HARBINGER

STEPHENS CREATIVE ARTS MAGAZINE SPRING '81

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EDITORIAL 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 fiction winner and the first and second place poetry 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 literary and visual Arts.

CONTENTS

POETRY

FICTION

PHOTOGRAPHY

ART

HIGH SCHOOL CONTEST WINNERS

Faculty Advisor
Eleanor Bender

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LETTER TO BLACKWELL FROM ST. LOUIS Lyssa Heidi Klein

I'm sitting under the Arch
staring down the Mississippi.
6:30 a.m.
and night falls away,
smoke-blue haze
wrung with pink.

I had to get out.
So I took a Greyhound,
watched small-town lights
and dark mounds of earth
through filmed windows
until there was only night,
and I slept.

It's cold as hell on these bleachers,
real meatlocker weather;
my hands are red and raw.
The sun rounds out quickly now,
big and orange/white;
smokestacks ringed in coral.

I began to hate people,
the same murk of faces;
hated them for their smiles
and two-penny laughter.
The noise in my head got so loud
both eardrums broke,
and I heard nothing.

I've missed the city,
missed its pulse, energy,
shimmer.
Farms in fall are
sprawled in seed,
ripe with color.
But I breathe lights,
horns and hustle.

I need some coffee,
time to think.
If you were here
I'd jog the waterfront with you,
tell you what great
legs you have,
then run like hell before you'd kick me.
As it is my ass is froze
and there's a drunk down below
who keeps hollering to me.
Take care
and tell Stanley I still have his Stones album.

Patricia Ann Freeman

1.

"Two people met on account of wishing not to disappoint a third person, who was their mutual friend. The two fell in love and were married."

Oh, the congruence of things, Stella marvelled, listening to the story her friend was telling her. How nicely things work out.

"But," the woman continued, "that's not all. Then the War came. Things were never the same after the War. The man came home very sick after two years at sea. He was a long time recovering."

2.

Samuel Cotton drug her out in the country. Drug her to a cabin with a dirt floor, on the Tchefuncte. She was se'emteen, and she had se'emteen babies. Se'emteen of em. Then she died. Then Samuel died. He was older than Hell when he took her.

3.

There you have it. Two complete stories. Now I have other things to tell you.

In the cosmos it is an uncreative day, that's all; which is to say, if you're the kind of writer who believes that writing comes from without, the Muses aren't with you. Sorry, try again tomorrow, when there will be some chance of lightsafts after a thunderstorm. I haven't this problem because I believe that writing and creativity and jazz come from within. Within, today, it is fair and sunny, warm, a slight bit of turbulence causing a lack of true control, if control is indeed the key, over the course of my life which is now unleashing itself through this Papermate, and no matter what, remember that yes, I am in control of you, not just yet, not as I write this, but when you begin to read this I will have complete control over your time. Any diversion from without, say, the ringing of the telephone, is hey, okay with me because as a matter of fact the phone has disturbed me many times tonight, so it may as well disturb you, just for effect.

Bet you're wondering, precisely as you finish the last sentence and begin this one, which is sometime in my future and sometime in your present, how long I am going to sustain this. How many trifling things have I got to tell you, and why have I embarked upon such a mode of telling as this? Bet you're thinking — ah but no! Presuppositions are unfair. A friend told me recently that I have the awful habit of pre-supposing, of making assumptions about what other people think. Now I have just discovered that not only in my personal life do I assume that no one can understand what I am doing, but in my creative life as well.

Truth is, right this minute, I understand perfectly well what I am doing. I will even say that you may call this nonfiction if that suits you. That is, if you take the narrow view of what fiction is. On the other hand, do not assume that I have not created a narrator to come between you and me. Narrators are funny fellows, sort of like priests in the confessionals. They know more than you do but less than the

creator. And certainly they will be cautious about their manner of conveying the word.

Personally, I have trouble with narrators, particularly the first person, present tense narrator. I have trouble, unless the writer is exceptionally skillful, in imagining just where the narrator is when she is telling me the story. I'll tell you right now where I am: I am in my room with my feet propped above me, and I am beginning to acquire a small headache. Do you believe me?

Internal monologue is fine. But straightforward talk from the page! Maybe when I'm good at it, at writing with a first person, present tense narrator, I will think differently. As for now —

When you come to the end of this monologue, you will see what I have done.

I just thought of a title for this piece. I wrote it over the first page: *Nemo Nullified.* Figure that one out. Figure.

My mother says I say the word "figure" too much, as in, "I figured you didn't want to come along." She thinks it's hick talk. Figures. There are lots of cliches in my speech, too. And often I use vulgarites when more imaginative words would do better. It's my upbringing which makes me self-conscious about it. For instance, once I told my father that a brother of mine needed a kick in the butt. "Young lady, since you've gone to college your language has deteriorated considerably. I've noticed this for some time. Now, I want you to clean it up. Hear me?"

I sat flabbergasted in the chair.

"Well?"

"I hear you." Then I removed myself from his presence by rolling myself over the arm of the chair, and I went and told my mother what happened.

"I'm telling you, I don't know. I don't know what's gotten into him," she said, her voice rising to a laugh.

Another thing about my father is that he loves to tell people about my accomplishments. He never says, though, "I read my daughter's work and it is very fine. You should see it." No. When he reads my work he says that it is cute. "That's cute, darling," he says, handing the manuscript to me. So I have a father who knows me as a daughter and not as the other person that I am, too.

Well, what do I do? He is sixty-four. I am twenty. We do love each other. It's just that we often, in families, let love stand in the way of truth. Love won't admit trouble. At least in my family, we tiptoe around with our troubles, a sigh here, a closed door, a rising from the dinner table there, a quick goodnight.

Isn't love always troubling, no matter whom you love? Thinking about it can carry you until you can see nothing in the same light anymore: water doesn't look like water, you're dry, and you're no desert flower. Love doesn't feel like love. Then what do you do? What do you do when you think that maybe love is nothing?

You lie awake, rub your palms over your brow. "Come on, you fool," you say to yourself, "what's the matter with you?"

4.

"Peace. That was all Celeste asked of life, just a wedge of peace for herself."

Now that's fiction. What Amanda might have said over the phone, had she not been wary, as we all are most of the time, of saying things we know that others will interpret as truth.

5.

I was going to stop there. What a fine ending, I thought to myself. But why does a story have to end? It doesn't have to do anything, does it?

"It does," said I.

I find a bird's skull,
fragile as a kite,
strangled between roots
of wild onions and weeds
that pierce the dirt
behind the gardener's shed.

This still reminder of
a cobalt parakeet
died when I was nine
and earned a proper funeral.
I found him dull and stupid
on his gravelled floor,
his warm bones just stiffening
against the grit,
his body fired clay
under cold blue feather
that suddenly moved
with lice I never knew were there.

Now the lice swim in dirt
through this empty grey bulb,
featherless slate fossil,
a cavity of ice.
The worms slide
through the hollows of his eyes
and dead vapor thoughts escape,
old voices
that rattle like keys
from the dark hole
of his head.

Barb Buford

Lisa K. Nelson

1.
In the Greyhound station, my cigarette rolls
among tired feet and Ventura luggage.
We put Locky on the bus. I watch him climb
the thin rubber steps.

The only thing I see as we leave the terminal
is the seventeenth-century graveyard;
I think about warm ale.
We climb the fence, rub palms
over moist stones, letters washed dull.

You arch over me, red hair pinned
against the winged clouds. Out of the cold lot
a rat lies, dull blade
on a sharp Boston alley.

We walk on,
wind deeper. You pull your head
farther into your trenchcoat.

2.
In the Commons we walk around and around
a statue, escaping the stares of old women
at the edge of the square where horses stand
bony in the shade
bags of manure pushed under their tails.
Before the sky turns black,

we go to Haymarket, pulled by our hair
on the sparking rail of the trolley. The graffiti
inscriptions mix as we go
underground.

In the square, men with pot bellies
and buttons gone from their shirts
sit by fruit crates. Flies lull
above lettuce and squash. Rinds float
in the gutter. We stand

in front of a store window
pressed between the tall buildings
that block the sky.

3.
Dusk
and rain.
Yellow taxis, headlights, stoplights
meshed in water, shine in your tortoiseshell glasses
that keep breaking.

In the hollows of a bank foyer
between two great columns
out of the rain,
a black man sits, accordion between his knees.
It echoes in the den of stone.

The three of us, you, me
and the jazz man,
are statues
in a hall, shadows mixing; music winds
around our bodies.

4.
In a flat on Marlboro Street
with chipped ceiling
and plastered walls, the city
dulls to night and

you are real now
as the fire
that slaps and licks the marble hearth.

We leave, go to an all-men's jazz bar
where I use the strange john. We drink
on the money you got from giving blood; you are
so pale.

5.
We give up a four a.m. breakfast at Rumpels
to help a blind man to a center
on Buswell Street. His knobbed cane
taps the dry sidewalk.

I stand back a bit
and you talk with him as we move around
the corner of the dawn.

I come closer. "What is red?"
"It's hot like the sun, hotter than
the other colors, I think, more like the lights
in the dentist's office."
"What's blind?" he laughs. I light

a cigarette, watch
the colors in the flame
until the match burns my finger.

6.
It is Sunday. We find a playground
with steel monkey bars. Silence
on the black concrete; you kick a beer can
from wall to wall until a woman in curlers
pokes her head out a window.

Tight between the buildings, dawn spits
on the damp streets. We walk.
I carry my wet shoes, slide
over the glass diamonds on the sidewalk.

Light shatters on the Charles River. I stretch
in the grass, feel your eyes
hot like sun on my back.

Molly Baur

Step, step. Step, step. *I went to Maine, to see my man, polly wally doodled with him all day.* Step one, *doodle waddle,* step two, *doodly do. Went to Maine, went to Spain, played with my man, out in the rain.*

Irene pranced on the sidewalk like a parade horse on a red carpet. Her scarlet boots shouted through the air, thick and shiny with rain. Boots so bright the puddle water she splashed seemed scarlet just from the contact.

She watched her feet as she walked. She couldn't help smiling. Talk about "Puss in Boots!" These extra night jobs really helped out. Damn, these are cute little boots. The little lace-up reminded her of a young maiden's corset. Except this would be fancy, maybe not a young maiden, but one of the night maidens. Black silk cords for shoe strings.

Oh Daddy Dear, she teased to herself, I only wore these boots to keep my pants dry! I wouldn't want to drag along in the rain. She smoothed the slick black pants over her cute little "ass-et," as Marco called it.

Oh, went through the rain, not to Spain — doodled all day with my man. Irene hummed, giggled, and mumbled herself down the street "Oh, I'm singing in the rain! Oh brother, Irene!" She sent a shriek through her head — punishment. She hopscotched a short step to land both neon boots in a deep puddle. They didn't cool off a bit. She tapped her heels. She remembered lowering a stick into the crick at home to see how deep it was. Her boot heels were a dipstick. You're a quart low, Irene. Oh, Irene, go to work. You're driving me crazy. She stepped carefully; she didn't want to ripple the water. Lift a heel, down, step. I went to Spain, step, in the rain. The sharp heels were scarlet needles sewing rain drops into a supple mirror.

She was out of the puddle, back on wet sidewalk. She wandered along, her arm and fingers floating against the buildings like a kite tail. She turned left onto Broadway. She always walked to the Parlour the downtown way. Past the old stores and hotels. Old, but not decrepit. They kept it nice. Picked up the trash and bums every Thursday morning. Around here, the trash gets picked up more than I do, she thought.

She passed the Benson, flipped up her locket: quarter till. If she went to work, Juanita would make her sit in the front room teasing boys all day. Instead, she stopped at the phone booth, a sentry box between downtown and the West End filled with Houses, Parlours, and cheap game stores. To hell with the Parlour. Today, she could play at the Benson. She slid edgeways through the half-opened door. Where's that dime? She remembered the bump of a dime on her pants. The phone jangled through her ear. Juanita would never admit it, but she knew that she, Irene Pincher, was too hot for front room stuff. Hell, she couldn't even keep her boots in the room. They'd want to be flashing up and down the halls, sirens, distracting all from their business. She let her boots tap dance to the phone ring. "Oh, went to the Benson, to get the best one," she sang. She brushed a clump of baby powder off her shirt and peeked at her chest.

The rings stopped and a voice answered, "Good morning, honey, I'm Juanita and I'm waiting for you in the Parlour."

"Oh God, Nita. It's just me, Irene."

"Where the hell are you? Days start at eight around here. Coffee with a squeeze for the business man."

"No squeezes this morning. I'm hanging around downtown."

"But you gotta be dressed up and smiling in ten minutes."

"Juanita, you know I'm always dressed."

"Uh ha, I imagine you're dressed up real tight."

"Dressed and ready to roll. I could go to Spain."

"Hey, come on to work. There's a guy here who likes water."

"Tell him to stand in the rain."

"No, I want to see you do a trick in the pool—bet your leather pants would shrink up and choke you."

"Last night, I did one with my boots on."

"Those stabbers?"

"Almost popped his water bed."

"Come on to work, Irene. I gotta get dancing."

"No. I called 'cuz I'm not coming. Marco said I could play at the Benson today, or this morning anyway."

"Creep. And I got to serve whiskey in tea cups to pansyassed grey suits."

"Bye, baby." Irene creaked open the door and did a Lady Godiva saunter up the street to the Benson.

The Benson: she clamored up the stairs to the big covered porch, loose silver dollars chinked together in her shoulder bag. She stood at the big door. It was like a picture with its wooden frame and plate glass window. She hummed, she tapped the toe of her boot. She watched it flash up and down, the blinking of a Christmas light. Where's the doorman? He's half the point of playing at the Benson. She watched herself in the reflection. So cute! Nice and thin. Food was the last thing she enjoyed spending her money on.

Irene wrapped her hand around the heavy, wooden door handle and pulled. It popped open, nearly bumping her nose.

"What in the hell?" She had expected a smooth, heavy pull. Moving into the lobby, she felt right at home, but the door was different. They'd added a hydraulic gadget. I'll bet it was that lazy-ass Perry's idea. Some doorman. She moved on, cruising past the main desk. Across the room she walked, her steps echoing and piling up around her. She stood at the coffee shop window. She pretended to look for a friend. She set her watch and brushed her hair. In the reflection of the gift shop window, she saw the men's room door open. Yep. Here comes Perry, head doorman. Once he'd told her that he was "in charge of lobby control." As he came toward her, Irene could see his lip twitch. He's about half harelip, she thought. I ought to give him some of my dog tranquilizers. He moved in close, backing her against the wall. She smiled anyway.

"Hi, baby," Irene tickled the doorman's chin; her finger smoothed around his collar. "Lobby looks great, Perry." She took his arm and strolled across the lobby. "Don't mind them." She waved away the looks from the old women perched behind the front desk. She took him near the front door. In the shade of a smooth and heavy rubber plant, silver dollars were dull lights on Irene's palm. "Marco talked to you, didn't he?" Irene slid her boot across his brown Oxford. She felt his breath. He was warm.

"Irene, you keep out of the way."

She took his hand and tickled his fingers.

"Don't go giving us a bad image."

"What do you mean, Perry baby? I'll only add some color." She leaned against the wall. Her boot toe became a little race car driving up the gold stripe of his pants.

'Don't waste your time on me, lady. I'm a decent man. Now go on, over by the chairs next to the door — like I called you a taxi."

As he picked the silver off her palm, Las Vegas, Monaco, and casino lights blinked across her thoughts. He clinked the silver, tossing it up and down. What a child I am, Irene thought. I take money from a daddy and pay someone to let me play. She sat down in a chair beside the picture window. It was nicer than any chair she had at home. Man, the people who come here! The men always have initials: D.B., J.B., Mr. J.M. Blackwell, suite seven. A short laugh popped from her mouth. She never knew if old J.M. was loaded more with money or alcohol. She waved at Perry siting on another nice chair beside the desk. His look was a threat that slinked across the floor. Even his threats didn't walk straight up. Irene turned back to the window. Better keep watch on who's coming in — no one interesting yet. She closed her eyes.

She belonged in places like this: fancy hotels, Spain, Monaco, the Riviera. She might make some big bucks with the kind of men who came to the Benson. If she could get just a little bit to the good, that's what she wanted to do — go to Spain, singing. Opening her eyes, she licked a finger and cleaned a spot off her boot. Looking out the window, she smiled. A shiny black car was rolling up like an oil drop. Perry came to the door and slid out, the slick rat. "Creep," Irene mumbled. She got up and followed him outside. Again, the quick swing of the door disappointed her. Outside on the porch, she leaned against the wall, watching Perry practically grovel at the limo's door. An annoyingly curly white poodle jumped from the car seat, ricocheted off Perry's knee, tiptoed across the sidewalk and up the stairs to wait in front of the door. Irene sneered at the snotty poodle. It growled. Sounding like the heels of a crowd of tiny ladies, the poodle tapped its red enamelled toenails around the porch. "Cheap thing," Irene mumbled.

She turned back to the car. A woman's head, amazingly similar to the poodle's, bobbed out the door. She was about fifty and, dressed in smooth black, she matched her car. "But your head matches your dog," Irene said to her cigarette. The lady stood beside the car, settling herself. She tried to push wrinkles off her dress. When she patted her hair, the black glove she wore tangled like a bat in the curls. Irene frowned: doubt if she's my type. Where's a man? I need someone who carries a wallet. She treasure-hunted through her bag and dug up a cigarette. A big man got out of the car.

"Ooo, man, I'd like to play with his bulges. Looks in good shape for an older guy." She focused on the bump of his wallet. "I could use that for my pillow; it's probably just as stuffed."

The man walked to the back of the car and stood next to the woman. He stretched an arm around the lady's shoulders. She wore it like a mink stole. She leaned against him and closed her eyes. He looked at the hotel. Irene bumped against his eyes. Goddamn, those eyes are blue! Why's he holding that old woman?

She's not leaning, she's sagging. Lord knows I wouldn't sag. God, her knees are even buckled. Irene buried her cigarette in the white sand of a cuspidor. Leave it to the Benson to have Caribbean sand in an ashcan. She felt the poodle staring. It wanted to sniff her boots. Irene took another cigarette, then, shaking her head, she put it back. Irene, you smoke too much. She tapped her fingers and scratched her head. A second later, she grabbed it again, lit it, and took a big puff with a small smile of satisfaction. The poodle tip-tapped to the door, whimpering like a spoiled child.

"Sir?" she heard the doorman ask. Irene moved along the wall closer to the street. A chauffeur was standing behind the couple. His black boots gleamed with a heavy gloss, quiet, not like the blaring trumpets of hers.

"We're almost home," Mr. Blue-Eyes said.

"Oh, baby, stay here awhile," Irene whispered. "I'll make the Benson real homey for you." She made herself rub against the bricks: think cat, Irene.

"Ma'am." The chauffeur's white glove fluttered against the black perch of his hat brim.

Irene slid along the wall, shortening the boot steps between her and the couple.

"Howard," the woman whined. Oh God, Irene thought. His name's Howard? I wonder if "Howie" turns him on? She imagined, "Buy me a drink, Howie."

"It's all right, dear," Howard said squeezing the lady. She slumped more.

"Howard, Howard, you know I'm exhausted. Nearly sick, too."

"Yes, dear, I know. Tonight, you can rest."

"Howie, drop her, man," Irene whispered, taking out some lipstick.

"Oh, Howard, I never want to go abroad again."

Wow, thought Irene, life is really rough. One abuse after another. She saw the dog mincing her way. I suppose the poor puppy had to go too.

"We've got the luggage, sir," the chauffeur said.

"Oh, Joseph," said the woman, opening her eyes halfway. "You're such a dear."

"Sir?" Perry asked. "Your luggage, may I take it to your room? I'm afraid the dampness won't be doing it any good."

"Yes," Howard said in a straight, strong voice.

Then Irene heard a whine. The poodle was sitting a foot away from her boot. When she glared at it, it went and sat at the door. Howard shifted the woman's weight, "Yes, let's go inside. I'm Howard Richards. We have a reservation for a suite. Something with one of those large baths. You know the bathing situation in Europe. Can't see how the ladies manage. Mrs. Richards, here, she's just flat worn out."

"Oh, maybe we could take her to the hospital," Irene whispered.

Joseph was still hovering. "And Joseph," Mrs. Richards said, "thank you, dear, for bringing up Madeleine. I just had to see her."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Joseph," Howard said. "As you see, we're staying tonight. Mrs. Richards is too exhausted to stand the drive home."

"Yes, sir." Joseph nodded.

"Be here in the morning to drive us out of the city and home."

"About ten, sir?"

"Fine." Still supporting Mrs. Richards, Howard eased out a roll of money. Irene's eyes followed the glint of a silver money clip. I wish they'd go in, she thought. He could get rid of that old sack he's lugging around. She's about to hit the sidewalk anyway. Howard pulled off a bill. It was stiff, new, it seemed to cut through the air to Joseph's hand.

"Thank you, sir." He ran to the driver's seat, and the car practically jumped into the traffic.

"Thanks so much." Howard handed a few bills to the doorman. Must be ones, Irene nodded to herself. But that other was a big one; Joseph almost got a hard-on when he touched it.

Then Perry, his lip twitching, came up the stairs to the door. As he grabbed to open it, he noticed Irene. "Get out of here," he hissed, looking back to the couple. She pointed to his crotch and said, "Why, Perry, your pants are unzipped!" He blushed and grabbed his front. Irene laughed and watched the poodle trot up beside him wanting to be let in.

"I'll call the cops," he whispered at her, then he jerked open the door, too hard. It smacked against the white fluff. A high-pitched yelp made her cringe. She dropped her cigarette, grabbed her purse and ran down the stairs.

"My Madeleine—oh, Howard!" Mrs. Richards tried to jump forward. When she left Howard's support, she tripped away and fell on her knees. "Oh, my little Madeleine!" Howard squatted beside her, his hands flapping like confused birds. "Howard, that horrible man smashed my puppy!" The doorman was kneeling next to the still dog. His face matched its whiteness. "Sue him, Howard." Irene stood on the sidewalk ready to move.

"Howard. Check Madeleine!" She pushed him away. "Arrest that man!" Already off balance because he was squatting, he fell on his rear-end. Irene watched his pants pocket bend open.

"Sir," the doorman croaked softly.

"Save her, Howard," Mrs. Richards sobbed, reaching her arms toward the dog. She didn't get off her knees.

Howard rocked his weight forward and stood. Mrs. Richards sobbed. The wad of bills fell from his pocket. The money clip sprang open when it hit the sidewalk. Bill flew and scattered. Howard slapped at loose money. Mrs. Richards sobbed, "Madeleine, Madeleine."

"Sir," pleaded the doorman.

Irene walked along the sidewalk. She was nearly on top of Howard. She walked on the heels of her boots. "Step one, lift high," she hummed to herself. "Step two, drag your heels." She heard paper scuffing with her steps. Now, grind the heel. She kept walking. Step three, slide. Move quick, but don't prance. "*Oh, went to Spain, played in the rain, polly wally doodle all the day.*" She looked behind her. Still on her knees, Mrs. Richards was pushing Howard toward the dog. "Save her, save her!" Howard stuffed more bills into his pocket and shrugged. Irene watched him plod up the stairs to the dog. Mrs. Richards had her hands over her face.

"I, I can't, can't . . ." Irene could barely hear her. Holding her breath and crossing her fingers, she peeked at her boots. She whistled long and low. Caught on

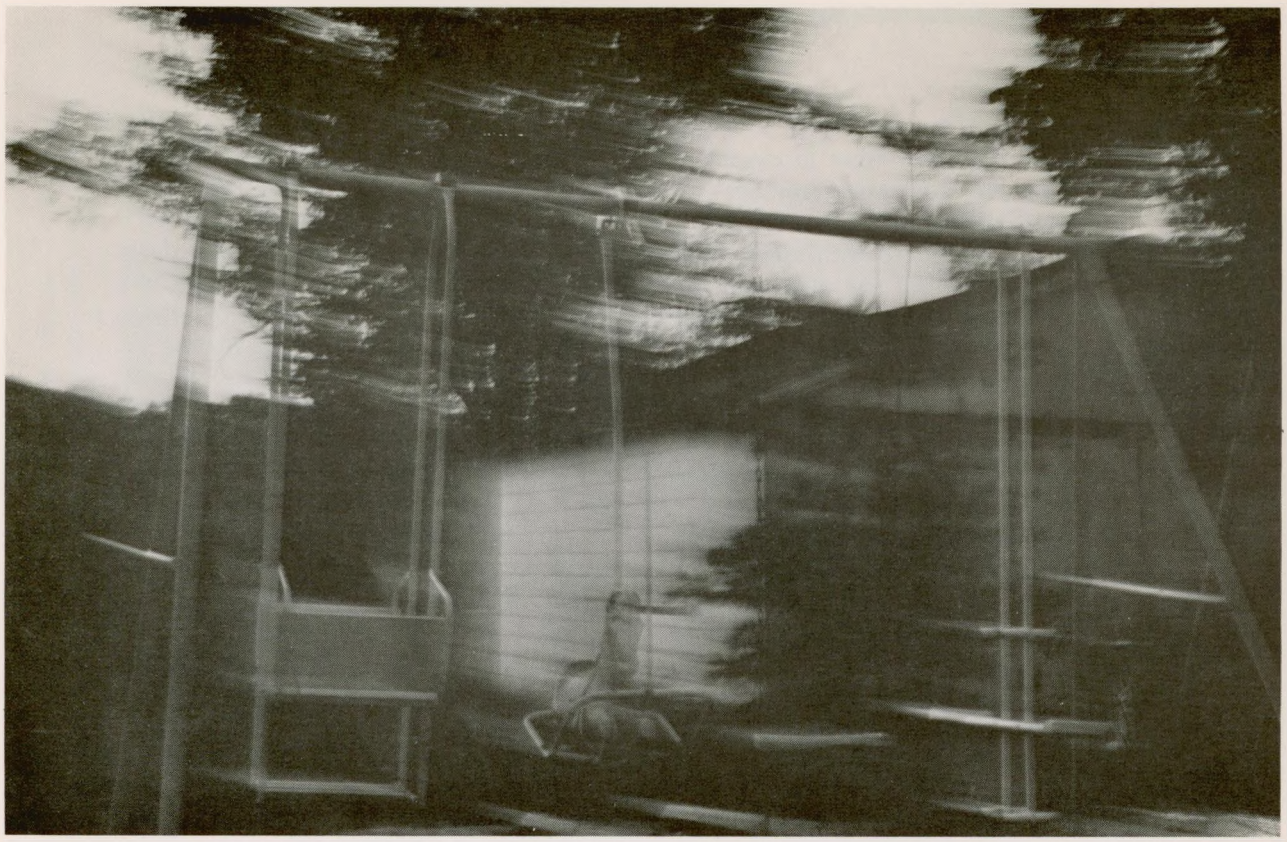
each boot heel, as crumpled as a candy bar wrapper, was a bill. Irene reached down and grabbed them. They were rain soggy. Slowly, she smoothed them out. She counted backwards: zero, zero, five. They flew down the pocket of her slick black pants. Her boots slipped her on down the sidewalk. She was too numbed to notice. Her heart felt like it had grabbed its ass and moved to her stomach. Goddamn, she really stabbed those bills! She turned the corner onto Eighth Street. Her heels clicked up the sidewalk like the little red toenails of Madeleine. She looked at her locket; some breakfast, Irene? Spain?

Without you here,
I hold a conversation with my dinner fork,
an intimate intercourse
that lives a meal
and dies in digestion.

By day,
I talk to the birds
who watch me
making love with the sun.

In the evening,
there's no one to hold me but the shower wall.
I bury my face in my arms against it,
plug the drain
and fall in,
delirious with water-pleasure.

Susan Schlegel



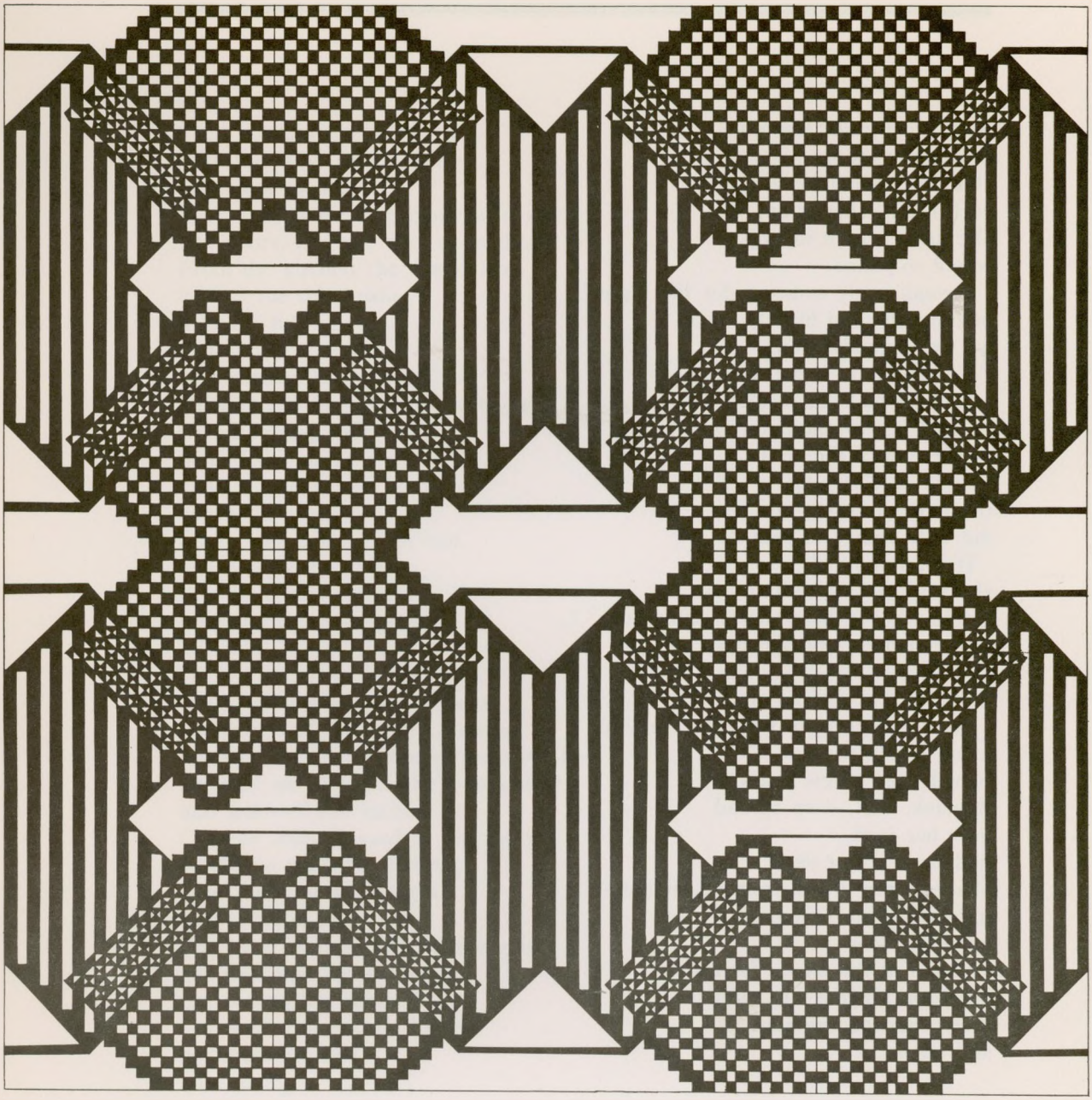
Lisa K. Nelson

1.
I did not know what to expect
from the lady, Mrs. Smythe,
who lived alone,
in a huge house with many windows
and doors. Did she ever open them?
From the kitchen she would look
behind the thick pane
a bright full moon
and smile,
as I kneeled in her yard
stroking the fine legs of my horse.
Or she would slide away
behind the shade
and I'd look across her land
above the trees
for the direction of the sun.
She was drawn inside,
kept in a constant cloud.
I wanted to move away.

2.
But I wanted the trees to stay,
the pale, and the leaves blowing.
I moved into the shade surrounding her
knocked on Mrs. Smythe's back door
and followed her inside.
Chinese dolls dressed in red satin
rested on polished shelves,
their faces wrapped tight
thin black paper.
The eyes squinted behind the glass
she said was for protection.
She looked like them.
I wanted to see them better
get them out and
hold them.

3.
Mrs. Smythe led the way
to another room.
Her feet sliding heavy
each hard hollow step.
She knew where to grip,
where to pause.
"I usually only come up for the night",
her breath solid like the wood
we were standing on.
"It is easier to come down."
I hoped I had not pushed her
hurried her to photographs
at the end of the stairs.
Stories of Wyoming,
the move and why the war
did such things to people.
"The damn Japs",
she said that twice and
I didn't know there was a difference
between them and the dolls.

4.
I came expecting to find Mrs. Smythe,
moon in the window.
It had been a few years.
A blank, dull, wisp spread
over her land,
bulldozer in her yard.
Shades were drawn from all windows,
hard wood block across
her back door.
I stayed in the shade for awhile,
but Mrs. Smythe was outside
drawn beyond the sun
and moon.



Nancy Jamieson

Sometimes,
dreams
get caught in trees.

They hang there
Eyes bulging,
thoughts
empty as a gambler's purse.

Cynics
cut them down,
bury them
in poor men's graves
to lie
on mortgaged bones.

Earth
is richest
over children's dreams.

Frances Bock

The black descended slowly, thinly veiling the shadows of tall palm trees and the bridge. The trees stood erect against the melting sun, a fiery red sun that had become a soft yellow as it went down. It fought itself, resentful of leaving the clear Texas skies.

The bridge connected the two countries, yet somehow it stood there unaware of its general importance. Not exciting or mysterious. It was neutral, in all its concreteness. Not solid white but a dirty white and the dirty white was stained and soiled because of the grease that dripped out from the big trucks filled with bananas, and the tires. They left skid marks and tracks full of grooves. Below the bridge was the muddy river, with banks that were thick with bushes and weeds. Weeds that grew upward and were as tall and independent as the people who swam across the river at night.

They approached the building. Actually, it wasn't a building, but a shed. It was perched at the beginning of the bridge like a seagull on a sand bar. Lone and small.

The man croaked, "Twenty cents, please."

Ben handed him the amount. She heard the clink of the coin as he carelessly threw it in the cash register. The man waved them through.

"Ben?" she said.

"Huh?"

"Look—I'm not so sure."

"Sure about what? It was your idea," he said. "Anyway, we're almost across." The boy draped his arm over the steering wheel as if to reassure himself. The gesture seemed unnatural to her, though, because he had placed it there so obviously.

She noticed that he peered over at her, stealing a look while she was looking out the window. Usually he saw her in some faded cutoffs with a tee shirt when she came to the farm. He always took her to the fields. He had hunted white wing while she sat on a rickety stool and read a book. She was always reading books.

Ben stopped at the checkpoint now that they were across. A policeman stood there, and she rolled down the window. She said, "Matamoros." The greasy man peered in the car, grinned at the couple, and said, "Esta bueno." His belly hung sloppily over his belt and a cigarette jutted out from his fat jowls.

What was it like on the other side of the border? What of that terrible—almost opportunistic—curiosity to experience the "foreign?" She knew what it was like, but she had never been by herself and especially not with a man. But Ben wasn't really a man—he was more of a man-child. Everyone at school always thought dinner for two "across" was far more exciting and daring than a dance chaperoned by adults. She knew that her parents would be furious. Somehow she felt tied to him. Like a child to its mother.

The Oldsmobile bumped and bounced up and down as they crossed the tiny, cobblestone streets. The car was covered with mud; it had splashed on the doors and fenders when Ben had driven it around in the fields. It looked as if someone had licked it on with long strokes of the tongue, and once the mud had settled it had been content to crust and crack—it had evolved from dark, sleek mud to a crusty dirt.

As they drove, little kids scuttled around the car with dirty washrags, torn and

faded red. "Clean windshields!" they shrieked with hopeful faces.

Ben scowled. "Gettaway," he waved with his hand. "You know, I hate that. They always do that," he said in a voice of vast experience.

They turned down the main boulevard. The street lights dimmed to a pale yellow against the green, upright trees. They were palms that were thin but full at the top. The crests were green and flowered outward so that when the palm swayed in the wind it looked like a woman with moppy hair swaying to music. It bent back and forth—almost a recognizable flow, like the tide of the ocean. The hibiscus were also in bloom. Red flowers that were shaped like cups, except for the yellow pollen that peered out like eyes. The showy flowers caressed the mangy, wild bushes.

Ben pressed the brakes lightly. Cars were lined up, each beeping its own horn of impatience. The constant honking sounded like turkeys squawking. A wreck. "Ayyyyyyeeeee! Mira!" The man waved his hands wildly, shaking his fist at the woman. She shook her head and pointed to his taillights. He hadn't used his blinker.

"I don't believe this! God," Ben shook his head in disgust.

"We'll just have to wait," Jan said.

"No, we don't. I know another way," Ben said as he turned the car.

"Ben, this is the only way."

"No it's not. I've been this way lotsa times."

Jan turned away from him and looked out the window. The streets were narrow, while the lights of Matamoros blinked with alertness. Loud accordion music drifted from a bar. A drunk staggered across the street in front of the car. "Damn!" Ben slammed on the brakes abruptly and the tires squealed.

Rows of houses were clustered along the narrow streets. A patchwork of colors and dirt. One house had a small front yard that was littered with coke bottles and banana peels and a broken broom. It was surrounded by a rickety fence that was unpainted except for vestiges of old whitewash. A hen squawked and flapped its wings in defiance. A mama stood in the doorway. She had long black braids and fat legs; her bright red skirt was ripped. Two small children clutched it.

They passed a vendor. He had a hand-drawn cart. It was covered by glass so that his customers could see what he offered. Candied fruits—sticky—the sugar had dripped all over the glass, forming a crust. He had hot dogs, burritos, and tacos, and those too had been in the sun all day. It didn't matter, though. Two children followed him and tugged at his sleeve.

A small store. Long strings of garlic dangled from the roof. Rows and rows of cans with Spanish labels—Hecho en Mexico—stacked to the ceiling. Even the smell of menudo and beans floated from the store.

Ben pulled into the lot. A parking attendant ran attentively to the Oldsmobile and took the keys.

"I guess you were right. I didn't know that we could get here this way," Jan said.

"Yeah, me and my dad came this way another time."

A beggar woman sat next to the door of the restaurant. A blind beggar woman: tousled white hair. She wore a print skirt that was torn and ragged. Her feet were bare and her hand was stretched out. The woman's face was etched full of lines that had deepened into soft, hard crinkles while her eyes were closed tightly.

She held a cane in the other hand. It had been carved out of an old piece of wood. She clutched it tightly, as if it was her only friend.

"Ben?"

"Huh?"

"Got any money?"

"Oh yeah, sure." He fumbled in his pockets because his pants were so tight. He had difficulty reaching down, and he dug and dug and finally came up with his money clip. He handed her a dollar.

"That's an awful lot," she said.

"Oh, well. Let's go. Want to?" He tried to put his arm around her waist, but she had moved ahead of him intentionally.

The waiter motioned to them. "Please, this way. Sir," he added as an afterthought. He knew his English. He knew it well. His black tuxedo was tailored and his hair slicked back carefully. The moustache curled upeards.

"How will this be, sir?" He smiled enigmatically as he handed Ben the menus. He abruptly turned around and walked away—then stopped short. "Something from the bar? Before dinner."

"Uh, yeah, um," Ben hesitated. "We'll take two screwdrivers."

"Yes, of course." He scratched his head and walked off, shaking his head.

"Two screwdrivers?" Jan frowned. She felt embarrassed about the whole thing. How innocent of us. Of him. Of me. "Ben, why did you order screwdrivers?"

"Oh, I dunno. Just thought it'd be a good thing to order."

"Sure," she said.

She wondered why anyone would want to call him Ben. Benji still fit him better—he hadn't grown into Ben yet. She remembered all the times she had spent with him at his dad's farm. His chubby cheeks were bunched up like a chipmunk's, while his eyes were close together with a small beak for a nose. His eyes were, in fact, so close together that he almost looked cross-eyed. He did not shave much, or, if he did, it was only once a week. When he smiled, his cheeks bunched up into two roly-polys of innocence. His body had not yet hardened—blubber hung out the side of his cummerbund.

Ben tilted his head back as he looked at the menu. "Anything you want," he said patriarchally.

She studied him and realized that he was as unsure of himself as she was.

Jan leaned forward and whispered, "We did it!"

"Did what?" he said, looking puzzled.

"Come on. Don't gimme that. We did the ultimate for seventeen-year-olds in the Valley. This is the thing to do and we're doing it. Boring dance, anyway," she added confidentially.

"You're right. Boring. It was real boring. But what really bugged me was the music: so loud. This is really neat. But when we were in Europe we did something that could top this. I don't know if Ann told you this. When we were in Rome we snuck out of our rooms—me, Ann, and Billy—and we got Chinese food and wine and ate it on the roof of our hotel. We got smashed on wine. Boy, did we have a

hangover," he bragged.

"That's nice," she said sarcastically. "Besides, what does that have to do with anything?"

"Oh, well." He took a sip of his drink. "Why don't you get the shrimp? I hear it's real good here," he said.

"I'm not in the mood for seafood tonight. Think I'll get the prime rib. Besides, how do *you* know about the shrimp?" she said.

"Oh, I just heard. Somewhere. I don't know where," he said uncertainly. "Waiter, waiter!" Ben called in stentorian tones. The waiter was busy and clearly ignored Ben. "Waiter! Waiter!" he called again, feeling indignant.

The waiter walked slowly over to the table, as if annoyed that Ben had persisted while he was busy with a more important customer. "Ready to order, sir?" the waiter asked.

"Yes, um, we'd like to order the shrimp platter and the prime rib."

"Fine. . . and to drink, sir? Care for another screwdriver?" the waiter said ironically.

Ben flushed as he looked at the more than half-filled drinks. "No, we'd like two margaritas."

Suddenly, looking at him, she felt terribly insecure—everything they had done had been so calculated and unspontaneous. The whole evening had been charted out by her like a ship's navigation, but now the wind had left the sails. And it was too calm. Well, not calm, but suddenly flat. They had gone to the dance and it had been boring and loud just as they knew it'd be and she had suggested they leave—but it wasn't a spur-of-the-moment thing. Jan had planned it out in her mind way ahead of time. Her parents had acted as if the debutante dance was such a major event, and she knew that it wasn't as important as everyone thought it to be.

Janice Beverly Rollins in white. She despised white because it reminded her of that innocence. Of not knowing. It was that freshness that annoyed her—the dress with its ludicrous silk daisies and high collar and expensive delicacy. It reeked—reeked of what? It followed her and haunted her. The long white gloves. The lace. Even the white shoes. She didn't have any white shoes. She'd had to go on a special shopping trip for white shoes.

"Jan, what's wrong?" Ben said as he snapped his fingers in her face. "What's eatin' you?" he said again.

"Me, huh? Of course, it's not you. Only—Ben?"

"What?"

"I'm sick of all that crap."

"What crap?"

"You know. The white and the dresses. And only certain people invited. It's such a sham. Since my mother is on the committee I had to do it. I just . . .well, I hate getting rooked into something I hate," she whined.

"Forget it. That was then. This is now. Okay? Besides, why can't you . . ." She couldn't hear the rest of what he said. A man with a guitar walked up to the table and began playing love songs to the couple. He strummed his guitar and then plucked it with a certain zeal; he threw back his head and bellowed, "Amor! Amor! Amor! Ayyyyyyeeeee!" The black shirt had fringe that swung as he sang. The

rainbow-colored sombrero was too large for his head, and as he moved his head to and fro it shook also.

"Huh, what'd you say, Ben?"

"Look, Jan,why don't you just enjoy it? You're the reason we're here," he said more loudly, above the wail of the singer.

"Oh, *am* I the only reason we're here? Glad to know you're such a man, Ben. After all, chivalry's not dead in the Valley. Is it? I'm glad you're doing this for your own conscience. And for me," she said.

Ben sat back and looked at her. His face flushed and he retorted: "Would you shut your big mouth for once? Just for once. Think you could? I'm sick of your comments. You're the expert. You do this. You do that. You know everything. You want me to read your kind of books. Well, I won't. James Bond movies and books are the best. I don't care what you say!"

Jan turned away and felt ashamed of her brilliant plan. For it had been her plan, and she hadn't let him forget. She reminded herself of a queen bee carefully guarding her ideas as if they were honey and only sharing with one of the lesser bees—only if he admitted he was one of the lesser bees. How stupid of her to guard her silly ideas as if they were conceived in one stroke of brilliance! She looked at him and realized she had stung him time and time again. No wonder they had never gotten closer.

Ben looked up at her. She had spilled part of her margarita on her dress. A big yellow stain streaked it. Jan dabbed her napkin in the glass of water and tried to get it off. She was trying to act dignified in that high-collared dress—dabbing at her chest—trying to get it off.

She sighed resignedly. "Guess I was a little messy. Aw, hell, I'll never wear it again."

"Your food, senorita," the waiter said as he gingerly laid the plate on the table. "The plate is hot."

Jan looked at the piece of meat and felt terribly guilty. "I've been such a jerk. I'm so sorry . . . "

"Forget it." He grinned sheepishly as he plopped a giant shrimp into his mouth. She threw back her head and cackled. The cackle was real. He laughed with her as he saw several women look in their direction.

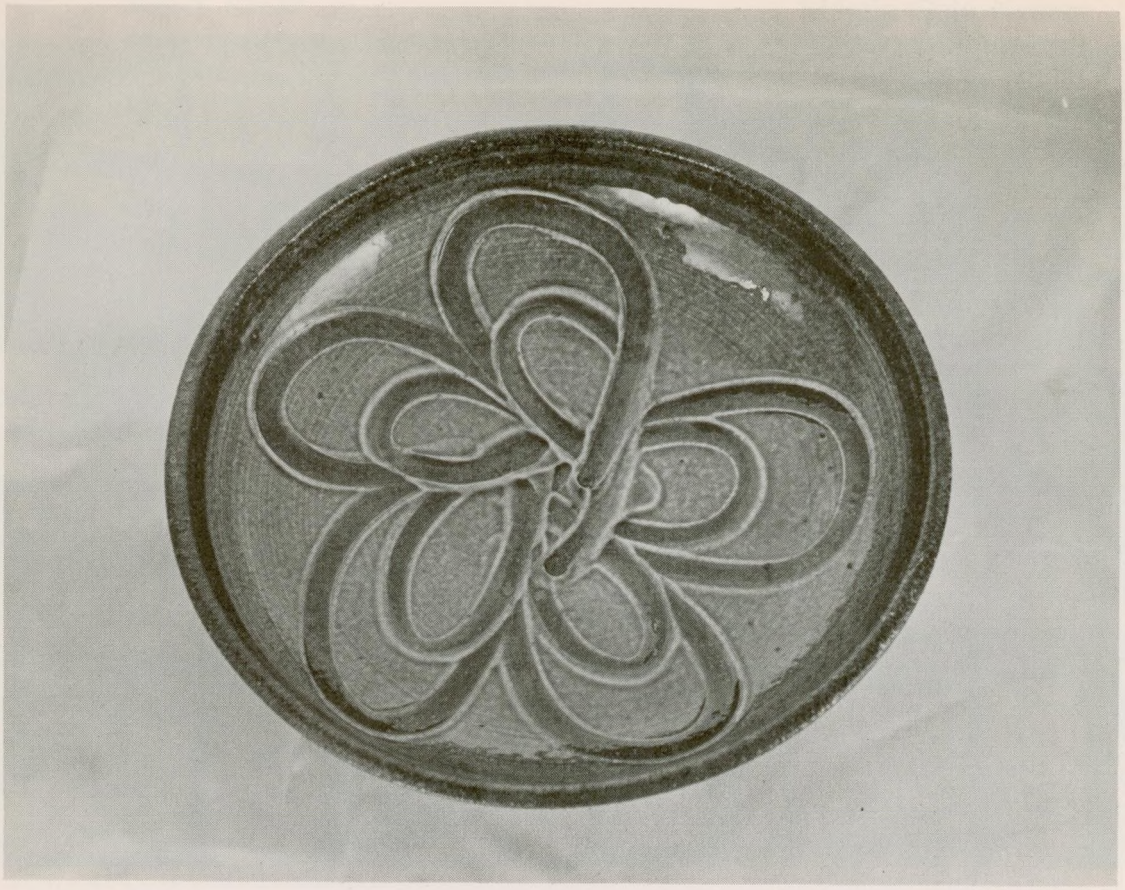
Hanson's proud of his gas station.
He says it's one of the oldest around,
and he's sold gas since it opened
in 1935.

You smile and nod,
pretend to be interested
as he points to the faded green sign.

My feet
naked on pavement
throb with the heat.
Sweat crawls down my back —
sticks in the cracks behind my knees.

The old man wants to talk,
but we squeeze back into the car.
I can't help wondering how he manages
the pumps
with one hand missing.

Patricia Ann Freeman



Sue Luger

Photographed by Lisa K. Nelson

Sue Luger

Sue Luger

Photographed by Lisa K. Nelson

Carla Dickey

Afterward,
in the lounge,
your eye behind me
meets hers halfway.
I can see her glow
on your face.

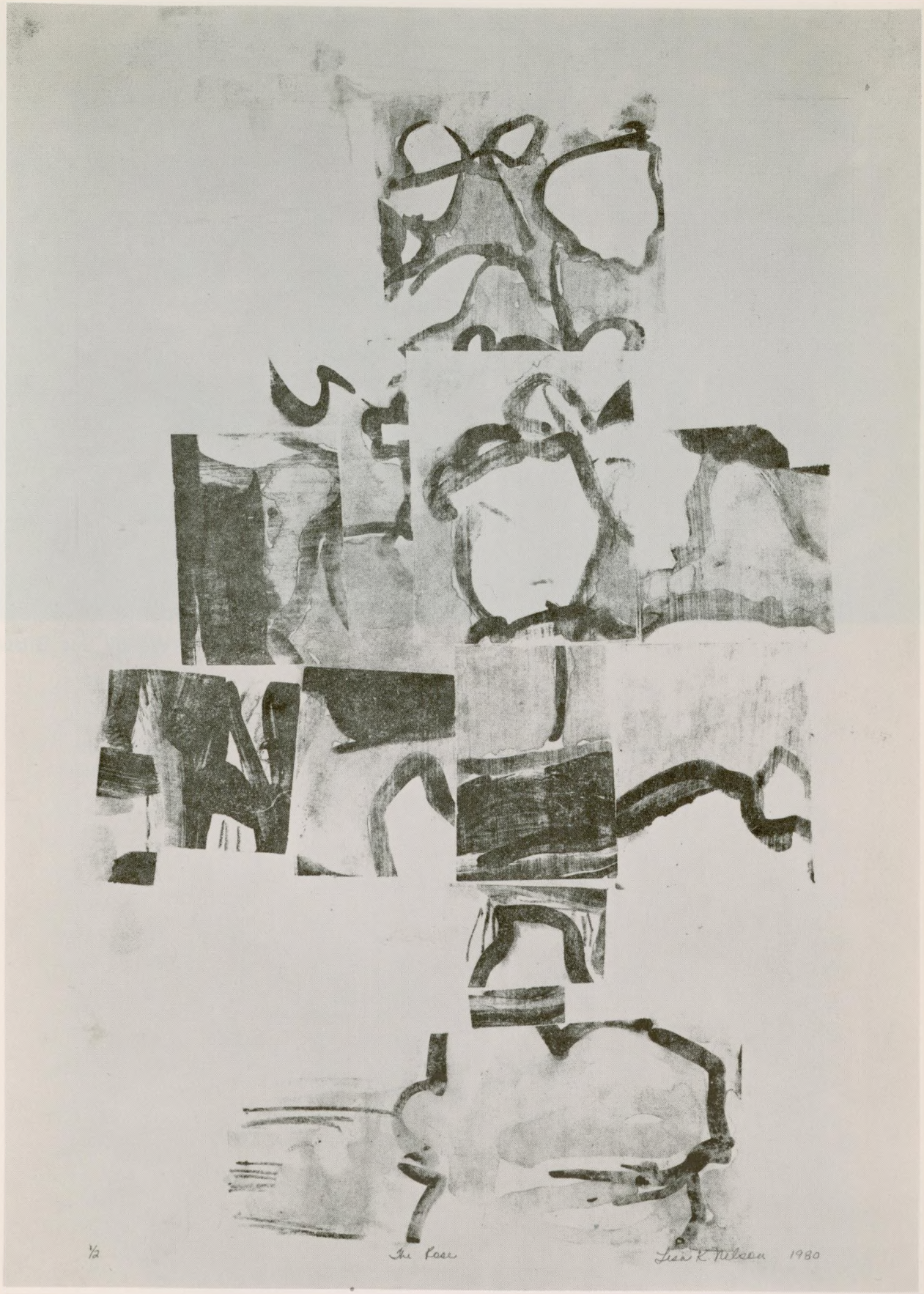
I am a watermelon
scooped of its fruit.

Apparently,
we traded souls.
While I was gone
you gave mine a new name and face,
and here I am, lover.
You press yourself against me,
a window to her room.

I am the cool skin of a snake.

You saw me at the mirror.
Startled, I tried to fly.

You hold me now.
I wince for comfort
from the hangman
whose eyes I recognize.



Lisa K. Nelson

Wendy Sue Gilson

Alone
in the rain,
my clothes are wet newspaper
folded around me,
patterns of flowers that wash to gray.

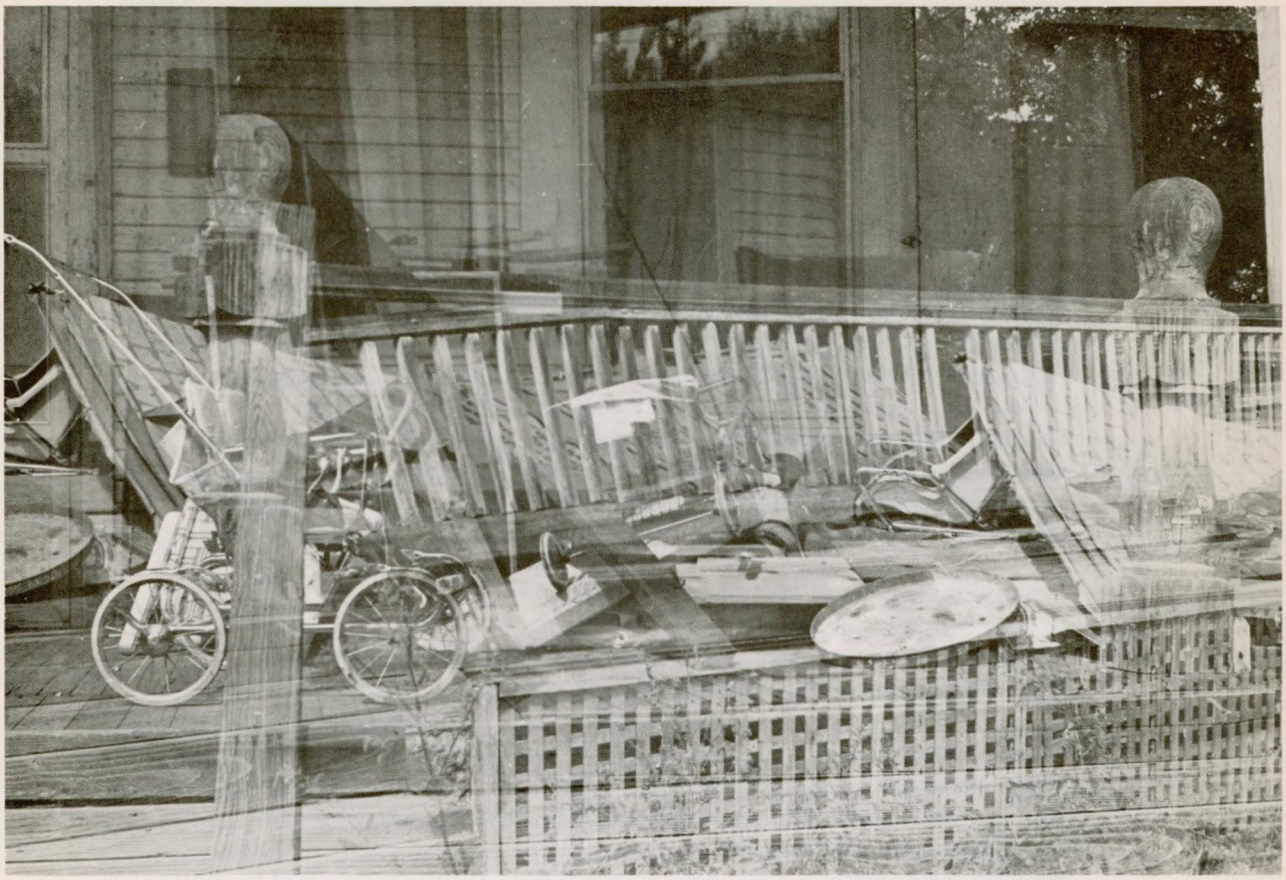
The loud hush
of four in the morning,
the whole town
one big bookstore;
my footsteps
crowd the silence.

It is five in the East
now
he'll wake
to sour diapers,
crusted pots, day-old coffee.
I pick up a fallen branch,
wipe the black on my skirt.

Under an E A T sign,
now green,
now blue,
I twirl my "cane,"
shuffle left,
shuffle right,
tip a hat
which isn't there,
bow to the night.

DRIVING THROUGH NEBRASKA _____ Marcia Gale Kester

The window is a sheet of ice
against my cheek.
You're explaining a new process
of crop rotation,
pointing out empty fields
where corn will be planted
for harvest in fall.
The land is dry now
like the bones of a bird
held tightly in your hand.
I see myself in the solitary
house we pass,
its sleepy shades drawn over
narrow eyes
sheltered by a sturdy fence.



Lynwood Jenkins

What little light there is stays caught
in the folds of your old skin;
shadows catch in every corner of this gallery
you tell me is our home.
It can't be mine. I would never have carpet
that drips in every room like the juice
of stale limes you squeezed for cocktails
on some summer morning
I can hardly remember. You tell me

my roots are here among the dusty pawns
on the marble chessboard. I ride
the knight through the rooms of the castle,
looking for a queen. I am a spare piece,

a tourist here, caught among the brambles
of your hair, the gnarled threads
of your apron, wandering among portraits of grandfathers
and cobweb mustaches. When I was six,

I ran from the German uncle who lives in oil
above the mantle. His pristine eyes chased me
up the stairs, and I knew he watched me sleep. You told me
at night he tangled my hair
with his gold teeth.

The ground was finally uncovered, and they had all afternoon. No one had been prepared for such a winter. It was not expected to stay so long, to be so hard on everyone. The cold blew into March and stayed till the end. The public schools were forced to close, and no one was able to leave his house for days. The southern city had closed down, was dark and iced.

The chill still insisted, but Jodie and Rozland could feel the April warmth pushing from the sky. They were able to ignore the last bit of winter and only recognize the clear new air. It was fresh and it was Saturday and they had nothing to do but go wherever they wanted. Pizza Hut was old and reminded them of winter. So they headed the other direction. They held out their arms and glided them through the air. "Look how easy," and pedaled along the road that could finally be seen. It was like beginning all over again, but they were sure they could still do it. They had not lost the precision and control, the freedom and grace of riding a ten-speed. They would always know how. It had come so easy.

The dominant blue sky was ahead of them, and they moved together. "I think it's here for good," and Rozland squeezed the handlebars and pushed her nose out to hit the sun. She was always certain of things, things you only had to feel, not know, especially when she was with Jodie. She'd say things she'd never say to anyone else, or ask anyone else, because Jodie heard her. She listened. The other girls gossiped and talked of what they didn't know for sure. They accused her of being with all of the guys, all in one night. Rozland knew quite well what "being" meant. The word signified more than she had ever actually done. It was more of the way the other girls pretended to act around her, as if they had never said any of the remarks passed around, that drew Rozland away from them. She was unable to believe in them. But Jodie was different. She was consistent, and had sense. Rozland knew there was more to her.

"You're gonna hit that hole," Jodie said in a low but direct tone of voice. She usually guided Rozland on bike rides and on what she should do in everyday life. Her advice cleared things up. The kind of things like boyfriends, fights with parents, and getting caught. Jodie seemed to know what everyone was supposed to know. Her opinions were straightforward. Rozland liked being near that discovery. Jodie had her own answers.

"Too late now." Rozland bounced on her seat and slipped to the bar. Her head jerked forward and she quickly gripped the brakes.

"You about lost it that time, grace. Are you okay?" Jodie stopped beside her and cupped her hand over Rozland's. It was small as if it were the hand of a child. "That was real bright," and Jodie's smile picked up what had fallen out of place. It smoothed out the surprise and embarrassment.

"Bet that looked real cute. Wow, that killed my ass." Rozland rubbed her hand down the curve of her bottom. She watched Jodie's big brown eyes following her hand. They were open and ready to go anywhere. They were careful not to miss what she was trying to say.

"I think you'll be just fine, just real fine." Jodie took her eyes away from

Rozland and back to the bike she was straddling. "Nothing you do surprises me," and she pushed herself back onto the seat. "Not a damn thing."

Rozland like to hear her say that. She sounded strong, but never ruling. She could say 'damn' in a hard way without her face changing. It always offered, and stayed gentle and calm. It asked to be taken one way.

"Want to try it again?" Jodie asked.

Rozland nodded. "Let's go this way. It's downhill."

"What a pansy," Jodie said and followed Rozland to the stop sign.

"But it feels so good. There's nothing to it." Rozland lifted her feet from the pedals and spread them out to her sides. "Here we go," and she checked to make sure Jodie was going with her.

Jodie was there, and they were off. Like two birds they soared. They cut through the air with power, and without any effort. Their speed caught the cold that had lingered in the air, but it was not the familiar winter chill. It was ripe and it warmed their bare faces. They were awakened from the rush. Their bodies burned and sprang to the sky. They had reached it together, and at the bottom of the hill they paused to catch their breath. It took time to gather what had been so widely spread out.

"I didn't want to stop," Rozland's face was red, a flame reaching its peak. It gleamed and then began to simmer down. "Didn't you want to go further, just run away with that sky?" She leaned her head back. She wanted to have that last bit of wind. "It's like proving you're alive, knowing you are."

Jodie tucked her hands inside her Levi pockets. She stood straight with her shoulders back and her lips pressed together. Her hiking boots were placed wide apart.

"Jodie, are you there?" Rozland asked and shook the handlebar on Jodie's ten-speed.

Jodie's face looked down and she stopped Rozland's hand by holding it.

"Are you . . . " Rozland did not try to move it. She waited for Jodie.

Jodie raised her head. "I'm not what you think," and turned her head toward Rozland.

"What do you mean? You're my friend." Rozland slid her fingers around Jodie's hand. "You can be anything."

"But I'm really not what you see." Jodie squeezed Rozland's hand. "It's a mistake at school, a damn serious joke. But I can't . . . They have to believe what they see. But I want you to know."

"Jodie, I know you are who you are. I don't need to know anything more. You don't have to explain . . . " Rozland paused. "Jodie," and Rozland closed her eyes and opened them wide, "you're Jodie."

"Well," and Jodie cleared her voice, "there's more to proving you're alive than flying down hills." She removed her hand from Rozland's, and put it back inside her pocket. There was so much to explain. She wanted to make it perfectly clear. Her eyes looked into Rozland's with eagerness. She saw it could wait.

"I think," and Rozland reached her hand to Jodie's cheek, "all you can know is what you see." She curved her hand around Jodie's head, and mixed her fingers through her black hair. "And of course, how you feel," and Rozland kissed her on the cheek.

Jodie hiked her boot onto the pedal. "That beats the damn hills anytime." She extended her arms so they were directly in front of her and grasped the smooth bar. "Believe what you see, cause it's really me."

"Me too," said Rozland.

"What would they think, those boyfriends of yours?" Jodie called as she took off ahead of her. She did not look back. She knew Rozland was right behind her.

"Oh," and Rozland climbed on her ten-speed, "it's different. I'd never do it to them first."

"I bet you wouldn't," and Jodie swung her head around and smiled.

Jane Ann Meador

Julie B. Trumbo

for Marciano

In the distance
a train whistle echoes
its wheels clack against metal tracks,
rock with winter darkness.

I remember the old phone booth
by the depot
where you called every night at nine
wearing your thin boxing jacket
and complaining of the cold
that chilled the glass around you.

Now
when I hear the trains
in the middle of the night
stirring my bones from sleep,
I lie in the dark
and sift through the sound
for a voice, soft and distant,
like the whistle
on the Northern Express.

Dana Lauren Ford

It is Christmas, but Zinnie's
is weighted in summer. I sweat
like August looking in the window
on the half-eaten salads, the felt
stocking above the bar, embroidered in sequins
with the tired names of the waitresses. Weighted

in summer and the Cotton Carnival
when officers on leave
came in for a pitcher and went out
drunk into the street, chasing the floats
and the women. Joe Parish, the owner, told me once

that if I really wanted Big Band
on the juke box, I'd have to drape my pearls
from the ceiling fan and do the half step
with him 'til he was "plum drunk." I danced
until my face was scratched from his red beard
and it was light. It has always been night

here, a mangled holiday. Tinsel hangs
from the antenna of the black and white
portable. My iced breath licks
the warped glass, and the striped
awning shifts its weight under the winter.
My feet, like suitcases,
let me know I've travelled.

I close the window behind,
slam it shut like a guillotine
and wave away these blue-grey pigeons
that pretend not to fly,
move in constant circles,
and mumble in hypnotic voices,
always of yesterday
and of the day before.
I send them
fluttering

into cloud
like ghosts of ash.
Their din fades,
severed by wind
as if a plug were pulled
between sill and sky.

They do not return.
The ledge is empty of their gurgling
and their shadowed stains.
I sit between the shadows
and wait
for the returning beat of wings
against these cold, hard panes.

Janet Bowman

Barb Buford

Anger don't break.
There all the time
steamin like August,
slitherin,
waitin til you
step on it.
Then your fist break,
your foot break,
fightin and kickin.
But anger don't break.

Chella McNeice Garrett

Wind sifts snow to the cold glass of the pane above his bed. Flat on his back in the dark he listens to sharp crescendos, floorboards creaking. "He's crazy . . . a burden . . . necessary . . . a home." He has heard enough, knows when the lull comes in the sounds they will discuss him, what to do with old Zeke. "To do" with a body is not right, and I belong to no one, a body in this bed in the dark, listening to you, in a mountain house I do not own. He rubs the bulging knuckles of one hand with the curled fingers of the other. Joints crack to straighten the fingers. Pounding. Feet coming downstairs. He holds his breath, body still. The front door is yanked open, slammed. "Bastard," his daughter screams after her husband from the room above his head. The start of a car motor. Silence. He sits upright and unbuttons his pajama top to the cool air in the room. His boots are in the closet, and he moves stiffly there and chooses a shirt. He will dress slowly so that she falls asleep again. Then he will leave, to take out this body that doesn't belong and let it go.

"You two, get out of that snow," their mother called from the porch to the two boys lying in the white. Three flaps of the arms and one of the legs made an angel, that is, if you got up just right and didn't mess up the head or the skirt. Zeke stood first and helped Sam out of his angel.

"Fine angels," Zeke said. Their bodies steamed the new powder on their jackets to dark patches of moisture. Zeke touched a mitten to the pale rose of his brother's cheek.

"If we go in now, she'll clobber us for being wet," said Sam. "Or Father will."

"He's not home. And besides, we won't go in until we're good and ready," said Zeke. He motioned for Sam to follow him to an opening under the porch where old extra bricks and flower pots were stacked. The space was enough to hold them both if they sat close together, knees drawn tight to their chests. Snow had dusted everything inside.

Sam caught a few flakes on his mitten held out to the air.

"Did you ever look up at snow and try to figure out just how it's falling?" asked Zeke. The two boys struggled in the space to lie on their backs, their heads outside, faces up. Zeke couldn't keep his eyes open long to the crystals, but he liked the way they filled in around his lashes and melted on his lips.

"Wish you could keep them," said Sam.

"Dan Jeffries has got snowballs in his icebox," said Zeke. "He can always keep them that way. I guess that's like keeping the flakes."

"They'd melt soon as you took them out, Zeke. You could never look at them long."

"But you'd have snow in the summer. Anytime you wanted you'd have snow right there."

Sam pulled his head back inside. "Not for always."

Cold pushes up the sleeves of his jacket until it finds his shoulder blades and neck, where it settles like a stole. He checks the horizon for a sunrise, but night will grey into morning. The hiss of snow on snow echoes each crunch of his boots. He sees his wife in her wedding dress far ahead by a fence post. She stamps her feet and holds the dress up from the ground, waving at him. Do you see me, he hears, we are late and they cannot throw the rice without us, hurry. He trudges toward the figure he has married before. The snow seems deeper, sucking at his legs as his wife turns away, walking down the fence line. She fades into the buzzing of the telephone wires strung above, into the hiss, the cold.

"He's seeing other women, you know," Zeke said to Ann as she cleared the dinner dishes. "He comes home late and perfume follows him in."

"Stop," Ann said.

"Why? I'm old but not stupid."

Ann turned from the sink and sat down at the table with him. He waited for her defense, as it always came; he's mine, I love him, let us work it out.

"I know," she said, "but he lets me keep you here if I pretend I don't see."

He tried to understand her, the meaning of "keep." People kept animals, and kept hopeless children without sense of their own, and kept belongings for friends who had gone away and memories without substance when the people got swallowed in the past. He was here. He was strong. But he couldn't live kept.

"Does he keep you?" he asked.

"Sometimes," she answered softly. She took her jacket off the hook in the wall to go move the car into the garage out of the snow.

A walk after dinner was their way of being alone together. Sam lit a fresh cigarette and the smoke mixed well with the cold. He was silent a long time.

"Sam, I want to marry her. She's beautiful." said Zeke.

"Never lasts," Sam said, smiling.

"Marriage or beauty?" Zeke asked.

"Peace and quiet. You;re always filling up quiet with talk." Sam shook his head and blew a puff at the white ground.

"You don't like the idea?"

"Oh, she's fine enough."

"How fine?" said Zeke, his breath smoking.

"Fine," Sam answered.

They walked to the end of Fletcher's pasture, both quiet, and turned back for home.

His legs are numb as he squats in the snow, rubbing his thighs. He wants the blanket from his bed to lie on. If he could sleep for just a little, close his eyes. He melts a handful of snow over the pain in his eyes. He remembers why he is out, the

doctor, his brother is sick. Go get the doctor, Zeke, be quick about it. Sam just lies there, small and feverish. "Hurry, I said," and his mother pushes him away from the door.

"But Father—"

"Now hurry on, your father's out, can't wait for him."

He falls in Fletcher's pasture and splits his lip on a half-buried rock, snow melting around his cheek. He scrambles back to his feet. If he gets there Sam will be fine. It all depends on him.

He's heaving on the stoop of the doctor's house, pressing his weight full on the buzzer. The doctor answers in his pajamas. Why doesn't he move faster for his bag? Zeke worries Sam will burn away in the fever before he gets there. But the doctor is ready and they arrive and Sam is still alive. The doctor slides past into the room. Zeke's father stops him before he enters. His father smells of old perfume and sweat, his suit rumpled.

"You just stay out here," he says. "You don't belong in there while the doctor's working."

"Why not? If anyone doesn't, it's you, out when you shouldn't be."

The slap from his father surprises him. He stumbles backward. His father steps into Sam's room and closes the door behind him. Zeke's lip is bleeding again and he blots it with a corner of his leeve.

He waits until the doctor leaves. "Sam will be fine," he says. His mother and father are upstairs, their voices hard through the closed door. He opens the front door as quickly as he can and goes out onto the stoop. The cement sticks to his bare feet. He scoops a small handful of snow off an evergreen bush by the door and takes it back inside.

Sam's room is close and his breath comes in gurgles through the dark. Zeke places his cool cheek against Sam's and feels its warmth. By fingerfuls, some dripping to his feet and the floor, he smoothes the cold water over Sam's forehead.

Sam smiles in his sleep.

"You're hard on Ann," Zeke told Bill.

"It's really none of your business," said Bill. He put T.V. dinners in the oven for Zeke and himself. Ann would be late getting up from the city. A snowstorm was on the way.

"When I was your age—"

"That was a long time ago," said Bill.

Zeke turned to the refrigerator and took a cucumber out of the crisper to cut up for the vegetable. Bill squared his shoulders, and Zeke knew it wasn't good to talk about it now. Now was somehow never right between them, as if later would be better, though later was always an endless string of nows.

"Is she worth it?" Zeke asked.

"Who?"

"Whoever," said Zeke.

Bill spun around from the stove, glaring at him.

"I want to know," said Zeke. "Please."

Bill relaxed a little, grinned. He motioned Zeke to sit down at the table.

"I don't know why I should tell you, but she's different. Ann, she's always there, never questions, always makes excuses for me. I don't want to have to make excuses. Ann makes it easy for me."

"Do you keep me to keep her?"

"That's stupid," Bill hissed. "I love her, that's why I keep you. She loves you."

"I can go away," said Zeke. The wind was picking up. The glass of the window rattled the silence. "I can go live with Sam."

"Oh, don't start with your Sam stories. He's gone and you know it. See what I mean? You're crazy. And anyway, Sam never pried into his kids' lives, always listening and lurking in another room of the house. You don't belong here. You belong in a damn home."

Bill scraped his chair away from the table and left the kitchen. Zeke heard him slam the door upstairs.

He feels warm now, sleepy, and it has stopped snowing. The temperature is dropping for the night. He rests his head on a snowbank, takes off a glove to brush the damp hair from his face. His hand is clumsy and swollen. He feels himself leaving this spot but he hasn't moved, and he sees Sam coming. It's hard to raise an arm to wave to him, but he manages. He knows Sam has seen it.

"Over here," he whispers.

Sam settles lightly on the snowbank beside him.

"It won't work, I tell you," says Sam.

"Yes it will," Zeke says. He scoops a handful of snow and pats it round.

"They'll keep in the ice box? For sure?"

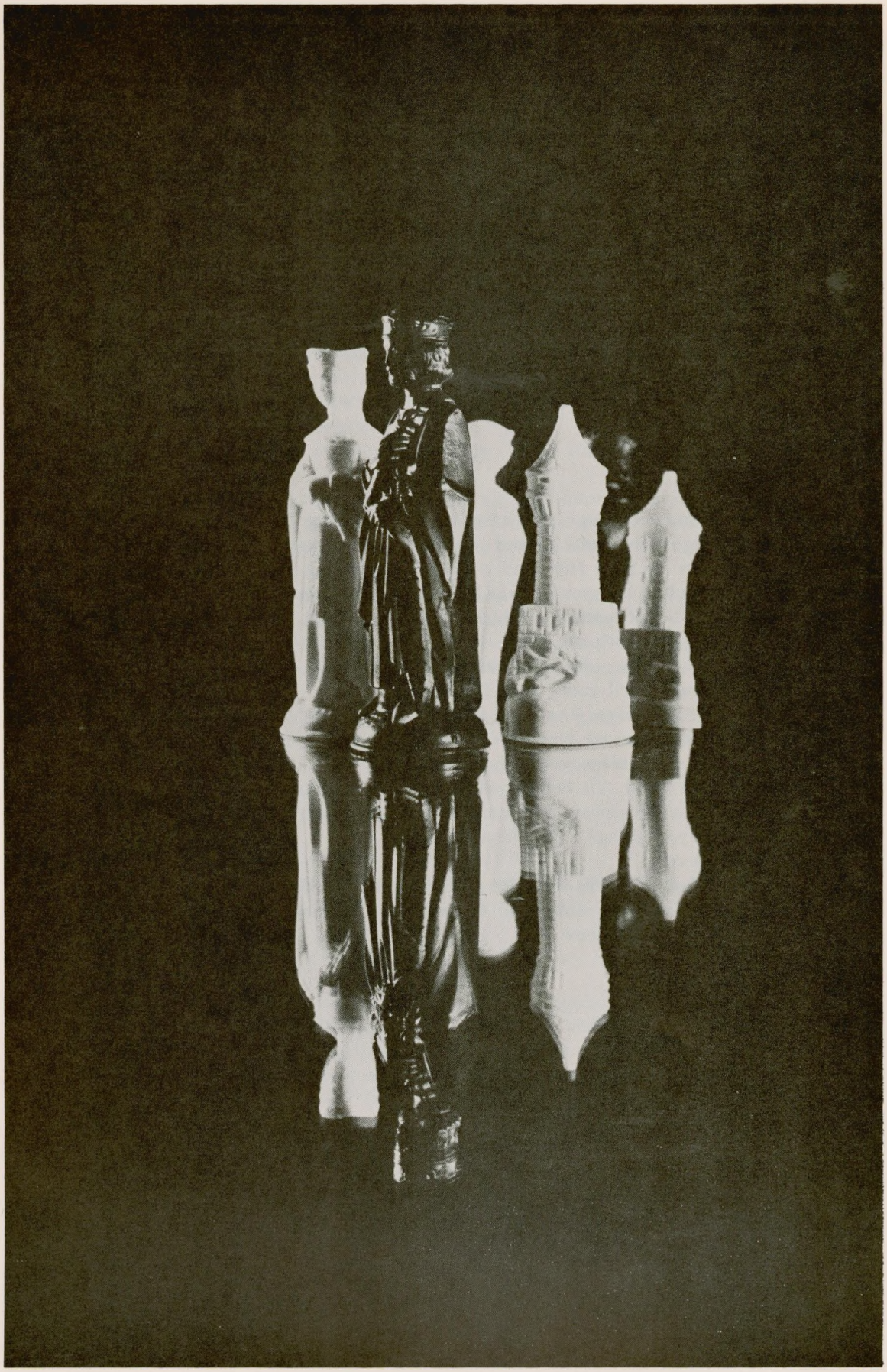
"We won't know unless we try," he says.

Sam stops his hand. "It belongs out here. It would just be dirty snow in there." Sam starts to move away. A blue shadow lengthens behind him.

"Where are you going?" he whispers to Sam.

"Inside. I'm cold."

"Wait up," said Zeke. He struggles to stand in the new powder and stumbles back into his own tracks, a white ball in each fist. He starts the walk home, forgetting his glove in the snow.



Heather Jane Fitch

Dana Lynne Ladendorff

HIGH SCHOOL CONTEST

The Creative Writing faculty of Stephens College is pleased to announce the winners of the 1980-81 National High School Creative Writing Contest. The preliminary fiction and poetry screening panels consisted of currently enrolled Stephens creative writing students and two faculty advisors. For fiction: Becky Andros, Jeanne Alaska Bernard, Ann Daniel, Cathy Davis, Susan Eberly, Patricia Ann Freeman, Janice Houston, Louise Quayle, Donna Robertson, Jennifer Saltzman, and Kathy Wells (advisor, Jaimy Gordon). For poetry: Jo Ellen Crews, Alice Goodman, Marcia Kester, Lyssa Heidi Klein, Mary Beth Leon, Joanna McKee, and Gail Townsend (advisor, Judith Root). Finalists in fiction were judged by Rosellen Brown, novelist (*Tender Mercies*), poet (*Cora Fry, Some Deaths in the Delta*), and short story writer (*Street Games*). Finalists in poetry were judged by Jonathan Holden, poet (*Design for a House,* winner of the Devins Award, 1972), critic (*The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*), and associate professor at Kansas State University. Both Ms. Brown and Mr. Holden participated in the 1979-80 Writers-in-Residence program at Stephens College.

WINNERS

POETRY

FICTION

1st PLACE

Rachel Eisler
The Spence School
New York, New York

Donna L. Tartt
W.H. Kirk Academy
Grenada, Mississippi

2nd PLACE

Char Christianson
Kent-Meridian Senior High School
Kent, Washington

Elizabeth Ruegg
Horace Greeley High School
Chappaqua, New York

3rd PLACE

Dana Gass
East High School
Denver, Colorado

Gretchen A. Gibbs
Special Projects High School
Tucson, Arizona

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Daska Slater
Ashland Senior High School
Ashland, Oregon

Carol Ihara
Roosevelt High School
Honolulu, Hawaii

Leilani Strong
Mountain Brook High School
Birmingham, Alabama

Anne Larsen
Interlochen Arts Academy
Interlochen, Michigan

Tiana Diaz
Interlochen Arts Academy
Interlochen, Michigan

Gena Schoen
Niles North High School
Skolie, Illinois

When your parents looked unfinished
because you weren't there, and if you were
they looked scared.

And small, crushed among black sunglasses on your mother's
young nose
is you.

But you don't remember it because you dropped the camera
A Rollei rectangular too heavy for Father
he wore it, and stood back to the sun as we
paused for picture.

And some are in color the koolaid is red
a pitcher full of stoplight.
I am wearing my thin watch and telling him
the time when he clicks.

When the camera dropped it fell slow
in no motion.
I forget where we were at the time.

I felt the stubble on my mother's knees
when I rubbed up, not down.
I knew my knees would be like hers.
I saw us then
her and me, in the rocker chair
in the living room.
I'd stopped sucking, and we both sat still.

When you died,
I cried like torn wood,
like pine asking why there are no leaves
pushing away the wind, like gnat's song
that is quiet as water
going over and over
the same smooth stone.

"Well, darlings," said Ivanovich, in his rich Shakespearean baritone, glancing up from his list and exhaling a cloud of fragrant grey smoke, "I guess we're all here, eh? Maybe I should check the roll. Of course I should," he answered himself, taking another languid puff from the cigarette in the ebony holder and ruffling about in his briefcase. "Where did I put the damn thing?" he muttered. "Ah, here it is. We shall proceed." He pulled a yellow legal pad out and called, "Thomas Flanders?"

"Here I am," I said, raising my hand like a school child and immediately feeling silly for doing so.

"Ah, good, Mr. Flanders. Will you please stand up?" I did.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Ivanovich, waving his cigarette extravagantly in the air and trailing a ribbon of smoke, "I give you Tom Flanders, who is to play our Faustus. You may sit down now, Mr. Flanders." I sat down gratefully. "Humbert Humbert?"

A small, dark, Italian-looking man with a receding hairline and a pointed black goatee rose to his feet timidly.

"What a delightful name you have, sir," said Ivanovich, chuckling indulgently. "I suppose your mother read Nabokov?"

Humbert looked at Ivanovich in total bewilderment. "Beg your pardon?" he said politely.

"Nabokov, man, Nabokov," said Ivanovich irritably. "Have you never heard of *Lolita*?"

"Isn't that some dirty movie?" ventured Humbert cautiously.

"Never mind," said Ivanovich patronizingly. "Cast, Mr. Humbert here is to play Mephistophilis. That will be all, sir." Humbert sank back down in his seat. I felt sorry for him.

Mendel Ivanovich is what is commonly referred to as an "artistic expatriate." He defected from Russia in his early thirties and directed several arty and rather vague underground films in Czechoslovakia and France which got rave reviews and awards at Cannes. When he came to New York he got a hero's welcome. Now he was "doing theater." He wished to do *Doctor Faustus,* calling it a uniquely American parable; he wished to be given a cast of "worthy unknowns." I, although my worth is questionable, am about as unknown as one can get.

Ivanovich is hard to describe fully. He is tall, auburn-haired and slender, with an ineffably weary, elegant look about him. His face is classically handsome, with a chiseled nose and raw Russian cheekbones, etched with fine lines about the eyes and mouth. He speaks good English with a British accent, and he chain-smokes Gauloise cigarettes in an ebony holder. Ivanovich is fey, witty, unabashedly effeminate, and given to Noel Cowardish posturings. He is charming as hell, but gets on everybody's nerves sometimes.

"Max Golden," called Ivanovich. A tall, delicate-looking blonde boy in a blue-striped Brooks Brothers shirt and khakis stood up.

"Ah,"cried Ivanovich, clasping his hands underneath his chin, "how perfectly *angelic* you look, my boy. You will be a marvelous Good Angel." He made a check on his list. "Lets see, the Evil Angel won't be here this afternoon—he had a dentist's appointment. What about Helen of Troy? Bayh Brittany?" He scanned the audience. A small, haggard-looking fat man in the front row stood up and cleared his throat. "Excuse me, sir . . ."

"I must say, you look divine today, Miss Brittany," said Ivanovich, deadpan. A ripple of nervous laughter ran through the cast. The fat man turned around and glared at us, then turned back to Ivanovich. "I'm Bayh's agent, and she won't be here until 6:30. She's on assignment. She asked me to tell you."

"How very sweet of you." purred Ivanovich. "We shan't be needing you further."

The fat man gasped, as if he was too furious for mere words, and stamped out loudly, slamming the door behind him.

"Bayh's so silly," said Ivanovich to no one in particular. "A simple note would have been absolutely miles better than sending that man. That's just like her."

The Good Angel, Max Golden, spoke up. "Do you know her or something?"

"Too well," said Ivanovich glumly. "Well, actually, no—I met her while she was modeling for Paris *Vogue,* and I rang her when the part of Helen came up. It's a nonspeaking part, you know. That's the only kind the poor girl can handle," he giggled, suddenly cheerful. He leaped up and rubbed his hands together. "Well, are we ready to go to work? Pick up a copy of the script on the table—I assume you are all familiar with it—and pop up here on stage. We shall start with Scene I. Chorus, come here. You must all stand behind this line—" The chorus rose as one, walked up to the stage and allowed themselves to be positioned like obedient sheep while Ivanovich cursed the stagehands in vehement Russian for not having been good enough to draw a line before rehearsal.

It was so exhilarating to be in a real play again, after years of commercials. I had almost forgotten what it was like to be on a real, roomy, magical stage instead of in a TV studio—look into this camera, read into this mike, don't step on this wire. Of course, I make great money in commercials—that's why I gave up theater. When I was an actor I was starving, and now I've got a Mercedes convertible and a summer home in Martha's Vineyard. But I miss like hell being around theaters and theater people.

The back door blew open, bringing with it a blast of icy October wind, and in came the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I caught my breath and held it for a second. She was—God, words seem so flat and silly when I try to describe her. She was tall and slender as a willow, with shiny white-gold hair pulled back in a French twist. Her face was classically boned, like a Siamese cat's, sculpted perfectly until it was almost a work of art, and she had wicked entrancing green cat's eyes. She was wearing a man's old-fashioned tuxedo, with a black tie and a black cummerbund nipping in her tiny waist. Her nails and lips were scarlet, and her hair and diamonds glittered when she walked. She exuded an air of aloofness, of cool superiority. I never believed in love at first sight until I saw her, but once was enough.

Ivanovich leaped off the stage and swooshed at her. "Bayh, darling!"

"Hi, Mendel," said Bayh in an utterly bored monotone.

"Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss," quoted Ivanovich. He grabbed her and kissed her on the cheek, then propelled her swiftly upon the stage. "Cast, meet Bayh Brittany, our Helen of Troy."

Bayh surveyed the theater with something closely akin to disgust. At last she said flatly, "I won't work in this drafty old barn. Mendel, you didn't tell me it would be like this."

"But what did you expect, *ma cherie?*" cried Ivanovich in mock distress, winking secretly at the rest of us huddled on center stage. "I never told you it would be Carnegie Hall."

"I don't like it," said Bayh doggedly.

"Nor do I," said Ivanovich affably. "But we must simply make do, musn't we."

"Damn your sneaky foreign hide," said Bayh darkly.

"Do be quiet, won't you," said Ivanovich, lighting another cigarette and waving it about aggravatedly in the air. "I hate to listen to you ramble on so."

Bayh gave us all an evil look.

"You even have your own dressing room, darling," purred Ivanovich. "No star on the door, perhaps, but I felt it was not necessary—"

"Shut up," said Bayh.

Ivanovich narrowed his eyes and glared at her through a cloud of smoke. "You may find this hard to believe, my dear, but you are not indispensable." He glanced about at the cast, saw our numb, embarrassed looks, and laughed lightly. "But we will let bygones be bygones, no?"

"Okay," said Bayh sullenly.

"Oh, thank you *so* much," said Ivanovich. "You're too kind. Now again from the top—Scene I, Act One. Try not to act as though you're reading, chorus."

From that point on, the production of *Doctor Faustus* took over my life completely. Some sort of drastic change had come over Tom Flanders, ad executive, a change which frightened and exhilarated me. I had always loved my work, liked the look of sharp new pencils and neat, freshly typed memos, liked the steady, reassuring clack of the typewriters and the soft narcotic Muzak in the background, liked staying after hours to meet a deadline, drinking coffee in a styrofoam cup and taking Vivarin to stay awake. I depended on my work, buried myself in it to keep myself alive.

But now, work seemed so stupid. I dreaded going to my office each day, hated the sight of my little prison-like cubicle. The accounts which had seemed so challenging now seemed odious and boring. Everything grated on my nerves. I snapped pencils in two, shouted at people, let the sheaves of paper pile up on my desk unnoticed.

My co-workers had undergone a change too. Take Eddie Bronson, my best friend. At one time I had admired Eddie. He was a winning salesman, he was clean and dynamic, he was a real go-getter. But now Eddie in his dark navy suit with his endless talk of statistics and quotas left me baffled and bored. He seemed too ordinary, so plodding and plebeian and dull.

I neglected my work, abandoned my bridge nights, skipped staff meetings, got chewed out by my boss for being "irresponsible." Funny, him calling me irresponsible. I've been steady as clockwork all my life. Good old Tom, he'll meet the deadline, he'll swing the Griswold account, he'll come through. We can depend on him. I don't really know what came over me. My work had always been first, but now this goddamn silly play was more important.

Instead of rushing home at night, grabbing a Big Mac and eating it on the way, and doing my work, I came home from rehearsal slowly, filled with a somber, dreamlike joy at the intricacy, the clean, pure emotion that lay in the strange, antique lines I had to learn. The stars seemed almost to sing in the heavens as I

thought about the mystery and beauty of it all, how the hypnotic majestic verse thundered in my head constantly.

Ivanovich told me I was doing well. "My dear Flanders, what a delightful look of melancholy you have about you," he said to me gleefully one raw, windy night near the middle of October. "You look every inch the part, I must say. Transformed from a nice young advertising agent into a haunted medieval sorcerer—what a genius I am, eh?" That was his way of complimenting me.

I had no close friends among the cast, who were a strange and mournful mixture of souls. Humbert Humbert was a sad, shy little man, difficult to talk to in person, but somehow dignified upon the stage as Mephistophilis. Valdes and Cornelius were college roommates, and kept to themselves, whispering in the wings. The Good Angel (Max Golden) and I were united only in our fervent admiration of the imperious, arrogant Bayh Brittany. I caught him staring longingly at her one day while she was in her Helen of Troy costume. She looked like a gorgeous classical statue, draped in flowing shite, carrying herself like a goddess.

"Poor kid," I said dryly. "You too?"

Max started slightly, shook himself from his reverie, and smiled wistfully. "Yeah," he said sadly. "God, she's pretty, isn't she? Just look at her!"

"I know," I said. We both watched her bend down to tie her sandal.

"At least you get to kiss her," said Max enviously at last. "The Good Angel doesn't get to kiss anybody."

I looked at Max, all young and blue eyed and choir-boy innocent in his white angel's robe, and suddenly I felt old, wicked and decadent. I was wearing a purple plush theatrical robe trimmed in fake ermine, stockings, a rusty black embroidered robe that smelled of mothballs, pointy shoes, and a wig. Bayh had collapsed in a folding chair and had commenced unceremoniously to massage her feet.

"*Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air/Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars . . .*" I said in Bayh's direction, for Max's benefit as much as mine.

Max gave me a gentle nudge. "Go talk to her, why don't you?"

"Aw, come on," I said. "She doesn't talk to anybody except Ivanovich."

"You're the *star,*" said Max stubbornly. "Go tell her hello."

So I did. I walked up to her and tapped her timidly on the shoulder. "Hi, there." My heart was practically in my throat.

Bayh glanced up at me with those laser bright green eyes. "Hi," said wearily.

"Are you tired?" I said pleasantly.

Bayh yawned and stretched luxuriously. "I'm tired as hell. I hate this stupid play. I could have gotten in *Oh, Calcutta,* except all they had were speaking roles. Three dollars more an hour and my name in lights."

"This is an easy job. All you have to do is stand there and look pretty," I said philosophically.

"That's all I *can* do," spat Bayh rather nastily. "I hate plays. I hate all art."

I was a little taken aback at her bluntness. "You hate *art*?"

"Damn right. It makes my head hurt." She bent down and began to massage her feet again. My heart melted.

I decided to change the subject. "Is Bayh your real name?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"I'm not going to tell you."

"How did you manage to come up with Bayh Brittany?" I faltered. "I mean, it's an unusual name and all . . ."

The goddess stood up, shook out her dazzling hair, and yawned again. "I read it," she said evenly, "in a Harlequin romance. If you'll excuse me." She drifted over to talk to Ivanovich. I watched her sadly as she went.

"Tough luck," said Max, who had come up behind me and was gazing after her dreamily too.

"Be still, my foolish heart," I said melodramatically.

"What did you talk to her about?" asked Max.

"About herself, naturally. That's her favorite subject," I said.

"Mine, too," said Max.

Ivanovich was a Svengali to the cast. He cursed us, he tutored us, he molded us into the characters he wished us to be and pulled us all together to perform his dream in unison, a symphony of words in motion.

One night, during a particularly lackluster rehearsal—we were all tired and hungry and the heat refused to come on—he leaped up on stage and began screaming, "Tragedy, tragedy, you fools! We are not doing *The Pirates of Penzance*! I need *pathos*, I need emotion! You speak as if you are reading grocery lists, scholars. This is your best friend, he is damned to Hell *eternally* unless you can convince him to change his ways, and yet you speak as though . . . as though . . ." He began to sputter furiously and could not get the words out. The scholars stood cowering in the background.

"And *you*, Faustus!" Ivanovich wheeled to me, his eyes blazing. "You have sold your soul to the devil for earthy pleasures, and this is the hour—yes, the very hour—that Mephistophilis comes to claim it. This is your last night upon earth, my man. In another hour you will be roasting on the spits of Hell, sulfur and brimstone in your accursed nostrils. Yet you show nothing but a mildish *concern*." He glanced down at the script. "What is the line?" Then he cried in a sudden tortured, agonizing wail that chilled my blood, "*Curst be the parents that engendered me*!" He paused dramatically, letting the echo of his works swell out and die in the empty hall. Then he said softly in a doom-laden whisper, "*No, Faustus—curse thyself.*" We all stood in awe . . .

"This is the way you must do it," continued Ivanovich busily, and in a more normal tone of voice, breaking the spell of silence, "What of line where you appeal to God's grace? You must shake the foundation of Heaven with it, Faustus, you must rattle the very gates. Here, see what you can do with it."

The next two or three weeks were spent in unflagging work to see "What I could do with it"—with the part, that is. I muttered the lines to myself constantly—in line at the grocery store, in my cubicle at work, to my bathroom mirror at home. I experimented with tone, with inflection, with putting my pregnant pauses and agonized roars in the right spots. I drew a few puzzled glances, to be sure, but one must remember that I was in New York—a city full of half-crazed people who go about mumbling darkly to themselves as an everyday occurrence.

I also thought unceasingly about Bayh—about the proud tilt of her head, about the soft hollows that certain angles of light scooped out in her cheekbones, about her emerald eyes and careless, tousled mane of bright cornsilk hair. It was the face that launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilium; it

was the face that haunted my dreams and waking moments.

I finally did learn to speak my lines in a way that satisfied Ivanovich's discerning ear. The chorus learned where to come in without frantic cues from Ivanovich, and Bayh finally stopped turning her back to the audience. The hopeless drunk of an actor who played Lucifer stopped forgetting his lines and trailing off in mid-soliloquy, and the scholars stopped acting as though they were reading grocery lists.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe opened on October 31, and ran for a month—one performance at 8:00 every night, with a matinee every Saturday at 2:00.

On opening night I was paralyzed with fear. I would forget my lines, I would trip on a wire and fall on my face, I would make a fool of myself. I paced back and forth in my medieval costume (which now, I must confess, felt more natural to me than my twentieth century clothes—the character of Faustus was beginning to up on me, you see.) Bayh was munching nervously on Valiums. Lucifer, who had previously confined his drinking to furtive nips in the men's room, liberated his pint of Gordon's gin from his coat pocket, where it made the rounds until Ivanovich stormed backstage and took it away.

But we all did well in the end. The gin added a certain Falstaffian passion and fervor to the lines, and Bayh's glassy-eyed, drugged look gave her beauty a tranquil, unruffled serenity. Towards the end of the play, I started to believe that I really was going to go to Hell (my gin-addled brain and my state of nervous exhaustion contributed to this belief) and I began to shout my lines with desperate, panicky conviction. My final lines, as the devils came to take me away, were screamed in genuine wild-eyed horror. "Ugly Hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer! I'll burn my books—Ah, Mephistophilis!" I was then dragged down to Hell, kicking and clawing and screaming. There was a stunned silence as the audience stared at the empty stage, and they they began to clap, a thunderous roar of applause that was aborted when it was realized that the play was not quite over yet. I could have kicked the chorus for not waiting to let my hard-earned applause die out on its own. Instead they sauntered out and basked in my applause until it died away into scattered, puzzled claps.

I literally fell into Ivanovich's arms as I stumbled off stage. "My God," hissed Ivanovich in delighted horror, "have you gone mad, Flanders?" He hoisted me up and slapped me lightly on the face, then wrinkled his nose distastefully at the smell of my breath. "Ah," he said knowingly, "it was Demon Rum, wasn't it, my boy?"

"Actually, I think it was gin," I said thickly, rubbing my cheek where Ivanovich had slapped me.

"No matter," said Ivanovich expansively, "you did brilliantly. I shall take utmost care to get you this well-oiled before every performance."

And although Ivanovich is notorious for reneging on his promises, he kept his word on that one. Every night before a performance, I found a half pint of Gordon's gin had been placed mysteriously upon my dressing table.

I spent the next month in a twilight world . . . a world of blurred perceptions and scrambled images. Feverish white-hot stagelights, the creak of my measured pace across the planks of the stage, Bayh appearing to me like a mirage in the desert, "*If I had as many souls as there be stars / I'd give them all for*

Mephistophilis—"

They rang and repeated in my head like a tape loop. There were also somewhat less pleasant voices—my mother's long-ago voice saying patronizingly, "Acting's fine for a hobby, but you've got to make a living, son." Mr. Feingold saying, "What the hell's wrong with you, Flanders? You used to be one of my best men . . ."

To stop them, I drank. I drank until I had paralyzing hangovers, and then I drank to cure them.

More and more, I began to exist in a state of nightmarish fear. I lived in terror of the day that the run of the play would end. I would have to come back to the real world that had once been my ally, but had turned on me suddenly and savagely. I would have no Ivanovich to tell me what to do, no one to watch over me. I would not have the adrenalin burst of applause and perhaps, worst of all, I would not have my darling Bayh. In a way, I would cease to exist. The side of me that had sprung to life as Faustus, would die just as suddenly and painfully as it had been born.

I am aware of how irrational all this sounds in the light of day, but in the cold starless windswept nights, when I was drunk on love and death and poetry and gin, I reveled in my misery, wallowed in it. As far as I was concerned, I was indeed Faustus and condemned to Hell.

The last night of the play was a cause for revelry for everyone but me. We had gotten good reviews, and most of us had gotten offers for other parts. I had been approached for the role of an Old South plantation overseer in a television miniseries and the role of a psychotic wifebeater in a daytime soap opera. I, characteristically for me at the time, had turned them both down somewhat haughtily, telling both the casting agents loftily that I was an actor, not a prostitute. (Eventually, after I began to realize that I was not going to be offered the part of Hamlet, I regretted it—but that, again, is another story.)

We did not have a cast party in the strict sense of the term . . . primarily because none of us were well-versed enough in theater custom to realize that we were entitled to one. After the audience had straggled away, Ivanovich called us all together for the last time.

"I's been lovely working with you all, absolutely lovely," he said, exhaling a thin stream of smoke through his nose. "You all did an excellent job in spite of yourselves, and I was rather pleased at the way you pulled together and made something of the play. I've enjoyed getting to know you, and I shall miss you all acutely, I'm sure."

It was an eloquent speech, for Ivanovich. We all clapped for a long time. Then Max, who had been elected spokesman, went up and presented him the gift from the cast that we had all chipped in to buy . . . a silver cigarette lighter engraved with his initials. Ivanovich told us dryly that he was touched. We all clapped some more.

"I have a gift for you all too," he shouted over the applause. "Hold on a second." He dashed off and came back with a wooden crate. He put it down on the floor and pulled out a bottle of green liquid. "Has anybody got any cups?"

"I have some out in my truck," said one of the stagehands.

"Be a dear and run get them," said Ivanovich.

"What is that stuff?" said Humbert suspiciously.

Ivanovich uncorked the bottle, closed his eyes, and took a long sniff. "Absinthe, darlings. Highly expensive and highly illegal."

"Hey," said Bayh brightly, "that stuff causes *brain* damage."

"Don't sound so excited, silly," said Ivanovich. "You haven't much brain left to damage."

Bayh giggled. "Yeah, but I sure had fun while I was damaging it."

The stagehand came back with a stack of yellow Dixie cups.

"All right, who wants to damage their brain first?" asked Ivanovich, pouring the first cupful of the noxious looking green liquid.

Nobody was too eager, and in the end, Bayh and Ivanovich and the man who played Lucifer and I ended up finishing the bottles. It was 2:30 a.m. and everyone else had long since gone home. Bayh was dozing peacefully in her chair, her long spun-gold hair fallen carelessly in her face, and Lucifer was trying drunkenly to stack the bottle corks on top of one another. Ivanovich was smoking another Gauloise, and I was staring raptly at the sleeping, golden-haired angel.

"You're in love with her, aren't you," said Ivanovich abruptly.

I started slightly, "Yeah, I guess I am."

"Everyone is," said Ivanovich. He began to sing softly in a Marlene Dietrich accent, *"Falling in love again . . .* ," then he began to laugh throatily. "God, I must be drunk, mustn't I?" He turned and looked at me and his smile died away. "You mustn't be in love with her, Flanders."

"Why not?" I asked, genuinely surprised.

Ivanovich smiled again. "Because she is a work of art, my boy. She is meant to be admired and cared for, but not loved, for she can never love in return. It is so with all art, unfortunately." He blew a smoke ring, and it settled about his head like a halo.

"What happens if you do fall in love with art?" I said slowly, thinking about my sudden detachment from reality and my obsession with beauty, poetry, tragedy, and matters of the heart, with a cold fear in the pit of my stomach.

Ivanovich smiled again, more sadly this time. "You will go mad, my friend."

We were silent for a long time. I thought about my life for the last two and a half months—of the charade I had made of work, of the hallucinatory haze my life had been, of the creeping fear that crawled up my spine when I faced down the stranger in the bathroom mirror, and the panic that washed over me in shuddering waves when I realized I was thirty-seven years old and had wasted my life so far. I had tried to lose myself in the character of Faustus, never realizing that I already was Faustus under another name, and had sold my soul to quite a different devil.

"How pliant is this Mephistophilis," I quoted absently.

Ivanovich looked at me sideways. "My dear Flanders, I fear I unwittingly have made a madman of you."

"That's all right. It is a divine madness, I think," I said softly.

Ivanovich rolled back his head and chuckled. "Quite right, my boy, quite right."

I got up and shook Ivanovich's hand, patted the jovially incoherent Lucifer on the back, and kissed the sleeping goddess that was Bayh on the forehead. Then I wandered outside where I could be alone with the wind and the stars.

$3