Harbinger

Creative Magazine
of the
Arts
Spring 1980
Stephens College

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Editor's Note: All of the material published in *Harbinger* is the work of students currently enrolled at Stephens College. This year we are also honoring the first place winners in the National High School Creative Writing Contest, sponsored by the Stephens College Department of English. With the exception of this contest, all of the decisions regarding content and design have been the responsibility of the student editors. Published in the Spring of each year, *Harbinger* is dedicated to the recognition of creative talent in the visual and literary Arts.

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Natalie Denmon

Scarlett Lett

Nancy Sykora

Poems on the Autochrome Nudes

I.

Her hair,
made brown by dust,
settles on her breast.

Her body,
naked as the field
in the distance,
reclines on brittle weeds.

Her eyes,
closed to block
the grating sunlight
flicker open
to meet your gaze.

A red flower
lies on her stomach,
invitingly,
to draw you closer.

She waits.
Go to her.

II.

I watch you wander undirected
through unknown forests
searching for something,
searching for something.

You find the opening
where willows bend,
you take the path
and fade from me.

I want to follow,
back to your castle of sorcery.
I could learn,
I could learn.

Let me journey into
your sanctuary of mist.
Icy forms of animals
and foliage will become
my only home.

I will wait for you,
here, by the opening.

Linda Burns

Kelly Covington

The Ship

The ship rocks on its belly
moans as it rocks
like a blue whale.
A fine old wooden chest;
it is full of sailor shoes,
whiskey bottles, scattered
pages of lusty novels.
Its mast is the gallows for
white sails, albatross wings
that carried men to ports
where bread is sold in baskets,
women wrap their heads in
muslin and tote sacks of
black beans on their shoulders.

I come often to
this place on the pier
to rest, to surround myself
with water. Sitting quiet
as sails, I dream
the city burns behind me
and think I am all there
is, hard, with wooden sides,
a single body in the sea.
It is October;
I am tired of this race of men,
I want to wrap my throat
in scarves, wear a top hat
and hope I am not recognized.

Kelly Covington

Harvest

Black between cracks
of weathered workboots,
my feet are tired of all this,
yet far from sleep.
I am ploughing through September,
brown with boredom;
my hands are sore for sudden rain.
I have been harvesting since
sunrise; this day has
worn my heel to bone.

The field is windless,
changeless; I am
shut inside this body,
stiff as old elbows.
I watch the sky from
the brim of my sunbonnet,
waiting for the evening to
fall like a planter's
seeds at my feet.
I am drawn to the moon
on moth wings; I want to
lose this day in wind.

Kelly Covington

Carnival

I stood at the gate
to the fairgrounds, watched
red dust rise with the shuffle
of feet and hang in the air
like the halo of a candle flame.
I turned to walk away,
but carnival voices wrapped
themselves around me,
tugged at my jacket sleeves
and pulled me toward the music.
There was comfort
in the rattling old patience
of pony bridles, fear
in the cries of spinning children,
anger in the moan
of an ice cream vendor's
tired feet. I held my hands
over my ears, tried to hum
the music away.

My mind is growing,
gathering moods as it
grows. Some days, I
am a balloon without its bones,
limp as old excuses;
or a plaster horse, stagnant,
moving only as far as the carousel
moves, wrapped around myself
like cotton candy. I
want to sleep, hush the music
in blankets, but I have
the eyes of a madman
with one leg over the wall.

Kim S. Warner

Fran Worde

Nightwalk

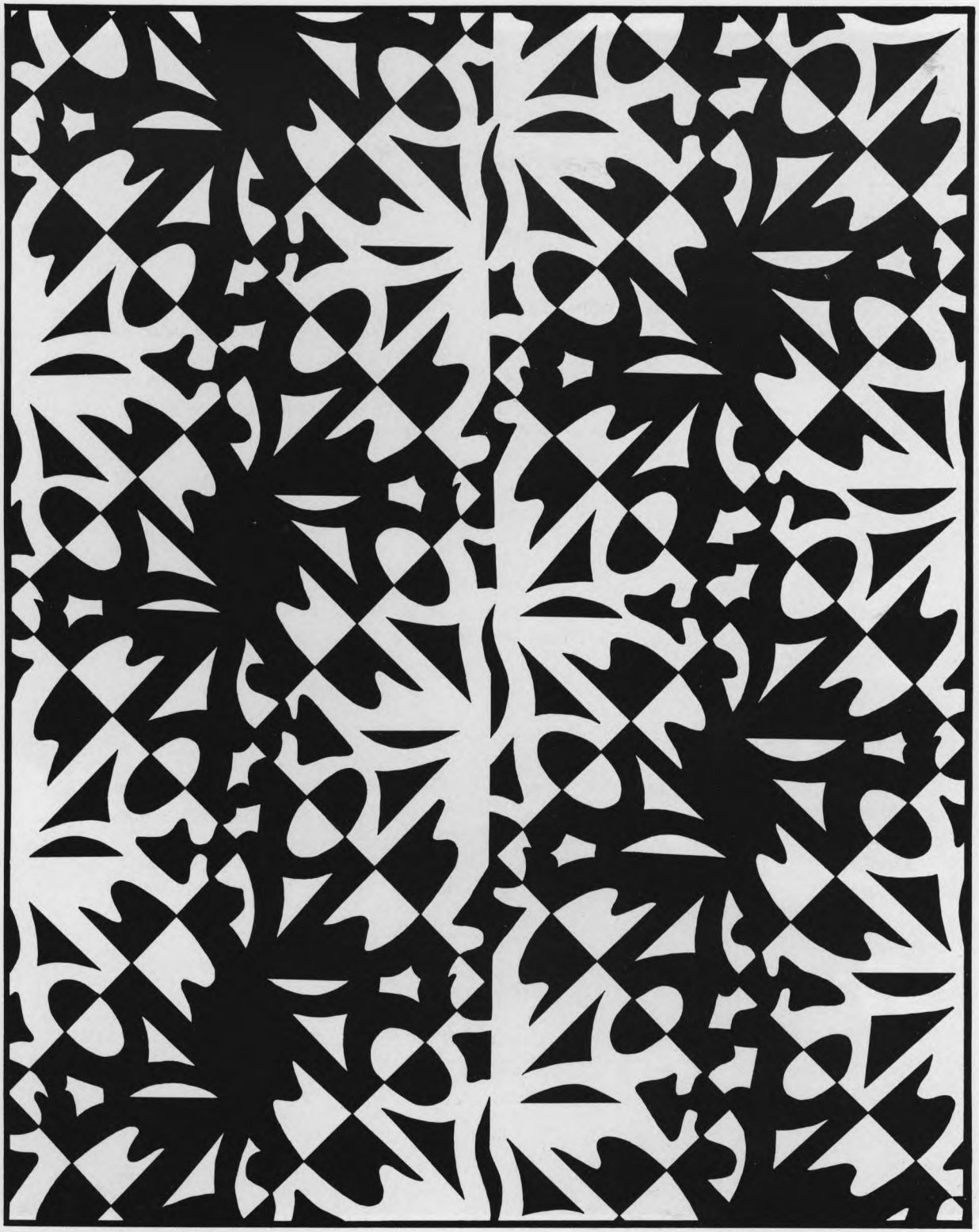
Pacing streets with cat feet,
child's eyes open wide
in the night.
My thoughts sneak
from bed to moonlit dark.

Asphalt
hot underfoot,
relief of wet, sharp grass.
Breath hushed
I run

Dodging shadows
streetlight buzz alerts me,
hands glowing cold,
hair haloed
in moth-spotted brightness.

Escaping from the beam
I fly
between each step
over the shock of pavement.

Linda Burns



Lin Haskins

Elizabeth Kaplan

Evening in Leningrad

The sky is dull white, like the glowing of a weakened fire. Grey buildings seem to force themselves against the evening clouds. Though it is warm, I pull my blue sweater close to my neck and stand closer to Jerry, who walks and laughs beside me.

His face is long with slender bones, his nose is pointed, and his thin hair swings on his forehead. He is somewhat taller than me, and always dresses in a shade of brown. Pulling a cigarette from his lips like an English lord, he says, "I love the Soviet people."

"Do you?" I move closer to him and stare up.

"Absolutely, absolutely. I love them so much that I want to share the greatest joy of my life with them. Capitalism." Shouting now, he wipes hair away from his face. "Let me hear those three words I want to hear—I love capitalism! Someone be a witness for capitalism! Let me hear it!"

We pass the cemetery with an antique stone fence and vines clinging to the graves. I point it out to Jerry. "That's where Tchaikovsky, Rubenstein, Borodin, and Rimski-Korsakov are buried. I tried half the day to get in there. I spoke to the soldier outside in Russian but still he refused to let me in. He said it will be open tomorrow in the morning. I guess I will have to go again."

"Yes, I guess you will."

A young man with dark eyes and a dusty jacket runs to us and begs with urgency, "Cigarette, please."

Jerry turns to him, staring, as if he were sitting behind glass in a Moscow museum. One hand still in his pocket, he reaches for cigarettes in his shirt and gives the young beggar a few.

"Thank you, American."

"Don't these people recognize an Australian?" Jerry hitches his pants and walks ahead.

In front of us, others from the tour group have stopped before a restaurant. My roommate, Liz, speaks for us all. Sturdily built KGB men walk with me every step. Even when I weave around columns on the street side, they follow. Their cigarette smoke waves in the air and disappears slowly. On the corner stands a man with no eyes, only wrinkled slits; and yet he, too, seems to watch me. The air smells like upcoming rain.

Liz has managed to get permission for us to enter, though the doorman probably senses her shaky Russian curious. This is not a tourist-designated restaurant.

We enter and check our coats. Elvira, the Spanish psychiatrist who now lives in London, pats her black evening dress and watches her reflection in a window. "This is a strange place."

I follow, never lead, up the elevator and onto a polished wooden floor where Russian music dives from the top and drowns in red velvet curtains. The room has low ceilings, unlike most other rooms I have seen in the U.S.S.R. It is very long and dark, like the outside of old buildings. We choose a table near the side. I watch husky Soviet soldiers in their grey-green uniforms sit silently at tables around the room. They observe every other face and ignore their chattering wives. They receive bottles of vodka with a distinct politeness from thin-lipped waiters.

At a table near the stage (where an anxious singer is coughing), a handsome black-haired man laughs with his young girlfriend. Twisting a ring on his fourth finger, he watches the stage.

Behind me sits a group of talkative Russian men, short-haired and solemn. One has blond-red hair and a dainty mustache. His shirt is blood red and torn at the sleeve. He is watching me, but never smiles, even when I return his glance.

I am at the corner of the table, Jerry beside me and Elvira across. She pours herself violet water into an elegant, green glass.

"It's quite good," she remarks.

"Well I want some real Russian vodka!" At the opposite end of the table, Theo, from Colorado, swings his arm, thickened by a blue down coat, to catch a waiter's attention. He puts his other around Joan's waist; she sits like a mute.

I am wondering where Mandelstam and Babel are buried and whether Esenin was really anti-Semitic, when Liz calls me.

"Are you joining us in some vodka?"

Not knowing what to do, I fumble, "Yes." But I know I will end up drunk. Oh God, I think, drunk in Leningrad.

A waitress with gleaming green eyes finds her way to our table. Liz orders vodka and caviar.

Liz sits with John. He has glasses with polished silver rims and dazzling striped shirts. He laughs at anything. I think: I will ask him the time and he will answer with a sharp laugh.

"Boy, did I get a good sleep last night!" He grabs Liz's leg under the table.

"I bet," I say.

He looks at me and winks. "You're a nice kid, you know that?"

"Gee, thanks."

"Hey, you know," he tries to appear serious, "I had an interesting chat with our tour guide, Natasha, today."

Liz swings her head back and moans. "Oh, Jesus, what did you do?"

"Now just wait a minute. I only asked her how I could be a member of the Communist Party."

There is empty applause as the first act ends. A group of modern dancers in matching rainbow pants and silver wigs comes out clapping and bouncing.

John continues. "She said, 'First a person must visit and have an interview with the local Soviet.' She really didn't go into that much detail. I don't know how many times she said, 'It's a great responsibility.' There could be a new city being established in Siberia. The average citizen would have the choice if he wanted to go or not. But, she said, when you're in the Party, you may just hear, 'Communist-Go' and suddenly you find yourself preparing to move to Siberia."

Liz grabs John's hand; "Let's dance." A new singer in a short pink skirt comes on stage. One act after another, each barely a minute long.

"All right, who wants to dance with me?" Jerry opens his eyes wide and I frown at him. Elvira laughs and stands up. From behind I feel someone touch my arm, and for a moment I am frightened. What have I done?

"Tui choyesh?" It is the blond man. He speaks in the familiar, "thou." But, no thank you, I tell him. I don't want to. I don't want to dance.

Our waitress returns and places a silver tray with dry crackers and caviar on our white-laced tablecloth. A huge bottle of vodka is set before me. Theo offers to open it.

"Let us toast to Russia!" He raises his glass and swallows his drink in one gulp.

I help myself to another and take a gentle sip.

"Not like that!" Theo says. "In one chug. Like the Russians."

"Yes," I smile. I force myself to take the single gulp. My throat burns and I shake my head as if I have a chill.

When John and Liz return, we all toast again, raising high our Leningrad vodka and clapping like clowns and squeezing our eyes closed as we force the vodka down in one drink. I feel dizzy and cannot decide whether it is safer to be drunk or sober. I want to be rid of all this seriousness. During the day, I had watched two plump Russian girls run down a bare street, chasing a paper blowing away in a frightful wind. They laughed aloud and I had thought: This is the first time in two weeks that I have seen anyone laugh, or even smile.

"Have some of this." Theo pours a different liquor into my empty glass. He had it hidden in his bag.

The vodka is almost finished and I say, "I have already drunk quite a lot."

"You certainly have." Elvira sounds like my mother. "No more or you will be drunk."

"It's too late," I confess. I drink whatever has been poured into my glass. It is something too sweet after the vodka. I begin to sing the tune of a piano concerto. "It is Scriabin," I say, looking over my crystal glass at Elvira. "I think I'm in love with him. He was so fanatic about his looks that, when he grew old, he wouldn't let anyone else touch his hair or his hairbrush because his hair was falling out. A fortune teller read my tarot cards once and told

me I was a Bolshevik in my previous life. Then my friend Sonia said she could tell if a person was reincarnated or not. She said I was, but that I hadn't been a Bolshevik. She told me I have a great debt to pay in this life because of something terrible this other person inside me did. You see, I have an obsession with the Holocaust. Am I talking too much?"

Elvira, the only one paying attention to me, now looks at me with sad, drooping eyes. "You're a Jew?"

"Yes."

"Go on with what you were saying."

I rest my cheek on my left hand. "Once I was in the Holocaust Museum in Haifa. Actually, I live in Israel. I'm not supposed to tell anyone. I have two passports: one has my Israeli visa, the other is blank. In an exhibition room there is a miniature concentration camp, set up exactly like Dachau. And there is another with paintings by artists killed by the Nazis." I hold my chest where my heart should be. "There is one room all about the children killed, and there is a dress of a baby who was murdered. I didn't think I would be able to leave that room. I kept staring at the dress and the photographs. Finally, I saw that I was late. I was with a group. I had to run outside quickly and the guide stood waiting at the front door. 'Are you the last?' he asked."

Elvira sits silent.

"But here's what happened. When I got back on the tour bus, I was afraid to leave. I was certain that when the museum was locked and dark, all the things would come alive again. The model death camp would start to run and the sirens blow and faces in the paintings begin to scream and the children in the photographs start to weep."

Jerry seems to have heard only parts of the story, but he turns to touch my shoulder. "Please don't cry."

The music begins again, led by a round, balding man with a gigantic mustache. It is "Hava Nagila."

Liz jumps up and grabs my hand. "Let's go."

I begin to dance in the center of the stage with rusty Soviet soldiers and fat Russian women beside me. The blond man who had asked me to dance stares at me with dulled eyes.

I can see that the band members watch me because I am singing along in Hebrew. Anything out of the ordinary is cause for suspicion. Hebrew is never spoken here. I begin to grow uncomfortable; the music has lasted too long. I cry to Liz, "I feel like I'm in a dance marathon!"

"Sit down, sit down now," Elvira calls to us as the song ends. "Let's make another toast."

"To the Russian People!" Theo raises his glass.

"To the Russian People!"

"Jerry," Theo says, lighting one of our last cigarettes, "exactly what do you do? You never told me."

Jerry smiles, a glimmer of his teeth showing. "I am what is politely known as a leech off society."

"A drink to the leeches off society!" Laughing with crooked, drunken smiles, we raise our glasses.

Elvira puffs her pale cheeks with laughter. "Listen to this, everybody! Guess what happened to me? I went on a special tour through the mountains—what is the name of that range around here—Oh, it doesn't matter. I had to go to the bathroom there so bad. But there were only these primitive outdoor places. When I went in, the smell was so bad I nearly died. I nearly died. I could only say, 'Oh, God, Oh God!' "

Jerry begins to choke on his laughter. He coughs up something, then borrows everyone's napkin to wipe up his mess. "Oh I'm sorry. I feel terrible."

I look at him, rubbing a stiff white cloth across his chin. "Let me help you."

"Oh, I am so embarrassed!"

Theo, still holding silent Joan, grabs the near-empty bottle he had kept well hidden. He announces, "We are all out of liquor. All out of liquor."

"Try some of these." Elvira passes me orange caviar.

"Oh, but I hate fish!"

She wrinkles her nose. "But everyone must try real Russian caviar. Take one."

I reach to the plate, holding my hand cautiously over the small, glowing eggs. With great precision, I choose the cracker with the least amount. Taking one tiny bite, I utter a loud groan and throw the remainder on my plate.

"It is vile!"

Elvira laughs.

"No alcohol?" Theo reminds us again that we are out of vodka.

I suggest a remedy. "I will fill our bottle with water, and put it on the table over there." I point to a table where a full bottle sits alone. "Meanwhile, we can have their bottle. Won't they be surprised when they return!"

"To vodka!" John sways back in his chair.

"No. There is no more." Liz moans.

Elvira turns her head to me. She leans forward and tells me, "There is a man watching you. Be a little quieter. Come with me to the ladies room." She holds my arm.

I stumble as I stand. I shake and cling to Elvira for support. "Don't just drag me away after what I've told you! What are you, an anti-Semite?"

Elvira opens the door to the red room. She slams it shut with a mighty anger and looks at me from behind her eyes. "Listen, don't talk so loud. I love Israel, too. Really, I do. I've been there many times. It's a beautiful country." She comes close, breathing in my face. "I have to tell you something, but don't you ever tell anyone. Do you hear?" She straightens up. "I am Hitler's niece."

I shake my head and cough. What was it she had said?

"Don't you hear me? I am Hitler's niece. My mother was Hitler's sister. Now go to the bathroom. And remember, don't ever say anything to anyone." Elvira leans against the wall as I walk to the sink.

I wash my hot face, looking at myself in the mirror. Suddenly I recall what Elvira has said and I look back at her. How many sisters did Hitler have? Did any move to Spain? Is she old enough to be a niece of his?

Still wet, I walk to her. "What did you say?"

"You heard me."

"Elvira, are you serious?" I watch her eyes. Do I see anything that reminds me of Hitler? She pulls my hand but I jerk it back. I imagine that her touch is cold and murderous.

I walk with poise back to the table.

"Let's go." Liz is slipping on her green jacket. She speaks to the waitress in Russian, asking for the bill.

When I think she does not see, I watch Elvira. I want to ask Liz casually, "Did you know that Elvira says she is Hitler's niece?" Would she laugh? Why has Elvira chosen me as her confidante?

Outside, the night is still white.

"Let's take the subway home." Joan finally says something.

Jerry agrees.

John leads us through thick glass doors. No one's face looks distinct. It seems as if few people in the Soviet Union ever speak. As though they do not know a common language.

Sitting on the subway car, I feel suffocated. There is a dry smoke in the air. Two seats away a fat woman in a decaying purple scarf puffs on a cigarette. I think: who could I tell this information to?

There is a great struggle to go in or out a door. Masses of bodies push beside me. I try to breathe in deep breaths and stay calm. We have returned to our hotel. For a second I had thought I was lost.

In the hotel room, Liz helps me undress. She pats me goodnight, then leaves for John's bed. I want to beg her to stay, not to let me die alone, but my lips are too weary to speak.

The heat and the night glare into my huge window. I can feel the graveyard waiting patiently across the street. Tchaikovsky, Rubenstein, Borodin, and Rimski-Korsakov rest in peace, their graves covered with red and blue wilted flowers from the crying mourners.

Lisa K. English

Margot Wenger

Storybook

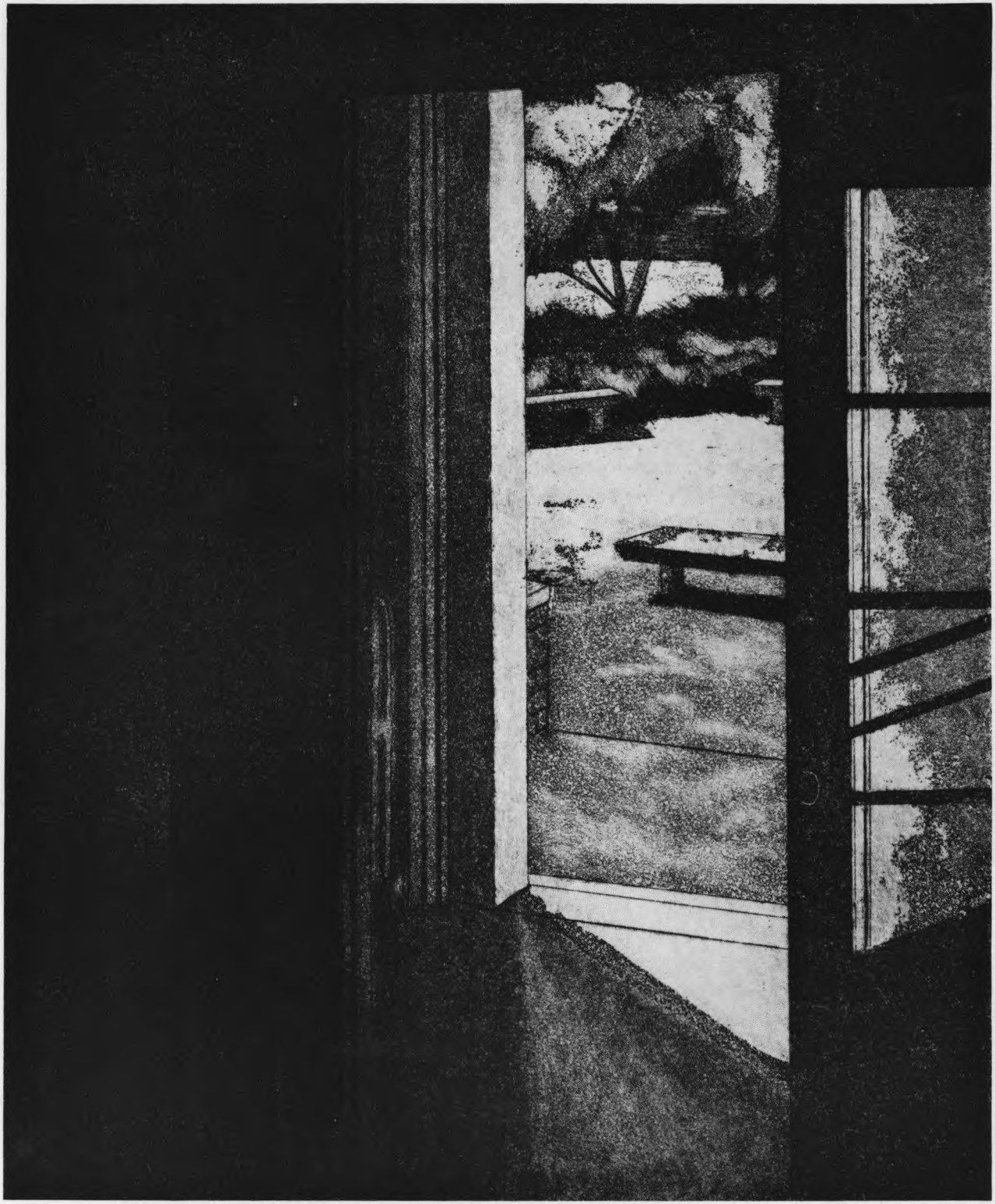
Mirror, mirror on the wall,
who's the fairest of them all?
Snow White
lies in a glass grave.
Corpse of Womanhood.

Seven dwarfs come and cry,
"Who will cook and clean for us?"

That poisonous apple
has done it again,

woman put under a spell,
to sleep till man awakens her.

Prince Charming,
you can dig up some other body.



Windy Klinge

Margaret Cheney

After Three Years Gone

I.

Mother reads in a dark armchair
smoke cloud screens
against us
the world
Lame giraffe legs bent under
she presses a cigarette between her lips
like an unspeakable thermometer.

She melts,
pages contain her carefully

Glares at interruptions and ignores them,
scrapes between her toes
with pianist fingers
idly
another drag
and she lifts the page
circling light years beyond
this filthy house and us
thin trail of cigarette smoke
tracing.

II.

My mother swollen, bloated,
rises above herself,
a luminous balloon.
She circles the wind
with elastic smiles, in
love with the air

In time I'll go there too
nerves stretched tight and fragile
sink into black holes and books
grunt, whimper grief
in time to pages turning.
I'll stalk realities like deer
and pray
not settling for next-bests
like "now"

I'll drift on helium highs
count wishes on lucky pennies
in some dank well,
their heads up, seven one-eyed hopes
watching me.

Susan Muenlenback


NE LIBRE
MONTMARTRE
AIRIE
BOULANGERIE
AU PETIT
ISSONS
STAURAN
AUCISSON 6
MAYONNAISE
DE S
CONCOMBRE 5
E CROUTE 6
OULET FRITES

Suzanne Lee

Becky Andros

The Zenith on Addison

"Mother?" the voice spilled from the old lungs. "Mother! That's Gene's truck down there! The blue one. Come see, Mother!" He pressed the smooth skin of his forehead to the sun-warmed pane of the living room window. Afternoon could always find him in the faded chintz arm chair by that window, feet across the squat stool with the crocheted cover, watching Addison Avenue below.

June swirled the keilbasa in the water of the heavy pot and called out from the kitchen. "Hank, it's not Gene. Gene's in California."

"No, Mother, that's Gene's truck all right. He's coming. Our son is coming! He said he would. Set an extra place at the table."

"Oh, Hank." June wiped her hands down the rick-racked front of her apron. "I'm telling you, that's not Gene." She shuffled to the living room of the flat, tugging the tiny blue flowers of her dress down over her round, ample hips. "Gene said last Christmas he wouldn't be home for a while."

She lifted Hank's feet back up onto the stool, picking off a thread from his white sock. "Here. We'll turn on the T.V. for awhile, and you just sit and watch until I finish with lunch." She bent from the waist with a grimace and pulled out the knob. The Zenith began to crackle and warm. The screen glowed to life in a black and white vision of Bozo's Circus. "Aw, Hank, look at that little boy they've got by the buckets. He'll never get that ball into number six."

Hank took no notice of Bozo. His hearing aid had inched up and out of his shirt pocket as he twisted from his chair to stare out the window. The taut wire yanked the plug from his ear, and it tumbled to his lap.

"You ever see such a nice truck? He parked it right in front there. Yes," adjusting a pair of black-framed glasses on his nose, "tell him to bring in the mail, Mother, while he's down there."

At the window June saw the truck—blue all right—Midwest Appliance 3600 W. Diversy 622-1010. "Just what are you looking at, that's an appliance truck. Gene's in California," she said louder, leaning over Hank's shoulders.

"California?"

"Yeah, Hank, you know. Our son. He lives in California now."

"Oh." His eyes followed the moving cars.

"Now come on. You watch T.V. and I'll fix some lunch." June stopped in front of the screen and turned the channels—Family Feud, Ivory liquid, Lee Phillips, Phil Donahue. "I think we'll watch him. He's always got such a good program," she said, then adjusted the runner over the faded spot in the carpet and shuffled back to the sausage.

"Mother," Hank said moments later, "tell Gene to bring a screw driver in here. Phil looks funny. Maybe it's the color." Vertical lines and hissing drowned Phil out on the screen.

"You say something, Hank? Hank?" Sigh. With a knife, she finished pushing the keilbasa off the long fork onto the brown, cracked serving plate.

"Mother?"

"I'm coming already." She took the bread out of the pan. "Just hold your horses."

June reached the living room in time to see Phil laugh at his pin-striped guest. Flash. Hissing. And the picture vanished into a whitish dot center screen.

"Oh no," said June, tapping the glass. "Don't tell me the T.V.'s gone on the fritz." She pushed in the ON/OFF knob, then pulled it back out.

"Hmm," Hank reflected, "it's good Gene came by after all. I might have some tubes he can use down in the basement." Hank took a lemon sour out of the candy jar on the round table by his chair, fumbled with the plastic, removed it, and placed the candy in his mouth. Pursing his lips around the hard yellow sphere, he was staring out the window again.

"I'll call Bob at the repair shop," said June, grumbling. "Maybe they can fix it, or I'll have to ask Adele to get Syl to do it." She scuffed back to the phone on the kitchen wall. "Always something."

Presently she called to the living room. "He said he's got a man in the neighborhood that can fix it. Be over sometime this afternoon. Hank are you listening?" She stood hands on hips by the phone. "Do you want some bread with your sausage?"

"No. Give mine to Gene."

After lunch, June settled Hank into his chair and herself on the couch, a bag of fabric squares at her feet.

"I can't understand why Gene doesn't come up from the basement," said Hank. "Maybe I should go down and help him find the tubes." He clutched the arms of the chair and succeeded in rising slightly off the cushion before falling back.

June put down the quilt cover and needle. "You just stay put. That's all I need is to have you falling on your head down those steps. Then how am I supposed to get you back up here?"

"Well, then go down and tell him the tubes are under the table with the saw." Hank lifted the April *Reader's Digest* off the table and carefully turned the pages, smoothing each over with his fingers from the top to the bottom.

The front door buzzer.

"About time," said Hank.

June heaved up out of the soft couch. She separated the blades of the bone Venetian blinds and peered down at the blue-overalled man. From the pavement the face turned upwards at the eyes between the blades and smiled. June pushed the silver button that opened the front door lock below.

"He's here, Hank. Oh, take your candy wrapper off the table for heaven's sake." She whisked the plastic into her palm before Hank looked up from his reading.

Knocks at the door.

"Just a minute," June said, working at the lock, then cracking the door the width of the remaining chain. He was tall, a scoop of thick black hair falling behind one lens of his glasses.

"Hi," he smiled again at June, "here to fix the television." He pulled an identification card from his pocket.

She read the tiny print, squinting. The chain came off. She stepped back and motioned to the T.V. "Just flashed and went out. Hank and I were watching that Phil Donahue, right Hank?"

"Mother, just tell Gene where the tubes are. I'm sure he'll fix it fine."

The repairman looked from Hank to June.

June shook her head. "Hank, this is the repairman."

Hank got a crazy sparkle in his eyes, glanced out the window and with pride announced, "That's a fine truck, son."

"Thanks," the repairman offered. "I like it." He moved past June to the Zenith. "Well, let's just see what's up with this set of yours."

"Would you like some coffee while you're working?" June asked over her shoulder, walking into the kitchen.

"Thank you," replied the repairman, "I'd like that." He pushed the set away from the wall. Squatting, he unscrewed the brown backboard.

June hesitated in the kitchen doorway, watching him work. Maybe he'd say all the tubes were burned. Maybe he just wanted to finish this last call and go home before it got any darker. The repairman was flashing a penlight into the dusty depths of the old Zenith. Over the top of the T.V. she noticed Hank struggling out of his chair, then coming slowly toward the set.

"How's the wife?" asked Hank.

"Uh, just fine," June heard the repairman answer. Now she hoped that it was just a small tube or a loose wire. Hank was about to jabber the poor man's ear off.

"Good. Good," mumbled Hank. "Be right back." He wobbled stiffly through the dining room, past June, to the bathroom. He grinned brightly at June, went in and closed the door..

June returned with the coffee. "I brought in the milk and sugar. You didn't say if you wanted them or not, so I brought them anyway. Where's Hank?" She checked the room with a sweep of her eye.

"Thanks." The repairman sipped the hot brew. "He headed back into that room a few minutes ago. Excuse me, ma'am," he dropped his voice, "does your husband think I'm someone else?"

She nodded, her face flushed. "My son. Gene. Once a day he sees his truck. Sometimes more. Today," she sighed, "you're Gene." June called back toward the kitchen and the bathroom, "Hank, what are you doing?"

"Mother," his muffled voice sounded funny. "Come here."

"Excuse me," June said to the repairman.

"Can I help?"

"No, no thank you. I can manage." She knocked on the bathroom door and entered, closing it behind her.

The repairman took out a blackened tube from the set. Quiet, except for the clock ticking on the television. The bathroom door opened.

"Well, where are they?"

"I took them out," Hank said, slowly tucking his shirt down into his pants, his speech slurred and pink gums showing.

"But what did you do with them?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, why did you take them out in the first place?"

"They hurt."

The repairman set the tube down. "Need any help?"

Hank slipped a slice of poppy seed cake from the plate on the dining room table. He gummed the slice in on his way back to the living room, a faint trail of crumbs falling along the way.

From the bathroom, "Hank, where did you last have them?"

"In the bathroom, Mother." Hank grinned cake-paste over the repairman's shoulder. "How's the weather in California been?"

"Pardon me?" offered the repairman.

"Go help your mother," Hank motioned loosely with his hand. "She's squawking about something again." Hank settled in the chair by the window.

"Ma'am," he stood, knees cracking, and headed for the bathroom in response, "is there anything I can help with?"

"Well, he took out those teeth of his and I can't find them." She had checked it before, but turned and re-opened the medicine cabinet, then scanned the magazine rack, the tub ledge, the window sill. Her eyes fell on the toilet.

"Oh, he couldn't have . . . . Do you think they're small enough to go down?"

"I can't see how they would. They would probably get stuck before they went through."

"Mother," Hank called, "have Gene bring me another slice of that cake."

"Oh you just wait!" June scolded.

"Did you check the floor real well?" asked the repairman. He reached behind the laundry hamper and ran his hand along the tiles.

"But I don't see them. That man . . . . " June opened the linen closet and stooping low, looked among the boxes of light bulbs and rolls of toilet paper on the floor. The repairman searched behind the towels on the shelves above.

"See anything?"

"No, just a lot of dust," said June. She added softly, "I'll have to clean that up. I really try to keep the house clean, but with Hank to watch—" She smiled an apology at the repairman.

"I really don't think they're in here," he said.

"No, no I suppose not." June backed out and bumped into the repairman, almost losing her balance.

"Easy there. Here, let me help," said the repairman, straightening her up in the tight space of the bathroom.

After a moment June took a kleenex from the box on the toilet and wiped her face. "Well, now I don't know what to do. Where he put them is anybody's guess." She dropped the used tissue into the waste bucket.

"Just a minute. I think I see something," said the repairman. He followed the falling tissue, then dipped a hand into the bucket. "Maybe we got lucky." He removed a carefully wrapped blue tissue bundle, unwinding the tissue from the teeth.

"These must be the ones," he smiled.

June's eyes closed gratefully. Her glasses slipped down the moisture on the bridge of her nose. She switched off the humming bathroom light and covered the repairman's hand with hers, taking the teeth.

"Thank you," she said. "How I would have gotten him another pair I don't know. Sometimes he's impossible." She stepped past him, smiling. "It's getting late. Do you think you would like to stay and have dinner with us?"

"Yes," said the repairman, entering the kitchen behind her, "yes, I think I would like to stay very much." The hazy evening light drenched the room in ochre, reflecting the pale down on June's full cheeks. "Besides, I've got to finish that T.V. of yours."

"Good!" Teeth in one hand, a slice of cake on the plate in the other, she headed back to the living room.

June folded the last napkin under Hank's fork. The table was set for three, the gray formica surface a square against the wall tiles. Most of the table surface hosted the round tray of bottles—vitamic C tablets, cherry-flavored cod liver oil, Geritol, Pine Brothers honey cough drops. Hank sat down across from the repairman, who followed him in. June ladled steaming potatoes into the serving bowl, then sprinkled dried parsley flakes over the top. The cabbage rolls were already on the table.

"This is really nice of you folks to have me in for dinner," the repairman said.

"Well, we're glad to have you," said June. "Rarely have the pleasure of company these days." A damp strand of hair clung to the corner of her mouth.

"Since when aren't we glad to have our son in for dinner?" said Hank into the thick slice of homemade bread he was meticulously buttering crust to crust, then folding over in half. He took a crescent bite out of the soft cushion. "You just don't come to see your parents enough."

June sat down in front of the potatoes, clicking her tongue at Hank. "Would you be so kind," June asked the repairman, "I mean, would you say grace for us?"

The repairman looked at June, and at the golden-hued picture of Jesus with a thorny red heart affixed to his chest on the wall past her shoulders. "Well I'm not real good at this sort of thing, but if you'd like." He cleared this throat. "Um, that is, bless us and thank you for this food," he mumbled, "Amen."

"Amen," answered June. Hank stared across at the repairman.

"Why so short? Living in California you don't say prayers?" He scowled.

"Hank," June scolded, "Will you stop? You shouldn't say that to someone you don't know."

"But I do know my own son, Mother," he set down his fork," and how come you don't visit no more?"

June glanced at the repairman. She leaned closer to Hank. "Hank, really."

"Mother, this is our son, and he can speak freely in his own home."

"But it's not—"

"Mother I'm not blind! All I want to know is why he doesn't say his prayers and why he doesn't come." Hank reached for another slice of bread. "Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" he reprimanded through a full mouth.

The repairman's cabbage roll stopped neatly in mid-swallow. "I'm not sure I know what you mean."

June pushed the hair back from her damp forehead. "No Hank, this is the REPAIR-MAN, for the T.V., not Gene." Her eyebrows knit a blonde band from one eye to the other. "I'm so sorry. He'll sometimes go on like this forever." Her lips were drawn tight, impressing the wrinkles of her chin and cheeks deeper into her face.

"What's the matter," Hank's voice now soft and thin, "don't you love us anymore? Why don't you come? I mean don't you think about your mother and father anymore?"

"Sure I think about them," said the repairman, looking quizzically at June.

"Well, why don't you come visit? You can bring the wife and children. We like children." Hank fixed his eyes on the repairman's. "Don't you love us? We miss you, you know."

"I'm sorry," June muttered to the repairman, "I don't understand what's gotten into him."

"What's gotten into you, Mother? He's our son. He should be with his parents. He should come see us. Hopping around all over that California. It isn't right."

"Hank, will you listen to me? He is not Gene!" Of all the nights she spent with him, why, when they have company he should be so insistent about Gene she didn't know.

Hank still watched the repairman.

June's opaque blue eyes welled up behind the glasses. "Hank, please."

Hank rubbed the wire to his hearing aid between his thumb and forefinger. Now he wiped his napkin over his lips. His fingers let it fall toward his lap. It caught on the hearing aid wire, draping over. "You are still my son. And I still deserve an answer!"

If the repairman left now, June would understand. Hank would stop carrying on eventually, and the television still wouldn't work.

The repairman laid his fork on his plate and touched June's arm lightly. He turned to Hank and said, "Well, I'm here now. It's the wife. She's been sick, and, well, someone had to watch her."

June covered her nose and mouth with her napkin, then dropped her hand, eyes shining in the light of the overhead fixture.

"Well, why didn't you tell us," Hank said, reaching a thin cool hand over to the repairman's squeezing.

"Maybe," the repairman said, "we just needed time I guess is all." Hank and June's eyes scoured his face. "But I'm here now."

"I understand. Your mother and I, we have troubles, too. Right Mother?" Hank sat taller in his chair. He had returned to his cabbage roll. Then, directly at the repairman, "So you do love us? Yes? You do love us?"

"Of course," said the repairman. "Yes. Yes, I love you. And the cabbage rolls, and everything." He nodded and smiled at June.

June beamed at the repairman. "More potatoes?"

After clearing the dinner dishes, June helped Hank into his chair for the evening. "You watch a lot of T.V.?" she asked the repairman.

"No, by the time I'm done fixing them I don't care much to watch." The repairman worked cross-legged behind the T.V. rustling metal tools, changing tubes, checking wires.

Hank filled his tumbler with water from the Pyrex measuring cup on the window sill. "He's busy, Mother. Leave him be."

June dropped into the couch and stretched her quilt over her lap.

"Did you find the tubes under the saw?" Hank asked.

June said, "Well look who's telling who to leave him be."

Hank wrinkled his nose and shrugged his shoulders to the window. "Have you been keeping up your Polish?" He continued.

"My Polish?" asked the repairman.

"Your Aunt Sophie will be disappointed if you haven't. Sister's not too good at Polish, but she tries."

"Oh," said the repairman. He held a tube up to the light. "Well, I've been trying, but I get pretty busy with these televisions, and it gets hard to do much else." He made an adjustment in the Zenith. "I think this might do it." The repairman tightened the last screw on the backboard. He crawled around to the front of the set and pulled out the knob. Crackling. Voices. Picture.

"What would you folks like to watch?" He fixed the brightness and contrast before pushing the set to the wall.

"Oh, anything will do. I'm just glad it's fixed," said June admiringly to the repairman. "Now we won't have to bother Syl."

"Syl?" saked the repairman.

"He lives in the flat upstairs," said June.

"He knows that, Mother. Why don't you go up and say hello? Then bring them down here. Mother, you call them."

"No Hank, we've got company enough."

"Now I remember," said the repairman. "Adele and Syl. Sure. Don't know who I was thinking of." He changed channels, stopping for a moment at each and asking, "How 'bout this one?"

"How about 44?" said June, wondering what he meant about Adele and Syl.

He switched to UHF, positioned the round antenna and rotated the dial. Merv Griffin's face filled the screen. Hank coughed and turned back from his gaze out the window to the T.V.

"Hey, what's he doing here? Who invited him?" Hank's voice climbed, thickening. He slid his feet off the stool, trying to get out of the chair. "I won't have him in my house!"

The repairman stopped assembling his tool kit. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Oh, it's Merv Griffin," June said lowering her voice. "Hank thinks everyone in the television is real. When there's a crowd on the T.V. he thinks the room is full of people."

Hank railed, "He owes me twenty dollars since 1952, and if he won't pay me then he can't come in my house! Get him out! I won't have him in here!"

June was off the couch, fussing around Hank. "All right, all right, but he never lent you any twenty dollars. You don't really even know who he is."

"That's him, that Griffin, owes me twenty dollars. Out of my house!" Hank's skin burned crimson out of his collar, up his neck, spreading pink over the balding head to the silver hair at the back.

"Tell her, Gene. She doesn't believe me."

"Hank—" She could cry.

"Tell her, Gene, tell her it's that Griffin," said Hank.

June struggled to put Hank's foot back on the stool. "Settle down, Hank, please!"

"I told you that, Gene, about the twenty dollars." Hank tried to rise, brushing June's hands away. "Leave me be, Mother!"

"Yes, I remember," the repairman said. "Oh, he's a real bad egg. Takes money from everyone."

"I don't want him in here," said Hank. "Scoundrel! Cheat!" Hank waved his fist at the screen.

"Okay, Hank, so we'll turn to something else. So we won't watch his show."

"No we won't," Hank affirmed with a sharp nod.

The repairman was pouring Hank more water. "Here, let me," June said. "you don't have to do that. Please, sit down."

"That's okay," said the repairman.

"No, please. Sit down," said June.

The repairman changed the channel on the television. Hank had risen and come to the set.

"Come on," he placed a thin hand on the repairman's shoulder. "Come on, we'll have some more of that cake in the kitchen. That Griffin, he makes me so mad." Hank scuffed on through the dining room.

The repairman placed his kit on the T.V. next to Gene's picture and went in after Hank. June folded her quilt, smoothed the apron over her dress, and followed them into the kitchen to make coffee to go with the cake.

She stood over the sink and poured the coffee from the scratched metal pot into the yellowed china cups, placing one in front of Hank. "Did I remember right that in the living room you put sugar in your coffee?"

"Yes I did. Do you have a spoon?"

"Why sure—here, take this one." June handed him her own spoon, then slid a chair from against the wall to the table.

"Here, take my chair," said the repairman, getting up.

"Oh no, no. You just sit. I'm fine just like I am. So tell us about yourself. How long have you worked in Chicago?"

The repairman shrugged his shoulder. "Oh, about ten years now."

"More than that, isn't it, Gene?" mumbled Hank, mouth full. "I got you a start back at the electric plant in 1959."

The repairman thought a moment. "Yeah, I guess that's right. Longer than I thought."

Thank you," June whispered to the repairman while Hank was busy dunking his piece of cake.

"No honestly," the repairman said to her, "I didn't realize it had been so long. You can get so caught up in this crazy rat race that you even forget your name."

Hank unscrewed the jar of strawberry preserves on the table, and proceeded to place a knifefull into his coffee cup.

"Hank, what are you doing?" asked June, reaching for the preserves.

"It isn't sweet," said Hank. "I want it sweeter. Coffee's bitter as chewing tobacco."

"Why didn't you use the sugar? Here, let me get you some more." She took away the knife and was placing her hand on Hank's cup when the repairman stopped her.

"No, he's okay. He's happy with that," he said. "Aren't you, Hank?"

"Hmm?" said Hank.

"I said your coffee's fine."

"Oh yes, yes, fine. A bit too sweet though."

"I liked that quilt in the living room," the repairman said. "Do you still sew?"

"Well, my eyes aren't real good no more, but I like to do that when I'm just sitting," June said, taking a sip of her coffee. "But with Hank I don't sit still very much. Nights are hardest, because he likes to go to sleep late, and I'm already tired. Then he wants to go to the bathroom, and I get up to help him, and I get the covers off and he says 'what are you doing? I'll tell you when I need to go the bathroom.' Then I go back to bed, then soon as I'm asleep he gets up and has to go and this goes on all night. Then he's up early and I have to get up and I didn't get to sleep most of the night."

"Mother, what are you talking about?" said Hank.

A tear caught at the bottom rim of June's glasses. She hastily wiped it away with her hankerchief.

"Mother . . . " Hank muttered, seeing her cry. "Gene," he whispered, leaning across the table, "tell your mother you liked the cake. She's so sensitive these days. Don't know what gets into her."

"Hey, I'm here," the repairman said, pulling June close to him, hugging her. "I'm here."

She didn't try to stop the water now, soaking a small ragged circle in the chest of his green service shirt. "I just—like when he falls down, and I wind up on the floor trying to get him up, or out of the bathtub. I just—"

"What is it? What?" the repairman murmured, rocking her softly.

"It's just that sometimes, sometimes I miss you so much. And California is so very far away."

"Shh, I'm here now," he said. He took her hankerchief and wiped her face.

Gene was soft and warm against June's cheek. Her lids closed heavily, squeezing out the last of the tears.

Jane Van Reyendam

Becky Andros

To the Lab Animals

Are the anesthetics working, Mr. Baboon?
Are the wires on your chest all connected?
Now sit right here in our scaled-down car
on the motorized sled that accelerates
to 40 m.p.h. and stops.
You'll keep on going, hurled
against a simulated dashboard and suffer
so next year's model will be a safer vehicle.

Hold still, little Rhesus,
while I bathe you in soap
that's too harsh for my children,
and please don't scream
when I immerse you in water
190 degrees.
Understand.
You're donating your life to science.

Inhale some more aerosol, Rabbit my friend,
and Pig, drink up all of your whiskey.
Dog, eat your strychnine,
and Rat, my disease.

Lucille Standlee

I Bleed Blue Blood

I bleed blue blood.
You wouldn't think so.
You'd say it was red if you
pricked my finger.
But it's because you are colorblind.
It's the color of my blood
that makes my eyes blue.
That's where the doctor looks
to see circulation.
And aren't my eyes blue?

You probably think my heart is
purplish red, too, like everyone else's.
But it's white.
It pulsates in my chest
like a living pearl,
too beautiful to cast before you.
One perfect pearl,
strung on ribbons of blue blood.

Your biggest mistake
concerns my brain.
You think it's dull grey
like yours.
Not mine.
It's like a rainbow—
with the seven perfect colors,
and every tint between,
glowing and glimmering
in my head.
The colors are in order, too,
from the red outer layer
of the cerebrum
to the purple brain stem
that pales to lavender
at the base.

You couldn't see all the colors
inside me even if you cut me open.

Drew-Derrix Templeton

Saxophone Nights

Dear Mother,

I am listening to Swing—
saxophones so rich I can see them gleaming,
clarinets sweet enough to eat—
and thinking of you
and how you love a good sax.
I remember you saying,
"It's terrible, but I enjoyed the war!",
telling me how you danced through the Forties:
took the Greyhound to grey bases,
jitterbugged all night with the enlisted men,
and got up to work in the morning.

I can see you in the kitchen
dancing in your blue slippers
and wondering whatever happened
to all those boys:
the dark one with the wealthy Californian family,
the blonde from Tennessee,
the married one who told his wife about you.
Do they have daughters like me?
Do they ever think of you?

Remember nights till one a.m.,
teaching me and Isabelle to jitterbug,
the buzz of the crickets,
and we were sweating,
you telling me to bend my knees?

Tonight you are home with a husband
who does not dance,
tapping your feet to the radio,
an occasional sax,
and thinking of me
who still can't jitterbug,
but is listening to Swing.

Lori Sullivan

Beth Sawyer

Ralph

When Daddy pulled the frogs out of the burlap bags, they'd lost a lot of their shine. He laid em in a line. Gus held the flashlight while Daddy and Uncle John argued about whose were bigger. I started playing with the little one, named him Ralph. His belly wasn't yellow like the rest, but he still had pretty markings. I played with his eyes, rolling them around, like poking at fish eyes, except these were harder, didn't mush into his head as much.

I figured I'd be eatin this guy's legs since he was the smallest, and so was I. He only had two holes in him, so Daddy must've missed a little cause there's three prongs on a gigger. Or maybe he was just too small to fit them all in his tiny back. Anyway, he wasn't bleeding no more. His skin got kind of crusty as it dried up so I spit on his head and smeared it around. Then I held him up and pulled his legs in and out; he kind of looked like he was jumping or maybe swimming. He had real long feet and there was this skin stretched between his toes. His back legs weren't fat, but they felt awful strong to me. You see, that's the most important part, the legs. In fact, I'd rather be eating frog legs than some old bluegill or bass any day. Don't get as much to eat but them legs look funny all spread out in Mama's frying pan. And the best part about eating frog legs is you gotta get them real late at night. I get to stay up until they're all cleaned.

When Daddy finished with the others, I gave him Ralph. He chopped off his legs and threw them in the pile, then he took that Buck knife and slit old Ralph's stomach wide open. He pulled back the soft belly skin and grabbed out all his insides. He leaned over and put them guts in my hand, told me to look close. It felt like a raw egg, you know, all slimey. And there was this little chunk of dark red that was moving, up and down, real slow. Daddy said if I didn't pull the other guts off that it would probably beat for a good half hour. It was still movin when I threw it down and went inside to wash up.

Lori Sullivan

Nancy Overson

Corkscrews

I used to have long blue spikes on my knees,
Curled like lapis lazuli corkscrews.
I could tie ribbons on them for holidays,
Hang my keys on them,
And core apples if I was making a pie.
I was proud of them;
I polished them with Windex.
Only they kept getting stuck in the ground
When I tried to kneel in church.
I even made holes in the carpet.
Everybody said I couldn't stop kneeling though,
So I had them filed off.
Now all that's left on each knee is a cluster of
Blue veins,
Like a bouquet of cirrus clouds.

Claudia Parish

Drew-Derrix Templeton

Feet

for Alice

She complained about her feet—they were too big,
and the wrong color, and wouldn't fit the seventeen
pairs of shoes her grandmother had left her—so one day
she took them off. Feet were just as glad to get away.
They skipped out to dance naked in the cabbage patch, and
played hide-and-seek among the peonies in the garden, the
yard filled with the chatter of giggling toes.

Careless feet fell into the bird bath that night
and drowned. When she found them next morning shrunken
blue in the cold water, she put them on again, pleased.
It took her all day to decide which of the thirty-four
shoes could come out of the closet.

Julie Bell Trumbo

Claudia Merle Hochberg

Panther Dark

across the lake
close,
a black head
bent down in a book
knees high in wheat
she sits crouched low
for hours
as I read thoughts
waving through water
knee high
she raises a
curved hand motif
stands
stretches her back
and walks away
darkened.

Molly Baur

Claudia Merle Hochberg

High Star Light

A friend and I
walk the alley
in midnight blue tennis shoes.

Fruit flowers line
the sides.
Purples with whites
greens with grace.

An old wire-framed man
in striped blue and white
appears watering
his heart grown
tomatoes.

Gable snaps two
grabbing my pant loops
as we tumble trot down the
grey chalky alley.

Crossing the empty street
home
I plan
to paint a sign
"Please don't eat the Tomatoes"
and set it up before
sun up.

Julie Bell Trumbo

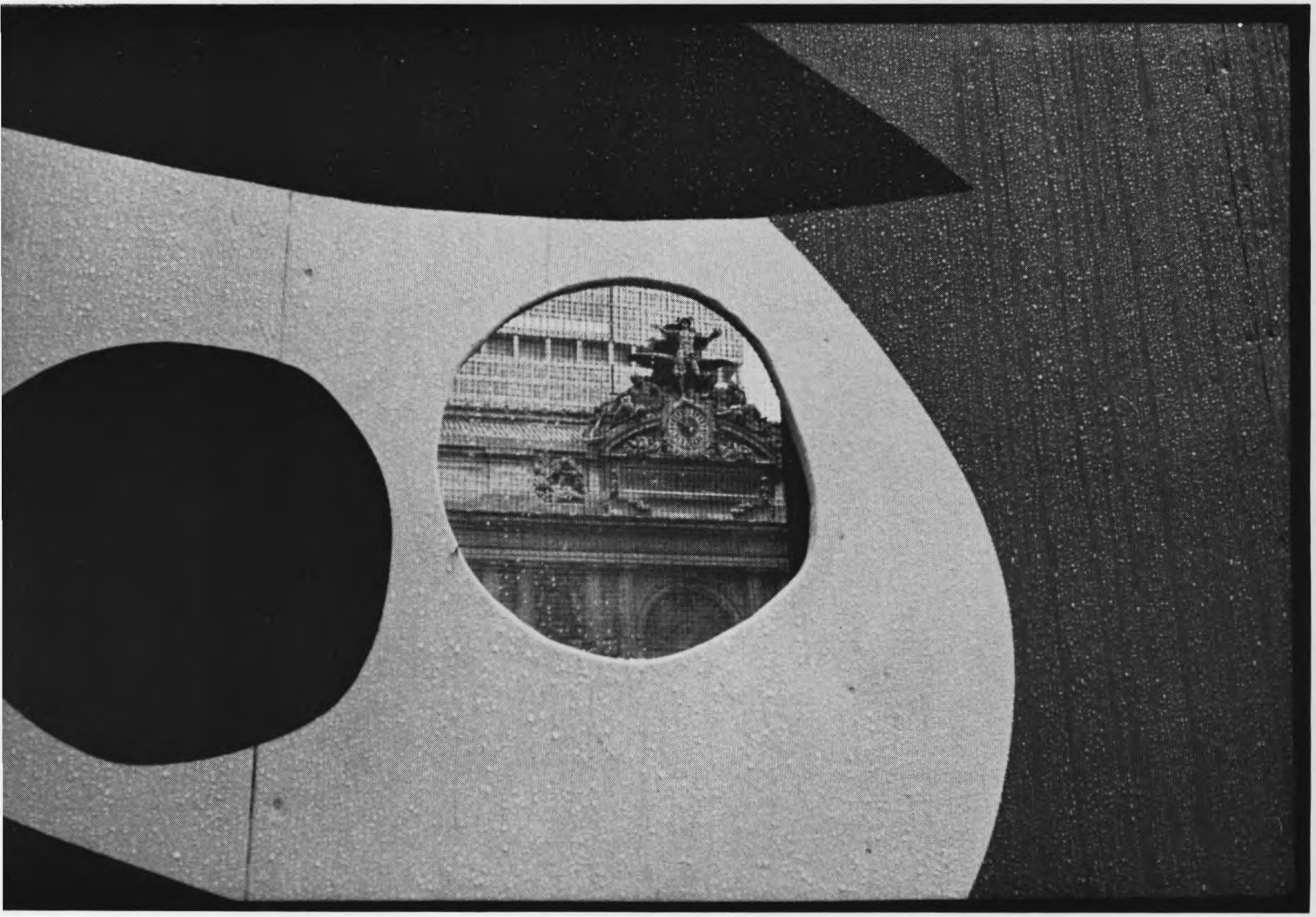
Jeanne Alaska Bernard

Waking Up Apart From Myself

I am bayou tired of this afternoon sleep
cold in my small room and of waking up lost;

tired of the summer's heavy heat
on my shoulders and of my bare feet
pricked by shells on Louisiana roads
flat and endless, as I stretch on to the warm
Bay Vermilion and on again past Marsh Island
into the Gulf and this September day
overcast and mild;

tired of muffled voices below
my window, waking to them this day
February with an opaque Missouri through
smeared windowpanes, the white sky
and the dark bones of trees always
moving in the moving air.

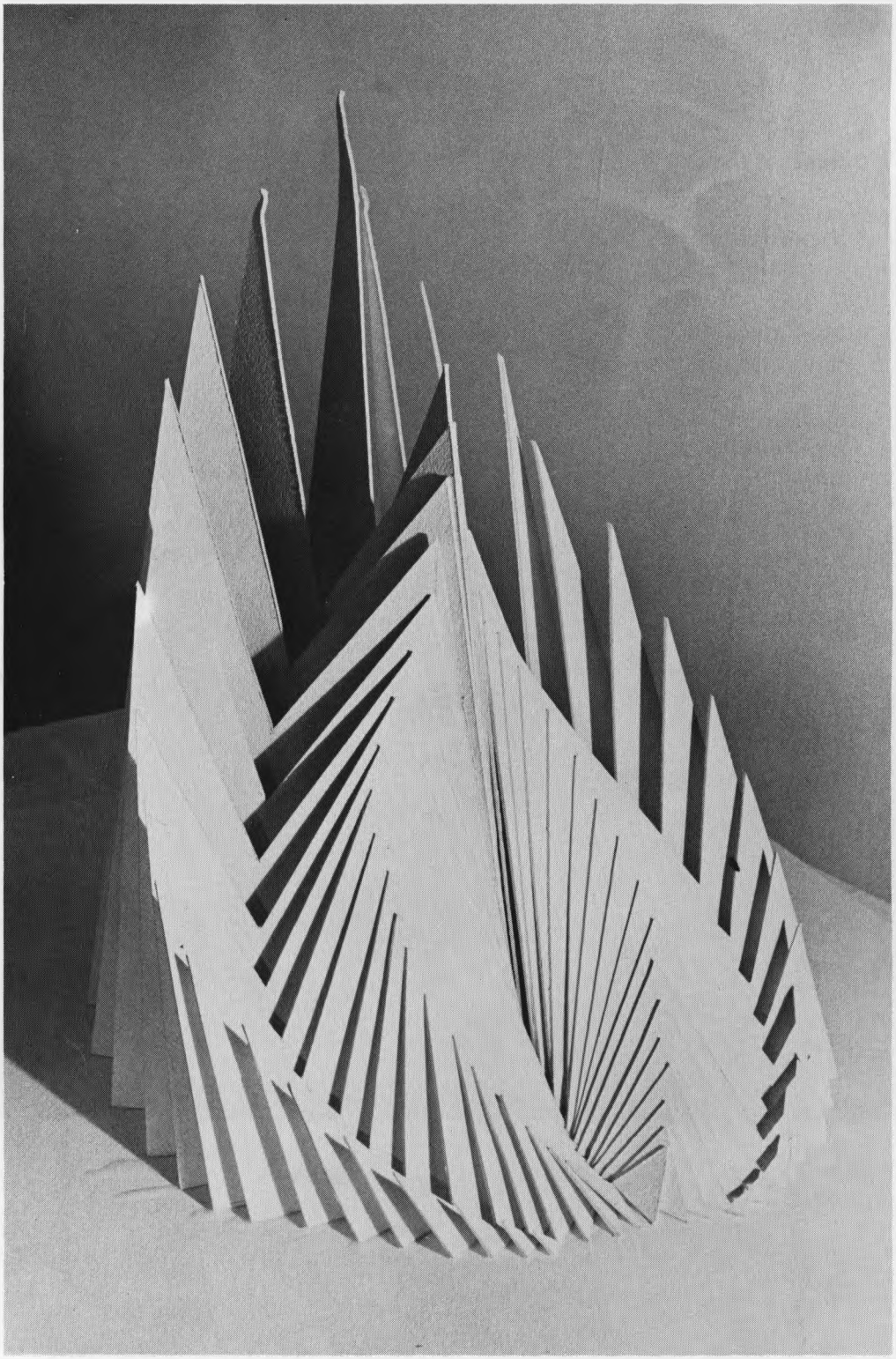


Claudia Parish

Dana R. Self

Illusion

Alone I will run up the
soft green hillside,
steal all the sunlight,
wrap it in my sweater.
Like a fugitive I'll
dash back to my room and
hide it under my
quilt for safekeeping.
Now it will be mine
when the rain falls
like grey drapery
or when you leave me
again.



Liz Dormont
(Photographed by Linda Burns)

Becky Andros

The Migration of Pyramids

We are nomads,
one with
linen-skinned Bedouins
and the hammered-gold disc
tracing arcs on lapis sky.

Desert things must move on.

Claudia Parish

Judy Radcliffe

Chella McNeice

The Creative Writing faculty of Stephens College is pleased to announce the winners of the 1979-80 National High School Creative Writing Contest. Finalists in fiction were judged by Kelly Cherry, novelist *(Augusta Played)*, short story writer *(Best American Short Stories, Pushcart Prize II)*, and professor at the University of Wisconsin. Finalists in poetry were judged by Gerald Costanzo, poet *(In the Aviary*, winner of the Devins Award, 1974*)* and director of the Carnegie-Mellon University Press. Both Ms. Cherry and Mr. Costanzo participated in the 1978-79 Writers-in-Residence program at Stephens College.

Poetry:
First Place

Judith Shulevitz
12820 S.W. 67th Ave.
Miami, FL

Second Place

Kate Lewis
42 Oak Ave.
Tenafly, NJ

Third Place

Amanda Holmes
404 E. Cass St.
Cadillac, MI

Honorable Mention

Martha Greenwald
151 Fish Hawk Drive
Middletown, NJ

Lisa Shirley
307 Arthur St.
Woodstock, IL

Linda Dahl Hart
816 South Park
San Angelo, TX

Fiction:
First Place

Tina Ament
302 Vista Bella
Santa Cruz, CA

Second Place

Sarah Swanston
113-30 199 St.
St. Albans, NY

Third Place

Katherine Clark
3309 Dell Road
Birmingham, AL

Honorable Mention

Leslie Lewis
Orchard Terrace
Sewickley, PA

Amanda Holmes
404 E. Cass St.
Cadillac, MI

Elisha Robinson
413 Trimmer Rd.
Spencerport, NY

Tina Ament

Pokerchips

I had to go see Roona Plotsk twice a week. My mother would park the car on the same corner in front of his office building and I'd follow her up to his office on the third floor. I'd been to Roona Plotsk's so many times that I could have easily gone alone on the elevator, but I always followed my mother. The lobby always smelled as if someone were cooking, and the same old lady, who my mother said had really bad arthritis, waved hello every time we came. I was the first one that Roona Plotsk saw on Mondays and Wednesdays. If we got there early enough though we would still have to wait in the soft chairs of the waiting room.

One Monday at the end of April, after we'd waited awhile, Roona Plotsk opened the door of the room where he saw kids and looked out at us. As I always did, I pretended not to notice.

"Go on," my mother said, "he's ready."

I walked in slowly, stopping to fiddle with the magazines. Inside the office I shut the door loudly. I hoped everyone in the building would hear it. I walked to the closet where Roona Plotsk kept the toys and said, "Anything new?" I said that every time I went.

"No, not today." I was surprised that he never got tired of the question.

"No, never any day," I said getting out the pokerchips and taking them to the wooden table where Roona Plotsk was already sitting.

"Have you heard from your father since I saw you last week?" He was always asking me that.

"The army let me go visit him last weekend."

"You went to Vietnam?"

"Yeah. I got to miss school on Friday afternoon to catch the army jet. They gave me a uniform right away so that I'd look like everybody else, and my dad met me at the airport in a *tank*. Daddy had to drive the tank out to the fighting place, but I was asked to march with everybody else."

"What happened when you got to the fighting place?"

"You're so stupid! We won of course." I started to arrange the chips into piles of five. Roona Plotsk had believed my story.

"Tell me, did you really go to Vietnam?"

"What do you think?" I picked up my end of the table and dropped it.

"There may be people trying to sleep downstairs, and they can't do it with all that thumping."

I laughed, but I didn't do it anymore. I went to the shelves along the side of the office where Roona Plotsk kept the dollhouse and farm animals. I didn't like the dolls, but I got the two horses from the animal box and went back to the table.

"You should have put the pokerchips away first," said Roona Plotsk. I pretended not to hear, and said, "We're going to have a horserace."

"Let's all go
to Pimlico," said Roona Plotsk.

"Let's see, what should their names be?" I asked myself more than him.

"Well," said Roona Plotsk, "how about something like True Blue or True Friend?"

"That's dumb. None of the ones on TV are called that. I think the red one will be called War Admiral, after Man-o-War's son."

"I don't like that one. How about Fair Play after Man-o-War's father?"

"War Admiral is his name. And this brown one will be called Tyrant."

"I don't like that name either," said Roona Plotsk. I wasn't sure what Tyrant meant, but that horse had won a race on TV and if Roona Plotsk didn't want it, I was sure that it was right.

"Couldn't we call the brown one Fair Play?" I considered this and accepted his idea.

"The race is about to start. The horses are in the gate. BRRRRING. And they're off!" I moved them as I called the race. "War Admiral is way out in front. He's ahead by three, four, five lengths. War Admiral is still widening his lead. War Admiral is the clear-cut winner." The race was over. I picked Fair-Play up from the racetrack table and said in a voice that sounded like a trainer, "We should have given him a different name."

"He ran a fair and good race."

"Why don't you like War Admiral?" I asked, "It's a very good name."

Roona Plotsk considered a minute before answering, and then said, "I don't like war."

"I'll bet you were never in one," I said.

"You're right, I never was in a war, but I've seen a lot who were, and I know a lot who don't want to be in one now."

"Maybe so, but wars are interesting, and they do make better horse names." I added one pokerchip to each of my piles. "What do you do at night?" I asked Roona Plotsk after I had finished.

"What do *you* do at night?" asked Roona Plotsk.

"I know something you don't do enough of. You don't go out and buy new games often enough."

"Tell me about some of the things that you do."

I got up and took Fair Play and War Admiral back to their box by the dollhouse, then went to the closet and got out the Chinese checkers.

"You really ought to put the pokerchips away."

I just brought the new game back to the table. I never played this game by the rules. I let the marbles race round and round the metal box they were kept in; it reminded me of the roller derby I had seen on TV the day before.

"I want the black ones to win."

"How about the yellows or greens." Roona Plotsk didn't like black. That was why I wanted the black ones to win.

"No, no, they're too slow." As I said this though, I noticed that the yellows and greens were about to win. I picked up some red marbles and dropped them onto the yellows and greens that were in the front. The red marbles fell on top of the yellows and in front of the greens that were in the lead. A black marble rolled over what I called the finish line first.

"See! The black won, and a red was second. I'll bet the yellows and greens are mad that the red ones cheated."

"You know that cheating's wrong, but I'll bet that the yellow and green marbles aren't too angry."

"And why not?" I asked, knowing what he would say.

"Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose, so what's the use in cryin' the blues."

I knew it. "You always say that. You're stupid." It always seemed funny that when I made fun of him he didn't mind. "You're really stupid, Roona Plotsk," I repeated.

"Why do you call me Roona?" asked Roona Plotsk.

"I don't know," I said. I got up and looked out at the cement courtyard two stories down. Then I went to the blackboard across from the table.

"Tell me why you call me that."

"No." I really didn't know why I called him Roona. The other Roonas and their friends, the Toonas, Boonas, and Troonas, were people who talked to me. They always came in large groups, lined up in the same order and wearing the same blue clothes. Roona Plotsk was the only Roona who ever talked to anyone besides me.

"You must have a reason for calling me Roona. What does Roona mean?"

I wasn't going to tell him. I picked up the eraser and banged it against the board. White powder spread into the air.

"Don't do that anymore." Roona Plotsk's voice was more firm than usual. "People can't breathe when there's chalkdust in the air."

I banged the eraser against the radiator. Roona Plotsk came and took hold of my wrist. It scared me a little that his fingers would hold that hard, but I didn't let on. More white dust circled in the air like smoke as the eraser dropped bottom down on the floor.

Roona Plotsk let go of my wrist and said, "I think it's about time for you to go. Take those chips back to the closet now."

I headed quickly for the table, picked up the piles of chips that I had made and threw them into the box with the others, and got up as if I were going to put them away. Then, I took off the lid and turned the box over, scattering red, white and blue chips all over the table.

"Pick them up," said Roona Plotsk.

"I have to go now, you said it yourself." I went to the door and opened it. My mother was standing by the magazines, and she looked up at Roona Plotsk and me.

"Good-bye," Roona Plotsk said.

As we left, I thought I heard Roona Plotsk putting the chips back into the box, and I hesitated at the waiting room door. But my mother had gone to the Drug King and gotten donuts for both of us, and she gave me mine as we walked out. That was why I liked going to talk to Roona Plotsk; I got donuts.

Judith Shulevitz

In the Wake of Aspen

The moon travels in the reeds
along the lake. I feel it there, full
in the water, and follow
in the wake
of aspen trembling dark in light
glowing like the skin of a mother's belly.

These aspen, tremulous
on a strand of wind,

lead me

to this old bus
its rag curtains billowing
like wings spread and paused

and to these young thrushes
in the window's edge
thin heads cocked high
and listening
holding me still
in the flat, aware discs of their eyes.

Kate Lewis

Over the Mountain from Brattleboro and Similar Places

I wish I could be the woman
I was for you
or rather the mermaid
I had become.
For in the afternoons of that summer
spent in the gully pond,
the breasts you admired so
became gills.

In the morning
waiting for you to wake up
I would watch the curious haze
creep off the mountains
and I would wrap my hair
from the night into day,
tucking in the strays
at the nape of my woman neck.

When the day's heat hugged
only the west side of the porch
we watched the shadows fall
among the grasses on the hills.
I dried my hair of the pond's
silvery waters, waiting
for you to pluck out
the first bluesy notes
that would start the night.

So your friends gathered on the porch
adding their music
to our private one.
So your friends left,
but not before telling you
they liked your pretty Victorian girl
and I ruffled my petticoats in thanks
careful to hide the fins.

As the night took on its Vermont chill,
we would rush to your room
leaving a trail of scales behind me.
And I would sit on the edge of your bed,
taking out pin by pin
and I would unwrap my hair
from the day into night.

Elizabeth Rieman

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