

**Wednesday, April 20, 1983**

11:15 a.m.

Reading  
Josephine Jacobsen  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts

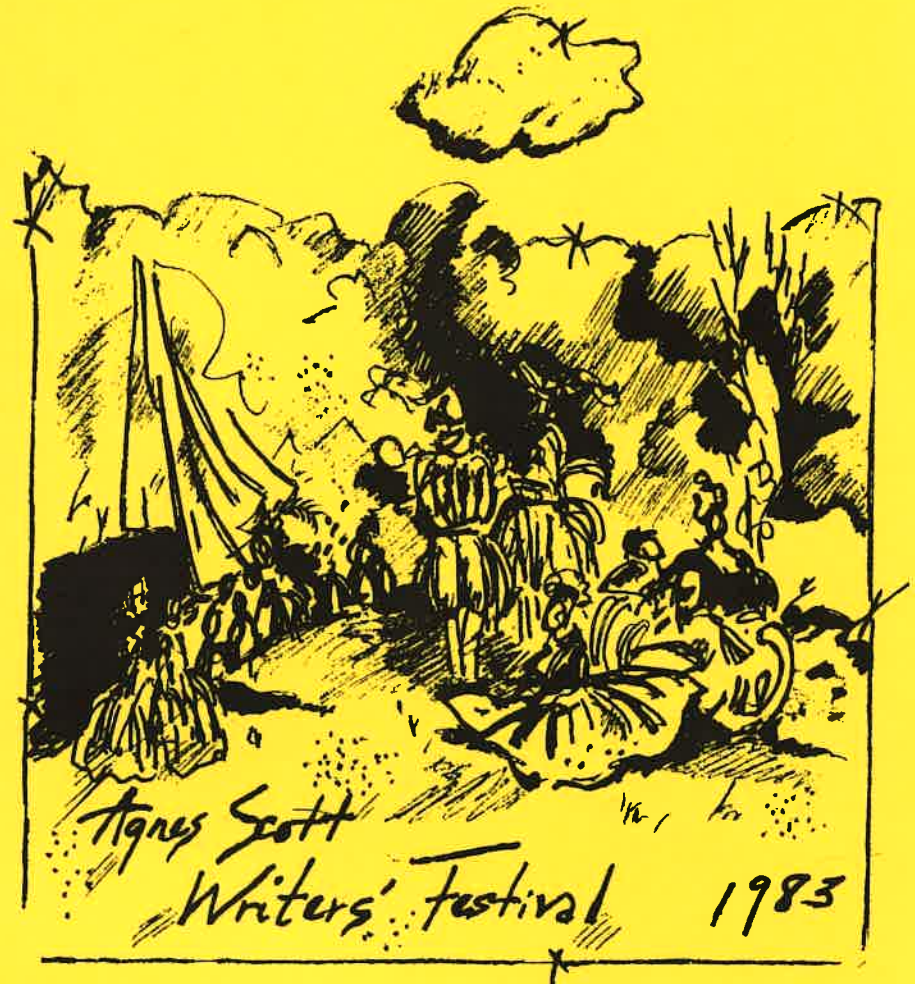
2:30-5:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion of Student Work  
Josephine Jacobsen  
Donald Justice  
Gretchen Schulz, Moderator  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts

8:15 p.m.

Presentation of Prizes  
Reading  
Donald Justice  
Winter Theatre  
Dana Fine Arts

The Festival Committee wishes to thank Dr. Eleanor Hutchens  
for her support.



## PARTICIPANTS

Josephine Jacobsen has served as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (1971-73) and now serves on the Literature Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. She is the author of six books of poetry, from *For the Unlost* (1946) to *The Chinese Insomniacs* (1982). Her latest book of fiction, *A Walk with Raschid and Other Stories*, was selected by the American Library Association for its list of Notable Books (1978). In 1982, she was awarded the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Prize.

Donald Justice, Professor of English at the University of Iowa, received the Pulitzer Prize for his *Selected Poems* (1981). Among the other awards for his poetry are the Lamont Poetry Selection Award (1959), the Inez Boulton Prize (1960), and the Harriet Monroe Grant (1954). Other major collections of his poems are *The Summer Anniversaries* (1960), *Night Light* (1967), and *Departures* (1973). He has taught at Princeton, the University of Virginia, and the University of California (Irvine).

Gretchen Schulz is Assistant Professor of Humanities at Oxford College of Emory University, where she heads the freshman writing program and sponsors the student newspaper and INK, Oxford's writing club. She has long been a supporter of the Agnes Scott Writers' Festival.

**writers' festival**  
**1983**

Spring, 1983

Editor  
Bo Ball

Cover  
Carol McCranie

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Send all correspondence to *Festival*, English Department, Box 975, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia 30030.

**A Home Somewhere in Miami**

You used to give us grandchildren hard candies  
 When we waved goodbye  
 A generation of cellophane between your gift  
 And that sweetness that seems to last forever  
 But never does  
 Ten years later, you fall into your second childhood  
 Full circle, as our circle has started to turn

A breath of urine infests knowing lungs  
 Heavy with age. Paint flakes dust covered  
 Walls and feet shuffle without power to lift  
 Men on wheels squeak by nurses  
 Playing cards speaking of riots in the street

Our sculpted legs stride past varicose veins  
 And stop  
 Entering a room flooded grey with you  
 Cornering its dimension, repetitively polishing  
 The wooden desk on the lap that used to bounce me  
 Expressionless years line your eyes which look  
 But no longer see

We walk slower, closer and more silent than ever before  
 Moving in an unending circle, counterclockwise  
 Moving for now we must be leaving  
 Putting you back in your crib of darkness  
 With a hard candy we brought for you  
 And we waved goodbye.

—David Bernstein

**The Last Patch of Sun**

The house darkens early in this season with no lamps on.  
 When I go into the yard, the West window is amber.  
 In its sleepwalk, the Earth has turned to another season.  
 The dog knows it, but she doesn't believe;  
 Flopped in the grass, her eyes are closed and her nose  
 Bobs as new scents come in with the oldest season.

Cold suddenly, the planet shifts, shrinking light  
 In a chilled room. And, it turns like a child holding a compass,  
 Who shuffles in drunken elliptical rotations, dreamily watching  
 The red end persistently point North, as an ice cube  
 In a hand-turned glass would stay its place.

And the weather vane is true, shaking a thin finger North.  
 An old breath comes to the dog as she moves close. The pecan  
 Trees have given up their leaves and lift their shriveled  
 Limbs to the cutting wind. Our backs to it: we huddle now  
 In the last patch of sun and the wind strengthens to lift  
 The hair on the dog's neck as she curls around my feet:

We are as if savages,  
 Awaiting the night's length.  
 In my old mind, there are  
 Ember lit beards and flame splashed hides.

—Kevin T. Cantwell

**The Tryst**

They met in the library  
third desk back, against  
the south wall.

Head tipped forward, eyes  
on *Moral Relativism Defended*,  
he half listened for the clack of her heels  
on dry tile. Shoes shed, she slipped  
past three stacks and slid her thin arms  
over his shoulders, surrounding him like  
the scent of must pressed between old pages.  
They conspired, hot fingers  
touching, in whispers too loud  
for a place close with strangers.  
They smiled, knowing the new shelver  
was not the hired eye (pictured as a man  
in ill-fitting suit, carrying a telephoto lens).  
They dreamt, quietly,  
and waited.

Ten years later  
in rooms all their own  
they still whisper.

— Angelin M. Coker

**The Other Darkness**

is hidden  
under leaves, stones, and dirt  
dark as death. But down deep:  
magic dark smoking with dead coming alive:  
the pretty guts of under the earth skin  
implode in joy, gloat in terrible beauty:  
in an other dark only worms and onions  
understand. Vegetation blunt and blackish-  
green is sunk each summer, deeper down:  
lead-gray rain and old rhythms of rot:  
musky loam is an animal  
infested with animals: stodgy beetles  
bricking in dens of peat, ants glutting  
their horny heads on dirt chocked with good,  
mad microscopic imps who powwow in mud,  
newts and slugs chummy hunters, blind bugs.

The other darkness is churlish and ugly,  
it is what roots unravel into, where flesh tumbles  
down, where ghoulish moss and fungus rules, how ants  
like black rice make strange love buck naked.

— David Bruce Denholtz

## Athens, Ga., 1973

I always remember the Indian summers  
 Along with the tar-black roads  
 And the pines in the project.  
 Somehow I always remember children playing,  
 The backwoods, the trash, the mosquitos,  
 The Kool-aid, the watermelon, mothers,  
 And dinner being called early  
 In the never-ending afternoon.  
 I remember the friends from down the street,  
 The boy across the fence,  
 My best friends' brothers,  
 And everyone's German shepherds.  
 I remember the red clay dirt,  
 The mud-pies and grass-pies baked in the sun,  
 The wading pool, the baby dolls,  
 The bed in the garage.  
 I remember crows, and bikes, and teenage boys,  
 Billy Preston, Three Dog Night, and  
 The windowsill transistor radio.  
 I remember sneaking away with my brother  
 To dinner at a friend's.  
 I lied to my mother; then it rained.  
 I remember the heat waves in the street,  
 The sun that never set,  
 And the pain that never was  
 In that young Georgia summer.  
 I remember the way the crickets sang  
 As I lay in bed  
 And the dusk finally came.

—Layli Dumbleton

## Dusk

Like beans on the back porch,  
 my hands crack  
 over old bricks of Poplar Street,  
 grasping at the edges of summerworn yards,  
 fingering old ladies' flowers,  
 running dark and deep  
 into the hedges bordering thought.

*It's just time, time for it.*

Leaving half the pan undone,  
 hands stop, past blooming.  
 Dusk creeping across the yard  
 touches me on the palm;  
 I sit flat on the floor  
 like Aunt V at sixty-five,  
 and you're telling me it's time.

*It won't heal, it's past healing.*

Hand:  
 reaches up, giving Great Granny's ring;  
 reaching over, grasping at dusk;  
 beans in the pan, as still and patient  
 as the old nurse in the corner of my eye.  
 There's nothing past healing but spirit.

*You always said you'd wear out  
 before you'd rust out.*

Picking up pan,  
 hands move the task inside  
 across old linoleum tile  
 child scarred and worn  
 to pull corded kitchen bulb;  
 blink back shadows, nurses:  
 it's not time for grasping at rings.

*We're going to try this one one time.*

—Ginny Herren

**Jack**

Dad got his hunting knife,  
 which we were not to touch,  
 and removed the top of the pumpkin.  
 Then spoonful by spoonful Martha and I  
 took out the slimy, lumpy stuffing.  
 We piled it on top of grocery store ads  
 and funny papers,  
 culling the seeds from the insides  
 for Mom to roast.  
 Dad carved the triangular eyes,  
 nose and jagged smile  
 that we had designed.  
 He cut a niche for the candle.  
 At sunset we carried our lantern  
 out to the geranium urn  
 on the front porch.  
 Dad lit the candle.  
 We grinned at the transformation  
 and named our pumpkin Jack.  
 Then we put on our costumes  
 and left to haunt the neighborhood.

— Laurie K. McBrayer

**Daddy Long-Legs**

My father would carry me  
 up the steps to sleep—  
 although he didn't know

I was still half-awake.

Or sometimes while in bed  
 with the door open  
 he would creep in and check on me

and disappear between the hinges  
 like an anxious spider.

Spiders always frightened me  
 and I would kill  
 daddy long-legs

thinking that they were spiders.

I always thought my father was tall  
 and now when I walk  
 through cobwebs  
 stretched in the night  
 I am caught in the fact

that like a spider crushed

my father does not seem  
 as tall anymore.

— Ronald Mancini



**The Three Candles (a painting by Chagall)**

Our heads are even with the trees  
 and our feet are in a pool of air.  
 We are not rolling through the sky  
 like the fiddler or the babies with wings;  
 we simply float in a corner  
 above fences, houses, a kneeling donkey,  
 women that clap and dance on the grass,  
 and a flute player that sways on a ladder.  
 I am in my white dress.  
 You stroke my hair as you do at night,  
 your boy's cheek against mine.  
 We could be underwater  
 except that the trees are on fire with blooms  
 and our candles burn,  
 unfolding three clean leaves of heat,  
 while the town sleeps  
 and the women turn, keeping the beat.

—Robyn Perry

**The Lawrence Tree: Figure-Ground**

Nights in Taos  
 O'Keeffe lay on a bench  
 in the yard of the little house  
 where Lawrence lived  
 before he went to Italy.

Nights she studied the tree  
 her eyes scaling the umber trunk  
 up up up beyond the knots  
 to a mimicry of roots  
 the branches  
 whose stolid counterparts beneath  
 the earth we cannot see  
 but know are there.

Nights the foliage  
 seen from under  
 swirled like an inky cloud  
 around the tree  
 and beyond a blue sky with stars,  
 white stars.  
 Who has seen white stars  
 on a blue sky at night?  
 Yet it is night,  
 a night particularly fine.

Nights did she ever blink  
 and see other than what she saw?  
 Did she ever see  
 the black throat of the universe  
 opening over the heavens  
 engulfing blue and all the stars?  
 Did she ever see a tongue of fire?

This is a trick of the eye.  
*It was particularly fine  
 at night with the stars  
 above the tree.*  
 O'Keeffe says so.

—Anne Richey

**Brueghel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus— after W. H. Auden**

Each assesses his day: the fisherman  
 By the jumping weight of his bag,  
 The plowman by the number of completed  
 Rows, the shepherd by his flock's safety.  
 Icarus and the sun slip into the water.  
 The shepherd hears neither the plowman's  
 Progress nor Icarus' peril. Seeing only his  
 Furrowed work, the plowman does not hail the  
 Gusting galleon. Why wonder at a winged boy  
 In free-fall? Brueghel was right:  
 One rarely values another's suffering as he  
 Does his own. If Icarus had fallen  
 In front of the plow, had wings frightened  
 The sheep, or tangled the fishing lines,  
 The whole community would have been disturbed.

—Melinda V. Spratt

**The Farmer's Wife Drunk In the Fields**

My aunt stood in the fields  
 As the breeze bent the broomstraw  
 Around her knees.  
 She folded her arms under her bosom  
 Taking a real stance.  
 When my uncle came for her at dusk  
 To lead her home,  
 She slapped his cheek,  
 Her first movement of the afternoon.  
 His face was as purple as the sunset sky  
 And my aunt fell down in the broomstraw  
 Laughing,  
 The bill of her Big M SEED cap bobbing  
 Above the straw.  
 "I ain't going no damn where," she said.  
 And my uncle reached for a smoke,  
 Stood there patting all his pockets  
 Looking for a match.  
 Then he walked back to his truck,  
 Found some matches on the dash  
 And lit his smoke before he drove home.

—Mark E. Swanson

### The Pirate I Found on my Porch

It's true that I'm Crowder Chemical's hotshot, as good as anyone in the business, and I wouldn't be good if I didn't think so. But I'll tell you right off that I've never been able to sell to women, and I can't do much with a man who thinks like a woman, either. My wife, Karen, had Cocoa Jo figured out long before I did—maybe right from the beginning. Cocoa Jo, a.k.a. Jochen Cacao Van Krooz, comes from an isolated island, where their genes probably get all scrambled up, and that may have been what threw me off the track. But the main thing is, that Cocoa Jo gets around an awful lot, and I'd have been better off if I'd realized that when I met him.

At Crowder Chemical, we sell weapons. In this industry the only significant purchasers are national governments, so the contracts are huge. One sale can boom or bankrupt an entire company. There are few salesmen in the industry, but the ones who last are all greyhounds. At forty-four I'd led the pack for twelve straight years at Crowder Chemical, and was gaining a step every year. Consequently, I'd get all the new stuff to sell; that's sometimes good and sometimes bad when you're paid on a commission-only basis. You might get exclusive sales rights on a new type of grenade for the Army, for instance, and earn a commission that makes the Rolling Stones look like slave laborers; then the next year they'll give you something like the Bologna Bomb, and you'll go begging for groceries. I'd never had a bad year before I tried selling the Bologna Bomb, so I guess it was about my turn.

We're between wars now, but that's not all bad. Because that's when the company, rather than mass-producing weapons, experiments a lot. Every month new weapons are developed, some of them hare-brained inventions and some of them very attractive packages. And fashions change. Napalm, for instance, fell from favor because of its visual impact on television audiences during the Vietnam War. Gas warfare, though, with its low noise level and softer punch, shows real promise for the coming decade.

The problem with peacetime is that it offers no truly reliable proving ground for the high-ticket, flashy items that bring the big contracts. That's where a good salesman makes the difference: persuading the armed forces to buy a product without a live demonstration. Personal credibility is everything. Don't think the generals won't remember you next time around if you've pulled a deal like Jack Montague did; he sold them some time-delay mines in the last war that stubbornly refused to detonate until our own personnel-carriers ran over them. Jack's at Dollar Bazaar now, in Ladies' Budget Clothing.

I was hoping this year they'd send me out with something to melt the generals' hearts; something splashy, like a thousand-yard flame-thrower. Instead, they handed me the Bologna Bomb. But I didn't get to where I am by being negative, so I hit the road and hawked my wares. Most years I'll spend eight out of ten days away from home, but this past year I hardly came home at all. It's been from Washington to L.A., back to the Pentagon, then out to California again, and so on. The more I travel and talk, the better I feel, so I didn't mind; maybe I couldn't make a sale, but I could keep myself busy trying. Karen and our four-year-old boy, though,

threw fits every time they saw me: "Fix the washer!", or "Watch me ride with no hands!"—that sort of thing. And Karen: "You're leaving again tomorrow?". She doesn't understand that in this business there's no such thing as slowing down; either you race, or you get trampled by the pack. I told her I was trying to knock out a living for us, and reminded her that it wasn't such a *bad* living, camping in a six-hundred-thousand-dollar house. But always she'd come back with the same song: commitment; involvement.

"That's what I want from you, Lee—involvement. I want you to know something about the things we do here, and even to do them *with* us occasionally. You could meet the neighbors, for instance; or you could help me find out what's wrong with those trees in front of the house."

I told her that presently I was involved, as intimately as a man could be, with the mortgage payment on the house (A peek at that, I suggested, might enrichen her life to a surprising degree without my help.)

I didn't actually want her getting into our money matters; I just wanted her to realize the necessity for my work. I make a lot, but I've spent a lot. So I *need* a lot.

This year-long money-sweat wouldn't have happened to me if I'd paid more attention to my hunches. I should've told Roogan, our vice-president for sales, to scrub it when they first brought the Bologna Bomb up from the basement. It had an unproven detonating device and unstable new ingredients, a combination which told me it would be difficult to sell and nearly impossible to store with any reasonable degree of safety. But those squirrels in Research never think about that sort of thing. They play around in the lab till something accidentally blows; then they wrap it up and call it a product and hand it to sales like a hot potato.

The Bologna Bomb was a spinoff from Bound-o-Round, a miracle plastic we developed a couple of years ago as a toy. A one-inch strip of Bound-o-Round, molded thin, could be stretched to an arm's length and would snap your granny in the ass from halfway down the hall. Our guys discovered later that it could do far more when superheated. They figured they could grind the stuff to bits, pack it into a bomb casing, and bury a small nuke in the center of it. When it blew, the bits would spray over several acres, settle, and then melt together into a fine sheet. But in just minutes, as it cooled, the whole glob would shock-shrink to a permanent, rock-hard plastic. So you could sort of "shrink-wrap" several city blocks, like the pepperoni or lunch meat you see packaged in the grocery, and no air could get in or out. That's why we called it the Bologna Bomb. The purpose of using a nuke explosive in it was to produce the extreme heat level required for melting; but as a bonus it would drop some pretty nasty fallout on the area downwind of the blast—stuff that in a few days would make your housecat grow antlers.

As I had suspected, though, storage became the biggest hitch in the project. We had manufactured a small stockpile of the devices in anticipation of brisk sales, but no one was buying and now the government men who had seen the stuff were breathing down our necks to make us dispose of it quickly and quietly.

"Sell it or sink it, but get that treacherous filth out of the U.S. of A.

before it cooks off," I was warned by Major General Willy Bartel, an Army weapons expert. "You've got sixty days. If some drunken senator starts yammering at the press about this, the public will scream 'No Nukes!' again, and if that happens I'll cut you out of the next war without a cent."

Now, Willy and I went back a long time. "Are you *serious*?" I asked him.

He stuck his jaw in my face. "Serious," he said, "as a sucking chest wound."

I was in trouble. If we dumped the project it would mean a total waste of the year I'd spent wooing prospects for the bomb. I needed more time. I hadn't even had a chance to try the mideast nations yet, or to look into the possibility of a "wash sale" in which I'd sell it cheap to some jerk-water neutral country who would turn it to the Soviets for some real bucks.

\* \* \*

By the time I got home to Plantersville, South Carolina, my frustration had turned pretty close to desperation. I drove up the long lane to the house, pulled off my tie, and trudged to the door, stepping well around the dog, who had acted kind of weird and snarly the last time I'd come home. I'd asked Karen to put some aspirin in his dog food.

My four-year-old boy caught me first, by the sleeve, and then it was Karen with more bad news about the trees, the trees. Two more would have to go.

"Two more of the *big ones*?" I asked. "For chrissake, what could it be? They're only pine trees, not purple orchids. The swamps are full of them; they'll grow in places where goats can't walk; what the hell do they have against living in front of a six-hundred-thousand-dollar house? Are these two lost, for sure?"

She nodded. "For sure. A man—a tree specialist—drove by yesterday and noticed them. He came up to the house; a pleasant little man, from somewhere in the Caribbean. He told me not only that the trees are diseased, but that we'd better get rid of them quickly to protect the rest. So he's coming tomorrow to cut them out. He said several others may have to go, too, before he's through, and he works by himself, so he may be around for a couple of weeks. Are you home for a while?"

She knew better than that, but she never missed a chance to ask.

"Okay," I sighed, "let him take the damn things, and just hope that stops whatever it is. Otherwise, by next summer we'll have to sow tumbleweed sprouts and sell the place as a ranch."

The following day I saw the smiling face of Jochen Cacao Van Krooz for the first time, when he knocked on my door at seven. He looked harmless enough then. He went to work right away, felling the big old pines and cutting them into ten-foot lengths.

All the scurrying sounds of the household routine were making me edgy, so I went outside to watch and talk to Cocoa Jo as he worked. At first he didn't say much, but he seemed to be an attentive listener. That suited me, because if I go for long without talking I begin to feel like an M-60 machine gun that's firing with its barrel plugged. Also, though, I'm sort of a compulsive information-gatherer, like most real salesmen. The

things I pick up I can always use somewhere else. So by questioning Jo I was able gradually to learn quite a bit about his Caribbean island home, Toucan Cay.

"It's not a sleepy place, as you might think," he told me. "It's a very busy little island. My people are descendants of Dutch sailors and pirates, and are used to hard work. My village is small, with hardly any real shops; mostly we trade with each other for our needs. But right now we need timber, and there's none of that on Toucan Cay."

He hummed as he worked. I was fascinated with the way he was able to load the heavy logs almost effortlessly, by himself, using a maze of ropes and old wooden pulleys. He was no taller than my chin, but stocky and square-faced with very still, blue eyes I suppose he got from his Dutch ancestors. He had a double-wide soft brown mustache that would practically tickle his ears when he smiled.

Once he started, he went on about Toucan Cay, and even told me I should vacation there. There were no hotels, of course, but his friends would put me up. Maybe I could fly down for a visit next week, he suggested.

"The *last* thing I need now is a vacation," I told him.

He looked at me and shrugged his shoulders, the way Karen does, and went back to his sawing. After a few minutes he took a break for some water, and told me some more.

My head was still aching with worry about my business troubles, so I didn't give as much attention as I might have to what he said. The island he described, although remote, sounded pretty much like all the others I've seen. One thing he said, though, went straight to the back wall of my brain and stuck there: it was his mention of the volcano. Toucan Cay, he said, was twelve kilometers long. At the low end was his village. At the far end sat a huge volcanic crater, two kilometers wide on the inside and dead now for hundreds of years.

One of our inventors in the lab once told me that great ideas, too, develop like little volcanoes. They begin as tiny red eruptions in the psyche. They won't go away, but smolder there until finally you notice the heat. He said if you'll work you way past all the smoke and look down inside, you'll see a place you've never been before.

All through the evening I could feel an idea rumbling around in my head, and two hours after I went to bed it woke me up. The message had bubbled up into plain view: Cocoa Jo's island was the sanctuary that would save the Bologna project. We could hustle the bombs out of the country to satisfy the government, and store them in the crater on Toucan Cay until someday, surely, I would find a buyer. I packed my suitcase before I went back to sleep.

The next morning I was pacing the floor when Cocoa Jo drove up in his flatbed, and I questioned him about a few details I needed for my trip that day to Toucan Cay. With that guy, though, you couldn't get just the information you asked for. You had to wait for his meandering explanations of *why* everything was the way it was.

But I'm used to that, after years of listening to jabbering customers. You have to sift carefully through everything they say, so that you don't

miss it when they tip you off about what they *need* from your product. The need is the key to the sale. At the same time, you have to let the useless junk go by; that is, all the talk they'll throw at you that really only pertains to their *personal* lives. They're just trying to shovel that stuff from their yard into yours, and if you listen to their babbling about Aunt Jenny's liver disease, you'll get buried under it all. Then, once they feel better, they'll walk away whistling and leave you digging out from under the muck.

So I let old Cocoa Jo rattle on about his people's culture. He talked for nearly fifteen minutes about the great value his people placed on freedom and mobility. Apparently they live on one side of the island for several months, then on the other, and frequently move to other islands and back again. What's more, he claimed that every person in his tribe could drive trucks, boats, planes, or just about anything that moves.

I sort of let that one go by, but tuned in a little more sharply when he talked about the logs.

"They are why I'm in the States now," he said. "We need timber on Toucan Cay, because that's one thing we can't grow. We have only our coconut palms, which are marvelous trees but no good for timber because of their curving trunks. There's not a straight tree on the entire island. So we send our barge up here to haul back the nice, straight pine trees which you pay me to cut."

"But they're diseased," I said.

"No matter to us. A tree that dies in one place can be useful in another. We're stacking them by the thousands along the inside of the old, thin walls of our empty volcano, reinforcing it, and soon we'll have our own bomb shelter there."

*Bomb shelter?* Now that one was more than I could let go by. I'd have to run that through the sifter again before I could let him go on.

"Excuse me. Where are you expecting a, um, bomb from, Jo?"

"Oh, the U.S., most likely." He hummed and went on roping some logs to his truck.

"The U.S. has nothing against Toucan Cay," I said. "We've no reason to attack you." (Of course what I *didn't* say was, what the hell would we want with a twelve-mile-long sandbox, two hundred miles from Brazil.)

"Yes, I know that's what you'd like to believe," he chuckled, just as pleasantly as you please. I make no apologies for my inability to understand him at that time. I've told you he was a queer bird.

So that afternoon I was on the plane to Miami, then on to Curacao, Boges Island, and, finally, Toucan Cay.

I wasn't prepared for the visual shock when I stepped off the plane onto the grass field. Landing there was like tumbling into a huge bucket of cartoonist's paints and watching the colors splatter all around you: butter-yellow sunshine, watery green coconut palms, random explosions of wild red flowering shrubs, and hundreds of brilliant birds polka-dotting the foliage. There was a chalk-white beach by the village, and smiling people with porcelain teeth. The island itself floated in the upper fathoms of an immense, calm, Dutch-blue sea.

I looked up from the village and westward, past the palm fronds and over miles of gently rising jungle to the far end of Toucan Cay, where

the ancient crater stood in the haze. I got right to work hiring a driver.

It was a half-hour ride by jeep to the crater. There I walked around the rim and looked down on the Toukies working in the crater below, stacking logs against the inside wall. I was surprised that the valley floor, inside the crater, was not barren and rocky. It appeared to be very fertile, with a low, lush coverage of dark-green vegetation. Also, the valley appeared to be accessible by truck, through a small gap in the east wall of the crater. This was our place, all right.

Then I ran into a snag, when I rode back to the other end of the island to approach the village's Council of Elders with my plan. I proposed to lease the volcano from them for the storage of a large quantity of what I called "chemical preservatives" that would require a warm, fairly constant temperature. I told them it was the price of land in the sunbelt of the U.S. that prohibited our storing the chemicals there.

The Council was a mixture of old men and women, but in their flowery outfits it was hard to tell them apart. They looked like fairly simple old yahoos, but as I spoke I could see they weren't rising to the bait. I wasn't even sure they had heard me at first, because they sat there staring, smiling, looking almost as if they were drugged. Usually, when dealing with these cracker-box countries, I can close on the first day. I'll fire off a few jokes, drink their kumquat wine, and choke down some of their stringy chicken while they trot out some glassy-eyed dancers or an animal show. Then I'll spread around some good old American buckaroos and the deal is made.

These blue-eyed old rooster parrots weren't having any, though. The money? Well, they said, they *might* be able to use it for something. Maybe they could buy fuel for their tree barge. Then one of them said, no, they could barter for the fuel, as they always had, with the broad variety of goods they made from their "great historic benefactor," the coconut palm. They smiled broadly and wished me a safe journey home, and that was about it. I was stunned.

I couldn't sleep in their open-air guest hut that night, with the jungle birds chattering like speed freaks and the lizards rustling around in the thatched roof. In the morning I walked wearily to the grass airstrip two hundred yards from the village. I remember thinking that my expensive shoes were being stained by the morning dew.

There was no terminal building, of course, just an old DC-3 parked in the grass. The aircraft was a badly faded blue, with a huge, gaudy parrot (actually a toucan, I later learned) painted all across the side. Resting under the wing against the gear strut was the pilot, a native, with palm-frond sandals like all the Toukies wore and his hat pulled down over his eyes. A toukie gal held the ladder for me as I climbed aboard.

"Good morning," she smiled, and I automatically flashed her one back that would shame a lemon shark.

I climbed on inside, muttering to myself, "A good morning to be getting out of this swamp." My head felt better when I passed from the glaring sunshine into the dark, musty airplane and sank into my seat. There were only three of us on the whole plane.

They weren't through jerking me around yet, though. The pilot climbed

on board and took off his hat to face us, and there stood my next surprise: Jochen Cacao Van Krooz, himself, in faded denim shorts and a white pilot's shirt; tree-cutter, truck-driver, trader, and, apparently, a twin-engine airplane jockey. He sure gets around, I thought to myself.

He walked back to my seat and spoke briefly with me before we left. I asked if he was the regular pilot, and he said, no, they all took turns.

"You've got a logging business, though," I said. "Where do you find the time?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "No problem. There's no scheduled service in and out of here. We only fly once in a while, when someone is ready and asks us to go. Good day, I hope you can get some rest on the trip home."

He made a brief announcement concerning our route, then stepped into the cockpit and we were off. I laid back in the mildewed seat and fell asleep immediately to the soft bass rumble of those old props.

At home the next morning in Plantersville, I woke up exhausted again. At the breakfast table I gave myself a good talking to, the way they used to talk to us at those high-priced sales seminars in California. I told myself that although the situation was grim, I was still Lee Weston; I reminded myself who was in charge.

At noon I located Van Krooz, already back at the house, eating lunch in his truck. I'd heard his name tossed around a little when I was on Toucan Cay, and realized I'd probably underestimated his influence there because of his youth. So I started in on him, really working him, hoping he'd go back and persuade the Council to reconsider.

No soap. Very politely (Karen was right: he was a charmer.), he refused to "insult the wisdom" of his elders.

I grumbled around inside the house for a while, but couldn't even get any sympathy from Karen. She'd seen a lot more of Cocoa Jo recently than she had me, and obviously they'd talked. She told me outright that I could learn a few things from him. It seemed like a good time to get out of there and go check in with Roogan at our headquarters in Columbia.

It wasn't so damn cheery there, either.

"The decision was made two days ago," Roogan told me. "The bomb won't sell; we can't store it, so we're pulling it off the market to cut our losses."

"Is that final? Has Crowder, himself, been consulted?"

Roogan nodded sympathetically. "No more Bologna, Lee. I hope we can find something better for you this coming year."

I knew what that meant. In this business, it doesn't matter if you've had ten great years in a row. One slack year, two at the most, and they figure you're burned out. Then they start giving the plums to the young guys and the turnips to you. I walked out.

I wasted a couple of days wandering around in Columbia, then drove on home to Plantersville. By then I felt as if the center of my head were ground-zero for the Bologna Bomb. It swelled and throbbed till I couldn't think. I finally went to Jim Holcomb, our doctor, who'd never seen me except at cocktail parties. It seemed to me he almost enjoyed my suffering as he whistled through his examination. The diagnosis was muscle spasms

in my jaw, brought on by tension. He said that in my sleep I'd probably been gnashing my teeth like a billy goat, and asked if I'd "...ever woken up missing a pillow, ha-ha-ha." I took some Valium.

The next morning I woke up groggy and had some coffee and another Valium. Cocoa Jo was later that morning than usual, so I sat and read the paper. Karen looked out the window and mentioned several times that he was overdue, and while we talked she told me a little more about him. I'd had more than enough of the Toukies, but I let her talk.

Evidently his people (there are only a couple hundred) have an arrangement in which the men and women switch roles every six months. In the spring, the men do the housekeeping, and the women take over the farming and fishing. Then in the fall they switch again. It all ties in with their idea of moving often from one part of the island to the other. The idea is to make each person aware of the problems and feeling of the rest of the tribe. I guess that's possible in a place that small. Karen thought all that was really neat. I thought about nuking those numbskulls if the chance ever came. My jaw just hurt like a sonofabitch.

When Cocoa Jo rolled up to the house that morning I went out to talk, but he noticed my pain and suggested I sit in his truck. I watched him through the windshield awhile; he was working away like a happy little elf. The Valium was helping now, but I realized it was making me awfully goofy. A redbird on the hood of the truck looked as big as Woody Woodpecker and the thoughts in my head bounced around with no substance to them, like floating balloons, the same way that Cocoa Jo sounds sometimes when he talks.

I stretched out on the truck seat to rest for a while, but couldn't, so I sat up and fiddled with the truck radio until I saw some papers lying on the dashboard, under Jo's clipboard. The pages, dirty and wrinkled, were stapled together into a short pamphlet. It seemed to be a brief history of the Toukies' existence on the island.

When I reached the fourth page, though, my head began clearing rapidly. On that page were several drawings of small plants, along with detailed sketches of their leaves. The central drawing was labeled *Toucan Lava Coca Shrub*. "Coca Shrub" sounded familiar to me, so I skipped to the bottom of the page and read. There it was: a description of the coca plant, from which, of course, cocaine is produced. There followed three pages of drawings and explanation, all of which dealt with the processing of coca leaves. However, it appeared that this was no ordinary process, but one developed specifically for the type of coca plants that grew on Toucan Cay. The last page explained why a special process was required.

If you could believe the Toukie who wrote that history, in Toucan Cay's volcanic crater grew the finest strain of coca plants in existence; no commonplace process would do.

The balance of the equatorial climate had something to do with it, but the real key, it seemed, was the unique soil mixture generated from volcanic ash and protected from wind by the crater's walls. I supposed that could be true, based on the commercials I'd heard about Idaho potatoes.

A stern warning appeared on the last page. It was a reminder to the

reader of the brief period of bloodshed when the original Dutch settlers, four hundred years earlier, had fought off Spanish explorers who had landed and discovered the coca plants. The Spanish soldiers, soon after landing, had found that chewing the leaves after lunch would make them feel as strong as el toro and smarter than Copernicus. I could see what that would lead to, with all those guys galloping around butting their helmets together and swallowing rattlesnakes headfirst. I couldn't blame the Toukies for wanting to keep the secret after that.

My discovery of their secret was a tremendous break, and I knew how to use it. But equally important was the clear message that came with it: the skills that had brought me to the top had not, I knew, abandoned me. Consciously or not, I had sniffed around and finally found the Toukies' weak spot, what their real need was: protection, against outsiders, of their precious coca crop. They were all a bunch of junkies! I was pretty pleased with myself.

\* \* \*

Cocoa Jo sat opposite me at the dark oak table in my study. I had asked him to put down his work for a couple of hours. Beginning the conversation, I withheld mention of what I'd found, but asked if he might reconsider my request for him to speak to the Council of Elders on my behalf. That was just a polite opener, and he, of course, politely refused.

So I began zeroing in on his needs. In as level a tone as possible, I gave him my assessment of his "bomb shelter."

"It won't work, Jo. Believe me; I'm in the business." I leaned forward across the table. "Listen, I know you're nearly finished reinforcing the crater, and to tell the truth it looked pretty sturdy to me when I was down there. Once your people are inside, they'll be safe from, oh, a pretty-good-sized blast, although it's hard to say what size you could expect." (Of course, that sounded preposterous to me even as I spoke. But you have to talk on the same level where the customer is thinking.)

"But here's your weakness," I continued. "Suppose you get hit with a small nuke. Hell, everybody's got one these days. They could lob one in on you from a tuna boat. Even if the walls held, the fallout would shortly drift down into the crater, and you'd all be singing 'Tough-Shit-for-the-Toukies!'"

Cocoa Jo sat and stared, silent this time. I smelled blood. I threw him my proposal. After explaining at length the nature of our Bound-o-Round plastic, and its fantastic capabilities, I offered to build a roof of the stuff across the top of the volcano on Toucan Cay. I would guarantee its protection against fallout for thirty days following an indirect blast.

He thanked me, and said, "I'm not sure a roof is necessary. Frankly, Mr. Weston, it's not a nuke bomb we're expecting." By now I was getting some idea of just how cagey old Jochen was.

So I levelled the big guns at him, the sixteen-inchers. I told him I'd seen the papers, and knew all about the coca plants. Watching him carefully, I saw what I was looking for: the flicker of shock in those still, blue eyes. Pressing the attack, I laid out the possibilities to him: I wished his people no harm, myself, I told him, but it could come at any time: Their secret couldn't hold forever (I think he caught my meaning there.), and when it

was exposed their island would be ravaged. Dope-peddlers, narcs, gun runners, and pimps would trample the island and warehouses would spring up like dime stores. That would be the end for the Toukies.

Old J.C. Van Krooz took that one right at the waterline. I sat back and waited while he foundered.

He turned his back and gazed out the window for a while but, of course, there was no alternative for him, so in a few minutes he spoke again and quietly agreed to help me. Yes, he said, he would do his best to persuade the Elders to accept a lease on the volcano, contingent, of course, on my building the plastic roof. I had no doubt he would succeed.

The next step would be a little troublesome, but I was back on track now and humming like a diesel. At our headquarters in Columbia I thundered into the V.P.'s office with the news that the Bologna project was saved. Roogan frowned and grumbled, and wouldn't even come out from behind his desk. But when I was rolling like this I was unstoppable, and he knew it. Roogan finally came around, but he cautioned me that the responsibility for success was now mine alone. That afternoon he met with old man Crowder to gain my reprieve, and that's all it took. The Bologna Bomb was sailing again, this time for the Spanish Main.

\* \* \*

Building a roof over the crater wasn't actually as big a deal as I'd made it seem to Cocoa Jo when I'd been closing him. We sent three hundred men down there and had it on in five days. We just staked down a two-mile roll of Bound-o-Round along the western rim and then, using some ropes, we pulled a sheet of it across the crater with helicopters. Once it was across, the ropes were tied to bulldozers, which drove down the eastern slope and stretched the whole roof tight. We figured there'd be no problems as long as none of the bulldozers lost its grip when we reached the stretch limit and started slipping backward toward the rim. We paid the dozer drivers a little extra for that. Then, quickly and quietly, Crowder Chemical shipped its entire cache of Bologna Bombs and stored them inside the crater.

Only two weeks passed between the day we started construction and the day I travelled to Toucan Cay for the last time to deliver the check for the first year's lease. My wife and boy flew down with me; it had been nearly three years since they'd had a vacation.

There were big smiles on those old faces when I gave the check to the Council of Elders, and a lot of excited Toukie talk that I couldn't understand. After that they surprised us by taking me and the family to the beach for a big celebration.

It looked as if every Toukie on the island were there, whooping it up with coconut beer and playing in the sun. In the background through the bright, milky haze, we could see the old crater, dominating the view as it did no matter where you went on Toucan Cay. Cocoa Jo and I sat at a small open-air bar under a thatched roof near the ocean's edge, and drank through the afternoon while my kid and a couple of little Toukies chased each other through the surf. A caramel-skinned young native woman with linen-white teeth was tending the bar; her husband cooked soup for the whole crowd.



I knew the hot sun was helping the beer along, but I hadn't felt that good in months, so I loosened my tie and just let myself go, laughing and joking with the locals. They all wore flowered shorts and gaudily-painted palm-frond hats. In my pale face and dark suit, I felt like a penguin in a house full of parrots.

As the sun dropped, a group began dancing in the sand. I spoke to old Jochen under my breath.

"Hey, Jo," I said, "what about all these guys? Are they, uh, hopped up? You know—on that coca weed? I've been looking around, but haven't spotted anybody snorting or chewing the stuff."

"Oh, no, no," he chuckled, shaking his head. "most certainly not. We were nearly wiped out four hundred years ago by berserk Spaniards who abused it. After that our own people got their noses into it too, for awhile, and nearly destroyed *themselves*. No, we're way beyond that lesson now."

He continued to sip his beer. The sun eased into the sea, turning the late day to a dull red. At Jo's remark I felt a tiny pulsing in my head, the first throbs of my old headache welling up again.

"Let's back up a moment," I said, pressing my temples with both hands. "I know you call your volcano a bomb shelter, and all that, but the shelter's *real* purpose is to protect your coca crop, right?"

"Oh, Yes," he said, nodding agreement, "that much is true. It's imperative that we protect the plants at all costs—but not for our own use. It's very possible that you misunderstand our objectives."

I stood tensed in that uncertain moment that every salesman fears, the moment when it becomes apparent that the customer knows more than he does. A starting bell rang in my brain, sending it down the track to catch up. It had a tough time, though, slogging up through four quarts of coconut beer from a dead stop.

Jochen Cacao Van Krooz continued. "Our greatest fear, throughout our history, has been that the crater floor would be rediscovered by outsiders, who would finally destroy our island in their greed for our fine, deadly coca plants. *That* is the kind of attack of which we are dreadful, the *bomb* I mentioned when first we met. Repeatedly, our forefathers have tried to destroy the plants. Several times they burned the entire crop, but the burning only made the soil richer and the plants would come back, thicker than ever. A year ago I was appointed by the Elders to try again, in our generation, to find a solution. That's why I searched and found you."

Found *me*? What kind of thinking was that? I had found *him*, right on my own front porch. He had my rapt attention now, though. I was looking Cocoa Jo squarely in the face, but felt I was seeing him for the first time.

Then, as I looked into the calm center of Jo's eyes, I saw the flickering of a reddish-orange light begin to appear there, a reflection of what he saw behind me. I felt the air begin to rumble even as I turned around to face the ancient volcano behind me, six miles away. The Toukies suddenly all were up, cheering and whooping, clapping their hands as if all their rich uncles had died on the same day. The rumble quickly grew louder and all of us, facing the dark horizon to the west, saw a powerful light begin to blossom over the top of the crater. The rubbery lid was

lifting fast, a transparent dome stretched two thousand feet high, but still it held on at the lip. Then it swelled at the sides, like a great thin balloon, and the light inside it burned like Satan's furnace.

At the center, of course, was the pride of our line, our most highly-developed product: an awakened, berserk, and angrily swelling, howling-red nuclear firestorm.

"The Bound-o-Round will never hold," I muttered to Jo. I knew its design limits.

But the balloon went to twice that size, clinging to the lip of the crater while it billowed two miles high at the top. The Bologna Bomb (or Bombs—who knows how many the crazy little bastards had lit off?) roared inside the quivering ball like three Saturn rockets roped together, but still the Bound-o-Round held. That's modern technology for you.

The huge flame suddenly flickered and went out, and with a great, muffled WHOOMP! the roof contracted and sank back into the hole. I didn't need to drive up there to see. I know how the inside of that crater would look: like a great black salad bowl, the floor sealed forever in guaranteed-bullet-proof rock-plastic wrap.

It got pretty quiet after that. I sat down and faced the beach again, where the children squealed in the surf under torch-light and the parents watched them play. Karen, too, was laughing with Cocoa Jo and it looked like the party would go all night. He offered me another beer. I drank it with them and after a while I began to chuckle, too. I knew what Karen knew: I couldn't go back to Roogan. I looked forward to a suntan, and to settling things with Cocoa Jo, but I knew I'd have to keep a sharper eye; I've already told you his grandpapas were pirates.

— Tyree Harris



## Timepiece

The mattress felt soggy, but Louise paid it no mind. Her back braced upright. She traced the slanting pattern in the wallpaper. She began at the shadow line where ceiling and wall meet—where the tops of the small pink flowers were torn from their stems—and followed the space between the flowers on their way across the wall: perfect, perfect, perfect, in the way they were designed and drawn and printed by machines. The eye could follow the white space between the flowers downward into forever—but—her eyes stumbled on something, returned to it. She counted the tiny pink blossoms. There were only two on this stem. There should be three. She started at the top again. She moved her eyes more deliberately this time: no, no, no—yes. Yes, there it was; it had only two blossoms; the third did not print.

Aunt Lucy was banging on the door again, and rattling the doorknob. Doesn't anyone understand a locked door any more? Let her knock. Even if she rammed her fat little fist through the door, she wouldn't be able to get past the mahogany dresser.

Aha, aren't you the smart one, Louise, except that you got off the bus at 14th Street that day, and nothing has been right since, no matter how hard you tried to put it back like it belonged.

She had thought about it for weeks—well, why not 14th instead of 16th? It took quite a bit of planning. After all, you can't just up and get off the bus a stop early for nothing, not after twenty-two years of riding to 16th Street, getting off at precisely 7:35 a.m.; walking precisely 73 steps to the lobby of the Hartman Building; riding the last elevator at the end of the hall to the 17th floor; spending your day shuffling the same papers, making the same decisions, saying the same things—to different faces, yes, but the faces moved on to the same destinies, the same little gray-suited, too-friendly group insurance salesmen, going off to their little successes and their houses in the suburbs and their predictably superior salaries and their equally predictable 1.5 children and ambitious wives; and at the end of the day it was all the same, Louise, locking up your desk and riding the first elevator at the corner to the lobby, and walking 115 steps through the lobby and across the street to catch the same bus back to the same neighborhood and the same street and the same white clapboard two-story house that you'd lived in all your life, with the same mother there to greet you at the door except that she got older, and shrank down and shrivelled and got meaner and finally she died.

Louise had planned it, yes, for two or three weeks, once she got the idea. She had watched the storefronts more closely for an excuse; no, for a *reason*, because if you were going to change something, it had to be for a serious *reason*. So she watched and peered at the storefronts and nothing came to her for about a week, but then she thought about the clock in the kitchen. It had stopped working about 3 months before, but Louise didn't really need a clock; no, not for measuring time, but because she liked the dependability of the thin minute hand making circles as it was supposed to; she liked looking up over the sink at 5:30 when she got home and seeing that the timepiece was still there, marking off the

seconds, even when she was not home to watch it.

So she had decided that, yes, needing a new clock was a serious reason, serious enough to go into the big hardware store at the corner of 14th to see how much a clock would cost.

Once she had the reason for it, it was all so simple. She had placed her feet, one following the other, on the 2 steps of the bus, just as securely as if it were the 16th Street stop. It had all gone so smoothly.

Perhaps that was why—because it had gone so smoothly—that it was so easy to slide again. The new clock had been on the kitchen wall for only a week—she would have forgotten about it, but the new clock was of a different shape, and the white circle left behind by the old clock on the dingy kitchen wall still gave her a jolt when she looked up at 5:30—but it had been there for only a week when she began to think about the stairwell. Looking back on it now, it was all so clear—what fool person would want to know what it was like in that stairwell? Oh, Louise, you are such a fool, you just had to know. So another 3 weeks of planning went by, trying to find a reason why you should go into that stairwell, and finally latching onto the notion, the fool notion, that it would be quicker to slip down the stairs to take the new trainee list to Bursten on the 16th floor. And on November 30th at 10:18 a.m., you took that manila envelope with all the destinations it had travelled to crossed out, and wrote in on the last line in the corner, "Bursten," and walked—how many? You had to count them, didn't you! 42 steps—oh, Louise, how could you have not known it was ominous, 42 steps and 42 years—you walked to the door and put your hand on its knob, oh, how your heart was pounding with excitement as you peered through the little glass door with the wire diamond pattern embedded in it. And how quickly you descended those stairs; you were so excited that you forgot to count them, so the next day you had a reason to go back, and there were 12 steps and then the landing and 12 more, and then you wanted to know, were there the same numbers of steps between each of the landings *all the way down*? So by the end of another 2 weeks, there you were, Louise, flying down the steps, 10-11-12, 10-11-12, and yes, there were exactly 12 steps between the landings of all 17 floors, but you didn't know about the basement level, because you knew that it wouldn't be wise to go down there, not into that dark and dismal and too-threatening place. And you were so excited to find that there were 12 at each level—the orderliness, the beauty of it all!—that you decided to check it to be sure, so at 5:00 you went through that door again, but you would have to hurry, Louise, so you wouldn't miss the bus; no, you can't change too many things at once, that could be dangerous, so you were flying down the stairs and not looking anywhere but down and who should you run into but Bursten. He was just standing there at the landing of the 13th floor—another omen, you should have paid attention, Louise!—he was at 13th, just standing there and smiling when you ran smack into him. And that was on December 3rd, and you lost count because he surprised you so, and you mumbled some excuse and fled down the rest of the steps without counting and made it to the bus just in time, and as you sat down in the 5th seat on the left aisle you knew already that you would have to go back in there to finish what you had started; in

fact, you'd have to start over again to be sure that you got the sets of 12 between the 17th and 13th right. So you did but you were more careful; you paused at each landing to look and listen, to be sure that no one stood in that stairwell as you wound down. And so you passed the month of December, running down 17 flights, or 34 sets of 12, with little listen-pauses in between each set, and Bursten didn't show up again, and you forgot, didn't you, that Bursten wasn't smiling at all that day in the stairwell; he was laughing at you behind his hand. You should have paid attention, Louise.

And on December 23rd you spent your dutiful 30 minutes at the office party and left, but you checked the hall to be sure Bursten wasn't out there watching before you slipped behind the door and into the stairwell, and then you flew down the steps with the little ticky-tacky plastic corsage with the gold balls bobbing up and down, oh why did they bother, every year the same stupid little corsage.

Then on January 7th, when you took the trainee list down to Bursten, instead of barely glancing up and mumbling, he leaned back in his chair and folded his hands behind his head and said, "How's it going, Miss Farley?" But you got past him, you just said what you always say to that inane question.

"Fine, thank you." And you got away. And he began doing it every time you saw him, and it slipped into the pattern and fit itself there so that soon you barely noticed it, until that fresh manila envelope arrived with your name written neatly in the corner, on the very first line, with no other names on it yet: Miss Louise Farley, and you opened it and there was a sheet of plain white paper, no letterhead, and a note in the same neat handwriting: "Miss Farley, May I have the pleasure of your company at lunch today? E. Bursten."

And you began to search for an answer, but none came, because there really was no reason to say no, but there was no reason to say yes, either. So you didn't. You just put the sheet back in the envelope, very carefully so the edges would not rumple, and put it on the corner of the desk and forgot about it, but at 11:59 Bursten stood before you. He had his coat on and was holding yours out to you. "Please?" he said, with that smile; no, that laugh, was he laughing at you again? And since you couldn't think of what to say to get out of it, you slid your hand into the coat sleeve and followed him numbly down the hall, no, not to the elevator, but to the stairwell! And the two of you trotted down the stairwell and you made the little pause at the first 3 landings until you realized you didn't need to do that because he was already in there, with you. And he took you to the employee cafeteria, and you thought, how kind, how could he know that you would have balked at going anywhere else? So he heeled you into the cafeteria and you got the same tuna fish sandwich and the same cup of hot tea and he led you to the same booth where you always sat with Miss Mavis and Miss Jones, but today they were at the regional planning meeting and surely he would have known that? So you sat in the Mavis-Jones-Farley booth with Bursten and ate your tuna on white bread as if he weren't there, and in silence he ate his hamburger; was he smiling then? And as you squeezed the quarter slice of lemon for 3 drops of juice, he spoke; you jumped, because you had almost forgotten he was there, and

he said, "I've always wondered, Miss Farley, how you must feel about training class after class of insurance reps, and sending them off to make salaries which are almost immediately 3 times that which you are paid?" Oh, how kind of him to have noticed that! But what do you say? "Fine, thank you"? No, that's for "How are you today?" So you said nothing, and he said, "Oh, come now, your opinion is safe with me; I've been here long enough to know company loyalty when I see it." Your eyes trailed down the slope of his nose, down his necktie, down into the plate of smeared ketchup and salt.

"Miss Farley," he said, "I think you are quite attractive, and I find myself thinking of you long after you leave my office on your delivery errands."

And you did the only sensible thing; you picked up your coat and left and went back to your desk where you belonged. But the next morning when you flipped on the light in your office at exactly 7:45, roses and baby's breath burst from a green florist's vase in the center of your desk, and the shock set your whole day on end, yet you could not bring yourself to move them. You left them right where they were, in the center of the desk, and worked on the pull-out slats of the desk all day, and when 2 of the young women from the typing pool on the 16th floor passed down your hall and gaped and admired them, you didn't see them laughing, did you, because the baby's breath was right under your nose. And at 11:59 he was before your desk again, and how kind he was to not mention the roses, because he knew they would upset you and you would have to get used to them, but he took you down the stairwell and into the employee cafeteria to the Mavis-Jones-Farley booth, but Miss Mavis and Miss Jones were there and he slid in beside Miss Jones, whose mouth turn down at the corners but she said nothing and he was, oh, so polite, begging their pardon and might he dine with you ladies? And how easily it all slid together into the pattern, and by Monday, January 14th, it was not at all a surprise; rather, it was expected, it was pleasant, when he came to your desk at 11:59 and helped you with your coat, and led you to the employee cafeteria. And so it went until January 23rd, and it was a Wednesday, and you had nibbled your tuna on white with him at lunch that day, and as you were locking the desk drawer at 4:58, he stood before you, and it was all so easy to take by now, because you had slid so far from the patterns that kept you safe: now you were not even thinking clearly, you were not asking yourself what is the reason for him being here at this hour? But how kind he was; he had already anticipated your search for a reason, and he said, "Miss Farley, may I accompany you home on the bus today?" And you nodded and he led you on your trotting flight down the stairwell.

So you got on the bus and you sat in the 5th seat on the left aisle and he slid there beside you, and you counted off the blocks that led away from the city, and almost forgot that he was there until your stop, and when you rose from your seat it was much like all the rest; he anticipated your moves; he rose, too, and followed you down the steps, then walked beside you to the white clapboard house that you had lived in since you were a child. And he followed you onto the porch and into the hallway and stood behind you as you checked the clock and yes, it was

5:30 p.m. precisely. And you dropped your coat across the chair as always, and you put the tea water on to boil, but as you turned to take the coat to the closet he was there, and he put his arms around you and said, "I want you." And the words made no sense at first, for what was there of you to want?

But then again, Louise, why not? You had changed so many things, why not this, too? And so you followed him up the stairs, followed him in the hall as he searched for the room he needed to do it in, followed him into the only room which had a double bed: your mother's room, Louise, and he led you to that bed, and when you lay on it in your blue woolen suit and your no-run stockings and your black sensible pumps, you sank down and down and down into that mattress and when he put himself on top of you the weight of him pushed you down and down still farther, and only then did you think of Mother's white hobnail bedspread, so you lifted yourself up just far enough to slide it out from under you, but he said, "It's all right," and he spread his handkerchief beneath you.

When you and he woke it was quite dark and you thought of the tea kettle downstairs on the stove, with its steam all spent, and you had forgotten it—perhaps it would melt? But when he lifted himself from you, you remained sunken in the mattress, and because it was dark you could not see that he was laughing. "The tea kettle," you moaned and he answered shortly, "I'll turn it off on my way out," and he leaned down and slid the handkerchief from the mattress and folded it and put it in his breast pocket. "My panache," he whispered, and you, you fool, you thought it was a term of affection for you.

And then the next morning when he was not at his desk you thought nothing of it, and when he did not show up to take you to lunch, you went about the circle of your daily routine, and when a week went by and you had not seen him, not in his office, not in the stairwell, not in your office, not even a brown company envelope with your name scrawled somewhere on it, you did not question it. You just accepted it like everything else, and slid back into the old routine, like the downshift from Daylight Savings Time.

And then the next week when you did see him he said nothing, and again he did not take you for lunch, and it was all as if had never happened, except for the matter of that other clock, which after 28 years of unswerving predictability, suddenly ceased its ticking, and an alarm screamed in the dark quiet nights, and in the stairwell you cut short your journey at 2nd, because something dark and dismal and threatening reached up from the basement and tried to pull you down into that dark and uncharted territory.

You were a bit young for the change, but perhaps? But 4 more weeks slid by and the ticking still lay silent, and a certain queasiness came over you, and you found that by mid-morning you were falling asleep at your desk, and the downhill strokes on the stairwell were strangely frightening and tiresome, and making a cup of tea at 5:30 took all the strength you could muster, and the familiar brew churned and boiled inside you. Exactly 42 days after he had you—42 days, Louise!—you dragged yourself to the clinic for the poor. Just an imbalance, perhaps some vitamins? Nothing important enough to take to Dr. Wilson, whom you could

certainly afford to pay, but something compelling enough to be at that clinic at 7:30 a.m., thinking that they would see you early and you could get into the office on time—ha! And as you sat there in that basement hall on a cold metal chair, staring at the scuffed brown linoleum squares, hearing the ticking of the internal clock that signalled 8:30, 9:00, 9:30, and seeing the puffed-up feet of the mommiewomen when they waddled in behind their bellies and you thinking, that is not me, I am here for some vitamins, but sliding your hands up over your lap to hide what you knew was in there. And sitting there thinking about the ticking of a new clock, one that was not your own but was inside you, something budding and alive, and then you thinking but maybe, perhaps? Perhaps—love it? Perhaps—cherish? Perhaps—I could feel something, make a decision about it, use it to fill the white spaces in my dingy life? And as you were thinking all those lovely, foolish thoughts, something in you coming alive, a little spark felt deep under the breastbone—and as you pondered, played with the possibility of life, the doors in front of you in that basement hallway tore open and delivered wheeled buggies with white swaddled bodies; the morning long the death nannies wheeled their sleeping charges under the noses of the women who pressed their aching backs against the hard chairs in that hall that led to the morgue, and you and all of them instinctively moving your hands across the abdomen, to shelter the little flames from the cold wind that blew in that tunnel. And all morning your feet moved in a grim dance for the cheerful businessmen who trotted in to pick up their green zippered packages and loaded them into long black carriages. Then finally the name you had given—Mrs. E. Bursten—and Doctor Nameless Verybusy, so distracted, probing you with his cold hands and cold instruments and cold eyes and, yes, it is not the change, ha-ha, let's see, you are 42 years old, this is your first, well it's never too late to start, ha-ha, the nurse will give you another appointment for next month, and here's some vitamins, that's what you need, ha-ha. Good-bye, Mrs., uh, Mrs. Baby. Ha-Ha.

And you stumbling to your desk at 2:00, and for once in your life closing the door behind you, and sitting there to work but forgetting to pick up the pile of papers in the in-box, just sitting there and staring at the grain of the door, noticing for the first time that the door danced with patterns of lines, and your eyes sliding down the lines from the top of the door, down, down, curving out over the pregnant knots, the curving lines swelling into huge bellies and drooping breasts, but you were restless; the groove had been broken, and you were thinking Mrs. E. Bursten, looking to see if that was written in the lines on the back of the door.

And then, because you knew, the stairwell was not so ominous for a while, and you used the time going down to think, when should I tell him? On the 6th? the 12th? Where should I tell him? On the 16th floor? the 17th? And over the tuna on white, staring off into the crowded cafeteria, searching for his face, and Miss Mavis and Miss Jones looking one to the other with their mouths turned down, but saying nothing until, until—

Until March 30th at 11:57 a.m. Miss Mavis shattered the silence with her tight little lips; she closed the door behind her: sit down, Louise, I feel you and I should have a talk, and you sitting there and watching the



patterns fall from the top of the door to the floor.

Being older, Louise, I feel I must speak my mind, for your own sake, though I know you are 42 years old and a grown woman; I will try to make this as painless as I can...he used you...toyed with you...Miss Jones and I feel...of course none of our business but...the Christmas party, after you left...got to drinking and you know how that goes...vulgar, despicable...and it was all a joke...would not tell you but I do not want to see you hope...when the truth is...

And you picking up the shards and hurling them at her: something ugly, something about her being a jealous, lonely, dried-up old biddy; is that what you felt about her all along, Louise? All those days in the employee cafeteria, numbly chewing tuna on white, watching but not seeing this twisted old face across from you in the booth? But what is she saying, who is that pounding, *that door is locked, doesn't that mean anything to you?* Who is moving the dresser, no, don't—the mirror—it will fall, it will shatter....

And if you don't want to believe me, then go look in the men's room, go, Louise, I insist, go see what is taped on the mirror in the men's room on the 16th floor, it is the joke of every despicable young person in this building....

It is strange to see how a mirror cracks. The cold, smooth, ephemeral lake of glass ripples from the apex of the blow into a thousand webbing patterns, but the web is too thin, too thin; the silvery bits slide, fall, tearing one from the other, tearing through the evanescent web, and the sound is like a scream, Louise, a quick scream that must reach its crescendo and end all at once because someone might hear, might come in the night to force their way from the hall and through the door, might heave the dresser, hurl against it until it tips, and the mirror will fall and shatter into thousands of brittle bits that can never be put back into the old accustomed patterns, and the reflection from it will always be as shattered as the mirror itself....

It's Dr. Wilson, Louise.

Aunt Lucy must have called him.

Where is it? You must answer him.

What does he mean? My appendix? Why do you want it back, Dr. Wilson? You brought it to me in a jar after you took it out, remember? Such a tiny thing, all pink and curled over like my little finger, floating in the jar that you placed by my bed, my little souvenir you called it, ha-ha. I thought of getting rid of it once—but how? Run it in the blender and pour it over the garden? Flush it in the toilet? Bury it in the back yard? But each time I took the jar and held it to the light, the label with my name on it got in the way, and I would turn the jar to see it, but only after I was reminded that it was mine, was part of me; it said so right on the jar: Appendix, Louise Farley, so I put it back in the corner of the closet and tried not to remember how it hurt when it came out. Such a little thing to cause such agony, the tossing, the twisting, the searing pressure in my spine, the tearing asunder that could never be mended, the hollow voice from the dark and dismal place inside me and threatening to pull me down, down that last flight of stairs. Last night in my nightmare the jar broke, and the honey inside spilled all over my bed and the little

appendix lay quivering in the honey, and my legs were warm and wet and sticky so I picked it up and licked it clean and put it back in the closet where it belonged, and it's there still.

Where is it?

Aunt Lucy yammers on: She has been sitting up here staring, all alone, every night since she moved out of her mother's house; she goes out to work in the morning, comes home at 5:30, eats alone, then comes up here and not a sound for the rest of the night, but last night there were sounds, whimpers, the mattress springs squeaking, the headboard ramming on the wall, but she wouldn't answer me and I went back to bed; but this morning, when she didn't come out to go to work, I knew there was something wrong, is she all right oh my God there's blood all over my good mattress, what have you done Louise?

Why is he looking under the bed, behind the drapes, in the bathroom, under the chair, in the closet? Look, Louise, he found something in the bottom of the closet, and Aunt Lucy is screaming oh my God, oh my God, is it alive is it all right, oh thank God it's breathing it's a miracle after being stuffed under a coat like that in the bottom of the closet oh Louise what could you have been thinking of?

But I did tell you, Aunt Lucy, look, I'll show you, it's right here, if you start at the top and count down, down, down, yes, there it is, this one is not right, the pattern is broken, there are only two on this stem where three should be....

—Jane Zanca