



HARBINGER

HARBINGER

1985

Editorial Staff

Literature

Nora Infante
Lisa Lennon Record
Stormy Stipe-Lowrey

Visual Arts

Pauli Bradley
Ruth Gilmore

Business and Promotions

Andrea Clark

Harbinger is a magazine of the arts publishing the works of students currently enrolled at Stephens College. Harbinger is published annually in the spring. The editors are responsible for the design and content of the magazine.

Harbinger is printed by General Printing Service, Columbia, MO

CONTENTS

Literature

Stormy Stipe-Lowrey

To a Poet Who Borrows For the Making, 7

Sunday, 8

Ben's Road, 9

Michelle Ottinger

Through a Barn Loft Window, 11

Bee Neeley Kuckleman

The Black Goat, 12

After the Funeral, 13

Gretchen Wahl

Letters From Abroad, 19

Susan Riley

The Piano, 31

Lisa Lennon Record

Half Hours With Nora, 32

Rebecca Jelsema

I'm Having a Private Headache, 35

Nora Infante

Cutting Edge, 36

When the Soul is a Sister, 37

Colleen Randall

Choreography, 43

Deborah Pursifull

Formulaic Spasms, 54

Blank Canvas, 55

Roadtrip, 56

Kim Hemphill

Sunbathers, 58

Stormy Stipe-Lowrey

Effie Loves Dirt, 59

Stacy M. Smith

The Person in Question, 65

Photographs

Linda Goldman, 15

Julianne Creighton, 16, 17

Jennifer Falconer, 39

Lisa Cummings, 40

Judith Friedman, 41

Chris Karstaedt, 61

Susan Thompson, 62

Pauli Bradley, 63

Drawings

Jane Eichenberger, 27

Susan Thompson, 28

Sally Kuhn, 29

Jennifer Draper, 51

Ruth Gilmore, 52

Leslie Maxtone-Graham, 53

Cover Photograph

Tim Baker



SUNDAY

Grandmother's heels
mark the pine
as she moves
like a dozer
onto the roads
of our rug,
uprooting cars
and trucks,
collapsing
our block homes.
At the hearth,
she mittens up
to the hot screen,
sends the boys
out for logs.
Sabra is sent
for the broom,
to clear wood chips
from our chimney base,
while Grandmother
slaps full
our sofa pillows,
then nestles them,
like children,
into the arms.
She comes,
at the sound
of our cow bell,
to the flat oak,
spread yellow
with Mother's
Sunday cloth;
and she waits
for the children's
settling,
before she bends
to bless
fresh peas
and greens,
seasoned,
she says,
with remnants
of a careless washing.

BEN'S ROAD

Kalia
spit juice,
arcing it high
as a hose spray,
toward Ben's small, green back.
It splattered dark and the shirt drank
like open dirt drinks when plowed for the season's planting.
Ben turned, his arm crossing over his shoulder,
before unbuttoning himself from the juicy shirt
to heap it like old soil,
away from the straight path
of his new road.
His thin back
bent forward,
bare.

THROUGH A BARN LOFT WINDOW

Cob-webbed dust
stings my nose
as it sifts down
from the rafters
through the caged sunlight.

Salted straw baled
in frazzled twine
lays in stacks
on a softwood floor.

I stare down through cracks
to the milking standards
where Black and Red Angus,
Hereford, and Simmental faces
were propped between the levers:
now an obstacle course
for daring swallows.

And in the corner
a sitting stool
hangs from a nail
above a tipped tin milk pail.

Grandpa used to fill
that milk pail
with steamy morning milk
from Bossy, Cocoa,
and Peanut-Butter Brindle.

Planting, milking, feeding,
cleaning, chopping, working.
Even when he shouldn't have worked
he did.

Grandpa and I climbed
the long spindly ladder,
before his diabetes
and false hip joints
put him in the chair.

Grandma moved the chair
down to the storage room
only one day after Grandpa died.
She said it was his bondage.

Grandpa believed
the dark reclining chair
was his cross to carry.
He thought he had somehow failed God.

So he worked
when he was able
until his calloused hands
cracked and bled
on the plaid sleeves
of his flannel shirts.

His John Deere tractor stands still—
Its distant chugs and pops
echo through the small loft window
where we used to sit—
Grandpa and I—
and talk of how far away
the rigid mountains seemed.

THE BLACK GOAT

(after Ai)

So I've killed my black goat.
What a relief!
It all began when I was three—
that's when my sister was born.
Her name was Mary and I wondered for the longest time
why everyone said MARY CHRISTMAS and not
BEE CHRISTMAS.
One day my father, who worked in a clothing store,
brought home one of the window props for her
because her name was Mary,
and nothing for me.
It was a little white lamb.
But I had my black goat,
only no one knew about it except me.
Two years later my brother was born.
Everyone always thought he was so cute.
When he went to kindergarten he wore a white linen suit
with short pants. I wished sometimes he'd fall
down in the mud and turn that white suit black.
One day Eddie Ingersoll beat him up on the way home
from school, and then he wasn't so cute.
All I had to wear to school was a purple dress
that a bird flew over once when I was walking home,
and the bird made a black spot on that dress.
I didn't want to wear it ever again.
but Mother said I had to.
Maybe I didn't have a white linen suit,
but I had my black goat.
My sister belonged to a subdeb club.
Of course, I really didn't have time
for subdeb clubs; I had to stay home
to take care of my black goat.
My brother could do a good imitation of Popeye.
His teacher let him go around to all the rooms
to show off.
I couldn't do anything but carry notes
from the principal to the teachers.
But I fooled them—I brought my pet black goat
to school and kept it under my desk.

AFTER THE FUNERAL

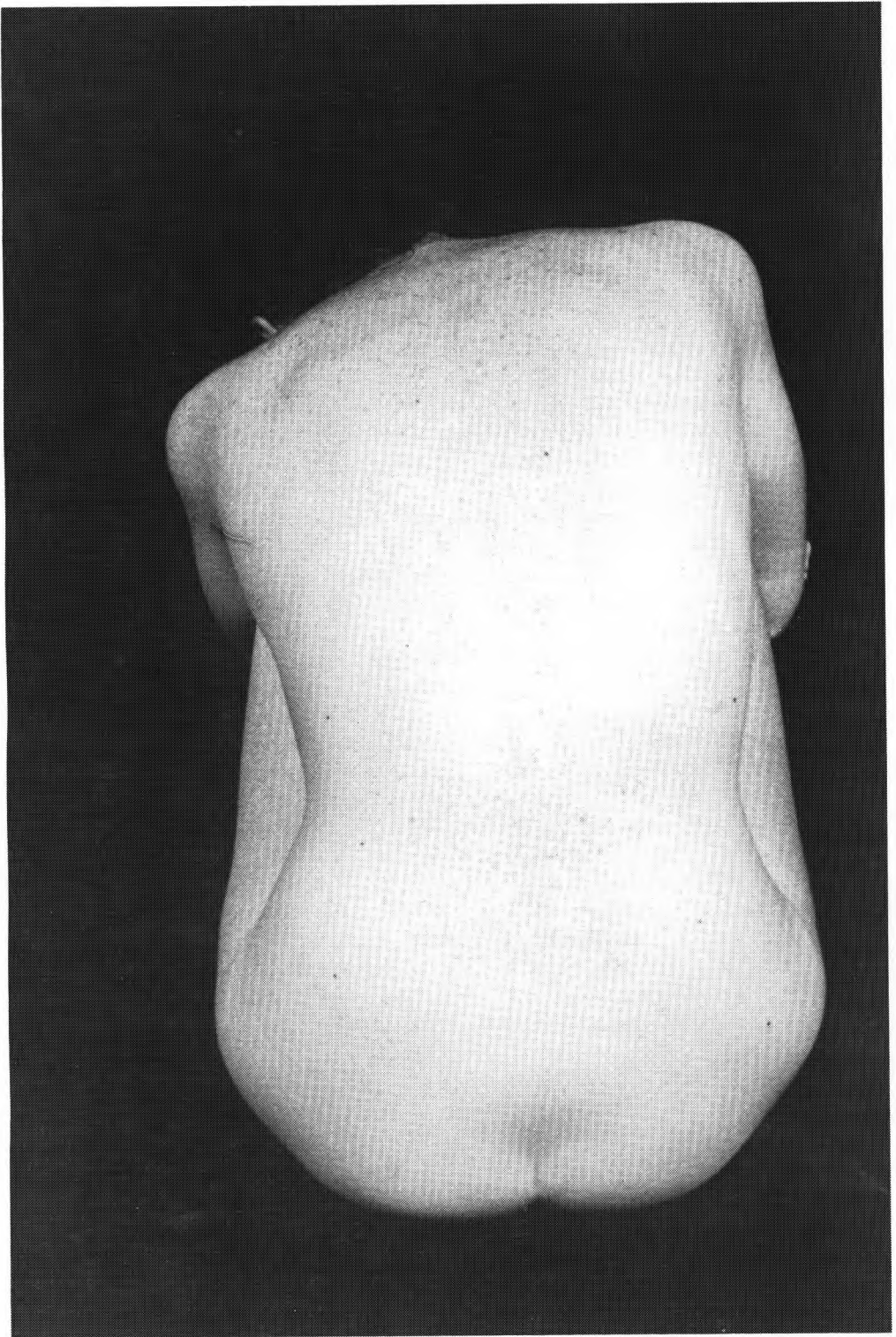
We laughed too loud and we talked too fast
at the lunch after Clyde Wilder's funeral.
Oh wasn't it a blessing that he died in his sleep
and didn't he look natural
and wasn't it funny how the altar boys hoped we'd stay
so they wouldn't have to go back to school so soon,
and isn't the ham delicious
and won't you have some more JELL-O salad
and isn't it nice we could all be together
even though—
and who made the pineapple cake
and is the coffee too strong
and we really have to leave now to get back to work
before the weather turns bad.



Linda Goldman



Julianne Creighton



Julianne Creighton

LETTERS FROM ABROAD

[Undated; August, 1984]

Dear Dr. B.,

Today I finally made it to Emmanuel Vigeland's Museum. It's only open on Sundays from twelve to three, and I've never been free on a Sunday until today. Well, a guidebook calling it the Kama Sutra Museum exaggerated. I really like the museum, but it was not more or less obscene than Gustav Vigeland's Park. The place is like a small church, and the walls are covered with frescoes of people struggling through life's cycle. Same idea as the park, but indoors. On the walls. Surrounding you. There were five statues, also. Better than the parks. And a little room with some of Emmanuel's other works. *They* were a bit more off-color, because you could see them more clearly. Lots of studies for figures that were hazy in the "church." But the best thing about the museum is the door. It's only three or four feet high, you have to bend down to get through. And Emmanuel Vigeland's ashes are above the door. So everyone has to bow to old EV when they leave. Smart, eh?

Today was a Vigeland kind of day. I had Dad's car at school tonight, and one of my friends, J. wanted a ride in it. So I said yeah, and we took off. It only took five minutes for us to get lost. As they say in California, "We were *way* lost." So we took this road, and we were in a parking lot, and J. said he'd gotten lost there the other day. So I went forward on a very narrow road. Turns out it was narrow because it was a path. A path in Vigeland's Park. We drove into Vigeland's Park. You probably don't think that's funny; but it *was*. We were on the path to the *monolith!* I mean *the* big deal. So we just drove on. We parked in front of the monolith and took pictures. I hope they turn out; it was about as dark as it gets here. Then we drove to the sundial, then to the circle of life, then we left. There were Norwegians *everywhere*, just looking at us. J. spoke French but his accent is as bad as mine; I know we fooled no one . . .

When I first got here, I had about eight crushes. Nikk, E., E., T., J., J., and G. Now, there's just Nikk. The worst one to sustain a crush on. He and I are *best* friends, we do *everything* together (that was written bitterly, ironically). We do everything but don't do *anything*, you know. He's got to be gay. He and I are constantly together, I heard from E. that he talks about me all the time, he obviously likes me, but he doesn't *like* me, I guess. He's from Edmonton, Alberta. He goes to university there, will be a senior in economics and Scandinavian Studies. *Very* smart, but sort of dumb. *You* know. Thinking about taking his masters in Linguistics, he's studied it and several languages. But will probably go for the MBA and \$\$\$\$. And just about the most effeminate guy you'd want to meet. Well, I do have a way of hooking up with gay men. I guess they need me to pretend to be their girlfriend so that no

one will know. Anyway, at this point I almost hope he's gay, that would be better than if he just didn't like me. I could go on and on about Nikk, maybe more later.

. . . last weekend we went to Copenhagen. There were four of us, Nikk, J., A., and me. J. and A. had sort of been flirting but A. liked him more than he liked her, sort of . . . anyway, there were supposed to have been seven or eight people going; we (A. and I) were excited that it would only be us four, we figured it was our big chance. We had the best time. We went el cheapo (\$50 round trip) on a luxury liner. A very nice one. We, of course, were in cabins so cheap we were under the cars. Under the *cars!* But since we planned on spending the night in the ship's bars, we didn't care. Unfortunately, I got sick. The boat was rocking wildly, and I was about to die. I went down to the room, leaving everyone up in John Paul Jones Pub. Then, about half an hour later, Nikk came in and threw up. I hadn't thrown up at least. Then we sat there, trying to get up the nerve to go back to the bar. We never did, because as we were getting up J. and A. came back down. So we went to sleep. The next morning the boat docked, we went ashore, and I was still sick. I realized that I was the first person ever to get Montezuma's revenge on the Oslo-Copenhagen cruise. I was sick all day. I took "the bathroom tour of Denmark." We were roaming the streets of Copenhagen, and every 20 minutes I'd go run to find a bathroom. I could write a book about Danish bathrooms. Then we took a train up to Helsingor to stay with J.'s relations. They were wonderful. S. and T. . . . Everyone but me stayed up, drank aquavit, and talked to S. and T. and their family; I was sick upstairs. The next day S. took us out to Kronberg Castle (called Elsingor in HAMLET, Hamlet supposedly lived on the site, but not in the building.) We also went to see where the Queen lives. Then we went back to Livoli Gardens in Copenhagen. It was great; like a non tacky Six Flags, if you can imagine that. And probably unsafe. Almost none of the rides had safety bars, and they usually didn't stop the rides. The car slows down, the people hop out of it while it's still moving, and people hop in while it's still moving. Also, they had beer there. We thought our lives were in real danger. As J. said, "First they give you beer, then they don't even stop the rides."

We stayed in J.'s cousin's apartment in Copenhagen that night. I was really sad, Nikk hadn't made a move on me all weekend. It was Saturday night and we were hoping to get on the Sunday night boat back. We all went to bed late that night, and got up slow. We went to a Burger King (they're *everywhere* in Copenhagen) and then to the ship, to beg them to take us on. (Our travel agent had goofed, so we had no reservations.) They let us on. So we left. I think there is one single revealing detail about our trip: we didn't go see the Little Mermaid. We went to Copenhagen and didn't see the Little Mermaid. How un-touristy. We had an embarrassingly good time on the way back. The ride was smooth, and we had fun. The M/S Scandinavia has the best Tom Collins in the *world*, and we were drinking some when a bartender, a *gorgeous* Norwegian bartender named Stephan, offered to make us a "special" drink later on. So, later on we drank "Abouts." About 90% alcohol. I remember tangoing in the tacky lounge to the boring band, and joining in a congo line. Fortunately, it was appropriate behavior for that bar. We had more fun, dancing and being silly. Then we went to our room, and we were even sillier. Then, wonder of wonders, Nikk *kissed* me. He's never done it

again, so I thought that was important. He *must* be gay. I mean, he had the whole weekend.

I am travelling to Scotland by train (!) with a Norwegian bisexual Paul McCartney look-alike. (I told Dad he was homosexual, so he'd let me go.) Leif is really nice, but I think he likes Nikk. Nikk probably likes him too. Remember when you told me I should describe guys I'm interested in in my journal? To look for patterns? I think the gay pattern is getting stronger. I'm a mess. Say hi and share this with everybody in CoMo, L. & A. & Dr. D., & M. & N. and whoever I'm insulting by leaving their name off.

Love, G.

Monday, Sept. 17, 1984

Dear Dr. B.,

Hi. I'm in Oslo now . . . Edinburgh was wonderful. I went to one play after another every day until the money ran out. Then I watched the occasional play and *lots* of street theatre. Actually, the street theatre was very good. Usually offbeat. I saw A TALE OF TWO CITIES on the street, at the Smallest Theatre in the World. It was mounted on the sidecar of a motorcycle. And no, it wasn't a puppet show, there were real people doing it. It took twenty minutes. I saw a group called The Brighton Bottle Orchestra. Four men, dressed in tuxedos, played music by blowing into bottles filled with water . . . Their big finale was "In the Mood." It boggled the mind.

In general, we tended to choose plays with titles like NEVER MIND THE OVALTINE, I'VE GOT A HARD-ON over plays with titles like HAMLET. Partly because we didn't want to go into cultural overload, and partly (mostly) because bad Shakespeare is horrible, and partly because the festival is a good place to see new talent on the rise, which Shakespeare isn't.

I think I sent you a postcard of THE DINNER PARTY. I'm so glad I got to see that. I probably told you about Milton. He's the guard I met there. We went out for about a week. I really liked him there for a while. I almost slept with him, because I almost wanted to, but also because I thought that it would be so . . . I don't know the word. But to lose your virginity to a man you met after seeing Judy Chicago's liberating vision of how-ever-many vaginas on plates. How liberated can you get? Maybe the word is "funny." But Milton and I parted friends (real meaning: we blew each other off) a few days before I left. I had to get him out of my hair because Nikk and Martha were coming to Edinburgh.

You remember Nikk. I wrote you a tearful letter the night I thought he slept with Leif. Well, he didn't. He didn't sleep with anyone. He's wierd.

Everything that has to do with Nikk blurs into one big wierdness. After that evening, Leif was still in love with Nikk, I was still in love with Nikk, and Nikk was still wierd. So Nikk and I still spent all our time together, we still danced all the time, and he even began to get flirtatious & kind of sensual towards me, but still nothing happened. And he and everyone else left . . . So after

Gretchen Wahl 21

the goodbye's I moped about Nikk until I got to London. Then I told A. about Nikk. A. is the opposite from me. She's only had one boyfriend her whole life (they're thinking about getting engaged; scary!), and she thinks I'm really stupid about boys. Well, up in my head I think *she's* stupid, but deep down I think she's gotten it right and I'm stupid. So after she listened to the whole story and saw pictures of him, she came up with "Hang it *up* Gretch! Look at his *wrist*, of course he's gay!" And "Oh sure, this one's different." (It's terrible when someone knows you so well they can make fun of something you'll say before you even say it.) And I said, "Of course, you're right." And I got over him. Wasn't that easy! Unfortunately, it only lasted two weeks. So by the time I saw him again, I was half in love with him, half wanting to be friends with him. I had told C. about him, when I was back to half-way in love with him. She took it more seriously than A. C. has gotten to be a pretty serious person. But when she met him she said this: "Get a real man, Gretch." Nice.

Anyway, during the trip Nikk and I got to be even closer. But it was wierd. I was sort of hanging back, seeing what would happen. And he kept pushing for more intimacy. We would talk late into the night, and one night he began talking about us going to the same grad school in Europe somewhere, and then getting jobs in the same university team teaching classes. I was sort of going along with it, and at one point I said, "Yeah, I think we'd work well together." And he said, "Of course we would, we have the same mind."

That was while we were in Scotland, in Glasgow visiting a friend of his, Edwina. I was passionately jealous of Edwina, until I met her. She and Nikk *did* turn out to be "just friends" as Nikk had said, and she and I got to be friends too. I know you're thinking, "Wait! Where does Martha fit into all this!" Well, Martha is from Nikk's town (city) in Alberta. They have known each other for 6 years, and they both study Norwegian, and they both wanted to go to Norway, so they decided to travel together. It was a big mistake; they didn't get along at all; by the time they got to Edinburgh they were about to kill each other. I spent my entire trip sitting between them—on trains, on buses, at plays, at movies, in restaurants, on park benches. In about three days I was about to kill Martha, too. She also liked to go to bed early, so she missed most of—all of—these late night discussions; plus she doesn't like to do the things we like to do, so she wasn't around a lot . . .

In London, Nikk acted strangely. The first night we were there, the conversation took a sudden turn to our parting, and we looked at each other, I almost cried, and he took my hand. And held it. We wound up walking around London holding hands. Like friends. Well, I was freaking out. So was Martha. I don't know about Nikk. When we got back to the hotel, Nikk and I sat up and talked in the lobby while Martha slept. I was sitting with my head on his shoulder, and his arm was around me. I about fell asleep, and we eventually went to our room & slept.

Now the thing about all of this is: it was always *his* idea. He was the one who was all into our being friends. I can't believe I forgot to tell you this part. Back in Oslo, I did try to talk to him about all this. I didn't get very far, because he knew what I was going to say, and he said we should be friends, since we had so little time left we shouldn't waste it on romance . . . Whatever. Well, I thought since we had so little time left, we should go for the fling, not the friendship. So I said, "How good of friends can we be in just six weeks?" and he got *visibly* upset and answered very curtly, "Very good friends, obviously!"

And we talked about friendship for awhile . . . so back to our story . . .

So what was all this physical contact? He's not a physical person. The next night he held hands with me some more, then, at night instead of leaving to talk, we played cards & listened to his 2-earphone walkman without talking while Martha slept, then we laid down in his bed together (with his walkman still on, of course!) until we almost fell asleep, then I got back in my bed. And that was all his idea, too! And the next night, same thing. See it was always his idea, but then nothing came of it. The last night, we went dancing, and he had his arm around me all the time we weren't dancing.

That was the last night we were in London. They left the next afternoon. It was hard saying goodbye to Nikk. We clung to each other, crying, for a long time. And I sobbed on the train back to London, then pulled myself back together and stayed the night with old friends of the family. I think they were in the pews the morning I was baptized . . . They had met Nikk and Martha, and are pretty perceptive but very sensitive, so they knew what was going on, so it helped to stay with them. I started feeling homesick in Glasgow, because I called home & found out I have a new nephew . . . I was so depressed to be in Britain while my nephews are growing up in the states! So, the W's treated me like a daughter, then put me on the train to Bergen, which took three days. I had a lot of time to think on the train. So, I thought a bit about Nikk. I can see us living together platonically, and I bet we do at some time. I can see us working together. We probably will. I just hope it all works out. I can see this turning into the DD syndrome. The DD story is too long, plus maybe I told you, but I can see me falling into being Nikk's friend, and then Nikk falling in love with me & me not wanting him anymore. I'm pretty sure he's not gay anymore. I can't tell what Nikk's feelings are for me, anyway. But I'm sure he's not gay. That's one thing . . .

You must be exhausted from reading this. Not to mention bored. But I will selfishly write on. The Nikk bit was a bit much. But I've all but given up my journal for letter writing, and the letters do get long. I'm learning about audiences by doing this. The account of my relationship with Nikk is different every time. My grandparents get a different story from my mother who gets a different story than D & N, and A & A, their story is different from the story B & L got. It's not a question of lying, or even of omission (well, the grandparents' is a matter of omission—*huge chunks* of omission!) but of style. Anyway, back to the story . . .

In Bergen I visited A., J., E., & S., four of my friends from summer school in Oslo . . . They lived in a huge dorm called Fantcroft. It's *huge*. More people live in it than in all of the Stephens dorms *combined*. 1300 people. I went to classes with them, and we played lots of Norwegian Monopoly (object, to get a hotel on Radhusplassen) and talk a lot. A. is smitten with J., who is smitten with his girlfriend back home. A., J., Nikk, and I spend a lot of time together as sort-of-two-couples-but-not-really. We had lots of late-night, lights-out conversations. We went to a wonderful bakery every day. I never made it to a single tourist attraction, except for the Leprosy Museum, and it was closed for the winter. I looked in the windows though. And, oh yeah, there was a stave kirk (stave church, only found in Norway) near the dorm that we walked to. They're all coming to see me in Cambridge.

Dr. B.,

I'm still really clueless. I can't decide what I should do with myself. I just thought I'd let you know. If you have any clues, send them. I'm stopping now. It's almost 2 A.M. and it's almost equinox time, so it's been dark a long time, even here in Norway. I'll write later.

Love, G.

November 13, 1984

Dear L.,

I've waited so long to write you that God is punishing me. I have a sore throat, and I can't talk. So, I'm in bed. I owe you and about six other people letters, so I'm getting started now. I started FINAL PAYMENTS this morning, too; and I have THE SECOND SEX on the shelf above my bed, waiting. They are very refreshing to those of us stuck in the Sexist Capital of the English-speaking World. I've got enough info here to fill seven Women's Studies journals. Maybe I'll sell it to next year's freshmen. If you get five or six entries that begin "When I was in England . . ." you'll know where they came from.

. . . Homerton is wonderful. It's about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away from the center of town, where all the famous colleges are. That's a hassle. But *everybody* here has a bike. I am always having close calls, though. For about the first week, I was in constant fear for my life. Once, I took off, going down the right side of the street. But believe me, you only do that *once*. I have a feeling that when it gets really cold I'll stay out here all the time. The college is great because you never have to go outside. From my little room on the 3rd (read 4th) floor, I can go downstairs to all of my classes, the mailbox, the cafeteria, the Student Union, the administrative offices, faculty offices, the bar, everywhere without going outside. Yes, the last item was, the *bar*. This is *not* Stephens College. There is a complete bar just off the cafeteria. I have spent many evenings in there. It's very cheap, and a good place to get drunk because you're among friends, and because you just have to crawl upstairs to bed. But it's also easy to go down there for a "study break" and not come back for three hours. We've learned *lots* of old English drinking songs. They're all either sappy, sentimental and nostalgic or filthy and disgusting. But it's sad, how much people drink here. Not everyone, of course, but especially the guys here drink a lot. And since the bar is where everyone in college socializes, it's hard to get away from it. Lately I've been drinking Dr. Pepper. Our bar is the only place in this whole country I've ever seen it.

Classes here seem to be really free-form. No tests, just essays. I'm taking an art history course, a history of political thought course, a course on Jane Austen & Daniel Defoe, and a course called History of the English Landscape. That course is great, we go on field trips and *everything*. The JA and DD course is good too. Jane Austen came last; we started with Daniel. I

thought ROBINSON CRUSOE was the worst, although our teacher made it a *bit* more interesting. But I loved MOLL FLANDERS. After six weeks of Jane Austen & ROBINSON CRUSOE, all that sex was reassuring. I was wondering how people back then reproduced! Rumor has it that this teacher is hung up on sex. His name is Winston Holmes, and he's my advisor, too. I haven't really noticed *that* much, but he did seem to get a lot out of R.C. I didn't see on my first reading. Nice man, though. Enough about work.

I'm in a drama society in town. It's called Cambridge University Light Entertainment Society, C.U.L.E.S. for short. . . . Prince Edward is in this society, but I haven't ever talked to him, although I see him all the time. He smiled at me once. Another famous person in this society is Stan. He's a lead singer for a band. Well, he's not *really* famous. The band's name is—get this—The Exploding Hamsters. O.K. He's not famous at all, outside Cambridge. But they are good. He went to Homerton, and I met him at the bar one night. I did have a crush on him, but he's kind of superficial and theatre-y in a way that's O.K. for a friend, but not for a boyfriend, if you know what I mean.

I did something really funny the other night. There is this literary society called The Shirley Society I wanted to join, but I kept putting it off. But Sunday night I decided to go, because someone was speaking on "How to Write a Novel" and far be it from me to pass up *that* kind of lecture. So I went, all by myself, to this well-hidden room in a well-hidden college. I sat down and started talking to people, and they kept asking me if I knew Spanish! And I kept saying no, until I realized that I was there on the wrong night, and that this week's event was "A Reading of Chilean Poetry." And it was too late to leave. I was trapped. Fortunately, they had someone reading translations, and they talked about the political and cultural environment in Chile, and the poetry was pretty good, so I wasn't sorry I went. *Next* week, I'm going to learn "How to Write a Novel." Oh, speaking of "How to Write a Novel," guess who I saw speak here. Norman Mailer. It was pretty interesting. He made fun of some English people, because it was basically a question & answer type thing. We Americans were sniggering in the back row. No one here has heard of him. He's really strange—Anyway, after I learn how to write a novel, I'll start one.

later that evening

I finished FINAL PAYMENTS. It was great, not only because it was good in itself, but because I felt like I would be discussing it Thursday night in Angela Jackson's apartment. I really miss you guys . . . The teachers here are great academically, but they are so formal. I can't picture going to any of their offices for a chat. I can't even tell a joke in class, I just have to smirk to myself. And I don't have any women teachers, and these men are probably sexist in the extreme. Although my advisor seems O.K. (We were talking about having problems being accepted by English people in the colleges downtown. He said, "Face it, Gretchen. You have three strikes against you. You're American. You're from Homerton. You're a woman. The only way it could be worse is if you were black—No—no, you could also be a black lesbian.") I'm deprived of women role models! Oh my God! Anyway, I need to talk to my advisor again tomorrow; maybe he'll chill out. I tend to ask a lot of my advisors . . .

I've become quite English here, but two days ago I had a disaster. See, I had a tea set. It was beautiful. Willow pattern. Very Japanese-y or Chinese-y. Anyway, blue & white. Tea pot, 4 cups, 4 saucers. I use real Earl Grey tea leaves and a strainer. We learned how to make tea properly after a *disastrous* tea-party early in the term, and I had the official tea set. Pot and all. So two days ago I rearranged my tiny but cosy room (w/fireplace!) and put my shelves on top of my desk and my tea set on top of my shelves. While I was watching Sunday night American football, the shelf collapsed. When I came back up, my room was *covered* in broken china . . . The only thing that didn't break was—thank goodness—the tea pot. Even at the cheap "Reject China Shop" it was 6 pounds. It now has a chipped spout—character. Tomorrow the maid sweeps my rug, so I can stop wearing my shoes all the time.

I'm really pooped. I feel better now, and I'm going to lead a normal life tomorrow . . .

Love, G.

January 20, 1985

Dear L.,

. . . I'm sending the letters to you today. You have my permission to publish them, and anything else you have of mine, of course. They're coming in a big manilla envelope . . .

As far as things are going, here's the Reader's Digest version: Home was great; Nikk didn't come; saw friends; Norway was good but COLD; I'm having tea in Prince Edward's room on Tuesday (He's directing a C.U.L.E.S. show I'm in); still juggling boys; writing a paper on Plato for an incredibly famous and intelligent historian; other papers on Arthur, Sutton Hoo, development of market towns in the medieval period, Anglo Saxon art, you name it—if it's medieval, I'm writing a paper on it. Give my love to everyone, more letters later.

Love, G.



Jane Eichenberger



Susan Thompson



Sally Kuhn

THE PIANO

Mother has dingy wood
and cracked ivory,
but our piano
is in perfect tune.

As I look at it
I tell myself it is an instrument,
and after all, anyone who has heard our piano
says that it sounds better than it looks,
that I should feel privileged
we have a piano,
but I am discouraged from playing it,
with its broken legs
staring at me hard,
and I don't like the room it is in,
so I let it sit there.

I want to refinish our wood
and fix our keys,
black and white,
which match the room,
so I can learn
to play.

HALF HOURS WITH NORA

1/2 hour to an edge

Past parkways, from tar pavements
and cultured rose bushes
there's a road without corners—
where bits of gravel tic the car.

I didn't know her then, nor want to see
a winding road weed-filled to its edges,
lined with dead things not used to movement.
But there, she spoke of others from her past,
some given the drive as a birthday gift
where once, a deer appeared through brush
as if she planned its entrance.

She made a memory—almost to end.
I reached to my right—grabbing flowers
of yellow with stems that itched my hand,
and she pulled to the edge.

1/2 hour for lunch

You served soup—the kind mothers make:
simmering cut greens and meat.
peppery seasonings, bread on the side.

Soup stirred three days straight,
nightly tasted by your mother—
your soup was her week-end visit
that ended in small disapprovements
like cleanser brands and pillow patterns,
your choice of pots and pans
and personal luncheon guests.

She left Sunday, after the breakfast plates.
You drove her to the flight at 10:15—
the plane that left before lunch,
the plane that left you cooking,
the plane that made me a guest.

1/2 hour in a jewelry store

Both eying earrings with special colors
swirled together in pounded copper,
we each take one to wear
and fight for a space in the mirror
to catch reflections at odd angles.

I pull up my hair for the earring to dangle,
strain my eyes to see profile.
She stretches her hat to one side,
covers an eye, and smiles
for declaring her time in the mirror.

The earrings are richer in her black hair
and more disguised in mine, but I had
to have—knowing she could buy them.
“Black on black?”
You can hardly see them,” I said
and pointed to ones less attractive.

1/2 hour walking

I noticed the roundness of wheels
reshaped at the bounce of the carriage
when I slowed my step for its passing.
She continued,
leaving me to see the twins—
two elderly sisters siamesed by clothing:
the shawl stretched to make one figure.

I thought to stop Nora and tell of my find
but they were cut—one took the shawl
and left the other to drive.

She looked behind to find me
and told me of the weather
by commenting on the breeze
that shook the remaining leaves
to mud.

1/2 hour driving

When I fell to hysterics on her second-hand sofa
demanding to be committed, she asked why?
Well, I plotted a murder once, I'm neurotic
and can find no milestones in my life.
She took a tape from her collection
and said "That is enough, you'll go home now."
I fastened my coat and tied my scarf
in the fashion of a Russian serf,
and noticed her candles and dried weeds
in an old black vase that shook
when she opened the door to leave.

She ran to the car avoiding the rain
as I walked to catch every drop
remembering her hysterics, how I stopped to comfort
and watched her earrings dangle
with each sobbing interpretation.

The tape clicked in—Mozart.
She began to direct the fall of rain,
the swing of the trees—her opera—
she in control of every entrance and exit.

She passed my stop, continued to the city
where Christmas lights outlined brick
and steel; buildings were cartooned
and stuck as scenery on her stage.
The lighted trees were her chorus;
as she straightened her hand to signal them,
the buildings moved on and off—

the drive was over.
I stepped to wet cement,
let the rain soak my cigarette
and listened to the opera leave
with Nora commanding the trees to sing.

I'M HAVING A PRIVATE HEADACHE

I turn on my music
so I can be alone without noticing.

The only person I see
is in the mirror,
looking like a documentary
in black and white.

CUTTING EDGE

On bed sheets of glass
You say roll over.
I'll let myself be scarred easily.
Bodies rushing through old sweat
Waiting to sink.
We roll over roll over and rip.

In hot smoky air, thick with ashes,
The loud beat plays for the hips.
Your neck cracks the rhythm,
My arms swaying, hitting window panes.
Inhaling, our heads crash down.
We roll over roll over and rip.

Thunder lives in my bed.
I listen quietly to the pounding.
Under my pillow I stab your heartbeat
With collected blades in my hands.
Blood melts the old sweat fresh.
I roll over roll over and rip.

WHEN THE SOUL IS A SISTER

Tonight you have a child in your lap,
and I am giving birth.
We have limits.
These babies are limitless.
I am in fear of rocking like a child;
you rock yours and are rocking with me.
Both of you are only mine.
I can only hear your children cry
and wish they were mine.



Jennifer Falconer



Lisa Cummings



Judith Friedman

Choreography

The curtain was opening for the final curtain call. As the royal blue velvet curtain reached the wings of the stage, I stepped forward into the thunderous applause. The clapping seemed to become louder with each step I took. It was as if the audience wrapped me in their arms, to embrace me with the warm bitter-sweet hug of an old friend. It was the kind of embrace that picks you up and twirls you around until you don't know if you are laughing or crying; and as I extended my arms forward to return their gratitude, someone handed me a telephone, and the phone was ringing.

I looked up to see who had done such an absurd thing. I could see darkness illuminated only by a tiny rectangle of fluorescent green light. I looked closer. The tiny green rectangle began to change shape. I realized the green rectangle was not changing, but my eyes were starting to focus.

"Damn," I said. It's 4:30 in the morning. That was not loving applause of an audience I heard; it was the blessed phone. Who in blue blazes is calling me at 4:30 in the morning, I said to myself as I stumbled from my bedroom into the living room, stubbing the big toe of my right foot on the coffee table and falling onto the couch as I reached for the phone that sat on the end table on the far side of the couch.

"Damn," I said again as I grabbed the phone with one hand and my foot with the other.

"Chloe?" The voice at the other end of the connection pierced the night's peace. The warm wonderful embrace I had felt just a few seconds ago had turned into a paralyzing vise so tight that it was almost suffocating. There was only one person who had ever called me by that nickname. I had not seen, nor heard from him in two years.

For a few seconds, I said nothing. Finally, I managed to squeak out an unbelieving, "Grant?"

"I'm in Kansas City."

I pulled the white cord from the phone with me as I walked to the picture window and pulled aside the sheer pink curtain. It was snowing. The big white flakes were floating noiselessly, hopelessly down, down as my heart sank slowly into the pit of my stomach. Then, those two years became only two hours, as Coco my albino cat jumped and landed in the middle of my lap.

"I'm on my way, I'll be there in two hours," he said in a way that sounded alarmingly familiar.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

The silence was punctuated by Coco rubbing and purring against my chest.

"I have to go to a funeral this morning," pulling an excuse out of the top of my head, "Why don't you come for dinner tonight?" What am I saying? I feel

like I'm at a funeral now!

"I don't want to wait until this evening."

Just what I was afraid of; when Grant starts getting impetuous and impatient, that can only mean he's been drinking. "Grant, where are you?"

"I'm in Kansas City."

"I know, but where in Kansas City?"

"At Larry's."

Larry's. Good old Larry was one of Grant's old drinking buddies. If those two got together, there was no stopping them for days. "When did you get in?"

"Oh, about six hours ago."

"Haven't you been home to see your mother yet?"

"Nope."

The first time in all our years that he's thought of me before his mother, and it has to be after we are divorced! "Well then, why don't you go see your mother, get some sleep, and I'll see you tonight for dinner." Why am I being so gracious!

"I take it you don't want to see me then."

"No! I mean, of course I'd love to see you; but I'd feel better if you got some sleep, before you spent two hours on the road in the state you're in."

"Same old Chloe."

"Yes. The same old Chloe would like to see you in one piece when you get here."

He laughed. His laugh was still the same, so bright, and rich, and carefree. Some things do not change. "You still worry too much. That's nice. I'll see you at 7 o'clock . . . tonight." He was gone with a click, and the dial tone began to buzz in my ear. I put the phone down and flipped on the brass lamp at the end of the couch next to the phone. Coco looked up at me and put her left paw on my cheek and brought her face next to mine. Grant had given me Coco after the accident, on the very day I'd gotten out of the hospital. She had been only five weeks old at the time and so tiny she fit in the palms of my hands.

Why hadn't I moved, I said to myself. I looked around at an almost identical apartment to the one Grant and I had lived in before we moved to Portland. It was even in the same apartment complex but not the same building. The only differences were the furniture and the direction the floor plan faced. I left all the furniture with Grant when I came back to the midwest. Why had I moved back to the same city, the same apartment complex we had lived in when we were still happy together? Why had I kept Coco?

"Because you're a sentimental old fool!"

There were lots of reasons for coming back. It feels safe to come back to somewhere that's familiar and comfortable, but it was not very comforting, seeing old friends who knew Grant and me as a couple, seeing our favorite restaurant, walking through the park we used to walk through together.

I let out a deep breath. I felt as if I hadn't taken a breath for the last five minutes. I hugged my arms around me as I walked to the kitchen, shivering. The midwestern winters haven't changed either . . . still blasted cold! Of course, in my stumbling slumber, I had forgotten to put on my robe. (Well, I

never claimed to be organized at 4:30 in the morning.)

I pulled a glass tumbler from the cupboard above the stove along with a bottle of rather nice scotch. At least, I've learned to appreciate good liquor since my days of tequila and beer with Grant. The kitchen clock said 4:40. Ten minutes ago, I was sound asleep, having a wonderful dream; and that jerk had to call. He's not a jerk, I just haven't been able to get him out of my mind for the last five years of my life.

"Well, why are you standing in the kitchen in the middle of the night, having a scotch without ice, talking to yourself," Coco seemed to say as she sat on the counter looking at me. I took a swallow of the warm liquid gold. "Well Chloe, this is your chance to finally put things to rest one way or another."

Somehow between 4:45 AM and 6:30 PM, I had managed to scrub the kitchen and the bathroom, vacuum, dust, and do the laundry, buy a new tablecloth, candles, a rump roast, potatoes, carrots, onions, and catsup. Grant had to have catsup with his roast beef. I had even baked a German chocolate cake. I hadn't stopped to ask myself why I was fixing his favorite meal, or why I had curled my hair and left it down, falling halfway down my back the way he liked it.

Why had he chosen now to get in touch with me? It's three days before Christmas. Christmas was always our favorite time of the year.

The roast was almost done. The aroma of good beef filled the apartment. The table was set with a new chantilly lace-edged tablecloth. Blue candles sparkled in lead-glass candlesticks. My blue, flowered china lay on top of red and blue, quilted place mats topped with matching napkins. Everything was ready.

Knock, knock. I took a deep breath and walked down the hall that leads from the kitchen and living room. Coco beat me to the door. I grabbed the brass doorknob and turned it. The door slowly opened. Grant was standing there with half a smile on his face, holding an enormous picture frame; and Coco sat at my leaden feet, staring at both of us.

"Hello," is this me talking? "Come in."

Coco let out an indignant meow.

"Is that Coco?"

I smiled. "She's grown up."

"I didn't think you'd still have her."

"She goes where I go."

He stepped around Coco and walked down the hall to the living room in his dark brown tweed pants, a cream colored pullover, with a brown silk shirt underneath. "He's dressing better than he used to." His brownish-blond hair looked gold from days in the sun, but his chameleon eyes were blue or were they grey? I couldn't tell because the lights were too dim. I hoped they were blue. That would mean he was happy to see me.

Coco matched my steps as I followed Grant into the living room. He turned the picture frame around. It was our picture of the skier coming down the mountain in a cloud of snow powder. We had bought it when we were first married, but we had left it at his mother's when we moved to Portland. In the three years since we had first moved to the coast, I had almost forgotten about it. We stood there staring at the picture and at each other. Grant shifted from one foot to the other and looked around the room, looking for a place to put the large painting.

"Why don't you lean it against the wall and talk to me while I finish dinner?" I turned and started toward the kitchen, calling back over my shoulder, "Can I get you something to drink? I have beer, wine, tequila, and Scotch."

Grant walked toward the hall that led to the bathroom and the bedrooms since that was the only empty wall space in the entire apartment except, of course, for the picture window which looked out over a grove of trees neighboring our old park. The park was covered with snow that glistened from the street lights. It becomes dark so early in the winter. Grant leaned the painting against the hallway wall adjacent to the bathroom and said he'd have a beer as he turned and walked toward the kitchen.

I opened the refrigerator and pulled out a Budweiser from the bottom shelf, closed the door, and twisted the cap off. I handed Grant the bottle, remembering that he never uses a glass, just drinks his beer straight from the bottle. He leaned against the white tile counter opposite the refrigerator and said thanks just before he took a long swallow from the brown, long-necked bottle. Coco massaged her sleek body against Grant's leg, blanketing his pants with white hairs.

"So tell me what you've been doing with your life," he asked as I began lifting the vegetables from the Dutch oven on the stove top, putting the potatoes and carrots into a serving dish. I was surprised to see Grant pick up Coco and begin to pet her.

"I've been teaching part-time and finishing my degree the other part of the time." I pulled the roast from the pot with a fork in each hand and laid it on a circular platter. "I went back to law school. I take my bar exam next month."

"Congratulations." Grant saluted me with his beer in his right hand.

"Thanks, but would you include some good luck, too. I haven't passed the bar, yet." I grabbed my Scotch glass to take a drink.

"I'm sure you'll do just fine. I bet you're the top in your class and you've got job offers from all over the country."

I laughed, proud that he could have such faith in me and replied, "Not quite, I'm only fourth, but I have had some pretty good offers." I began making a roux of flour and butter to make gravy and he asked, "What about your dancing? I didn't think you'd ever give that up."

I gave it up for you when we were married, I said to myself, but that wasn't enough to keep us together. "That's what I teach here at the university. I've even been commissioned to choreograph some pieces for a few midwestern companies." By jove, Chloe, I think you're bragging. No, I just want him to know that I've put my life in order; and I've put the pieces together since Mandy died. It isn't the right time to bring up our daughter, yet.

"What about you? You look pretty successful. I assume you are now an official hydraulic engineer. At least, that's what you were studying when we were in school." I looked at his obviously expensive clothes. For as long as I've known him, the only time he wasn't in blue jeans and a T-shirt, or a plaid flannel shirt was at our wedding. Grant put Coco down and helped me carry the serving dishes to the table.

"I guess you could put it that way." He laughed. "Right now, I'm working on a dam in the southern part of the Cascade range near Redford, Oregon." He rambled on and on about his work. The topic carried us through most of dinner until he poured more thick red sauce from the almost half-empty catsup bottle. (It was a small bottle.) "You still don't eat much."

He was partly right. I'd just been picking at the food on my plate. My stomach was in knots because I was wondering where the conversation would lead when dinner was finished. "Oh, it's just that I'm enjoying our conversation," I said as I watched him swoop his last piece of roast through the puddle of catsup on his plate. He had just finished his second helping, to my not half-eaten first portion. Grant loved to eat. Eating, drinking and talking about himself were only three of the many things he did well.

"How about some cake," I started to rise and pick up his empty plate to carry it the few, short steps into the kitchen. Coco had been keeping my feet warm throughout dinner; but now it was time for her supper, she decided, as she followed me into the kitchen.

"Only if there's coffee to go with it."

"Coffee! When did you start drinking coffee? You've always hated it!"

"It's become a lifeline out at the construction site. I guess I decided it was about time I drank what other adults drink. You should know that more than anyone."

"Yes, I should know. It cost us a marriage and a daughter."

Grant grabbed his wine glass and strode to the living room, staring out the picture window. He had switched from beer to wine at dinner. I walked up behind him and put my hand on his shoulder. He felt like a rubber band pulled taut and ready to snap. "I don't want to discuss it."

"We've never talked about it. Its been three years; don't you think it's about time we put it to rest." I walked around to face him.

"It's been three years and six months. It's over. There is nothing to talk about." He said it with such calm it was frightening. Then he snapped his head up and looked at me with such horror in his eyes. "That night on the beach haunts my sleep."

"We've never talked about that night. Don't you realize that's why we can't let her go, why we split up?" My voice had cracked. I slapped my hand over my mouth and turned away, hugging my arms around my shoulders. I turned back, taking a deep breath. Grant was staring at me, but he turned away as I reached for his hand and walked with him to the couch.

"It wasn't your fault, it wasn't anyone's fault, it was an accident." I grabbed his arm that was on his lap.

"She's dead."

But we're not, and her name is Mandy, Amanda, you've never even said her name."

"All right!" He sprang off the couch like a jungle cat and began pacing the room. "Amanda! Amanda is dead. What do you want me to do, trade places with her?"

"No, I want to do what we should have done three years ago, talk about it. Talk about that night. No! Grant, stop it! Just stop it! Do you think you're the only one who has been hurt? It happened to both of us. It was an accident. It happened. We can't change that. I can't carry it around inside of me for the rest of my life. You are the only person I can share my grief with. Why can't you share yours with me? Do you blame me for what happened?"

"No, of course not!"

"Grant, I wanted to go. We'd been cooped up in that tiny little apartment night after night. I was sick of staying at home. We were going stir crazy! You know I liked to go to the beach when it was storming. I liked to hear the waves

come pounding in on the rocks.” I hugged a sofa pillow to my chest as I remembered. “You made me bundle up like a cocoon. I had so many layers on, I was sweating before we got out the door.”

“We should have taken the truck.”

“But we took the station wagon because the heater didn’t work in the truck. We drove along the coast road. It felt so good to be out. Don’t you remember? It was a perfect night. The stars were blazing as bright as the full moon. And the baby, do you remember? She was so active that night. I grabbed your hand and put it on my belly. I said to you, ‘Grant you won’t believe this!’ She kicked so hard your hand bounced off, and I thought she would jump out right through my navel. We drove onto the beach because you didn’t want me walking down that rocky path.

“The party had already started by the time we got there. Everyone was laughing and drinking and eating. You grabbed a beer and boulabaise, and I grabbed a hot dog. All the time I was pregnant, seafood made me nauseous; it still does. Someone grabbed a guitar, and we all started singing. It was so nice to be sitting in front of that huge bonfire, sitting between your legs, wrapped in your arms. Then we started singing 99 Bottles of Beer. We’d only gotten to 82, when I noticed the car looked strange. I couldn’t see the tires! I thought it was just my eyes.

“I poked you in the ribs and pointed at the car. Then everyone looked, and then everyone started laughing. I had begun struggling to get up off the sand with my big belly, but you finally had to help me up, and you went over to the car. Everyone was already at the car and digging by the time I waddled over.

“Sometime during our rabble-rousing, the tide had come in. The car had sunk up to the axle in the heavy wet sand.

“I thought it was hilarious that the car was stuck in the sand, and I was digging at the front of the car,” and I looked at Grant. His eyebrows hovered over stormy grey eyes.

“I’d finally dug deep enough to see the bottom of the hub-cap shining in the firelight, and then I saw the tire start to turn. I looked at you, and tried to warn you,” he added.

“I couldn’t hear you with the wind blowing all around us.”

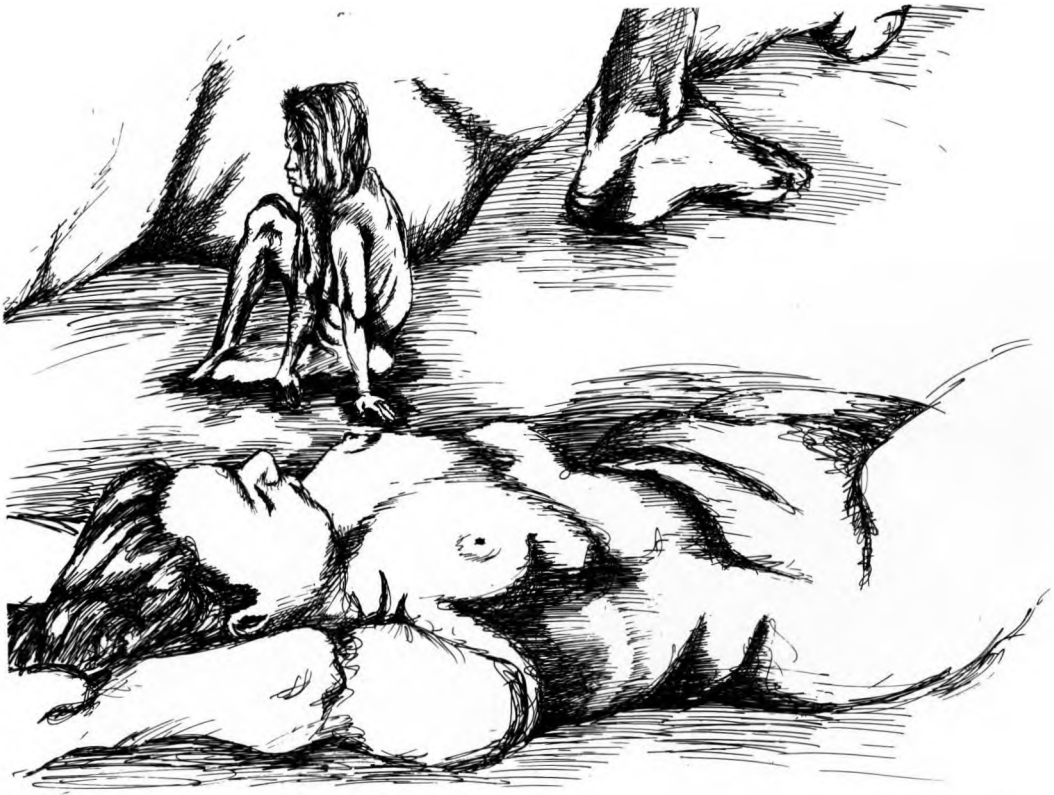
“You looked up at me and the hood of the car caught you in the middle, and just kept rolling. By the time I’d gotten to you, the car had rolled you onto your back, and I could only see your chest and head. Thank God, someone had had the presence of mind to go get a jeep and chains, while the rest of us pushed against the car to keep it from rolling any further! We got you out. I don’t know how, but we did. Then I was at the hospital in the waiting room, and the doctor was standing in front of me saying, ‘Your wife is fine; but, I’m sorry, we couldn’t save the baby; we couldn’t save your little girl.’”

I didn’t feel the tears running down my face until I tasted their saltiness on my lips as I watched Grant relive that night. We were sitting on the couch, rocking in each other’s arms. I’d cried a thousand times since that night on the beach. For over a year since that awful night, we had walked around the house like two strangers, not talking, not touching, not feeling. Nothing had helped, and nothing had changed until I said to him one day, “Grant we can’t live like this, we’re killing each other. Whenever I try to talk to you, you storm out of the house. I can’t live like this. I love you. But I can’t live like this. You can curse me, hate me, divorce me, whatever you want. When you’re ready

to talk, you'll know where to find me." And I left, and now we were here.

It was quiet in the room. Grant pulled away from my arms as Coco snuggled in between us. For a moment he just sat there looking at me with steel blue eyes, and then he cracked that funny half-smile of his. "I guess we should have talked about this a long time ago, but it seems like we still have some unfinished business."

I didn't want to press my luck, but I knew I would anyway. "How about if I make some fresh coffee, and we can sit and talk?"





Ruth Gilmore



Leslie Maxtone-Graham

FORMULAIC SPASMS

Now I have the form; what now?
I have the form. What will I
have? The form, what will it have?
The form, what will it show? The
form, what will it show about form?
What will it show about poetry? What
will it show about poetry today? Will
it show about poetry today? Does it
show about poetry today? Does anyone show
about poetry today? Does anyone talk about
poetry today? Does anyone talk about poetry?

BLANK CANVAS

My mother painted
the bathroom bright purple,
the dining room melon,
streaked the upright black
piano antique-green, then
went away. I kept
watching

 myself fade.
Not enough, the paint-
by-numbers, stacks piled
in cracked basement corners.
I turned to cakes.
For two months I made
white batter neon, hot
pink, swirls blue and yellow,
not enough, kept
wanting

for her to come back,
finish what she started,
my room.

ROADTRIP

The day Ma and Pa Lake took us to Hannibal for the long-promised picnic, it rained and Pa cursed like always: "Goddamned weather," he said and away we went, sailing on Highway 19 in Pa's apple red Plymouth.

I loved that car, big old boat with huge fins at the rear, push button gear shift and on the steering wheel a grip knob, scarlet glitter under clear plastic, Pa's ornament for his fast auto.

Four of us in the back seat, feet dangling, sniffing the air like puppies, smell of wet hair and hard boiled eggs teased noses while Pat and Lorie played tic-tac-toe and I whispered stories to Jackie about running away to live on a river raft like Huck Finn while Ma stared out the window and Pa whistled.

Rain fell in grey-blue ropes against the windows as Pa pulled over to a side road overlooking the river and Ma said cheerfully in the sad light. "We'll have a picnic in the car," while Pa sighed and shook his head: "Goddamned weather," he said.

Pa kept the motor running for heat while Ma unwrapped the sandwiches from their crinkly wax paper, thick slabs of salty pink ham on white bread lathered with French's mustard and gave each of us a sweet pickle, a blue napkin and an egg, and said, "Don't make crumbs."

Pat stuffed his whole egg into his mouth, chewed and grinned at me, teeth smeared with a mess of yellow and white paste and I screamed that I would be sick if this went on and Jackie burped while Lorie cried because she found a hair on her ham which Ma told her to eat anyway and Pa just sighed and watched the rain trickle down the glass.

Crisp apples for dessert sent sweet juice slipping down my chin and over my fingers so I licked it off and felt satisfied with the day, the idea being that nothing was better than a rainy picnic in Pa's car with Ma's sandwiches and all of us.

We wiped our mouths, Ma folded the wax paper carefully for future use and Pa drove through Hannibal but it wasn't much so we went home; Ma related for the tenth time as to how Mark Twain was her sixth cousin so maybe one of us would be a writer and wouldn't that be something else she said and turned to find Pat polishing off Lorie's hairy ham sandwich which she had chucked under the seat; Jackie was asleep on Lorie's lap and I was making unintelligible gestures out the back window to the truck driver behind us, and as we pulled into the driveway the clouds went away, the rain stopped and Pa looked at the sky and said nothing but I knew.

SUNBATHERS

Faded green
Mermaids,
Your water reflection
Is more beautiful
Than you.

Sister mermaids,
Protecting one another
From the east sun

In a concrete pond
Only half full,
Covered with fallen leaves
And no penny wishes,

Surrounded
By once live flowers
That guard you sea creatures
With frost bitten finger tips
And broken tails,

I must speak the truth:
Your creator
Made you unlovely,
And your caretaker
Let you grow old.
Your youth
Swims without you.

EFFIE LOVES DIRT

Days back, I dug into soft dirt, my fingers pushing down to scoop up; and when I caught sight of cloth, I tugged at it to bring not only my doll, but the dirt she carried, to me. And when I had her rocking at my chest, Charlie and my sisters pranced from behind wide trunks to sing in mockery:

Effie loves dirt,
She always buries Gert.
Baby, baby, baby,
baby, baby, baby.

I remember still the tune of their teasings; for when they first came from the pines with their chant, I felt as if, for a moment, Gertie and I were given a rhythm for our rock. But when they broke into full laughs, I know I tried to hide the fresh hole (perhaps with my thin legs). I bashed Gertie's face against my palm to knock the dirt from her eye sockets, and I brushed us as free as I could. Yet, a burning flush came up my sides as quickly as Shirl's hand came down to pull me into the run Clara led across the planted field; and I know the joy that overwhelmed me in realizing it was all for fun.

Our feet went low as we jumped the rows of green, Charlie jumping two at a time and challenging us to do the same. We passed to the front yard where the pyracantha bushes bent full, and we snuck to each other's backs to smear them with the berries' thick red. At our fronts, we hurled pinecones and dates and squealed to excite ourselves all the more.

When first dark neared, we crashed our forts and made our slow way to the back porch. Into the steam of our kitchen, we clamored, bringing the biggest pinecones for Mother to prop in her window sill. Mother's fingers played on our brown heads as we passed by to wash, and she turned to line our plates along the wooden counter in order of age, mine farthest from the hot stove for which she knew Charlie had no fear.

For evening games, we climbed from rug to chair to table and on, avoiding the floor that would mean three laps around the house in a night kept alive by the woods' sounds. Or perhaps, for a bit of hide-and-go-seek, we hid in drawers and closets, calling "it" a cheater for counting too fast.

All too soon, we were sent, and took our earth-smells with us, to bed, reaching up to Mother's arms and cheek before we slept.

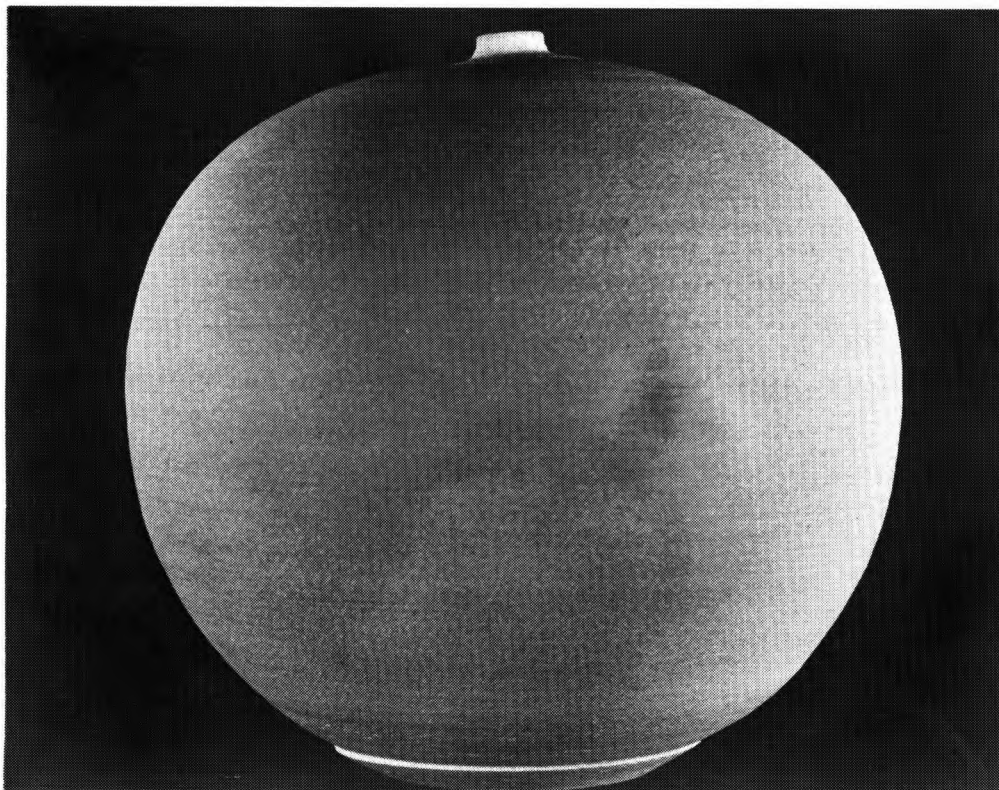
I awaken now to the whirs outside my window and cross from my bed to the reflection of my face. From my dresser. I pick up the framed youngsters on a Christmas tree hunt, their bundled hands holding tufts of pine; and I know they still sleep there in the land, only half-wakened on this morning.



Chris Karstaedt



Susan Thompson



Pauli Bradley

THE PERSON IN QUESTION

Rae 1—the main character; wants very much to love herself and she does to a certain extent; she can't love herself more because she isn't really sure there's more of her to love; she is not narcissistic in any way; she loves her essence, her being, her life, but she is not always sure of who she is or where she's going. She is black, in her mid-twenties. She is a hopeless romantic; she is evasive, influential, but shy; dominating yet in a subtle way; persistent almost to the point of demanding; she has an overall humorous personality and she's very easy to get along with, if she likes that person.

Rae 2—part of the subconscious of the main character; she is essentially a bitch, she knows it, and she loves it; she is evasive, unpredictable, immoral—the epitome of the “bad girl”; she is mean but not nasty; she could curse a person out and the person would not even realize it until after the fact; she cares about the feelings of others as long as they coincide with hers. She loves men and would not hesitate to steal someone's boyfriend and then dump him; she is not really evil, she's just not very nice.

Rae 3—another part of the subconscious of the main character; very shy, very quiet; she never says much of anything, however when she does, she makes sure she's heard. She is a daydreamer, but she makes all her dreams come true. She is the romantic side of the main character; she too is evasive, but she, unlike Rae 2, is nice.

Act 1 Scene 1

A very modern, sparsely furnished room. There is a full-sized bed, a large reclining chair, a window-seat, large pillows are tossed about the room. The color scheme of the room is red, black, yellow, and white.

Rae 1 is in the window-seat, looking out of the window, smoking a cigarette. Rae 3 is reclining lazily in the chair. Rae 2 is in the corner sitting on a large red pillow, smoking a cigarette.

It is 2:30 a.m. One lamp is on, casting a hazy light over the entire room.

Rae 1: I don't know what you'd call it
cause it bein' me, I already
know what it is . . .
sometimes.

Rae 3: What?

Rae 2: (sarcastically) The person in question, Rae.

Rae 1: Beginning in a time when the sun danced
ever so slowly across a blue and white stage,
making its way toward the furthest
horizon,
leaving a path for the future to
walk on.

Rae 2: (sighs loudly and looks bored)

Rae 1: Becoming . . . ever so slowly, steppin' into life
with a head held high and a word for
every phrase and/or comment ever
mentioned.

Rae 2: I'm impressed, Rae.

Rae 1: You should be, Rae.

Rae 3: I am.

Rae 2: So exactly what are you talking about, dear?

Rae 1: You, me, her . . . all one in the same.

Rae 3: Are you sure about that?

Rae 2: Of course she is, Rae. That's why she sits in windowsills.

Rae 1: (sighs)

I sit in windowsills
when it's late . . .
And stare at the night;
And wonder how it happened
And why not right;
And why it lasted so long
And why it felt so good;
And why things don't
always turn out
the way she thinks they should.
And why life isn't perfect,
and cashew nuts aren't sweet;
And why the feeling inside
is so incomplete.
And why her world is broken
and her heart doesn't like to beat;
And why the feeling inside
is so incomplete.
And why it's cold outside,
and within there's no more heat;
And why the feeling inside
is so incomplete. (silence)
And why she locked the words away
And why she's so discreet;
And why the feeling inside . . .

And why she stares at the night,
when there's nothing really to see;
And why the feeling inside
is so . . .

Rae 2: I think we get the picture.

Rae 3: (to Rae 2) That wasn't very nice.

Rae 2: I'm not very nice.

Rae 3: That's beside the point. She's explaining, and I'd like to hear.

Rae 2: (to Rae 1) Then please, by all means, continue. We don't want to upset goody-two-shoes, now do we?

(Rae 1 glances at Rae 2, then looks out of the window again. Rae 2 smirks, looks at Rae 3, sighs.)

Rae 2: (to Rae 1) Okay. I apologize. Tell us about us, or you, or whoever.

Rae 1: (grins at Rae 2, then looks out of window again)

Complication walked in like a king on a red carpet, (glances at Rae 2)
sat on an uninhabited throne,
and ruled a land visited by few. (chuckles)

A bad dude with a good influence;
always ready to confuse. (looks at other Raes)

And we all know confusion given
is Complexity assumed.

Rae 3: Oh, so now we're Complex?
(silence)

Rae 2: Is that assumption correct?

Rae 1: (blows smoke from cigarette, looks at Rae 3)

Yes.

Rae 3: So Complexity was given in a little velvet box
on a silver platter, and
received like a four carat diamond
on a solid gold band . . .

Rae 2: Which I never had.

Rae 1: (hesitates) Something like that.

But Complexity brought company . . . Naj.

Rae 2: What the hell is a Naj? What the hell are we talkin' about anyway?

Rae 1: About me, Rae . . . and Naj—a bad mo-ther-fuck-errrrr.

Naj was so bad she could knock you down and
pick you up at the same time; she could
confuse your heart, explain to your brain,
and never let your mind know what was happening.

Rae 3: Are we that bad, girl?

Rae 1: Not us . . . not Rae . . . —Naj. (pause)

They were together like white on rice . . .

Rae 3: like covers on books,

Rae 1: like songs in the
soul of a black man;

Rae 2: and even when jeans fade there's a
little of the blues left behind.

Rae 3: Hey, that was pretty good.

Rae 2: Yeah, it was, wudn't it?

Rae 1: I'm trying to tell a story here.

Rae 2: Well tell it baby . . . tell it.

Rae 1: (sighs)

Naj sat in the driver's seat and
Complexity became a willing passenger.
Together they drove along Confusion's
uneven road, until they had a head-on
collision with Time,

Rae 2: which has been known
to be an obstacle.

Rae 1: Time confronted those two and found them
not so inseparable, or so he thought;
and they parted.

Rae 2: So now, lemme get this straight. When we decipher all the poetic
shit, what we cum up wit is two people who wuz inseparable 'til Father
Time came 'long and seprated 'em. Am I right about it?

Rae 1: On the nose.

Rae 2: So now, lemme ask you this—who are the two?

Rae 1: (pause) Complexity and Naj.

Rae 2: Any fool widda ear coulda figured that out. Who is Complexity?

Rae 1: (chuckles, then gradually starts to laugh more and more)
Any fool with an ear, girl.

Rae 2: OOhh. (long pause, then very quietly) Rae.

Rae 1 goes back to windowseat, sits, and looks out window. Rae 2 walks over
to Rae 1, looks at her, then out window. Rae 3 hums softly, walks to others,
looks at them, then walks away to sit on red cushion. Lights fade. End scene.

Scene 2

Spotlight comes up on Rae 3 seated on the red cushion. She is on the phone.
The other Raes are off stage.

Rae 3: (speaking softly)

Nathan . . . Nathan, I . . . no go ahead. I'm listening. (pause) But this
isn't what I want. You should know that.

(pause)

I understand all that, but . . . it's only for a little while longer . . .

(pause)

But Nate if I can, why can't you?

(pause)

(voice becomes louder)

What makes you think this is any easier for me? I love you, dammit,
and I want to be with you. Why can't . . . (pause)

Nathan . . . (pause)

Nate . . . (pause)

(angry now)

Nathan all I've heard is you, you, you. What about me? I'm so fuck-
ing tired of hearing about *your* wants and *your* needs. What about
mine? What about *me*? You act as if you don't give a damn about
what I think or what I feel.

(pause)

Fine, Nathan. That's just damn fine.

She slams down the receiver and stares into space. Paces, mumbles, sits, looks at phone, looks down and begins to rub forehead.

Rae 3: I won't call you anymore Nate
if that's what you want.
It seems you try so hard to forget . . .
and to make me forget . . .
but I won't do that.
And I won't call.

And I won't write to you anymore . . .
That way my letters won't be around
to clutter your mind
or your house
or your whatever.

I won't come by anymore . . .
if that's how you want it.
I'm sure there are millions of places
I can go that won't remind me
of you—

Of course I don't know where.
But I'll be damned if I come by.

And I'm sure it can be arranged
so that I never see you again . . .
if this is what you'd rather.
Of course my druthers are of no importance.

(long pause)

I guess this is goodbye, Nathan.
I would really rather not say goodbye . . .
but of course
my druthers . . .

I've been yours for so long that
it just doesn't seem appropriate . . .

Goodbye, Nathaniel.

I won't call,
I won't write,
I won't come by,
I won't see you . . .

But no one can
stop me from loving.
That I can do all by myself.

(pause) (then in a growing rage)

Rae 3: You know actually, I don't need you Nathaniel David Hall. I don't need you at all.

Rae 2: (appears from background and speaks very quietly)
I think you do.

Rae 3: Who the hell asked you what you thought?

Rae 2: My, my . . . feisty aren't we.

Rae 3: Fuck you, Rae.

Rae 2: You know,
I find very annoying your need to
forget,

and . . . (with a knowing smile)
Very intriguing your inability to
do so.

Rae 3: (very angry, screaming, almost to the point of tears)
Damn you, Rae. Get away from me.

Rae 2: (urging on)
Why? Why, Rae, why? Tell me why you need to forget him? Tell me
why you don't want me around? Why, Rae, why?

Rae 3: (now crying and screaming)
Because I don't want to be like you . . .
Because I don't want to be . . . like you . . .
Because I don't want to be . . . you . . .
(long pause)

Rae 2: (quietly)
Honey . . . you're already there. You are me now.
(she goes to Rae 3, whose crying has subdued, hugs her and starts to
hum same tune Rae 3 hummed at the end of scene 1. Lights fade on
these two and come up on Rae 1, sitting in the windowseat.)

Rae 1: We were so lonely, the two of us being apart. Didn't know what to do
without each other. I still remember all the things he said to me.
Once he told me to
think of him holding me tight,
when I stare at the moon
on sleepless nights.

Rae 2: (in the shadows)
I told him you sit in windowsills,
when it's late.

Rae 1: He said I taught him how to love,
how to cry.
Dear God, my heart cried whenever he wasn't around.

Rae 2: (still in shadows, barely seen)
and love is a very strong emotion
that makes you do crazy things.

Rae 1: I told him in ten days . . .
But his mind seemed to believe that
one day was equivalent to
24 hours,
Which wouldn't have been so bad if
each hour didn't have
so many,

Rae 2: minutes . . . seemed to last forever
when he wasn't around.

(lights fade on Rae 1 and spot is on Rae 2)

Rae 2: And so many times I got lost
in the silence.
So many times I wanted to stop thinking
about things that needed to be thought
about when I didn't feel like thinking
about them.

It would have been so much easier.

Rae 1: (from shadows)
But sometimes the silence was so loud.

Rae 2: (lights dim)
And if I couldn't hear it,
the silence of things unsaid
and thoughts not heard . . .

Rae 1: (lights up on her)
But it was so audible. So *damn* audible. So *goddamn loud*, it was
driving me crazy.

(pause)

Until he called. Until he put seven digits on the tip of his finger and I
heard his voice from inside a small white box.
That's when the silence got quiet enough
for me to hear the noise of the
sounds around me.

(lights fade on Rae 1 and Rae 2 and come up on Rae 3 who is seated on the
red cushion on the phone.)

Rae 3: I know, babe, but just ten more days . . . (pause)
I love you too, Nathaniel.

Lights fade. End scene 2.

Scene 3

The three Raes are in their original positions as in the beginning of scene 1.

Rae 1: (spoken quietly)
So once again Naj and Complexity went hand in hand
down a yellow brick road looking for
forever,
but they found Silver instead.

Rae 2: Now lemme tell you 'bout Silver. The man was
beautiful. I called him Silver 'cause
in the summertime that beautiful yellow
body was bronzed by the noonday sun
so he said that in other times of the
year he must be Silver. Thank God
he was never gold 'cause chile I
don' know if I could'a took it.
He was so sweet, so kind, so knowing, so
understanding, and did I mention loving?

Rae 3: (nervous)
No, not yet.

Rae 2: Well, I am now. The man was a lover if there ever was one. That
man could . . . Oh girl, it oughta be a crime . . .

Rae 3: (agitated)
What should be a crime?

Rae 2: For a man to move between the sheets like that all night and thru half
the next day . . .

Rae 3: (angry)
How could you?

Ray 2: (puzzled)

How could I what?

Rae 3: How could you sleep with him? What about Nathan? Don't you have any morals?

Rae 2: Baby, morals don't do a damn thing for me on a cold lonely night.

Rae 1: (puzzled)
What's the problem?

Rae 3: (loud and upset)
What's the problem? What's the problem? I'll tell you the problem. The bitch is at it again, sleeping with whoever and whatever has an extra leg.

Rae 2: (angry)
Wait a minute dammit. I'm sick and tired of your holier-than-thou attitude. What the hell makes you think you're better than I am? Just because you wait around on a lover who's too far away to even remember what you look like.

Rae 3: He does remember what I look like. He *remembers* me, he *loves* me, and I know he's waiting for me.

Rae 2: Oh yeah, babe, he's waiting and fucking everything that looks good in a skirt.

Rae 3: (screaming)
Fuck you, Rae!

Rae 2: (screaming back)
Fuck me? Fuck you baby and Nathan, too. I'm gonna have this man whether you like it or not.

Rae 1: (calmly and quietly)
What if I decide to have them both?

(pause)

Rae 3: (rage)
You bitch.

Rae 2: (amazed)
You know I'm beginning to think you like that word.

Rae 2: (amazed)
I'll be damned.

Rae 1: Yes, I'm sure you will be, but in the meantime, I want them both so why not?

Rae 3: (angry)
Why not? Why not?

Rae 1: Why are you so emotional?

Rae 3: Damn you Rae, you're worse than her. (points to Rae 2) You can't have both of them. What will people think? You're sounding like a whore.

Rae 1: A whore? Because I want two incredibly gorgeous men, I'm a whore? (pause)
So be it then. (pause)
And why would I care what people think about me? People would be appalled to know what I think about them.

Rae 3: That's not funny, Rae.

Rae 1: It's not meant to be.

Rae 2: (laughing)
It is to me.

Rae 3: (to Rae 2)
Shut up, Rae.

Rae 2: You shut up. All you do is sit around and state the do's and don'ts of life. For once in *your* life just shut up and . . .

Rae 1: (cuts her off yelling)
Both of you shut up. I get so tired of your constant fighting.
Both of you just shut up and let me live my life the way I want to.

Rae 2: Well excuse me, bitch.

Rae 1: You know if somebody else calls me a bitch . . .

Phone rings. All look at it and each other. Finally, Rae 2 speaks. Throughout this, phone continues to ring.

Rae 2: (to Rae 1)
Well it's your fucking life so answer your fucking phone.

Rae 3: It's for me. It's Nathan.

Rae 2: Well it's about time. He hasn't called in two weeks.

Rae 3: He's been busy . . .

Rae 2: Doing what? Forget it. I don't even want to know. God, how I wish it was Silver. (pause, then to Rae 1)
Well, answer the goddamn phone!

Rae 1 looks at other Raes and then picks up phone.

Rae 1: Hello?
Hey. How you doing? I was just thinking about you. Can you hold on a second?

Rae 1 gives phone to Rae 2.

Rae 2: Okay, I'm back now. I'm so glad you called.
(pause)
Tonight? No, I'm not busy, unless you have something for me to do.

Rae 3: (to Rae 2)
No, Rae.

Rae 2: Oh, that sounds like fun.
(pause)
Do you want me to?

Rae 3: (to Rae 2)
What about what I want?

Rae 2: (to Rae 3)
Shut up, brat! (then to phone) Well, it may take awhile for me to change.

Rae 3: (to Rae 2)
I'm not going anywhere with him.

Rae 2: (to Rae 3) You're not invited anyway. (then to phone) How about seven?

Rae 3: (to Rae 1, pleading)
Nathan might call tonight.

Rae 2: (to Rae 3) Do you honestly believe that? Do you really believe that on a Friday night, Nathaniel Hall is going to stay at home just so he can call you? Grow up, Rae.

Rae 3: (takes phone and speaks) On second thought, Silver, tonight may not be such a good night after all. This is very short notice, you know. Why didn't you call me sooner?

Rae 2: (to Rae 3) Give me that phone, Rae.

Rae 3: (keeping phone from Rae 2) What else did you have planned for the evening?

Rae 2: (to Rae 3) GIVE ME THAT PHONE, RAE.

Rae 3: (still on phone) What if I'm not interested?

Rae 2: Damn you!
Rae 2 slaps Rae 3 and the two begin to tangle with each other. They continuously hurl insults at each other. Rae 1 pushes them apart, takes phone from Rae 3 and speaks to phone.

Rae 1: Silver, it seems I have a slight problem making up my mind. I tell you what, let me call you back in half an hour, okay?
(pause)
Yeah sure, bye.

Hangs up phone and looks at other Raes.

Rae 1: What do I have to do to make you understand? Why won't you listen to *me*? This is my life.

Rae 2: Well since it's your life, I wish you'd make up your fucking mind. Why don't you just drop Nate? You know he's no good. It's not like it used to be anymore. Who wants him anyway?

Rae 3: I want him and he wants me.

Rae 2: Is that why he hasn't called in the past two weeks?

Rae 1: I want him.

Rae 2: Silver is sexier.

Rae 1: And that's all he offers.

Rae 2: So, what more do you need?

Rae 1: (shouts)
Love, Rae. I need *LOVE!*

Rae 3: Nathan loves me.

Rae 2: Nathan has lost your phone number.

Rae 1: I haven't lost his.

Rae 2: Then call him.
(long pause)

Rae 3: No.

Rae 2: Why not, Rae? Why won't you call him, Rae?

Rae 3: No.

Rae 2: (urging on)
Here's the phone, Rae. (goes to phone) Dial his number and wait for him to answer, Rae.

Rae 1: No.

Rae 2: Go ahead, Rae. See if he's home, Rae.

Rae 1: (louder)
No.

Rae 2: And if he is, see if he's alone, Rae.

Rae 3: (louder)
No.

Rae 2: (louder)
Go ahead, Rae! Go ahead!

Rae 1: (shouts)
Stop it!

Rae 2: (shouts)

No, I won't stop! *You stop, Rae! You stop!*

Rae 1: (shouts)

Stop it!

Rae 2: Call him.

Rae 3: Stop it!

Rae 2: Call him dammit! Call him, now!

Rae 1: (yells at the top of her lungs)

Stop it.

Long pause. Lights slowly fade as spot comes up on Rae 1

Rae 1: I will do what I want, when I want, and however I want to do it.

And nobody, but nobody can stop me,
from being the me that I want to be.

(she walks to windowseat, does not sit but looks at other Raes)

(Pause)

Rae 1: I will be me.

She sits, lights cigarette, looks out of window. Lights fade. End scene.

Scene 4

Rae 1 is in window seat, smoking. Other Raes are sitting facing her.

Rae 1: Time is my only obstacle

And until I get over that

I will sit in my windowsills

And I will stare at the nights

that pass.

If you are here with me

I will love you.

If you are unable to find me

I will love you.

If you leave me

I will love you.

But I will love me first.

Rae 3: I will love me first.

Rae 2: Me, I will love first.

Rae 1: And no one will take that

from me.

Because I am the me that I want to be.

Rae 2: Because I am me.

Rae 3: Because I am me.

Rae 1: Because

Rae 2: I am

Rae 3: I am

All three Raes: Me

Rae 1: (looks at Rae 2)

The person is no longer
in question.

Rae 1 looks out of window and continues to smoke.

Rae 2 moves cushion to windowseat, lights cigarette and stares out window.

Rae 3 moves chair to windowseat, lights cigarette, and stares out window.

All blow smoke at the same time.

Blackout. The End.

\$4.00