



**aurora**

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WRITERS' CONFERENCE ISSUE

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\*POETRY AWARD WINNER

## Ode to the Vietnam Dead

*for Allen Tate*

No, the wind takes the beginning seed farther  
But past none who see, or remember, none who  
Move in their green cave to forget the burning

Song of word and earth. The mute and silvered dawn  
Is still seeping into the marbled figures, the riders  
Atop still stone, speaking to winter and no leaf.

Speaking for those who will not, for us who cannot,  
And for the listening spark of the few who must not.  
No, the wind takes the remaining seed, building,

Slowly building the body out of sand, blind dust  
That circles in a brief tempest, finding form in mist,  
Turning and thinking, but turning, finally, to rest.

What the sun can now harvest – lean ground, yielding  
A desolate sameness, year on year, harvesting black  
Earth, rich with the continuing struggle to resist.

At evening, the wasted long hours surmount, crushing  
The pale sky, the eggshell moon. Who had time, when  
Soft wind lifted a silver leaf so that it shone

In a young child's eye, to remember the dead long ago,  
The endless fight on the endless hill, for the word honor,  
Scratched hastily over golden soil that heaved and said nothing.

– Gary Kerley

## Sugar County Carnival \*SHORT STORY AWARD WINNER

— Miriam Patisaul

Albert stood with his hands in his pockets. His arms were so long that his shoulders hunched up to his ears. He squinted as if he could hear better that way while the baggy old man jabbed a bony finger into Mr. Trope's side and gummed his words before spitting them out.

"Well, I tell you how it was, see," the old man hesitated and shaded his eyes from the raw glow of the light bulb that swung from the ceiling. "Thisyer army private walked out on that ther dock — I was settin ther eatin a hot dawg — I didn't have no lunch before I come to the carnival, see — and he come out ther and said, 'Afternoon, grampa,' and then I said, 'Hey you dummie' — see I figgered what he said he didn't mean respectful — so he throwed back his head to laff and his cap come off, so he swiped at it." The old man fastened his hands around Trope's arm.

"I believe he muster caught the toe of one of his ol shiny shoes in between the boards," the grampa continued. "He stummeled around a lot before he finally fell — I believe his ol laffing mouf hit the corner of the dock — I believe I seen his head hit it — anyway he finally fell in the water, but he didn't make no big splash. Just kinda glided out a piece and sunk. And he didn't even try to swim out or nothing. Jest fell in and stayed. I et my hot dawg and waited, but he never come up."

Trope said nothing to the old man but twisted to release his arm from the grip of the knobby fingers. He snatched his whole body away.

"I seen it happen." The old man reached for Albert with his arms outstretched and his fingers bent. The boy leaped across the room, shaking the small wooden office that overlooked the park where the Twelfth Annual Sugar County Carnival made a colorful spectacle.

Mr. Trope, who was the park caretaker, shuffled through the Yellow Pages, then dialled Civil Defense. While mumbling into the receiver, he flipped the pages of a ragged paperback, *Naked Murderer*, on his desk. When he hung up, he paused to mark a paragraph and turn down the corner of the page.

Mr. Trope still said nothing to the grampa but went out the door with Albert trailing behind. The bulk of the caretaker's body bunched up over his belt, leaving his legs short and wiry. The round features of his face contorted into a scowl that pushed the corners of his mouth down and pulled his eyebrows out like open drawers. Trope ambled past the handicraft display and Rodiman's World Famous Snake Show. Albert drew stares from the people who milled around the park; no other boy in town had hair as long as his own blond mane. He wore a T-shirt he had painted with fluorescent colors, and a pair of green pants he had patched in the seat with a toy flag he'd bought in Atlanta last spring. He mimicked Mr. Trope as the man leaned backwards and made a quick advance down the hill to the lake.

Trope removed his shirt and shoes and carefully arranged them on the dock that grew

out of the hillside and extended over the shore. He waded in where the water was muddy and shallow.

"Ain't nobody spozed to swim here," a little girl chirped from the bank. Mr. Trope turned his scowl on the child until she stuck out her tongue and ran away. Albert laughed a lazy, heaving laugh and made little mounds in the sand with his feet.

The Civil Defense truck rattled down the slope and creaked to a halt. Three men stumbled out of the cab. Bumping and colliding with each other, they hurried to unload their equipment.

When at last they began their solemn business of dragging, no splash or ripple of the two rowboats could be heard over the noise of the carnival and its merry-go-round. People gathered on the banks and the shore readjusting their carnival faces to fit the new spectacle. Like a buzzing of flies in the heat, the conversation ran spasmodically.

Trope, now dripping on the sand, pushed at Albert's back with both hands and said, "Move on, kid."

The boy's chin shifted back and forth for a few moments. "Why?"

"Because you ain't got no bizness here. Ther ain't nothin you kin do to hep, and you ain't got no bizness watchin. Draggin is a serious operation."

"What are you doing here?"

The caretaker glanced toward the office and muttered, "I'm employed by the county."

"Oh, I know that," Albert said. "I mean what are you doing now? Besides watching."

Mr. Trope pointed with his head toward the spectators and flapped his arms. "I'm mainly trying to move this crowd. It's my job to be here." He cleared his throat and raked his wet socks through the sand. He dug his voice into the audience.

"If you folks wanna see what a dead man looks like just stan ther," he screamed like his

throat was full of rocks. "They gon pull him up in a minute." He turned to the huddle of teen-agers behind him. "You gon see a dead man if you don't move back," he threatened a girl whose shirt spelled "Myrtle Beach, S. C."

Albert blinked at the unexpected sideshow. The boy's grin rocked under his nose when Mr. Trope turned around again.

"Lissen boy, I'm tellin you to leave. If any of them idiots is friends of yours, round em up and leave." Trope added with a sneer, "Go home and visit your Mama."

Albert laughed and stomped the ground. "I figure the whole neighborhood heard my old man telling me to get the hell outta there and not to come around any more."

"Your Pop's a good man," Mr. Trope retorted. "We been deacons together. You a rotten kid to get stuck with."

Albert felt in his pocket and drew out a pair of wire-framed glasses. He set them on his nose and ran a finger around the rims. Suddenly he jerked his eyebrows upwards and said quietly, "My mother loves me." He paused, swallowed and then sang, "Jesus loves me, this I know . . ."

"They love you only because they haf to," Trope replied, "but I got sick of you ten years ago, and I ain't planning to take no more. Now leave before I have you hauled outta here."

"I paid my way to the carnival. You can't throw me out."

Mr. Trope muttered something to himself or to God; with his hands he mopped at the sweat and grit that streaked his neck. He turned and faced the crowd, shoving a little to make room for himself. "In a minute you all gon see a dead man bein pulled outta the water. It ain't pretty, so go on back up the hill. I meanit now, go on!"

The sun's reflection separated into puzzle pieces and skimmed the surface of the lake. The two little boats bobbed and knocked against each other as their occupants probed

the lake bottom with a long hook. Mr. Trope backed up to the dock and braced himself with his hands before pulling up. Albert climbed after.

Mr. Trope stood up and mopped at his sweat again, each time looking at it on his hand before drying it on his pants. "This is off limits to you," he said, "git back on the ground."

"Aw, come on, Trope, you been telling me to move from there."

"Albert," the man clamped down on his voice and strained the words out through his teeth. "Look, you bastard, I'm telling you to move agin." The caretaker's lips drew out so thin and tight that his mouth almost disappeared.

"Mr. Trope, how many drownings have you seen?"

The taut muscles over the man's body relaxed and he shielded his eyes from the sun. "Oh, I know about drownings. I've seen four — no, five. Two uvum was pulled outta this lake. The worst I ever seen though was the woman that got caught in some ol tree branches that fell in the river that feeds this hole — she'd been drowned a week before she was found. The rest I saw wuz jest regular drownings. One uvum wuz a kid, maybe ten years ol — that little deaf Perkins boy with the wild mama — now that wuz somethin — Yeah, I know how bad this sorta thing is." He leaned his head toward the three men on the water. "I done that sorta thing before too. I don't guess they need no hep today though."

"So you're just standing around gawking like everybody else, right?" Albert stretched his neck and bulged his eyes. He laughed.

"I tole you it wuz my job to be here. You gittin on my nerves agin."

"But how do you keep score? You know what I mean, you must have somewhere you can mark off drowning number six."

"I kin remember. And I also kin remember I don't hafta take no more offa you." Mr.

Trope punched the boy's stomach with his finger. "Gityer butt outta here. You shoulda been the one who fell in." The older man jumped from the dock to the ground with a force that caused his knees to wobble outwards when he landed.

Albert looked up to the carnival; from the lake the view was a gay conglomeration. Flies swarmed, the talk droned, babies squalled, Trope shouted. Albert pushed the long strands of hair that stuck to the sides of his face behind his ears and whispered, "Oh, shit."

He pulled his glasses away from his face and put them back in his pocket. He wiped his chin and forehead with the tail of his painted shirt, then looked toward the two boats that rocked so near the dock that Albert could hear one of the men whistling. With a smooth, broad jump, Albert landed flat-footed behind Mr. Trope.

The caretaker raised his gritty voice again. "Everybody's gon be watchin you when you puke them hot dawgs up all over your clothes when you see that body! How bout a little respect for the dead, a little solemnness in the face of tragedy? This ain't what you paid to see anyhow. Git on back up to the carnival. All uvyuh!"

"You don't have to be so rude," a woman snapped. She grabbed her child and bumped his head on her wooden pocketbook. He did not flinch.

"Yeah," the young boy parroted, "you don't hafta be so rude."

"I'm going back up there to set down," the mother said to the son as she wiped at the ketchup on his chin and shirt with a dirty kleenex. "You can watch awhile if you want to."

Mr. Trope stood still — only the sweat on his face moved. The sun continued to glint and blaze; the heat seemed to drip down the sides of the sky into the hole in the earth where Sugar County was, where the park was,

in a valley by a lake that had no name.

Trope was posed like an ape with Albert breathing on the back of his neck. The ketchup-stained kid copied Mr. Trope's stance but assumed a dried monkey look of his own. He examined Albert's flag patch and then reached up to tug at the stars and stripes.

"Now I wanna know whut happ'ned," the little boy said in a gruff voice.

"Aw, some dum ass fell in and drowned. Some soldier." Albert answered.

"Some dum assed soldier fell in and drowned. I knew that much," said the child.

Mr. Trope looked down at the youngster and frowned. "Get lost, kid." The child met the fiercely kniteyebrows of the man with an unperturbed gaze.

"Listen, man," Albert knelt down to level his eyes with the child's, "this is Mister Trope, Butt Director. He wants to tell you where to take yours, but he won't cuss a little kid."

"Won't cuss a little kid. He's crazy as doo-doo." The little boy packed his small paws with sand and pieces of grass and carefully filled Mr. Trope's trouser cuff.

Trope was slow to realize what the child was doing. At first he shook and slung his cheeks from side to side. Then he snatched Albert's shirt and pulled it into a wad. "You! You tole the kid to do it!" Albert laughed and leaned so far back that only Mr. Trope held him up.

"Sonofabith!" Trope's voice grated higher.

"Watch it. You're talking about my mother." Albert laughed in lazy heaves. The child pinched the flesh that hung over the back of Mr. Trope's belt.

"Goddam Mafia brats!" The caretaker gave the shirt in his fist another snatch and let go. Albert fell.

"Goddam jackass," the little boy retaliated with a peculiarly serene reverence. "If you warn't makin so much racket and mindin everybody's bizness you might know they got aholta somethin out ther." He pointed toward

the boats that rocked a few yards from the end of the dock.

Albert got up and knocked at the wet sand clinging to his hair and clothes. He reached for his glasses.

One of the three Civil Defense men floundered around in the water and pushed. The other two men sat in their boat and pulled until the body, feet first, flopped in with them.

When the waiting crowd of people shoved to get their glimpse of the man scraped up from the bottom of the lake, they backed up against the four o'clock sun and broke their swarm. It was with a strange awkwardness that the people moved away from the spectacle of seeing a dead man and were consumed by the rides and shows of the carnival.

"What'd I tell you?" Mr. Trope shouted after them and shook his fists in the air. "Cain't say I didn't warn you! I tole you!"

Only Albert and the little boy waited with the caretaker to pull the rowboat out of the lake. The two Civil Defense riders jumped out in the shallow water and helped drag the boat through the sand until it stopped. Albert rested his knees against the side of the boat, and the child imitated him, while Trope and the other men argued about how to wrap the corpse. He could not have been much older than Albert, the drowned private who was now only a wet, scummy, lifeless heap of uniform in the floor of a faded yellow boat. Water spouted and gurgled from his pockets and his mouth.

The child leaned over and stretched his fingers toward the body. He jabbed and poked at the arms and face and squeezed the nose.

"Man, what in the hell are you doing?" Albert asked. He squinted in the afternoon blaze.

The eyes of the child were wide and clear. "I jest wanna see whut it'slike to be dead. I wanna see how it is not to feel nuthin."

## \*HONORABLE MENTION

**Dancers and the Dance**

Bent into a stupid crouch,  
     the fauncolored form  
                     pushes the leaves

Aside; a motion forward,  
     the hunt causing  
                     anxious glances toward

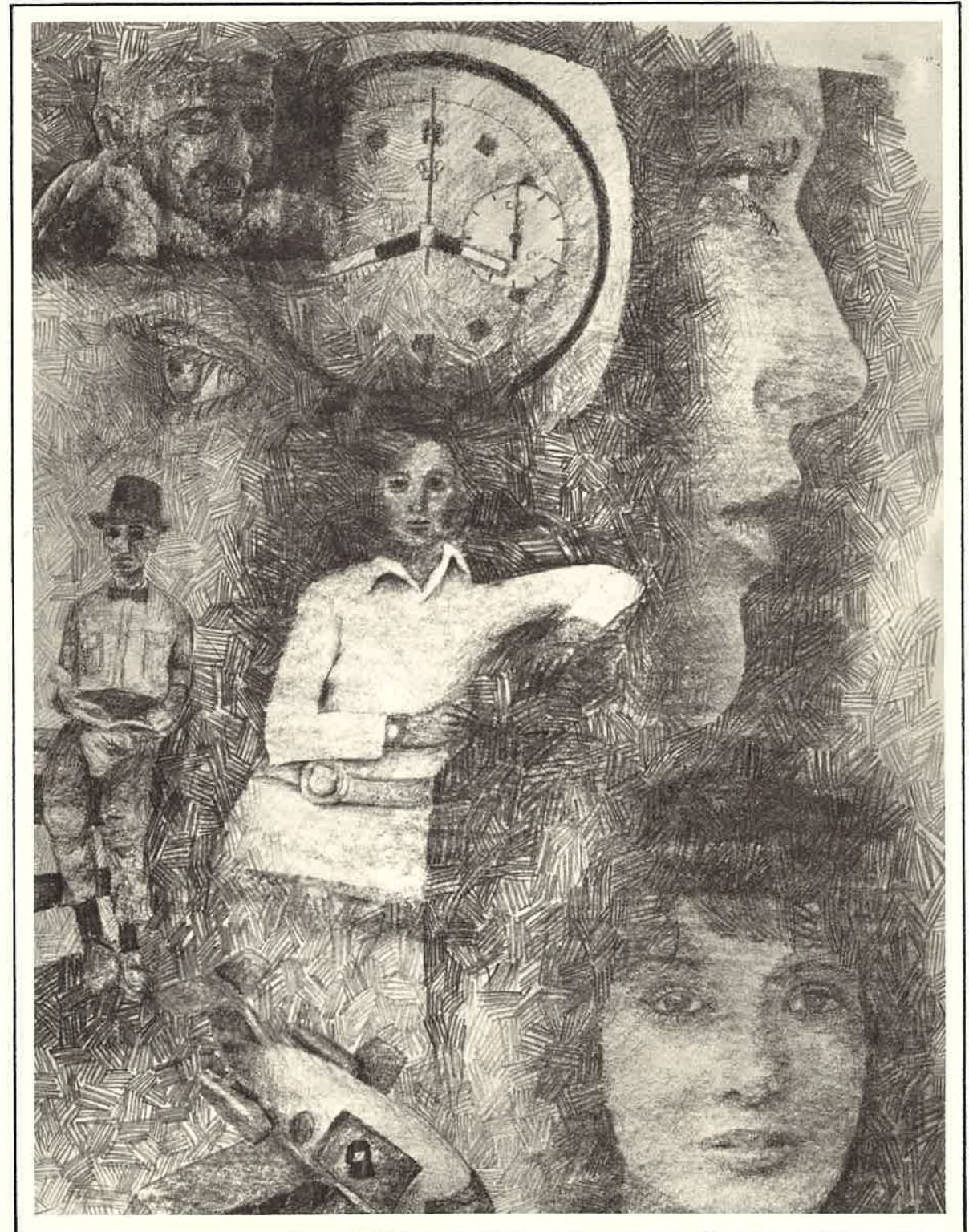
the surrounding bushes,  
     it steps in alarm  
                     through belly-high weeds.

A cautious prowler  
     in the morning fog, it pauses  
                     to hear the bestial

silence. It kneels  
     with eyes burning into  
                     the mist, and convulsively

clutches the smooth  
     and icy throat  
                     of a gun.

— *Phil Williams*



— *Susan Steagall*

## One Fall Morning

— Ginger Rollins

Somehow the sound of her own name must have aroused the sleeping child. The left side of the big feather bed felt cool, almost wet, as her arms and legs unfolded and jerked slightly upon contact with the chill island.

Suddenly she sat straight up in bed, then with a spurt of energy, was at once beside the bed which was level with her waist when she stood at full height.

Downstairs, a sweating glass of orange juice waited on the breakfast room table. Oatmeal steamed in the flat soupbowl beside the juice. Probably the temperature could have been 101 in her grandmother Sinclair's breakfast room and the oatmeal still would have been set steaming at every growing child's place.

"Miss Verginger, what kind of eggs is you going to have? Your Nama says you can have fried, poached or scrambled. Hmph! My children sure don't tell me what they want. I tells them. She buy you the moon if you ask for it."

"Oh Rosa. Do I have to eat eggs?"

"You sure is. Don't you go turning up your nose at good honest food. You just eat it and be glad you have it. And don't never waste none of it either. Now what kind?" Rosa's shining black face glared out from under her red bandana turban as she stood waiting for an answer.

"Poached, I guess."

The orange juice tasted cool and refreshing as it lubricated the night-parched throat. As Virginia plunged her silver spoon into slightly watery oatmeal, the crusty layer of melting sugar crackled ever so lightly. She had learned from uncomfortable experience not to dawdle when, one morning, her chilled oatmeal-sugar mixture had metamorphosed into a substance

## \*HONORABLE MENTION

disgustingly like Elmer's glue. But she had eaten it anyway. No one in this house ever wasted food. That was because Nama and her daughter, Virginia's mother, never let the children forget that there were Negroes like Tom and his family out on the Ward Place and even white people like the Kackleys and the Jacos and Clarene Thomas who never had enough to eat or enough of anything.

From the kitchen, the sizzling noise made by water running over a hot metal skillet announced that the cooking was done. Nama set the plate down and kissed her granddaughter on the cheek. "Well, you sure did finish that oatmeal quick and in a hurry. Here, I'll butter the toast and sit down and have a piece with you."

Virginia was pleased. It really wasn't much fun eating all alone. And there was always the chance that Nama might tell one of those wonderfully exciting stories about her own childhood up on a farm in Tennessee.

Instead, Nama said, "I've got some scraps I've been saving for you up in the attic, if you'd like to watch TV this morning and make doll clothes."

About six months ago, Virginia's grandparents had purchased a television under the guise of its being "something for two old folks to do at night." Everyone knew, however, that it was really for Virginia and her brother Herrell, since the children's parents had banned TV in their own home for "intellectual reasons." Even though the television was still fun to watch at times, the thrill had worn off rather quickly.

Virginia hoped that her noncommittal expression would be correctly interpreted by her grandmother.

Nama's eyes twinkled as she added, "Well, Rosa and I are going to be outside shelling corn and fixing it to freeze. Why don't you come on out when we get dressed and make some nice mudpies for lunch? We'll fill up that old Coca-cola bottle with water and set up your kitchen next to the rock garden."

Virginia was delighted. Her grandmother could always tell exactly what she wanted to do. "Nama, can I have an old magazine to take out and use for a recipe book like Mama's?"

"Sure, if you want to, honey, but why don't you try cooking like me with a pinch of this and a dab of that?"

Not quite under her breath Rosa began to mumble into the dishwater something about, "that child don't need to go littering the yard with papers. That'll just be one more thing for me to have to clean up. Spoiled rotten, that's what she is."

The grandmother was halfway up the steps when she called back over her shoulder, "Run up to my bedroom, honey, and sit in front of the mirror so we can comb your hair. I'll be there in just a minute."

Kneeling in the seat of the chair was the only way to see herself in the three-sided mirror behind the mammoth mahogany dresser. Having achieved this position, Virginia began to scrutinize the figure clad in mint green pajamas reflected in the glass. Oh that nose!

To a small girl, it seemed unbearably large. Perhaps that was because hers was round rather than tapered and graceful like her grandmother's and mother's. However, she was comforted somewhat that at least hers wasn't as big as Daddy's, Nampa's, or Herrell's.

A moving figure in the corner of the mirror suddenly caught her attention. It was the reflection of Nama pulling on her slip in the bathroom. Virginia was always very interested to see Nama in her funny baggy underpants, with that odd thing around her chest. She often wondered if perhaps the reason her own

nose was so big was that she was so skinny in the chest and that maybe if she put on a little weight there, her nose might miraculously diminish. Sometimes Virginia thought she would ask about that, except that she wasn't supposed to be seeing Nama without her clothes on.

The grandmother was coming into the bedroom now, fully clothed in a faded blue print dress that at one time must have been used for more than just shelling corn. Nama believed in using up everything, even though this dress now sagged two inches longer on one side than the other. Virginia remembered a story she had heard all her life. It was about Nama's mother who had literally starved to death trying to save her children the year the crops failed on the farm up in Tennessee.

Morning sun drenched the room with light and warmth. The smell of clean sheets and fresh ironing teased her nostrils. Virginia watched in the mirror as her grandmother brushed the usual one hundred strokes. Oh, how she loved her grandmother's eyes. Seen in the mirror, they were like the eyes of that deer Virginia had seen two years ago on the wall of the Planters Wholesale, kind and shy. She still remembered her father's reassuring words, "Oh, he's just posing for a picture." How she had wanted to believe that story, but even then she knew the real reason why that deer looked so sad and solemn. She knew he would never be able to get down from that wall and go save his friends from what had happened to him.

Virginia noticed the cake of pink rouge and the tarnished tube of lipstick sitting on the back of the dresser. She always wondered why her grandmother never wore makeup except on Sundays. Nama was certainly not poor now. Virginia knew because Nampa had gotten Nama a new mink coat just like old Mrs. Van Orsdale's. But Nama always said she didn't know where to wear the coat. Mrs. Van Orsdale wore hers to church every Sunday,



even in the Spring, but Nama had said, "It might make the Kackley children feel ill at ease when they ride with us on Sunday." So she only wore the coat to Memphis sometimes.

The pleasant brushing began to slow down. "96 . . . 97 . . . 98 . . . 99 . . . 100. There we go! Let's get those tails back up and then you run put on that red striped playsuit you wore down here yesterday. Sweetheart, I've decided that it might be nice for us to hop in the car and run get little Clarene Thomas to play with you this morning."

Hardly waiting for an answer, the grandmother chattered on. "With her mama always away from home working at the telephone office, why, that's no way for a little girl to be brought up. Let's call first, but I bet she'll jump at the chance to come over here. Don't know what made me think of her except that she hasn't been in my Junior Sunday school department lately. She'll enjoy coming over to play mudpies with you."

The grandmother began looking for the number on the phone pad when suddenly Rosa's ponderous form appeared at the door, beads of sweat already across her forehead and upper lip.

"Miss Edwina Sinclair. I think I done knowed you long enough to come in here and put in my two cents worth! Our little Miss Verginger don't need to be lollygabbing with that white trash. It just ain't healthy."

Virginia was surprised at Nama's angry reply, since her grandmother rarely ever showed her temper. "Rosa, I don't ever want to hear you talk like that again. It must be this hot spell we're having. That poor afflicted child; you're not even Christian. Only by the grace of God are we so comfortable. We should always befriend the less fortunate. It's good for children to be exposed to all sorts of people and it surely won't hurt Virginia to be nice to that poor lonely little girl."

"Hmph," came the reply. "I chooses to

keep my distance." Rosa shuffled back toward the kitchen.

With an exasperated sigh, Mrs. Sinclair turned to complete her telephone call.

Virginia didn't mind playing with Clarene no matter what Rosa thought. In fact, she rather enjoyed her. Clarene was such a curious girl; she wore such funny clothes and those thick glasses made such a wonderful prism when Clarene would take them off long enough for Virginia to experiment. Her hair was odd, too, all frizzy and curly, kind of like Rosa's. Virginia thought that probably Clarene's mother only brushed hers fifty or maybe just twenty-five times a day. This Clarene was more fun in some ways, even though she was older than any of Virginia's other friends. Clarene was thirteen, but she sure didn't act like she was. In fact, she still liked to play in the mud. She was very skinny and loved to have teaparties and almost always had a very interesting sore to look at on her leg.

Virginia thought about her own brother Herrell who was thirteen and four years her senior. He never would have anything to do with Clarene and always said that she and Virginia both were big babies.

"Virginia, are you daydreaming again? Come on now, if you're coming."

Grandmother and granddaughter walked out the side door and got in the big turquoise chrome decorated Buick that Nampa had given Nama for her birthday in June.

In about five minutes, the car was rolling up in front of the tiny vine-covered stucco place where Clarene, her mother, and her brother, David, lived. David glared out from behind the torn screen door and yelled that Clarene would be out in just a minute.

A cold chill crept up Virginia's spine. Over the summer, she had almost forgotten the cold steel-gray eyes and tan, hardened, raw-hide body of David. That same shock of wavy brown hair still fell over his left eye. She knew for a fact that he was fifteen years old

and still just in the sixth grade. This she overheard in the principal's office last spring while checking out of school to go have Dr. Furr remove a splinter from her foot.

Probably she would not have remembered even then if David had not frightened her so badly and made her so hideously and acutely aware of him earlier that very same week.

She had been walking down the dimly lit school corridor during the lunch hour one Tuesday when, from behind one set of lockers, she heard her name being softly called. Suddenly an iron grip on her arm caused her books to go crashing to the tile floor. All she could see was the decaying tooth in the middle of the slow grin that spread across the otherwise hard face. Suddenly the grip loosened, the hands flashed up and he flipped his eyelids until just the pink membrane showed. The horrid face he made sent Virginia's face into her skirt like an ostrich's head into the sand. "Ha, ha!" David had barked as he scampered off. "I just wanted to scare you." Virginia could remember standing there for several minutes crying as if she would never quit.

At that moment, the door of the car lurched open. "Hi there, Miss Sinclair. Goll-ee. Hey Virginia. It's been a month of Sundays since I seen you two last."

"Hey, Clarene," Virginia asked. "Have you ever been to the Smoky Mountains? That's where we've been for vacation all summer."

"No, I ain't. But I tell you what. Them church folk's been watching after us real good with food and clothes and stuff."

"I'm so glad, Clarene," replied Nama.

Clarene rattled on in her high-pitched monotone. "Know, I hardly got to tell Mama about them nice church folks. She still works all night and sleeps all day, so me and David, we don't get to talk to her much. And now she's done taken on another cleaning job on her days off from cleaning the telephone office. Says she wants to see if she can't buy

me and David a new coat for this winter."

"Honey, you'll probably need a new coat. I believe you've filled out over the summer." Nama was looking over her shoulder as they paused at a stop sign.

"Yes'm, that skirt ya'll gave me last spring won't even zip now," said Clarene. "But I wore it anyway so ya'll could see it." She smiled proudly.

By the time Nama had deposited the keys in their usual place on the buffet, walked through the house and out the back door, the children had already prepared a dozen or so gooey black cloverleaf rolls.

"Nama, look over here. Now we're going to make some clay pots and set them in the sun to dry. Clarene's going to make one for her Mama and I'm going to make one for you, my Mama and for Rosa."

"That's wonderful, dear. You'll be as busy as two little bees."

The cool, damp earth felt pleasant beneath the bare skin of the children's sprawled legs. A warm breeze sifted through the treetops causing the leaves of the two old pear trees to rustle lazily. The cooing of a dove wafted gently down from the pecan grove.

Rosa and the grandmother, methodically scraping one ear of corn bare after another, faced so that they could watch the children as they played. Mrs. Sinclair said to herself how much more matured Clarene's body looked than Virginia's. "Well, the girl *is* four years older. Poor thing. There's talk she'll have to be put in with the afflicted children if she goes back to school this fall. Just can't seem to learn." She continued her rhythmical scraping.

"Hmph! That child don't even have gump-tion enough to put on clean underpants."

Nama acted as if she had not heard Rosa's low-pitched comment.

"Hey, Virginia," Clarene said. "Mine's finished. Hey, why don't we do something else now?"

"Well, wait just a minute. I haven't finished mine yet. You know, I had to make three. Go put yours over in that spot of sun and I'll bring mine in just a second."

While Clarene walked carefully toward the spot of sun to deposit her little pot, Virginia, with tongue extended, labored diligently to put the finishing touches on the last of her three ashtrays. "There, that's done," she said under her breath. Then in three running flurries, the ashtrays joined the little pot to bake in the mid-morning sun.

"Are you girls already finished making mudpies?"

"Yes'm. Can we have some cookies now, and Clarene wants a glass of water."

"Not until I get some of that mud off of you. Come over to the hose and let me rinse off your hands."

Clutching Clarene's muddy hand, Virginia skipped with her over to where the grandmother was waiting with the running hose. The icy water ran in tiny rivers down their mudcaked arms. She and Clarene squealed together as they began to shake their arms wildly, flinging diamond beads of water into the morning sun.

As they ran into the house, Virginia heard Nama saying, "Come on, Rosa. Let's us go in with the children and have some cookies too. It's really too warm to be standing out here all morning. Anyway, we'd better be putting on something for lunch if everybody's going to eat here."

"Virginia! Oh Virginia!" Nama called from the kitchen. "Don't ya'll be messing up the house. Come on. We're fixing to have some of those cookies that Aunt Charlene sent and Rosa and I aren't going to wait!"

"Yes'm," Virginia called from upstairs. "Clarene just wanted to see my room. We're coming!"

They went back down to the kitchen. Virginia thrust her hand into the green and white cookie tin, extracting several of the large

white, crumbly discs. Clarene, suddenly very quiet with a pained expression on her face, shrank into the shadow in the corner.

Virginia heard Nama make her voice very tender and ask if Clarene wouldn't help herself to a few cookies. "No, ma'am. Thank you ma'am. All of a sudden like, I feel sort of on the puny side. Say, can I have that water now?"

"Sure, darling. Here, let me see if you have a fever. Don't you want to lie down for a few minutes? Rosa, fetch this child some water."

Rosa silently thrust the glass in one wet black hand toward Clarene who, clutching the glass in both hands, drank long and hard. Virginia watched, pondering the curious things Clarene had just told her while they were in the bedroom.

The scene was vivid in her mind, Clarene on the opposite side of the bed asking, "Are you the only one who sleeps in this big bed?"

"Sure, who else?" Virginia had answered.

"Well, I'd be scared to death in that big bed all by myself," Clarene said.

"Nama says big girls don't get scared."

"Well, I don't get scared either," Clarene continued. "Me and David's been sleeping together at night for about a year now. It's lots warmer that way and I never get scared no more."

Clarene finished her glass of water. "Miss Sinclair, maybe I ought to be getting home now. I feel lots better after that water."

"Clarene, we had really wanted you to stay and eat lunch with us. I had Rosa set an extra place for you."

"That's mighty nice of you ma'am, but you know I have to fix lunch for David. Think I will go out, though, and get that little pot that me and Virginia made. It's probably all dried out by now, that sun's so hot."

In her peculiar slew-footed gait, Clarene crossed the kitchen. As soon as the back screen had slammed shut, Rosa said, "Miss Edwina, know what I think about that Cla-

rene?"

"No, I don't Rosa, and furthermore, I don't want to know right now. Virginia, you run get the keys off the buffet. Rosa, before we go to take Clarene home, you'd better check to make sure the dogs haven't gotten into the corn."

Rosa obediently shuffled out the back door, sniffing very loudly. Virginia stood very still, munching on her last cookie, eyes squinted, still engrossed in thought. Having replaced the cookie tin on the proper shelf and given the cornbread one final peek, the grandmother turned toward the door. "Why, Virginia! You haven't heard a word I've been saying. Run on, now, and get those keys."

Looking toward her grandmother, Virginia said, "You know what, Nama? Clarene told me she likes her brother. I can't stand that boy. He scares me. But, anyway, nobody's supposed to like their own brother."

"Why, Virginia. I know you love Herrell. That was real sweet of Clarene to say she loves her brother."

"Yes, but Clarene says she sleeps with her brother. She told me about some things that made me feel all funny inside. Said that David taught her that's the way people make babies. But, Nama, I don't ever want to sleep with that stupid Herrell!"

The grandmother made no reply. Suddenly the silence was shattered as Rosa's high-pitched voice rang out, "Oh my Lawd God! She's done fell. Halp! Miss Edwina!"

The screen door banged against the back of the house as Nama flung it open. There lay Clarene, a limp mass out in the spot of sun.

Pushing Rosa aside, the grandmother rushed to the girl's side, gently raising Clarene's head onto her lap. "What in the world has happened?" A slow groan forced itself from Clarene's half-parted lips. "She's coming to. Quick, Virginia, run get some water and a cloth. Rosa, you help me get her inside to Virginia's bed."

Standing at the side of the big bed in her room, Virginia gazed down at Clarene, who was now resting with the cool, wet cloth over her eyes. Nama had gone out in the hall to telephone the doctor. As she stood there, Virginia noticed Clarene's long skinny nose and on impulse looked down to Clarene's chest line, which had not been completely covered by the quilt Rosa had carelessly thrown over her. Maybe the reason Clarene had a long skinny nose was because her chest was starting to get big.

"Virginia! Rosa! The doctor said that we should take Clarene out to the county hospital right away. He'll meet us out there to check her over. Clarene, darling, I called your mother too. She said she would take a taxi out as soon as she possibly could, but she's supposed to be at work all afternoon."

Clarene sat up in bed. "I feel ok now. Must of been that hot sun just took me by surprise."

But her voice had begun to waver on the last few syllables; Clarene began to cry. Gathering the girl into her arms, Nama nestled Clarene in her bosom, rocking slowly back and forth. For the first time, Virginia noticed the tired and torn look on her grandmother's face. Nama's soft brown eyes were sad and solemn, just like that deer's. As Virginia saw some tears trickling down from the corners of Nama's eyes, she wondered if her grandmother were crying because of Clarene.

Turning off the main road, Mrs. Sinclair guided the car into the emergency entrance where Dr. Furr stood waiting for them. The car stopped and the big doctor opened the door. "Is this the young lady who fainted? Why, she doesn't look sick to me! She's too pretty to be sick. Miss Edwina, would you mind letting me check her over?" The doctor flashed Clarene a cordial and reassuring smile as he helped her out of the car. Virginia wondered why the doctor hadn't seemed to notice that Clarene was really very ugly looking.

"That would probably be good, George,"

replied Mrs. Sinclair. "Her mother gave the permission and said that she would get out here as soon as possible. I'll leave Rosa and we'll be back right after lunch."

As they drove down the driveway, Virginia kneeled backwards in the seat waving to Clarene who stood, looking little, between Dr. Furr and Rosa, who was like a black thundercloud. "We'll be back soon, Clarene, so don't worry," Virginia called, though she doubted that Clarene understood.

On the trip back home, Nama said, "Virginia, you must promise me that you won't tell any of your friends about this morning."

"Yes'm. I promise." To Virginia, there was a strange sacredness about the whole situation.

By the time the big blue Buick bounced over the initial bump into the driveway, Virginia's grandfather had come home and was calling across the lawn, "Hey, Sugarfoot! Where've ya'll been? Aren't we eating lunch here today?"

Virginia ran to her grandfather. "Oh, Nampa. The most terrible thing has happened. My friend Clarene got sick this morning and we had to take her out to the hospital."

"Goodness gracious. There's no need to cry, sweetheart. What's she talking about, Mama?"

"Come on in," Nama said. "I'll just put everything out on the table. But I've got to talk to you first. Come on back in the kitchen."

The sound of Tarzan's blood-curdling screams blared from the television in the sun parlor where Herrell sat with his eyes glued to the screen. Virginia decided rather than have Herrell pester her, she would just follow the grown-ups into the kitchen. Anyway, she thought she had had quite enough of brothers for awhile.

Pushing the swinging door aside, Virginia stepped into the kitchen. She heard Nampa's voice, "That's really awful. Poor kid, poor

Clarene. This looks like a terrible mess."

"Virginia, you're not supposed to be in here." Nama looked over toward the door. "Go on out and sit down at the table. We'll be right out."

Virginia walked slowly out to the mahogany table in the dining room and stood behind her usual chair with the red and white satin seatcover. She didn't feel like smiling into the big gold framed mirror over the buffet. The roses in the center of the table seemed terribly wilted. At this point, she didn't care if there were people like the Kackleys and the Jacos who didn't have enough to eat. She wasn't hungry and knew she couldn't eat.

Suddenly the telephone in the hall began to ring. Although directed into the receiver, Nama's voice was audible as far as the dining room. "Six months gone! I never dreamed it was that much. Oh, this is terrible. But George, the worst part is who the probable father is. Has she told you anything about what she's been doing?" The rest of the conversation trailed off.

Virginia didn't think Clarene was so terrible, and it hurt her to hear everybody saying that she was. In fact, Clarene was her best friend now. That's what she had said while they were still out making mudpies.

Suddenly she felt a hard thump on the back of her head and looked up to see Herrell taking his usual place beside her. Virginia's tongue, like a reflex, shot out of her mouth, directed toward Herrell in their usual native-like greeting.

All four had now assembled at their places. Nama, her face looking as though it might shatter at any moment, was saying something about having to hurry back to the hospital. Then came her customary words, "Daddy, will you return thanks, please?"

Virginia found it impossible to close her eyes as the family bowed in prayer. A dove cooed gently in the distance as she looked at Herrell with a new interest.

## For Leda

When it was better for you,  
Finding your daydreams enveloped  
In quiet, or seeing that sunrise  
Was the color you'd always imagined:

tiny inner tongues. Did it happen  
As you had described it: the fear  
And the warmth, the unelected shock  
Of face and feather. The blue curve

In the holding of neck to breast.  
Love asks that blood be mystic,  
Closing all eyes. For the moment beating,  
Loudly beating the shape of soul.

The egg silence growing, you taste  
New blood, sweeter. The child must  
Have known the secrets of air and sky.  
Can you release the bulb of thinking flesh

And not regret a speechless birth?  
Spiritual wings open and the child  
Relives an ancient passage. Mouth groping

To unbend each arm, the body's mirror  
Slides apart. He, suddenly erect, is  
Going back. The flesh and nerves contract,  
Trying to forget, unable to fly.

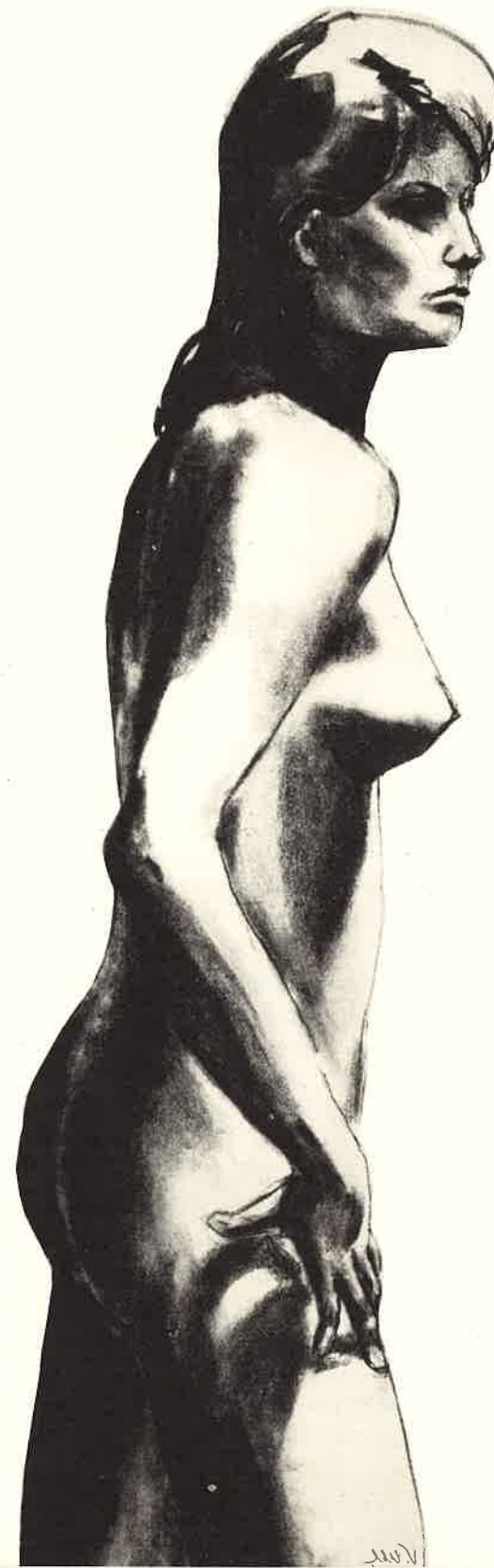
— Gary Kerley

## The Professional

Orange light sporadically splashes  
across the room and neon fizzes  
on the window ledge, as she sits  
by the bed, naked, a stiff chair  
flattened against her sagging thighs.  
Her fingertips touch the window sill,  
lightly and with no purpose;  
the cotton spread slants off the bed  
on to the floor, as a man walks down  
the sidewalk, putting on his overcoat.  
It is a very cold night.

She has been good,  
really good, and reasonable, a professional,  
so to speak. A symphony of virtuous vices,  
an elegant hand on the back,  
a hero in the final act. The last  
cigarette is crushed and she pulls the covers  
over her hips, across her breasts  
and up to her smiling face,  
which is sinking into satin.

— *Phil Williams*



— *Virginia Uhl*

## The View

— Marta Powell

Wilma sat statue-stiff on her wooden stool behind the cash register, feeling her yellow print blouse sealed wetly to her back. Sticky heat filtered through the screen door facing her, as the sun burned riotously bright on the white plot of concrete outside. The fan that rotated lazily above Wilma's head seemed only to slice the heat into heavy layers that settled on the cash register and Wilma's flaming hair. Wilma could feel the salty bubbles sprouting across her forehead and trickling down the too-orange film of makeup that clung to her face. With the disappearance of the sun behind a cloud, the sidewalk turned an eye-pleasing gray, disturbing Wilma's gaze.

Twisting on her stool, Wilma scanned the red-leather booths that lined the walls and the row of tables that filled the middle of the floor, pleased to find the Downtown Cafe empty. The last of the church crowd — a sea of fancy neckties, shiny patent leather, and stiffly-starched little-girl dresses — had floated through the screen door, well fed and sluggish. With each slamming of her cash-register drawer, Wilma had forcibly smiled eartoear

and with one of her syrupy cliches — Hope youenjoyedit, SeeyounextSunday — encouraged them to return. The great exodus was always a tiresome ordeal for Wilma, who had come to loathe the cliches as heartily as she loathed flashing her smiles on and off like a neon sign. No one ever tipped her.

Wilma glanced at the old, gray-faced clock that sat like a blemish on the wall. One twenty-three. From underneath the counter she took her bloated handbag and fished through the bagful of unnecessaries to produce a large oval mirror, scarred with blots of hardened makeup, and a crumpled yellow Kleenex. Her reflection was less than heartening. The blackness that sat in tiny globs on her lashes and drooped in half-moons about her eyelids made her eyes clownish. With the Kleenex she tried to erase the drooping lines of black and smooth the sweat-streaked film on her cheeks. The early-morning hour of effort had done nothing to enhance her sixteen years. Dismally, she shoved the mirror and Kleenex back into her handbag and stuffed a toothpick between her pouting, red-

waxed lips.

From the park across the street, Mr. Shepherd emerged and walked in silent and well-calculated steps toward the cafe. Noting his approach, Wilma quickly began straightening the glass-enclosed gum display below the counter. As his shadow pierced the canvas-white sidewalk, she straightened to greet him, clutching a pack of Fruit Stripe gum in her sweaty left palm.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Shepherd," said Wilma, quickly ripping the wooden fang from her mouth.

"Good afternoon," he returned in his soft-but-clear voice.

Mr. Shepherd always arrived at one-thirty, only a half hour before the cafe's Sunday closing time, and invariably sat in the booth against the wall on which the sailfish hung. Wilma followed Mr. Shepherd with her eyes. Her gaze drifted to the wall above the booth. Arching its body across the stagnant sea of brown paint, the sailfish disturbed Wilma. It seemed so unaware of its predicament — dead and hanging on a wall. Beneath the fish sat Mr. Shepherd, eating vegetables, drinking iced tea, and seeming altogether interested in his food.

Wilma, from her perch, stole long, wondering glances at middle-aged Mr. Shepherd, admiring his neatly laundered pale blue shirt, his creased slacks, and especially his blue socks that, unlike the thin white kind that many older men wore, never crept down into the heel of his shoe. She found everything about Mr. Shepherd very clean and fresh and curiously wondered how he managed to escape the hottest summer Sundays without sweating. She thought it very wonderful that, though his gray-white hair had yielded to baldness, it was never a glossy baldness but the soft, textured baldness of a baby's head.

Deciding to perform a courteous, hospitable chore, Wilma slipped from her stool, smoothed the wrinkle-striped skirt, and walk-

ed toward the sailfish wall and Mr. Shepherd's booth.

"Is everything all right?" she asked, her heart thumping nervously against her rib cage.

"Quite fine, thank you," he replied, after politely touching his lips with his napkin.

Wilma tried to stroll calmly back to her cash register, but her legs moved like rusty scissors. Looking into Mr. Shepherd's ocean-eyes had made her feel very sweaty and unclean. Returning to her post, she decided to busy herself by straightening the cigar display.

Minutes later, when Mr. Shepherd stood before her cash register politely waiting for his change, Wilma grew flushed, fumbling through the coins and desperately trying to think of something amusing to say. Consciously avoiding her cliches, she finally asked him if he cared to buy a cigar, but he smiled and told her that he did not smoke.

Mr. Shepherd pushed through the screen door and walked the length of the sidewalk before crossing the street and placing himself at the end of the ticket line forming in front of the theater for the Sunday matinee. Wilma thought his progress down the sidewalk was very king-like. She imagined how he drenched the lady in the box office with his liquid blue eyes as he softly and clearly said: "One, please." Wilma watched until his light blue shirt passed into darkness through the theater door.

Wilma grabbed her handbag and walked quickly to the door marked "Ladies" at the rear of the cafe. She pushed her way in as two of the waitresses were making their exit. They did not swap smiles. Wilma knew that the waitresses felt it very unfair that she had been given the more desirable job of cashier simply because Mr. Wilson, the manager, had been a boyhood friend of Wilma's father, who had died more than four years ago.

The mirror threw Wilma's image back at her with fierce clarity. Bending over the sink and cupping her hands, Wilma dashed hand-





— Erin Sherman

## Hypercentricdoomia

— Bennie C. Hammonds, Jr.

Harm not the innocent 'midst thee. Rant and rave and slash your throats 'til death do you part and blood is like water; Yet harm not the innocent 'midst thee . . . and crowds up ahead blocking the street and moving too fast to see anything but flashing lights of the ambulances and the people, so many people almost deafened by the screaming crying grieving moaning raging crowding people everywhere around the trail of blood the long trail of blood all up and down the sidewalk blistering 'neath the sun . . . Harm not the innocent 'midst thee. Destroy yourselves 'til none are left but flames and ruins and massive graveyards; Yet harm not . . . the procession of hundreds upon hundreds of hovermobiles gliding across the bright Martian sky behind the single, flower-decked, chrome-lined, black hovercoach . . . Harm not, my God, the innocent! Snipe and raid and blitz and burn and genocide as long as you wish, yet . . . woman falling, baby crying, screaming-searing light flaming down, the red and blue dissolving in blood . . . YET —

Blazing noon sun. Sky naked blue. Heat waves/Wind blasts. Dust swirling 'round. Gritted/clear air. Mountains distant. Jagged jugged peaks. Foothills squatting. Desert. Windswept desert. Sand flat desert. Sizzling/gusting desert. And the graveyard.

Cemetery lying lifeless in the sweltering/breezing desert.

Gravemarkers sitting soulless in wreath-lain rows.

People standing crowded 'tween silver tombstones.

People, many people, so very many people.  
People like a standing ocean hundreds deep

and hundreds wide.

Standing mourners in semi-circle.

Men, women, children, black, yellow, white.  
Silent, grieffaced mourners 'hind uniformed policemen.

Mars Police at silent, shoulder-to-shoulder attention.

Red and blue uniforms unmoving, helmets under right arms.

Standing Honor Guard in semi-circle.

Semi-circle 'round open grave.

Moving silently and slowly along the crimson carpet stretching straight across the sand from where masses of hovermobiles sat parked, a scarlet-robed priest of the Reform Maglican Church led the funeral procession to the gravesite. A black man, tall and muscular, buried his face in his hands and soundlessly wept like a baby. Six altarboys followed the priest carrying mourning staffs, and every one of them had tracks of tears on their cheeks. A little yellow girl began crying loudly, and her mother embraced her and buried her head in her bosom. Following the altarboys was a man in all-black, his face wreaked in agony. Two white teenagers stood blinking furiously, burying their deathfeel beneath bland faces. With immediate family and dignitaries behind, six Mars Police carried the flower-flooded coffin to its final resting place, while discreetly-concealed telescreen cameras beamed the scene across the universe.

To the rear of the crowd of mourners, a teenage girl excused herself and slowly stumbled away down a row of headstones, her tears falling onto the shifting hot sand with every other step, until she tired and unceremoniously squatted in the sand, covered her

face with her hands, and weeped, shaking her head several times.

Then she began whimpering and mumbling to herself, her choked, garbled voice crying out, "Why, ugggGod, *why*? She was a g-gooddd woman . . . uhhh, she tried to help — to help ev'ryb'dy . . . uhh, for so longgg, over ten years! Uuuggghh, mwhy do allth good people diee??? She tried to help the people . . . all the people . . . uhh, no matter the color . . . crying with them . . . struggling with them . . . uggh, *WHY?!!*"

But the only answer was another gust of wind and sand.

Swirling grains and sunlight beaming down around the waiting chasm under golden coffin resting still upon the crossbars placed by rock-faced pallbearers now standing back with blackness in their hearts no blacker than the grief of trancelike gentleman who with misted eyes-of-death stood near crimsoned priest intoning words of long-ago ancient Latin "Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo, Domine. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem. In paradisum . . ." so droning while altarboys in white-red robes stood 'round with staffs raised high above the mourning assemblage in crowded circle 'hind stiff-poised Mars Police disarmed with red roses in each lapel, her most-loved flower.

Mother-in-grieving of white hair and wrinkled face, of tear-stained cheeks and quiv'ring hands, of pale yellow within veiled black, of whisp'ring Oriental chant of death beneath your breath, Mrs. Y'ung Su-Po, remember you a teenage girl discovered missing from home one long-ago day and searched for frantically until found wandering exhausted in the desert at verge of perishment, then lying in bed with babbling family 'round wondering why no indication from she before of such until you shooed them off and sat with crying, crying daughter and you asked her gently why and the sad-eyed teenage girl told you she ached from war and hate and misery

and poverty and racism and scenes of hungry children and deprived people and so great was her compassion that she couldn't bear not being able to solve all the anguish of Mankind, so great her despair that she felt she had to suffer and die herself to pay for living comfortably without need; remember you now, Mrs. Y'ung Su-Po, and know that your dearest daughter's anguish is ended forever.

There is no balm in Gilead. No solace for your suffering soul. Only your arm around you wife's shoulder and your inscrutable face directing unyielding eyes at the gilded casket as if X-rays boring through a final time to rest upon the lifeless daughter of silver hair and yellow skin and azure eyes and slender size so cold and still now but not at all like once before when you had come home alone to find her disheveled and sobbing, nearly in shock, battered and crying, and you had comforted the young woman daughter and pleaded her what happened until she told a street thug had raped her, and unbelieving had you comforted her and asked how with Mars Police self-defense training she had let it happen, and the pitiful woman-girl had simply said, "I could not hit him," and then in that strange way you understood her, crying more for him than herself; Mr. Su-Po do you struggle not to cry while knowing she will never cry again.

The priest began speaking in English, "We gather here this day of our Magnus, Solarious 56, 3099, to commit to the desert the last remains of one whom we all did love, Lynn Y'ung, wife of Mr. Lee Ching, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Su-Po, and captain in the Community Affairs Department of the Mars Police Corps, a position she did faithfully hold for ten and a half years. There are no words to express our deep sense of loss over the tragic and senseless passing of this compassionate woman. We all did love her . . ."

There are no words, Mr. Ching. No words to describe how you feel looking at the gilded

coffin and brilliant flowers before you. No words to soothe, no words to erase the still-vivid scenes of once-wife fondling adopted baby at her breast, adopted because she could never have one her own, scenes of arguing with her how her runaway emotions made her too concerned in other people's problems, scenes of cradling her precious in bed, of watching her bent over her desk doing paperwork late at night, arranging, supplying, requesting, handling a million things at once, driving herself past her physical endurance simply because someone needed help, organizing the yearly Streamas party for under-privileged kids and getting them toys and new clothes, the grownup girl-child and wife helping others, always helping others until the visiphone call and Mrs. Lian half-screaming, "Mr. Ching! It's Lynn! . . . Oh, my Magnus . . .!" and not even waiting running out the office into the street to hail hovicab and a Mars Police squad car flashing to a landing before him with a sobbing patrolman leaning out saying, "Mr. Ching! We got here as fast as we could to take you there . . ." and climbing in and taking off at the same time confusion trying to find out what happened radio blaring ". . . reported to be in critical condition . . ." crowds up ahead and officers all talking at once hundreds people blocking the street and moving too fast to see anything but flashing lights of the ambulances and people, so many people and almost crashlanding so he could get out noise of people crying, screaming, grieving, moaning, raging, crowding people his arms flailing to push his way through someone yelling, "CLEAR THE WAY! IT'S MISTER CHING! HER HUSBAND! GET OUT OF THE WAY . . .!" and the tearful, shocked faces looking at him as he went by, all the grieving faces and then his feet almost slipping on something sticky blood on the sidewalk, oh Magnus, all under everywhere struggling crazily to the center of the crowd and then the scene which paralyzed him tangle of doc-

tors and medical equipment crushed in by people in a circle with blood all over the sidewalk and jostled by Mars Police angry and grieving until recognized him and called doctor from kneeling between heavy medi-chines blocking can't see man who stood before saying, "I'm sorry. We did all we could. It was just a matter of time for her, but . . ." mind numb pushing forward scared eyes desperately searching unbelieving past the barricade to see Lynn lying on her side under portable transplanters and lifesavers her body torn and bloodied a gored tunnel through her stomach ripped her artificial leg deteriorating into pulp now without her life-force her face burned ghastly eyes frozen blind upwards dead Lynn dead Lynn dead Lynn . . .

Like her father do you not cry, Mr. Ching. Outside.

He lies entombed by 31st. Century medical technology, the little boy near-death and dreaming of once-mother standing on an open street holding his hand talking to a woman holding a newborn baby smiling and yet somehow crying knowing she can never birth a child and turning to leave, the dying form cringes 'neath the jungle of life-support systems when the scene of horrordeathdying returns again seeing mother turn to go back onto the sidewalk when the fire exploded between them rays raining down her body twisting voice screaming plunging back to him with blood against her uniform pushing him down other woman falling headless baby dropping onto surface, pain-clothed patient who waits for death to cvertake you, try to moan to ease the misery but not the sight of mother falling in blood and bathing rays onto sidewalk reaching out to you with an arm dripping red but carried backward and dying with every inch being taken until blast of light erupting through her body and last seeing her rolling off to one side with rays like lances piercing her, little boy do you wait for death and reunion with her after infamous parting.



Another boy watched as if in a dream grief-filled policeman lower golden coffin and covering flowers into enveloping grave, as real as the husband and father until now Stoic who crumble in weeping without shame, as real as wails of old women seeming from all sides who erupt into agonized cries, as real as the veiled mother who clutches helplessly at her heart and led away by next-of-kin, as real as yellow Mars Police who uttered animal-like and balled his fiststightly, the telescreens filming coffin sinking.

But then another boy lay entombed, this time by 31st. Century torturing technology, the needles jabbed all over within him, dark machines whining around him pumping repentance and eternal-agony into him, this boy not yet eighteen, black, poor-once, street-liver from the day he was born, dope-pusher the only trade he knew, his fists his only skill, an astrohead with HPM-6 his only druggedblood, this boy silently screamed from the torturers' handiwork and I see him screaming once before, crying with hot tears he spills falling upon the man's lifeless body at his feet, the man with crushed and crumbled skull with handcuffs locked behind his back, while people stand around the entrance to the alley around the white Mars Police speaking into microphone, "... resisted arrest and tried to attack ..." this boy utters the silent scream of eternal tortured pain and the scream of revenge of burning pigs for father murdered and clenches his hands around lethal ray rifle but not before the lethal syringe which plunged into the base of his neck to shrieks of wasting the white pigs who genocided his flesh-of-flesh now riding a flaming comet with showers of stars before his eyes and a plunging sweetness pulling my soul apart floating sailing over rooftops with graviboots music crushing his skull like my dad kill the first cop I see Heaven and infinity rolling under until the red and blue uniform of one of the white pigs who killed my dad below the universe in

his sights red and blue and "Fire on Auto-lock" and lightning spitting down at the murdering pig who killed his father firing ray-fingers which spun him around and cut down more pigs nearby and the sun blossoming into crescendo of spotlights slashing him as he tried to crawl that's it murderer die like you did to my dad die pig oh die oh oh pig die pig oh pig die die oh die oh pig die pig oh die pig oh oh die

The boy who squirms from torturing agony, know you your wish came true to kill a pig.

Then there were no words but the silent painwails of the coffin being carefully, tenderly lowered into the patient grave on golden cords by six Mars Police, lowering sweet Lynn Y'ung Su-Po Ching . . .

These hands which hold the cord descending her, these hands which soon ago held the handle which raised the weapon which aimed the barrel which fired the laser which killed a little yellow boy for throwing a rock at them.

. . . into her final resting place, life ended at forty-seven, once-daughter, once-wife, and once-beloved of an entire poverty-stricken community, a whole world, now nevermore . . .

These hands had fingered keys, had idly, lazily fingered keys, had fingered keys in darkened pants while out beyond, a flashing craft had dived from sky toward huddled masses sitting unmoving in protest and had smashed a girl, a beautiful black girl, had smashed a girl and flew away, had killed a girl and flew away, and these hands had fingered keys, had idly, lazily fingered keys.

. . . now lowered into the waiting desert, her desire to help people, all people, now ended forever, never to smile at a child nor suffer another's worries, never to buy the children toys . . .

These hands had held a solar-powered cigarette lighter and lit an imported processed Saturnan cigar and flicked ashes on the body

of a suspected sniper shot during the Fifth Mars Chinatown Riots, a pregnant yellow woman shot in the back once and the stomach twice. . . her only wish to serve her fellow human beings with all her heart, with all her energy, with all her mind, body, and soul

And these hands holding the cord settling

Lynn Ching into her grave had held a magnesium club which crushed the skull of a handcuffed black man in a dark alley . . . for nothing.

These white hands placed her in her grave and began covering her with glistening Martian sand.



— Virginia Uhl

### A Sequence of Days

Good Friday:

This was the day he died;  
 The day both Earth and Sky  
 Denied their hybrid darling;  
 Earth thrust him from her breast  
 Giggled on a dogwood sibling;  
 Each tight bud got the red blot of his blood;  
 Retells the technicolor crime  
 Each double-crossed white bloom  
 Each bloody bearing time.  
 This was the way he died:  
 Earth thrust him from her lap  
 And fettered herself to freedom;  
 Sky turned a black back on him  
 And shut that stunning eye  
 Where surely he had seen  
 The "Aye" of God.  
 This was the way he died  
 The day he died.

Black Saturday:

O now God's boy is bled of all his goodly godhood,  
 And dead as either thief,  
 And dead as Judas.  
 Earth spreads a rugged lap to hug her ragged doll;  
 Recalls his noisy weaning time and weeps,  
 Offering him again a dripping breast  
 To titillate his pulse,  
 But he is dead.  
 She locks him in her rockered arms and runes him rest,  
 Hurling curses on that sly dog, Death,  
 Who bit, of all her bastard lads,  
 The best.

Then Sunday:

And who can say whose son it was unwound himself  
 That morning?  
 Broke those lockered arms and got away?  
 Picked all the locks of the past that held him fast  
 And got away from lullabies at last,  
 Away from even dreaming of a breast?  
 Aye, who can say who Jew-ed the tomb that day;  
 Left scabbed rags glued to that fooled slab of stone  
 And went out loud to meet the Sunday sun?  
 Whose body, cowled white, wove in and out of sight;  
 Moved through room walls as we move through mere air;  
 Rose heavenward without a stair  
 Hovering light as light?  
 What family tree would not graft gladly such a stem?  
 What Supernatural Sire  
 Not shout, all tongues on fire,  
 Claiming Him?

— G. H. Emily

### Kouros

I kissed your face, at peace  
 As you rested your head upon my lap.  
 But you slept and never felt the wind  
 Upon your face or knew that sleep  
 Destroyed time and smoothed faces  
 Like a patient Grecian artist.

— Kathleen Costello

## Turns

All that is remembered  
is forgotten; the turn  
of a nameless street,  
the summer voyage in March,  
the afternoon of silent music.  
The listed names of dead  
friends are misplaced,  
out of a vague bitterness  
for their desertion;  
the order of prayers  
is confused by the sabbath.

Age defines its own selection;  
moments of desire, points of turning  
to green roads long as light  
resume at intervals of contentment;  
the bitter nights resurrected,  
faceless as ice,  
form their own final circle.

– *Phil Williams*

## The Sheltering of Her

My brother has come back from the risen place.  
An ancient meadow listens to the jewel in his flesh.  
His shoulder blades drop without sound to the floor,  
Where they shake once, enclosing a woman's heart.

The sheltering of her, like rain in a noiseless  
Winter, is a white stone of her child's face smiling.  
Shadows move the moon along a lake, as she hears  
His breathing where it is all light and water.

I watch my brother kneel, and know that he  
Has forgotten what holds him to the earth.  
Her shelter of blood covers him like a shroud;  
The pointing waves rock his body to sleep.

– *Gary Kerley*

## Celebration

There are lizards pushing the stone, arching,  
Knowing what crests their backs. Like bats,  
They sense the hour is through, the sun exhausted  
Behind the lighthouse, beneath galaxies of air.

Moles have worn soft places in my flesh,  
Sleeping in the brown pockets of time;  
Waking the hawk that waits in my elbow,  
They move excitedly when I dream of drowning.

Not hearing the owl of my past, it responds  
By noise: the incredible shouting of wings.  
I think of celebration as an opaque lion,  
Feeding its young what crawls on the earth.

– *Gary Kerley*



– *Vivienne Drakes*

## Fireflies

— E. B. Anderson

David paused over the watercolor pallet. Something was missing. Of course the painting did not look like the old Graham house, but David never had been interested in making pictorial replicas. It was the feeling of the place that he wanted to capture in color. The passing beauty of the old house struck his imagination, and around him he felt the ease of the wide porch with its white railing that a person could prop his feet upon. The spacious rooms, the high ceilings, big windows — the ease and the nostalgia. It was a nice change from having to work in his crowded one-room studio in the apartment.

The front screen door swung open, and a barefoot child in yellow play clothes came skipping to a halt at his side. "Daddy, I'm ready." David still lingered over the pallet, thinning a dab of yellow and mixing it with a touch of red. The child tilted her blond head to her right shoulder, pouting her lip out. "Daddy, you *promised!* Don't you remember? You said we could catch fireflies tonight."

"Um-hmm." David added a little more red, deepening orange spot on the pallet.

Getting no further response, the girl crossed her arms and assumed the most exasperated position her four foot-two inch figure could express. She tried again, this time turning her whine into a plea, "Da . . . ddy — PA-LEASE!"

"Babe, I've almost got the color I've been hunting for, see?" She didn't care about his old colors, and her face showed it. "Now, don't bother me, Dora. Go find Mother."

"But Daddy — it's getting dark." She relaxed her arms, but kept her head cocked, glad she finally had his attention. "And besides, Mother says she has to practice now."

"Practice?" It had been years since he had heard Amia say that. When they had been students, she had spent at least six hours a day at the piano, most of that time working on technique.

"Daddy . . ."

"Okay, okay. Quit whining and let me finish this. I guess it *is* getting too dark to work out here."

Dora jumped up to throw her arms around his neck and gave him a bump-kiss. "Oh Daddy, thank you! I'll go find a jar. It'll need

grass and rocks and air holes." She scampered over the wooden floor, down the steps toward the garage.

"The child is too demanding. Amia's fault. She always spoils her." He lifted the brush, dabbing a spot of orange into the lower corner of the painting. "Hmm. Give it a little warmth."

As he rinsed the brush in the water jar, David heard the brassy tinkle of the piano begin in the front room. He wiped his hands on the worn knees of his favorite tan corduroy pants, the ones Amia had tried to throw away, then pushed his rusty brown hair back from his forehead. He slung the water out over the banister and began capping the tubes of paint.

Amia had been excited when she first heard from Joe that the old place had a piano. How long since she'd touched one? Four, five years? This one must have been in Joe's family for a long time. Joe had told her he had had it tuned last month, but with the early summer moisture it was really off again. Amia had detected that immediately.

Leaving his supplies on the front porch, David ambled through the front door into the room where Amia was squarely seated in front of the ancient upright piano. The back seam of her blue dress zippered up her rigid back past her pointed elbows toward her ash-blond bun. She glanced over toward him, watched him slouch down in an overstuffed armchair, then turned back to the keyboard. Her thin fingers ran up and down in black and white two-octave scale patterns.

Her technique had gotten lousy, he thought, watching the straight back lean toward the right elbow. Those same old scales. Wish she'd get around to playing something.

Dora came skipping through the front door, holding an old pickle jar in her hand. "Daddy, I found . . . Oh Mama!" She ran over to the side of the piano stool. "Oh Mama, play something pretty so I can dance like Mary

does when her mother plays the piano."

Amia mumbled that middle C was striking two strings at once, but she began one of her old pieces called "Spring." David propped his head up with his hands behind his neck, wanting to see what Dora would do. Lately, he had seen her imitating her little friend's ballet routines, only in Dora's body the rigid positions seemed to come out pure dance. He liked to think of her as his creative child of nature, free to move, free to express, in her own young way with no limitations.

The sun itself had already set, but the after-glow was filtering through the organdy curtains. The dust Dora had raised broke the light around her as she crouched up in a ball, very tiny and still in the middle of the room. The treble sounded tinny at first, then it began to soften. At the first bass note, Dora began slowly to unwind, letting her arms lead upward in a point together. The bass grew richer. David could feel the notes somewhere between his lungs and stomach. He felt hypnotized. Now Dora was standing the height of her six years, letting her face lift upward at the same time she unfolded her arms and raised to half-point, taking all the glow up with her . . .

The music stopped as suddenly Amia turned around on the piano stool. "Really, David, we've got to get her into ballet classes."

Dora dropped to the floor, crosslegged and pouting. Where her golden figure had been, David now gazed into Amia's face. Her green eyes were dull under the straining forehead.

"Oh Mama," Dora sighed loudly. "I wasn't through yet." Then after a moment she added, "But I *do* want to take ballet like Mary!"

"Isadora —" Amia always called her by her full name. "We'll have to be going soon. If you are going firefly hunting, you had better do it now." She reached through the grayness to switch on the floor lamp. "And put on your socks and shoes."

"Oh, all right." Dora pulled herself up,

throwing her father a pleading look. Getting no response from David, she grabbed the pickle jar from the floor. "All right. I'll do it *all by myself*." She marched out of the room on her heels.

"David, you'd better bring in the yard furniture and pack the car. I promised Joe we would have the keys to their place back by ten tonight."

David rose out of the armchair slowly. "Nice way to end a leisurely weekend, Amia. Why did you have to bring up the ballet lessons again? What do you want to do? Argue all the way home? We've already talked enough about it."

"David, I think you're being unreasonable and selfish."

"You're the one who's being unreasonable! That money I got from the Lincoln Art Show isn't enough for even one year of ballet. What do you want to do? Build her hopes up with a few lessons, then make her drop it? Besides, she doesn't need lessons; she's a natural dancer." After six years of marriage to Amia, he felt like he was finally seeing the real woman. He turned in disgust toward the kitchen, but Amia stopped him.

"So, instead of even trying to work something out, you're going to take your prize money and go sketching in the Bahamas for two weeks?"

"Oh, so you don't think my sketching trips are important to my work. Is that it? Ha!" He turned to face her squarely. "Amia, when we married, we promised to be inspiration for each other. Seems like all I've been getting lately is your continual worrying about your own trivial concerns."

"I don't consider the grocery bill and Dora's upbringing trivial concerns, David." She passed him in the hallway and began packing the suitcase in the bedroom. David slammed out the back door, his mind racing back over their relationship the past few years.

Truth comes slowly, he thought, jerking up one of the wooden lawn chairs. Now I know: she is shallow. Money. Clothes. A nicer apartment. Inspiration? Ha! She bothers me constantly with her picky concerns — the P.T.A., the first grade car pool, her boss's quirks. After all, I never said that she ought to get that secretarial job. If was her own choice. We could live cheaper, surely. But no — she had to stick Dora and me in the same shallow pattern. I see it coming. First, the ballet lessons. Next, the Girl Scouts; then, the sororities!

He slapped the wooden chairs down on the floor of the kitchen.

Maybe I ought to just go to the Bahamas and never come back. Would certainly be the easiest thing to do.

Amia had the suitcase packed. She moved into the kitchen. David crossed his arms and leaned against the back door.

The adrenalin spark is gone, he thought, watching her bend over to check the gas stove. Romantic-idealism fails again. After a weekend of relative bliss, it's back to the old routine — six o'clock alarms, long hours of working in the studio, with some attempts at creativity while Dora dances in the hall and Amia grows compulsively neat. End-of-the-month bill talks, and Amia's nerves. If she could only learn to take things leisurely. But in the last few years, she's only become increasingly compulsive about ordering our way of life.

Amia straightened, felt him looking at her. "The suitcase is packed, and the house is in good shape. We'd better start back if we plan to get into Glaston by ten." She paused on her way into the front room, "Oh, David, don't forget your paintings on the side porch."

She really fooled me when we first met at that beach party. I've got to laugh now just thinking about it. Stayed up all night talking about poetry. The artist and the musician. God! What a platonic relationship!

He walked slowly toward the bedroom for the suitcase, thinking about that night.

Well, she wouldn't let me touch her — not that I even thought about it. Not, at least, until that early morning when we walked out to see the sunrise over the ocean.

He pulled the suitcase off the bed and paused in the hallway.

He had been used to those sunrises, but Amia had grown up inland and had never camped in the wild or even visited the seashore. She had seemed very excited about the whole experience.

David looked through the hall door to the front room. He could see Amia standing still, looking down the room toward the piano. She had been so still that early morning. He remembered the experience vividly now. She had stood next to him, shivering in the breeze, her golden hair streaming out behind her, those eyes sparkling against the air. The swelling mountains of blue after blue rolling in over each other. And what a sky! That strange, awesome mixture of red and gold. It had seemed to touch everything in view . . . the clouds, the sand, Amia, glowing. Bright, that morning.

But she isn't thinking that now. She's probably wanting her piano back again. I told her she didn't have to sell it when Dora was born. We could have gotten the money from somewhere.

He walked into the front room and placed the suitcase by the door.

"David?" Her voice sounded tense, restrain-

ed.

"Hmm?"

"I've been thinking." She walked up directly in front of him.

"I have, too."

"Maybe you are right. Maybe a person's hopes shouldn't be built up beyond what is actually possible."

Her shoulders sagged a little as she looked down at her hands. David put his arms around her waist, felt her shiver, suddenly aware himself of the heaviness of the air that seemed to press down around them. She didn't look up, but rested her forehead against his chest. They stood together in the silence till they heard Dora's footfalls on the front porch. A moment later she came bursting into the room.

"Daddy, do you want to see?" She held the jar up right in his face. All he could see were twigs and rocks surrounded by glass. Flashes broke through the tangle sporadically.

"Mary says they're talking to each other when they light up."

"Maybe they are. Come on, Babe, let's head on out. We've got a long road ahead of us."

During the drive back toward the city, David was aware of Amia, sitting quietly beside him. Her eyes were straight ahead, but her thoughts went beyond the windshield. Glancing back at Dora in the mirror, he could see the child snuggled down between his art supplies, her arm around the flickering pickle jar.



## CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Anderson is a junior English major at Agnes Scott College and has studied narrative writing under Dr. Margret Trotter. Last quarter, Elizabeth was the *Aurora* poetry award winner.

Kathleen Costello is a senior English major at Agnes Scott College. She has taken directed writing in poetry under Dr. Margret Trotter and has published poetry in the fall issue of *Aurora*.

Vivienne Drakes is a sophomore at Agnes Scott College.

Geneva H. Emily graduated in 1970 from the University of Georgia with a B.A. in English literature and is now enrolled in the graduate school. Her work has appeared in several literary publications including the *Georgia Review*, *DeKalb Literary Arts Journal*, and *Calliope*, the student literary magazine of the university.

Karen Hamann is a junior art major at Agnes Scott College.

Bennie C. Hammonds, a native of Atlanta, is a sophomore at Emory University majoring in French. He has published several stories in the *Archon*, the creative arts magazine of Emory and has studied writing under Mr. Michael Mott.

Gary Kerley is a graduate student at the University of Georgia seeking an M.A. in English. Winner of the Writers' Conference Poetry Award, he has published poetry in *Ann Arbor Review*, *Cardinal Poetry Quarterly*, and *Calliope*.

Miriam Patisaul is a senior art major at Georgia College at Milledgeville. Last year she was editor of *The Peacock's Feet*, Georgia College's literary magazine and published several prose pieces and poems. She is the winner of the Writers' Conference short story award.

Marta Powell is a sophomore at Agnes Scott College. She has studied narrative writing under Dr. Margret Trotter.

Ginger Rollins, a senior music major at Agnes Scott College, received honorable mention in the Writers' Conference short story contest. She has studied writing under Dr. Margret Trotter.

Erin Sherman is a junior art major at Agnes Scott College.

Susan Stegall is a senior art major at Agnes Scott College.

Virginia Uhl is a senior art major at Agnes Scott College.

Phil Williams is a senior at the University of Georgia with a major in Journalism. His first book of poems *New Seeds* was published in the fall by Madisonian Press. Currently he is working on his fifth volume of unpublished poetry. Phil received honorable mention in the Writers' Conference contest.

The judges for the poetry and short story contest are B. W. Ball, Gretchen Schulz, Margret Trotter, Patricia Austin, Marian Berman, Betsy Haynes, and Barbara Shuman.

## WRITERS' CONFERENCE Calendar

Thursday, April 13  
8:15 P.M.

Lecture by May Sarton  
Reception afterwards

MacLean Auditorium  
Rebekah Scott

Friday, April 14  
11:30 A.M.

Reading of award  
winning manuscripts

Outdoor Theatre  
Dana

2:00 P.M.

Panel discussion  
of the writing published  
May Sarton  
Michael Mott  
Marion Montgomery

Rebekah Scott

Informal refreshments

## PANELISTS

May Sarton has been an instructor in English composition and lecturer in creative writing at many colleges and universities including Harvard and Wellesley. This quarter she is a visiting lecturer at Agnes Scott. A member of the Poetry Society of America and the New England Poetry Society, she has received many awards and honors. She received the Golden Rose of New England Poetry Society, the Reynolds Lyric Award, the Lucy Martin Donnelly fellowship of Bryn Mawr College, and a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry. She has published many novels and volumes of poetry including *Cloud*, *Stone*, *Sun*, *Vine*, *I Knew a Phoenix*, and her latest novel, *Kinds of Love*.

Michael Mott had an early career divided between periods of studying writing in the Middle East and Italy, and editing trade and technical journals in London. He has since written several volumes of poetry, *The Cost of Living*, *Tales of Idiots* and *New Exile*, *A Book of Pictures*, and a novel *The Notebooks of Susan Berry*. He was editor of the *Kenyon Review* and is now teaching creative writing at Emory University.

Marion Montgomery has been the assistant director of the University of Georgia Press, assistant and then managing editor of the *Western Review*. He is now a member of the English department at the University of Georgia. Recipient of the Eugene Saxton fellowship from Harper to write a novel, he has published *The Wandering of Desire*, a novel, *Dry Lightning*, poetry and has contributed to many literary publications.

