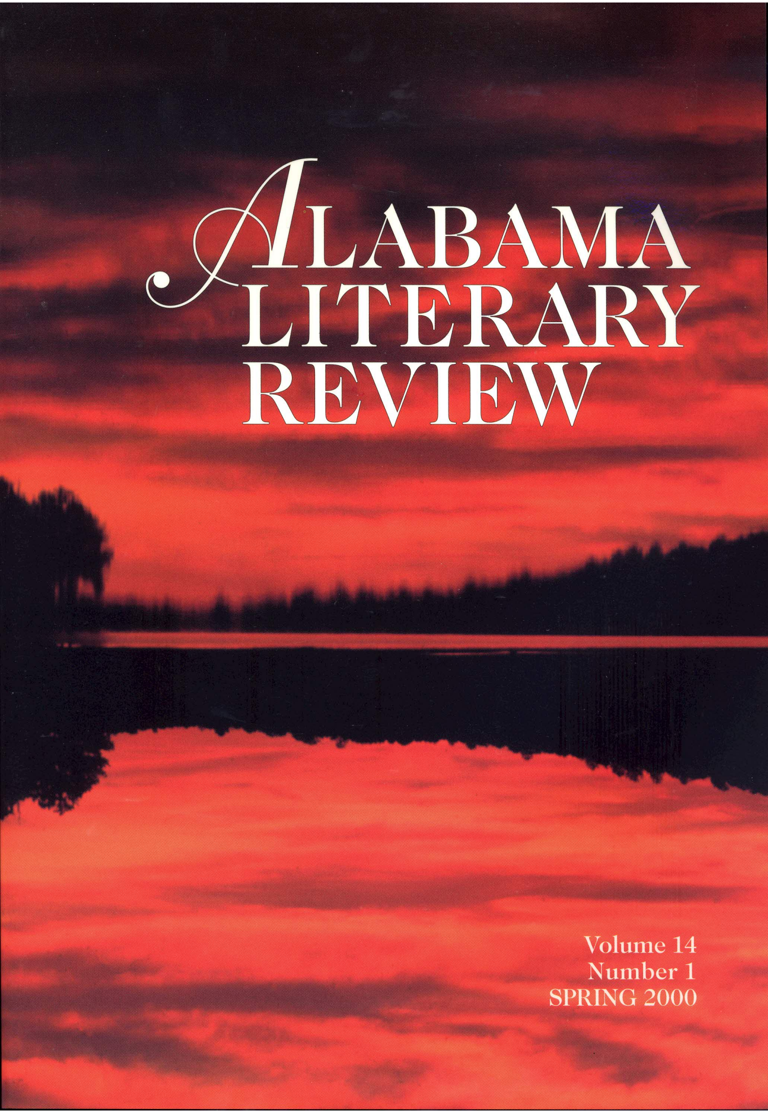

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Michael Martone

Fore

1.

My house at 29 Country Club Hills overlooks the old Country Club of Tuscaloosa. The ninth tee and green, a short par 3 of 183 yards is screened by a ragged hedge of pines and kudzu-vined sycamores. Sitting in my metal motel chair in my driveway, I can hear the golfers yelling "fore" as the sliced ball crashes into the scrub across the street. Later I see the foursome hacking through the underbrush with their clubs looking for the lost balls. Mowing my front yard, I'll find one or two dinged up balls buried in the long grass. I keep these discoveries in a big yellow bowl on the dining room table to give to my father when he visits to play golf each winter.

2.

The couple of streets of ranch homes on the hills above the golf course once must have been *the* address in Tuscaloosa. Built after the war, the neighborhood is the waking reality of a fantasy conceived in the foxholes. To be able to putter over to the club by means of your own electric cart, that was the dream. Every house has a view of the fairways rolling toward the dark river in the distance. But the money of those heady days, now, has gone, jumped north over the river to paper company land growing houses instead of trees. There, there are new country clubs with their necklaces of garden homes and McMansions hugging the shores of artificial lakes. My neighborhood is worse for wear, shabby even. Its lawns, like my own lawn, are ragged with a mixed prairie of centipede and crab grasses, creepers, ivies, and vines, the whole Southern swampy ecology that stands in contrast to the groomed swath of grass across the crumbling road.

3.

My neighbors ask me what I read. They have seen me sitting in my motel chair, reading. They invite me to sit with them on their enclosed porches looking out over the golf course. We drink eight ounces of Coca Cola served in sweating glass bottles. They all tell me that Walker Percy wrote here overlooking the country club. *Love in the Ruins* was written while visiting friends who lived in the house in the cul-de-sac at the end of the road. The golf course in that book is our golf course, they tell me.

4.

Sitting in my driveway in my motel chair, I can watch the freight engine move a short string of cars through the golf course. The treble of the diesel notches up a thump or two as it leans into the hummock by the tennis courts. The spur leads from the main line downtown through the country club over to the tire plant and the refinery on the far side of the course and was built through the fairways during the war. The country club with its rail line hazard is hard by the lock and dam on the Black Warrior River which casts a huge concrete backdrop to the green expanse. Tugs with tows of coal and covered barges of cement slide behind tiny clutches of golfers skylined and foreshortened on exposed decks of the back nine tees by the river. They take practice swings as the ships blow their horns entering the locks. Off in the distance on the other side of the river, the municipal airport launches, each morning, the flights of executive jets. The paper company and Mercedes planes take off over the golf course. It is a strange pastoral. Green rolling hills. Pools of white sand. Ponds of black water. The light glints on the steel rails. The bridges of the ships slip by, visible above the green-level levees. The white jets circle, sink through the branches of the weeping trees overhead, making their evening approaches into the setting sun.

5.

In the evening, the automatic sprinklers sprout sprays of water on the tees and greens. The hiss of the irrigation mixes with the saw of the cicada and the chorus of peepers in the copses. The air is warm and close. Lightning bugs rise up out of the grass.

6.

One weekend soon after moving into my house, I sit in my driveway on my motel chair reading *Love in the Ruins* when a convoy of identical electric carts, bumper to bumper, jostles by. The old men are two to a cart. Each waves at me. They wear the funny hats and gloves with straps and cut-outs. It is the start of a scramble tournament. The participants disperse to all the tees to start play simultaneously instead of launching one after another at the first hole. The motors sizzle and hum as they head up the hill and drift around the corner. Here they use the public street, but down by the ninth tee, they can slide onto the network of asphalt paths built for the carts. As the string of carts trundles past, I can see through the trees out to other convoys creeping slowly onto the back nine in the distance. It takes minutes to witness this slow parade. The clubs clank on the rough roadway. I can tell the old men are anxious, ready for the contest to come. They laugh and slap the backs of their partners, doff their hats. Then they are gone, rounding the curve by the ophthalmologist's house. After a while, an air horn sounds down by the clubhouse signaling the start of simultaneous play. The neighbors say they once used a shotgun, its report echoing off the cement of the lock and dam, but now they use the airhorn.

7.

My house at 29 Country Club Hills is built on fill. My lawn runs down hill to fall off into a ravine which runs with water when it rains and where English ivy and Virginia creeper, poison ivy and honeysuckle boil up to entwine the cyclone fence enclosing my backyard. Where my house sits must have once been air over a wider gulch. My street crosses the ravine over a culvert that drains the water out into the golf course. On the other side of the ravine, tucked behind a little redoubt, is the clutch of buildings owned by the country club. From where I sit in my metal motel chair, I can just see the end of the corrugated metal covering the pole barn where they store the golf carts. Once, on the shady road above the culvert, a snapping turtle the size of a manhole cover lounged for an afternoon. The golf carts steered cautiously around him. At night I dream of this house washing away. When it rains, it rains tropically. The old seamed gutters of the house are clogged by pine straw. Water sheets down the driveway, the street. The red dirt turns to a red slip that glazes everything with a powdery rust.

8.

Every morning, I watch my neighbor, an old woman tending her grandson, take a walk. She carries a bucket in the hand not holding the hand of the child who toddles beside her. She looks for lost balls in the rough and in the lawns of the houses adjacent to the golf course. She finds them in the piles of pine straw left curbside for the city to pick up on Mondays with the other yard debris. On the weekend she sits on the curb across the road from the ninth tee with the bucket of scrounged balls she has washed and polished and sells them to the golfers as they play through. The golfers have had a few beers by then, and they have lost a few balls that my neighbor will find tomorrow or the day after. So even though it is frowned on by the club, they buy a couple or three back from her. I see them groggily examine the balls' branding and check for the nicks and deep smiles cut in the dimpled surface before they flip their choices in the air as if to test the aerodynamics. Then they reach into their pockets.

9.

On Mondays, the club is closed. There are signs tacked on the pine tree trunks bordering the course saying that what you are looking at is private property and that there is no trespassing. Black kids from the neighborhoods next to our strip of genteel cottages ignore the signs, and each Monday morning, in foursomes themselves, lugging tackle, bait buckets, lunch baskets, and plastic pails they use as creels, they wander out onto the course. They fish the water hazards and the runoff ditches and then work their way over to the river, catching catfish mostly. At night returning, they stop to show me that day's string of fish, and tell me the story once again about the alligators that once lived on the course and might live there still.

10.

When I first moved to Alabama, I was asked if I played golf. Little did I know then I would find a house next to the country club. No, I told them, I don't play. That's a shame, they said, since you can play here nine months out of the year. They laughed and continued. Just not in June, July, or August. In the summer the green of the grass of the fairways is leeched away by the sun. Action on the course all but disappears. Young boys in big hats who carry, on their rounded backs, big awkward bags of jangling clubs, trudge over the bleached hills. Lessons and league play. They hit skimming shots that skip along the placid seared surface of the grass and steaming cart paths, ricocheting like stones on the mirage ponds generated by the heat. I have fled indoors. My motel chair is chilled by the air conditioning. I read a book in the living room, look up from time to time through the glaring picture window. The course shimmers through the trees.

11.

Very early each morning the greenskeeper's men start their work grooming the course, changing the pin positions on the greens, raking pine straw from the bunkers. There is a parade of Dr. Suess vehicles streaming out from the compound of metal buildings down the road. Converted electric carts stuffed with hand tools where golfers would stow their clubs putter about. Other carts haul wagons heaped with sugar-fine sand to replenish the hazards or fill up the divots on the tees. There are sousaphone shaped machines used to blow the leaves and bark from the fairways. There are mowers of all types, their gangly gang of twisted blades daintily suspended by means of wires and pulleys for running at full speed on the public road to get to the part of the course where yesterday they left off cutting. Later, I'll see the half-sized tractors creeping along, trailed by a train of fidgety reels v-ed behind the hitch. My favorite contraptions are the donkey motors, big engines with handle bars and their mowing decks thrust out ahead like a cow catcher. Their drivers, steering, stand behind on tiny, almost invisible platforms like the musher on a dog sled. I love the illusion of this levitation, the careless, effortlessly floating men, slaloming between the neat rows of long-leafed pine. Men, on foot nearer by, sweep the borders of the rough and the underbrush with hand implements angled like golf clubs. They swing the weed whackers, motorized scythes, as fluidly as the golfers practicing approach shots, pitches, chips. Back and forth, back and forth. The puny engines making an insect sawing. The men work their ways back to the club house, the various pitches of their small engines sputtering out, the course groomed, before the first tee time.

12.

The realtor showing me this house asked if I was going to join the country club. "It's very reasonable," she said. She thought its proximity was a real selling point. "I don't golf," I said. That wasn't the only thing happening at the club, she continued. She mentioned the tennis courts and the pool. "There's a new chef in the dining room, and a whole mess of folks just belong for the food." And then she wistfully recalled the dances on the terrace in the summers. And later that summer, after I moved in, I did hear the old band music drifting over from the verandas and patios. The club, she told me, was here long before the houses were built. They built the houses after the war. It was a new idea then. It was glorious. Those dances are reported in *Stars Fell on Alabama*, a book I read that first year while sitting in the driveway. Sitting in my metal chair beneath the stars, I hear the bubbles of old dance melodies down at the club. I do hear, on breezy summer weekend nights, the murmur of the dancers, the occasional guffaw, and the suggestion of chiming glass. A kind of lullaby.

13.

If the weather is right, the smell of cracked oil and vulcanized rubber creeps up the valley along the river from the factories beyond the golf course. Some days it seems to have bonded chemically with the humidity, locked into the still air, and the reek lingers, impossible to get used to, a kind of aromatic film. Other days there is just a hint, a few long strands of molecules, carbon cooking, dispersed within a breath of breeze as it freshens. Friends visiting those days stop mid-sentence, nostrils flaring. "Someone," they say, "must be tarring a roof somewhere." Our roofs are never tight enough. Osmosis. The smells saturate the house. Something has been left on the stove. The stove has been left on. Something is burning.

14.

Sirens go off over at the club. There is sheet lightning in the distance. The golf course is crowded with players who, interrupted by the warning, reluctantly make their ways back to the clubhouse to get out of the rain. Bolts of lightning have been known to travel miles looking for the conductive synapse of a golfer, clad in metal spikes and gripping a 5 iron, to enter the ground. The rain now begins to sheet and the low ground fills immediately with the gray layers of run off. I can see the lightning walking up the river, the green carts scurrying beneath the lowering clouds and the tendrils of sparks. A train, lit up and sounding its horn, wades through the course against the stream of carts flowing back to the club. Heaven spoiled by heaven.

15.

A neighbor has told me that when Wallace built the new courthouse downtown the rubble from the old Beaux Arts one was hauled out here and dumped into the ravine behind my house. Scattered on the viney floor of the gorge, covered with vines, are the remnants of capitals carved with acanthus leaves, fluted column drums, defaced faces of Justice and Law, rusting escutcheons and cracked hinges from the old wooden doors. Melting marble steps. Drifts of fragmented letters and words. Gargoyles sunk in the mud. I can't get up the nerve to work my way down into there, though I think about it often. Perhaps my neighbor is fooling with me. Through the links of my chain link fence I peer into the jungle canopy that roils up out of the ravine. Nothing and everything.

16.

In the winter, the grounds crew stacks canvas tarps on wooden pallets next to the greens. On the nights there might be a freeze, they spread out the tarps on the greens to protect the grass. In the morning, the canvases are white with frost, the fabric stiff from the cold, frozen in undulating waves, a meringue. In the morning, as the sun warms the course, the crew folds up the tarps again, revealing the brilliant green greens in their organic organ shapes set in the still frost-white fairways. The crew goes from one hole to the next, the first foursomes playing patiently behind them.

17.

A deer came with the house. It is life-sized and painted. Over the years its cement flesh has rotted. The iron tendon of its rear leg is exposed and rusted. The velvet of his antlers has worn away leaving the branches of corroded rebar. In the spring and summer the deer is enveloped by the creepers and vines which clad him in a kind of topiary coat he sheds in fall. I see his flat, staring eye fix on me as I lounge in my metal chair in the driveway. The deer seems alive because the foliage around him is alive. He seems to move since the setting he poses in transforms day to day. Or maybe he is moving. He is being tugged on by the ivy, bullied by the tendrils, slightly shifted over time, sifting into the forest behind him. A visitor will be surprised, mistake the deer for a real deer surprised by the visitor. I watch them watch each other. Both hold perfectly still, waiting for the other's next move.

18.

Through the picture window, I can see through the trees to the ninth green where golfers in pastel outfits and oversized hats take turns putting. Behind me is another vista. The long wall of the living room is wallpapered with a mural which depicts, in three colors, an elegant antebellum mansion set on a rolling plantation sward. The edges of the house are smudged by ivy and draped with wisteria. The weeping trees are bearded with moss. There are no people in the picture, so it is hard to say if the picture represents a ruin or not. It attempts to capture, I think, in its gestural, impressionistic style the indigenous Romantic nostalgia which hereabouts is so deeply layered. You would think the wallpaper is just another example of that longing. But look closer. It's easy to miss. In the front lawn of the ancient house is the green puddle of a putting green and in its center a vertical brush stroke which, at first, you thought was meant to be a sapling or an indication of the breeze, but now upon closer inspection turns out to be a pin, its checkered flag snapping in an invisible wind.

Randall Curb

Liam

> "The Soul selects her own Society—
> Then shuts the Door—"
> Emily Dickinson

Liam is a County Wicklow man. He did not introduce himself to me as such, and when he boarded the train at Arklow I didn't know which Irish county I was travelling through. But in a pub in Galway I had met a "Limerick man" and in Killarney a "County Clare" man, the geography immediately following their Christian names in the hail-fellow handshakes we exchanged. There was no initial handshake between Liam and me, no formal camaraderie. I didn't even learn his name until shortly before we parted, a little over an hour after we had met. As the train pulled into the Dublin station, I fished a scrap of paper out of my shirt pocket, handed him a pen, and asked for his address. In a heavy, childlike scrawl, he wrote "Liam Hayes," a street and number, and the lovely words "Arklow, Co. Wicklow, Eire."

That was in the summer of 1993. I have not heard from Liam since, and there is little reason I should. I wrote him several times that year, from England and my home in Alabama, but it was evident from early in our conversation that he would not turn out to be a letter writer. I didn't mind. I might still be writing to him today—about ordinary things like the weather and holidays and the deaths of relatives—but I suspect he is no longer in Arklow. That, at least, is my intuition. But wherever he is, he is still a County Wicklow man. Some people wear place like a birthmark. Of no race is this more true than the Irish.

No longer writing Liam does not mean I have stopped thinking of him. No, hardly a week goes by that I don't write him a few sentences in my head. His name will bubble into conscious thought without the merest cue, and I will hear again the soft way he pronounced it: "Lee-uhm Hace." I have forgotten the names of the Limerick man and the man from County Clare, though both were friendly and engaging, as Irishmen in pubs usually are. The Limerick man, who liked to dance, was a bit mad I think, and the Clare man adamantly preferred Murphy's stout to Guinness. Their faces are lost to me now, and the timbre of their voices, and one day they will slip out of my memory altogether, and I won't know they were ever there at all.

About Liam, there are many things I remember: his solitary self-containment on that bustling morning train, his furrowed brow, his liquid eyes, his bashfulness. When he took the seat directly across from me and said "Good morning" in a rusty voice that I imagined, wrongly, he was using for the first time that day, I sensed immediately that he was kind. If I had discovered later that he had picked my pocket, or learned that he had killed a man, I would still tell you he was kind.

I was concluding a near circular tour of Ireland, begun three weeks before in Dublin and now returning there. I had met the train in Enniscorthy, in County Wexford, where I'd spent one disappointing day and night. I'd had to take a taxi to catch the early train. At the station platform I encountered a woman with shabby clothes, bad teeth, a facial tic, and thick, rolled-down stockings. She looked me over (perhaps she'd heard me speak inside the station) and said, "You're an Amerikene, aren't ye?"

I told her yes, I was, and I lived in the South.

"Oh darlin'," she said "Can ye tell me about Graceland?"

I was too sleepy to lie—I've never even been to Memphis—though I think I know enough about the place to have given her some satisfaction. After that I sensed she was a bit disgusted with me. Her silent indictment was that I was a fool to have flown all the way to Ireland when the shrine of Elvis was practically in my backyard. Still, she let me take her picture, seemed flattered to be asked. She was traveling to Dublin too, to visit her daughter, who was having a birthday. In a torn shopping bag she carried a large gift-wrapped package. She had no luggage. Once we got on the train I never saw her again; I knew she had disappeared into a smoking car. A burning cigarette dangles from her hand in the picture of her I took.

I have a photograph of Liam as well. I took it from three feet away, with him directly facing me, just before the train pulled into the Dublin station. Every few months I take down the album of this journey and look at it. His right arm rests at the elbow on the little table between us. His right cheek rests on the closed hand, the knuckles, of that arm. He is leaning slightly forward and looking directly into the camera. He wears a blue, heavy cotton shirt with two placketed breast pockets. A fringe of white undershirt shows at the base of his neck. He has a large Adam's apple, and his ears seem unusually big also. His oiled hair is more red than brown and is brushed away from his forehead in a kind of unconsidered pompadour. His thickish eyebrows are exactly the color of his hair. His face is long and narrow, his chin coming to a point indicating, arrow-like, the Adam's apple in his slender throat. He is unshaven, and his sprouting mustache is redder than his hair. His eyes are filmy and pensive and blue—the color not of the gray-green Irish Sea so close to us but of Galway Bay. They give him a somber look, and he does not smile. I feel that if I continued to stare at those eyes I would soon fall asleep.

Perhaps Liam chose to sit with me because I too looked pensive. Maybe he thought I was the kind of person who wouldn't bother him by talking too much, because maybe, in the beginning, he had not planned to talk beyond his "Good morning." Did he suspect I was an American before I spoke? There were other vacant seats nearby. Did he think it might be interesting to sit with an American? No, I don't think he was as deliberate as that. He simply sat where he sat, next to a window, opposite a stranger.

I don't remember who spoke first after we'd exchanged hellos. I believe I did. Since it was early, I believe I asked him if he'd had a good night's sleep. He looked so rumpled and tired. He said he'd slept all right but his children had wakened him before six, running into his bedroom and flinging themselves on top of him and the bedclothes because they knew he would be leaving by seven. There were five children altogether, I learned. He was twenty-six and had married at seventeen. He was a house painter and handy man who hadn't worked for a while. He was going to a government office in the capital to discuss a renewal of his unemployment compensation. He looked care-worn and hungry, and I found myself wondering if he'd had any breakfast.

He did not ask me where I was from, nor why I had come to Ireland, nor where I was going. He didn't comment on the chill or the mist of the foggy morning, so bleak, to my mind, for July. Instead he looked at the monocular I always wear around my neck when I am traveling and asked, "Do you use that to help you see?"

I am legally blind, but I had not told him anything about myself, and few people notice my limited vision at the beginning of a casual meeting. Sometimes the device I wear like a necklace is mistaken for a tiny camera, and I have been stopped for questioning by security watchers in museums and galleries. Liam, however, had asked the right, perceptive thing; I can't see so much as a traffic light without holding my little telescope up to my right eye. So I answered, "Yes, I'm partially sighted," a phrase I'd found more commonly used in England and Ireland than our "legally blind" or "visually impaired."

"My dad was completely blind in his last years," Liam said. "I stayed with him, the two of us, after my mother died. Until I got married, that is. Then he went to a home. He died last year, my dad." I said I was sorry, and he was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Are you losing your eyesight or are you . . . ?"

"My condition is pretty stable," I told him. "I have lost only a little additional sight since I was born. The problem is inherited and occurs in the optic nerve. It comes down through my mother's side of the family."

"Do you have any children of your own?"

"No," I said. "I've never married. I have a sister whose eyesight is perfect, 20/20. It skips around. But she has no children either."

I figured he was wondering if I were afraid to marry and have children, but he didn't ask and I didn't tell him. Instead he went back to talking about his father, whom he spoke of with devotion and reverence. It was clear to me he was still grieving. Then he said:

"It's hard to find work in my little town. It's hard everywhere in Ireland. Some of my cousins have emigrated. One is in the States, I'm not sure where."

"Have *you* ever thought of leaving?" I asked.

"Did leave. Two years ago. Went to London. A mate had some work for me there. It's a terrible, unfriendly city. Dirty. Too many people. I had to live with squatters in a place called Brixton. I couldn't bear it. I came home a couple of months later. I don't ever want to go back there. I was miserable."

I decided not to tell him how much I love London. My London—the National Gallery, the theatre, the parks, friends in Kensington and Chelsea—is on another planet from a squat in Brixton. I had been there once and knew.

"So you came home."

"I came home. I don't want to leave Ireland. I love my country, my wife, my family. But it's hard."

I asked him for his children's names, and he gave them to me in order of their births. I can't recall all five, though I believe one was Kathleen and another Tom. I wish I did know them, all of them. His wife's name, he said, was Mary.

He talked a bit more about his father and the pain he had endured from arthritis and other ailments. The memory of that pain made his words come more slowly. Eventually he came to the funeral, and the Church. He told me he still went to Mass, though not so often as he once had. He said his mother had almost become a nun. I said, "You believe in God," in a way that was part observation, part question.

"Yes," he said. Nothing more. No qualification, no lament against the Vatican, no disclaimer. No "Do you?" Although I do not believe, not any more, I didn't answer the question he didn't ask. I said, "Good. That's good. Faith can be difficult these days."

"I want my children to grow up the way I did. Mary takes them on Sundays when I don't go. Mary loves the Church. She loves taking them there, even the littlest ones."

And so he talked of Mary, and I told him a little bit about my family, my hometown, Alabama. I asked him if he would like to visit America someday.

"Maybe," he said. "I'm not sure. It's so big. I wouldn't know where to start. New York scares me."

He listened as I made suggestions, places that might appeal to his wife and children. He nodded, but we both knew he couldn't afford such a trip, not for seven people. I felt that his mind couldn't really light on something as vast and foreign as America, not on this drizzly morning in a train bound for Dublin. He had more pressing concerns.

As we began to view the dismal south Dublin environs from our shared window, I asked him if I could take his picture. He answered, very matter-of-factly, "Okay." He didn't change expressions, lift his shoulders, adjust his collar, put a hand to his hair. So when I look at the photograph today I know I am seeing Liam plain.

He had only a duffel bag with him, sitting at his feet, probably containing a sack lunch. But once we were ready to leave the train I had to collect two suitcases from the baggage compartment. Before we stepped down to the platform he took one of them, the larger and heavier. I told him the guest house to which I was returning was only a few blocks away, and though the case he held was stuffed with books and sweaters I'd bought in Killarney and Cork I assured him I could manage. But he noted that I wouldn't have a free hand for my monocular, which I might need for crossing streets. And so he kept a firm grip on the heavy bag as I walked beside him, directing our route.

We didn't talk as we walked to the guest house. There was little traffic, and I probably wouldn't have needed my spyglass after all. But he told me if a car was approaching. We both have long legs, strode briskly, and got there in a matter of minutes.

Outside the door we met the proprietor, who welcomed me back and took the suitcase I was carrying. I took the other from Liam and in the next moments asked him to write his address on the piece of paper I'd found. Afterwards I thanked him and wished him luck. I said I would send him a postcard from England; I was flying into Heathrow in two days. He smiled and said, "That'll be nice." Going down the steps from the hotel door to the pavement he said, "So. Goodbye. It was good to meet you. Take care."

As soon as I responded in kind he began to walk toward O'Connell Street. In a moment he would be out of sight. I held the monocular up to my eye to get a last look at him, one which, otherwise, would have been beyond my ken. Then I looked at the paper and discovered his name.

*

Twenty years ago, when I was a graduate student in Alabama, I walked each morning from my apartment to the small local post office half a mile away. One hot day in early summer, after I gratefully entered the air-conditioned building, I saw an elderly black lady, gnarled and stooped, who was standing at a counter with what I came to see was her checkbook. She was obviously having trouble writing. Her fingers were stiff and swollen as they clutched a ball-point pen.

"Young man," she said to me. "Could you he'p me a minute?"

I approached her and asked what I could do. She wanted me to fill out the check, to a utility company, as she instructed me; then, she said, she would sign it herself. I did as I was told, and she thanked me. When she wrote her name, with a halting, palsied hand, the letters were printed and large. "Cora Pankey" were the two words. She straightened up slowly, clearly pleased to have this task accomplished. I put the check in the envelope for her, sealed it, and dropped it in the drop-slot nearby. Again she thanked me, and I went to check my box.

When I started toward the door a moment later, I saw that she was again bent over the counter, fumbling with some papers. I asked if I could assist her in any way. She looked up and said, "Honey, could you open these two pieces of mail for me?"

"Sure," I said, taking them from her and slitting each one open with the tip of my pen. They appeared to be bills or advertisements. I handed them back to her, and without looking at their contents she put them into her big navy-blue purse. Then she looked at me again.

"Thank you. You're a nice young man," she said. "You must be a student at the college. Well, I hope you're happy."

At the time I was deeply unhappy, but I said, "Yes, ma'am, I'm doing fine. Looks like hot summertime's here already, doesn't it?"

I pushed open the heavy glass door for her. She became more erect and stepped out, her right hand holding onto her walking stick for dear life, her left clutching the purse. "Thank you," she said, and began to turn to the left; my route was in the opposite direction. I stopped and said, "Before I go back towards campus, is there anything else I could do for you?"

"Yes," she said, without hesitation. She turned her head slightly to address me more directly. Her stick was planted firmly on the sidewalk. "Every once in a while, you pray for Miz Pankey."

"Yes ma'am, I will," I told her, and she said, "I thank you."

We turned our backs to each other and walked home.

*

I now find I cannot easily call on the God both Mrs. Pankey and I believed in back then. What passes, perhaps, for prayer, as I lie in bed at night waiting for sleep, is a litany without preface or amen. The words are never exactly the same from night to night as I haven't committed the list to memory. Whatever follows, however, "Mother" and "Daddy" are first, though my father is gone from me now. The other names include both the living and the dead, and some who could, for all I know, be either. "Janice," I say. "Andrew." "Sarah . . . Benjamin . . . Norman . . . Joan . . . Rob . . . Evelyn . . . Aunt Grace . . . Nancy . . . Amelia . . . Grandmamma . . . Joe . . . Fern . . .Tim . . . Diana . . . Julyan . . . Madeleine . . .Kenneth . . . Derrick . . . Delphine . . . Gérard . . . Mrs. Pankey . . . Adelaide . . . Mary . . . Liam . . . ."

Kelly Cherry

Self and Strangeness

I waited for my high school history teacher to assign World War Two, but I waited in vain. We were somewhere in the Oklahoma Dust Bowl when the school year came to a close.

Later on, after I'd learned a little more history, I decided my teacher had probably intentionally avoided World War Two because she didn't know how, or was afraid, to talk about race and culture. My high school was in the South.

Now, still later on, and seeing how my own students think that the Vietnam War is history whereas to me it is a still-present part of my life, I think maybe World War Two just was not yet historical to my young teacher.

I attended a county high school in Virginia when Virginia was ranked second from the bottom in public education. My biology teacher, a bachelor who tooled around in a red convertible, was fired for teaching the theory of evolution. The guidance counselor asked me what I wanted to be. "I like writing, science, and drama," I said.

"Oh," she beamed, "why don't you write science fiction for television?"

As it happened, my parents didn't purchase a television until the summer after my first year in college. I was killing the summer at home before transferring to the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, which was mostly my mother's idea. I used to stay up late reading the catalogues of colleges I was not allowed to apply to: Vassar and Swarthmore were my favorites, but my parents thought it would be foolish to spend that much money on a school where all you would be doing was reading. You could read for free in a library.

One night, after we had the television set and before I left for New Mexico, and having sadly put the college catalogues away, I stayed up to watch an old movie that had Gregory Peck in it.

The movie, based on a book, was *Gentlemen's Agreement.* In it, a Gentile reporter pretends to be a Jew in order to discover and expose anti-Semitism in the community. I found the movie disturbing, and instead of going to bed I slept downstairs in the living room, curled up in the wing chair, the better to catch my father before he left for work in the morning. I woke up when I heard him come down the stairs. "Dad," I asked, even before he could get to the kitchen, "what is a Jew?"

Of course, I sort of knew what a Jew was. But why were people so mean to them?

In our family, *Jew* was synonymous with *smart. Jew* was synonymous with *good musician.*

Perhaps a writer thinking about race in the South is expected to address the relation between black and white people, but I want to start here, with Jews.

I had known some black people. My best friend when we lived for five years up North was a black girl named Mary Elizabeth. In her bedroom, Mary Elizabeth had one of the most wondrous objects I had so far seen in my life, a bank in the shape of an owl. The owl had big wise eyes, and when you dropped a penny in the back of its head, the eyes opened even wider and briefly lit up. Mary Elizabeth and I would spend an entire afternoon putting a single penny in, making the owl blink, shaking the bank to make the penny fall out onto the bed and then putting the same penny back in.

And when my family moved back South, spending the first year in a tenant house on a farm, my sister and I tried to make friends with the black girls from the other tenant house but they chased us off the dirt road and called us names because—well, my sister and I didn't know why. They just didn't like or approve of us. We were poorer than they, so they may have dismissed us as "white trash," except they didn't merely dismiss or *diss* us, they threw sticks and stones. At six and nine, my sister and I didn't realize they might have other reasons. All we knew was that they weren't at all like Mary Elizabeth, who had been fun to be with and liked to play paper dolls and came to my one and only birthday party.

But I had never known a Jew, or at least had never known I knew a Jew, and, as I say, I also had never got to the end of the history book. I trailed my father into the kitchen, where he made himself a cup of coffee. Before instant coffee became widely available, he used to mail-order coffee from Louisiana so he could get it with chicory. "Dad," I asked, while he was still blowing on his coffee to get it cool enough to drink, "what, exactly, is a concentration camp?"

Within two months of this conversation, I was engaged to a Jewish graduate student at New Mexico Tech. He was doing research in atmospheric physics. Instead of an engagement ring he gave me a piece of lightning trapped in a plastic cube.

Don't ask me what this meant or even how he got the lightning inside the cube, or if he did or if "lightning trapped in a plastic cube" was shorthand for some kind of scientific experiment—I was still just a sophomore, studiously drawing vectors in my physics-lab notebook, and I knew only that, one way or another, I possessed a thunderbolt. I believed a thunderbolt, even encased in plastic, was superior to a ring any day.

This engagement lasted, I think, one week, but it made an impression on me, so that when I was, myself, in graduate school, in North Carolina, and a young Jewish artist named Jonathan Silver appeared on the scene, I got engaged again, and this time there was a wedding.

It was sparsely attended, because Jonathan's family disowned him for marrying me. Naturally, my father then threatened to punch out his father. Jonathan's brother conferred with my brother. His mother sent best wishes but stayed away, just as her husband had ordered her to. My mother wondered how any mother could be such a wimp. In the midst of all this, Jonathan and I were pronounced man and wife, borrowed my father's car to drive off in, and checked into the Honeymoon Suite at the Thomas Jefferson Hotel in downtown Richmond. That night, we were hit by a blizzard, and the next day, on the way back, we drove into a ditch.

Which is pretty much what you could say about the whole marriage.

A couple of weeks before the wedding, while Jonathan and I were sitting at the kitchen table at my parents' house in Richmond, my mother had said she thought he and I should be apprised of a situation we might face. She disappeared into the dining room, rummaged through a drop-leaf desk, and returned with the deed to the house. This particular house was the fourth and last one my parents had in Richmond, the one they'd saved all their money for. "Read this," my mother said, pointing to the small print.

Property in that subdivision, which had been annexed to the city of Richmond, was, it seemed, under no circumstances to be sold or leased to *non-Aryan* persons.

"On one hand," my mother said, "it doesn't mean anything and everyone knows it doesn't mean anything. It's a common clause, irrelevant to any real situation. On the other hand, it means, and everyone knows it means, that black people are not allowed to live here. Who knows what it could mean, if someone tested it? And on the third hand, it means, even if nobody has ever thought about this, that the two of you would not be allowed to buy a house here either."

My mother did not say this to scare us. She was an energetic soul who liked nothing better than a good fight. She was not interested in keeping up with the Joneses, because she had only contempt for the Joneses. Nobody ever told *her* what to do. For example, it was about this time that my parents were invited to attend a choral concert at an all-black church in downtown Richmond. The invitation was a considerable honor. Members of the church wanted to say thanks for the courageous way my parents had represented them in insurance transactions.

My mother finished her speech. Then, having exactly zero money and no expectation of owning a home anywhere, Jonathan and I laughed simultaneously.

"I just wanted you to know what you're getting into," my mother said.

Perhaps we still didn't know *that*, but though Jonathan and I laughed my mother had succeeded in making us realize, with a sudden sharpness, what it means to be a second-class citizen. The feeling reminded me of College Day for High School Students, which was held at the good school inside the city limits. I'd managed to get a ride, skipping classes at my county school. I was fifteen, and another of the colleges I dreamed of was Princeton—because that was where the Institute for Advanced Study was, and the Institute was where Einstein was. I went up to the Princeton booth. Teen-aged boys and blazered college reps looked at me as if I were crazy. I stated my mission. The boys and the reps hooted. If it had not been so un-Princetonian, they would have slapped their khaki-clad thighs. "A girl!" they said. "A girl wants to go to Princeton!"

These things—race, gender, class—become so mixed up that it's impossible to separate them out. Did Jonathan seem to me an ally against a world of WASP privilege? Was I drawn to him out of, in part, a sense of guilt for the transgressions of history? Did we founder because I was angry with a category of human beings—men—for having control over my life? Or because I was, amazingly, too *obedient* to him, this one individual man, relinquishing control (for that was also true, to my mother's distress)?

A writer raises these questions in disguised ways, weaving them into the very fabric of her fabrications. All my novels are somewhat about money, or the lack thereof. Two unpublished novels wrestle with issues of racial integration, and one published novel, *Augusta Played*, treats of, among other things, Judaism. In every fictional work, there is for the writer the problem of point of view. Whose point of view will she use, and why?

At the outset of *The Second Sex*, which remains and will remain an extraordinary book no matter how many revisionist biographies of its author may be published, Simone de Beauvoir states, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought," remarking that the duality of Self and Other was not, in the beginning, sexed.

But for a writer, Self and Other *are* sexed. (And one means, here, *sexed* and not merely *gendered.*) A writer, obliged to select a point of view, has to choose between a male and a female point of view or else write something extremely experimental. When I look back at the poems and fictions I wrote before I began to publish much, I find that most of them adopted a male point of view. A sinister male protagonist named Dev chills a young female character's heart with his erotic nihilism. A sinister red-headed male protagonist goes to Mexico for the Day of the Dead and experiences a Thomas Mann-like baring of his essential self. A younger, but still sinister, male protagonist who lives out in the country paints his more-or-less-oblivious (she's very sound asleep) pregnant wife a bright orange. An even younger male protagonist, named Rubicon Bright because he is smart and has a Rubicon to cross, is not himself sinister but everyone around him is. And *he* probably *will* be, when he crosses that Rubicon.

Recently I stumbled across this shrewd observation by Joanna Russ, who is speaking about the female writer writing from a male point of view:

> She is an artist creating a world in which persons of her kind cannot be artists, a consciousness central to itself creating a world in which women have no consciousness, a successful person creating a world in which persons like herself cannot be successes. She is a self trying to pretend that she is a different Self, one for whom her own self is Other.

I wish someone, maybe that high-school guidance counselor, had explained that to me in time to spare me a lot of wasted effort, wasted because it was effort I put into writing falsehood rather than fiction. And yet, and yet. What young writer can fail to be thrilled by the magnificent aim of renouncing the Self for the sake of the expression of the Other? Keats, we all know, located greatness in "*Negative Capability,...*when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." For Keats, a great writer was one who was willing to forego a point of view in order to render other points of view fully.

Here, then, are two poles of thought, and these days it may sometimes seem that a writer, especially a female writer, is being asked to hang herself between them. A female writer wants to imagine the world as it may exist for an Other—a male self, or a black or Jewish self, perhaps a self whose economic background is unlike her own. She wants to do this because she wants to know a wide world and she wants to know it intimately, and because she comes to understand her own point of view better by understanding other points of view, but also because fiction is, first of all, fiction. Fiction *is* falsehood, and what was wrong with my sinister male protagonists was simply that they were incompletely imagined. I didn't know a lot about men, and I knew even less about sinisterness. It will seem ironic, to a female writer wanting to seize the same rights to ambition as have been traditionally granted to the male writer, that contemporary critics of literature condemn her for "appropriating" experience that "belongs" to someone else. A writer is told she must not explore the experience of people whose skin color differs from hers.

An American writer is told she must not explore third-world experience. Sylvia Plath is anathematized for attempting what, in a kinder light, may be seen as a very young writer's empathic, if arguably clumsy, memorialization of Holocaust experience. Experience becomes a boutique commodity, something like a pair of designer shoes, and nobody gets to walk in anybody else's shoes.

And yet and yet. The woman writer wants to be faithful to her own consciousness, for her experience *is* different from anyone else's and especially from men's experience. She agrees that she has a special responsibility to convey her experience precisely because it has for so long been marginalized and may therefore, unless she takes steps to see that it is not, be overlooked. History imposes obligations, of which this seems to her to be one. Moreover, experience, her experience, has taught her that if she is not careful she may dissolve her Self in the acids of desire, wanting always to be who or what she is not. There is a longing to escape the Self that is so great that it may appear to be a kind of philosophy when, really, it is only boredom, frustration, or self-contempt. A writer must find a way to be both true to herself and free of herself.

Here is everything I know, whether it is sufficient or not, about how this is to be done: To begin with, the writer needs to acquire mastery of techniques, and in my opinion, the more techniques the better. The goal is a confidence that permits forgetfulness: The writer can focus her attention on her subject. And in the second place, a writer needs to deepen her acquaintance with this self of hers with which she is seeking to establish a working relationship. If she does, she will find that, no matter how different the Other, at first glance, seems, it is inevitably the Self that is lastingly exotic, sometimes alienating, and, for sure, as strange as an unidentified species. It is the Self, protean and, so to speak, submarine, that tempts us to dangerous, unfathomable depths. Here we encounter a solitude as huge as if it contained creation and as local, concentrated, and unrelieved as if all the layers of creation weighed on it. Nearly, but not quite, overwhelmed, we reach out to an Other to share an identity.

Philip Stephens

Blue Rose Motel

They ducked out of the rain blown off the gutter.
The door clicked shut. "Shh. Listen," Helen said.

"To what?" Ward said, but Helen scanned the room.

Let's just go on."

"You said stop. So I stopped.
Did you want something swank between Des Moines
And Kansas City?" Helen bit her lip.
"Oh, c'mon. What's the matter now? I mean,
All I said was I wished you hadn't told me
This thing you told me before we made the trip.
Then you got mad."

"Why shouldn't I? You're scared
Of what your folks'll think."

"No. All I said
Was that I thought it would be easier
To take this visit, not knowing what I know."

"Why can't you say it, Ward?"

"Look, I can say it.
But this is not the time to have it out.
My parents find out how you are, they'll think—"
"I know what they'll think. They'll think some white trash
Has got her money-grubbing claws in you.
I don't care what they think. I care what you think."

Ward turned, and curtains strung across the doorway
Behind the counter bellied up and split,
Unveiling a thick-gutted man who stuck

His uppers out, then sucked them back and scowled:
"You need a room? Or you just want directions?"

"A room," Ward said.

"Reason I ask you that
Is ain't nobody stops." The old man passed
A pen and form to Ward, then took his card.
From back where Helen waited, she could glimpse,
Between the gaping curtains, TV light –
First peach, then pink, red, brown, the closeup shot,
Or so it seemed, of some exotic flower.
"My wife, she said the sky was heavy here,
That's why nobody'd stop. She wasn't right
Up in her head, though. Lord, a night like this
Would make her crazy as a shithouse rat."

"What's that?" said Helen.

Ward looked up. "What's what?"

"That screaming."

"I don't hear a thing."

"I do."

"This old boy keeps a mare across the four-lane.
She's foaling."

"Does he know that?" Helen said.
The old man stared. "I mean, what if she's narrow?
What if her colt's breach?"

"You some farm-fed girl?"
The old man said. Ward didn't speak to that;
He kept his head down, filling out the forms
While Helen focused on the TV screen,
Glimpsing robed women kneeling on a stage.
They gripped another woman who was naked
And struggling as a black man mounted her.

Ward passed the form back, and the old man's teeth
Clicked as he said, "My wife begged me to call
This place The Green Rose, but there's no such thing.
'Somewhere there is,' she'd say. We come to find
There ain't no blue ones neither. Here's your key."

"I'll get the car," Ward said, then he was gone.

"I built us this blue rose," the old man said,
"Some thirty-foot high out of fiberglass
To draw the tourists in. Wind blew it down."

The old man stuck his lower plate toward Helen.
She looked away from him and saw the screen,
The woman balanced on a low trapeze
While men in crotchless tights were hoisted toward her.
Ward honked, and Helen turned, but out beyond
The four-lane, headlights cut across the field.

"Looks like they got that mare," the old man said.

Juliana Gray Vice

Noccalula Falls

They've made a park of it,
a trail bordered by dusty marigolds
leading to the falls, a respectable stream
tumbling over good Alabama marble—
more expensive than Italian, we're told—
frothing white for an instant,
then down the Coosa to Gadsden.

Water is water. More interesting the polished plaque:

how the Indian princess, Noccalula,
rather than marry at her father's command,
threw herself over the falls,
which he named for her in grief.

Even as visitors snap at the words,
something uneasy filters in,
even as the zoo's one shabby lion
behind two circles of chain-link
looms so dark and obsolete
that the developed shot will hold only outline
and the glint of an eye,

even then is something a lie
in history and its telling,
so much romance in the Mississippian wilderness,
a tragic tableau waiting to be engraved
and sold in London penny-dreadfuls,
sold to us now, here, paid for
by grim Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill.

We have the names, rolling syllables
older than maps:
Tuscaloosa, Etowah,
Choccolocco, Talladega, Cheaha,
Noccalula,

princess of ghosts.

Wyatt Prunty

A Child's Christmas in Georgia, 1953

Marching through Georgia to bed, he stopped, listened,
And heard, "While shepherds washed their socks by night."
Later, he sang the same skewed line off key,
And his parents howled; until getting it wrong,
He decided, beat getting it right.

But Christmas Eve they read about killing
The first-born, fleeing the land, and returning
By another country, till he couldn't sleep
And had to check so slipped from bed to stare
The darkened height by which the wise men steered.

Downstairs there were his mother's stacks of albums
And, mantle-high, her unblinking gallery
Of gold-framed graybeards gazing, and matriarchs
In black, scowling the generations back
Into place; and then there were the others,

His infant older brother who never
Came home, two cousins lost in war, an uncle
Who captained his ship over the flat world's edge,
And one fleece-lined pilot lost years now inside
The stilled weather of a relative's box camera.

And then there were the lines he'd heard in church,
"Pray that your flight may not be in winter,"
So that was how the pilot disappeared?
And "Woe to the pregnant and nursing," so
That explained his brother, or their mother?

There was one thing he knew by heart by now:
Rubella cooked, cleaned, and scolded her way

Through the house tuning the news and talking back,
Though she didn't vote, and said her baby
Died because he wouldn't come out in Georgia.

Still standing there and staring up, he pressed
His face till the cold glass fogged and hurt his nose,
Though there was only the street light yellowing
The side yard and his father's dormant garden
And the Talmadge's coiled drive and empty house.

So what were they singing about, the records
And radio? And why all these presents
When over drinks his parents grieved those missing?
What was given if you had to go away
And wound up framed like a silent question?

In the morning Rubella would light the stove;
The paper boy would whistle up Milledge,
Tossing the new day high over one hedge
Into another by the porch for parents
Who ignored their food and read to themselves.

So, still at the window, he studied the sky,
Figuring Pontius Pilate flew for Delta
And that the two parts to the Bible were
The Old and New Estimates, which like Christmas
You read out of the names of those missing.

Philip Stephens

Paradise, Missouri

I paced. I looked at thumbtacked prints of Christ
Down in the nursery of the Baptist Church:
Christ raising Lazarus, scolding disciples,
Or suffering children to come unto him.
My groomsmen sat, drank beer, and talked too much.
"When you got fitted for that tux," Josh said,
"Did you get fitted for a ball and chain?"
"Hey man, once you get married," David said,
"You won't believe how many chicks'll want you."
"We should have gone back out to Paradise,"
Ralph Yale said. "Like we did before my wedding."
"Don't tell this now," I said.

"Why not?" he said.
"We drove out to that shotgun shack Mike Hall had –
Liquor in troughs and bags of dope like snacks,
And God, there were these girls up from the lake.
Man of the hour here gets messed up so bad
He mashes with this one. Turns out she's married.
Hell, you'd been dating Julia, what? A year?"
"You're one to talk," I said. "You got married
Just one week later. What'd you do that night?"
"Yeah, yeah. So they're right by her husband's truck.
Course, hubby kicks the hell out of our boy,
Until Mike pulls him off, right?"

"I don't know."
Late amber light blazed through one window well,
The stink of perfume and soured milk grew strong,
And while they kept on about Paradise,
Its recent dam, its shotgun shacks, its store
Where we, as boys, bought stinkbait and tobacco,

Then went down to the river, I ignored them,
But when I tried to crack a window, saw
This print of Jesus in Gethsemane,
Down on his knees before the soldiers came
And Judas kissed his check and Peter lopped
The ear of Malchus off. And I recalled
She wasn't pretty. "He gets drunk," she'd said.
"He even hit me just for eating french fries
In his new truck. I bet you're not like that."
We'd leaned against an old outhouse in back,
Her lips against my neck, my hands inside
Her shirt, until she had me follow her.
Again, her lips, and then a shot of light
Ripped through my skull, and I dropped to the road
Taking kick after kick. All I could see
Was the lit billboard glaring near the store:
Last stop before the lake- liquor, bait,
And ammo.

"What was that girl's name?" Ralph said.
"I don't know," I said.

Then someone upstairs
Called, and my groomsmen stood, and we filed out
Into the sanctuary of cut flowers
And organ swells and fading, glass-stained light.

Philip Stephens

Stripper

Along the tourist strip up from the dam,
We two boys wandered, ogling storefront windows
Where leather goods and T-shirts hung like ducks,
And busts of Christ were chainsawed out of oak.
We passed the cage where freaks ate snakes, cages
Where men struck fastballs while their women waited.
We went to the arcade, played pinball, skeeball,
And eyed, back in the corner, a machine
The sign said we weren't old enough to touch.
And so my brother shoved a quarter in.
Above the rifle, this word—Stripper—pulsed.
Inside, a scratched slide of a woman glared.
One hand on her cocked hip, she smiled at us
Like she knew us but was oblivious of
The black dot on her arm at which my brother
Fired. When he missed, he fired again and struck.
A different woman, stripped of her blouse, gleamed.
A raucous volley followed. Each slide revealed
More and more women posed behind the glass,
Their hands on knees or breasts or reaching out,

Their faces grim or grinning as my brother
Took aim at every target, picking off
Hair ribbons, bra, skirt, shoes and stockings, garters,
Until one woman stood, stripped to her panties,
The target steady, her breasts thrust toward us in
A confrontation boys knew little of,
Her lips forming an O I thought voiced pain.
The last shot laid her down. The screen went black.
We hurried out the backdoor toward the darkness.
But then there were the cries of whippoorwills,
The docklights trembling on the distant lake,

A concrete walkway leading to a maze
Hacked out of hedges, a sprawling topiary
Where playful screams and cloying laughter rose
From couples who'd discovered they were lost.

Kevin McGowin

Ruins of Shacks

To begin, they were porous
to the wind, and their dirt floors
exhumed inch worms after a rain
just as any soil would be obliged

to do. I never actually knew
anybody who actually *lived* in one–
they've moved on, they're dead, they're
free. Time makes the most

of what earth has to offer:
a weathered board, shuffling on the wind,
of armies of shrubs piercing fences at
night, and covering the remains

with the trappings of the quick and the dead.
They used to pick cotton on this land,
and plow the fallow fields for summer;
they used to bake slow in the blackening sun

that old star with only so long left to live.
A hundred years ago it was, or a little more
perhaps: perhaps. And trees disrobe in autumn.
The soil sinks inchward by the year. And that's

what we forget: the soil, the soil.
The trees that outlive every southern spring.

Marlin Barton

Errands

During the summers as a boy, I liked to play out on the high front porch of the old wooden store my father owned in Riverfield. I'd watch while people pumped gas or went in to buy or just to socialize. Everybody knew Conrad Anderson's store. When the weather turned cold I'd play inside, ducking between the aisles or behind counters, pretending to hide from one or another enemy, and if I grew tired of games, there were always the grownups to sit and listen to. Their conversation didn't always make sense to me, but I still liked to listen. When I think about it, it seems as if I spent more time around adults than around other children.

Whenever Dr. Hannah came in I'd always stop playing. I loved to listen to him talk. His voice had a musical quality to it and his words came out as though they were climbing up and down a scale, but the scale's pattern was always changing, so you never knew quite how he would sound. Whenever he spotted me, he'd come up grinning and say, "Hello, little Conrad," his voice rising, hesitating, "been slaying any dragons today?" Then, somewhat lower, "Is all well in the kingdom? Or can you say?" Again, higher in pitch, the voice sustained, "I'll have you know I was talking to the walrus this morning. He said the time has come," lower now, "to speak of many things, of shoes and ships and sealing wax, and cabbages and kings."

I would smile and think how funny he was, and then his voice would fall very low and he'd turn towards the adults if there were any around, snapping his fingers and moving in the same manner as his voice sounded, orchestrating the two. When he was like that, in one of what everybody called his *funny moods,* I'd watch him, spellbound, the way a four-year-old would watch a clown in the circus, or a magician on the stage.

But I remember other times too, such as one November morning when the doctor stood by the pot-bellied stove in the middle of the store, talking to some men about the new sheriff who had just been elected. Dr. Hannah had begun to walk back and forth as he talked, and when he said something important he'd snap the thumb and middle finger on both of his hands to add emphasis, and then gracefully turn and look towards the ceiling, as if he might float upward at any time.

As he walked back and forth like that, Rufus, the young black clerk my father had hired five or six months earlier, had gotten behind him with a feather from his duster and had begun to tickle him on the back of his neck. Dr. Hannah didn't seem to notice it at first, but then he began to shake his head each time the feather touched him. Finally, he turned around. He moved like a dancer, searching for whatever it was that was causing his irritation. But Rufus had quickly hidden the feather, and he wore the most serious expression he could muster. Dr. Hannah slowly turned back around. "Now where was I?" he said. Someone told him, and he snapped his fingers and started in again. Then Rufus got the feather back out.

A few of the men in the group smiled secretly at Rufus, and I managed to smile a little too, at first. But there was something that wasn't right about their smiles, and as Rufus started again with the feather, I began to frown. I wasn't sure why, but I felt angry at the way the men looked, and finally I went outside to the porch and sat down on a bench so I wouldn't have to watch any more.

When Dr. Hannah wasn't in the store or in his office he was usually out on call. If we saw him driving down the road, we knew enough to give him a little extra room. Of course, there wasn't much traffic back then on those dirt roads, so he wasn't in danger like he would be now, and everybody knew about his early morning departures. There was a steep bank directly across from his house, where the church is now, and he'd jump into his old brown Model T Ford and slam it into reverse, rev the engine, shoot across the road going ninety to nothing, and–three times out of four–crash into the bank. That seemed to be his way of finding out when it was time to go forward. He'd knock it into low gear as he bounced up in his seat, then give it the gas.

Since everybody knew how he left his house in the morning and kept an eye out, it wasn't so bad, but he could be dangerous in the curves. He'd lean in the direction he was turning the wheel, as if it took his whole body to steer, and the sharper the curve, the more the lean. Sometimes his head would hang halfway out the window, and he'd have a look on his face like he'd been working on a difficult case, and lost. Whenever he'd go by we'd laugh, and somebody would say that he was in one of *his funny moods.*

In the winter it was worse. The dirt roads would often be almost impossible to drive. He'd get stuck in the mud or slide back and forth across the road as he drove. Sometimes the houses he had to travel to were so far from the road he would have to trudge through half a mile of woods, or wade the swamps along the Tennahpush or Black Fork rivers. He told the story once of going way back into the swamp to a shack where a black family lived. He said that when he walked into the yard several little black children began crying and running from him, and when the mother came out she said, "That's all right. They ain't never seen no white folks before." He said he'd had to set a broken leg for one of the children and that the child had screamed with fright and had scratched wildly at him the whole time.

He came into the store almost every day, so when there was a day or two, or three, that he didn't make it, and when Mrs. Hannah came instead, we'd all ask about him. Mrs. Hannah would simply say, "The doctor isn't feeling well today," and that was all. She referred to him as "the doctor," never by his name. And it was always that he wasn't "feeling well." We'd all nod and say how sorry we were that he was under the weather. I used to think it was strange that he was under the weather so much. It seemed to me that a doctor shouldn't let himself get sick.

Then one summer afternoon, after I'd gotten big enough to be trusted with small chores and errands–I was about eleven–my mother sent me over to the Hannah's to pick up some medicine. Her feet had been swelling and the doctor had something for her, she said.

It was a hot afternoon and the sweet, sick smell of Mrs. Hannah's flower garden hung thick in the humid air. The bees buzzed through the tall grass in the yard and around the marigolds, zinnias, and dahlias near the walk. The house hadn't seen a coat of paint in years and the wood around the windows was just beginning to rot. Bushes and creeping vines had made a real effort to cover the clapboard house, as though its lack of paint had made it naked. I walked up to the end of the porch and stared through his office window, the old glass full of imperfections, but the doctor wasn't in. Then I made my way down the porch and knocked on the front door. There was no answer. After waiting for a minute, I decided I'd try the back door.

When I came around the corner to the back of the house I didn't see the doctor, only a long porch that ran the width of the building. There were a few buckets full of water sitting on the edge of the porch, one with a gourd dipper. Beside the buckets sat a garbage can filled with empty medicine bottles, and its smell, when it hit me, reminded me of the inside of his office. Halfway down the porch there was a neatly stacked pile of firewood left over from winter. It was piled high and I couldn't see what was at the far end of the porch, so after a little hesitation, I slowly walked toward the woodpile, trying to see over it. I was startled when I spotted the doctor. He stood just beyond the woodpile, without seeing me, his face with that same expression, as if he'd been working on a difficult case. All his features were tightened and his arm was extended, his hand balled into a fist. In his other hand he held a syringe, its clear glass reflecting the white heat from the sun.

Instead of leaving him alone, as something inside me told me I should, I called out. He turned abruptly toward me, his expression shocked, angry, seeming to emanate from another man.

"Get away from here! What do you think you're doing?" he yelled. Then he stepped off the porch. "Don't *ever* come sneaking around here again. If. . . "

That was all I heard. I ran past where the church is now, then even faster down across the railroad tracks, and I didn't stop until I reached the creek where it ran under the trestle. I spent the afternoon there with my feet stuck in the water, down into the sand where the mussels burrowed deeper and stirred the silt into dirty clouds with their shells. I watched, wishing I could be like them instead of wondering how I could suddenly feel the way I did about Dr. Hannah. At that moment I hated him.

Afterward, whenever he came into the store, I'd either disappear into the back room where the extra stock was kept or slip outside, anything to keep from being around him. When I saw him driving down the road on those days when he'd be leaning into the curves, I wouldn't smile, or wave, and his voice didn't sound much like music anymore.

Over the next few years he saw fewer and fewer patients. He began to send them to the doctors in Demarville. He said he was retiring. Mrs. Hannah would come into the store by herself, saying even more often, "The doctor isn't feeling well."

I stopped playing in my father's store, and began working in it instead. I pumped gas, boxed groceries, and waited on customers. Rufus worked the mornings; I worked the afternoons. On Saturdays we both stayed until late, barely able to move through the throng of blacks who came there to socialize.

Then one Saturday night about ten o'clock—a little past the time I usually went home—a black girl named Johnnie Mae came bursting into the store. She ran to Rufus who was filling a jug with kerosene and said, in a high-pitched, frightened voice, that Rufus' mother had sent her to tell him that his brother T.J. had been cut, and that Rufus had to fetch Dr. Hannah and not come home without him.

"Help me get the doctor," Rufus said. "I know if I'm by myself, Dr. Hannah won't come."

I didn't want to go but finally said all right, and we walked down to the doctor's house and Rufus beat on the door while we both called from the porch. There was no answer for a long time. Then Mrs. Hannah finally opened the door. "The doctor's sick," she said. "Too sick to come out." She stood blocking the doorway, but she was so small that Rufus slipped past her and I followed into the dark house.

Rufus made his way to the bedroom door and stood there, saying again and again how sorry he was to be coming in and disturbing them. "But my brother's been cut," he said, "and Mama said she didn't want nobody but Dr. Hannah."

Mrs. Hannah pushed past Rufus and went into the bedroom while I stood in the dimly lit living room and watched through the door. Dr. Hannah sat on the side of his bed, half dressed, about to put on a shirt.

He was shaking and moving slowly. He kept mumbling, "I'll go, but wait. Wait, let me. . . " But Rufus wouldn't wait, and Dr. Hannah pulled on a long coat and walked unsteadily out of the bedroom, carrying his bag.

We got him to Rufus' place, Rufus doing the driving. The doctor had tried to talk to me in a weak voice on the way, asking how I'd been, how my family was. The incident behind his house had happened years before, but I could not forget it. I either mumbled answers or wouldn't reply at all, and I wouldn't look at him.

"I'll wait in the car," I said when we came to a stop, but the pleading look on Rufus' face made me finally go inside.

We got Dr. Hannah into the crowded room where Rufus' brother lay on the bed. Towels were stretched across him, soaking up the blood, and he moaned softly. The doctor began to clean T. J. up, but his hands shook terribly and sweat popped out on his suddenly colorless face. "I've got to step outside a minute," he said. "I'm feeling ill." Without looking towards any of us, or waiting or any response, he picked up his bag and left the room with one of the kerosene lamps. I couldn't believe what he was doing. I wondered if he would go just to the back porch or all the way to the outhouse where he knew no one would see him.

After some time he walked back into the room with his bag in one hand and the lamp held up near his face. In its light I could see his eyes clearly, and I'm sure that he must have seen mine, seen the anger and the disappointment in them, because he turned quickly away from my gaze and his expression looked somehow like the one that T. J. wore.

He began to work again. His hands moved slowly and skillfully as he pulled each stitch tight. "Just hold still. Not much longer now, son," he said, his voice rising. I realized I was suddenly watching the same man who had paced back and forth in the store, snapping his fingers and speaking in his rhythmical voice, yet I made myself turn away, and just as I did so, I saw Hannah glance at me and frown.

He finished and told T. J. to come in when the cuts were healed and he'd remove the stitches. A few weeks later, he did, and there was hardly a scar.

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He soon stopped coming out altogether. Then maybe two years passed. People said he was in bad health and that he spent most of his time in a wheelchair, one of those heavy wooden ones with the high back and the wooden spokes and rims. Mrs. Hannah came into the store, always alone. People still asked about the doctor. They were concerned, they said, and wanted Mrs. Hannah to know that he was thought about.

It still made me wince sometimes when I walked past his house on my way home, remembering the look on his face that long ago day, the anger in his voice.

And then, on an afternoon in late January, when I had just made it past the old house and was hurrying toward home with a bag of groceries for my mother, the sound of Mrs. Hannah's voice came from behind me. "Conrad!" she shouted. "Conrad! Come here, quick. I need you." I turned toward her and watched as she beckoned me with a hurried motion of her arm.

I hadn't been inside the house since the night with Rufus; I had only glanced in now and then through the cloudy windowpanes as I passed, so when I entered the dark living room, I felt as though I were in a place that was somehow forbidden, not to be violated.

My eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. The room looked the same as it had years before—there was a sideboard, a few large chairs, a table. Then Mrs. Hannah shouted something, and I looked toward where she stood at the fireplace. Dr. Hannah lay there, sprawled across the hearth, part of his arm and shoulder in the coals of the fire, his wheelchair overturned beside him.

"He tried to get out of it," Mrs. Hannah said in a bewildered voice.

His face, when I got to him, showed pain and utter helplessness. His eyes were wide, dilated. He was heavier than he'd been when I'd last seen him, but as I reached down to lift him away from the coals, I never considered not being able to.

He felt light as I slowly swung him around. I got a tight grip, then walked carefully with him in my arms toward the bedroom. Mrs. Hannah followed me.

The bedroom door stood only slightly ajar. I kicked it open and turned sideways to move him through the threshold. His foot caught on the doorknob and he began to weigh heavier.

Then his body slowly started to slip out of my hold, and I staggered to the bed and laid him across the yellowing white spread. He sunk deep into the mattress and lay silent, looking broken down.

Mrs. Hannah said then that she was going to get something for his burns and walked quickly out of the bedroom.

He lay quiet and motionless, his eyes shut. I sat beside him on the bed and looked at him, at his frailness, his helplessness. I wanted to do something for him but didn't know what. Finally he stirred and opened his eyes, and after a moment when he seemed to be studying my features, he lifted his hand toward me, called me by name, and gently touched the side of my face. I understood then that he had forgiven me.

Brad Watson

Little Awakenings

We were drifting through one of our long separations. This was after most of the worst stuff, though, the head in the oven and the space heater, the slap fights out in the front yard late at night, the ramming of the car through the screen porch. Now that she was weakened, her pious mother had slipped her a little Jesus mickey, and I had to listen to that when I visited our little boy, blah blah The Lord This blah, God That blah blah. It was worse than anything that had happened before.

Some friends of mine were living in a trailer park out in the country, just a fenced-off area on the edge of a pasture, a corral for mobile homes. All the trailers there were small and made, as far as I could tell, during the 1950s, the time when all those post-war people decided to hit the road, and these were trailers that seemed made for the road. They were two-toned and streamlined, rounded or angled to slip the wind. These mobile homes had hitches and little sets of wheels suspended inside the concrete block pilings that held them up. Somehow, and sadly, a dozen or so of those post-war wanderers had ended up in this pasture, lives had dried and faded like old newspapers in the sun, and now all the trailers were for rent.

I still had the VW bus we'd bought in California, our own minature version of the mobile home dream, and I had the back seats in it. My younger brother Ray and I were going to pick up the guys at the trailer, get stoned, and go to a drive-in movie with a case of beer. We left our mother's house, where I was rooming again during the break-up, stopped for the beer and ice at the Jitney Junior, and drove out to the trailer park corral.

Arnold, the angel, let us in. He had such a cloud of diaphanous light brown hair you could hardly see his face. It gave him a beatific presence. He took careful, deliberate steps in his heavy, unlaced workboots. He had a paper cup in his hand. Lester and Sammy, rimmed with the weak light from the table lamp, sat on the dirt-brown sofa. They held little paper cups, too.

"Mushroom tea," Arnold said. He poured us two little cupfuls. The cups were Dixie cups, the little disposable ones you pluck from dispensers in bathrooms. I think they were there when Arnold moved in, and I wondered about the kind of people who would live in a trailer with an actual trailer hitch on it and drink their drinks from these little Dixie cups. As if at any minute, any minute now, they might have to hitch up and move again. But they never did. The mushroom tea was thin and tasteless.

"I ate some of these with Zach," I said. "Nothing much happened."

"The tea is better," Ray said. My brother continued to surprise me with his experience in the drug-taking business. He had just turned fifteen and looked like a pretty girl, his wavy hair parted in the middle and reaching halfway down his back, his dark brown eyes big and soft as a calf's. I shouldn't have brought you along, I thought.

We took our Dixie cups and settled in the trailer's living room, which was small but comfortable. The room I'd been sharing with Ray in our mother's home was smaller. Once again, time and lives were on the old hamster wheel, nobody going anywhere. Everyone wanted things to get better but everyone was confused and exhausted. My wife and little boy were living with *her* parents, so there we were. No one should be allowed to marry so young. I couldn't think about any of it. I was running my father's dingy bar, the Crazyhorse, no windows, the stench of piss and spilled beer. Day-in, day-out, all night, pushing beer over the counter and playing a little pool. I had developed an impressive bank shot. I rarely saw the sunshine. I'd say I wasn't living for the future. Part of that was being only nineteen years old, still only nineteen years. But we had a baby! I don't know what I was thinking. Nothing, like I said.

We sat in the trailer and drank the tea. It began to develop a taste, like soil and rubber bathtub toys. Nothing was happening, so Ray and I got up and poured ourselves another cupful. Lester said he'd been out into the pasture behind the trailer park that afternoon and had just happened to see the mushrooms growing there. I asked him how he could tell they weren't the poisonous kind, and he said it was easy. Sammy said you didn't usually find the poisonous kind in the same sorts of places anyway, and yawned, and two little brown paisleys fluttered from the back of his throat like cupboard moths. I looked around and saw that the paisleys covered the walls of the trailer living room, and the air was full of them. We breathed them in and out. They were hairy, like anchovies, and they began to loosen up phlegm in my chest. I coughed and shot something onto the carpet.

"Oh, wow," said Lester from his scrawny face. He had no eyes.

"We'd better go on to the movie, if we're going," Arnold said, very dreamy. I couldn't see his face at all, in the little cloud of hair on his head.

"Man," I said, "I can't see your face."

"My mother, man, she oh-dee'd on Valium one time," he said. "Looked in the mirror and had no face at all. She freaked out. The old man took her to the hospital."

"Wow."

We went out and I opened the sliding side door to the VW bus and they all bumbled past me trying to get in. The case of beer was in there, sweating, the ice bag melting beside it. I cranked up and got us onto the road, an old two-lane country highway. I made sure to put my whole mind to the driving, because the road was so narrow and the night was so dark. The headlamps lit up a tiny circle the size of a stage spotlight in front of the van. I forced myself to check the speedometer. We were doing ten. I sort of woke up then, in my position hugging the wheel, and saw that my brother in the front passenger seat was leaning very close to the windshield, his eyes wide with silent cartoon terror. Just over our shoulders, Arnold and Lester and Sammy were out of their seats, holding onto the backs of ours, leaning toward the windshield with similar expressions. I started to laugh. Slowly like people very frightened they turned their heads on stiff necks to stare at me, their eyes round as bush babies', and then they began laughing, too. I stopped the bus in the middle of the road.

"Christ," I said. "We can't go to a movie!"

I managed to turn the bus around without getting stuck in the ditch, and we idled it back to the trailer park and went back inside, where we sat in the living room and sort of lost track of one another. It was like looking out at the world through the pinhole in a box camera, and speaking every now and then to others who were inside a room you could see into through your pinhole.

Dickey came in, all miniaturized and with an aura. He lived in an even smaller trailer across the little dirt drive path that wound through the park. He was just seventeen himself, and he had a well-known problem. His problem was his wife, who was only twelve or thirteen, maybe fourteen or sixteen, I forget, but she was awfully young, and not pretty, with tiny stupid eyes, a long nose, and long lifeless blonde hair. But she was crazy. Crazy for sex, crazy for wildness. Dickey couldn't keep up with her, much as he tried. No one could have. Maybe a whole pack of boys. But no one man. Dickey, who had run off and joined the Navy by somehow lying about his age, had fetched this girl away with him out of their small town in Michigan, and now they were stationed here in Mississippi at a naval air training station some 200 miles from water. Same middle of nowhere, only hotter. The first time Dickey shipped out on a carrier, his wife disappeared. He had to go find her when he got back. She was living with some spades down in Laurel and didn't even know where she was, had cut off her long blonde hair.

Now Dickey knocked on the door, and he may have been knocking for a while, we didn't notice, so he finally opened the door and came on in, which we noticed and were surprised by, but no one spoke. This didn't matter because Dickey paid us no mind and went straight to the sofa. He sat down between Lester and Sammy, buried his face in his hands and began to sob.

"She's gone," he said. "She's really gone, this time. I can't find her. She's taken off, I don't know who with this time. I don't know where she is. God, what a life!" He moaned and sobbed and rocked on the couch. After a couple of minutes of this, when he'd pretty much gotten the biggest emotion out, he looked up from his hands, blinking and wiping away huge tears. We stared at him as if he were dying before our eyes. I was terrified.

What's the matter with you guys?" he said.

"We're tripping on mushrooms," Arnold said.

About that time I noticed my little brother was missing. I wandered back through the trailer looking for him. The hallway was only about ten feet long but I was moving down a long corridor with dozens of rooms standing to either side. I think this was because the scene kept recycling itself in my head, resetting itself and running again. Who knows how long I stood in that hallway, inching along? At the long-away end of it my brother lay on a blue waterbed mattress under a very bright bare bulb, staring at the bulb with unblinking eyes.

"Ray!" I shouted. I heard bumbling and moaning, and after a long time the others bumped into me crowding into the room. It was like the moment on the road in the bus all over again, but it wasn't funny.

I pointed to my brother. I was crying.

"Oh, my God," I said, "what's wrong?"

"Oh, man," someone said, "is he dead?"

"Check him."

My brother's eyes, brown and cowlike but still unblinking, moved to look at us.

Someone laughed, maybe Dickey.

"He's not dead!" someone else shouted.

I fell onto the bed and held him. "Ray!" I said. "Get up, come outside."

We all slipped through the fence and walked into the field. The long grass was moist with dew. I sat Ray down and wandered off by myself. The sky was perfectly clear and stars shone brilliant and distinct against black space. You could see right out into space, there was no protective barrier. I was moaning, Oh, this is no good, this is no fun.

Dickey took over then. It must have been that Navy training. He herded us all back into the trailer, which was a feat because we'd all scattered into the pasture, each in his own world. Arnold had climbed a little tree. Lester stood at the edge of the cow pond, as if he wanted to swim but first had to invent the concept. Dickey came from a grove of pines, pulling Sammy by the arm. He got us all back inside and made some coffee.

"Where's Ray?" I shouted.

"Sit down, shut up!" Dickey said. He went outside. We crowded to the window. Dickey walked back into the field to where we'd sat Ray down a little earlier, stood him up and walked him back toward the trailer. We sat back down. The door opened and Dickey came in with Ray and sat him down on the sofa. I forgot where he'd been, and then I remembered.

After we'd drunk the coffee, Dickey put us all in my bus and drove us around for a while. At first he drove very fast, about a hundred miles an hour, and never turned, like the whole town was in a straight line and he was racing through it, I was pressed back in my seat with the force of acceleration, until we began shouting, Slow Down! Stop! and he eased off some, and after some time the blurred lights flashing past began to come into focus, and street signs and intersections and houses and yards and cars in driveways, a world transforming. We finally came down way on the other side of town, about two in the morning, in the vast, mown, dew-laced emptiness of a golf course. I felt as if my whole body had just come unclenched from a long, long, sustained electric shock.

"Oh, man, that was something," Arnold said. "You got to watch that shit, man."

"Poison," Lester said. They laughed.

"It was awful," I said.

"Well, it's my turn now," Dickey said. "I'm getting fucked up now," he said, "and you guys can take care of me."

Not long after that I had a religious experience. I woke up in the night feeling lower than ever, and decided maybe the wife was right. God, I said, whatever you want to me to do. Whatever. Please help me. That's how low I was. And right then I felt this wave of emotion roll over me and out into the air, it all poured out. I wept. And then, as washed out as if I'd taken a giant hit of Valium, I got some sleep. The next day I drove over to my in-laws' house and told my wife about it. She was skeptical, but gave me a chance. We went out on a few dates. We parked and made out the way we had in high school, before we'd done anything, long wet kissing, no fucking. She said she wanted to do it right this time. I had long talks with their minister, started going to their church. We got back together. I was a family man again. But it couldn't last. I couldn't ever get back that feeling I'd had in my room the night I was saved. There was nothing in the church like that. It was a Southern Baptist church, and so of course pretty soon everyone began to look very comical, in their polyester suits and dresses, their little leather Bibles in their clean hands, their little wedge-shaped purses, the little rolls of fat around the ankles of the ladies, the clean-shaven double chins of the men with their iron handshakes, swaggering Old Spice good cheer. Heaven was exactly like Earth, and they held the deed. I began to feel very strange, as if I were a secret amnesiac pretending to remember who these people were, where I belonged, what it was I was supposed to be doing. I felt very sick at heart.

Of course this erosion took place over some length of time. I'd started at the junior college, worked a local woodshop job, then we'd moved away to the university, joined a Baptist church up there. But all this time the ground beneath my feet was being eaten away. I was getting edgy, morose. I wanted to drink. My wife finally complained and said, "Don't you love me at all?"

"Wait, now," I said, "don't ask me that. It's not a good time."

Jeffrey Goodman

The Hazards of Mortality: The Uncollected Poems of Yvor Winters, 1919-28, 1929-57

When he died in 1968 (of, ironically, lip cancer), Yvor Winters left behind him over 200 pages of published poems, including more than 250 separate titles. It was the work of almost forty years. Although he had published, too, more than 1000 pages of literary criticism over roughly the same period of time, the poems always stood first. As Winters himself had remarked, repeatedly, from the beginning of his public life as a writer until the end: the only reliable way to understand a poet is through his poetry—through the *substance* of what he has had to say and the *technique* of how he has said it.

Winter's poetry animated his criticism, "like a rapid hand within a glove." For him, criticism, of course, understood the literature of the past and the present. But criticism did this, mainly, for the sake of improving the literature of future—either his own future writing, or the writing of others that he might influence by his poetic example or by critical argument.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1900, Yvor Winters was raised in an enlightened, mercantile home. His paternal grandmother read to him from the historian Macaulay. His father, according to one source, had a nervous and physical breakdown before Winters was four. According to another, he was a successful speculator on the Chicago Board of Trade. During Winters' youth, the major social and intellectual currents in America divided between, on the one hand, a late Victorianism and, on the other, the rise of modern science and technology. Yet the fundamental philosophy of life and education in America had remained a 19th-century Ciceronian humanism. The individual represented the body politic; the body politic, the individual. This was the Chicago of the first two decades of this century—a place of tough guys, plain Protestant earnestness, and plain hard work, a time characterized by what Howard Baker, Winters' friend, once called "Middle-Western stoicism."

The measure of an artist rests not in his background, in what he has been given, but in what he has been able to do with what he has been given. An artist absorbs, lives with and finally transcends his background—even his heredity—or he is not really much of an artist. Winters' earliest poems seldom indicate an especially unhappy or alienated childhood. They reveal, in fact, a reasonably gay, imaginative temper and a sensibility full enough of sweetness and light. Although the family, for financial opportunities, had moved to Southern California when Winters was a schoolboy, then to Seattle, he had returned to Chicago for high school. At fourteen or fifteen, he became enthusiastic about poetry. If the day's school curiculum had stimulated this—the prestige of poetry was fairly high at the time—this meant English poets like Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley and Americans like Longfellow, Bryant, and Emerson. It meant Virgil and, perhaps, Horace. Soon, however, he had discovered the new, "experimental" poetry in McClurg's Bookstore in Chicago, immediately purchasing copies there of avant-guarde journals. Originating in Chicago, one of these journals was Harriet Monroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, the very center, perhaps, of the New Poetry movement in America. Monroe allowed Winters to hang around the magazine's offices, where he read the back issues.

Gazing at the big picture, we view Winters—at this point—as part of a generation of Midwestern writers, including his wife, Janet Lewis, Glenway Wescott, Robert McAlmon, Hart Crane, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, among others whom Ford Madox Ford in *The March of Modern Literature* (1938) praised for "the excellence of their product," "a conscious literary art," "realism," "the Flaubertian message," and for consanguinity with "those chief ornaments of Southern writing, Misses Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Katherine Anne Porter, and Caroline Gordon," all three of whom Winters knew personally and admired. Ford speaks further of "a whole Middle Western American group, as a rule from the University of Chicago, an educational institution differing from all the other universities of Europe and America in that it really has fostered imaginative writing and at least one movement—that of the Middle Western novelists and poets. ...It deserves this note," he goes on to say, "because it is, as far as this writer is concerned, almost the only instance of a similar tendency anywhere discoverable in modern literary history ... and because, with its later Southern extension, it has kept alive almost the last traces of a conscious literary art in a world everywhere so driven to distraction that *the pen as a weapon* has grown almost as obsolete as the stone arrowhead." For those critics and scholars who really desire to get serious enough to understand Winters, this, surely, is the place to start.

Winters' history, after this, is fairly well-known. Sadly, at the outset of his sophomore year at the University of Chicago, where he had joined a talented Poetry Club, he contracted tuberculosis. For his health, he traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, spending the next three years at Sunmount and St. Vincent's sanitoriums, mostly bed-ridden, more or less motionless. Yet during this time, he persevered; he read, studied, and wrote poetry; and, in 1919, published his first poems. How these bedridden years might have affected the heart and mind of an eighteen-year-old is impossible to say. Winters' main activity was to stare at the ceiling, the wall, or out the window, noting the angle of sunlight on an aspen leaf. (Is it, therefore, surprising that one of his first classical poems, written a full ten years later, begins, "Death. Nothing is simpler. One is dead") He spent 1921 and '22 teaching in coal mining camps and, between 1923-25, returned to school at the remote campus of the University of Colorado, Boulder, earning a B.A.(Phi Beta Kappa) and an M.A. in nine semesters. He next taught French and Spanish at the still more remote campus of the University of Idaho, Moscow, finally, matriculating in 1927 to Stanford (in part, for the health of his wife, who also suffered from TB), where he taught literature and writing for the next thirty-eight years.

By 1929, however, Winters had already vitriolically broken from Modernism *per se*, having posted his objections—like Luther his theses—in the first issue of *The Gyroscope*, a hand-printed quarterly under his editorship. The journal's aim was the "approximation of a classical state of mind" that was to be achieved, or activated, from "a stable and comprehensive point of view." How had this come about? It had come about when, in the late twenties, Winters had become increasingly dissatisfied with the results of literary modernism, both his own and those of others employing free verse and other experimental techniques, and wished, instead, to write poems like those he had long admired by Baudelaire, Valery, Hardy, and Bridges—poems, in his view, superior to anything he'd seen in free verse. These poems had modern *and* classical virtues.

The two books under review, *The Uncollected Poems of Yvor Winters: 1919-1928* (edited by R.L. Barth, 1997) and *The Uncollected Poems of Yvor Winters: 1929-1957*, derive, respectively, from Winters' modernist (1919-28)and classical (1929-57) periods. The modernist period was experimental; the classical, more traditional. Now, the fundamental difference between classical and modern art is simply this: whereas classical art measures the norm of human experience against the heroic or ideal, modern art individual, unique experience against the normal (or average). Romantic art appears to be something of a half-way house between classical and modern art. The ultimate aim of Romantic art is to arouse the senses to more intense connotative experience.

The Uncollected Poems of Yvor Winters: 1919-1928 (edited by R.L. Barth, 1997) contains thirty-nine poems that, long buried in obscure journals, have not appeared before in book form. Even setting aside the author's centrality to our understanding of 20th-century American literature, the intrinsic merit of Winters poetry alone makes this, along with its companion volume, an important, must-own publication. Barth's brief afterword explains: "the earliest poems included are the earliest poems Yvor Winters published; the later ones date from the period of his experimental mastery." The collection, Barth remarks, contains "surprises." These include "the verse tribute to Carl Sandburg. The charm ... of Maestro Winters taking his schoolchildren on a field trip. ... The strange Gothic trappings and decadent tone of 'Concerning Blake.' In brief, this volume contains a number of poems unlike anything Winters ever wrote."

For the student of American poetry and criticism, this book fills in spots in the big picture that, heretofore, have been blank.

We find, indeed, poems unlike anything else Winters wrote — the style more relaxed and casual, the idiom less strained and introspective, perhaps, than in the select poems that, in the fifties, Winters himself preserved for posterity.

The first volume contains the poetry, in short, of a sensitive young man who has been, temporarily, touched by tragedy.

A first example, a love poem called "White Song:"

> Snow,
> Silencer of footfalls,
> Guard my thoughts,
> Let them run with no sound
> —They will be unseen against you—
> Let them run with no sound
> And pick quietly
> At a certain window
> Till they push in
> Breathlessly.
> Maybe
> —If they come suddenly—
>
> She will love.

A second example, "The Schoolmaster Writes to a Poet:"

> Again the summer,
> Santa Fe,
> And a few people—
> A moment
> When one speaks
> Beneath low trees.
>
> You are not here.
> I wrote:
> "The villages
> Are pressed flowers
> Laid away."
> And you rode through them.

So my letters—
Yet drifting
To the mailbox,
I leave them
From old habit

The summer ages.
The people come and go.
And I shall go —
For my gray fence is old,
My letters quiet,
And these lines forgotten.

Third and fourth illustrations reveal the influence of Imagism but are tinged with Virgilian sadness and piety. In one stanza,

My eyelids stony
Like the light of day
Where hopping birds
Are heavy—

"Old knots" in trees are "little fist-rubbed faces/Of gargoyle grief; While shadows/ Slip down the trunks/Like tears."

Then the pathos, finally, of "Chicago Spring" (before returning to Santa Fe):

My body is gentle
As the light on the pavement.
My fingers play on the air
Like evening wind running in leaves.

But, ... The hand of God
Is heavier than mountains.
It stands on the air

Like an odor.

Behind each of these poetic examples, we hear a classical, humanistic sensibility through which the brilliant sound and the cleansed light of the New Poetry have beamed. "My aim from the first poem in this collection," wrote Winters in 1966, in the introduction to his *Early Poems*, "was a clean and accurate diction and movement, free of clichés; in other respects, my methods have altered with the years."

Fundamentally, Winters was not an aesthete, a moralist, a pragmatist, a scholastic, a Romantic, a naturalist, a neo-classicist, or a realist—though, in various ways, he was all of these. He was, fundamentally, a humanist. The humanistic poet trusts the power of language and reason to change our lives and thoughts. The humanistic poet seeks the goals of the active life in the contemplative. ("Each line an act,/ Through which few labor and no men retract." The concealed pun on the word "act" — action/dramatic play—contains the kernel of Winters' life's work. For he had grasped from an early age that life is flux *and* form, illusion *and* reality. Of these dialectical term sets, the early poems emphasize the first; the mature poems, the second. It is worth knowing, for example, that Winters' called his first book, published when he was twenty-one, *The Immobile Wind*.) Concerned with the whole person and the whole community—operating at the maximum of consciousness in the flux of experience—the poet mediates between the philospher's search for general truths and the aesthete's desire for particular forms of beauty, without favoring or diminishing one or the other. The serious poet attempts, if really an artist, to see things from a stable and comprehensive point of view. This is an "objective" view, in Winter's mind.

From the classical period, *The Uncollected Poems of Yvor Winters: 1929-1957*, comes off, like the former volume, as uneven in quality; it too contains a number of poems unlike anything else Winters wrote. The most significant novelty of this second collection of poems is, perhaps, the proportion of satire, the most powerful example of which is certainly "The Critiad."

Composed in the form of the great late 17th-and 18th-century poetic satires by Dryden, Pope, and Churchill, "The Critiad" surveys the state of

American criticism in the early thirties, naming names. This was one of a series of publications that, over a three or four year period, expressed Winters' growing unhappiness with current literary culture, that separated and alienated him from it, and that, to a degree, gave him a pariah's status. It is, furthermore, my guess that this poem—more than *The Gyroscope*—or the infamous reviews of Crane's *The Bridge* or of T. Sturge Moore and Yeats—alienated most directly his literary peers, or, at least, those among its victims who had faced it in *This Quarter* in the fall of 1931. The explanation for this lies close to the surface. "The Critiad" has the fineness of perception and condensed power characteristic of all excellent poetry in any form. Its satire moves, even today, athletically and with wit. It traverses its area of expertise as quickly and surely as that other great scholar-athlete of the twenties, the former heavyweight champion Gene Tunney, the ring.

For historical purposes, it would be nice to quote the whole of "The Critiad" here. Yet, at 170 lines, the poem is far too long for this. It should be read, however, I'm sure, by every careful student of American literature and needs to sit on the syllabus of every every graduate seminar in 20th-century American poetry and criticism.

The poem consists of nine stanzas of varying lengths. The introductory stanza declares the task, the problem at hand. It is evening. Winters is sitting by the warm fireplace, presumably at home. He is reading, or rereading, what his peers have said about him in print and in letters, their curious and conflicting offers of advice, criticism, and correction.

Frustrated, he will this time respond to them poetically, as Dryden, Pope, or Churchhill would have done; or, before them, the great Latin satirists, Juvenal, Persius, or Horace. The peroration that I have been describing concludes as follows;

> As the matter stands
> I rest a monster in their fumbling hands.
> Nay, hardened in the sin of vanity,
> I wonder if they might not learn from me.

The second stanza recognizes "that fine poet, Allen Tate," as the solitary "sound" critic among contemporaries. Others critics are "intrepid as are walkers in a dream,/ Masters of every subject known to man/ Save poetry." What are they doing, then? "Dissembling with fine academic smirk/ The faint stupidity of all their work."

The hellish third and fourth stanzas number, among this rank, Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley, Laura Riding, Robert McAlmon, Zukofsky, Krembourg, Mencken, Brooks, and Zabel; (leaving hell, perhaps, for purgatory), the fifth, more positively, Wilson, Blackmur, and Burke; with increasing approval, the sixth, Harriet Monroe; the seventh, Irving Babbitt; the eighth, Pound and Eliot (surely a juicy Ph.D. thesis lurks here, and a still juicier book!)

Level by level, the spiral of criticism sounds as biting and merciless as the rhythm powerful and exact. Take "the dancing circus twins,"

> Josephson with sunshade on a rope,
> Cowley in tights and bareback on a trope;
> The Little Editors in step and firm,
> Bright-eyed and pert, a military worm.

The critical point of Winters' satire seems so curent today:

> The formal rebels, barking out by rote
> Rules of Experiment from each dry throat.
> These and a hundred more at least as thin
> God gave us as a minor discipline.

Following long stanzas devoted (positively) to Babbitt and (negatively) to acolytes Seward Collins, Hector Chafer, More and Foerster, and (positively) to Monroe, "Aunt Maria ("Mistress of error and consistency/ I trust no critic as I trust in thee"), Winters turns to Pound and Eliot, the acknowledged Luther and Calvin of modern American poetry. Pound's portrait is one of a wild giant, a Titan, from a heroic age. It is oddly, in part, a self-portrait:

> He made our grandsires slubber in their seats,
> Time-serving editors hunt safe retreats...
> Each fool was breathless not to make a sound,
> Sweating with terror not to waken Pound.

Eliot is a fine, precise critic; his disciples, however, are something else. Montgomery Belgion, for example, "making no pretense/ To any little trace of common sense;... Forming conclusions for no earthly good/ Because each premise was misunderstood." Could any four lines go more directly to heart of our continuing and current critical ills? They finger the dominant intellectual disease of our time—a time in which, without training in philosophy or logic, we accept rather than question major premises; or, when we question them, question without method or general and salubrious purpose.

The ninth and final stanza turns to the neglected and misunderstood pantheon of modern poets that Winters most admires: Hardy, "that heroic oak," Williams, Bridges, T. Sturge Moore, Adelaide Crapsey, Marianne Moore, Stevens, Mina Loy, and Tate. As a whole, "The Critiad" formulates a world of parturient play. The poet-satirist wields the forceps of irony. "Each metaphysic foetus judges best. Great poets all!" Yet Winters, though weary, is undiscouraged. Most literary critics are, after all, worms, their mouths agape, while the food of the gods is running through them:

> Yet will I publish still, and if I must,
> Share with the great, obscurity and dust.

Like the Arthurian knight on his quest for the Grail, the poet is on a comparable quest for reality. His guiding light is, it seems, the example of the great poets, past and present:

> They left me richer, having kept the trust.

And if the faint worm try his lip on me,
Such are the hazards of mortality.

In the preface to this collection, Barth describes Winters' attitude toward his uncollected poems. "The *Collected Poems* (1960) had established the canon Winters wished to preserve; the *Early Poems* [1966] formed a kind of supplement. To avoid any possibility of confusion, let me state here that the poems in this volume [and its companion volume] were very precisely excluded" from the *Collected* and *Early Poems* by Winters himself. Barth adds, however, that although he agrees that Winters previously collected poems *are* his "best work," he is nonetheless unable to agree with the poet that "any other uncollected material is rubbish."

In my opinion, no poem in this book—not even the sonnet entitled "Treading infinity, alone I go"—deserves this epithet. Rather, the poems in this (and its companion) volume reveal to us a more personal, raw, naked, and undigested side of Winters than we have seen elsewhere. They bring out, one might say,the flesh tones of a very big, rich canvass. They are emotional works by an emotional poet.

Despite the unfortunate 19th centurism of its closing couplet (not quoted here), the beautiful song entitled "Epitaph for the American Dead" is typical. Published in *Poetry* in 1944, it is a tribute to the many soldiers and sailors who died, tragically, during 1942 and '43, the darkest, most fearful years of the war:

Few names last, where many lie;
Even names of battles die.
These will stand for many more:
Wake, Bataan, Corregidor,
Attu, and the Coral Sea,
Africa, and Sicily;
Callahan, who ran his ship
To the very cannon's lip.

To sum up. Each of these collections further supports what we already know: that Winters belongs to that very select company of creative and

cricial geniuses "whose minds are living." While others writers dissipate or merely die,

> ... those whose minds are living
> Grow hard and cool and gay,
> Elude the unforgiving,
> And somehow have their say
> In words no fool can touch
> Because they mean too much.

Because they mean too much. The common bond between his early and later poems was Winter's humanism. He was heir to Erasmus and Thomas More, to Dr. Johnson and Baudelaire. As a modern humanist it served his mission to restore to modern literature—without diminishing the aesthetic—the classical virtues. This was a mean, ideally, between the critical genius of Irving Babbitt and the aesthetic genius of Ezra Pound, between Hart Crane and Professor X, who is to this day to be found in every English Department in America, a relativist and a spiritual drifter, with especially little knowledge of the art of poetry. Winters argued, throughout his life, that art can be measured with *some* objectivity a) against experience(reality) and b) against what has been produced in the past. For these reasons and for many others, he stands out thirty-two years after his death as one of the most gifted and original of American poets and one of the important Americans (of any kind) of this century; and yet, in many quarters, he is virtually unknown. His collected works would make a perfect project for the Library of America series, and Barth's collections are an important contribution to keeping interest alive in Winter's life and work.

Wayne Greenhaw

Handbook for Boys

When I was ten he was twenty years older, but we saw the world in the same simplistic way. He was a chunky man, all round and soft with a giant's feet. When he grinned his face twisted into contortions, showing big yellow crooked teeth, and I laughed with delight at his antics. When his big fat face turned sad, full lips pouting, I wanted to reach out and hug him and make him know that I cared. His name was Dee, and he was my cousin.

He lived with his family down on the delta of the rivers that flowed into Mobile Bay in the wilderness of south Alabama. The three two-story frame houses of the family compound had wrap-around screened porches and several out-buildings for boats and other no-longer-used vehicles. The whole place was covered with huge broad-limbed live oaks, spooky looking, but great for climbing. Dee's mama and daddy, Aunt Lucille and Uncle Harry, lived in the middle house that was larger than the other two, where Cousin Sybil and her husband, John, and Cousin Ruth and her husband, Kendall lived.

In the summertime, Dee and I sat on the screened porch of his parents' home and listened to the thousands of frogs and insects chirping in the woods. They made a wall of noise, and yet it was eerily quiet. Now and then the call of a lone bird drifted in from somewhere across the water, and Dee would shift his large, off-centered head sideways, scrunch his face, and say "Whip-er-will," and I'd say, "Whippoorwill," and he'd nod and say, "Whip-er-will, ol' Mockin'bird." At last light, we'd sit on the end of the pier with our poles and drop hooks draped with worms or crickets into the dark water alive with fish. By full darkness we had a mess of perch that the colored boy Cater helped us clean. When Dee and I grabbed the fish, they flopped out of our grasp. Cater clamped their wiggly, slimey bodies down on the boards next to the outdoor sink and held them steady and cut around the gills and down the side. He took the backside of a spoon between thumb and forefinger and raked against the sides to scrap away the scales. Aunt Lucille floured and fried the fish, fixed French-fried potatoes and cole slaw. Sometimes she made hushpuppies as big around as my fists. We'd sit on the back stoop where Cater helped with the feast, eating off of yesterday's *Mobile Register*. None of the grown-ups ever ate fish, although they went fishing out in the river, the bay, or the Gulf of Mexico every week or so. Sometimes they'd dig up oysters and bring them back in croaker sacks, and Cater would pry them open with his knife. I slurped them down without sauce, but Dee like his swimming in catsup. He'd get red stuff around his mouth and squirt a half-eaten oyster through his teeth and Cater would frown and shake his head and I would think if he kept doing it I was going to get sick.

Once I asked why we couldn't eat with the grown-ups in the dining room the way Dee and I did at dinner on Sundays. Dee scrunched his face into a heavy frown and said, "Cater can't eat in there with us." And I said, "Oh," disappointed and unsure. Later, after he'd thought about it for a while, Dee said, "Whites don't eat with coloreds." When I got back home, I asked Mama about it and she said, "Well, that's true in the South. In the North, however, people don't discriminate." When I asked what "discriminate" was, she said, "Up there, folks just look at one another as folks," and I said that sounded like a good way to be. She smiled and kissed my cheek and said I was thinking right to think that way, but don't say it out loud too often, or I'd get into trouble. She always had a sweet way of explaining things.

The next summer Dee and I and Cater, who was twelve, built a canoe out of an old log from a tree that had blown down in a bad storm the past winter. "Ol' black bear lived in that tree," Cater said as we began chopping.

"Really?" I asked. The tree was located less than a half-mile up the red clay road from Aunt Lucille and Uncle Harry's place. I had never heard them talking about bears in these woods.

"There's bears all around," Dee agreed.

"Sure is," Cater said.

We cut through the sycamore log at two places fourteen feet apart. Dee, who was strong as a young ox, lifted one end and heaved it to his shoulder. It took me and Cater to pick up the other end and balance it.

Then the three of us toted it to a pair of sawhorses we had fixed in front of an out-building.

Then we started hewing out the inside, just like it showed in my *Handbook for Boys* I got as a Boy Scout. "This is the way the Indians did it," I explained to Dee, who couldn't read.

"I heard Mr. Harry say you was the runt of the family," Cater said one hot afternoon while we were working. I glanced toward Dee, who was looking to see my reaction. "Well," I said, "I am the littlest one here," and both Cater and Dee chuckled and nodded. I'd never thought of myself as a "runt," although I was shorter than most. I figured, somewhere along the line, I'd have to prove just how big I was.

Cater was big for his age but not half as big as Dee.

We worked in the shade of the live oaks. From the long gracefully bowed limbs Spanish moss hung like decorations from long ago. When a breeze blew every afternoon before twilight, when the tides began to change in the Gulf to the south, the moss swayed gently. The loose gray strands rubbed together in the day's last breath, whispering undertones and warnings of night.

Cater rolled his eyes and gazed up through the trees into the gray sky. "Ol' ghosts talkin'," he said.

"Ain't no ghosts," Dee said. "Sybil and Ruth say they ain't no ghosts. John jokes. Kendall gonna spank him."

"There are no ghosts," I reassured him, but I looked around through the long shadows.

"Y'all don't know nothing," Cater said. "I been in ol' Nazareth Church when the ghosts of the dead come calling. They sing 'Amazing Grace' just like a long time ago. No music, no nothing, jus' voices."

"Oh, bullshit," I said.

"Don't cuss, Thomas Morgan," Dee said.

"I'm sorry," I said. I had promised his mother I would never curse in front of him. She said she didn't want him learning bad habits. If he didn't hear me say it, she said, he would never say such things. "Dee's pure of mind," she said.

"You cuss, and I'll tell Mama."

"I won't," I promised.

"I tell you true," Cater said, his eyes big as half-dollars. "I was sittin' with Mama when a host of ghosts come down out of the heavens and sang the spiritual song."

"How do you know that?" Dee asked.

"I was sittin' right there on the pew," he said. "It made me want to hide my head in Mama's apron. I was so scared. Mama patted my knee and said for me to act like a big boy and not be scared, that it wasn't nothing but the heavenly hosts come callin'." Cater shook his head. "I didn't hide, but I was scared slap down to my bones. I tell you that."

We kept to our work, but now and then we looked around to see if we saw something unusual. After the clouds swept over and the oaks whispered louder, we gave up and went to the porch, where Aunt Lucille said we could have a little piece of peach cobbler after supper.

She dug out a portion and gave it to Mae, Cater's mother, who worked as a maid for the households. She moved from house to house during the week, cleaning and washing and ironing, always humming some song, always keeping a look-out for us, always there, within reach.

At night I woke in the darkness of the room where Dee and I slept, and I gazed through the shadows outside the window and wondered.

It took us three weeks to carve out the inside of the log. Then Uncle Harry said we needed to waterproof it with a solution he found in one of the out-buildings. We brushed it on like paint and let it sit for twenty-four hours "to cure," as Uncle Harry had advised.

That night we sat out on the back stoop and ate our fish with greasy hands. Sitting in a triangle in straight-back chairs at the small square table covered with newspapers, we stared out toward the water between bites.

"We gonna float down the river and find us a bed of oysters, dig 'em up and sell 'em to Leek Smalley at his store," Cater said. "Make us a dollar or two and have some good cats besides."

"That's a great idea," I said.

Dee grinned and nodded. He showed his big crooked teeth.

Cousin Ruth's husband, Kendall, had found two old canoe paddles. We washed off the dust that had gathered over years of storage. Kendall remembered how he and Uncle Harry had built a canoe long before any of us were born. They had paddled it up into bear country and found the remains of an old Indian camp from a time when the Creeks and Choctaw lived in this wilderness. "There were some small mounds where the Indians buried warriors who died in battle," Kendall said. "There are worlds of Indian artifacts just laying on the ground up there."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"It's told in Indian legend," he said.

"Besides, we were there," Kendall said.

I studied on that idea, which Dee said was "true as the Bible," but it still made me wonder. Cater said there were some Indians still living up in the swamp to the north. "It's desolate country up there," he said with an air of knowledge.

"I'd like to see an Indian," I said. Once, at a museum along U.S. 90 near Destin, Florida, when Daddy and Mama took us on vacation. I saw an Indian. He was a "Redskin Renegade," according to the sign. He wore artificial leather pants and a shirt with frayed tassels along the sleeves and down the outer sides of the pants. He looked sad and undernourished, on display with two lazy alligators that lay in the shade near a mud puddle. All three looked like they needed a good supper.

"I wouldn't," Dee said. His eyes were as large as Cater's. "I don't want to see a Indian or a ghost," he said.

"We might could learn something from an Indian," I said.

"Like how to build a dugout canoe?" Cater asked.

"We know how to do that," Dee said.

"Maybe he'd teach us a better way to do it," I offered."I doubt it," Cater said. He motioned. "We got the book, *Handbook for Boys*, and I'd say that's all we need."

After we finished eating and wiped off our faces, we sat on the front steps while Uncle Harry and Kendall and John rocked behind the screen. Aunt Lucille came to the front door and said, "You boys don't stay out and get eaten up by the mosquitoes."

"Can we catch lightning bugs?" Dee asked.

"Go ask your mama, Cater, if she'll give y'all a fruit jar."

Cater scampered off to the back of the house to find his mother in the kitchen.

"What kind of Indians live around here?" I asked.

Aunt Lucille chuckled before she ducked back into the house.

"Aren't many Indians anymore," Uncle Harry said. "Used to be a bunch of Creeks up the river a piece."

"They were a bad bunch," John said. "They killed every last soul at Fort Mims," he added. He said it like it happened week before last.

"Fort Mims?" I asked.

"Where's Fort Mims?" Dee asked, inching a little closer to me.

"Up the river a few miles."

"Could we paddle up there?" I asked.

"I don't think I'd go that far, if I was y'all," Uncle Harry said. "It's probably fifteen, twenty miles, maybe farther."

"We went one time years ago," Kendall said.

"When you had the canoe?" I asked, remembering his tale.

He nodded. "It was beyond the remains of the old Indian village.

"Where artifacts are laying around on the ground?" I asked.

"Hush, Thomas," Dee said. "Let Daddy tell about Fort Mims.

"It's a very dark place, surrounded by thorny bushes and man-traps still set to this day. And it was nearly two hundred years ago that those poor people were trapped inside that fort and massacred by the mad Indians. Killed five hundred and some odd, all told," Kendall said, his voice coloring the history with mystery.

Cater returned with the jar, saying, "Let's catch us some lightning bugs," but I said, "I want to hear about Fort Mims and the massacre."

Dee rose and followed Cater. Ten feet away, Dee slapped his hands together and announced, "I got one."

I stayed seated on the steps. "How'd the Indians kill so many?" I inquired.

"The settlers were sleeping in the middle of the day. It was hot, like these days, and there were thousands of mosquitoes, big ones like out tonight, and many of the little children had come down with the fever," Kendall explained. "Their parents were tending to 'em. "

"And some damn fool had let sand blow up against the gate where it wouldn't close," put in John. "They didn't have the sense or the energy to sweep the sand aside."

"So when the Indians came, they walked right in and started killing, and nobody could get away. They had 'em hemmed up in there," Kendall said authoritatively. "The Indians were mad as hornets because white soldiers had killed a half-dozen peaceful Muskogee Creeks who'd been on a trading mission down to Pensacola. There'd been a few skirmishes here and there, up Burnt Corn Creek, down this way. By the time they got to Fort Mims, they swarmed in there like a bunch of banshees and cornered men, women, and children, taking 'em by surprise, and before sundown they had killed everything white inside the log walls.

"It was the news of that tragedy, carried up to Tennessee by horseback, that angered old Andy Jackson so much he took it on himself to raise an army of volunteers and march south into Alabama and kill every Indian he could find. That's what happened up at Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River. Old Hickory they called Jackson. He slaughtered every redskin that wouldn't join up with him."

"And those who joined him he later made slaves of and sent 'em packing off to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears," Uncle Harry added. "That's how Alabama got free of renegade Indians. Or most of 'em."

"Except for those who got away and live up the river a piece," I said. I was mesmerized, taking in every word, every fact, every message. Four hours later I awakened in our dark room. I lay in the bed across from Dee, listening to his heavy snoring, gazing across the mound of his rising and falling belly, wondering whether the ghosts of all those people who were killed at Fort Mims were still wandering around in the wilderness up there just a few miles north of us.

The next morning, when we prepared to launch our dugout, I asked Dee and Cater if they wouldn't rather paddle north into the old Indian territory.

They looked at each other. They had not given it a thought. The idea all along was that we were making the dugout to go fishing, and everybody knew the best fishing was to the south. But I had been thrilled and captivated by the words of the men last night as they talked about the Fort Mims massacre, the Indian wars, and General Andrew Jackson. Within moments, using the powers of persuasion I had learned from my father, a traveling salesman, I convinced both Dee and Cater that we should paddle north and take a look at the historical sites. "It's kind of like Lewis and Clark," I said.

They stared at me like I was crazy. They had not the first idea who Lewis and Clark were. And when I said, "If they hadn't taken off across the country to find the Northwest Passage, we wouldn't know where the Pacific Ocean was to this day," they just shook their heads.

We looked over our work one last time, savoring that moment before we discovered whether it would work or not. After a slight hesitation, we slid the dugout into the dark river water. We stood back and watched anxiously as it dipped once then came up, floating. It rocked to the side, took in some water, then rolled back upright.

Cater and I steadied the boat for Dee, who climbed in awkwardly and was almost thrown over the opposite side. He grabbed the post across the middle and held himself balanced as he bent his knees and lowered himself to a sitting position. I handed over a small pail he used to dip out the water from the flat bottom.

Cater lowered himself from the pier into the front, settling on his knees, sitting back on his heels, and I did likewise in the rear, where I could paddle and guide, trying to make myself into an Indian.

Cater and I lowered our paddles into the water and started out against the current, the bow pointing northward. I maneuvered into the middle of the hundred-foot-wide water, out of the reach of the low-hanging branches of the thick brush.

Within a mile, after an hour of steady paddling, the river narrowed and the banks became more visible with large trees taking the place of the thick undergrowth. Several camp houses dotted the shoreline, set back into shadowy coves. We passed a simple plywood square with a three-by-six porch with a deer's carcass stretched between a triangle of timbers. A stench drifted to us, and Dee remarked, "Don't go no closer," and scrunched up his face.

"I wonder why..." Cater started, gazing toward the place.

I wondered who and why, and where the people were. I shivered, then lowered my arms and paddled harder and deeper, pushing on up the river.

By mid-morning, as the sun beat down, we slowed to a crawl. We were drenched with sweat. Even Dee, who paddled occasionally, when one of us grew tired, was sweating. He knotted a handkerchief at each corner and dipped it into the water and capped it on his head to cool his scalp.

"I don't know whether we ought to keep going," Cater said, looking around at the dense woods and the bright blue sky.

But I kept pushing onward.

Dee looked from shore to shore, and in a short while pointed northwest and said, "What's that?"

The bank on the far side of a long bend was cut high and white. Above the cliff were live oaks similar to the ones at the family compound. Beyond the first growth of trees was another embankment that rose about twenty feet without trees.

"Looks interesting," I said, aiming.

"I don't know," Dee said.

"Looks kind-a spooky to me," Cater said.

"Nothing but an old Indian mound," I said. "Just like what John and Kendall were talking about last night. I bet there are worlds of Indian artifacts up there, just laying on the ground."

I guided us toward the high bank. The dugout stayed on course, exactly the way I maneuvered the paddle at the stern, the front pointing toward a sliver of white sand that shone brightly in the noonday sun.

As Cater prepared to jump into the shallows and pull us onto land, Dee said, "There ain't no Indian ghosts."

As Cater tugged the flat-bottom log toward the sand, Dee scooped up our lunch and thermos before stepping out. Cater reached to grab his meaty arm.

"I'm awright," Dee said, jerking away, avoiding assistance, stumbling and falling as if in slow motion, like Mo in *The Three Stooges*, reaching out with hands clawing and grasping at air.

Our lunch tumbled from his grip as his wide back splashed into the water.

"He can't swim," I uttered.

I shoved my paddle onto the bottom of the boat, stood and jumped into the river after him.

I immediately sank, the water just off the sandbar dropping to a depth over my head. I slapped out, my open palms pushing against the water, lifting myself up with the thought of grabbing Dee and pulling him to safety. But when I grabbed for him, he fought against me. His arms and shoulders were strong. They shoved against me, but I didn't give up. I swung around through the water and came up on his opposite side to surprise him and throw my arm over his shoulder. I would cup him under the chin just like the illustration in the *Handbook for Boys.* I would lift his head up out of the water and drag him to safety, throw his limp body onto the sandbar and straddle his body and push into his lungs and pull up on his butterflied elbows like the drawing of the two boys.

But when I came up on his left side he was so surprised, he swung around and caught me on the jaw, knocking me back into the deep water.

As I went down, falling back, Cater shouted, "Snake!"

I heard his warning as my head ducked beneath the water. Somewhere nearby I heard splashing. My mind held a conglomerate of ideas: Dee's drowning, Cater's being bitten by a snake, I'm...

My feet slid against an embankment of sand on the bottom of the river. The sand moved with me, giving beneath my feet, rolling, like a wave down on Dauphin Island, rolling and sliding away from me, carrying me down with it, like an undertow.

I fought. I slapped my hands against the current. I kicked. I held my lips clinched, daring not to gasp for breath, praying against any thought of drowning.

Suddenly my chest gripped hard and tight, wrenching my insides, and I was forced to open my mouth and gulp. Water poured down my throat, strangling, filling my throat and my chest, heavy, pushing against me with the weight of a heavy anvil.

Just as I thought my head was about to clear the water's edge, something big and bulky surrounded my body and jerked me free of the shifting sand.

My shoulders came up first, then my head was thrown back. I gasped and choked and coughed and spat up a knot of water lodged in my throat.

Dee threw me onto the sandbar, my shoulders hitting against the hot sand, and he lifted my arms and pushed his weight against my shoulder blades. Another blockage in my chest clamped my throat tight, like someone had their fingers wrapped around my windpipe. Dee grunted as he came down onto my back again, and again the constriction in my chest released, and water flowed from my mouth involuntarily as Dee raised my elbows and pulled them up into the air again.

"God!," I exclaimed after the water rushed from my throat. "God!" I said again.

"Dee saved your life," Cater said as he dropped to his knees next to my face. From his hand hung a limp six-foot water moccasin, his black head split down the middle.

Later, while all three of us sat naked in the sunlight with our clothes drying nearby, Cater said, "I don't know how he did it. I swear I don't." His face glistened like a wet black rock. "When you came out of the boat, that snake headed for you with his head up out of the water and his tail swishing from side to side. Dee moved so fast, he caught the snake by its tail and popped him in the air like a whip or something. That ol' snake's head burst wide open. Next thing I knew, Dee had a-hold of you and was pulling you up out of the deep. You'd done slipped into that current over yonder and it was pulling you out like it had a drag-line around your ankle. But ol' Dee wouldn't let go, he had you in his hands and dragged you up onto land, you fightin' him every inch."

"But..." I started. I wanted to tell them how it was I who was going to save Dee. It was I, the Scout who was on his way toward becoming an Eagle who planned to be the hero. Instead, I hushed. After a while, I gazed toward the high bank that held the promise of Indian mounds and artifacts. For an instant in the afternoon haze of the bright sun I thought I saw a figure standing there, tall and superior, lording over this land from which he had once been chased. But when I wiped my eyes and looked again, I saw nothing there.

Cater had pulled our boat onto the sand. Like our clothes, it had dried. The paddles lay on each side.

We lay on the sand in the heat, resting, our bodies drying like our clothes and our boat.

Our lunch was lost, along with the thermos. We cupped river water in our hands and sipped. It soothed our throats but made our stomachs growl with hunger.

Cater stared at the high embankment. "You don't want to see some ol' Indian mounds, do you?" he asked.

"Naw," I said. "Not today."

As we climbed into the dugout, Dee said, "I can taste me some of Mama's peach cobbler."

"And a big ol' spoon of ice cream on top," Cater said.

"And a giant glass of iced tea," I said as I lowered my paddle into the water and we started moving into the middle of the river where we would catch the strong downstream current to take us home.

Next summer I took up other activities: Little League baseball and going to Scout camp, where I learned arts and crafts but was never very good at any. I did earn an Eagle badge, which made me wonder about the accomplishment. After high school I went off to college. When I returned home on holiday vacations Mama would tell me about visiting Aunt Lucille and Uncle Harry and Dee. Dee always asked about me, she said, and she would tell him about my studies, and he would grin and nod and say he would like to see me.

I was out west in graduate school one August when Mama called and reported, "Dee died last night." I felt a little catch in the back of my throat as I uttered, "Oh no." I couldn't leave to come home for the funeral. I was busy preparing some paper for my fall classes. I waited until Christmas, when I returned to our house in Tuscaloosa to sit with Mama and talk about family. One morning we rose early and I drove south to visit Aunt Lucille. Uncle Harry had died several years before and I hadn't made it home for his funeral either. Cousin Ruth and Kendall had moved away, leaving their place empty. He had gotten a high-paying job

ERRATA

ALR regrets the omission of the following conclusion from Wayne Greenhaw's "Handbook for Boys":

> with NASA over in Mississippi. Cousin Sybil still lived next door. She came over every morning and cared for her mother. Her husband, John, still worked in town, leaving every morning and returning just before twilight. When he arrived, we all sat on the porch. To the slow tune of Aunt Lucille's rocking chair moving against the old boards, they talked. Sybil told how Mae and Cater had moved away years ago. They'd heard Mae died of cancer some time back. Cater, she said, had gone up north and had never been heard from since. When she said the words I hurt a little, ached inside with a longing for that afternoon when we lay naked on the sandbar and listened to the river roll by, breathing deep the clean fresh air.
>
> In the last light, Aunt Lucille said, "I wish you could of seen Dee. He was right handsome laying on the white silk in the coffin. He looked so peaceful. Like he was asleep. You know, he found the Lord in his last days. He found the Lord and gave his soul to Jesus Christ."
>
> For a moment I started to protest. *Dee couldn't reason. He knew little or nothing about history. He had no idea how to contemplate any religion, much less Christianity.*
>
> Cousin Sybil looked toward me and nodded almost imperceptibly. Then she reached over and patted her mother on the knee. "He's in heaven, Mama."
>
> After Aunt Lucille rocked forward and back again, a whippoorwill called from somewhere across the water. An instant later, a mockingbird answered. I hugged my arms close to my body, feeling yesterday's chill bumps as the moss began to whisper.

Theron Montgomery

Lying at the Edge of the World

I know I sing at the edge of silence,
I know I dance around suspension....
Sophia De Mello Breyner. "I Feel the Dead"

He awoke in the dark and didn't know where he was. He sat up, feeling smooth metal bed rails with his hands while loud traffic droned in the night outside a window. "Where am I?" Louie said. He tried to stare through the dark, feeling a sharp, weakening pang of hunger. A ceiling light came on, blinding and bright. Louie blinked and his eyes adjusted to a white ceiling, white walls, and a green tiled floor. He was in the middle of three hospital beds. An old, frail man in the bed to his right had flipped on the light switch. The bed to Louie's left was empty and made-up, a fresh jonquil on its smooth pillow. The old man to his right, in covers and grey pajamas like himself, rubbed his eyes and reached for eyeglasses on a metal night table. He had wispy white hair, no teeth, and sagging bags under dark, hollowed eyes.

"Who are you? What am I doing here?" Louie said. He stared at the old man and around the strange room. The man slipped on his glasses, reached for a black cord clipped onto his bedspread and pressed a button.

"What am I doing here?" Louie demanded. But the old man seemed detached, even bored, and looked to the door of the room as it swung open. A dark headed woman entered, dressed in starch white, wearing scarlet lipstick. Louie stared at her and realized he had been asleep with his glasses on.

"Yes?" she said.

"Butch is at it again," the man told her.

Butch? Louie stared at them.

The woman shook her head, came forward. Her large, scarlet lips, dull blue eyes, and pinched nose seemed familiar, as if from another time. But it was not his wife.

"Where am I?" Louie said.

“You're home,” Scarlet Lips said, her voice high and false. “Now, go back to sleep.”

“Home?” He stared at her. He could remember black and white kitchen tile and sunlight in the window of a breakfast nook.

Scarlet Lips placed her hands on his shoulders and pushed him gently down into the bed. "Go back to sleep."

"I'm hungry," he said.

"We eat in the morning," she answered, her tone not changing.

Louie sat up. "Answer me," he demanded. "Where am I? What am I doing here?"

The woman took a step back, set her lips, and crossed her arms.

“Careful, Butch,” the old man made a terse whisper. “Remember last time.”

Last time? He wasn't sure about last time. He looked at the man, then at the woman. He lay down and pulled the covers up to his chin.

"Much better," Scarlet Lips said. "Now go to sleep."

Louie nodded.

Scarlet Lips gave him a quick smile and left the room, turning out the light.

"Night, Butch," a sad whisper came in the dark.

"Good night," Louie echoed, still trying to see through the dark, and listening for familiar sounds in the steady din of traffic outside a window.

Louie awoke and the still room was filled with gray light from the windows. He heard the steady drone of morning street traffic outside the window and saw his blue bottle of Milk of Magnesia and a glass of water on the metal bedside table. Mac was asleep. Joe's bed was empty, made up, with a fading jonquil on its smooth pillow. Louie realized he had slept with his glasses on. He heard feet shuffling in the hallway on the other side of the door. His legs ached. He was hungry. But he knew to wait until someone came. The door swung open with brighter ceiling light from the hallway and the thin male orderly, whom all the patients dubbed "Too Nice" in his white maintenance suit and close, kinky hair, came in with their bedpans. "Good morning," he sang out. "Potty time."

Holding a broad smile, Too Nice poked Mac awake. Louie watched him lift Mac's bed covers and place the bedpan under Mac's body. Too Nice came and lifted Louie's covers, tugged Louie's pajamas down. Louie winced as the cold steel met his bottom. Too Nice watched and smiled while Louie let himself go. He handed them toilet paper and Louie and Mac wiped. He took the bedpans with the wipes into the bathroom, flushed the toilet, and left the room without looking back.

Louie watched the door swing closed and Mac drifted back to sleep. The door swung open with "Orange Hat," the short, obese dietician in blue overalls and the orange baseball cap, pushing in the food cart.

"Good morning, good morning," she piped. She had a dimpled face and a lazy eye. She wheeled the cart between Louie and Mac's beds. Mac opened his eyes. Orange Hat grinned and cranked each man's bed into sitting position and slapped clip-on trays across their bed rails.

"Look what we've got for you," she sang, like she had a surprise. She placed covered plates before them, silverware wrapped in napkins, and plastic, capped glasses of juice. Louie smiled for he. He thought her well intended but not all there. Mac gaped at her with his bare gums, reached for his eyeglasses on the table, and slipped them on.

"Why, Mister Smith," Orange Hat exclaimed, as she removed the lids from their glasses and plates, "whatever's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," Mac said. He dabbed his eyes under his lenses with the edge of his bed sheet. "It was just a sudden memory."

"Now, now," she patted his leg. "That does no good."

"No coffee?" Louie said.

"Afterwards," Orange Hat trilled, smiling and reprimanding him with a waving finger, as if to a child.

Louie smiled for her until she turned and pushed the cart out of the room. He made a face. He and Mac unwrapped their napkins and began to eat.

"Say, how you feeling, Butch?" Mac skirted his eyes at him, mouthing toast.

"Fine," Louie said, spooning egg into his mouth.

"You got a little rowdy last night."

Louie stopped and looked at him. "Oh, did I?"

"But don't worry," Mac winked. "I looked after ya."

"Thanks," Louie said, nodding his gratitude. But he could not recall being rowdy or not.

After Orange Hat removed the trays, the younger attendant, "Blonde Braids," wearing a small white uniform with freckles and blonde braids and heavy makeup, came in. She did not acknowledge Louie or Mac and began to talk to herself, rehearsing a conversation between herself and her boyfriend about using the condom or the sponge in their love making. She took Louie's glasses and shaved him first, letting him hold the mirror while she talked, intoning a man's husky, demanding voice and then a meeker, wiser feminine one, stroking lather from Louie's face and wiping the plastic razor on a towel across his chest.

Louie and Mac listened in silent amusement while Blonde Braids shifted her voice and point of view between that of the woman and then that of the man. The woman said she would try to meet his needs and use the sponge, but only on the condition that he teach his eager member to be patient. Blonde Braids finished shaving Louie and wiped his face. She threw off the covers, stripped off his pajamas, and gave him a quick and warm sponge bath with her deft fingers, talking as the man, who said he wanted it when he wanted it. The wet, warm sponge made Louie's skin tingle, but little else. He liked this part. He tried to catch her eye but Blonde Braids didn't meet his look. Her mouth continued to intone like a recording, going on to the weather report or a fashion feature from some television channel she watched. Blonde Braids dried Louie with a towel, handed him his glasses, covered him up, and went to shave Mac.

"Can I shave myself?" Mac asked as she removed his glasses.

"No," she said. "You cut yourself, remember?" Mac pouted his lips. In a moment, he wiped tears from his eyes and she ignored him, beginning to lather his face, repeating what some fat man had said about the thrills and dangers of "bungee jumping" on a Today Show.

Blonde Braids finished Mac's sponge bath and stopped talking long enough to give Mac his glasses and walker, and Louie his cane. She helped them get out of bed and go into the bathroom to brush their gums, put in their dentures, and comb their hair. They came out to her rendition of a Pepsi commercial with a basketball player dribbling in outer space as they sat in the steel chairs by their closets and she helped them dress in frayed underwear, old white shirts, faded suits, and worn shoes. Blonde Braids silently guided them by their elbows out of the room and down the hallway to the lounge where old and shriveled people, most in wheelchairs and in old clothes like themselves, played cards or checkers at tables, stood chatting with or without walkers, or sat gaping on a sofa at the wall tv. Louie recognized the scarecrow-thin old woman in the wheelchair with the moth-eaten paisley bathrobe and the frizzled blue hair who gave him a wink. "I got plans for you, baby," she chortled. Louie smiled for her.

"You get sun today," Blonde Braids announced and led them outside onto the patio, helping Louie and Mac sit at one of the concrete yard tables in the sunlight. She left and an orderly brought them coffee. Mac sipped from his styrofoam cup, set it down, swelled his chest, and looked Louie in the eye. "It was you and me, Butch," he declared. "You and me. We broke the grip at the Battle of the Bulge."

Louie smiled for Mac, but he could not remember that. He could remember the war. Dead boys and body parts. Hard, grimed faces. The shooting. The ever-constant knot of fear, crumbling buildings, dirt and smoke. Louie watched Mac close his eyes to the sun and felt sad. He shook his head to forget the war. Old people, some with visitors, were seated about the patio and the yard inside the steel linked fence. Some were seated by themselves and stared into space. You could tell the outsiders: younger, louder, and over-dressed. "There is the edge of the world," Mac interrupted, opening his eyes and nodding to the fence. “There is the edge of the world.”

Studying the dirt path along the chain link fence, Louie remembered his cue. He rose on his cane and walked to the linked gate before the busy street of the outer world and stopped. He squinted, found his word *walk* scratched onto the post and smiled to himself. He peered about, hung his cane by its handle in a link of the fence, and began to swing his arms and take deep, wheezing breaths, hearing the harsh goads of his long dead boxing coach and a scratchy rendition of *Bye, Bye Blackbird* for some reason. He began his walk, punching the air, unassisted along the fence, feeling the stiffness in his legs, his body tighten then loosen as he lapped the yard, staring out through the links of the fence at the noisy, busy street and people of the other world hurrying by on the sidewalk.

A white limousine went by and Louie remembered a DeSoto. Red and white. Big red steering wheel. Smiling Maude and the kids with him on vacation. He lowered his hands, shook his head, and continued walking. Each time Louie lapped the patio, wheezing for breath toward the gate, Mac saluted him from the table. Louie nodded. His breathing began coming fast. His legs ached. But Louie set his dentures and lips and made himself walk two more laps before he stopped and gripped the links, feeling his heart pulse, his hips and legs tremble. He sighed and grinned. He was not a quitter yet. Coach would be proud.

As he took his cane off the gate, Louie turned into the rigid, unseeing stare of a bald, old man in gray pajamas, slumped pale and thin in a wheelchair beneath a tree. Louie met the look. It reminded him of a fish. He blinked, dabbing the perspiration on his forehead with his sleeve, and quickly turned away.

After lunch in the cafeteria, the nurse, Scarlet Lips, led Louie and Mac to their room for a nap. She took Mac's walker and Louie's cane, helped them remove their glasses, coats, and shoes and lie back on their beds. No sooner did she leave than she was back.

"Mail call," she announced, handing Mac and Louie envelopes.

"My direct deposit slip," Mac said, slipping on his glasses.

Louie slipped on his glasses, opened a big envelope, and pulled out a gold card.

"Happy Birthday, Mr. Burns," Scarlet Lips informed him. She made a smile.

“Birthday?” Louie said. “How old am I?”

Scarlet Lips paused. “Er, well, I'm not sure,” she confessed. “Eighty-five? Eighty-seven?”

Louie gingerly fingered the card. He opened it to small print he could not read. He looked to the signature. *From the staff*, he could make out, and the last word, *Home*. Louie pondered and blinked. He sighed and looked up into Scarlet Lips' bland gaze.

"May I use your pen?" he asked, seeing a red one in her breast pocket.

"No," Scarlet Lips said. "It's time for your nap."

Louie smiled for her and then he lunged for her pen. Scarlet Lips shrieked and grabbed his arm but Louie clung to her breast pocket. "No," she screamed, "no," while Mac came off his bed and hugged her from behind. Louie got the pen and the cap off, fell back onto his bed, and printed the large, hasty letters *HOME* on the underside of his wrist before other hands came over him, seizing his arms and the pen.

Louie lay in the dark, holding his throbbing hand. *Where am I?* he thought, hearing the steady drone of night traffic outside a window. He tried to peer through the dark, wanting it to become familiar. "Where am I?"

A ceiling light came on. He blinked and squinted. He had been asleep with his glasses on. A bed on his left was empty and made up with a wilted flower on the smooth pillow. He was in a strange, white room with a green tiled floor. In a bed to his right was an old man in gray pajamas who had flipped on the wall light switch. The man blinked at him. He had mussed, white hair and dark, hollowed eyes.

"Where am I?" Louie said. "What am I doing here?"

The old man made a sad smile with bare gums and shook his head. He slowly slipped on glasses from a steel side table and raised a cord clipped to his bed cover with a button on the end.

"Don't make me do it, Butch," he said. "They've already given you one shot today."

Shot? Butch? Louie stared at him and about the room. He looked down at his bruised, veined hand. Two knuckles were bleeding. He saw the sprawled word *Home* printed in red on the underside of his wrist and then remembered. Louie threw off the covers and climbed over the bed rail onto the floor.

"What are you doing?" Mac said.

"I'm going home."

Mac stared after him, holding the cord button. Louie went to his closet, opened it, and dropped his pajamas. He dressed in the faded suit and an old white shirt, stepped into worn, two-toned shoes, and pulled on an overcoat.

"Butch," Mac said. "Don't do it. They won't let you."

Louie went toward the door, stopped, and turned to the window between his bed and Mac's. He unlatched the window and tried to lift it.

"You can't do it," Mac said.

Louie closed his eyes and strained against the window. It creaked, lifted. Mac cowered down in his bed. Somewhere an alarm sounded and Louie pushed out the screen.

"Take me with you," Mac pleaded. "Take me with you."

Louie shook his head. Mac's eyes glistened behind his lenses. He dropped the cord and offered his feeble hand. "Give my best to General Patton, Butch."

"My name isn't Butch," Louie told him.

Beyond the window and the shrubbery, shimmering vehicles streamed before him on an ink night street: shining headlights, brake lights, stop lights flowing among flashing, blinking business lights. Constant noise, motion, and blurs. He felt exhilarated by the possibility of adventure, flopped his overcoat like wings past the ice plants and onto the sidewalk, grinning and relieved, thinking of home, realizing he had forgotten his dentures, remembering to look for the North Star like when he hunted raccoons as a boy, and head east to where Oxford, Alabama, would be. Louie couldn't find the stars, but a sign flashed *walk*, an arrow sign pointed toward Eastern Boulevard. Louie turned east and walked along the curb, hiking up his thumb with a smile at the ever-flowing river of lights, cars and trucks, a scratchy *Waiting for a Train* reverberating in his mind, and remembering this was how his long ago buddy Hal and he once hitchhiked to the Chicago World Fair.

Among cans, broken glass, gravel, and weeds, he sat in the warm sunlight before the highway zipping with traffic, wondering where it was going and trying to recall what he had been doing. He tried to take in the sweeping monotony of noise and motion, wanting it to become familiar. Louie rubbed his eyes, rose on stiff hips and legs, feeling a pang of hunger.

Like a slow, growing mirage, a young man came along the side of the road toward him, dragging a heavy wooden cross over his back, sweating in green biblical garb with a cord tied around his waist, long hair, and sandals. "Morning," the man nodded as he went by. "Been saved?"

Louie nodded and watched him grow smaller down the highway. He could remember pews and "Onward Christian soldier, Marching as to war," but he couldn't remember whether he had been saved or not. He tried to recall, turning into a pine thicket to urinate, unzipping and peeing and hearing soft singing that was not in his head but coming from below the bridge on the highway. Louie zipped up his fly and followed the sound down a slope to a sandy bank with a trickle of a creek, discovering a little girl in red overalls playing on the opposite bank with two nude dolls, and singing about "bare necessity." Louie stopped, stunned by her small face and shrill voice her dark curls and little fingers. She wore a clean white tee shirt and small green tennis shoes.

"Hi," she beamed.

"Hello," Louie whispered. "Where," he managed, "is your mother?"

The little girl pointed in the direction of nearby houses. But Louie did not dare look away from her. He brushed tears from his eyes.

"Want to play?" she said.

Louie nodded. He stepped over the water and sat beside her in the sand, marveling at her small face and large brown eyes.

"We're digging for worms to go fishing," she said. "They can't use their arms," she explained, "so they have to use their heads." She showed him by dragging the dolls' heads through the sand.

"Here, you be one." She handed him a doll.

Louie smiled and reached for it, noticing the rough printed letters in red on his wrist. He dropped the doll and stood up.

"I have to go home now," he said.

He stumbled across the creek, clambered up the slope to the highway, and walked over the bridge as a horn blared, cars and trucks whizzed and blasted by, a fragment of *Hang on the Belle, Nelle* echoing in his mind, then *Stardust.* He used to drive, too, he remembered. Had a blue Buick and a black Packard. Louie shook his head. Or was it a Blue Packard and a black Buick? Plaid, rayon seats and a wood dash. Maude smiling beside him as he drove, the kids in back. He shook his head to be rid of it. What was gone did no good. But home was a place. He could see the black and white tile of the kitchen and quiet sunlight streaming into the breakfast nook. You could hold your own cup of coffee, listen to Dizzy Dean on the radio, catch the news on tv, or Ernie Ford or Jimmy Durante. You could pee on the floor if you wanted to.

The hill ahead of him began to look familiar. This was the road that went into town and at the foot of the other side was the stone and wood Rabbit Filling Station—no, no, it became a Texaco. And beyond that was Clement's Hardware, the lumber yard he once owned and Julia's Grill, and beyond that were framed houses and the left turn toward his house among the shady oaks. He smiled and walked faster, despite his hard breathing, the rising, stabbing pangs of hunger and his aching legs. A car pulled up even with him, then went ahead of him into the grass and braked.

"Hey," the driver called from her window. "Hey."

Louie stopped, stared. His head spun.

"Need a ride, Old Timer?" She was a smiling girl, blonde ponytail, yellow blouse, and gold on her neck.

Louie tapped his chest.

"Yeah, you," she laughed. "Get in."

The back door opened and a giggling brunette girl in cutoffs, sneakers, and a blue blouse got out. She smiled, lifted her brown beer bottle and led Louie into the back seat, got in beside him and shut the door. Inside, the car was white and cool, a loud and rhythmic noise throbbing from a speaker somewhere, and the faint smell of perfume. Another grinning blonde girl sat in the front passenger's seat. The girls smiled at him: young and bright eyed, in jewelry and in tight tee shirts or blouses.

"So...where to, Grandpa?" the grinning driver said.

"Over the hill," Louie said.

The brunette beside him lost a swallow of beer onto the floorboard. The girls howled with laughter and Louie tried to smile. The car moved onto the highway with a surge of speed. He watched as they grinned at him and drank from their bottles, the driver grinning at him in the rear view mirror. The girl in front with the driver offered him an opened bottle over the seat. "Beer, Grandpa?"

"Thank you," Louie said. He was thirsty. "Thank you." He took the bottle and drank.

"Hey, Grandpa likes that stuff," the girl beside him exclaimed. The girls shrilled and laughed, watching as he finished the bottle and lowered it. "Thank you," he gasped.

"Sure," the girl who gave it to him said, and she winked at everyone.

Louie tried to smile back. "Am I at the Cross Roads?" he wanted to know. "Am I at Cross Roads?" The girls just nodded and grinned. The car went over the hill to no Rabbit Filling Station or hardware store, framed houses, or even trees. Instead, there was a bright, white pavilion and a parking lot, streams of cars, billboards, signs, and fast food stands built of brick and glass. The still-smiling girl in the front seat with the driver offered him another bottle, but Louie shook his head, staring out his window, wanting what was outside to become familiar. His head felt light. Everything began to float into a slow spin in loud and rhythmic noise: the cool, white interior; the sweet, faint smell of perfume; the young faces, their grins and eyes . . . .

Louie awoke. The room was still and full of light, the walls white, and chrome rails were on either side of his bed. He sat up, blinking. There was a bandage on his hand and the steady drone of traffic outside a window. "Where am I?" he said. He was in the middle of three hospital beds on a green tiled floor. An old, frail man was curled up asleep in the bed to his right and a dried and yellowed stem was curled upon the smooth pillow on the bed to his left.

"Where am I?" Louie called. "What am I doing here?"

Charles Rose

A New Roof

What Samantha Hall did for Teejay Banks on the morning before her father drove up to visit her in his brown and beige Cadillac Deville, she did biscuits and gravy, cheese grits, three eggs over easy, whole wheat toast. Normally she saw to it he had granola for breakfast. She was worried about his cholesterol even though he was only twenty-two years old. She had to watch hers, for she was thirty-six. She didn't bring up her father right away. She waited. She spooned up granola and fat free milk, set her spoon down, and asked him to spend the next two days in a Best Western motel.

"He won't understand how we feel, Teejay. He'll think I'm using you for sex. Since that's just what we don't want him to think it might be better if you were somewhere else."

Teejay swabbed egg yolk with a piece of toast, then decided he'd better not talk while he ate. "So I should care what your old man thinks. We both know we're not using each other for sex."

"I know we do, but Daddy doesn't. Just do this for me, just this once, Teejay."

He said he'd do it one time only. He'd move into a Best Western motel for two days. He saw relief in her pretty blue eyes. She ran her hands through her thick blond hair, her big breasts flattening out a little. "I won't ask you to move out again, Teejay." Then her soft white hands were warming his. "I'm going to tell Daddy I have a wonderful man in my life. You, Teejay, only you."

He held the palm of her soft hand up to his lips. "What you tell your daddy is up to you. You do what you feel like doing."

They made love right away in Samantha's brass bed. Teejay honey! Oh Samantha. She made the bed with Teejay in it, pulling the sheet up past his chest, poking and pinching his arms and legs. She knew how to make him feel good in bed but it wasn't just sex they had going for them. There were things that made them feel close, hearing birds sing waking up at dawn, taking long walks, working crossword puzzles together. He would help her set up her still lifes, gladioli and pussy willows in a long-necked vase, lemons and limes, a Florida orange, oodles, she'd say, of bougainvillea. Sitting quietly in her studio, he would watch her sketch and paint.

On his second day in a motel, a Best Western close to East Pensacola Heights, he got a telephone call from Samantha. He could come back any time, she said, her father had left a day early. Instead of going back to her house he asked her to come to him, get in the minivan her father had purchased for her while he was there and drive to the Best Western. That she did for him, came to his place. She brought an electric razor for him with her, a pair of levis, a tank top, mousse for his hair. He waited to ask her what she'd said about him to her father, until just before checkout time.

"When I told him about you, Teejay, he said he hoped it would work out for us." She unsnapped her bulging purse, searched through her many credit cards.

Two days later Teejay got word that his father had died of a heart attack. He'd called his father in Cantonment—the telephone ringing on and on, why didn't he buy an answering machine?—because the next time Samantha's father drove up in his Cadillac, Teejay thought he'd just head back home, spend the time in the house he'd grown up in. He got his old maid aunt on the phone instead; that's how he'd gotten the news. Something quivered, leaped, ran amuck in his brain. *The house is mine now. Sonofabitch is mine.* He put the cordless back in its cradle. *Last time I saw you you were dead drunk, in Momma's bedroom in your boxer shorts. You do that one more time I'll whip your sorry ass.*

He didn't ask Samantha to go to the funeral; he wanted to spare her that. The night before the movers came, Teejay slept in his mother's room. His mother had died two years ago, worn out, riddled with bone cancer. It was raining when he woke up. He had a bucket set at the foot of the bed. The roof had a leak in two places, at the foot of the bed, above her vanity. Something would have to be done about that. He moved the bucket on top of the vanity, seeing his face in the mirror, a surface that once had held his mother's face. His great grandfather's

Bible was still on the dresser, births and marriages written inside. An Olan Mills photograph taken in Biloxi was also there—his father in a rented tuxedo, his mother in her wedding dress and lifted veil. His father was wearing sideburns then. His mother wore her hair in butternut curls. They were holding hands in front of a latticed arch.

He got up and went to the living room, already puddled in several places. He walked out on the front porch and watched the traffic on U. S. 29 nosing through the rain, Gulf beach-bound vehicles with Tennessee license plates or with Ohio or Illinois plates whose occupants stared straight ahead. The rain stopped before the movers came. Teejay led the moving van back to Pensacola in the pickup truck Samantha had purchased for him. Samantha's house looked good to him, Samantha coming out on the front porch with a paint brush behind her left ear. Teejay got out and went to her right away, while the ramp was coming down from the truck.

What belonged to his father was sold. His mother's dresser and vanity, the television set his mother had watched—game shows, talk shows, sit-coms, day in and day out until she died—Samantha made a place for these things in an upstairs room in the back of the house, with a nice view of the bay. It was somewhere for Teejay to be by himself. He kept the photographs on the dresser. His great grandfather's Bible he also kept. Sometimes he opened it and read the births and marriages, a sheet of tiny printed inscriptions from before the Civil War on up to his great grandfather's marriage and his grandfather's birth, in 1918. In a broad hand was his father's birth date, William Banks, in 1935. No one had ever called his father William. He had always been called Willie.

He stayed in his mother's room while Samantha worked in her studio. Instead of watching her work, he stayed up this room, watching talk shows on the television set, looking out at the sailboats on the bay. Looking up from the open Bible once, he felt a spear of probing sunlight between his eyes. The letters B...A...N...K...S were shimmering, floating away from him. He raised one hand to shut out the voice, Willie talking to him, *I'm talking to you. You can have it all with this woman.* He closed the Bible, let the sailboats go on cutting swathes in the bay. He got out of the room in a hurry. He took a walk down the sandy road.

When he got back he went to the studio and put his hand on the doorknob to her studio. *You can have it all.* He'd tell her what his old man said, but the door, he couldn't open it.

In bed with Samantha, it wasn't the same. He would roll over afterwards and go to sleep. He'd be out of bed before Samantha was, making coffee for them in the kitchen just so he could be away from her. Still, he tried not to show what he was feeling. Not much seemed to change in their life together. They went fishing off the bay bridge. He made stretcher bars for her canvases. He drove her paintings to a Gulf Coast art show in the new minivan, and when she didn't win best of show, not even an honorable mention, he did his best to make her feel okay about it. He said the best of show painting made him want to vomit. Samantha shouldn't give up her painting because someday she would be recognized.

He decided he had to put his house up for sale. He listed the house with Deen Real Estate Agency in Cantonment because he felt Hugh Deen should have the listing, not Buddy Purvis, he was telling Samantha, the only other real estate agent in his home town, because everyone knew Buddy drank like a fish.

"He was my daddy's big buddy but he sure isn't mine." He waited for Samantha to set up three long-stemmed calla lillies in the long necked vase. She ran her pink tongue along her lower lip, looking out at the sailboats speckling the bay.

"Neither one of them sound very reliable to me. Why don't you let Daddy handle it? He has some good friends in real estate, right here in Pensacola."

I'm talking to you. You can have it all. He had to pull his eyes away from the calla lilies.

Hugh Deen told him over the telephone he was only interested in selling land now. Lori Torbert was handling house sales now. Teejay met Lori Torbert at the house. She parked her Nissan Sentra in the driveway. She came up to him on the front porch and sat next him to him on the porch swing. Her skirt was a little too tight for her, and there were, streaks of orange in her short blond hair, but she was still a nice looking young woman. He saw she wasn't wearing a wedding ring.

The house needed a lot done to it. A fixer-upper, Lori told him. She thought he could get eighty-five thousand for it if Teejay put in a new roof. Yes, the roof leaked; something had to be done, he thought, but where would he get the money? Not from Samantha, or Samantha's daddy. So he asked Lori to sell the house as is.

"All right, but that's going to take a while. At least get someone to clean it up.

"I can do that. I think I can take care of that."

Lori asked him how she could get in touch with him, and he left her Samantha's telephone number. The next day he called Magic Maids in Pensacola and arranged to have the house cleaned. He sat out on the porch swing while the girls did the job. He dropped by the real estate office to leave word that the house was ready to show. Lori Torbert turned in her swivel chair, and gave him the news. "I'm not really sure I can sell your house unless you put in a new roof. "

"Try selling it without one. Come down on the price if you have to," he said.

Three weeks later, Lori Torbert called him right before lunch. Samantha picked up the telephone, handed it over without a word, and went off to the kitchen. Lori Torbert sounded put out with him. She had shown the house on a beautiful day, no likelihood it would rain, she thought, but after she'd shown the house to these people it had rained on the way to the car. "You can imagine how I'd look to my clients if it had rained while they were in your house. That would be one sale I could kiss goodbye."

Samantha was waiting for him in the kitchen. She had a pot of split pea soup simmering, whole wheat toast in the toaster, an endive lettuce salad already made. She was stirring the soup with a wooden spoon.

"That was my real estate agent on the phone. She wants me to put in a new roof. If I don't it might not sell so quick."

He told Samantha it had started to rain while Lori Torbert was showing the house. "She told me that old roof of mine leaks like a a sieve," he said. "She said that was one sale she had to kiss goodbye."

It was the first time he had lied to Samantha. Nothing showed in his voice, nothing showed in her but irritation over the way he was handling the sale. Two slices of toast popped up in the toaster.

"You ask me, this woman doesn't know which end is up. I mean she isn't professional. She should have told these people the roof leaked before she had them inside to look at the house."

"So next time she tells them," Teejay said, "and the time after that too."

Samantha set down her wooden spoon. "All right, Teejay. You can have your new roof. My checkbook is in my purse. Would you please go get it for me? You fill out the check. I'll sign it."

"You get it."

"All right I'll get it," she said, and laid the spoon down on the cook top.

She came back with this bulging leather purse. He couldn't stand to watch her poke through the clutter—change purse, pink tabbed keys to the van, tubes of lipstick, the pink flowered checkbook cover. You can have it all, but not at this price, no goddamned way he would write out the check. Something snapped in him, made him be mean to her.

"You sure your Daddy would want this? If he found out you were paying for my new roof, he'd say you were using me for sex."

Samantha bit down on her lower lip. "He won't find out about your new roof because I don't intend to tell him about it."

"Well, you ask me, you should tell him. Ask him to pay for my roof That way he'll have to write out the check."

Split pea soup gushed out of the pot, the pot clapped down on the linoleum.

"Get out of my house! I mean it! I want you out of here!" Samantha yelled at him.

He got his razor and toothbrush, a change of clothes, his parents' wedding photograph. The Bible he left where it was. He climbed in the pickup truck and drove away to Best Western.

He pawned the pickup truck to pay for the roof. He went down the next day to a pawn shop—we keep the title but you keep the keys—and came out with seventeen hundred dollars in cash. Next he went to a roofer and got a date for getting the job done. He would have to wait a week; he would have to live in a motel until the new roof was on the house. After that he could live in his own house, be there when Lori Torbert showed the house, and when she sold it he could get a decent job and find an affordable place and get his truck out of hock and start living.

Samantha called him that evening. She said she had to see him. He watched her pull the minivan into the parking lot. She brought sandwiches in a picnic basket, paper plates, and linen napkins. She spread their picnic out on the bed, and opened a bottle of cold beer for him. Her soft plump arms opening out to him made him want her again, like before.

Teejay was sitting out on the porch swing, watching the traffic go by. It was his house now, not his father's. Hammers—one after the other, two at once, four at a time—were whacking brads into shingles. Big black men and little white men were laddered against the sloping roof. Their flatbed truck was parked behind his pickup. Rotten shingles were stacked between the pecan tree and a cluster of sun-browned pampas grass. Teejay had a mattress in his pickup and a floor lamp and two table lamps, Samantha's kitchen chairs, a small ice chest, a hot plate, his mother's television set.

He hadn't turned off the utilities yet even though he hadn't any way of paying for them. He hadn't asked Samantha to pay the bills for him. He'd been to see her after she came to him, had slept with her on her brass bed, their love cries echoing in his mind. Teejay honey. Oh Samantha! And yet he heard her coming down on him the next day, in the kitchen. You can do what you like with your tacky old house. You can turn it into a museum and live there the rest of your natural life. He tried to tell her he wasn't doing that. He would live there until the house was sold. He would move back to Pensacola and find a place of his own after that, but that didn't mean they couldn't see each other. But he wasn't about to be a kept man. Kept, you think I want to keep you. You're the one who asked me for money. Someone must have let Lori

Torbert know he was here because around noon she showed up in her Nissan Sentra.

The roofers were off on their lunch break. Teejay made room for Lori on the porch swing. He had to put his feet on the porch to keep the swing from rocking.

"So I see you're putting on a new roof"

"That's right. That's what I'm doing." He felt Lori's arm brush his elbow. "And that's not all. I'm moving in. I'm going to stay here until you sell the house. I got a mattress and some kitchen chairs in my truck and some other things I need to live here. I'm serious. Here's where I intend to stay until you sell this place.

"You'll have to move your things out when I show the house.

"I can do that," Teejay said. "I can move them out to my truck." He rocked the porch swing just a little, and she put out her feet and stopped it.

"You are actually going to live here?"

"Sure am. I have to live somewhere," he said.

"I know but I may not sell your house for a while. I think you should be reasonable and find a place to live in Pensacola."

"I had a place in Pensacola," he said, "but that place is no longer available."

He looked away from the stacks of shingles, the ladders, the passing cars and trucks, shutting Samantha out of his mind. He eased his body close to Lori Torbert's, kept his eyes fixed in hers.

"Could I ask you something personal, Lori?"

"Some things I'd rather you didn't ask."

“I'm not prying into your personal life. I just want you to know why I moved out from the place I was in, that's all.” He found the words he wanted without looking for them. “What I'm asking you is would you live with an older man if he were your sole means of support?”

"I'm my own sole means of support," she said. "I sell real estate. I get along."

He felt the porch swing move a little, aware that both of them were moving it. "Supposing you met an older man who owned a Cadillac Deville."

He touched Lori's instep with the toe of a boot, and she giggled, rocking the swing. "Who wants a Cadillac Deville?"

"If I stayed with this woman I know I might be driving one someday."

"I wouldn't want you to give up a Cadillac."

"I wouldn't want to either but I might."

Lori put out a long leg to stop the swing, looking out at the traffic, controlling her voice so it sounded like how she was on the telephone, her bright blue eyes boring into his. "Why don't you come to my house tonight? I'll cook dinner for you and we'll watch a video."

"I wouldn't want you to cook dinner for me. But I will watch a video with you," he said.

That night they ordered takeout Chinese. He let Lori pay her half of the bill. She poured out Chablis in long-stemmed wine glasses and when the movie started she refilled them. They held hands, watching the movie, and then he put his arm around her, dropping his fingers to her breasts. She took his hand and let him fondle her breasts. Her lips fluttered when he kissed her.

Later, naked, drinking Chablis, she turned on her side and showed him the strawberry birthmark high up on her left buttock. "When I was a little girl my mom told me it would go away. But like a lot of things it didn't go away."

"I won't be going away until you sell my house."

"Well maybe I never will sell your house."

The next night he was back at Lori's place. They drank a pitcher of margaritas. She pointed out the antique furniture she had from her grandmother, really nice things, she said, a tea table with a marble top, a bonnet table with a drawer for gloves, a hall tree in glossy golden oak. She sat up on the carpet, swept one hand toward the hall tree. "That bastard I was married to tried to talk me out of the hall tree."

"What would he want with a hall tree?"

"He's renovating an old house in Pensacola. He says the hall tree is rightfully his because he was the one who refinished it. That's how Bill determines ownership."

There were photographs in her bedroom—she must have a big family, he thought—and a framed Cantonment High School diploma. She showed him her majorette photograph. She was in it with six other girls, kneeling in front of a drum major. He liked Lori as a majorette. He was sorry he hadn't gotten to know her then.

The next time he was with her they drank another pitcher of margaritas. Waking up in the middle of the night, he reached out to the woman beside him. Samantha, he heard himself saying. Lori turned over on her side. She didn't say anything to him, but when he touched her strawberry birthmark she grabbed his hand and shoved it away. He got up and went to the bathroom, and when he came out Lori was asleep. Or faking it, he couldn't tell which. He put his clothes on, and said goodbye to the hall tree.

Lori called him several days later. She was spending the day in Pensacola; she would come by his place when she got back. "I've got news for you, Teejay," she said. "Someone is interested in buying your house." But by nine o'clock Lori still hadn't shown up. He thought of going to see Lori at her place; then the Nissan pulled into the driveway and Lori was at his front door.

He tried to kiss her but she pushed him away. "I'm showing the house tomorrow at ten. So you need to be out of here. I came over tonight to tell you because you need to clean up the place."

"Out? I live here," he said

He nudged a beer can with his foot, and went up to her and put his hands out. She took one of his hands in both of hers. "It's not that I don't want to see you, Teejay, but right now isn't a good time. We can see each other after I sell your house."

She let him kiss her before she left him. He stood out on the porch for a while, watching the traffic go by. He didn't want to go back inside the house right away. Lori Torbert was like the other girls he'd known. She probably would have made life miserable for him. The first girl he'd had sex with, he'd taken her to a high school football game. He'd had her in the back seat of his father's car. When he got back home, there was a light on in the bay window. His mother and Willie were dancing. His mother's hands were locked behind Willie's neck. Teejay'd driven around the block several times. They must have heard him pull out of the driveway because when he got back the lights were out all over the house.

He swept up the kitchen and took the garbage out. He loaded his things on the pickup, the floor lamp and table lamps, the kitchen chairs, the hot plate and the ice chest, his mother's television set. The wedding photograph he put in the glove compartment.

He stayed in a motel in Cantonment, across the highway from Kentucky Fried, and the next day he sat in his room until ten, watching game shows and talk shows, as his mother had for so many years. He got in the pickup at ten-fifteen and headed back to his house. He drove by the Nissan Sentra, the brown and beige Cadillac Deville. It figured it would have white-wall tires. He tried to figure out what had happened, knowing what if not exactly how. As for how, that he would never know. He gassed up at a full-service station, had the oil checked, the windshield cleaned. Returning, he passed his house again. The Cadillac must be on its way back home, to wherever it had come from.

Hugh Deen was in his office waiting for him. He was half a foot shorter than Lori Torbert, an old guy she couldn't be interested in. Hugh Deen told him Lori Torbert had gone home early today. She was going on vacation tomorrow and she wanted to get started packing. Hugh Deen had the earnest money for the house. He counted out fifteen crisp one-hundred dollar bills, and handed them over to Teejay.

It started raining when he got to Samantha's. Drops of rain puckered the white sand along the narrow road that led to the bay. He left his earnest money in the glove compartment, put a tarpaulin over his things in the truck. He wiped his shoes off on the throw rug by the door so he wouldn't track up the living room. A still life was set up on the coffee table, double blossomed camellias in the long-necked vase. He moved quietly through the big dining room to the kitchen. Samantha was washing romaine lettuce, patting each beaded leaf dry, folding wet lettuce up in a towel.

It rained on into the afternoon. They made love in her room, on her brass bed. Teejay honey! Oh Samantha! She had to ask him do you love me? He heard himself saying, “I do, Samantha,” rain drumming on their storm-tight roof.

Contributors

Marlin Barton is from the Black Belt region of Alabama. He teaches creative writing at Huntingdon College and at a juvenile detention facility in Mt. Meigs, Alabama. He has published stories in such places as *The Southern Review, The Sewanee Review, The Virginia Quarterly Review,* and the 1994 *O. Henry* collection. His collection of short stories titled *The Dry Well* is forthcoming from Frederic C. Beil, Publisher.

Poet, short fiction writer, novelist, translator, **Kelly Cherry** recently retired from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she was both the Eudora Welty Professor of English and the Evjue-Bascom Professor in the Humanities. She spent fall 1999 as the eminent scholar for the Humanities Center at the University of Alabama-Huntsville. Her most recent book is a collection of short fiction entitled *The Society of Friends*, published last fall by the University of Missouri Press.

Randall Curb's essays and reviews have appeared in *The Georgia Review, Poets & Writers, The Oxford American*, and *The Southern Review*, among other magazines and journals. He lives in Greensboro, Alabama.

Jeffrey Goodman teaches English and Creative Writing at the Alabama School of Math and Science and Creative Writing at Spring Hill College in Mobile. He has been a Stanford Poetry Fellow. His latest book of poetry is "A Strung Bow" (R.L. Barth).

Wayne Greenhaw's latest novel, *Beyond the Night: a remembrance*, is now in its second printing from Black Belt Press. He is currently writing a screenplay set in rural southwest Alabama and he is polishing a novel entitled *The Long Journey* set in the Tennessee River valley of north Alabama in 1919.

Kevin McGowin was born and raised in Birmingham. He moved to Montgomery and attended Auburn University at Montgomery, before moving to the University of Florida, where he earned his MFA. This winter he'll received Ph.D. With his wife Bonnie and their three cats, He lives and writes in Raleigh, North Carolina, and teaches at North Carolina State University.

Michael Martone teaches creative writing at the University of Alabama. Much of his work focuses on the American Midwest, including *Seeing Eye* (Zoland Books, 1995), short stories written in the persona of Dan Quayle, and *Fort Wayne Is Seventh on Hitler's List: Indiana Stories* (Indiana University Press, 1993. His most recent collection of essays is *The Flatness and Other Landscapes*, published in January 2000 by the University of Georgia Press and recipient of the Associated Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction.

Theron Montgomery has worked for the *Jacksonville News,* the *Anniston Star*, and the *Gadsden Times*. His fiction has appeared in over a dozen literary journals as well as being selected to the anthology, *Southern Writers in the Nineties*, edited by George Garrett and Paul Ruffin. He has served as Chief Editor for the *Alabama English* journal, as a Founding Board member of the Alabama Writers' Forum, and as a member of the Southern Literary Task Force for the National Endowment for the Arts. He teaches English and creative writing at Troy State University.

Wyatt Prunty is the author of *Balance as Belief*; *What Women Know*; *What Men Believe*; and *The Times Between*; all published by Johns Hopkins. His other works include a critical study of contemporary poetry, "Fallen from the Symboled World": Precedents for the New Formalism. His most recent book is *Unarmed and Dangerous: New and Selected Poems* (Johns Hopkins, 1999). He is the Carlton Professor of English at the University of the South.

Charles Rose has published stories in numerous reviews, including *The Sewanee Review, The Georgia Review, The Southern Review, Southern Humanities Review, Willow Springs, Shenandoah, Georgetown Review, Crazyhorse*, and *The Chattahoochee Review*. One of his stories appeared in *Craft and Vision: The Best Fiction from The Sewanee Review*, edited by Andrew Lytle (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971). He retired from teaching at Auburn University in 1994.

Philip Stephens' first collection of poems, *The Determined Days* was chosen for the Sewanee Writers' Series and will be published by The Overlook Press in April 2000. His poems have appeared in *Agni, Southwest Review, North American Review*, and *Meridian*, among other places. He was educated at the University of Missouri at Columbia, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California at Irvine. He currently works as a free-lance writer in Kansas City, Missouri.

Though currently an Ohioan, **Juliana Gray Vice** was born in Selma, Alabama, and attended the University of Alabama. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in English at the University of Cincinnati. Her poems have appeared in *River City, New Delta Review* and *Sun Dog*.

Brad Watson was born in Meridian, Mississippi, attended Mississippi State University and The University of Alabama, and worked as a newspaper reporter and editor on the Alabama Gulf coast and in Montgomery, Alabama before returning to the University of Alabama to teach literature and writing. His first collection of stories, *Last Days of the Dog-Men* (W.W. Norton, 1996/Dell, 1997) won the Great Lakes Colleges Association New Writers Award, the Suc Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and was a *New York Times Book Review* Notable Book in 1997. He is working on a novel and a new collection of stories. Currently Briggs-Copeland Lecturer in Fiction and Director of Creative Writing at Harvard University, he divides his time between there and the Alabama Gulf coast, where he lives with his wife, Jeanine, and their son, Owen. His oldest son, Jason, is a forester in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The Alabama Writers' Forum

is a professional network providing support to Alabama's literary community.

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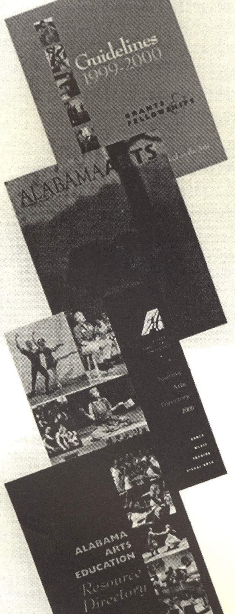

READ ALL ABOUT THE ARTS IN ALABAMA

Grant Guidelines, published annually, provides comprehensive information on the programs and services of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. The publication includes funding guidelines and all forms necessary for a grant application.

Alabama Arts is a semi-annual publication about the arts and artists of Alabama.

The Touring Arts Directory lists Alabama's performing artists who are available for performances in local communities. Also listed are visual arts exhibitions available from Alabama art museums.

Alabama Arts Education Resources is a new publication which provides a detailed listing of educational resources and services available from more than 100 arts groups in Alabama.

The State Arts Council's Folklife Program works cooperatively with other organizations to produce a large number of publications, CDs, and tapes which focus on the traditional culture of Alabama. A recent publication, *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* is a book of essays with a CD recording documenting the history and current use of an historic hymn book.

The State Arts Council also publishes a weekly email newsletter, AlabamaArts, that contains recent arts news, grant lists, and other information about the arts and artists of Alabama. To subscribe, go to http://www.onelist.com/subscribe/AlabamaArts

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