muted light sifting through the material, enclosing me in a magic world of yellow and orange. I blew softly on the sheet, and waited for it to relax again, touching my face ever so lightly as it did. I imagined I was a beautiful, tall, blonde princess anticipating the arrival of my lady-in-waiting.

She came, moments later, in the form of Mother. "O.K., girls, time to get up! Vacation's over! Doris, open youe eyes! Carol, pull that sheet off your face! You'll get French toast if you hurry!"

My sister and I bee-lined for the bathroom. As usual, she won.

After breakfast, we endured the usual "final inspection" and bolted out the door. Doris ran ahead of me, joining up with some of her friends. She was nine, and found the company of her peer group far more exciting than that of an ancient thirteen-year-old sister.

Entering the huge red brick building on Harmon Street, I felt the old "belonging" return. I walked down the long, dimly-lit hallway toward my new homeroom. All the familiar sights and smells and sounds greeted me. I responded with a quickened pace and a faint smile. Summer had come and gone and nothing had changed within these walls. The water fountain stood in its usual place, waiting to spray the eyes, ears, and mouth of its first victim with a grand display of power; the windows on the doors of the classrooms sparkled and gleamed in the morning light; and the slightly acrid but not unpleasant aroma of Lysol, chalk, old books and years of accumulated dust added to my sense of comfort — the comfort of familiarity. For seven years I had walked these halls and studied in these rooms. And now, at last, I was an eighth grader, a senior. Nothing could spoil this day; it was mine — and it was special.

I knew Room 109. For years I had tiptoed to peep into it. I entered the class and was greeted with the customary question — "What did you do on vacation?" Richard Lenz was first. "Hey, Carol, whatcha do?"

He was the class "dope," a head taller than any other boy in eighth grade. All the kids decided he was at least sixteen. He had been in the sixth grade for two years, and everybody treated him like a big, dumb brother.

"Nothing much," I replied. "Just went to the movie on Saturdays and Jones Beach with my family on a couple of Sundays."

"Me, I didn't do nuthin', either. My old man made me work in his butcher store sweepin' up the sawdust. Didn't even gimme a buck at the end of the summer.

Damn creep."

"Aah, now, ain't that too bad," chimed in Rudy Herzberg, the class "smart ass." "Let's take up a collection for poor Dickey-boy. Maybe he can buy a new pair of socks for graduation."

What a bastard he was. I savored the word "bastard." I rolled it around on my tongue, wishing I could shout it out and watch it fly into Rudy's chest like a wing-tipped arrow. It sounded like the perfect way to kill off all the smart-asses and anti-Semites of the world.

Helga Gebhardt, the class beauty, removed a bobby pin from her hair. Soft, golden locks rippled across her lovely face. "I took a train to visit my cousins in Milwaukee. They live on a farm, and my Aunt and Uncle let me drink beer every night. It was great."

Oh, Christ, I thought, too bad she didn't explode. I didn't hate Helga; I envied her. The fine, long, blonde hair and fair skin and blue eyes. The face of that damn Botticelli angel, again. When she grew up she would look like Lana Turner.

Most of the seats were taken now, and chatter filled the room. The boys in the back of the class snickered over a dirty joke that Johnnie Valucci told them. Margaret and Mary McFee, the red-headed twins, pretended shock, rolled their eyes and crossed themselves. We all laughed, and I was about to ask. . .

Then she marched into the room. It was just before the bell rang. She was very big. Not just tall and skinny like Richard. Big like a woman is big, with heavy, rounded breasts straining against her white, starched cotton blouse. She wore a navy blue skirt that reached below her knees, and her legs were covered with thick, cotton stockings. On her feet, she wore brown, laced oxfords. They were heavy and ugly — the kind of shoes the girls wore when they showed pictures on the "Fox-Movietone News" of the Hitler Youth marching in the streets of Berlin. Her large, round face was framed by a coronet of thick, brown hair — braided.

Her eyes surveyed the class briefly, and without a flicker of a smile, she found a seat in the rear of the room.

Mr. O'Brian, our homeroom teacher, walked in as the bell rang. He took the roll. Just before he came to my name, he paused and looked up, smiling.

"I see by my records that we have a new girl in class. Please stand up and introduce yourself and tell us where you are from."

All faces turned toward the back of the room.

She rose quickly. "My name is Marie Schmidt. I was born in Germany." She pronounced the "G" like the sound of "ch" in chocolate.

Born, my foot, I thought. There were other kids in class born in Germany and none of them spoke with an accent so pronounced. I was sure she had just come off the boat. She sat down as Mr. O'Brian said, "Welcome."

Rosh Hashonah arrived a week after school started. I was absent the customary two days. We all went to synagogue and then to Grandma's house for dinner. All our relatives were there. We ate together, exchanged all the current gossip, and promised to keep in touch. We never did, but being with the family was always a treat for me.

On my way to class the following morning, I stopped at the water fountain. I lifted my head, the water still dripping from my mouth. There she was, standing over me. A cruel smile played at the corners of her mouth. I couldn't move. My back was against the wall, the fountain was on my right, and this huge, swollen giant on my left. "You a little Jew-girl, yah?" she said softly.

"What's it to you," I answered, wondering where my courage came from. My lips were twitching. I was scared.

"I show you what it's to me," she said. She kept looking at me, the smile never leaving her face. The heel of her right shoe ground into my foot. She leaned forward ever so slightly, using the full weight of her body to make her point. The pain spread through my flesh, my bones. It stabbed my toes. I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to understand what was happening to me. When I opened them, she was gone. I stood there, choking back the tears of pain and anger before limping on to class. I never said a word to anyone.

That Friday afternoon at one-thirty, Marie quietly rose from her seat. Without a word, she left the room. She never returned that day. No one in class commented on her mysterious departure.

I spent the weekend secretly nursing my tender foot and praying her seat would be empty on Monday morning. My prayers were in vain. Monday morning she was there, a wordless, looming threat. She was turning my special year into a nightmare of fear.

The McFee girls were having their lunch in the school cafeteria, and I joined them. We were good friends. Last Christmas they invited me to attend midnight mass with them, and the memory of that strange, beautiful evening remained with me for months.

"Hey, Carol, ya know why Miss Big-tits leaves school early on Fridays?" It was Mary.

"No," I said. "I don't want to know, either."

She ignored my answer. "Well, her parents pick her up at school and they all drive up to the mountains someplace and stay the whole weekend."

"So?"

"It's a special place, kind of like a camp, and the guy that runs it is called Fritz Kuhn, or something like that, and he's a big shot. My Father said he's the leader of a bunch of nuts. They called themselves the 'German American Bund.'..

The peanut butter stuck in my throat. I knew all about those Nazi bastards. *The Daily News* always showed pictures of them, marching goose-step fashion and carrying swastika banners. I knew, too, that they hated the Jews and wanted them dead. Just like Hitler. Marie Schmidt, Hitler's friend. My enemy. I knew somehow she would find a way to hurt me again.

It happened on a Thursday in the girls' locker room. I was reaching for my gym suit when suddenly, I felt her behind me. As I turned around, she leaned across me, pressing her hands against either side of the locker door. Her feet straddled the cement floor. I was trapped by arms, legs — and fear.

"Get out of my way, please. I have to use the bathroom." I felt the sharp, cold metal of the locker frame cutting into my back.

"Pee on the floor, kike. Toilets are for Aryans, not Jews."

"Please, let me go. I'm late for gym." I was whispering now, terrified by her words, her body and her heavy breathing. She stood there looking down at me. The hate in her eyes filled me with dread. I was shaking, and the sour taste of nausea crept up into my throat. Suddenly, I felt a warm trickle crawling down my leg. I started to sob. I looked down, and saw the small, wet spot on the concrete. She saw it, too. She moved away from me, and the silence of the locker room was broken by her vicious laughter.

We were together in class every day, but I did my best to avoid her. If our eyes

would accidentally meet, she would mouth that word — that terrible word — she used that sickening moment in the locker room. But she never came near me again.

On a Monday morning in late November, her seat was empty. Mr. O'Brian told the class that she would not be graduating with us. Mr. and Mrs. Hans Schmidt and their daughter, Marie, had been deported back to Germany. He said something about illegal aliens. It didn't matter. She was gone, and Monday mornings were so good again that I heard my very shoes hurry to 109.

Christmas came, and I shared that lovely celebration with my Christian friends. Then January, and graduation. The auditorium was filled with parents, friends, and reluctant sisters and brothers. The graduates were seated on stage. The girls wore long, white organdy dresses, the boys dark, blue suits. Even Richard Lenz looked great.

I spotted Mother and Father in the fourth row. Doris was sitting next to Dad. I caught her eye. We winked at each other, and she blew me a kiss. She did look like an angel.

When our Principal, Mr. Dannon, handed out the awards, I received the American Legion medal for excellence in American History. Helga sat next to me. She whispered, "Terrif, kid."

I pressed my knee against hers.

The ceremony closed with "America, the Beautiful." I sang as I never had before.

—Carol Colbe

Albert

After cooking supper, Ada Balm sat at the table, fingering the water beads on her glass of iced tea. Periodically, she sipped the cool liquid, her gaze wandering to the stove where the warm supper waited, to the clock on the wall, then back to the window. She knew the sun was setting, for the buildings across the street seemed to emit a dirty, yellow glow. Thinking about the sun reminded her of how hot she was, and she picked up an old sales paper off the table and began to fan herself.

"My, but it's hot in here," Ada said to her son, Leon, who sat reading at the table.

Leon said nothing.

Ada leaned forward, craning her neck. "Whatever you're reading sure is awful thick. What's that word right there?" she asked, putting her finger on the top of a page.

Leon looked up briefly. His eyes, which reminded Ada of two hard, green peas, met hers and narrowed. His thin lips were set in a hard line. "It's **obscure**," he said, pronouncing each word distinctly, "**Jude the Obscure**."

"Is that the same Jude that's in the Bible?"

"No," Leon sighed, going back to his book.

Ada leaned back in her chair, turning her face toward the window. "You know," she said wistfully, "I wouldn't mind this heat so much if I could see the sun go down. Why, when I was a girl back in Tarboro, I'd sit on the front porch every afternoon and watch the sun set. There was always such purty colors in the sky — orange, pink, and gold. Didn't have none of these ugly buildings standing in the way!" she said emphatically and gulped down the rest of her tea. "Wasn't as hot as here, neither," she added, pushing her short, brown curls from her face. "We always had us a cool breeze blowing in off the river, and if it got **too** hot, I could always go wading in the crick behind our house. Never will forget the time your uncle Bobby tried to teach me to swim and threw me in it," she chuckled. "He had to lift me outa the water, and me just a spittin' and a spewin'."

Leon sighed again and rubbed his eyes. "Well, you're not getting me in any creek," he replied. "and the word's **creek**, c-r-e-e-k. I've told you a hundred times before it's not 'crick.'"

"You got no right sassing me," she scolded, shaking the sales paper at him. "Back where I come from, boys treat their mothers with respect. Now when I was a youngun, if I hadda —" Ada stopped in mid-sentence when she heard the door open.

Albert Balm stepped into the room. "I'm home," he said, hanging his hat on the back of a chair. He put his newspaper on the table. "What's for supper?"

By now Ada was standing. "High time you drug in," she chided. "You get later and later."

"The boss left early. I had to lock up the store," he said in that slow, quiet way he talked.

"He must leave early a lot," she retorted, busying herself at the stove. "We'll be eating in a minute. Leon, put that book away and wash your hands."

"My hands are clean," Leon snarled. "Whatcha think I am? Some hick that rolls in the mud?"

"Do what your mama says, boy," said Albert.

"Yessir." Leon left the room, his head lowered and his book under his arm. Albert sat at the table and began to read the paper.

"I never heard such sass from a fifteen year old," Ada remarked, as she placed dishes on the table. "His behavior gets worse every day."

"It's nothing," Albert muttered.

"Nothing! Course you ain't round him much as I am. Did you see the way he looked at me while ago. Gives me shivers." She paused for a moment, observing Albert's pale, expressionless face as he perused the front page. "Are you listening to me, Albert?" she finally asked.

"Yessir." Leon left the room, his head lowered and his book under his arm.

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"What'd you say, Ada?"

"I said he gives me shivers. You know what I think's wrong with him? I think he's been in the city too long. All he does is sit in here and read, read, read. Why, he'd be a different child if he was raised in the country." She leaned across the table and set a plate before Albert. "I sure do wish we could go back to Tarboro to live. Just a little visit would be nice. Wouldn't you like that, Albert?"

"Tarboro?" he asked, looking up at her. Her fat face was flushed, like that of a child who had played hard in the sun and had to be called in. Her eyes were dark and glassy like deep water. He looked closer and saw his reflection there. "That's far away, Ada," he explained. "I don't have money for a trip like that, and I can't take that much time from work."

"You never have enough time," she whimpered. "All we ever do is sit in this hole, just sit and wait for God knows what."

The water trickled down. Albert continued to look at his reflection.

"Mark my words, Albert Balm. I'm tired!" she sobbed. "This just ain't no way for a body to live. I gotta get away, just for a little while. It don't have to be Tarboro. Just out in the country someplace where there's trees and sunshine, or m-maybe a little crick. Let's go tomorrow, Albert," she begged. "And don't tell me you can't take me, 'cause I know you don't have to work on Sundays."

"All right," he said reluctantly. "Tomorrow. Somewhere close by. We'll come home before night."

The sobs subsided, and she wiped her face with her hands.

"We'll have us a grand time. You'll see," she laughed and grabbed his shoulders, putting her damp cheek to his face. She then sat in the chair by Albert and grinned at him as she lifted the dishtowel off the platter of hot biscuits.

"Come to supper, Leon," she sang out. "Let's eat before it gets cold."

It was dark the next morning when Albert walked out of the apartment building and onto the sidewalk. He was tired, for he'd lain awake several hours, thinking about how he hated leaving the city. He felt safe among the buildings; they

watched over him. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked about. A nearby street light bathed the stoop in an eerie warmth. He remembered the night before, the feel of Ada's face against his. Slowly, he raised a hand to his face, and his fingers trembled slightly as they touched his cheek. Good, he thought, it's not sweaty. There was no wind. Nothing moved. The early morning silence wrapped about him like an icy blanket. He leaned his head back and relished the soothing coolness.

Several minutes passed before Ada emerged from the building, wearing a yellow and orange flowered dress that made her look larger than she was. With one hand, she held a large sack. With the other, she prodded Leon.

"Come on, now," she ordered. "I don't aim to put up with your foolishness."
"Quit poking me!" he demanded, shaking his fist at her. "I told you before I don't wanna look at any ol' sun and creek."

"Leon Balm, don't wave your fist at me, and quit blaring your eyes."

"Mind your mama and get in the truck," came Albert's voice from the dark.

"But I don't wanna see any ol' —"

"Hush, boy. Get in the truck," he repeated.

Leon climbed into the truck parked by the curb. Ada climbed in beside him and put her parcel on the floorboard.

"I got enough food in here to feed an army and then some," she groaned. She patted her curls in place, then shut the door. "You want me to put that Jude thing of yours by my sack?" she asked.

"No," he answered, gritting his teeth. "I'll hold it."

"But Leon, honey, it ain't even light yet, and you can't read in the dark." She reached for the book.

"Keep your paws off," he snapped. "I told you I'd hold it."

"Ada drew back. "I can see I gotta teach you some manners, or me and you's gonna tie up for sure." She rolled down the window and poked out her head. "Come on, Albert. Quit your gawking. We don't have time to waste. What are you looking for anyways? I sure don't see nothing."

"Nothing," he echoed and headed for the truck.

They had been on the road an hour when the city was behind them. Occasionally, Ada reminded Albert that he wasn't to stop until she said to, for she was going to choose the place. The ride had been relatively silent until a bit or brilliant orange edged over the horizon. Then Ada cried out, "I see it! I see it! Look everybody. I bet you ain't ever seen anything so purty. Get a load of those colors. I wish I could pick that sun right outa the sky and put it in my pocket." Once, she bounced on Leon's hand, and he cried out as in severe pain, "Whatcha trying to do? Break all my fingers?"

Albert lowered the visor over the top of the windshield. The sun's glare was bright, and he had to squint in order to see the road.

Ada nudged Leon with her elbow. "Take a whiff of this good country air," she said and stuck her head out the window. "It smells a hundred times better than that city soot. Come on, Leon. Take a deep breath."

"Do I have to, Papa? Just because she says to?" he whined.

"Go ahead, son," Albert told him.

Leon inhaled deeply and made a face. "Smells like something died," he mumbled.

"That's cows you smell," Ada laughed, pointing to guernseys grazing in a

pasture. "I can't think when I've seen a lovelier sight."

"They're almost as purty as the colors in the sky and smell just as sweet as a cool river breeze," Leon chortled.

"Go ahead. Make fun if you want to," Ada said.

Leon snickered.

"But one of these days," she continued, "when your poor, old mama is dead and buried, you're gonna wish you was a little bit nicer."

"I see it! I see it!" Ada bellowed. "This is it, Albert. Get ready to turn."

Albert squinted. A few hundred yards ahead was a rickety wooden bridge by a dirt road that disappeared into a thicket.

"Are you sure this is it, Ada? Is this where you want to go?"

"Be quiet and stop asking fool questions. I told you I'd pick the place. Now turn!"

He turned, and the truck quivered as rocks and grit crunched beneath the tires. Leon's head bobbed as he read. The road curved into the woods for about a mile, then opened into a clearing by a pool of black water that might have once been a creek. Albert parked the truck by a tall pine, and sunlight filtered through the needles, forming thin, spiky shapes on the hood.

"Lord mercy," Ada cried. She pushed the door open and hopped to the ground. "Just take a good look at the crick!" she exclaimed. "It's enough to take my breath away. Come on, Albert, Leon. Y'all can't see nothing sitting in the truck."

"I suppose we better go with your mama," Albert told Leon, who looked at him with brooding eyes.

"Don't forget that sack, neither," she called.

Leon got out of the truck and took his book. Albert followed with the sack, which reeked of warm cheese and had a big greasy stain on one side.

Ada pointed to weeds and trees. "Look at that there oak," she said, grabbing Leon by the arm and pulling him to the tree. "This is where we're gonna eat lunch, right here in the shade of this lovely old tree."

"I think it's the ugliest thing I ever laid eyes on," Leon scowled, pulling away. "I told you before. I don't wanna see any trees, and if I did wanna see 'em, I'd look 'em up in an encyclopedia."

Albert put the sack down under the oak and leaned against the tree.

"And I say reading ain't nothing. Ain't nothing at all," Ada smirked.

Leon had no time to back away before she lunged and tore the book from his hand.

"There ain't but one place this piece of trash belongs," she thundered, shaking the book at him. She stalked toward the water's edge.

Leon balled his fists and quivered like the old truck. Small clods of dirt flew into the air as he sped toward her. Then he was upon her. His fists landed in the center of her back, and she gasped for breath.

"I told you to keep your paws off. Let go!" he yelled, grabbing the book.

Albert watched from the shade of the oak. A mosquito buzzed near his face. He swatted at it absently and missed.

Ada's face was red and sweaty as she swallowed great gulps of air. Her strength returned, and she yanked the book away, causing Leon to fall backward. "Let that be a lesson to you, 'cause you sure had it coming," she shouted. She held her shoulders back and planted each foot solidly before her.

The mosquito lighted on Albert's face. Ada must have heard Leon's bestial noises behind her but didn't stop to look. She ran toward the water. The dirt was slick and caked to the bottoms of her shoes. She threw her arms in the air as if to toss the book when Leon threw himself against her. His bony hands clutched at the book.

"Let go, Leon. Let go," she screamed.

"Got it," Albert muttered, slapping his cheek. He thumped the dead insect into the air.

Ada's feet flew from beneath her, and she toppled into the water. Leon fell in on top of her, and the book plummeted into the mire.

Albert watched his wife and son sink and resurface.

Ada's wet curls covered her eyes, and her dress ballooned about her. She flailed her arms in the air and sputtered, "Al-Albert." Then her mouth filled with water.

Leon thrashed wildly, squealing like a dying pig. "Papa, hel—" he choked, sinking again.

A warm, wet breeze blew through the clearing. Albert's hand went to his cheek. He fingered the bite.

The sun crept over the tops of trees, and flecks of light shimmered on the dark water rippling in widening circles. Steam rose from the creek, and beads of sweat formed on Albert's brow. He stared at the ripples, mesmerized by the slight waverings that seemed to grow to giant waves, swelling over the bank. Moaning quietly, he fell against the tree and slid slowly to the ground, where he huddled, waiting for the surge of black water.

—Gloria Raley

Problems that Arise Because I Don't Sleep as Late as He Does

I woke up hours before him. I always wake up hours before him. But I never get out of bed. I think it's principle that keeps me in bed. We say: "Oh, good. We can sleep late tomorrow." And I'm wide awake at eight. I do get into the idea of staying in bed and waking up slowly and lazily: we should open our eyes simultaneously, half smile, roll closer and hug, drift off again, wake up a little and hug and progress from there. But I wake up at eight and he keeps on sleeping.

So there I was, wide awake at eight but I wouldn't get up. I watched him for a while, and then started touching him softly with my toes, and then harder with the vague notion of seeing what it would take to wake him up. I got bored with this and rolled over a lot and drifted off a bit and dreamed a bit about something like unfinished work I had to do. I woke up again. The bed was unbearably hot, so I kicked the blankets off of myself. And then I kicked the blankets off of him to see if he would wake up. He didn't. He just shivered and curled up tighter and looked kind of pitiful, like an embryo. I felt sorry for what I had done and put the covers back on him. Then I drifted off into another dry, uncomfortable dream. My body was getting stiff from being in bed so long, and I was already developing a headache. He didn't wake up until eleven, and he half smiled at me, and rolled closer to me, and reached out to hug me, but I was already irritable and his body was so hot from being under the blankets that I thought I would be stifled. I said, "Let's get out of bed." He gave me a disgusted look and rolled away.

I got mad, but didn't show it. I got up and started putting on my clothes and pulling out my car keys. He said, "Don't you even want breakfast?" I said no, that I would fix something at my house, good-bye. But he held me back for a moment with, "Wait a sec. The game's today."

LSU was playing us at home, and we had been planning to go see it. He said that he would get there at twelve even though the game didn't start until two. He would do this in order to save places for us on the floor. Floor passes are handed out to the first hundred or so people to get there, so I was to come at 12:30 or 12:45 so that I would have a floor pass too. It was 11:30 before I finally left.

"Good-bye," he said, "I enjoyed it."

I said, "Yes."

By the time I had finished making breakfast for myself, showering and changing, it was 12:45. And I did not feel like rushing. If I remembered something, I did something about it, even though I was running late. I remembered that I hadn't watered the plants in three days. So I watered the plants and tuned in some classical music for them. I got out to the car and remembered that I had pom-poms in my room that I could bring to the game, so I went back for them. While I was in the house I remembered how much popcorn cost at the coliseum, and how stale it usually was, so I popped two batches of popcorn and poured it into a grocery bag. Then I left.

I was not worried. I would get there about 1:00, I thought, still an hour early and not many people would be there yet. I got there at 1:15 and it was crowded. He met me no later than thirty seconds after I got in the door. He said, "There aren't any more floor passes. I've got a place saved for you down on the floor with me, but you can't get a floor pass. You're late." I said that I knew that I was late. But I

had popped popcorn. Then I realized that I had left the popcorn in my car.

He said, "Have you seen how crowded it is in there?" I thought of mentioning that I'd only been inside the door for half a minute and had hardly seen anything but his face, but instead I said, "No."

He said, "Who else came with you?" And this was really a stupid question because no one else came with me, we had made no plans for anyone else to come with me, and at no time had we ever mentioned the possibility of someone else coming with me to the game. "No one else came with me," I said.

He said, "Well let me go get my stuff off the floor." I asked why, and he said because I couldn't sit alone. I said that there were still a few things that I could do by myself, and that sitting on my ass watching a basketball game was one of them. I started up the ramp away from him. He said okay very skeptically, and I didn't turn around because my eyes were moist with anger, and he might not understand that it was anger. He hollered after me, "Wait a sec. Remember we're meeting at Joe's tonight." I turned around because I had to do something to indicate that I heard him. I walked back to him with my head ducked a little and handed him one of my pom-poms. Then I left him.

It was very crowded inside the coliseum. I would have to go to the upper level, I thought. Then I looked over to the other side of the coliseum, which was LSU's side, and saw that there were a lot of good empty seats over there. I started over there.

I had walked maybe two steps and could go no further because there was a group of sweated and plaided sorority girls and fraternity boys standing in the aisle gabbing. I said, "Excuse me, excuse me," but they were talking loudly and earnestly about something stupid, and the boy directly in front of me took a half step backwards and almost crushed me. He had one hand in his pocket and the other hand held a casual beer, as if the aisle was the natural place for a social. I raised my voice and said, "Excuse me," and this time a couple of the boys heard and made room for me so that I got two steps further when I was faced with this sorority girl who hadn't heard me say, "Excuse me," and hadn't noticed the boys making room for me and subsequently was standing right in my way with her mouth open and issuing, "What a scream!" This time I led with my shoulder, "Excuse me!" and pushed on through, knocking her off balance.

I decided the basketball game wasn't worth the trouble. I walked down the next ramp and out the first exit. I felt like in the movies when the crook loses the cop in a crowd. I felt smarter. I knew that I might look pitiful, walking away from the coliseum with my pom-pom while everyone else was walking towards it. I knew that if I told Robby that I had left the game that he would think it was because I didn't want to sit alone and he would think that I hadn't meant it at all when I said that there were still a few things I could do by myself. So I decided that I would go home and tune in the game on the radio so that I could act like I had seen the whole thing when I met him at Joe's. I got into my car while someone waited for my parking space. I was glad to be alone in my car. I was surprised that he hadn't insisted on sitting with me.

I came to a red light. There was a woman at the intersection. She had just come out of the hotel on the corner and she was wearing an overcoat. She was about thirty, tall. Her hair was dirty blonde and she had not combed it. Her face arrested me. It was set grimly, her mouth, her cheeks, the wrinkle on her brow. But her

eyes were openly desperate. Whatever her mission in this town, it was not happy. Maybe she would face her grim purpose upon crossing the intersection. When the wind blew, she tightened her coat. The light changed and I left her. She had not had an opportunity to cross the intersection.

I had not gone two blocks when I saw a little boy running. He had a red knapsack that bounced on his back while he ran. I passed him quickly, but once past him I slowed down and watched him for three blocks in my rearview mirror. He did not stop running. I wondered why he was running? Would he be punished if he was late for whatever he was running to? I thought about stopping and offering him a ride. Most likely his parents had told him not to accept rides from strangers, but surely he wouldn't see me as a stranger. I was taller than he, but surely he would see that I was just a girl, someone his parents might have in to sit with him. I tried to think how I could phrase my offer, how I could hold my face so he would like me. "What a frantic hurry you're in. I'd like to give you a ride, and if you let me I'll bet we can get there in time."

But he would keep on running right past me if I tried to pull up alongside him. What I needed to do was pull across the sidewalk ahead of him so that he couldn't get past me. If I timed it close enough and opened the passenger's door right away his momentum would carry him right into the front seat and I could shut the door and pull off to explain.

What was I thinking? I was trying to trap this little boy. I would not be helping him. I would be a menace. And I could never let him out after such behavior. He would be crying and his parents would call the police and I would be arrested. I drove home.

The phone was ringing when I walked in, but I caught myself and didn't answer it. I thought it might be him calling from the game, or if not him then someone he knew that would mention to him that they had talked to me while I should've been at the game. I went downstairs, tuned in the game and began writing a letter to the boy I really love who is in the Navy. I wrote him how miserable I was, how I couldn't stand to be around people anymore, how the only way I knew that I was still capable of a nice sentiment towards another human being was that I loved him and missed him. The postman came while I was writing the letter, but I did not go out to check the box. I was following through most thoroughly. I was still at the game for all the world was concerned. I wrote about how I had left the game and how miserable I was, and gradually I began to feel better. The light in my room was beautiful, dammit. I wrote, "I can't sustain depression any better than I can sustain joy, dammit. Something always interferes. Sooner or later the earth inserts a couple of fingers into your brain. Like a meddling neurosurgeon. An interesting face, a five dollar bill in the grass, a slant of sunlight that comes gold and headlong into your eyes so that you can't see over the next hill, a bad wreck — something so that you can't turn in anymore. You're forced to look up from yourself and confess that of the two of you, the planet is substantially the bigger. Confess even that it is basically beautiful."

I went on to apologize for getting so philosophical and added that life also sucked because of the Navy, etc.

When I got to Joe's Bar and Grill there was no sign of him. Dee and K.A. and Jim Bob weren't there yet either. I got one glass of draft. I ordered it in a distracted way, turning my head this way and that to see if I could spot anyone, not to

indicate to the bartender that I was supposed to meet someone, but where were they? I would probably order a whole pitcher when they arrived. In fact, they might be in the next room — and I walked over to check it out while the bartender poured my beer. They were not in the other room.

I took my glass of beer and sat at a small round table. I looked about the room in curiosity. Joe's was not packed, but there was a fair sized crowd. I knew no one, although one blond haired guy looked familiar. I could not place him.

I settled in a chair facing the door. I would enjoy drinking this one beer by myself. When the beer was gone and I had a second, I decided that I didn't want anyone I knew to come to the door. Everytime a shadow approached the door from the outside I held my breath. Everytime it was a couple of strangers, a boy and a girl. Once a couple came near my table and I heard the boy say, "Let's sit here, okay? By the fire." He pulled out a chair for her at the table next to mine. He touched her shoulder and bent down to her ear and then left her — to get their drinks, I presumed. All of these movements seemed exquisite and tender to me. The girl's shirt was soft and tied with a big bow. She looked very pretty sitting at the table without a glass or a partner.

He came back with their drinks and they began to talk about the game. I no longer paid attention to them. I knew that we had won after double overtime. I began to get crazy ideas. I thought that I would take my birth control pills out of my purse and swallow one right there in front of everyone. I would hold the pill container up to catch what little light there was in the room so I could make sure and take the right day — Saturday. Then I'd swallow it down with two gulps of beer in front of everyone.

Then I got a wonderful idea. I went to the bar and ordered two pitchers of beer and seven mugs and pretzels. It came to seven dollars. I brought the beer and pretzels and glasses to the table in two loads. Then I went about the room collecting chairs. "Excuse me. Are you using this chair?" Sometimes someone would have to move their coat or purse off the chair for me. They always seemed startled to find me at their table, smiling, polite. I thought that there was nothing startling about someone asking for extra chairs. Large parties were known to meet at bars; that was not unusual. One guy thought I was the waitress and ordered. I nodded my head like I had caught the order — and I had, bourbon and coke — and I took a chair from their table. All around the room I went gathering chairs, and into the next room too; I got ten chairs and arranged them around my table. I poured myself a glass of beer from one of the pitchers. I was not in a hurry.

—Robin Wagner

Participants

Nathalie F. Anderson, instructor of English at Emory University, has served as a Writers' Festival panelist for six years. As an undergraduate at Agnes Scott she was poetry editor of *Aurora*, 1967-70, and winner of the Janef Newman Preston Prize for Poetry, 1968, 1969, 1970, and the Robert Frost Award for Writing, 1970. *My Hand My Only Map* (1978), a collection of poems, is her first book.

Josephine Jacobsen, Honorary Consultant in American Letters, Library of Congress, is the author of five books of poetry — from *For the Unlost* (1946) to *The Shade Seller* (1974). Her latest book is *A Walk with Raschid and Other Stories* (1978). Her poetry is widely anthologized. Among collections containing her fiction are *Best American Short Stories* (1966), *O. Henry Prize Stories* (1967, 1971, 1973, 1976), and *Fifty Years of the American Short Story* (1970).

Howard Nemerov, Pulitzer Prize poet, is also a novelist, story writer, essayist, and critic. Among his books of poetry are *Gnomes and Occasions* (1973), *The Western Approaches*, *Poems 1973-1975*, and his highly acclaimed *Collected Poems* (1977). Mr. Nemerov has been Poet in Residence at Hollins College. He has taught at Hamilton College, Bennington College, University of Minnesota, and Brandeis University. He is currently Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor of English at Washington University.