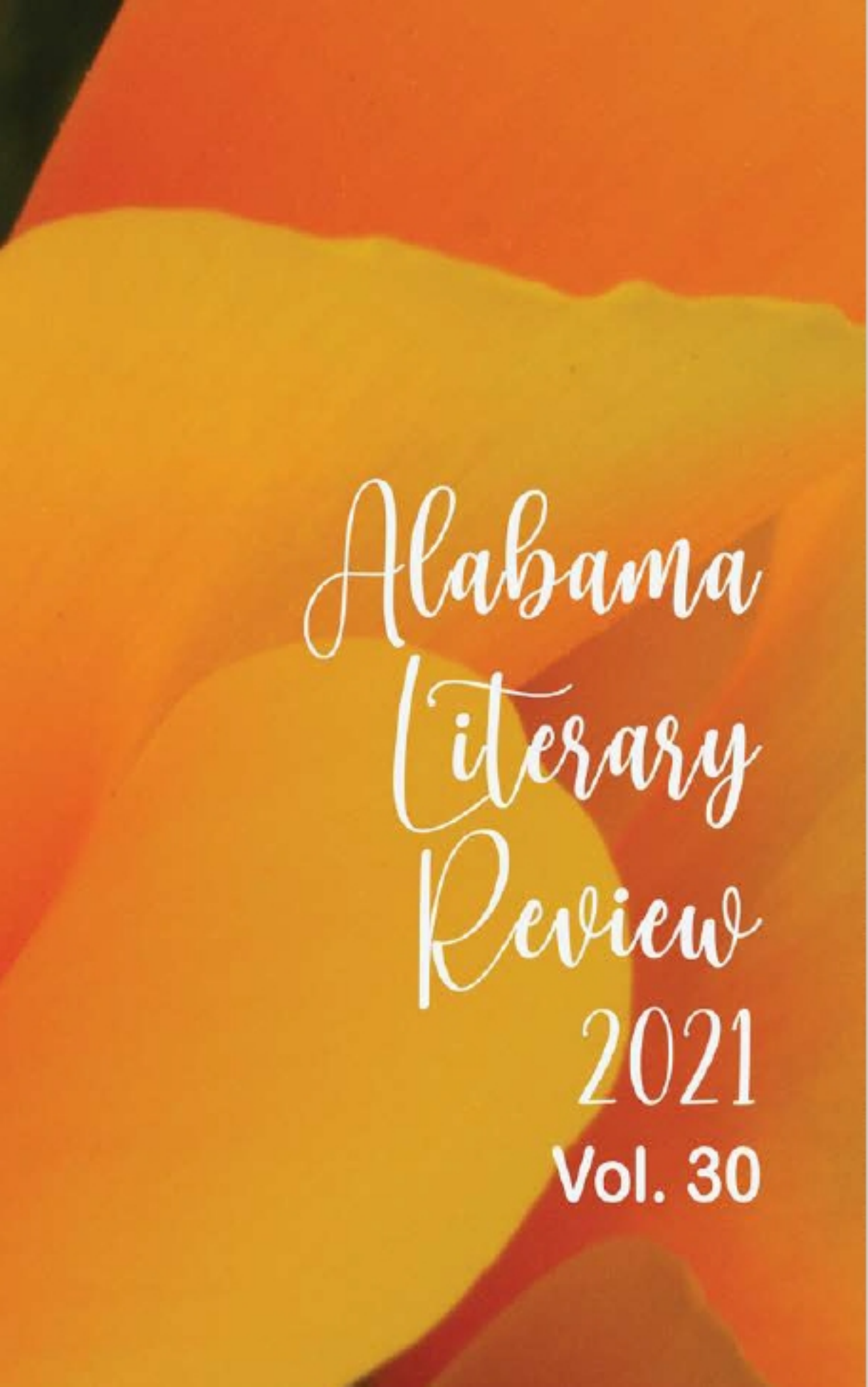
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Ned Balbo

***No One Leaves the World Unhurt,* John Foy. Autumn House Press, 2021.**

John Foy's third book, *No One Leaves the World Unhurt*, is J. Allyn Rosser's selection for the 2020 Donald Justice Poetry Prize and a darkly witty, beautifully written addition to the distinguished series. Foy, no stranger to well-earned recognition, continues to develop and refine a voice established in the excellent *Techne's Clearinghouse* (Zoo Press, 2004) and the New Criterion Prize-winning volume *Night Vision* (St. Augustine's Press, 2016) — books in which the author's black humor and skeptical musings never obscure his compassion or seriousness of purpose.

"The Payment Plan," the new book's opening poem, and "Cost," its penultimate offering, embody a characteristic stance. Through the bland terminology of balance-sheet capitalism, Foy examines more substantive matters of mortality and meaning. "The Payment Plan"'s smooth-talking speaker pretends to offer strategies for dispensing pain in predictable allotments: "Our actuaries first consult the charts // and calculate, for someone of your age, / the ratio of grief to be applied / based on tribulation indices." The poet's barbs are directed toward those who reduce human life to a business transaction, their vague assurances designed to prey on fears and bring in profit — "[We] hope you know that interest will accrue, / as per the plan, on unpaid balances" — but Foy's subject remains the very real grief that no advance plan can ever anticipate or diminish. In "Cost," the speaker is seeking an investor, or at least some good financial advice: "I have an asset on my books that I / must carry and maintain despite the cost: / this body that I live in like a house. . ." Here, Foy's voice is looser, more openly tongue-in-cheek as he mocks the idea of placing monetary value on the body that is also, unavoidably, himself: "The thing I have will just depreciate, / the net effect of which will likely be / not foreclosure or eviction but / a rendering of my house unlivable, / an act of God that leaves me in the cold / zeroing out my balance in the books." The dry humor of both poems highlights the absurdity of viewing human lives through an economic lens, while raising serious questions about the nature of ownership: is there anything that is *truly* our own when, in the end, we ourselves will be swept away?

Foy displays a tender side in poems that arise from his love of music. "Long Live Rock" references the movie *Night of the Living Dead* in elegizing the speaker's youthful rock star dreams, while cryptic references suggest a hidden narrative: "I lived for so long in that edifice, / that house of decline" and "Electric guitars, I thought, would redeem / the dying I endured behind machines." Are the speaker's fantasies of "rock stardom, never really mine" a way to escape from having to witness the death of an ailing parent or loved one? In "Night Riff," Foy depicts the calming solitude of playing the guitar in darkness: "The dog's awake / and wondering why I'm here, but that's okay. / The sound is quiet, rich, and sure enough / to soothe the mind of any animal. . ." Here, the act of playing is itself the gift, independent of any need for an audience beyond the speaker's pet and the player himself: "and I am left alone with my guitar, / as much of it as I can hope to play / without a thought for where I have to go."

By referencing the early '70s television hit, Foy's poem "The Partridge Family" expands to the wider world of popular culture. In seemingly casual but highly skilled blank verse, the poet shifts back and forth between his childhood love of the show's fantasy (a pop music-performing family tours the country in a Piet Mondrian-inspired psychedelic bus, playing their hits and engaging in shenanigans), his mature response to old episodes ("the single mother, Shirley Jones, / would smile and sing but never did get laid"), and the real-life rage of actor Danny Bonaduce ("Danny Partridge") who was arrested "for assault, / when he punched out a 'transvestite prostitute' / he'd taken for a girl. Now, that was bad." In his final lines, the speaker recalls, reluctantly, "how, back then, I thought it fit and meet / that such as these should sing of happiness." Foy's masterful management of tone — from wide-eyed wonder to outrage and poignant regret — yields a fascinating exploration of lost innocence that transcends the era and the show.

Foy can be serious as well. Several poems reflect on the subject of war with a sensitivity born of the author's informal interviews with recent veterans and his own family history (his English father was a soldier who spent much of World War II as a captive German prisoner). "Making War," an outstanding sestina, inhabits the voice of a veteran looking back: "The enemy was always closer / than we'd thought, pouring down fire / on our flanking team, and then a final / blast and bewilderment in the ditch. . ." A trio of poems that share a structure (four tercets of tightly written three- or four-beat lines) also share an impulse to confront

civilian expectations: "It's not like what you hoped it would be" ("Cordite"); "Get used to the lack of light" ("Clip"); "Look at the target, gauge the range, / and line your body up with what // you want to hit" ("Concussion Grenades"). These brief but powerful poems address us directly: we become the recruit plunged into a world whose rules for survival are unfamiliar — a world where deadly weapons, and the will to use them, are disturbingly commonplace.

Taken together, the serious moments and layered ironies at play in John Foy's work suggest a highly appealing persona — one who refuses to accept easy answers, conventional wisdom, or the meaningless cant of politics and business. He feels empathy for "Gollum," Tolkien (and Peter Jackson's) "poor son of a bitch, / corroded and ruined in the dark"; he mocks Mattel's Barbie in neat couplets while celebrating a daughter's justified skepticism at the appeal of "Barbie's upbeat catatonic face / gazing across all time and space" ("Headless Barbie Commission"); and Chris Childers, gifted poet and translator of Latin classics, is rewarded with one of Foy's loveliest lyrics, "Contemplative": "The birch I point to, even though it's late / to practice any kind of augury, / is right in line with that old apple tree / I look upon beneath the sky and take / my bearings from."

For all this wide-ranging poetic wealth, I haven't even touched on Foy's extraordinary sonnet sequence, "The Museum of Sex," an authentic New York institution that, if it didn't actually exist, would have to be conjured from Foy's imagination to provide the perfect vehicle for his distinctly singular blend of wisdom, irony, and bawdy compassion: "Would there be dioramas like the kind / at the American Museum of Natural History? / To go alone would be unthinkable. / How sad, to wander through the galleries / inspecting things that don't seem doable." Here, as always, the lens turns toward Foy himself — not to claim attention but to avoid excluding himself from the serious joke that is life itself: the aspirations we hold dear, the hopes that sustain us, and the falling short that is our daily lot. John Foy's prosodic confidence in verse formal or free is evident throughout the book, as is his kindly, yet skeptical vision; and though *No One Leaves the World Unhurt* serves brilliantly as both apt title and sage reminder, it's equally impossible to leave John Foy's new book without also feeling amused, enlightened, and deeply moved.

Jane Blanchard

Imperative

Forget me not when all is done.
Regardless of which side has won,
I certainly shall think of you,
The former near-and-dear ones who
Allowed malevolence its run.

You reckoned me a simpleton,
A woman you could use, then shun;
If only love had led you to
Forget me not.

Yet even in this garrison,
I hear a distant clarion:
Each one of you may someday rue
The stress and strain you put me through.
Should peace be sought and there be none,
Forget me not.

Rapunzel

My gray hair loosely wound about my head,
I live within a different tower now.
No longer do I daily ponder how
To steal away from stony home. Instead,
With needlework or poetry or prayer,
I try to make the most of solitude.
Depending on the hour or the mood,
I take to bed or sit upon this chair
Or pace around the room I never leave.
A servant brings me food; another tends
The basin and the pot; a seamstress mends
Whatever clothing I cannot. Reprieve
From silence comes when one of them appears.
So goes my life in these my later years.

Interview of Charles Hughes

Jane Blanchard: Congratulations, Chuck, on the recent publication of your second collection of poetry, *The Evening Sky*, near the end of a challenging year for everyone. Did the pandemic impact this project at all?

Charles Hughes: Thank you, Jane. All of the poems in the book had been written before the pandemic began, and so they weren't affected. I would say that the pandemic — and the horrific political context in this country in which it has occurred — have given me a somewhat grimmer perspective on our present reality, something that I think is true for many people. And now I wonder about the poems in *The Evening Sky*. Will they find their footing in our new, grimmer world? I hope so.

JB: You now have two collections with Wiseblood Books. Apart from the pandemic, was the process different the second time from the first?

CH: On the whole, I'd say no. Wiseblood Books was a fairly new publisher in 2014, when my first book of poems, *Cave Art*, was published. Since then, Wiseblood has expanded its staff and its capabilities. But I wouldn't say the publication process at Wiseblood varied, in any essential way, from *Cave Art to The Evening Sky.* My perception is that Wiseblood Books and its founding editor, Joshua Hren, are deeply committed to beauty in poetry and fiction as sacred — as a sign (and perhaps more than a sign) of God's love in the world. By "beauty" here, I mean to include beauty in its gritty, tragic, and difficult forms as well as its other manifestations. And based on my experience working with Wiseblood, this commitment hasn't changed. It's a commitment I share, and I feel very honored and very grateful to have published two books with them.

JB: You and I met in 2016 at the Sewanee Writers' Conference, where you were a Walter E. Dakin Fellow after the publication of your first collection, *Cave Art*, in 2014. How have such encounters at such conferences affected your work?

CH: Writing conferences — and especially the Sewanee conference (which I think I've attended three times) — have been very important to me. I started being serious about writing poems fairly late in life, in my fifties. These conferences have taught me much that I needed to know about poetry. But they've also helped me in another way as well, by putting me in touch with other poets such as yourself, for whom the writing of poems is an essential part of their lives. When I began attending writing conferences, I was going through a major life transition; I had worked as a lawyer basically for my entire adult life, and now I was contemplating retiring from my law firm and beginning to devote a lot of my time to poetry. That's a big change in an external sense, but it also required a big internal shift. The affirmation of meeting other poets at writing conferences helped me to think of myself as someone who writes poems and to accept this and feel OK about it, despite the cultural context in which I was used to existing, which (to say the least) doesn't always place a high value on poetry.

JB: The very last poem of *The Evening Sky* is the source of the book's title, and the very first poem reveals the theme of memory, but the pivot of the collection is the second section, "Elegy for My Father," which is itself subdivided. How did this structure come to be?

CH: I tend not to have a book of poems in mind, when I'm working on an individual poem. When I'm working on a poem, my entire focus is on making that poem (as far as possible for me) the most fully realized poem it can be, without thinking about how it might fit in or connect with other poems I've written. As a result, when I've come to arrange the poems in my two collections, the process has seemed a little haphazard. It's true, though, that the three poems you mention in *The Evening Sky* are important to me for their subject matter and themes, which no doubt accounts for their conspicuous positions within the book. And it's certainly been part of my experience in arranging the poems in both *The Evening Sky* and *Cave Art* that I've noticed — retrospectively — recurring themes, and I've tried to take these into account in arranging the poems. Otherwise, the order of the poems in both collections came about largely because of more mundane considerations, such as trying to maintain some sense of variety in length, form, and mood.

JB: Writing about people we love can be hard! Writing about ourselves can be hard! How do you strike a balance between revealing too much and revealing too little?

CH: These can, as you say, be difficult judgments to make, especially when other people are involved. If a poem I'm working on is in some way autobiographical — and does not involve anyone else — I feel I can pretty much let the demands of the poem determine how much ought to be revealed. It's all very subjective, and different poets will have different inclinations as to how much to reveal about themselves. Enough needs to be said, of course, that the reader can, to some degree, enter into the self being portrayed in the poem.

In the case of a poem involving others (meaning actual, nonfictional people other than the poet), the situation is more complicated. There will be the risk for the poet of invading another person's privacy or possibly even of breaching a trust. Since I believe that life is way more important than art, I feel that a poet in this situation has an obligation, at all costs, to avoid doing these things. My wife and sons appear in several of the poems in *The Evening Sky*; I was able to show them these poems, before the poems were originally published, and obtain their consent to publication. "Elegy for My Father" was written after my father's death, and I agonized a long time, in the writing of this poem, about what and how much should be said.

JB: I infer that leaving your home after 30 years was harder than leaving the practice of law after 33. Am I correct?

CH: Yes, definitely. A few years ago, my wife and I moved out of the house we'd lived in for so many years, and where we'd raised our family, and into a condo in the same town. My poem, "Downsizing," in *The Evening Sky*, describes some aspects of this move. The move was clearly the right thing to do, and my wife and I have become very settled and happy in our new place, but the process of the move was difficult and produced, for a time, a certain amount of grief for what we had left behind.

I didn't grieve over my retirement from my law firm, which occurred almost six years before the move out of our house. I'm deeply grateful in many ways for my legal career, but I was

burned out and ready for a change — and I was beginning to write poems. My then growing ambivalence about continuing on as a lawyer is alluded to in the poem, "His Biggest Deal Prompts a Senior Lawyer to Reflect." Going from working as a lawyer to working as a poet gave me a good deal of trepidation at the time, but not grief. My wife, thankfully, seemed to have no doubt at all that this was exactly the right thing to do. It was only by virtue of my wife's unwavering confidence, and with the help of many prayers, that my uncertainties were overcome.

JB: Regarding process, do you ever start writing a poem in blank verse and then realize that something else would be better?

CH: Deciding to write a poem in blank verse or in some other manner (rhymed stanzas, sonnet, or whatever) is almost never the starting point for me. My normal starting point is the arrival of some sense that I have a poem to write, however vague this sense might be, in terms of subject matter, theme, length, etc. I usually begin by experimenting with the first few lines, and I try to get a feel for what will work best for the poem I have in mind — considering such things as meter, rhyme, stanzas, etc. I love blank verse and will normally consider it at this stage. This experimenting may take days or even weeks, although of course sometimes it's much briefer. Once I've made these basic decisions and gotten to work on the poem in earnest, it would be unusual for me to change them. If the poem really doesn't seem to be working after that point — which does happen, unfortunately — I'm much more likely simply to abandon it.

JB: About blank verse, how strict are you with meter? You seem more willing to use an extra syllable at the end of a line than in the middle of a line. Is this true?

CH: Pretty strict, I'd say. For me, iambic pentameter has a certain natural beauty about it. But this beauty can sometimes best be brought out by varying the meter from its strictest form. Richard Wilbur spoke of "endangering" whatever form he was working in, and I do think this is important, within limits, for the sake of both the beauty and the expressiveness of the poem. As you know, certain variations to the strict iambic pentameter line have, over time, become fairly standard (to the point that they are hardly noticed as variations) — substituting a trochee as the

first foot of the line, for example, or ending a line with an extra, unaccented syllable. I use these variations — and others — when I think they serve the poem well, and you're probably right that I'm more likely to have an extra, unaccented syllable at the end of a line than in the middle.

JB: With rhyme, you seem to prefer full rather than partial, yes?

CH: Yes, which is perhaps mostly a temperamental preference. But rhyme, if used well in a poem, can be much more than mere ornament. It can take the poem in directions that wouldn't otherwise have occurred to the poet. It can be a means of discovery for the poet and can free the poet, to some degree, from his or her preconceptions. It can, as A. E. Stallings has said, be a method of composition. For me, full rhyme seems more useful and effective for these purposes than partial or off rhyme. And when I've used partial rhyme or tried to use it, I've found it difficult to achieve consistency and avoid a feeling of randomness.

JB: You are not afraid of repetition, as in "The Bees . . .": "Things are as they have been." How did that expression come about?

CH: Well, repetition of course is a very ancient poetic device. It's used with great frequency in the Psalms, for example. It can be used for emphasis, as a way of slowing down the poem, or to call attention to different aspects of one reality, among its many functions. The poems in Gjertrud Schnackenberg's *Heavenly Questions* are modern poems that use repetition to very beautiful effect. "The Bees . . . " is partly about the experience of living in what seem to be two different worlds at the same time (in the poem, a peaceful Sunday afternoon in the garden and also a world dominated by war) and of having an awareness of those different worlds triggered by a minor change in external circumstances; the repetition of the line you mention seemed, I think, to help convey this experience.

JB: You are also not afraid of blurring the timeline of an experience as in "Before Our Eyes." What were you aiming for there?

CH: Seeing is the theme of "Before Our Eyes," and it's a theme that, I think, shows up fairly often in my poems. It's an important concern of mine. "Where there is love, there is seeing," according

to Richard of St. Victor. And this is where time comes in: I think we all might be able to see more deeply and fully into reality and perhaps become more compassionate and loving, if we weren't so bound up in time. Poems can help with this; poems can give a sense of suspending time or at least of slowing it down, and thereby can help us see better.

Just behind this present world — this world we live in every day, so full of shadows and suffering and sorrows — is a magnificent world from which suffering and sorrow have been banished and where love reigns supreme. (I'm speaking now out of my faith as a Christian.) The latter world has broken into our everyday world decisively in the Incarnation and continues to break in from time to time, I believe. We can catch glimpses of it, if we are open to doing so. And part of my faith as a poet is that, if a poem can somehow loosen time's grip, it might open us up to these glimpses.

JB: One of my favorite poems in this collection is the very anapestic "Running with the Wind." What a marvelous way to describe that particular dream! And the cæsura near the end — oh, my. How did this poem happen?

CH: I really appreciate these kind words from such an accomplished poet as yourself, Jane. Well, I think that, as we grow older, our thoughts (and our dreams?) tend to turn more and more to summing up, to assessing what we've done and haven't done with our lives. At least, this has been true for me. Anyway, these kinds of concerns seem to have been the impulse for this poem. And I remember I'd been reading Robert Frost's "Blueberries," which evidently put the anapestic meter in my mind.

JB: Chuck, what I most admire about you as a poet — even more than your technical skill — is your ability to point out the inconsistencies or ironies of life without imparting bitterness. Is such a strategy or a philosophy?

CH: My life, on the whole, has been a lucky one — in my marriage and family and in other ways — and it would be ungrateful and unjust of me to be bitter or to express bitterness in my poems. And then, on a deeper level, your question makes me think of something that Albert Camus says in an essay, which has

become very important to me. He says there are in the world both "beauty" and "the humiliated" and that he does not want to be unfaithful to either. Not an easy balance to achieve, whether in life or in art. It's one, though, that I want to strive for in my own life and in my poems.

JB: What is next for you, Chuck? Are there any poems in the making? Are there any poems ready and waiting for a third collection?

CH: A third collection seems really far off at the moment, but, yes, I do have some new poems — and I'm fervently hoping for more.

Robert Boucheron

Shady Grove

Harriet Thigpen got by for seventy-two years on personal charm and a photographic memory. She used her gift to settle an argument or surprise strangers. She could recall the weather on a particular day, recipes to feed a family of six, telephone numbers no longer in use, addresses of persons who were deceased, and passages from books that nobody reads.

Life was not hard, but Harriet toiled and suffered her share. She raised three children and buried two husbands. Before marriage, she worked for a company that published almanacs, directories, and one-volume reference books. The job suited a mind such as hers, though she irritated colleagues. In a disagreement over a matter of fact, Harriet was always right. The second husband, Carl Thigpen, left her a comfortable house in Hapsburg, Virginia, a secure income, and a web of family relationships.

The youngest daughter lived nearby. Helen was preoccupied with raising her own children and advancing her husband's career. Sam Dobbin practiced law—house sales, estate planning, trusts, wills, and probate. He looked after Harriet's affairs. The grandchildren were exposed to regular visits. The family respected Harriet's privacy, which meant she passed much of her time alone.

Harriet had no schedule to keep, no responsibilities. Her health was excellent. She smiled at strangers. Alone, she hummed a popular song or an old hymn tune. Lately, in the course of a day there were gaps she could not account for. She shrugged them off. Short-term memory. At this point, what did it matter if she lost an hour here and there?

In a smart print dress, with coordinated hat and handbag, Harriet went for an afternoon walk. She had no destination. The spring weather was fine, and the streets of the upscale neighborhood were safe. The rhythm of motion and the balmy air led her to wander.

A police officer on patrol spotted Harriet on the brink of a steep bank. He pulled the cruiser to the side of the street, left the lights flashing, and approached on foot. A large man in a dark blue uniform, he called out.

"Ma'am?"

"Why, officer, what a pleasant surprise!" Harriet smiled

warmly and extended her hand as though at a reception. "Do I know you?"

"No, ma'am. Norman Coles. Are you all right?"

"Never felt better in my life. And you?"

"I'm just fine, ma'am." He grasped her firmly by the elbow and guided her toward the cruiser. "This is a risky place to walk, ma'am. Do you know where you are?"

"Of course, I do," she said indignantly, then gazed at her surroundings with interest. A river of cars rushed below. "The highway cut. Goodness, how those azaleas have lasted. How did I get here?"

"That's what I'm asking you, ma'am."

"I must have walked here on my own two feet."

"I want to take you home now. Do you live with relatives?"

"No, I'm all alone in the world." If not strictly true, this statement struck the right note.

"Can you tell me where you live?"

Harriet automatically gave her address. As they drove to the large, Tudor-style house, Coles radioed the station. The dispatcher told him to stay with the wanderer until a family member or friend could be located.

Once home, Harriet treated Officer Coles as a gentleman caller. Sam Dobbin found them seated in the living room, conversing. On a coaster before the officer was a glass of iced tea, untouched. Next to it his service cap lay upside down. He stood as the man in the dark suit entered.

"Must you go so soon?" Harriet chimed.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Sorry to drag you into this. Sam Dobbin, attorney." The men shook hands.

"All in the line of duty, sir. Good day, ma'am." Officer Coles slipped his hat under his arm and exited. Sam took the patrolman's place on the sofa.

"All right, tell me what happened."

"Nothing, Sam, absolutely nothing! I went out for a stroll, which I often do, you know. It's good exercise, and the spring weather is delightful. That nice police officer stopped and . . . picked me up." She giggled.

"How long were you out?"

"I don't know. I lost my way. It may have been an hour."

"You covered a good three miles."

"I must have had one of my spells."

"Spells?"

"Like sleep walking, but I'm wide awake."

"So this wasn't the first time."

"No, but the first time in public."

"Requiring police intervention."

Harriet's gaiety faded and she turned to face her son-in-law.

"Well, Sam, what shall we do with me?"

"For the moment, nothing. That is, if you're all right."

"Yes." She took an inventory. "Physically I'm all here."

"Let me talk to Helen. I'll ask her to call you tonight after supper." He glanced at his watch.

"You must get back to the office. I'm a bother, and not even your own flesh and blood."

"Harriet, stop. If you need anything, call us, either one. We'll talk to you tonight."

*

With a phone call to Helen's sister in Minnesota, the family council convened. Their half-brother was in a sailboat somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean, cut off from communication.

"Harriet should not be left alone all the time," Helen began.

"You can't take me in," she said to the Dobbins. "You have enough to do as it is."

"We could hire a home health aide," Sam said.

"I'm not that far gone."

"What about a companion?" asked Constance. The speakerphone made her voice sound tinny and irrelevant.

"That sounds lovely," Harriet said. "Are educated young women of good reputation still available for a pittance?"

"Why don't we ask Theodore Percy," Helen said. "Harriet is a member of St. Giles. Maybe he will have an idea."

The next day, Sam phoned the rector of St. Giles Episcopal Church, a respected and well-loved figure. He responded with sympathy.

"How is she? I have missed seeing her at church."

"Her physical health is good. Her mind is sharp except for the spells."

"I am a trustee of the Shady Grove Rest Home," Percy said. "Let's invite Harriet to lunch there. The residents' lending library is in need of a volunteer coordinator."

"She's bound to know what's afoot."

"A dignified pretext. At Harriet's age, though we seldom admit it, we contemplate the end. Shady Grove is one step closer."

They set a date for the lunch. Harriet's tact was a match for Percy's.

"My research skills are outdated. How much would they benefit the lending library?"

"Consider it a social occasion."

"I look forward to it, then."

*

Late one morning, another fresh spring day, Sam and Helen fetched Harriet in their car. Harriet wore the same print dress as on the day she was apprehended. It was new, after all.

As they looped up the drive to the main entrance, Theodore Percy and Dr. Etheridge Vowles, the director of Shady Grove, stood in the neoclassical porch. A large, florid man with a dark, curly beard, Dr. Vowles wore a plaid suit and a fawn-colored vest with a gold watch chain draped across. He beamed and chuckled, as though life were a continual feast.

"Welcome, welcome everyone! Father Percy arrived this very minute. Mr. Dobbin, Mrs. Dobbin." He seized their hands. "And Mrs. Thigpen, what a lovely dress!"

Greetings were exchanged all around, with remarks on the fine weather. Harriet was intrigued by the house, a mansion converted to its current use. On the fascia over the columns, a motto was inscribed.

"*Deus nobis haec otia fecit*," she read aloud. "Vergil, isn't it? The Bucolics. A god has made this leisure for us. Or just God."

"Really, Mrs. Thigpen," said Dr. Vowles, "you're the first person to identify that tag on the spot. Are you a classical scholar?"

"Oh, no!"

"How did you manage?"

"I attended college, Dr. Vowles."

"No doubt it dates from the time this was the Lockhorn estate," said Father Percy. "Quite apt even now. Back then, a smattering of Latin was taken for granted among the Virginia gentry."

A spry, white-haired man, evidently a resident, emerged from the shrubbery.

"*Fortunate senex*!" Harriet said gaily, with a wave of the hand.

Startled, the old man passed without a word.

"O lucky old man," Harriet translated. "It's from the same poem. Two shepherds meet in the country outside Rome . . ."

"You're just the person we need to organize our library," Dr. Vowles said. "Won't you come in and have a look?"

Like a potentate receiving an honored guest, Dr. Vowles offered his arm to Harriet and escorted her inside. The Dobbins followed, and Percy brought up the rear. Harriet inspected the former parlor, with its fine woodwork and heart pine floor. The old drapes remained, as well as a brown leather sofa. Sprinkler

pipes hung from the ceiling, spoiling the effect. Shelves carried a hodgepodge of books donated by the residents. More books lay in random stacks and cardboard boxes on the floor. A wooden card catalogue salvaged from a school stood in a corner, like a child being punished.

The party progressed to the administrative office, once the morning room. They saw the vast game room, equipped for billiards, ping-pong, and cards. The card table had a jigsaw puzzle spread on top. They peeked in the lounge with its massive stone fireplace. Through glass doors, they glimpsed the terrace, paved with marble tiles and decorated with urns.

The tour ended at the dining room, where residents gathered at the double sliding door. Like famished souls in the underworld, Harriet thought. The white-haired man they had flushed from the shrubbery led the pack. Jovial Dr. Vowles greeted them by name.

"Mrs. Drake, Mr. Wentworth, Mr. McCloud, Miss Arrington. And Mr. Greenleaf, with your nose in the door as usual."

The grandfather clock in the hall struck noon. The double door parted, and the crowd surged forward. Several small tables filled the large room. Dr. Vowles guided his party to one in the middle, set with a white cloth, china, silver, and a glass vase of cut flowers.

"From our own gardens," he said. "Many of our residents are avid gardeners. We encourage them to pursue the activities they have always enjoyed."

A waitress appeared with menus, each a single page headed by the date. She wore an old-fashioned costume of black and white, like a serving maid, and a name pin: Selena.

"The selections vary from day to day," Dr. Vowles said. "There are alternates for those with special dietary needs. Do you see anything to tempt your appetite?"

Selena hovered nearby, ready to take their orders. Dr. Vowles offered suggestions, asked questions, and facilitated decisions. With a ready supply of anecdotes, he made sure the talk was lively. Selena reappeared with a tray, and the table was laden with good things.

The Dobbins gazed around the room in wonder. A chandelier hung from a ceiling adorned with plaster garlands of fruit. Harriet was animated and gracious. She flirted with Dr. Vowles, who gamely returned the compliment. As Selena brought coffee, Harriet opened her arms to include the table, or perhaps the whole room.

"When can I move in?"

"We will be delighted to have you join our merry band," Dr. Vowles said, "as soon as there is a vacancy."

"As a trustee," said Father Percy, "I see nothing to stand in the way of your acceptance as a new resident. The application is pro forma."

"I can look into the financial side," said Sam Dobbin, "which will include selling the house."

"Are you sure you're ready for this, mother?" asked Helen.

"Yes, dear, as sure as can be. I'm tired of living alone, tired of living in the past. Did you bring me here to organize a library when I'm losing my mind?"

Dr. Vowles let someone else take the question. As no one did, it hung in the air.

*

The vacancy appeared, the house was sold, and a date was set for the move to Shady Grove. Sam Dobbin did all the work, legal and financial. Harriet hoped he collected a fee for his effort, but it seemed indelicate to ask. Besides, it all happened in a rush. Hardly was the decision made, when it became a reality. No time for regret. Her life was no longer in her own hands, but in those of inexorable fate.

Movers came at the end of August. Much of the furniture went into storage. Grandchildren would divide it at some uncertain date. Harriet's private room could accommodate a few pieces. Helen helped her choose a bed, a bureau, and a small desk. She rejected a rocking chair as too old-ladylike. They settled on a French armchair upholstered in tapestry.

Harriet never cared much for furniture, so it was no great loss. Still, she wondered. Torn from familiar surroundings, with objects and pictures to jog her memory, would she forget more and more? As it was, her two husbands blurred together. She caught herself skipping over the second and attributing everything to the first. The spells seemed to be getting no worse, but how could she tell? She was jumping off a cliff and expecting a breeze to waft her to safety.

Alone in the empty house, Harriet perched on a windowsill and traced a finger on the dusty glass. It was shocking how dirty the house was, denuded of carpets, curtains, and sofas. How could she have lived like this? The air was hot and sticky. The power was turned off. With people away on vacation, August seemed more final than December, more of an end to things.

Dead in the water, her sailor son would say.

Harriet groped in her handbag for a cigarette. She found things in it that couldn't be hers. Then she remembered that she and Allen had quit smoking years ago. Or was it Carl?

Sam Dobbin was busy that day, and Helen had the children to manage. Theodore Percy would drive Harriet to Shady Grove. Years ago, when he arrived at St. Giles as a young priest, he was eager to win souls and carve a niche for himself. He grew in stature, while from a busy mother, Harriet shrank to an irresponsible child.

At last, the rector strode through the front door, a trim man of sixty clad in black with a plume of snow-white hair.

"Father Percy," she cried impulsively, "into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

Rick Campbell

The End of the Road: Portal, North Dakota, Part I

Before we began the trip, we decided that DL did not have enough holiday time to go home on the highway and that she would have to fly. Though we could have passed through Portal and into Canada, we decided to go camping first. We had some days to fill before her flight. We'd only camped once on our trip — in Wisconsin. We set up camp. Then it rained. Now here we were, finished with US 52, and we had not taken the camp boxes off the roof rack a second time. We headed to Lake Metigoshe State Park near the Canadian border to give camping a second try. The weather was better, but on a hike to the lake we were attacked by ticks; that dampened our enthusiasm, much as the rain had earlier, so we packed up and headed to a town with a laundromat. We decided to head for Regina and spend a couple of days in the city (knowing nothing about what sort of city it was.)

After we cleaned up, we started east toward Dunseith where we would catch US 281 and drive north to the International Peace Park and the Canadian border. In Dunseith we found one of the great kitsch wonders of the world — a giant turtle made of tire wheels — and then drove north past the Turtle Mountain Reservation and pulled into the Peace Garden. I expected it to be so full of patriotic clichés that we would not stay more than a few minutes, but it was beautiful. The gardens were far from being in full bloom, but one could see how exquisite they would later in the summer. The Peace Chapel was beautiful and, if I must say it, peaceful. It was mostly white on white and full of quotes about peace.

Had we gone south on 281 we would have been on Larry McMurty's road. He grew up down in West Texas within listening distance of the highway and wrote that if anyone said "the road" they were talking about 281. McMurtry had been in Dunseith too. He must have seen the wheel turtle but did not mention it. To each his own.

As we left the park we were at the border and in a short line to cross into Manitoba. I'd expected some trouble because I was traveling with my dog. I had a folder of dog papers to prove that he had all his shots and was in fact who he and I claimed him to be. I'd reread *Travels with Charley* in preparation for this road trip and noted that Steinbeck could not get Charley over the border because he had no dog documents. I was ready to prove that Mu Shu was vaccinated, certified, justified, and worthy of a trip to Canada.

As the border guard came to the window, I had my dog folder in hand when he asked to see our papers. This guard looked as official and stern as my car looked raggedy and suspect of something. It wasn't so much a drug smuggling look as maybe the Joads heading to California. There were two large camp boxes and a toolbox strapped to the roof, and the car was fully loaded with our stuff and dog stuff — dog bed, dog cooler, dog bowl, dog food. We had backpacks, food boxes, and sundry other travel things. This was, after all, a long highway.

The guard asked the usual questions — *What's your purpose for coming to Canada? How long will you be staying? Do you have any weapons?* DL said no, no weapons. I always wondered if people with weapons said yes. I said yes. No firearms, but I do have six knives, two hatchets, and a machete. He looked like he was about to ask why so I said we've been camping and fishing. DL looked at me like I had just done some TMI thing. He took our passports and drivers licenses and said to park over there. He never looked at my dog folder.

About 15 minutes passed, though it seemed longer, before he came back. "Have you ever been fingerprinted?" he asked. DL said yes, for work. I hesitated. I had not been fingerprinted just so I could teach English. I said no.

"Are you sure?"

"No, not sure. I don't know. I was arrested once. A misdemeanor. West Palm Beach, FL. More than 30 years ago."

He asked me to step out of the car and we walked behind it to talk.

"Yes," he said. "that time."

"Well, I spent the night in jail, so I guess I got printed, but it was a misdemeanor possession charge and I thought that didn't count."

"It counts," he said. He told me to get back in the car.

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1973 — Palm Beach County, FL

I had just met this beautiful young woman under the most strenuous of circumstances. My mother's boss asked me to come to the Montgomery Ward's company picnic softball game so I could play for his team and kick the other side's butt. Around the sixth inning there was pop up into short left center. I went back from shortstop and at full speed caught the ball over my shoulder. Then I flattened the beautiful woman. I helped her up and made sure she was ok. I said I was sorry and that I get carried away playing this game. Then we started dating.

I was living in my VW Bus in some sand dunes near Juno Beach, Florida. The first time I went to M's house to pick her up her mother was troubled by me, my long hair, my bus with the bed and all my clothes strewn about. Then she was more troubled when I crawled under the bus to jump the solenoid and drive away. This wasn't much of a date. We drove out to some quarries west of town where folks like us went to get high and make out. On the way back a county sheriff pulled me over and decided my hair and bus gave him probable cause for a search and that turned up about a half an ounce of pot. Busted.

At the county jail I called my mother, but my friend answered. (Lots of people used to crash at my mom's house.) He said it was too late to wake Rose and he'd come get me in the morning. He was more considerate of my mother than of my circumstances. I was printed and photographed and taken to a cell. It was probably 2 a.m. by then. I was given a lumpy mattress and told to find a bunk. The door slammed shut. I looked around. Four bunks and four guys in them, so I put my mattress on the floor and lay down.

I'd taken the shirt off that the cop had brought me because it was satiny pink knit with a deep V plunge. He couldn't resist fucking with the hippie. I didn't think it was proper jail cell attire so going shirtless seemed like a safer option. In the morning my mother and C came, bailed me out, and we went back to her house. I explained that all of my friends smoked pot and since she couldn't tell it from our behavior, it must not be that bad.

A couple of weeks later I went to court. It was in a small suburb west of West Palm Beach; the country judge asked if the pot was mine. I said, it was in my van, under my seat, wrapped in my old sock, so it wouldn't do much good to say it wasn't mine, but that my girlfriend, M, didn't know it was there. He said I was a gentleman. I said tell that to her parents. He fined me and put me on an installment plan to pay it off. It was listed as a misdemeanor and I thought it was all over. And it was, for forty years, until this curious attempt to cross into Canada.

***

I wondered why we had to talk out of DL's hearing. Did he not want her to know that I had a record? Was he protecting my secret, my reputation? Trying not to scare her with my criminal past? And why was it ok to let her go to Canada with a guy who had six knives, a machete, and two hatchets? And what about my stinky, poop-eating dog?

Finally, he let us in.

O Canada

Regina, unfortunately, rhymes with vagina. I really wanted it to be Re-geena, to rhyme with Purina, or Noxema. But no. Vagina. I am not a prude, but I couldn't say it without a grimace. From the U.S. border we drove north across high plains and then west for some long miles on the Trans-Canada highway. I had this romantic notion that it would be more rustic, more Jack London like, than US interstates. It wasn't. It seemed narrow and rough, made the tires sing as loud as the wind blowing from wherever it blows

from in Saskatchewan. We ate a decent lunch in a small town on a green stretch along a river. Not much of the high plains are green. I should have been listening to Neil Percival Young when I was "in his prairie home," but I forgot. Another opportunity unlikely to come again.

Finally, around dusk we rolled into Regina and, I as am also wont to do, checked into our 2.5 rated hotel. I could claim that was because we needed a place that allowed dogs, and while that's true, it's also because I am cheap. DL does not travel with me because of the great hotels I take her to.

Regina, despite its name, was a pleasant little cowboy city. It reminded me of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Larger and more sophisticated, but that's not hard to do. It was also windy and dusty. There was a lot of light. It was late May, but that far north, light lingers long past dusk. There are not many trees or hills to get in the way either.

We had excellent meals, dogs were welcome, and we walked the streets without worry.

Then the trip was really over except for the part to come — going home solo.

Return on the Rivers

> O Western Wind when wilt thou blow
> That the small rain down can rain?
> Christ! that my love were in my arms,
> and I in my bed again!
>
> (Anon)

> Yes, and only if my own true love was waitin'
> Yes, and if I could hear her heart a-softly poundin'
> Only if she was lyin' by me
> Then I'd lie in my bed once again
>
> Bob Dylan

Regina, Saskatchewan to the U.S. border

6:20 AM, Regina airport. She walks away. There's a beautiful song playing on the radio. It's in French but it seems sad and familiar. Avec du something. I drive the airport loop. This place feels like a small, regional airport in the states, larger than Valdosta, smaller than Raleigh/Durham. I intend to head south, but I have had no coffee and I need gas. How many liters of more expensive Canadian gas do I need to get to the border, and do I factor the exchange rate? Hell no. The $130 tent I bought in Regina seemed to cost $130 — on my credit card statement will it be less? Too complicated this early in the morning, maybe all the time, and really I am just thinking of the woman I just waved goodbye to.

I turn on Albert St. and head back downtown looking for gas. There are stations everywhere, but in some strangely civilized way they don't open until 7 a.m. So I go looking for coffee and end up at a quick serve, Tim Horton's. I am not impressed; it seems like a Canadian Dunkin' Donuts except that everyone working the counter is Asian-Canadian. Do they say that here? Coffee and pastry in hand, in a crowded parking lot, I struggle to extricate my car from its narrow space. I find myself going the wrong way backwards toward a Canadian female pedestrian who is cutting through the parking lot; she curses me and says not politely that I should go back to the States. I should. I am trying.

I buy gas and figure that five gallons ought to get me to Montana, but I'm looking into the rising sun while trying to read the gas pump and can't make out a thing. I can't see the numbers rolling quicker than nickel slots and so I just pump by feel. When it seems enough seconds have gone by to pump five gallons I stop, replace the hose, and go into the glass house (so like the States) and pay the man. I say I have no idea how much I just bought, couldn't see in the sun, and he says $23.40. I give him $25 in Canadian bills that I had gotten from an ATM because I wanted to look sophisticated and pay for my meals, or beers, or something with Canadian money. I feel like I am wasting this romantic travel moment by spending this pretty paper on gas. So it goes. I get some equally cool coins back — silver coins with copper centers worth a dollar and sundry other things worth 25 or 10 cents. Sort of.

I follow a cattle truck out of the city and listen to more songs in French. The moment I leave Regina I'm on a high desert plateau and lonely. If I were at the border now and asked if I had anything to declare I'd say no, I left everything at the airport.

Canada Highway 6.

I pull off the road to walk Mu and read a roadside marker. *The Woods Trail / Qu' Appelle Trail. Here in 1881 Sitting Bull led his "Sioux" band this way to seek sanctuary at Fort Qu' Appelle*. I am amazed to find that Sitting Bull and his Lakota stragglers had come this far north trying to elude U.S. troops. In July 1877, almost a year after he and his warriors won the Battle of Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull came here and lived in the region for five years before he made his tired and hungry way back to the U.S.

I keep going south. The sky is large and the highway very empty. *Bluer than a pale blue angel*. For much of my trip towards the border there are no cars behind or in front of me. I roll past Milestone, Pangman, Minton and several unnamed intersections. I have the feeling that Sitting Bull is watching. Of course, he is not happy.

Border Crossing

At the Montana border I am ready to be hassled again. I figure if the friendly Canadians had given me such a hard time getting into Canada then surely the Americans, who I have long been convinced did not like me, would take this opportunity to punish me for something.

1975 — Somewhere in Vermont

Three of us in a suspect Econoline van were trying to get back in the States from a quick trip to Ontario and Montreal. It was early afternoon, and no one was crossing except us. The guards had too much time on their hands so they could use it to hassle pseudo-hippies. We and our van had Florida licenses and we looked quite casual. Our van looked like it could have been crammed with contraband, and I guess we looked like we could partake of

it. The van had been refitted as a camper — we had cabinets and chests; we'd paneled the walls. We were traveling and living in the van and had lots of stuff. Daniel had two guitars. I had a bag of harmonicas. Marie was a hairdresser; she had dozens of little bottles that could hold and hide hash and coke. We had no drugs with us, but the guards would not take our word for it. They made us sit at tables while they took almost everything out of the van. As soon as they finished inspecting the guitars and harmonicas, Daniel and I got comfortable and began to play. Marie got her book and sat in the sun.

I think our utter lack of fear annoyed them, but they soldiered on. It was Marie's vials and bottles that finally got to them. After the first dozen or so offered nothing but noxious chemicals, they lost their zeal. They told us we could go, but we were in no hurry, so we took out time repacking the van.

With this experience in my head, and my overall distrust of the government minions, I expected the worse when I rolled into the border crossing.

The guard smiled and asked how long I'd been in Canada.

"Three days man, three days." He didn't appear to get my favorite Woodstock allusion.

Why were you there? he asked.

"I dropped my girlfriend off the Regina airport so she could fly home." I don't like saying girlfriend — I'm old. There ought to be a better word, but we are not in business together, so partner does not work either.

Do you have anything to declare?

"No." I didn't try my romantic lines on him.

Any Alcohol?

"Three beers," I said, "but they're Sam Adams."

He got that joke and waved me in. Welcome back he said.

I felt guilty that I expected to be punished.

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In "Driving Montana" Richard Hugo wrote, "The day is woman who loves you." He was in a good mood and that didn't happen often in Hugo's road poems. For me, love felt like it was in the past tense. But the road is good consolation; it's there, open, all before you. Your music is strong; on your IPOD "whatever the next number, you want to hear it."

Montana looked a lot like Canada. I was about forty miles north of the Missouri River, but I did not continue south to find it. I had not yet decided that following the river east and south would be my route home and a theme for this essay. It's ironic, if not worse, that after months and months of planning and map reading, I did not have a plan for the second half (the return) of this journey. The outbound plan, exhaustively researched and somewhat well executed, was to follow US 52 to the Canadian border. Why I did not have a plan for returning I can't say. If pragmatism were a greater part of my character, I would have returned on 52. I could have looked again at what I had seen and what I'd missed. And there's that curiosity of the highway: it does not look the same when you change direction. 52 East (South) would not look or feel the same as 52 West (North).

But I am not pragmatic or well organized. McMurtry wrote that he liked to travel from worse to better; for him that meant driving from north to south, east to west, or from cold to warm. I had done the opposite. South to North. East to West. Temperature wasn't much of a factor; summer took care of that. Would 52 have felt better, had a better tone and attitude if I had begun in Portal? My rationale was that I was following the origin story of the highway. It began in West Virginia; of course, it's not a one-way highway. Originally it ran from West Virginia to Central Indiana. However, it was later extended; the first extension went to Portal. North and West. That's a bit of an illusion too, I suppose. If one lived in Portal maybe that would seem to be the origin point and the road would carry you Southeast to Indiana. That's the way it is with highways; they run from where we are to where we are not. So, since the Missouri River was not yet my goal, I turned east on Montana 5 at Plentywood and made my way to Crosby, North Dakota. I didn't have to, but Sidney Crosby is my daughter's favorite hockey player, and I wanted to send her a picture of the town sign. Every now and then, when little *themelets* pop up, one should pursue them.

"The Good as It Gets Road"

McMurtry found his road driving U.S. 2 in Montana between Fort Peck and Fort Union. These roads, one could call them GAI-GR, but that seems unnecessarily stupid, are a stretch of highway that satisfies a driver so much that he or she says this is as good as it gets. McMurtry was heading east toward U.S. 281. He says it's the top of the world road because from there he would be heading south, and it would be all downhill until he made it home. Hugo said north is up on all of our maps.

I was heading into North Dakota only a few miles north of McMurtry's great road, but U.S. 5 was not the spiritual experience for me that he had. Even if I had been on the 2, I was too far east; Williston, ND, is not anyone's favorite place. I was making my way back to Lake Sakakawea because I was supposed to meet a friend who, in my proverbial heart of hearts, I didn't expect to show up. He didn't. After he stood me up, I thought it's a damn good thing I didn't drive here from the east coast. It's weird to say to yourself that I would have been in the area anyway (northern North Dakota) so it's ok to be stood up. We were going to meet and camp and that's what I did at Fort Stevenson State Park. Lake Sakakawea was not there when Lewis and Clark came up the river; it was made when the Missouri River was dammed at Garrison. Now the lake has drowned almost all of the evidence of the Corps' passing.

In this part of North Dakota, the Hidasta spelling "Sakakawea" is used on road signs and most historical markers. The Hidastas, also known to us as Mandans, were the most populous peoples on this section of the river. Lewis and Clark and their men wintered in one of the Hidasta/Mandan villages in 1804-05 on their slow way west and upriver.

Sacajawea is the spelling most often found in history books. Even today, this continues. The Lewis and Clark Trail Guide spells it "Sacagawea." The National Geographic Trail Guide spells it "Sacajawea." The Devoto edited editions of the Journals spell it "Sacajawea." So too does Ambrose in his definitive account of the expedition. There's far more confusion surrounding Sacajawea than just how to spell her name. Most standard (white male) accounts label her a Shoshone-Hidasta woman, saying she was born

into the Shoshone tribe but later kidnapped and raised by the Hidatsa. The Hidasta version, told by Bull's Eye, who also said he was her grandson, claimed she was born a Hidasta and that her brother lived with the "Abuarckee," (Absarokee) or the Crows. The Shoshone, whom Lewis and Clark also called the Snake Indians, would have been enemies of the Crow tribe and, therefore, maybe the Hidasta too.

Accounts of her death vary widely and wildly too. Perhaps it's naïve to think that as the only woman on the Expedition more attention would have been paid to her, but the only records of her life at this time are Lewis and Clark's reports. The first day that she comes into the Expedition's camp with her husband/owner, the French trapper Charbonneau (who Clark spells Chaubonie) she is referred to as only a "Squar" purchased by the Frenchman from Indians. Historians refer to Sacajawea as one of Charbonneau's wives, but as she is only 16 when she joins the Expedition and she's already pregnant, it's unclear how and where she was married. Lewis' first reference to her is as "the woman" and a page later as "the squaw." This is two months after Lewis assisted in birthing her first child; in the passage about the birth Lewis refers to her only as one of Charbonneau's wives. Later, June 10th of 1805, Clark notes that *Sahcahgagwea*, our Indian woman, was very sick and on June 14th her case is considered dangerous. Spelling was far from Clark's forte. Not only did he spell many words wrong; he seldom spelled them wrong the same way.

On July 28th the Party was nearing the Shoshone (or Snake, as Lewis calls them) lands where Sacajawea was supposed to have lived after being kidnapped by a Hidasta raiding party five years earlier. Lewis spells her name out "Sah-cah-gar-we-ah" our Indian woman, as if she's just being introduced to the narrative and is curiously everyone's property. Who is she, how do we spell her name, when and where did she die? None of that is ever reconciled.

On August 17th, 1806, back at the Mandan village where he was hired, Charbonneau is paid for his (and Sacajawea's) services to the Expedition. Neither Lewis nor Clark mention Sacajawea in these final accounts.

Sacajawea has more statues in her honor that any other American woman. Every image of her is imagined, since there's no recorded image of her. Every image I've seen renders her as radiantly beautiful. Maybe she was, but given her hardship — pregnant at 15, living off the land and probably rarely bathing while with the Corp, I doubt that she looked like a movie star.

Fort Stevenson State Park

For a couple of days on the lake I was camped next to a platoon of Afghan War vets; as the nights dragged on their damages, large and small, grew louder. Sometimes angry, more often sad. It was a reunion and an attempt at salvation. When they saw me walking around they called me Sir. One night I shared their beer. On the third morning as I was loading my car, their leader, I didn't catch his rank, said he was sorry if they had been disturbing me. Even though I had considered moving to a more isolated camp site, I said no. It's cool. You guys take care. I have a long way still to go.

On the Lewis & Clark Trail

From Fort Stevenson I picked up the "official" Lewis and Clark Trail on North Dakota 23. For much of this journey I'd been close to the Trail, the path of the Corp of Discovery; I'd crossed it, I'd been within a couple of miles of it, I'd seen exhibits at museums and roadside markers, but now I was on the Trail.

On the L&C Trail signs Lewis is wearing a triangular cap; it reminds me of Paul Revere. His arm is extended; he's pointing the way. Clark, in a coonskin cap, stands beside him, arms crossed on his rifle. The image is inaccurate. Paul Revere hats were outdated by 1803 and coon skin caps were sort of 20th century tourist scams. Lewis' hat would most likely have been a "cocked hat" that a captain in the U.S. Army would have worn and Clark might have worn a fur hat. Why this false image has come to be the "official" L&C trail icon and the one most often seen of L&C images is still another marketing mystery.

Since there was no Lake Sakakawea then, I am aware and disappointed that L&C never actually walked this land that I am on about 40 miles from what was the Missouri's course, far outside what they would have explored when traversing the terrain along the river. Even when I make it to where the river was, I won't see any sign of the sandbars, the "bluffs of the river . . . remarkable white sandstone." Lake Sakakawea has drowned the river. The National Geographic guidebook likes to use "inundated." It's sort of a collateral damage euphemism that sounds less permanent than drowned and might be reversed and returned to the way they were. I suppose they could. The dam at Garrison could be blown apart and the river allowed to rush out and maybe it would eventually return to its original bed. Not only will it not happen (at least not on purpose) but the land that's been drowned for long years would not look like it did in 1804, and I doubt that it would ever regain its original topography, flora and fauna. Rivers can't go home again.

Lake Sakakawea is not going away. The Garrison Dam produces a lot of electrical energy; this lake and dozens of smaller Missouri River lakes have been integrated into North Dakota's recreation culture. Boating, camping, fishing, and birding are all firmly established in the lives and bank accounts of North Dakota and its people. Lake Sakakawea is huge, the third largest manmade lake in the United States and its waters are, in places, over 200 feet deep. I drove more than 200 miles when I circled it. Access to it is, for its size and popularity, rather limited. Much of its western shore lies within the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, and cliffs and canyons that border the lake deter tourists and vehicles. That's good. If it were more accessible, I am sure it would be more exploited, more developed, and uglier.

Proof of this conjecture can be seen on the north shore, bordered by ND 23, that has been taken over by the oil and gas industry. As the highway rises and falls over grassy hills and buttes, it curves around small blue ponds. As I try to look at geese and ducks on the blue water and follow the flight of eagles, I've got tanker trucks, oil crew vans, and pump rigs on my bumper. These guys are not out here sightseeing. The wind is blowing hard across the highway and I've got my hands at 10&2, holding on for dear life, trying to keep my Rav 4 from rolling into a pretty pond.

Every few miles I'm assaulted by the oil or gas complexes — a few khaki-green tanks, pumps that look a little like dinosaurs, and ugly, bulldozed, muddy parking lots. Sometimes a crappy work trailer too. These complexes, far too many of them, reminded me of scenes from some Third World movie set, something that's supposed to be Afghanistan, or Chechnya — where a military camp has been hastily set up and some U.S. SEAL team is going to blow it and rescue hostages. These things look like they were built last week and are only supposed to last for a few months. Like all booms, this one will end, but when it does these compounds, their scavenged remains, the scars on the land they've trashed will remain. Each time I come around a curve, or over a rise, I'm stunned and saddened by the next compound looming ahead. All of them seem abandoned already; I never saw any workers. They were probably all on the highway, roaring up on my ass and passing me at 70 mph on a two-lane highway in 30-mile wind gusts.

I wanted to write an open letter to the people of North Dakota and say pay attention; it's getting really ugly out here. Are you sure it's worth it? How much oil money do you need, how much will you get after the corporations take theirs and don't pay enough taxes? How bad was it before oil money moved into your lives and began to ravage your beautiful land?

Some of the signs at the compounds said they were owned by Indians. Maybe Chief Seattle's claim that "every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove . . ." has been traded for oil and gas revenue too.

I find myself assuming that Lewis & Clark would not like what Capitalism's driving engines, profit and industry, have done to "their" river and its land. I first thought about this while driving down the Ohio and thinking that Lewis would be appalled by the electrical power plants, mills, and nuclear reactors lining its banks. But would he? Was Lewis (or Clark) an environmentalist? Did they think that the beauty of the land they were exploring should be preserved? Both of them knew that their mission was to map, survey, and describe these new lands so that waves of settlers could follow them and "make use" of the Missouri River valley and the lands opened by its tributaries. The lands included in Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase were defined as all the land drained by the Missouri River basin, and Jefferson had his eyes

set on expanding that range even further to include lands west of the Continental Divide as well. Lewis and Clark wrote often about how beautiful the river and the land they traveled were; they seemed to be in awe of the Missouri. But would they think that the mills, factories, cities, sewage plants, oil pumps, refineries, fracking and whatever else is being done out there is wrong and dangerous? I don't know. Did they think that nature should be preserved and protected? I don't really think so, but I also don't think they or anyone in 1805 could imagine the magnitude of the destruction and despoiling to come.

After my forty-mile sojourn in the oil-fracked wilderness, I came to New Town. It's really a new town. It replaced towns that had been destroyed when the Garrison Dam "inundated" the land. Some folks wanted to name the town Vanish; it would have been a portmanteau made from the names of two destroyed villages — Van Hook and Sanish. Whoever made the decision to go with New Town must have been frightened by irony. New Town was a post-apocalyptic scene from Mad Max. Beat-up cars, old pickups, and oil company trucks lined stores' and social services' parking lots and crowded three or four-deep in a parking chaos I had never witnessed before. It was like thousands of poor people were trying to leave a shitty music festival at the same time and no one was moving. Hundreds of women and children, some Latino, some Indians, most in flannel, milled and huddled among the stranded cars. Everyone wanted something but I didn't know what it was. The highway was jammed too, bumper to bumper, as far ahead and behind me as I could see. There couldn't be more than a few hundred people who lived out here, and all of them and more were desperately waiting in New Town's few parking lots. Tankers, flatbed trailers, and other big rigs lumbered into town and out, throwing clouds of dust into the air. Oil workers' pickups jammed the highway too. Trapped in these squadrons of industrial vehicles were campers and RVs. Maybe some of them were tourists just trying to make it into western North Dakota or Montana. Maybe some of them were oil field workers heading back to Williston and points west. At least one of the cars carried a simple-minded tourist, me, who was sickened by what he was seeing and was desperately trying to get the hell out of New Town.

Rick Campbell

Down the Missouri

Seven years, I've been a rover
Away, you rolling river
Seven years I've been a rover
Away, bound away,
Cross the wide Missouri

Fort Stevenson to Mobridge

My *Lewis and Clark Trail Guide* follows the Corps' westward course, so on this journey I am reading it backwards. It seems fitting. After my excursion around Lake Sakakawea, I headed south on US 83 and stopped at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center; though it was a good museum, this area had been rather despoiled for me by New Town, the lake's flooding, the fracking and oil and gas trucks. The Center seemed less of a celebration of L&C's amazing achievement as some sort of apology, a quaint nostalgic commercial. Cynicism had gripped me hard. I did get a chance to stand on the bank of the Missouri, and it was perhaps as close as I had come to standing in the river. My little dog got his feet wet there.

By far, what redeemed this stop was the six-foot tall statue of Seaman, Lewis' Newfoundland dog. Seaman, like Sacagawea and York — Clark's slave — was one of the less heralded heroes of the Corps' journey. Seaman did noble duty; he brought ducks back to the boats, he frightened bear and marauding buffalo and kept the whole party's spirits high. No one agrees on what happened to him once Lewis returned to St. Louis.

A few miles later I picked up ND 1804. A Blue highway. I had been on far too few of them on this journey. Since the first couple of thousand miles had been traversed on 52, Blue highways were not part of my theme. I have driven my share of them in my travel lifetime, though not this time. I love the idea of Blue Highways and when I first head out on one, I love that too. But I lack the patience to travel like Heat Moon. Eventually, I start looking at my dash clock and doing math in my head about how many miles I have yet to go, or worse, how many I have recently gone. McMurtry wrote of Heat Moon, and the even more intrepid An-

nie Proulx, that their travels were real achievements, but he had no desire to emulate them. He was sticking to the Interstates.

Since leaving WV weeks ago on 52, I had only spent a few miles on an Interstate. I used the 74 to get through downtown Cincinnati and into Indiana. We spent a few minutes on the 494 to navigate Minneapolis/St. Paul when 52 took us there with night falling. And farther on in Minnesota, when 52 was swallowed by the 94, we gave in and drove it to Fargo.

In *Roads*, McMurtry chose to stick to Interstates. He called them the Great Roads and likened them to the Great Rivers of America. Both were used to move commerce and people as quickly as could then be done. A typical McMurtry travel day could cover seven or eight hundred miles on the 35, the 75, the 90. His mission was to drive and look around. He seemed most often to drive alone and to rarely stop. On a drive from Duluth to Wichita he says he spoke about 20 words — a thank you at a Quik Stop, ordering at a lunch stop in Missouri, and renting a room in a Wichita motel. I have often found myself doing the same kind of travel when I drive from my North Florida home to West Virginia. I have two routes that I most often use. I call one West and the other East. Hardly original and not very descriptive or accurate either. West goes through Atlanta on the 285, 75 (which I hate doing) to connect to the 81, the 77, and the 79. East goes through Augusta, GA, and Columbia, SC on the 77. The 77 connects with the 79 in Wytheville and climbs and curves through the Virginia and West Virginia mountains. This is a two-day trip for me.

I make this high-speed trip, stopping only to pee, walk the dog, and buy gas because I am not traveling, I'm driving to get to DL's house in WV. I have no theme. I am not out to drive the Great Roads; I'm not even looking around much until I get into West Virginia where the mountain landscape and its attendant horizon is so beautiful that I look, no matter how many times I've driven it. Luckily there are relatively few cars on the 77/79, so staring off into the distance isn't too dangerous.

A Rant

I don't like trucks and truck drivers. They know that they own the highway; they're like coal barges on the Ohio, plough straight ahead, throw your wake over the pleasure craft. But since I am never on the river in a pleasure craft, I don't hate barges. Trucks, yes. I hate two of their habits in particular: how they pull into the left lane when there's a vehicle entering the highway regardless of the traffic already in the that lane. Let those entering the highway slow down, pause or wait rather than getting in front of me and staying there until you can get back to the right. They slow five or ten cars down to let one car on. It's the merging car's task to get on the highway when and as it can; it shouldn't always get such a large invitation. I hate even more when on a two-lane interstate one truck pulls out to pass another on a hill and then both of them run side by side for a half mile or more while helpless cars jam up behind them. Two trucks should never run side by side. Truck drivers think they should never have to slow down; they think that if they give you a turn signal they can cut in from of you even if there's no room; they make you slow down so they can get in front of you and go slower than you were going. Yes, it's their job but it's not their highway.

***

After reading McMurtry, I have softened my attitude toward interstate travel and also decided that I am not such a cop out and a failed traveler for using them. McMurtry is smarter than I am. The very thing that I hold against interstates, he finds interesting. He says they are our great rivers in that they roll through long stretches of countryside without affecting it. The river/interstate and the land they run through constitute different realities. People miles inland from these conveyors of commerce and people know little about the river/highway. Drivers know little about the country they drive through and rivermen knew little about the land beyond the river's banks.

Is this good? No, neither good nor bad. It just is, but it was also revelatory for me. I wanted too much from interstate travel. I wanted it to be what it was not. Long hours alone on the Great Roads offer me time to think, meditate, plot essays, and best

of all listen to music. There's little I like more than listening to eight hours of music. I break it up with a little NPR news so I have some sense of what's happening in the world, but as good as NPR is, I have only a bare bones knowledge of politics and events and that's usually enough. I prefer my music.

McMurtry says he's going to write about what he sees, and since we know he won't see a lot of details, and he admits he does not stop very often, that he passes up museums, parks, and most roadside attractions, quite often he's writing about himself, what he thinks, what he's read, what happened on a previous visit to St. Paul or Chattanooga. This is a dangerous precedent for a travel writer who doesn't know what McMurtry knows and write as well as does. It is, therefore, a dangerous precedent for me too. It turns this type of travel writing into a memoir rather than a travel essay. More accurately, on the continuum of memoir to travel essay, since both are part of the other, it moves the focus toward the memoir pole.

There are no extreme conditions in this Great Roads travel, no into the vast unknown, no crossing the desert in a jeep or camel caravan, no scaling peaks or shooting rapids. No swimming with crocodiles. There are few elements of adventure. And, when traveling alone, there's no stimulating dialogue either, unless the writer talks to himself, which I do all the time but seldom admit or record. There's just driving and looking.

On 52, and on my return from its terminus, I was not JUST driving and looking. I had theme and purpose. I had itineraries. I had a reason to study my maps. This is both a blessing and a curse. If one does not explore the chosen highway, or river, well, then the narrative suffers. What's missed might be vital. If one chooses as his subject what turns out to be a boring highway, like 52 turned out to be, then it's quite a burden to make that highway narrative exciting. One better be a good writer.

I had hoped that 52 would prove to be interesting if not exciting, but I'd done such extensive research on it that I was pretty sure it would be neither. I'd convinced myself that trying to find out why 52 existed, why it went where it did, would be revealing and revelatory. It wasn't. When I finished the journey and rolled into Portal, I still had no good answer to either question. 52

didn't go through major cities, didn't pass near National Parks, and once past WV, didn't cross great mountain ranges. I could find no reason to connect Portal, North Dakota to Charlestown, SC, or anything else along the highway's route. The only truly scenic part of 52 west of WV was its run along the Ohio River.

What to do? How to solve the writerly dilemma I made for myself. Scott Russel Sanders said that good memoirs were not about lives well lived but lives well written about. That's the answer. 52 is not a highway well lived; I have to make it a highway well written about.

David Cashman

The Piece

came to be his favorite in the repertoire, not because
it was an audience favorite that could be counted on
night after night to elicit waves of warm applause
— and thus that sought-after feeling of connection,
of knowing on both sides and across. In point of fact,
he had come, over the years, to regard that feeling as
inauthentic, as mostly an illusion. Much better
the feeling he got from the McGrath, now his signature
piece, the piece that had enabled critics to place him
in a niche, a small and rather peripheral box, respected,
yes, but not to everyone's taste. The piece was supremely
difficult, of that there could be no doubt, and it
had taken him years of work to acquire the facility
it required. Performing it was now a celebration
of a mastery he had given a lifetime to attain, a celebration,
too, of the joy arising from the singular and profound
connection he felt with the small cadre of listeners who
came across the large divide. He loved the playing of it;
he loved that he *could* play it; and in the hours between
the rehearsals, the equally necessary performances, he loved
contemplating a mystery he would never completely solve
— or, better, name: what was the force that had connected
him to the piece before he could hear its beauty,
what was the force that had affixed its mastery to the progress
of his soul, that had given him a proper life — what beauty,
what love, was *that*?

A Breakthrough, The Easement

You come through by sleepwalking, at the very least
by closing your eyes. The portal has spiraled open
like an aperture and snapped shut behind, sealing
your happy capture. This is your brief removal
to an Edenic country. The path by which you fashioned
your approach — the interminable hours
of practice — is not forgotten exactly, but somehow
collected within, implicit now, a part of your
capacity for going forward, an aspect of your new repertoire.
Fingers and brain speak one language in unison,
and you go on playing in this blessed respite
before the next frontier of consternation — and resolution.
You go on playing, playing.

Indian Summer

One week after the first hard frost:
a day warm and windless
— and the ginkgo, almost it seems,
mints its coins in a single sheet,
a flattened span, round and
golden as the sun itself,
fallen on the still-green grass.

Christine Casson

Door Thrown Open Into Wings

For Sarah Hannah, 1966-2007

For four days a mockingbird trills and sings
fervent notes to anyone who'll listen,
hours on end from its secluded limb,
vocalizing wrens, a bluebird, flickers,
the chups and chirrs of parenting robins,
calls and refrains increasingly frequent
and fraught — an unearthly song — some siren
needling I can't dismiss, circumventing
sleep; my waking pinioned to sound.
You'd flown
to your death from a roof, I'd heard, keening
in silence your *not here*; your *ones*, *nothings*
rupturing air, definitions splintering.
This singing is you, throat open, alone —

ten years in each day. And you've begun again —

Independence Day

Music from a thumping radio one block over
And fireworks that sputter, sizzle, then wham
Madly in the humid air, like gunshots
They sometimes hear late at night. Planes pass overhead —
Incessant this travel here to there
Even on the Fourth. Some child in the street
Shouts in delight. This couple eat their dinner
On a scrappy deck — the only sound
The scraping of forks on their cheap plates —
Her "pretty" *Corelle* dinnerware that won't break.

No need to buy replacement settings
Except in the most extraordinary
Circumstance — when she slams one to the floor, *bam*,
Frustrated, *bam*, by their inability
To get along. They will make and remake their small
Universe: fireworks, food, a naive squeal, and songs
Played too loud on a radio next door,
Turned up hard enough to crank a world.

Catherine Chandler

Author's Note

These poems represent two chapters in *Annals of the Dear Unknown*, a verse-tale relating the events leading up to, during and following the Battle of Wyoming (aka The Wyoming Massacre), an American Revolutionary War battle that took place in Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania in July 1778, with a particular focus on her Connecticut Yankee ancestors, the Munsons.

In "Together They Come" Diah Munson, returning to Wyoming Valley after having secured a safe haven for his family to ride out the war, unexpectedly meets up with his children, who have narrowly escaped the violence, at Shohola on the Delaware River. "In a Lonely Field" describes the scene of the carnage approximately three months following the battle.

Together They Come

As Wilmot shepherded the family
across the Minisink's first sixty miles,
he anguished over what had come to pass —
his mother dead, Benoni given up,
the settlement about to be destroyed,
the grief soon to befall his father, Diah.
He knew the dangers lurking in the woods,
yet sensed a deep and unseen power of grace.
Little Walter walked most of the way
and rarely asked to ride the patient horse.

As Diah rode back from Connecticut,
unsettling news he'd heard along the way
from families heading eastward on the trail,
made sleep next to impossible. He reached
the shallow crossing on the Delaware,
and stopped to rest his horse and stay the night
at Sam Wares' inn and tavern at the clearing
Lenape named Shohola (Place of Peace).
He rose at daybreak, hoping to be back
with Rachel well before the week was out.

Diah saw them first. Bedraggled, barefoot,
at the water's edge, waiting their turn
to mount the horse and ford the Delaware.
Beside himself with joy, he cried out, *Wil!*
then realized that Rachel was not there.
On hearing every detail of their loss,
Diah neither wept nor censured God,
but quietly withdrew into himself,
vowed never to return, and planned ahead,
his children clinging to his unsaid words.

In a Lonely Field

For weeks, marauders made their presence known
in what was once Westmoreland. As they left
the scene of carnage, so did all the circling,
hissing, satiated turkey vultures,
who, for now at least, would have to settle
for an injured warbler or a woodland vole.
In late October, settlers who'd returned
to salvage what they could of wasting crops,
were ordered to recover and inter
the remains of those who'd perished in July.

Distinctive shoes helped to identify
a few of them, but not with certainty,
for most had been reduced to scattered bones
and rotting rags. The men dug two mass graves
and laid their friends and family to rest
as best they could. The Battle of Wyoming
faded from collective memory,
as older settlers died, and new ones came
to harvest trees and dig for anthracite.
A monument eventually was built.

Diah Munson never did go back
to place a proper headstone on the grave
of Rachel Tyler Munson, wife and mother
of their dozen children, living, dead, and lost.
Within six months he married Eunice Bradley,
a cousin whom he kept as bedmate, cook,
and nanny. And because the Pennymites
had occupied his Susquehanna claim —
and later were awarded title to it —
Diah bought a grist mill and moved on.

Aidan Coleman

Descent

What I remember
begins

atop a ladder,
saying "Hello, Dad"

to dad,
who's shaving.

Before, at the short end,
a sudden crowd

with biscuits
and orange juice

welcomes me
down — welcomes me inside.

Proposal

Not down on one knee,
when I suggest and you agree.
Through the night-orange
a single star presses. Call it ours.

Spring

Fresh-mown grass and at dusk
in two and threes
rabbits like little loaves.

Aidan Coleman

Brood

Merely idea,

you
became a name,
assuming as sleep
a home with us

And so the small losses begin

Unsteady steps bloom
in my steps,
as cries buffet rooms of my choosing

Pietro Federico

translations by John Poch

Alabama

2006 – Birmingham

Three walls collapsed from a fire.
The western one from the altar end
that dragged down the lateral walls with it.
Now you can only enter this church
or exit it through the wall at the entrance
where the stoup still stands,
and you can cross yourself with rainwater.
The roof is an enormous, open rib cage
arching inward as if under a whip,
its black back bent down, on all fours.
There is an elegantly-dressed, old woman
who comes every Sunday
at sunset and sits in the back row.
The back of what? You might say, *as there is only one wall left.*
But there's something magic in those who don't forget,
in her so nostalgic she can see into the future,
in those who don't ask for words but for an entrance away
from the world into the world, where the sky is a sanctuary
and the tabernacle is the sun.

Massachussets

Boston. Fred Boyce. One of the victims of the Fernald School in Waltham, an institution built in pursuit of a eugenics policy supported by the United States government in the first half of the twentieth century until the 1960s.

Do you think you know what it feels like to be alone?
I oversee the carousel from a kiosk.
These children coming in droves enter
from the night into this rotating tent of light.
There are those who spin and those who hold
back with absolute faith, reaching
for someone who will take their hand.
And a grownup arrives like clockwork
every time.
I already understand
the shy anxiety of the poor little innocent
for whom nobody will come out of the dark.
But you know there is worse. Here I am.
With my heart broken when I was a child,
I could only dream of the prison of things already seen.
Before going to sleep
I would say *Run away* to my heart and *don't come back tomorrow until you have* . . . I meant to say this
and this and this, but what?
I was stymied and fell asleep crying
because I didn't know what I was really saying
when I was saying come *back*, *tomorrow*, let alone
a snack please, *the hands of my mother*,
or the slight pressure I see on that boy's back
on the carousel, although he will never fall.
With Joe and some others, we set the institute on fire.
But how does one escape a childhood
when almost all the world is nameless rage?
I was nineteen when I walked out that fucking door.
I didn't know how to read or write, or what it meant.
I could barely feel what I felt.
We knew so little how innocent we were.

But one evening Joe comes to find me.
I talk to him about the twists of fate,
or more precisely why fate
had never joked with us.
How can your fate make jokes
if destiny is the state?
I say, *To joke you have to have a face.*
Joe's face is cut by the lights,
the right side of it sculpted by the bulbs
from the dartboard booth.
The left is in the dark.
He asks, *Remember the name of that fucking church?*
The Holy Innocents, I answer automatically as if a dream,
not because I remember it.
Joe says nothing else, no need.
He drinks, looks at me smiling, waiting for me to get
fate's joke
about the loneliness we've always shared.
The innocents are not the innocent, I tell him.
I feel like a blind man whose sight has been restored,
but why is it still not enough?
I love you. Although fate may own your friendly face,
why is it still divided? I think, while smiling
at him with the left half of my smile.

Maine

Gully Oven Hollow (West Lebanon, Maine) 1982. The fiddler is Arve Tellefsen.

My father is driving me through the summer.
I rolled down the window just in time.
That high note of violin
pierces the car through the open window
as if a sniper had fired a warning shot through it.
Around us only the pines
of Gully Oven Park.
It's August but there is no trace of the crickets
whose voices were crowding the air just a moment ago.
My father pulls over and opens the door
cautious as he did in the morning
when he saw that footprint from the street,
a huge specimen, the black bear
who is now lying dead on the trailer.
We hunt her down for an hour.
One footprint at a time
my heart in my throat and the rifle in my hands
with the gunsight ready.
Before shooting he whispers
Don't be afraid of her scream,
in fact, maybe it's better if you plug your ears.
I want to prove him that I'm a man,
but dad knows me and knows that sound.
He knows I'm brave
but also that from the day I was born
I walk on the border with a dream
that he doesn't understand.
He takes the shot.

When she screams, the bear speaks our tongue
though it seems she can't say a word
only because too much blood floods her lung.

Dad holds his trophy from under her chin,
and he keeps her face turned upwards.
She stares at me with her whiteless irisless pupils,
so black… almost as if absolute darkness had a face.

Now we find ourselves walking through a pine forest
tracking a violin.
I don't think dad did it on purpose but I notice
that he has brought his rifle with the gunsight
as he were chasing it.
I don't know how my father cannot recall
but for me it feels like it was yesterday.
I remember the absence of any other sound,
the heat, the bees, the mosquitoes,
the crickets, the cicadas, the wind in the foliage
everything was suspended,
and the forest felt unbearable and good.
Two minutes and I glimpse
a clearing in the heart of the wood.
A woman for every child,
they are sitting on the edge of something,
looking down into the place
where the violin plays.
My father loses interest
or maybe he's afraid because he doesn't understand
and retraces his steps but I do not.
He calls me. I do not acknowledge.
I want to see what those people are looking at.
And when I get to the edge I look down
and I see a blond man
as blond as I've never seen
and it probably is the sun
gathering in that cavity
right in the center of the clearing
as in a well.
All the insects missing from the forest are there.
There are thousands of them buzzing and fluttering
around the fiddler.
I have never been able to explain
the spell and terror of that sight.
You are a fool who wants to run away
and like a fool you stay.

That man was the wood he was playing in,
but more than a tree or a river or a bear could,
it was the center of that place, it was a god,
it was the where, the when.
I have witnessed something
that not even my father could teach me.
You can't hunt this vision
as clear as the sun.
If this type of courage is a dream
I don't want to wake up.

John Foy

Mania

I would meet you upon this honestly. I am sick,
but not with cacospectamania,
neurotic staring at repulsive things,
and not with coprolalomania,
that hunger for the scatological.
And dipsomania, I don't have that,
the morbid need for steady alcohol
– but let me circle back to you on that.

I don't go 'round with empleomania,
the insatiable urge to hold public office.
And lagneuomania? Well, I declare
I'm not preoccupied with lechery.
My problem, here, is metromania,
the catastrophic need to write in verse.
At least it's not ophidiomania,
an excessive interest in reptiles.

My Love of Poetry

I remember now, I don't know why,
in fourth grade I think it was,
I called a kid
a douchebag.
His name was Howard Hutchinson.
He ran to tell the teacher
that I had called him
a douchebag.
The teacher, Mrs. Nathan, promptly came
to talk to me
in the harshest possible terms
and asked me why
I had called him
a douchebag.
"Because he looks like one," I said,
although back then I didn't know
what a douchebag was.
I did, though, like the sound of it.
Detention was my just reward.
In point of fact,
he wasn't that objectionable,
but the frisson of *douchebag*,
a sonic equivalence I could not deny,
was so exact, given what I saw,
that I gave in, alas,
to the dark allure of accuracy,
and thus began my love of poetry.

Robin Helweg-Larsen

Advances in Personal Care

1700 BCE

A length of fibre to extract a tooth —
a flint to decorate yourself with scars —
a large, strong thorn to make holes for tattoos —
an oyster shell to scrape off excess hair . . .
so health's improved and beauty is accented.

1700 CE

High heels and wig show stature, vigour, youth;
a monocle improves both look and looking.
How we've advanced, compared to ancient times!
Some say there'll be advances still to come,
but how, when all's already been invented?

Roald Hoffmann

The golden age

It begins with vision
and ends there too.

Here, hills lolloping
down to unseen sea,

islands above the fog.
Elsewhere, the fields

around Haarlem, flat
as they can be. But

tear yourself away
from Ruysdael's clouds

to be pulled in
by the white sheets

of fabric spread across
the fields, and now

the mind's telescope,
not held in check

by optics, zooms in
to the sharp rise

of peduncles of
a field of tulips

the Queen of Night
bloom, or lowly garlic

scapes. One can't stop
the flow, now we are

elsewhere, where cut
flowers sit in vases,

and nearby oranges
glow. Someone's

showing off how well
he can do reflections

off pewter or a glass.
Why not pull in a skull, or

brace of pheasants, as if
we needed reminding

that demise is next to
domain. But the reflections

are good enough to show
a window, so off we soar

again, into it, out and
about, to soul-touch

the land we'll walk in
and, rejoicing, rejoin.

Roald Hoffmann

A Colombian artist in the islands

Iguanas came late in life
to Enrique Grau, sprawled
across each other and the pages
of his Galápagos sketchbooks,

He drew the marine "imps
of darkness"; *Amblyrhynchus*
crustatis, raising its snub snout
out of water, soon to dive,

El Niño-willing, for algae, then
back to the porous rocks for warmth.
He drew the land iguanas,
basking and saurian, on lavishingly

rendered rocks, in the makeshift
shade of a gnarled bush.
Grau returned to his Cartagena,
there in charcoal and pastel,

on meter and a half square paper,
worked out his obsession with
the spiky crests, shadows, the
squat threat of these cactus-

chomping, torpid lizards. They
have also not left my mind
ever since I saw Grau's iguanas.
I went to the islands, out for wasps.

hoping the lizards cross my path.
But it wasn't to be. Grau died.
And now I imagine: Enrique
and I are sitting on a hot rock,

watching the iguanas forage.
A swatch of pink — that's *rosada*,
Enrique says, in heavily
accented English, and looking

much like his selfportrait.
Have some water, Enrique, I say.
And do you think they need some?
They're still, and just then one

changes into a dragon. And back.
I blink, touch Enrique's hand.
Did you see that? I did, he says —
Allosaurus fragilis, I should think.

What does an iguana dream about?

Greg Huteson

Homestead

A culvert and a rusty metal shed,
a thorny clover patch, a metal grate,
a fence arthritic as an old bat's wing,
a red wood wagon and a willow sprig.
A bench swing on a shabby pinewood porch,
a nest for skunks beneath the buckled house,
concavities that sag with spiders' weight.
A grove of oaks, a hound dog, and a boar.
Or if not boar then armadillo pair.
Alert they are, with leather shells intact,
curves not yet cratered by a jacked-up truck.
A long dirt path that's cut with sand clay ruts.
A creek that smells of onions, stocked with bass.
A dearth of prints along its muddy bank.

J. M. Jordan

Blue Nocturne In Staunton, Virginia

Night falls. The screen's cold glow
beside the open window there
has fixed your unremitting stare
on a thousand things you need not know.

A thousand sights you need not see.
A thousand wants you need not feel.
A thousand wishes as unreal
as a tinsel moon in a cardboard tree.

So leave the aching pulse of words,
this parched unreal scriptorium
for the strange unreadied world, the drum
of strangers' footfalls, wings of birds

unseen in the now-dark air.
Set out and leave that place behind —
that trap, that manacle of mind
and failing spirit. Leave it there

for shadows and the sweet dark musk
of honeysuckle as it falls
in great heaps over garden walls,
of distant music in the growing dusk.

You have known too much today.
So step into the inscrutable blue
of night, that truer world that you
can't know, can't see, can't say.

Contra Tenebris

Q: You said in a tweet that, when pulling down a statue, a chain works better than a rope. Why?
A: It has less give, so more of the force of the pull will be directly conveyed to the statue.
— Professor Erin Thompson, John Jay College, *New York Times*

I.

Beware the Ministry of Wraiths, my son.
Beware the insubstantial ones who drift
about the dark ways of the world, bereft
of flesh or bone or memory of their own.

Beware the ones who have no songs to sing,
whose muteness is a howling emptiness,
a stalking hate, a hunger to possess
the breath and being of some living thing.

Something must die. Something must be killed
so that this howling emptiness might be filled.
And so they stalk the vacant spaces in

the commons, seeking some bright life to take
so they can lap the blood like dogs and make
their shadow-selves articulate again.

II.

Nothing you love is yours, they hiss. We will burn
your temples to the ground. Nothing belongs
to you — not your houses, your children, your songs.
And you belong to nothing in return.

What you thought you received as a gift is rotten,
a ruin we will finish with acid and flame.
Your children will not remember your name.
Your stories and your prayers at last will be forgotten.

Now they are prowling the quiet corridors.
Fingering the hasps and the latches of doors,
Prying at back gates rusted from unuse.

They are rasping through the grates. They are creeping
into the hall to set the Shadows loose
in the dark rooms where the children lie sleeping.

III.

They see the fields you have inherited —
The bloom-rich gardens, the house on the hill
That shaped the contours of your native will —
As something to be torched and ploughed instead

Into a graveyard. Even the town nearby —
With its half-lit bars and shadowy hotel,
Its small stone church with its persistent bell —
To them is fit for nothing but to die.

Refuse the coffin they have made for you.
Refuse the dust, the darkened cell, the silence.
Refuse the headstone they have etched. Recite

The verses that your family taught to you.
And when they come at last, pray not for violence
But arm yourself against the rising night.

David M. Katz

Tea with Cavafy

People think of me —
I would have them think of me —
As a poet, without qualification, as I
Attested by stating that as my occupation
On my passport. There's a difference, though,
Between that face and who I truly am,
Between my tortoise shells and homeliness
In three-quarter profile and the words
That are speaking with you here and now.
Note my faded window screen, the ghosts
Of my city in its weave of fleur-de-lis.
It allows me to sleep, but also enables
The light to caress my spirit at dawn.
I have moved the screen aside, drawn
The heavy drapes to admit the glow,
Like the moon that pulls the waves away
In front of a porthole. Simply stated,
That muted glow is who I truly am,
And who I truly am, you may imagine,
Is a man sitting quietly in his study,
Enabling each thought, each image,
Each word to emerge slowly, arising
Between you and me, gentle visitor.
Out of the glow, black letters of a phrase
Will settle in your mind as if they came
Directly from my living lips, conjuring
A lover I was yearning then to see
For a few fateful moments one afternoon
When I was in despair of losing him.
Though he is gone, my words are here for you,
As present as this heated pot of tea.

Seventies Rejection Note

It will be many years before
this poem will mean anything
to anybody. He wrote that,
And only that, in a garbled hand,
On paper with a deckled edge.
So it's a visionary poem,
I first thought, to shield myself
From hurt. It's praise for entering
The avant-garde, since I'd composed
A letter to the future from
That sorrow of a year, honoring
A poet we admired who had
Just died, half-starved, of laryngeal
Cancer, coughing from Gauloises
And funnelling pints of Pernod
Down his gullet, much too young,
Yet old enough to be my father.
My second thought about the note
Seems closer to reality:
The editor had placed a curse
On me for all eternity,
Had thrown my modest elegy
Down like a detested hat
And jumped on it repeatedly.
Young though I was, I could laugh,
When I'd cooled off, at how absolute,
How Delphic his dismissal was.
I've dined out on the tale until
Today. He died two days ago,
And as I scan his swollen verse
And the eulogies of sycophants
With debts to him outstanding, see
An excess of causticity
In the tone of all the prose he wrote,
I know that he would never get
The jokes I tell about that note.

Legend Must Do

I was born on the Lower East Side of New York
To shopkeepers just off the boat from Galitz
In the Russian Pale. My grandpa's wrapped
In a story now, in the wooliness of legend.
Among the men we have woven into
A generation, he was drafted into the army
Of the Czar. His palooka of a sergeant
Was easy game, and grandpa took a pint
Of vodka out and got the sergeant drunk.
Weaving along the side of a ditch
In a dizzy march, the two moved on,
The officer fell in, and my grandpa deserted
Into the woods. I have no idea
Whether any of this is true, but
Legend must do when the facts are few.
My grandpa had an accent, opened up
A tailor shop, was father to my mother
And her sister (a Communist! "Milk
For babies!" she shouted for the poor).
That's all I remember except for the lumpy vests,
The slight white frame, the scar of the appendectomy
He revealed to me, shaving by the frigid toilet.
"They cut out half my stomach, boychick."
He smoked Phillies and died when I was eight.

Bob Kunzinger

Fields where Sunlight Streams

The trans-Siberian railroad runs from the Baltic through Russia's western cities and villages, through the great dense and ancient forest, cuts across the steppe and the taiga, turns down along the Amur River, pushes its back up against China, and reaches out its falling fingers to find Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan. It spans the massive Russian empire, spans decades, czarist reigns, it spans the birth and death of the Soviet Union, lifetimes of laborers, the deaths of exiles; this stretch of rail cuts a path through politics, dynasties, families, through a multitude of ethnicities, through suffocating summers and bone-cold winters, Arctic winters, frozen winters so cold the mere mention of the trans-Siberian railway to westerners conjures up images of ice and barren fields of snow. This train moves aside whatever stands in the way; rock and soil, marble, a countless crisscross of fallen birches and pines. A myriad of engineering principles makes this train run across these iron rails through green landscapes. It rolls over pools of spent oil, of human waste, to carry passengers past the eastern edge of Russia's frayed European fabric into the silent mystique of Asia. These rails carried opportunity to the Siberian outposts, while transporting millions to gulags and prison camps. It brought soldiers to war and home again, bodies home again, Jews from their homes to eastern towns during the pogroms, tourists trying to reach Baikal, businessmen hoping to spend a few days away from the city; it brought the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the west to the east, and the hopes of millions into the vast indifference of the Russian frontier. These packed train cars have slid past vast apathetic fields for more than one hundred years, and they've carried the confessions of gulag guards, of Bolshevik evangelists, the wit and subversive criticism of dissident poets, the last hopes of a dying imperial family; these carriages have carted east those feared in Moscow, those freed in prison camps but forced to flee no further than the next station on a frozen frontier; these cars moved multitudes to the wasteland beyond the Urals hoping to populate the eastern perimeter of Russia, leaving them there to die from disease and deadly winters.

This train moves though our lives carrying stories of strangers, companions who help us blend in despite compromised communication skills, creates brothers who bond over chess and Baltika beer

on some late night/early morning leg just above the Mongolian border.

This railcar carries this father and son into Siberia, the "frozen tundra," where nothing grows, and exposure to the elements kills the strongest of men. This is the wasteland to which politicians in St. Petersburg and Moscow sent their enemies, fearful of their power but more fearful of making them martyrs. Every story set in Siberia portrays characters wearing parkas but still freezing their asses off. This is the image carried by Cold-War era kids like me.

It is a clear summer afternoon here in St. Petersburg, and the temperature today is in the seventies. My son, Michael, and I wear short sleeve shirts and carry our bags to the edge of the platform which the sign dictates is our ride to Yekaterinburg, the city which separates east from west, our first destination on this fabled train. Right now it is in the mid-eighties in that city, and we both hope the cabins onboard are air-conditioned. The porter takes our bags and the passengers are boarding — men mostly, and some boys. They all hold their tickets and scout the numbers on the sides of the train carriages. One man asks if we need assistance, and now, only now, it is finally clear to me that we are really doing this; after years of thinking about it, months of planning, thousands of dollars in air travel and train tickets, and countless hours of research about where to go and where not to go, my son and I are about to train across the widest wilderness on the planet.

We chose second class, which means purchasing tickets for beds in a cabin built for four, bunk beds to each side of the entrance. Each bunk is about the size of a twin mattress, has storage, a light, and is tucked away quite comfortably, though the space down the middle of the cabin, about the width of the heavy, locking door, is narrow enough that two passengers sitting on their bunks with their feet on the floor can't do so directly in front of each other or they will bang each other's knees. The cabins are generally full, so Michael and I always have two other passengers sharing the ride and sharing the table between the beds against the outside wall, which is made up mostly of a generously sized window. Travelers in second class are mostly businessmen heading to or from a job, families of four who already have the means to afford such luxury, and that rarest of specimens: the tourist. Us. For just a few rubles more, passengers can purchase meals, but few do. The brown bag provided has a bottle of water, a piece of chocolate, and a small container of rice

with meat — or as my son noted, wood chips. Besides, there is plenty of food to be found without succumbing to their grab-bag concoction.

If we had wanted to travel first class, I would have paid twice as much so as not to have cabinmates, but then, of course, what's the point? The foundation of travel is people, local people who have unique customs and dialects, who share advice and laughter and, sometimes, tea, a bottle of wine, or vodka. Traveling on the Siberian railroad with cabinmates means learning to share, learning to trust, spilling communication skills like hand signs and silly drawings onto the table between us and pushing detente to its limits.

Then there is third class, whose passengers ride in a separate car altogether, built more like a narrow barracks with a multitude of bunks pushed against each other in haphazard ways, and those passengers have little access to or money for the dining car, their bags and suitcases tucked under their heads for lack of storage as they head to their summer datchas. It is cheap, and it gets them where they need to go. In the beginning of this coast to coast concept, there were only the extremes — Imperial travel with red velvet walls and inlay tables covered with the finest cuisine from the best chefs; or the cars filled with workers, exiles, going as far into the bleak distance as their health allowed. But today this train carries every conceivable aspect of Russian society, a veritable cultural cutout from some ethnography museum. And we're all wrapped by some steel casing brushing time aside as we click along, some for hours, some for days, some until someone else says it is time to disembark and start over. For all of its potential claustrophobic sorrow, this train is all about starting over.

The trans-Siberian railroad moves with bullet-like precision ripping holes through customs and cultures across nearly half the planet, with a history that pulled the 19th century expanse of Czarist Russia into the 20th century and the dominance of Soviet Russia, and then helped escort the mystique of so-called democratic Russia into the 21st century, all the while in its wake creating jobs, bringing people out of their ancient ways and setting a new course for anyone who hears its timeless and imposing rumble along this iron scar across two continents. The distance from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok is roughly six thousand miles, a journey of which very few travelers need or wish to engage. Perspective: it's as if I boarded the Long Island Railroad at Montauk Point to head to downtown Manhattan and decided to continue on past Honolulu. We are an anomaly. The other travelers, nearly

all men, are heading to or from work projects or visiting family just one or two stops away. Some people travel further, but not more than a station or two, and in third class a few families carry a month's worth of belongings. As for the passengers going the distance it seems to be just the two of us and a family of four from France, and I think we're all a little anxious; though if Michael is, he certainly doesn't show it.

I remember when I was young and rode trains with my father, and when we made it to mid-town Manhattan, I was nervous, surrounded by so many strangers. Fifty years later, I feel somehow safer here on the Siberian rail. Maybe it is experience, or perhaps it is being well-prepared which calms my nerves and welcomes what's next. Most likely, it is simple resignation: we are here, we will board, and the train will leave the station. No magic tricks.

We are far from the first father and son engaged by this railway. Czar Alexander the Third ordered his son Nicholai to start the project, and the young prince took it to heart, pouring his energy and ambitions into carving this legacy onto the Russian landscape. He hired a Scottish engineer and that man's son to figure it all out. The engineer brought in fellow countrymen and went to work under Nicholai's guidance, and the Scottish influence is still obvious all along the route. A few decades after his father's decree, that young prince became Czar Nicholas the Second, the so-called "Last Czar" of Russia, who in 1918 boarded the train with his son Alexi on this same route from St. Petersburg to Yekaterinburg for what would be the last ride of their lives. One hundred years ago that father and son, his mother Alexandra, and his four sisters rode to their new home in an old palace. I stare down these tracks aware that this is that same rail, and we're heading to that same city, and will soon look out and see the same landscape seen by the Czar and his son that last time before the entire family was shot to death in the basement of that palace.

We come here to follow that czar and his family, to follow Chekhov, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, the Bolsheviks, communists, tourists, laborers, dissidents, exiles, businessmen, to follow them eleven time zones across one nation. To ride the railway from this first station to the last is to cross centuries, generations, and cultural differences so drastic some areas aren't recognizable as sharing a common history.

We have come here to diagram the long and compound sentence which is the trans-Siberian railroad. We have little idea of what to expect, no common-ground upon which to even make a guess from any other of our travels, and both of us completely lack the language skills to navigate even the dinner menu. We are, in a sense, self-exiled pilgrims relying upon our faith in strangers; strangers whom, for the majority of my life, I was taught not to trust and who hated Americans. Yet, standing here now looking down the tracks beyond the dozen or so train cars, my soul settles down, finally able to reach beyond that terror which comes with anticipation, ignorance, and misinformation. And just by virtue of resignation to the fact there is no turning back, I find comfort in the kinetic reality of now, the boarding, the finding of our cabin, and making our own way. Here, now, seeing as far as I can in the late afternoon of the White Nights, I can't help but think of my own father standing on the platform of that Long Island station, waiting for the express to Manhattan. He made that journey every day for decades. My dad, who is at the end of his rides, the end of this own journey, sat in the seats facing forward and read the paper, nodded to comrades continuing downtown with him, and in the afternoons on the way home he might break up the hour and a half trip with a drink in the bar car. That was his ride. And this is mine, my son's and mine. We will head east to the other side of the planet through the remote forests of Siberia, where I am told our closest traveling companions are the ghosts we bring along to talk to on the long hauls through endless nights. I don't mind; it will be good to spend time with them, understand again why we carry some with us and leave others behind as me move through our days. There's something about the absolute stillness of travel that makes time re-align itself and allows perspective to permeate those nights, allows us to excise our demons and watch them drift into our past as we move along.

You can't buy therapy like this in the states. There are too many towns, too much noise, and too much conversation. Everyone is always talking to someone. In America we already know how to get where we are going without a need to ask for help because we keep track; and even if we get lost, we can check our phones and get back on track. We keep track of where we've been, and if we are late we hustle up and make tracks. We demand of ourselves to stay on track. It is where we ride the rails to get home to our family, find comfort in some small tract of land.

These Siberian tracks run the rails from the Imperial capital to the naval town on the Sea of Japan, to the land of exiles, of Decembrists, of Solzhenitsyn. They run so far into the wild, dark distance it is difficult to try and keep track.

On previous trips to St. Petersburg, I walked by this station dozens of times in this cultural heart of Russia, Peter's City, but never gave it a glance. Now we're inside our own metaphor, boarding the train and seeing where it brings us, sometimes exploring, sometimes just enjoying the sound and the enchanting suggestion of forward motion. It is the way of things on this train across the earth, that at times we disembark to take a break, to explore another way; some companions will be with us longer than others, and some so briefly we will forget they were there to begin with; some of this ride will terrify us, some of it will excite us, and some of it will bore us to death, but still we ride. For some, a time will come when they wonder why they don't just step off for good, wish they never boarded to begin with, some continue on anyway but with resignation, some with determination, and some with no expectations at all but to see what's next.

We stand in the passage between cars and look at the landscape while Michael plays "This Land is Your Land" on the harmonica. Birch trees dominate the August distance, and for quite some time we pass little more than white tree trunks with green pastures and the occasional small shack alongside the tracks. Some shacks have guards who stand outside smoking cigarettes and watch us pass, but mostly the small guard houses remain empty, and all are painted royal blue, all of them; as if someone in Moscow one summer day handed paint to some poor worker and said, "Go brighten up the place."

The striking reality of this "place" is that the landscape outside remains as much a part of the journey as the hallways inside, as much a companion as our cabinmates, and as essential to the crossing as the dining car and the thousands of miles of tracks still ahead. For the most part, the train itself is the tourist attraction here; it is hotel, dining car, and late-night pub. In America, we train through somewhere else on our way to where we are going, but in Russia, the somewhere else is our traveling companion, the arc of our narrative, the string of dynamic moments in our character development. Tolstoy points out, "One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between man and nature shall not be broken." Even on a train; especially so, since it is the "trans-Siberian" part of this journey that makes the ride unique.

Out here is not like passing through the Adirondacks, no matter how similar the surroundings may sometimes seem. This terrain remains, for all intents and purposes, mostly barren of towns and people, making the train a moving oasis, and it is exactly that contrast which provides balance and makes anyone on this ride aware of each nuance of the journey, and it is that vague "barrenness" which keeps us from forgetting exactly where we are. Certainly, closer to the city when we first left St. Petersburg, the surroundings seemed more suburban than either city or rural, but once we passed Lake Ladoga just a few hours later, any semblance of towns slipped into the shadows and we quickly discover this train remains the most essential element. In many stretches of this ride, the population onboard is indeed significantly larger than the residents in the surrounding territory.

"Slow Train by Dylan," I say, and Michael smiles. He knows the tune, and he knows if he can't retort within a minute, he buys the next round in the dining car. I throw it out there while he's playing "This Land is Your Land," figuring it difficult to call up a different tune so quickly. It's one of our games, this one train songs. He continues to play for half a minute, then says, "Midnight Train to Georgia," and returns to Guthrie without missing a beat. "The other Georgia," he adds, and I laugh.

Within the carriages, the narrow hallways are often crowded with Russians looking out the corridor-long windows. None of it is overly confining or claustrophobic, but on a week-long journey across wilderness, sharing a cabin with businessmen whose dialect is hardly recognizable as Russian, we find respite here between cars where we can hear the rails beneath us and feel some coolness coming in the moving floor. These carriage connections are something akin to tectonic plates sliding back and forth so when we stand against the walls facing each other one of us might be moving in the opposite direction of the other, but not too much and it is all so much smoother than we had expected, and some passengers passing through to the dining car might pause for a moment, look out the windows and listen to Michael play American folk music. It is odd to feel at home in a land so far from our own, and the further east we move toward an absence of western Russian architecture or cars or really any sense of village life at all except guards near small royal-blue shacks, the easier it is to believe we are moving across the upper mid-west in America, or across Canada where such vast wilderness might still be possible. Still, as Ian Frazier points out, Siberia is so big it is more of an idea than a place.

The first stretch of this trip is not unlike the ride through Nassau County on the way from Manhattan to the emptier farmland of eastern Long Island. This eastern stretch out of the city of Peter the Great has the same sprawl of factories and endless roads of houses and swing sets on otherwise empty lots, elementary schools not improved in forty years, stores, rows of parked cars along narrow streets, scattered trees, tiny stores with small windows beneath Cyrillic words, random garages, industrial sites ad nauseum, and the royal-blue shacks. The train makes more frequent stops now than it will tomorrow and the stations here are more crowded with men in suits and women in heels and children carrying hard suitcases filled with clothes and toys to bring to the family dachas just outside the city.

Farther east, the city-sprawl eventually gives way to villages with their own center, disconnected from St Petersburg in the daily ways of life, with their own soul of sorts; a town square, an abandoned or repurposed estate, and some notable industry. These are the suburbs which mark time as we know it. In the city, changes can be so immediate and drastic, it is numbing. One day it is Leningrad; the next St. Petersburg; one day the markets use the traditional ways of shopping — pick out your goods from behind the counter, go to a different line to pay, return to the first line to turn over your receipt for the goods — the next day you're putting all your goods from the shelves into a cart then onto a conveyor belt where someone bags it all and you walk out like you just left a western superstore. No transition, no warning, no sense of what-was in the sudden world of what-is.

In the villages far from the city, changes can be as drastic yet paradoxically irrelevant. The owners of the local businesses and factories have changed so that the money makes it to the pockets of some oligarchs in Moscow instead of the government in Moscow — but what do local workers care? People still work at the same garage they always have, the same factory, the local store. Maybe more customers from the city show up, but otherwise life is the same since no one in these small hamlets had any knowledge of, or any need to know, where the profits went to begin with. They live their lives, and once in a while they ride this train east, to visit family or find work. Life in the city and in the rural spread of Russia is similar for that disconnected routine. But in the suburbs-as-we-think-of-them, people try to balance the changes with home improvements such as satellite dishes, new appliances, and foreign-made cars, all tempered by traditional garden plots

tended with archaic tools. Throughout the run along the rails from St. Petersburg nearly all the way to Yekaterinburg, small gardens back each another with tiny sheds for supplies. This is shared land, and everyone learned generations ago to respect each-other's plots, their vegetables, their place in time. And the farther we travel the more distance exists between villages, and I am so overwhelmed by the seeming distance from what in the west might be defined as "civilization," I am reminded of Tolstoy's words, "I felt a wish that my present frame of mind might never change." In these regions, the railroad stations become the focus of the lives of locals. The train is their commerce, and we are their customers, their connection to the rest of the world, their topic of conversation and their method for keeping track of time. We all have our own reasons to travel through Siberia, and each of the stations of the crossing has its purpose beyond the simple ritual of passengers boarding and disembarking. It is mail depot, food court for old women selling homemade goods, gathering spot for children home from school, and they all bear it well, conduct their business well.

Closer to Yekaterinburg, the spaces between those stations, however, seem vast. Marshes sometimes appear, or fields of grass and hay, and wheat, and runs of grazing land with scattered cattle seemingly without guidance. A shack appears, and wires run along the rail. Every hour or so a few roads converge around a few houses, and a car rolls to a stop next to the tracks, and I wonder where it is going. It can't be east, certainly it can't be east I foolishly believe, since it seems to me that there isn't anything in the east except that mysterious and vast nothingness which awaits us through the great northern forest. But even still, the vastness I see outside the two feet wide by four feet high windows in these passages becomes even more barren as we move closer to the eastern edge of "European Russia," so that eventually the only visible life is our own reflection in the windows at dusk and the fading light on the tops of birch trees. At some point all landscapes require imagination to cover the darkening distances only barely visible during daylight, let alone when dusk fades. The west has long been curious about the outposts of Siberia, the villages in the east, the prisons, the isolation and cold. For now I turn my attention within again to a passing Russian man who nods with a smile as he moves toward the dining car. The sun has set, so studying the wilderness of this expansive nation will have to wait for another day as it is finally, and completely, dark.

The villages outside seem to be mirrored onboard in the hallways and sleeping quarters, each cabin a cottage, each passenger a resident, safe inside this vein running through Europe into Asia. The balance of inside and out, of engineering and wilderness, simply means we are as much a part of what we pass at fifty miles-an-hour as we are a part of conversations in the dining car, further highlighting the contrasts. It may be the twenty-first century in the cabins, but also something older, weathered, somehow waits in the lands stretching across the Urals and the Steppe, dioramas of decades in decline, a wilderness witness to slaughters, pogroms, transports, exiles, and dissidents, and this train has been an accomplice in this tragic history.

During the day the brilliant, warm sun on the landscape is inviting, primal, but as night falls, the shadows blend history and place, so that out among the faded trees it seems as if ghosts gather and wave to me as we ride past. *This land wasn't made for czars, I think, let alone presidents or general secretaries*. It is the most untamed place I've ever been, with its beautiful and ancient and timeless sameness about it, its horror and tragedy, its heroism and redemption, and standing on board now it is easier to believe that those historic and not so long-ago terrors along the rails were merely fleeting moments which never could take hold with any permanence.

Standing between cars is only slightly louder than inside any individual train car because despite being "sort of" outside, these spaces between — the gangway connections as they are called — are designed nothing like the locomotives in television westerns where cowboys leap after each other across iron joints and passing tracks. These are mostly enclosed passages, pleasantly cooler than the hot cabins but decidedly not exposed to the elements. Every alternating passage between cars is reserved for smokers, and since so many Russians smoke while traveling by train, those passages are normally filled. Michael and I stand by ourselves between the cars in the odd, non-smoking passages, and he plays Guthrie while I look out at the wilderness with dusk coming on, out at the same land Angela Carter describes in Night at the Circus as the caravan crosses into Asia: "Outside the window, there slides past that unimaginable and deserted vastness where night is coming on, the sun declining in ghastly blood-streaked splendor like a public execution across, it would seem, half a continent, where live only bears and shooting stars and the wolves who lap congealing ice from water that holds within it the entire sky."

Our train treks along thirty-miles-an hour faster than Carter's, and the timeless and borderless tone of the harmonica brings me back to the moment at hand, and it is a scene out of Guthrie's own life, a page of *Bound for Glory*, and I think how every young man should experience this freedom, this absolute sense of the moment. Here, Michael has his first taste of the wild possibilities before him in the middle of what was once one of the most restrictive empires and then one of the most invasive governments in the history of humanity. I watch him play while he watches the dark outline of trees rip by, and I take note of how good he has become. The disappearing sun lay flat behind me, illuminating Michael's face, catching a glint on his harp, and he looks older, like he belongs, like I am another Russian passing between cars, and he is simply here, and it makes sense. *When did he get so good?* I think, listening to him somehow keep Guthrie's repetitive melody from being boring. He nods toward a blue shack with a solitary guard and keeps playing, a talent he apparently managed to master while I was passing through his youth on my way to work. *We've been riding this metaphoric train for twenty years*, I think. And so far, it seems we've managed to stay on track. Michael dips his harmonica. "'Take the 'A' Train' by Ellington," he says. He plays louder to make a reply more difficult to conceive, and he is right. Tonight's round is on me, even though I quickly recall a half-dozen compositions. Downtown Train, Crazy Train, Casey Jones, and that Springsteen one which escapes me at the moment. There's something about the train motif which all artists have borrowed and shared to satisfy our common metaphor. "'Everyone loves the Sound of a Train in the Distance,' Paul Simon," I say, but he shakes his head. It's too late. We laugh.

These times we spend together in this passage have become our small shared American space. When we enter our cabin or the dining car or stand in the hallway looking out the wall-size windows at the landscape, and conversation inevitably occurs with other passengers, we are separate, two American travelers who happen to be father and son barreling through a land so foreign it is difficult to find common ground. But in the passageway, quiet, we find something we can relate to. It is normal to need some place like this when traveling — a pub, a church, a coffeeshop — a place to find one's bearings and catch one's breath. It doesn't need to be for long, the length of a tune, perhaps.

Michael stops playing to take a photograph of mysterious fields of cattle with no apparent farmhouse or farmer, but the light is gone and he gives up. I wonder what happened in some man's ancestry or political bend during imperial or soviet days that finds him on a farm nearly in Siberia to tend cattle without neighbors, without news, without much interaction with other men. Then Michael plays again and the music brings me back inside where I watch him lean against the wall of the car, hands cupped around the edges of his harmonica, a thousand miles of track behind us, and I laugh out loud at the convergence of circumstances that finds me with my twenty-year-old son on a train rolling across the former Soviet Union toward the Pacific, hardly a lick of the Russian language between us, the vague destination of Vladivostok, just a dot on a map, closer to Hawaii than to where we are now, with no apparent purpose other than to get there, playing and singing American folk songs. It didn't take long for us to settle in to our own lives in our own cabin, feeling like this trip was made for him and me.

I look at Michael and smile. He turns to me and laughs. "What?" he says.

"Springsteen."

He stares back out the window trying to dial up a train song by one of his favorites. Nothing. *Of course not*, I think. This one's for the fathers:

I will provide for you
And I'll stand by your side
You'll need a good companion
For this part of the ride
Leave behind your sorrows
Let this day be the last
Tomorrow there'll be sunshine
And all this darkness past
Big wheels roll through fields
Where sunlight streams
Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

Shiv Majmudar

The Cape

For as long as I can remember, my mother has worn a mask. Years and years, I've seen her come home with it still on her face. I don't think she feels it. It merged with her, becoming a part of her. Becoming a part of our lives. When she smiles at me, I don't see her mouth curl at the sides. But I see her eyes crinkle in joy, like she's squinting in sunlight.

I'm used to seeing that by now. The mask has never changed her face or emotions. Like she has a birthmark at this point. I don't question it, wonder about it, or even think about it. Not at all. It's not like I don't care. I've always cared that she worked in the ER. I'd go to school, and kids would tell me that my mom was there when they broke their arm on their bike. It made her special, like she had healing powers. And it made me special, too. I knew how important her job was. I wasn't like those other kids whose parents worked at CVS or whatever. When teachers have asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I've always said a doctor.

Things like that make you special. The smell of the hospital was the smell my mother came home with. That sickly clean smell that reminded me of shots at the doctor's office. There's things that you love and you hate, and then there's things with a little bit of both. That smell was part of my mother. Just like the old scrubs. And the mask.

When I turned eleven, just a little less than a year ago, she gave me a small stethoscope for my birthday. She had gotten me the same thing when I was five. Right now, it had the left ear plug missing, and I only could hear from the right. Maybe I had plucked it off when I was playing, because I had gotten a marker stain on it or something. The stuffed bears and Mickey Mouse had gotten enough check-ups for a lifetime by the time I was six and a half, when I last remember hearing a heartbeat through it.

"I thought you'd like it," she had told me, smiling. My birthday had been on an off-day for her that year. She had made sure that she could be there. My father was snapping pictures in the left corner. "They give them free in the lobby area, you know, with the stickers and trinkets." I nodded and grinned, even though I didn't know what to do with it. I put it around my neck, like a necklace.

"It's great!" I told her. I touched the small, silver circle at the bottom of the elephant's trunk. "Does it actually work?"

"I think it does," she replied. "I couldn't really tell. It's just like the one I got you when you were little. It's just not the red and blue one. I thought this one was more realistic and everything."

"Really?" I smiled softly and put it in my ears. I couldn't tell if my heartbeat was just a vibration from the instrument. But sure enough, I could hear the faint, yet bold, pumping noise in my chest.

"So, do you like it?" she asked, almost tentatively.

"Yeah, it's great!" I said to her. Dad gave me a thumbs-up from the back of the room. I don't want to say that what I told her was a lie. In a way, it wasn't. I thought little mementos were nice, even if they weren't useful. I still have a small coin that my grandparents gave me two years ago. It's nice to have things to remember people you love. That's what I treated the stethoscope as. Sometimes, I feel like I haven't touched it for years. It's in that little nook of the closet, which has become a sort of shrine. Little mementos, little memories. Physical memories. Memories I can touch when I want to remember them.

When things go in there, they become old. They become artifacts. Memories from the past is what history is. History of my family. History of my life.

But when I've touched these things recently, I can only think about the history I'm in.

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My mother always told me that I needed to love what I have. And I do. I love my family, my close friends, my neighborhood, always untouched by anything unfamiliar or dangerous. I'm twelve now. I'm old enough to run from danger, handle myself, stay away from scary people. You spend your entire life, maybe since you were four, thinking that you're smart and better than everyone else. You start with the little things. Learning to look both ways before crossing the street, tying your shoelaces on your own, watching your first PG movie, reading a 'challenging' book. You're smart until you run into something that you can't think your way out of. That's when hands scoop you up and show you away around it. Everyday things are in your way. Every day you're no longer smart. Until these things build you. Until you scrape your knees and put on the antiseptic and band-aids by

yourself. Until you do the monkey bars without falling onto the wood chips. That's when the hands disappear. That's when you start to work your way around things by yourself. That's when you start growing up and start thinking you're smart again.

My tenth birthday was important to me because it marked the day that I became a tween. A girl named Jessie said that between ages ten and twelve, you were a tween. I wasn't a child anymore. And now that was *mathematically* speaking. Not just telling my parents about how mature I am. I had the playground law on my side. There were kids whose birthdays were in the summer, and they never got recognized as being a tween by others. Bragging to your own parents or siblings got boring after a while. Anyway, being nine and three-quarters wasn't the worst thing in the world.

That's probably the most grown-up I've ever felt in my life. I could have been an adult at that point, even though I never have been one. That's when I really believed I had moved past childish things. I never loved being a child. Maybe just a year ago, I had carelessly stuffed that stethoscope in my closet. My mother had given me that. And I had let myself slip it away like it was worth nothing.

As you grow up, you *do* want to be a child again. Adults always wistfully say that, like we have some sort of golden nectar that they once had. I hadn't ever realized what they meant. No one does, until something happens that forces them to. Suddenly, you wish you were younger again, and everyone could shield you and tell you that it was all right.

A pandemic made me wish that. Not acne or anything like that. Not anything that my parents wished would go away when they were my age. My mother was in the kitchen, home from work when I spoke to her.

"Mom?"

"Yes?"

She was cutting apples into slivers. I still lose my teeth even though I'm twelve. One has grown in a weird way in my gums, and it's screaming to get out. Cutting apples helps with the pain. It's the little things that make my mother the person she is. The way she finds time to buy birthday presents for friends or watch me play soccer. The little things that are big. For me and for her.

"Are you still going to have to go in? The hospital would be closed, wouldn't it?" I know I sound inept, but she knows what

I'm thinking. People say dumb things when they have nothing else to say. What else should I have asked her? If she would be safe? No, that sounded pessimistic, like I assumed the worst.

She put the apples on a plate and set them down on the table. "I'm still waiting for instructions. You know how the school board had to set things up for the rest of the year? My work has to do the same." She told me to eat and then paused, her teeth pressed down on her bottom lip. "There'll be precautions and things like that to keep us safe. They won't just throw us back in."

"But what if they do?"

"It doesn't work that way, my love," she said softly. "That won't happen, okay? They're not allowed to."

"Will you have to quit?"

I'm spitting out questions without thinking about them. I feel like we're talking hundreds of feet above ground. Distant and jittery. There's no logic to what I'm saying. Only fear.

She laughed quietly and put her hand on my back. "No, no, not at all. You'll never have to worry about that."

Her voice was reassuring for me, but it didn't make my questions go away.

"What about dad? Will he be fine?" I asked her, almost naggingly.

"Dad will be all right," she reassured me. "Just like me."

I shook my head. It felt like she was telling me not to worry, instead of telling me why I shouldn't be. There were plenty of reasons why I thought I should be. A global pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. Like a war or famine or natural disaster. Being told not to be worried was always the first step in these things. Disaster was the next.

"Mom?" I asked her. My voice sounded weak, like I was sick.

"Listen," she said. "I know you're worried about this. We all are, and I'll admit it. But you don't have to do the worrying. That's what me and Dad will do. And we'll do it when it's time."

"But the time is now, Mom." I sounded ridiculous and childish, like I was warning her about an alien invasion.

"You'll be in school virtually until summer vacation," she reminded me. "That's more than enough time for your father and I to assess the situation. We're not going anywhere until it's safe."

"But what about you?" I asked her. "You can't quit work all of a sudden if they make it go back. And it isn't safe."

She sighed and didn't answer my question immediately. For a moment, I thought she wasn't going to answer me at all, until she replied, "This all happened suddenly. And when things happen

suddenly, people don't know what to do with it. You think this has been here for months, my love, and many other people do, too. We've been hearing it on the news since January at the longest. Your father and I didn't expect this to happen, and I know you didn't. Don't feel like you're the only one who thinks this, all right? You aren't alone. This snuck up on people. And they're in shock now. Things are moving slowly, but they are moving. It'll be safe by the time the plan rolls out."

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," she tells me. "Look at the bright side. No real school! Classes start later, and you won't have to get up super early."

"And you?" I ask her.

"Don't think like that, please?" She's pleading with me to be happy. To not worry. I don't know how I couldn't. I'm only worried about her. Dad works from home. Doesn't she realize what this all means? Maybe she does and is hiding it from me.

"Mom, be honest with me," I tell her, looking into her eyes. "Will you be all right?"

If she doesn't want me to worry, she has to be honest. Even if she is scared, I'll know that she is prepared at least.

"We'll see."

"Do you promise?"

She looks me in the eye and hugs me. I smell the hospital on her as a sort of perfume. "I do."

***

It was late at night when I woke up from my sleep. I checked the alarm clock beside my bed. It was only ten thirty. I settled back against the covers, listening for noises downstairs. If my parents were still awake this late, I'd hear them.

My throat felt parched and almost sticky, so I got out of bed for water. Being as silent as I could, I crept downstairs. My parents were talking over the table, so I stopped to listen before coming all the way down. It's clear that they're trying to whisper, like little girls on a playground when they're excited about something. But they don't sound excited about anything. Are they scared? But being scared is just excitement turned into a monster.

"I can't wait until Tuesday," I heard my father mumble as I gripped the railing. My body was still waking up from sleep. "The dealership says they'll take me in then. It's about time anyway. Finally, we'll have both cars working again."

I heard my mother nod, and they talked for around half a minute. Mainly boring stuff about the taxes and the car and everything in between. My ears woke, however, when they began talking about work. I usually put this under the 'grown-up talk' category, but things are different now. I'm not playing with friends or going to school even. There's me, TV, my books, and a mostly empty house. And these days, my parents' jobs interest me. Mainly because I'm more mature than I was a while ago. But I'm worried about my mother for the most part, and that's why I start to listen.

"You can take the van starting Monday," my father offered. "I'll pick up the Prius; you just drop me off."

"Sounds good," she answered. At this point, I had forgotten why I was even down there in the first place. I heard a pause.

"Did you tell him?"

He asked her softly, like he was exchanging secret information like spies in movies. I strained my ears trying to pick up what my mother was saying.

"Not yet." She stopped before going on. "He'll be fine when we tell him; he's old enough, and smart enough to know the kinds of things that are going on. . ."

I thought hard, bearing down on myself to think of an answer. Were they having another baby? No, that wasn't it. They always told me that we didn't have enough time to have another child. I knew I should be upstairs, but I stayed down. I wanted to hear this whole conversation. I wanted to know what they were talking about.

"So you lied to him?" he asked. My mother answered quicker than I thought she would. Or at least quicker than I would have. I was in disbelief. What could she have lied to me about?

"Not really," she replied. She lowered her voice, like she wanted no one to hear her. "I could tell he was worried about me, and I didn't want to encourage it."

"So you did," my father said. *Case closed*, his tone murmured. *No need to worry anymore, nothing to see here.*

My mother sighed. "I-I just didn't want him to worry about me."

"We all worry about you, Meghan," my father said softly. "Why should he be any different?"

"He's just a little kid," she murmured, barely audible from where I was standing.

"He's a mature kid," he corrected her. "And he'd be the first one to tell you that. Kids are resilient people, Meghan. Remember those NICU kids that you met? They're braver than I could ever dream to be! Don't underestimate your own son!"

"That's not it," she breathed, her voice like a breeze blowing in the sky. It was frail but sure and strong. "I don't want him to worry about me. I wish he wouldn't at all, it'd be better for him if he . . ."

How could I? I wished I could speak and say that to her, but I didn't dare go downstairs and blow my cover. I knew why she wanted me to not worry about her. I knew about the stress and pain that it would give me. But I cared, because I was her son, and I wished she acknowledged that. Acknowledging that I care, that I'm with her.

I didn't need to hear any more. I crept silently back upstairs and into bed. My throat was still dry, but this time it hurt.

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When I logged into school on Monday, it was clear I hadn't slept. I didn't know if anyone could notice, and I didn't care if they did. When you get older, little things don't bother you anymore. The bigger things do. Bigger things as you get bigger. I can't think of anything but the present, about mom, our family. Not when those hospital people are sending her in, like a lamb for slaughter, those officious fools at the hospital in their starched suits and ties, watching her go to war for them while they just sit there. If I went there, their blonde, Barbie doll-like secretary would offer me lollipops, like little tokens of kindness that would make up for everything. Like they know what this is like.

They don't, I thought, and I bit the inside of my cheek hard in anger. *They don't, and that's why they're doing this to her, like she's nothing but a wooden doll. A cheap wooden doll. Something they can replace without digging their hands too deep into their pockets.*

If my mother were here and could read my thoughts, she'd tell me to calm down gently, like I was fussing about nothing — only so that she could take the anger on herself, so that she could give herself the burden, let my mind rest. She's just as upset as me, I saw yesterday. My parents don't need anything more on their chests right now. If I could take just a little bit of it! It'd be like Sam Gamgee taking the ring from Frodo. I have nothing else hard in my life. I'm a kid, and I can take it.

But you have taken it, a small voice inside me whispers. Look at yourself! Think about the things you've been feeling. You have been taking it, and it's too much for you. You're angry, scared, worried.

It trailed off, leaving me feeling hollow and alone. I knew it was right. Maybe my mother was right, too. I shouldn't worry about her. It's worse for me.

"Hello?"

My mother was standing at the door. She had her scrubs on, with a mask and a face-shield. Her eyes smiled at me.

"Hi."

She peeked in at my blank computer screen. "Are you in class? If so, I don't want to disturb you."

"No, no, it starts in ten minutes or so," I tell her. She nods and comes over to me.

"I just wanted to tell you something, okay?"

I know what she's going to tell me. It's almost eight o' clock. She's going to work. I know it from yesterday. That should have never been a surprise to me; of course she'd have to go in.

"Don't worry, Mom, I already know," I said without thinking. Her eyebrows are raised for a moment, then they come back down.

"I'm sorry I lied," she whispered. Her voice fluttered like the wings of a broken bird. "I just didn't want to worry you. You know, with everything that's going on nowadays I didn't think that — "

"Mom, it's all right." I interrupted her just as quietly as she spoke. I don't want to hear her apologize. It'd be for nothing. It's my fault I ever believed her. Believed anything other than what I knew. . . .

She nodded, and I saw that her eyes were wet, shining like stars. "It's going to be all right, son," she whispered to me, like she was hushing me to sleep.

My throat hurt like it had last night, and it hurt to breathe. "I know."

She reached out and hugged me, and I hugged her back. Her scrubs smelled like the hospital, and the smell brought a new, aching pain to my throat.

"Don't be scared," she told me softly, like I was young and hiding in her skirt from something. "It's all right. Don't be scared."

"I'm not scared," I said in whatever I could muster from my broken voice. "It's just, just *this*."

"This?" She pointed at her face shield and mask. "This is a cape, Jimmy, not a mask. Don't be scared for me, okay? You can't find fear out of me; I'm more than that. And you're more than that, too. Remember that, all right? For me."

I looked at her eyes, the only thing the mask didn't cover up. Were they pleading? No, my mother would never plead. They were strong and bold, and the tears in them didn't mask that. She was confident in me to be as strong as her. The pain in my throat loosened. I could never be like her, but I thought of her. Almost every second of my life.

"I will," I told her, and I gave her a small, faintish smile. She returned it and kissed me on the forehead.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

She nodded and her eyes crinkled. "You grew up so fast."

I didn't know what to say to this, so I gave her a sort of half-nod.

"Bye, Mom."

"Bye," she said, and she walked out the door.

Almost as soon as she left, I darted up the stairs to my room. Class wouldn't start until two minutes from now, and I had just enough time. I opened my closet door and pulled out the stethoscope, cold and dusty.

What could happen in the future meant nothing to me then. I held it in my hands, and the metal became hot with my grip. Every second felt precious to me. My mother could have been in the same room with me now. Even if she wasn't, I still had the mask and cape of my hero.

Dennis McFadden

The Shamrock Saloon

Teddy Fitzgerald was a rich kid. His father had invented a new hybrid of rose, though Pags never knew, and never cared, whether horticulture was the reason for his wealth, or a hobby he was able to indulge because of it. All he knew was that Teddy was rich and loud, particularly when drinking and showing off for friends, exactly the conditions under which he approached Pags that evening some twenty years before.

Pags was waiting for a friend under the streetlight in front of the Shamrock Saloon on Main Street in Greenwich, a quiet little village in upstate New York. Teddy came up behind him and walloped him on the back, hard, knocking Pags into the street. It was so unexpected and flagrant — though Teddy was born obnoxious, Pags had never seen him openly belligerent — that his first reaction was that Teddy, obviously hammered, must have tripped on the uneven sidewalk and tumbled into him accidentally. He was soon disabused of that notion. Teddy was all over him, apologizing loudly, profusely, all the while shoving Pags backwards. Pags juked away and headed for the door of the Shamrock Saloon. *Whatsa matter, Pagano, you don't want to accept my apology*? Teddy shouted, his friends milling about the sidewalk, half ashamed, half amused, entirely incredulous. Maybe it had been a dare, Pags thought later, maybe a bet to pick a fight with the first person he saw; maybe he hadn't been singled out at all, except by fate.

Teddy was a year behind him, taller, handsomer, a linebacker; Pags was a second-baseman, a scrawny one at that, his nose too small for his face and hair like a crop of withered weeds. Pags fled into the bar. Even though his mind told him his was the moral high ground, that he was right not to get drawn in, not to retaliate physically, not to be baited into an ungodly street brawl (one he was bound to lose) by a rich, drunken punk, his gut nevertheless called him a coward—not only that night, but every single time the memory resurfaced.

His humiliation was mitigated a week later by the grander fate that awaited Teddy. According to eyewitnesses, a young lady was granting sexual favors to her boyfriend in the front seat of his car, visible only to a trucker passing by high in the cab of his semi.

The trucker, understandably distracted, failed to see Teddy in his blue Monte Carlo stopped at the light. The resulting collision sent Teddy into the middle of the intersection where another tractor-trailer on the crossing highway squashed his Monte Carlo like a bug. Teddy's funeral featured a closed casket.

Though he was gone, Teddy's name lived on. For years Pags's friends, whether conceding to him on his choice of which game to watch, which bar to go to, how to play this hitter or that, acquiesced with the expressed fear of being *Fitzgeralded* if they didn't.

Twenty years later, Pags and his wife went to a cook-out. Every year Freddie Matson and his wife, Carol, hosted one for his office, Matson Insurance, where Stacy worked. Pags had managed to avoid the last two—or the first two, as far as they were concerned, Stacy having worked there for three years now — but this year he'd acquiesced. It was time he got to know his wife's boss a little better.

Freddie called the place his "camp": a sprawling white house with green shutters, tucked among the maples above a bend in the Battenkill, a wrap-around, screened-in porch, manicured landscape, surround-sound in every room, a 60-inch flat-screen, a walk-in shower the size of a small room. Pags recognized disingenuous, backhanded boasting when he heard it, but it had the desired effect on Freddie's guests: *Man, if this is your camp, I'd hate to see what your house looks like. Man, I sure could get used to roughing it here.*

Pags said nothing. He watched the face of his wife, Stacy, glowing with excitement. Glowing with pride. Almost as if in ownership.

A beautiful August afternoon, bright sun, green grass, deep pools of shade from the trees by the lazy, low, rocky stream. Down across the lawn, six or seven kids were kicking a soccer ball around — an abomination. Pags would sooner watch paint dry than watch a game of soccer. In fact, he often did watch paint dry, or lacquer anyway, on his bats, the baseball bats he crafted in the workshop out behind his house. If it didn't involve a baseball, bat and glove, it wasn't a sport. He recognized April, Matson's kid, but not the others. He didn't know many of the people there, though Stacy knew them all, employees of Matson Insurance and their families, a well-dressed, buttoned-down breed that was alien to Pags and his blue collar. Stacy was an administrative

assistant. Pags was a carpenter. He'd designed his own business cards: *Al Pagano, Cabinetmaker / Baseball Bat Maker.*

On the patio, Freddie was manning the grill, steaks on fire, smoke and sizzle and bluster. Freddie was a cliché, tall, dark and handsome, artful, black wavy hair, close-set black eyes full of light. His wife, Carol, stood beside him, a tall woman, tall as her husband but wider, a certain equine proportion to her long face. He'd known her much longer than he'd known Freddie; she and Pags had gone to school together. Stacy gave Carol a hug, standing high on her tiptoes to do so, then circumspectly shook Freddie's hand, smiling as though at an inside joke.

As though they'd never hugged before, thought Pags.

"How do you like your steak?" Freddie shouted, even though Pags was two feet away.

Pags shouted back, "Like my women — thick and tender and smothered in onions."

Freddie laughed, too long and too hard. Carol chuckled. Stacy smiled.

On a table beneath a canopy sat a glistening bowl of shrimp sweating on ice, along with other assorted, unidentifiable hors d'oeuvres — not a chip, dip or peanut to be seen. Pags took a Yuengling from the sea of ice in a large gleaming tub, a cornucopia of bottles and cans. After he'd judged that pleasantries enough had been exchanged, he asked Freddie if he minded if he took the 60-inch flat-screen for a spin, explaining that the Mets were on, as if that were all the explanation needed. Freddie was gracious. He called his daughter away from her soccer game on the lawn and told her to fetch the remote for Mr. Pagano.

The living room was dim, cool and quiet, an oasis from the party blaze. Pags sank into a couch so plush he feared he might go under. Looking up as April handed him the remote, he was surprised by the frown, by the look of naked disgust in the big brown teenage eyes.

"What?" he said. "What'd I do?"

"Like you don't know," she said, turning on her heel, stomping back outside, leaving him grateful that he and Stacy had never had kids.

"Soccer's not a real game!" he shouted after her.

Having had too much to drink, he let Stacy drive home that night. They'd stayed late, well past dark, and were among the last to leave. Pags and his Yuenglings had stayed mostly in the living room watching baseball, mostly alone. Stacy'd been content to

let him be. He supposed she'd been happy enough just to get him there in the first place—the last two years he'd dismissed it out of hand — and she was certainly used to having a reclusive husband by now, all the hours he spent by himself in his workshop. Still, he was mildly surprised there was not even so much as a hint of reproach all afternoon, or all the way home.

The countryside flickered by in the headlights, the woods, the odd farmhouse, the cornfields turning crisp and brown. "You know, you can use cruise-control here," Pags said.

"I don't like cruise-control."

"It's a good idea when you've been drinking. Keeps you from speeding."

"It doesn't feel like you're really driving if you use cruise-control."

He thought about it for a moment. "It doesn't feel like you're really washing clothes if you don't take 'em down to the creek and beat 'em on a rock, does it?"

"Wise-ass," she said, not sparing him a glance.

They passed the mill on the river at the outskirts of Greenwich, headlights skimming the white foam on the water, and he told her to slow down where the streetlamps commenced, and the speed limit dropped, and the cops often waited in ambush. She said nothing, though her jaw might have tensed, whether with added focus, or annoyance at his backseat driving he couldn't say. On Main, they drove by the Shamrock Saloon, now a non-descript, beat-up old bar in a hundred-year-old building that had once been a grand hotel. Pags had spent many an hour there, the scene of his first legal beer, the place where many a game was celebrated, or lamented, or replayed, a solitary getaway just as often—only a fifteen-minute walk from his house on John Street. But he could never see the place without thinking of Teddy Fitzgerald and what happened there twenty years before.

"What's that song," she said, "you know the one, something about waltzing with the man in the moon, something like that? Oh, what is it?"

"You have to give me a little more to go on, Stace."

"It's running through my mind . . . *waltz with the man in the moon . . . across the floor of the Shamrock Saloon . . .* something like that. It was by . . . oh, what was the name of that band?" She tried humming an uncertain tune.

"Is it animal, vegetable or mineral?" Pags said. "Is it bigger than a breadbox?"

She took a lot of kidding for her memory. She squeezed the wheel in frustration, stamping her foot at that damned, recalcitrant factoid that refused to be coaxed from her brain — one in a long line of lost memories. It never helped.

Pags watched her driving. He normally drove, seldom saw her behind the wheel. He studied her. A small woman, spine stiff and straight, scarcely touching the back of the seat, she squinted straight ahead through her thick glasses. She drove clenched, two-handed.

He can still see her driving that night, in the ambient glow of the headlights, humming in distress, driving so earnestly, so sincerely, as if the fate of the world depended on it.

It was the last time he saw her drive. Had he known what would happen, he would have said something. Done something. Touched her knee. Something. Protected her.

Ow! Grab it hard and squeeze it! had been Stacy's exclamation when Pags, crossing his legs, had cracked his shin on a crosspiece under the restaurant table on one of their early dates. *Grab it hard and squeeze it* had since become their esoteric motto, with varying inflections, although the it in question never again referred to a shin. After they got home from Freddie Matson's cookout on the Battenkill, Pags, beer-weary, sleepy, went straight to bed. When Stacy soon joined him, sans her usual pajamas, he was not surprised when her arm came across his chest, and she breathed into his ear, "Want me to grab it hard and squeeze it?"

On another early date, around the time their motto was born, she'd stood in the soft light of her bedroom, posing in a meager nightie, and said, "I've been told I have a statuesque body," smiling, glowing with pride. Pags agreed. She had a lovely, classically proportioned figure, small, eager breasts, firm, shapely bottom, though her gorgeous body was not entirely at peace with her slightly funny face, thick glasses, overbite, and straight, brown, ordinary hair. But her announcement of it, her need for affirmation, her insecurity, made him feel sad and protective. It was the moment he knew he would marry her.

This night, after the cook-out, after she'd coaxed and teased, after they'd made love, the normal time for easy sleep, she still was reluctant to give up the day.

"I was talking to Freddie today while you were inside." Not a newsflash. "I was telling him what a great carpenter you are. He's thinking about having some work done."

"He could use it. His jowls are starting to sag."

She sighed, wiggled away an inch. "You know, this is why I can never talk to you."

Pags countered with a sigh of his own. "What kind of work?"

"A new bathroom. I told him you'd give him a price."

"Where? At his camp or at his house?"

"At his house. Though he's thinking about redoing the kitchen in the camp, too."

Pags thought about it for a moment. "He really does have too much fucking money."

"So why don't we take some of it off his hands?"

"I like that idea. A heist. An inside job. You can be my man on the inside."

"Better — overcharge him. He'll hire you no matter what price you give him."

"What makes you think so?"

"He has to keep me happy. I'm the one that holds that place together."

"Little ol' Stacy Pagano holds Matson Insurance together?"

"He can't do without me."

"You sound awfully cock-sure."

A Stacy giggle. "Trust me," she said.

Those two words caused a lightness in his belly, a bubble that floated quickly up to his head, bringing dizziness. *In Stace We Trust*. The little girl beside him, naked and statuesque, boldly trying her wings, flying blind without her glasses.

She wanted to invite the Matsons to dinner, to repay their hospitality. Pags just bet she did. He wasn't surprised. What did surprise him a bit was her wanting to invite her mother too, at the same time, for the same dinner, in the same house.

"What?" Stacy said. "She can help me in the kitchen."

"The last time you and Betty were both in the kitchen together," Pags said, "it was an iron cage death match."

"It was not."

"You were in tears."

"I was not."

"At the least you were whimpering and sucking your thumb."

"Maybe a little bit," she said. "Wise-ass."

It was complicated. Stacy had been a daddy's girl, she and her mother constantly vying for her father's affections, and ever since his death at the age of only fifty, the mother-daughter relation-

ship had been, without its anchor, free-floating and ill-defined. Pags liked to think of his wife and his mother-in-law as *free spirits*, although *whack-jobs* was a fair-enough alternate description.

John Moore had been a big, barrel-chested man with a booming voice he employed to good effect as manager of the Witches, Pags's over-25 baseball team back in the day. A handsome man despite his coke-bottle-bottom glasses (Stacy had inherited his eyesight), he'd been well regarded in the community right up until his untimely death. Afterwards, not as much.

He'd owned a small construction company, and one of his backhoes had turned on him, with tragic results. Sudden, sad and shocking, but another shock lay in store after they'd rushed him to the hospital: There they'd discovered he was wearing women's underwear. Silk panties, pale yellow.

Betty claimed to have no knowledge of her husband's hidden sartorial proclivities; she was as shocked and surprised as everyone else. Stacy, though, was never quite sure if she believed her. Word had spread like a kindergarten cold, as small-town word is wont to do, to lasting effect on his father-in-law's reputation. He became a punch-line.

Don't get your panties in a bunch! wasn't a new exclamation by any means, but the fresh addendum, *Like John Moore did*, certainly was — followed by the glances down the bar at the Shamrock Saloon to see if Pags, whom they'd forgotten was there, had overheard. He had. Other times, hushed whispers and snickers by a gaggle of drinking men, followed by the casual, unobtrusive glances Pags's way, betrayed the subject of their amusement. Pags reacted to these incidents with a mental shrug. Boys will be boys. Although, as in his father-in-law's case, maybe not always.

Whatever gets you through the night, was Pags's philosophy.

Stacy was more high-strung, not so equanimous. How much the revelation about her father might have tipped her already teetering equilibrium, her already precarious temperament, Pags couldn't judge. Though he did worry.

Once, in bed, she'd said, "You don't think he was gay, do you?" She was nestled onto his shoulder. They hadn't been talking about her father, but he knew who she meant.

"Not usually," he said. "He usually seemed pretty grumpy to me."

She gave him a shove. "You asshole."

"What's the difference? So what if he was?"

"'So what'?"

"Yeah. So what? If it made him happy. Live and let live."

He was of course aiming to put her mind at ease. The thought of two men having sex utterly repulsed Pags, made him queasy, but he was open-minded enough to not think about it. To live and let live.

"But it didn't," she said after a while. "It didn't make him happy."

When Betty arrived, well in advance of the Matsons, she hugged her daughter and greeted Pags with a kiss on the mouth — not a romantic kiss by any means, a quick peck, but still enough to unnerve both Pags and Stacy, a custom of her mother's that always had. Once he'd suggested to Stacy that he might slip her a little tongue to cure her of the habit, but Stacy had failed to see the humor, and Pags wondered if maybe she thought it might not cure Betty, only encourage her.

"You're wearing that?" was the first thing she said to Stacy upon entering the house. Stacy was wearing tight white shorts, moderately high heels, a hot pink blouse. Betty, a slender woman, still attractive on the verge of her senior years, wore a navy cocktail dress and a necklace of what appeared to be miniature sea shells, overdressed as usual, wearing too much make-up as usual. Pags could still taste the lipstick.

"Yes, I'm wearing this," Stacy said. "Are you wearing that?"

"Are you going to change?"

"No. I am not going to change."

"Stay as sweet as you are," Pags offered.

"I thought you said your boss was coming," Betty said.

Pags stayed out of it. In his clean blue jeans and dressiest Mets tee shirt, he didn't think either of them was particularly appropriately dressed.

When the women went to the kitchen to continue their bickering, he went upstairs to the spare bedroom, the guest room that seldom saw a guest. The second TV was there, a cheap little set; it was where he went to watch baseball when Stacy was watching *American Idol* or some other equally inane reality fare on the flat-screen (much smaller than the Matson's) down in the living room. He'd squeezed in a comfortable, albeit somewhat battered, easy chair, though usually he stretched out on the bed. Sunlight through the window fell across the ancient varnish of the sill, across the room a cluster of dust mites floated, and for a while it was quiet. There were heaps of pillows and cushions, ex-

cess blankets and bedspreads, a comfortable clutter. The window overlooked the little front yard on John Street. Betty's car, a big black Jeep, was parked two feet from the curb. He considered retreating for a while to his workshop in the converted garage out back before the Matsons arrived, but he knew he'd start working if he did, and he'd only get dirty again.

Not with company coming. Not with such special company coming. Pags was anxious to see how Freddie and his wife interacted together in captivity.

When he finally heard a car door slam out front, he went to the window. Stacy hurried outside to greet them on the walk, before they were out of their SUV, a white Cadillac Escalade, giving Carol a perfunctory hug, all but ignoring Freddie and his Cheshire Cat grin — a little too pointedly ignoring him, thought Pags. Chattering happily, she led them up the little walk toward the house. Freddie looked tipsy already. Pags couldn't hear the words, could only see the smiles, on the faces of Freddie and Stacy, at least. Carol, a step behind them, was not smiling, nor looking at Stacy — upon whom her husband's eyes were glued — but was looking instead at the house, searching the front windows for signs of life.

Pags stepped back. Not until they'd disappeared under his view, and he heard the front door rattle, heard Stacy's animated introductions to her mother, the commotion in the hallway, did the street-side rear door of the Escalade open.

April emerged, having concluded that she'd been abandoned.

Stacy called up the stairs, "They're here!" but he lingered at the window, watching the girl. April glanced at the front of the house, as her mother had, but without curiosity, without expectation, with only a glower of dread, a touch of familiar disgust. Then she turned her attention back to the phone in her hand, her thumbs commencing their earnest busyness.

After the first wave or two of banal chatter had passed at dinner, Freddie said, "So, Stacy tells me you make bats."

Pags's mouth was full of potato salad. "Yes," he said. "*Baseball* bats. Not the kind that hang around caves."

"Since when do you care about bats, pops?" said April, twiddling her fork in her cole slaw, staring at her phone beside her plate.

"Well I'd certainly like to know more about it. Piques my interest, you could say."

"It's called making conversation, dear," said Carol.

"So," Freddie said, looking at Pags, "wooden bats, I take it.

I'm sure aluminum bats are anathema to a purist like yourself."

"Anathema?" Pags said. "Is that anything like an enema?"

A titter of laughter, even a reluctant snicker from April, though Betty's was the rowdiest. "A baseball bat up the old wazoo!"

Pags went to the living room and fetched a bat, one of the three mounted over the mantel of the faux fireplace. "Impressive," said Freddie, holding the thing in his hands, turning it, feeling the sheen. "How do you get this . . . this intricate design like this?"

"It's a laminated bat," Pags said. "Those are alternating pieces of maple and ash."

"I'd hate to hit a ball with it," Freddie said. "It's too pretty."

"Let me see it," said Carol.

From hand to hand the bat went around the table, touched, admired, reverently examined. Pags felt a swell of pride. For a moment he allowed himself to believe they might actually realize the extent of the effort that had gone into the crafting of the thing, the hours, the sweat, the frustration, the love.

The bat made its way back to Freddie. "I gotta hand it to you," he said, and he did, making a show of handing the bat back to Pags. No one laughed, which Freddie took as a sign to turn serious. He sipped his wine, a gulp. "I like baseball. Never played much when I was a kid, but I used to watch it sometimes. Got too busy though, I guess."

"You can never be too busy," Pags said. "That's the beauty of it. There's always time. It's the only sport where there's no clock. It's timeless."

"I'll say," Stacy said. "Some of those games seem to take forever."

"Oh, my God," Betty said. "We sat through so many of them when John was managing the Witches. They seemed endless."

"Endless. Timeless. Is there a difference?" Carol said.

"Whoa," said Freddie, "Carol from out of left field—no pun intended—deep question, blow my mind." He made a *ka-boom* sound, his fingers miming an explosion from his head.

"There is a difference," said Pags. "The game's over when the last man's out. That's when the timelessness ends."

"My God," Freddie said. "I don't know if I can wrap my mind around that concept."

"You're drunk, Freddie," said Carol.

Freddie cocked his head. "I don't know if I can wrap that concept around my mind."

April said, "You're drunk, pops."

"How could this have happened?" Freddie, center stage. Pags was watching Stacy, the anticipatory smile, waiting for the next gem to fall from Freddie's mouth, when he noticed Carol watching him watch her, watching, in fact, in much the same, sly manner. They made eye contact, a meaningful glance, though Pags had no idea what the meaning was.

They'd been friends since — what? Seventh grade? Sixth? Somewhere around then. He remembered the first time he'd really noticed her, in ninth grade English, Mrs. Strock quizzing them about the reading assignment, *Ivanhoe*. Pags wondered who Carol was talking about, this *bree-on du-bwah gil-bare* character, when Mrs. Strock had pointed out, delightedly, that of all her students, only Carol was properly pronouncing the French name of Brian DuBois-Gilbert. Carol had taken no end of teasing from the boys after that, lame, French-themed teasing, from French fries to French kissing to French ticklers, but Pags had been impressed. Senior year, they'd been on the prom committee together. Conversations about their dads, whose drinking and cluelessness they had in common to endure. Dating problems. Lettuce in the teeth, gravy on the lap. She taught him a new word: halitosis. Never romantically involved, he and Carol. Never the closest of friends, but more than mere acquaintances.

Now here they sat, years on, around an unlikely table amid unlikely companions, sharing a secret moment, and somehow it all came around again for Pags, this timelessness thing.

Freddie said, "I may be drunk, but I know what I like. I know a beauty when I see it." He looked at Stacy. "How much do you want for that bat, Pags?"

"Now what the heck would you do with that bat, Freddie?" Pags said.

Freddie said, "When we were kids, we used to toss rocks in the air and see how far we could knock 'em." Looking at Pags, pausing, grinning. "You'd probably kill me."

"Oh, not for that," Pags said. This was met with titters by the three ladies at the table, titters that weren't quite sure of themselves, couldn't quite gain their footing.

April looked up from her phone, glaring at Pags with a meaningful frown.

For dessert, Betty served her famous cupcakes, to the usual heaps of praise. Pags couldn't help it: Every time he saw Betty taking her bow in the spotlight, he couldn't help but picture her wearing men's underwear, gaudy, polka-dot boxer shorts, under

her perky cocktail dress. It was a recurring image, and he wondered sometimes if he should share it with his wife, if it might be therapeutic to her, but thus far he'd resisted. The jury was still out on Stacy's stability.

He asked if anybody wanted to see his workshop. Much to his surprise, April was the only taker. Freddie said he was allergic to sawdust and manual labor. Stacy pointed out that he never wanted her or her mother to set foot in there.

"Not *unattended*," Pags responded. "It's okay on a guided tour. If I let you in there by yourself, I'd never be able to find my table saw again."

When Pags, Yuengling in hand, ushered in April and switched on the light — it was windowless except for the three small panes in the garage door that never opened anymore — she said, "Wow," though by no means in an exclamatory manner. She looked around the room, sniffed the aroma of lacquer (like the smell of bourbon, Pags had always thought), and added, "What a mess."

"But an impressive mess," he said. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Oh, sure." She kicked through the heaps of sawdust on the floor, the wood scraps, the abandoned pieces of bats here and there. "Don't you ever sweep up?"

"I tried it once. Didn't like it."

"It just gets dirty again," she said.

"Exactly."

"You spend a lot of time in here." Not really a question.

"Yeah," he said. "Me and Joe DiMaggio and some of the boys."

She crossed to the lathe and stood touching the cool metal, her other hand still clutching her phone. Standing with her back to him, she said, "You know my dad and your wife are doing it, don't you?"

She didn't turn. He shook his head as he might at a marauding mosquito. He took a long drink from his brown bottle, saying nothing. She was tall for fifteen, well on her way to her parents' height, but her shoulders, bare skin above her wide-necked shirt, touched by a fringe of brown hair, were slumped. Pags said nothing.

She finally turned around. Face lowered, big brown eyes peeking up, her mother's eyes. "Did you hear what I said?"

"What makes you think so?" he said.

"I've heard him on the phone. I've seen them with my eyes."

"Seen them doing it?"

A sour look crossed her face. Adults. "Not *doing* it."

"Does your mom know?"

The slumping shoulders shrugged. "I don't know. We don't talk."

Pags took another slug, staring at the girl who was growing more impatient by the second. Her face had gone red. "So?" she said.

His turn to shrug. "So, what do you want me to do about it?"

"*Stop it*," she said, angry, stamping her flip-flop in the sawdust. "Make them *stop* it."

"Easy," he said. "Easy. Don't get your panties in a bunch." And when she looked at him, a bit horrified, he added, "Like John Moore did."

A week later, a crisp morning smelling of fall, Pags knocked on the door of the Matson's house on the outskirts of Greenwich, a modern, sprawling house, not quite a mansion though it had that aspiration. Across the valley just a hint of color was beginning to touch the trees, a distant farm, sun gleaming on a silo. He'd called to say he'd be out to estimate the bathroom job. Carol greeted him with a smile that tried to mean it, and there was tension, tension that normally might have been excused simply by virtue of the fact that it was probably the first time they'd ever actually been alone together in all the years they'd known each other. He held his tape in a clammy fist. When she asked if he'd like coffee, he asked if she knew about Stacy and Freddie.

"No," she said. "Yes."

She sat on the edge of the easy chair near the fireplace. He leaned back on the sofa as if settling in to watch a game. The cat came to kibbitz, a fat calico called Zsa Zsa, and Carol tried to call her away, but she snaked around Pags's ankles, jumped up to his lap. Pags neither removed, nor petted her, despite the escalating rumble of purr.

He told Carol what April had said. Both Pags and Carol had suspected. They were fairly sure. They couldn't be entirely certain.

Now what? They could not simply meet, declare their suspicions, then go their separate ways. Spy work, the gathering of evidence, proof, was considered and dismissed. Confrontation was the only way to go. Rip the Band-Aid off. Go bold or go home. She and Pags should confront them at the same time, Carol decided, together, so alibis and denials could not be considered and concocted and coordinated. They could meet for dinner again. So Pags could give them his price, they could say. They could spring their trap then.

"Now let's think this through for a minute," Pags said. "What if they're innocent? What if it's only some serious type of a flirting thing?"

"I will not tolerate that either. One way or other, it has to end."

He picked Zsa Zsa up and put her on the floor. She jumped back up again. "It's the other that worries me," he said.

Wally's was a venerable restaurant on Main, across the street from the Shamrock Saloon. When he told her they were going to meet the Matsons there, Stacy was excited. "Oh, goody!" she said, hopping, actually hopping, actually clapping her hands, "goody!" and he was touched by her childish delight, feeling villainous for luring the little girl to a favorite place only to ambush her there. Then he remembered: Wally's had fallen out of favor the last few times they'd gone. She hadn't liked it. Musty-smelling. Poor service. Overpriced. Disappointing food.

*

Carol didn't waste time. After drinks arrived, before they ordered—she told the waiter they'd need more time, and Pags, stomach roiling, muttered, *I'll say* — she fixed Freddie in a cool gaze, then Stacy, then back to Freddie. "Pags and I have been talking," she said. "As a matter of fact, the whole town has been talking. Word is that you two are having an affair."

In one instant the world changed. Stacy wiping whiskey sour from her chin with her crimson napkin, Freddie taking deep breaths, his eyes scanning the horizon for escape routes, weathering Carol's withering glare. Stacy's face red, blistering red, and radiant, her eyes growing bigger behind her thick glasses, looking at Pags, filled with shock, filled with hurt, filled with betrayal — whether at betraying, at having been betrayed, he couldn't say.

"Well," Carol said. "I guess that answers that."

Freddie reached for Stacy's hand, gripped it as she tried to pull away, a fresh bout of panic on her face. "No," Freddie said, "it's not an affair. It might have started that way, a fling, but — we couldn't help it, we fell in love."

"Wait —" said Stacy.

"We've been trying to figure out how to tell you," said Freddie.

"Sluts," Carol said.

"We want to be together," said Freddie. "It's as simple as that."

"There's nothing simple about it!" said Stacy, standing, her red face awash behind her lenses. With a muffled sob, she fled across the room and out the door. Through the window they saw her hesitate. Freddie hurried after her.

They watched him take her hand, saw her pull it away, saw heated words they couldn't hear, saw Stacy walk off briskly down Main toward her home on John, her pretty little bottom bouncing on her high, high heels.

Across the street, beyond Freddie, was the Shamrock Saloon. Freddie watched her walk away. Then he looked through the window for a moment at Pags and Carol inside, his face a glowering red shadow, a glower completely without conviction, and he too went off, in the opposite direction, toward where he'd parked the Escalade.

A moment of silence as they stared at the street.

Pags said, "Where the hell's the waiter?" and Carol said, "I'm famished," and they came this close to laughing.

After the waiter had approached the table like the captain of the bomb squad approaching an abandoned suitcase, they ordered, scallops for him, a steak, rare, for her, and damned if they didn't eat, and drink, Merlot for her, Yuengling for him, and they talked about what would come next. Speculation, of course. Carol did not seem to envision a future with Freddie, although Pags wasn't so sure about his with Stacy. His thoughts were skittery and jumbled. The scallops in his stomach felt as though they were dancing a polka.

After a while they were left with nothing but the Shamrock Saloon across the street, which they stared at, in silence, for some time.

"What was that guy's name?" Carol finally said.

"Who? Teddy Fitzgerald?"

"Yes," she said. "That was it — Fitzgeralded."

Stacy was home when he got there. He could hear sad little sounds behind the closed bedroom door, but he didn't knock, he didn't call. Nor was he quiet; he made sure she knew he was home as he went to the spare bedroom and turned on the little TV. She should be the one to come to him. He waited and waited, watching the late game from the coast, the Dodgers and Padres, San Diego desperately needing a win, and for a while

it was timeless, there was no clock, there was nothing bearing down. Stacy never came. When the game was over, he decided to go to sleep, let her fret, see what the fresh light of a new day would bring, but it was he who fretted and tossed and could not sleep.

After a while he arose in the dim glow from the streetlight out front, and walked across the hall, and tapped on the bedroom door that was still closed. He tapped and called her name softly a few times before she answered: "Go away."

Pags, having taken the first step, already feeling aggrieved, took umbrage. "*Me go away?*" he said, albeit still softly. "You really think *I'm* the one who should go away?"

"Just go away," she said. The sniffles had not subsided. "All of you."

He did, back to the spare room, this time to sleep and let her stew. Though it was he who stewed. Again. Sleep still wouldn't come. When finally it nearly had, it was nipped in the bud by a bellow from outside the window.

"Stacy!" was the bellow. "Staa-cee!" Freddie, drunk in the street. "Stacy! I gotta talk to you! Stacy! Please!" More than a little bit slurred: *Sta-shee. Schta-see. Schta-shee*. Now and then he nearly got it right: *Stay* — see!

Pags went to the window. "Freddie — shut the fuck up."

"Pags," said Freddie, down by the hedge. "Pags," he said, searching the front of the house, unable to see Pags in the darkened window, "we never meant to hurt you. Or Carol."

"Get out of here. I'll call the cops."

"Pags, I can't. I love her. I love your wife."

He was about to say, *Well, she doesn't love you*, but he couldn't. He realized he couldn't. He went back to bed. He listened to the bellows and bawls for a while, heard an angry neighbor yell, and sooner than he expected, he heard other voices, gruff, mean, then opened his eyes to the red light flashing on the bedroom ceiling, listened to the cops take Freddie away, then the quiet.

Had Stacy even heard him? Not a sound from the hallway. Now the nighttime quiet, heavy and thick, filled his head. He was adrift in a toxic brew of tedium, sleep clawing at him. Not much later, he heard her whisper in the doorway. "Pags? Was that Freddie?"

"Your mother wears boxer shorts," he said, wide awake, but in a dream.

She came closer. “Do you hate me?”

“No,” he said. Then added, “I don’t think so.”

“Do you know how sorry I am?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Can you forgive me?”

Later, afterwards, he wasn’t sure if he responded as he did because he meant it, or simply because of the flow: “I don’t think so,” he said.

Later, afterwards, he’d have given anything to take those four words back.

She sat on the edge of the bed. Her back stiff and straight, clenched as though she were driving. He rolled away, toward the window. She said, “What are we going to do?”

“I don’t *know* what I’m going to do. I don’t know what *you’re* going to do.” He didn’t know if there was a *we* any longer. He heard another sniffle. He thought he’d thought it through before. He thought he’d allowed for this possibility or that: If it wasn’t true, fine, he could forgive her flirtatiousness, if it was true, not so fine, he could forgive her infidelity, eventually, but the price would be higher. Now it didn’t seem so simple.

He said, “Do you love him?”

She didn’t answer. He felt her shrug. He waited. Another soft sniffle.

It was not a no. It was far from a no. Which, in Pags’s mind, was a deal-breaker, at least for now, at this minute, in the middle of this night in this odd little room where the streetlight glowed on the ceiling, and the bed was softer than it ought to be, and sleep was only an illusion, something that refused to come to his rescue.

He fell into a trance-like state, wanting only to sleep. She began to talk, and talked for a while, softly, trying to remember, asking Pags to help her, where was that place they went that weekend, not long after they were married, the place where they saw all those ducks — or were they geese? — on that pond out in the middle of nowhere. Oh, where was it? It was a staging area, it was spectacular, like something on the Nature Channel, the way they all took flight in perfect formation, even their wings flapping in unison, sun glittering on feathers, and the squabbling racket — oh, where the heck was it? When was it? Did he remember?

But he didn’t answer, wanting only sleep, wanting only for it to be over.

At some point he sensed her leave, the sound of it no louder than her sigh.

Almost there. He awoke again when a car started, but only barely. He waited for it to pull away. And waited. But he fell asleep, finally, before it did. It never occurred to him.

It honestly never did.

He wasn't the one who found her. Next morning was bright. A knock on the door, an uproar. She'd rigged a vacuum hose from the tailpipe of her old clunker to the passenger-side window, stuffed towels in around it for a seal.

She'd taken off her glasses and put them on the dusty dashboard.

Limp as a rag doll. Relaxed at last behind the wheel.

*

Whenever he comes across Carol, less frequently now, at the Price Chopper, or at the mall in Saratoga, she invariably says to him some variation of this: "Isn't it amazing, this power you seem to have? Look at Freddie — he ended up Fitzgeralded, too." She's speaking of her ex-husband's decline, his slide into all-out alcoholism, the loss of his business and his esteem. His pitiful, whiny existence. Pags caught him once, drunk, after he'd broken into the house, searching for a picture, an artifact, a souvenir, anything that Stacy might have touched.

Carol never mentions her. At the funeral she paid her respects, gave Pags a hug, and by now, she must feel he's moved on, gotten through it. She probably wonders if he's seeing other women yet, maybe someone special, and must feel that surely he is. She might wonder if he's still enamored of his silly baseball bats.

What she has no way of knowing is that Pags's passion has lost a yard off its fastball. The days he spends crafting his bats, the hours he spends watching his games, seeing the ball leave the bat and soar in a majestic white arc over the green, pristine ball field, are no longer timeless. Stacy is there with them now, with Joltin' Joe, the Splendid Splinter, Stan the Man, and all the boys of summer.

The timelessness has been lost in her presence, the girl he couldn't protect, the girl who loved too much, there with him, waltzing with the man in the moon, slipping away, yawning, bored, itchy, anxious.

David Middleton

The Dwelling Place

North Louisiana, 20—
saying the grace of names

for the farmers of north Louisiana
who plowed by horse and star and Pegasus

and

remembering Donald Davidson (1893-1968)
author of "Woodlands, 1956-1960"

I have not changed any of my views on Agrarianism since the appearance of I'll Take My Stand *[1930]. . . . I never thought of Agrarianism as a restoration of anything in the Old South; I saw it as something to be created, as I think it will be in the long run as the result of a profound change . . . in the moral and religious outlook of western man.*

— Allen Tate, 1952

1

Late autumn twilight leaves these fields and hills,
Rays paling where the gathered summer corn
Ripened on stalks that crack when dry winds rise
Toward Justice long suspended and ensphered,
Her faint stars gleaming down toward candle flames
Whose trembling gently marks the stilling air
Finding in time its way along the porch
Where I in age rock back and forth alone,
Pondering these old commons of the gods,
Breathing in deep the verses of the rows
Well-turned by hoe and coulter, foot on foot
In rhythms that a memory-keeper knows,
Harvests of word and heart cut to the root —

Sole dwellers in the past of house and land,
Familiar spirits of this cadenced place —
And I, an elder son who has no heirs,
My father, mother gone, in settled graves,
My wife and child, my brothers, sisters too,
My fiddle and its fiddlestick high hung
On hooks like willow limbs of Babylon
Yet taken down to raise a story up,
A music blent with chronicle and psalm
For one who left her constant farmers last,
Her fairness, just and lovely, ghostly grown,
Her purple tassels raveling on the breeze,
Star-Maiden of the scales of gold and corn
On whom I call to appraise an age debased
And give true weight and measure to my song:

2

And so I dream where memory cannot go
Of shallow tides that washed the fossil-bones,
The mastodon and elephant and whale,
Extinct for eons in these inland beds,
The sand and silt and clay rolling in wolds
Uplifted from the prehistoric sea
With gypsum, limestone, sulfur, and the marls,
Tectonic plates down-warping, tilted, worn,
Streams shaping hollow, mountain, bluff, and bend,
Kisatchie, Nacogdoches buckled up,
Steep ridges ironstone holds on sloping peaks,
Their backbone crests molded by wind and rain,
The great ice sheet retreating toward the lakes,
Meltwater in the Late Wisconsin Age
That made the Mississippi, glazed with light,
The flyway of the heron and the crane
And other birds that died without a name,
Its thawed banks bringing northern flowers south,
The snowdrop and the crocus and the rose,
Seed, root, and bloom taking the king's highway,
Keeping the holy days as each day was —
Things undivided, cleaving, other, one,
Their speechless be uttered in time's prime tongue —

Old father of the waters going slow
On progress through his realm of flake and hail
With sun-bowed blossoms glacial in their pace
From Louisiana's flooding delta plain
Toward marshes and a sparkling star-grained shore
Where breakers leave the driftwood and the shell,
Dark waters of the flounder, crab, and gar,
The stingray, shark, and jellyfish, each thing
A harsh gulf holds, gives up, then takes away,
Its dunes of sea oats heading salty-sweet:

3

And there, from Asia, walking on a bridge
Of rock and ice to a land no man had seen,
Indians, who for twenty centuries
Ate mayhaws, grapes, pawpaws, chestnuts, pecans,
And honey sticky on the limbs and tongue,
Made golden in the hollow trunks of gum
All sweetening the meadows where they fell
Between wild streams and fields that tamed the corn,
The prickly squash vines fruiting near the roots
Of beans twining up stalks toward tassel-light,
Together called Three Sisters by the tribes,
A kindred whole, the soul's first metaphors,
Enwoven in their world ten thousand years,
Come from the Sun who fathered all there was,
Even the Father of Waters in his bed,
The deer and bear they honored as they killed,
Their foreheads daubed with dead and living blood,
Their tattooed images the signs of clans —
The Wildcat and the Panther, Wind and Bird —
Full brothers of the eagle and the wolf,
Vast grasslands where the long-horned bison grazed,
The saber-tooth and mammoth, born and gone,
The maiden woods that shaded pool and creek,
Persimmon, blackberry, walnut — bass and bream,
Great mounds of dirt, grit, skeleton and shell,
The funerary urns on which they cut
A double-headed vulture, shoveler duck,
Middens of trash and ashes, graves and waste,

The raids for scalping, plunder, slaughter, rape,
Their neighbors kept and left, the slaves and slain,
The beehive house of wattled grass and mud,
Packed earthen steps of flat-topped pyramids
Where priests and healers, one in name and bond,
Tended in that dark room the tribal flame
And pine-hearts, dipped, took home the sun's own tongue
For warmth and meat stone-boiled in deerskin pots,
Adopted as their blood-kin by the gods,
Roaming the great domains of near and far,
The Hunter-Gatherers of glade and range
Who found a ground that never had been lost,
All dancing to a brink that linked them all,
Bright likenesses in constellated night,
Fire-temples of the village and the sky:
And though they did not mark as we have done
The houses of the zodiac or days
Made sacred by the stable, cross, and tomb,
They sensed the measured essence of the land,
The weather of the heavens and the air,
Of animal and plant — bird, beast, and seed —
Lakes burning with the waters of the stars,
High cycling rites they thought would never end:
The winter Bear, Cold Meal, and Chestnut Moons —
Snow twinkling on ground corn, the baked coiled clay,
The sloshing pans they raised from sandy creeks,
Their salt grains leached to whiten in the sun,
The springtime's Walnut, Deer, Strawberry Moons —
Chill hoeing for the "little corn" and beans,
The honey and the onion gathered wild,
The robin's mating-call, the migrant skies,
The catfish and the crappie and the perch —
The Small and Great Corn Moons when summer comes
And leaves and in between the warmer nights
Of Watermelon, Fish, Mulberry Moons —
The peach and pumpkin, squash and sassafras,
The turtle and the gros bec and raccoon,
The time for basket-weaving, building homes —
The cooling moons at last that autumn brings —
The Turkey Moon and then the Buffalo,
Dry days of torching brush to widen fields,
Elderberry mellowing, chinquapin,
Tracking the bucks for antlers, flesh, and hide

When hungry, roused, they butt, fighting for does,
The clacking racks they thrashed with, even locked,
The purple huckleberry's winter fruit,
Then Bear, Cold Meal, and Chestnut Moons again,
The air that turned to ice their tears and breath
Like stars falling in glitter from their spheres,
The whole of things each household kept and shared,
The common fare of birth and life and death:

4

And then three hundred years ago there came
Out of the coastal South's depleted fields
Long salted by the Atlantic's windblown foam
Wagons of yeoman farmers — Irish, Scots,
Welsh, English — freehold kindred! — to a land
They cleared of virgin cypress, longleaf pine,
Their cabins made of notched logs, timbers squared,
Of local oak and native hickory,
Their acres staked by grave- and boundary-stones,
Corn golden grown without the old corn gods,
Cradles and chairs both rocking by the hearth,
The only book they needed their King James
In this far place they sought to flee a king,
The family tree whose branches bloom and fruit
Between the Testaments, their matter blessed
And ringing true, those stories timeless, new,
The marriages and births, baptisms, deaths,
Ur-stems of every sur- and given name,
Preserved as well by untaught chroniclers
Who kept the weathered ledgers, journals, notes,
Tied letters, clipped obituaries, curls,
Printed or cursive words, each deep-inked page,
Crude portraits framed by genealogies,
The tall tales handed down by mouth and ear,
The Highland tunes transposed to these low hills,
Legends for wide-eyed hearers by the fire,
Their cedar chests' quilts, ribbons — keepsake worlds,
A black slate's chalky numbers, ABCs,
The facts of gossip mixed with gossip's lore,
Plain histories of the meadow and the lane:

And when in time they tore their cabins down
They put up manors worthy of the land,
Farmhouses made for living, not for show,
The boulder-stones dug up, bricks shaped from clay
Shoveled from steep red walls of river bluff,
No foreign architect with fine designs,
Just neighbors and themselves, with knowing guess,
The feel of right and rightness in the thing,
Of heft and touch and balance, grain and cut,
No etched designs or compass, leveling plumb,
Old-school their only rule, the rule of thumb,
Like pinching this and that in recipes,
No granite from Carrara or New York,
No balcony or widow's walk or dome,
Parlor, gazebo, secret garden, maze
But kitchen, bedroom, living room, and hearth
Near which they dined, a long-benched table planed,
Porch swings that raised their parlance toward the stars,
A southern drawl so slow it almost paused
Before a stillness gracious and sedate
Even when pests and weather made them fail:
And there for years they showed, undispossessed,
Set hospitalities of sweat and blood,
Earned gifts that virtue's manners yet demand,
Pouring out water cold and pure from wells,
Buckets pulled up, spilling from hidden springs,
Abundance on the table's high-piled plates
For travelers unnumbered and unnamed
No porter looked down on or turned away,
No walled *hortus inclusus*, gated, barred,
But unlocked doors that opened to a knock,
The ample board that fed them if they stayed —
Tomatoes picked, potatoes dug that day,
Cream-mantled milk drawn mornings, ready cows
That only death could sunder from a dream,
The sudden nothingness beneath their sleep,
Late autumn slaughtering, the pail and blade,
Cobs hollowed for a pipe stem's smoking-bowl,
Churned butter chilled, then melting gold on gold
In window-light come tawny from the corn,
Bacon from hogs coaxed forth toward slop and knife,
The bass that sometimes struck a baitless hook,

Baked pies scenting the kitchen's windowsills,
Cool orchard-winds blown in to curl and go
Returning apple sweetness to the trees,
A table fit for governor or mayor,
Field hands, kinfolk, wayfarers where a prayer
Would grace the fixings, leavings of each meal,
Salt pork and greens, pot licker, dipping bread,
The ladled gravy, mashed potatoes, peas —
Lady and purple hull — the honeyed ham,
And children taught their "Yes, Sir," "Please," and "Ma'am,"
Then, next day, farewells said, the turning back
To living roots they thought would never die —
And will not die until they die in me —
My father casting seeds before the dawn,
Plowing the earth the way his father plowed,
My mother tending garden, orchard, hens,
Whose new brown eggs lay wet and warm in straw,
Her fingers deft, adept to pull and loop,
Sewing with flax and cotton, carded, dyed
With petals, berries — cultivated, wild,
No ornamental myrtle-beds or planes
But marigolds and dogwoods bred and read
For beauty's use, the book of leaf and bloom,
Home remedies of mint and sassafras,
By store-bought goods then setting little store
Except for what they could not make or raise —
Pens, paper, needles, coffee, sugar, ink
And panes to let the sun alone come in,
The light divine of Indians, Genesis —
Both sons and daughters helping when they knew —
Through hand-me-downs of craft and thrift and love
Binding mind and bone — the manners of the land,
All bearing in themselves the fruits they bore
From meadow, row, and pasture to a place
Where rank and worth were one when fathers carved
And served grandparents, mothers — children last —
Blessing the simple feast with simple words
They spoke once more in verses shaped and phrased
By Tyndale, Cranmer, Coverdale and all
Who heightened and tightened England's common tongue
In Holy Writ for ages and the age,
Words learned by word of mouth and well-turned page

In house and church and school and court of law,
Heard best in pinewood chapels made of pine
By yeomen who still spoke as Shakespeare spake,
The Thames and Avon flowing in the Red,
Who, like the Caddo, built by river-creeks
In scattered hamlets, farmsteads set apart,
Provisioned by their labor, stock and ground,
Until past mere subsistence far enough
To grow a market-village for their crops
With cobbler, blacksmith, wheelwright — skills and wares
That matched their own — by barter, bill, and coin
Exchanging handicraft and shaking hands,
Their word made good by all they were and made:
And as they rode their wagons home again,
Wheels clacking in dry ruts or stuck in mud,
They sensed what only sense can wholly know,
Saying the grace of names each season brings —
Day-flowers blue and moist in April shade,
Pink morning glories winding toward the sun
On green June limbs of locust, elm, and gum,
September's feather bells spread white in pines,
December's mistletoe in bare pecans,
Red holly fruit the cedar waxwings love —
All speaking for themselves, the Maker's way,
Things Englished that the Indians once named
In languages now lost as Adam's tongue
When being gleamed and God's first song was sung:

5

But all too soon along old hunting trails
That widened into lanes, then wider roads
(Indians left to wander pathless woods
Of small pox, whiskey, syphilis, and tears)
Appeared what seemed another kind of man
Until he rose within ourselves as well,
Who bought up narrow arpents still untilled
In floodplains that the natural levees fed,
Alluvions overflowing, soil so rich
Their pride's Corinthian splendor laid a base,
Their capitals' acanthus-leaves and scrolls

Like offerings raised, the columns of the gods
Guarding great lawns whose graveled alleyways
Grew oaks to cool the ladies when they strolled,
Gentlemen sipping bourbon on the porch
While slaves dragged burlap bags of cotton bolls
Their masters sold abroad for bags of gold,
Estates that rose above the estate of man,
A world in which no yeoman could have lived,
Far from a hearthside mantel's flintlock, clock,
Framed samplers made of home-dyed cloth and threads
With numbers, letters, woven from the earth,
The barn dance and the fiddler, bow aglow,
The hock-cart gold in golden harvest moons:
Instead, the planters built a kingdom kept,
But only for a time, by chattel slaves,
From modest, meet proportion, due degree:
The long halls, ceilings, galleries bedecked
With glittering chandeliers and painted stars,
Zodiacs, busts and statues, portraiture —
Maecenas, Martial, Caesar, Cicero,
Bright Pegasus and Lyra and Orion,
The Heavenly Shepherd — and those maidens loathe
To sing the songs of Zion in Babylon,
David with his harp, dodging Saul's quick spear,
Moses' stone tablets shattered at the calf,
Shy Amos tending sheep and sycamores,
Preaching against the kingdom of the north,
Christ bowed to write his lost words on the ground,
The wife of Pilate turning toward the truth,
Or else commissions from that place and time,
The family patriarchs in formal dress,
Black waistcoat, black cravat, white ruffled shirt,
Hoop-skirted ladies poised atop the stairs,
Their sons at ease in military dress
Of West Point, VMI, The Citadel
With sash and saber, hand on hilt for war,
And near the walls on which these portraits hung
The daughters skilled in needlepoint and keys,
A gamboling lamb of Eden on its leash
And hymns whose verses judged them as they played,
"Awake, Jerusalem, Awake," "O Word,
That Goest Forth on High," "Our Bondage Here
It Shall End By and By," "Repent, the Voice

Celestial Cries," "That Awful Day Will
Surely Come," "The Lord Who Truly Knows the Heart,"
"This Is the Field, the World Below," "Watchman,
Tell Us of the Night," and as night took the day
And parlor-light one final hymn was sung,
"There Is a Happy Land Not Far Away,"
The ladies unsuspecting, in a daze,
All dreaming of a planter's eldest son,
Dancing at spring cotillions to the strings
Of violin quartets while in the fields
The aching strains of slave songs lingered still —
"Roll, Jordan, Roll," "Follow the Drinking Gourd,"
"Wrestle on, Jacob," "Hunting for the Lord,"
"Jordan's Mills," "Jesus on the Waterside,"
"I Want to Go Home," "The Sabbath Hath No End,"
"The Old Ship of Zion," "Satan's Camps A-Fire,"
And "All My Father's Children" — without cease,
Faint undertones of calling and response:
And there, sedate in pride's entitlements,
Liqueurs and not pot licker to their taste,
Wines, French, expensive, in a fine-cut glass,
Not jars of moonshine snuck from hidden stills,
Long mornings and the longer afternoons
Comfortable in their study's easy chair,
The feathered cushion, scroll-arms, padded back,
The fathers soothed by punkah, pipe, and port
With drowsy browsing eyes through bookcase panes
Saw gilded, marbled, leather-bound fine tomes,
In Latin, Greek — Horace and Hesiod,
Theocritus and Virgil — pastoral dreams
Of first estates they never understood
In eclogue, georgic, elegy, and ode,
The uncut pages splotched with rust and mold:

6

But then a nightmare woke them from their sleep
When blue troops bled through butternut and gray
To torch those mansions where from flute and flue
Of pillar, chimney, black flags billowed white
In winds that strewed their soot across our fields,

Stark columns pointing darkly toward the stars,
Whirled ashes of the crackling zodiacs,
The walls' and ceilings' blazing paint and frames,
The patriarchs aflame, the statues, busts
All shattered by the ax and rifle butt,
Charred volumes curling wordless in the gusts
(Simms' library at Woodlands drifting east
As dust toward Alexandria and the sea)
While quartermasters took off all our stock
Marauders had not slaughtered, whiskey-fired,
Who razed farmhouses too and raised the dead
To steal a wedding ring or pearls unstrung,
Our kin long shrouded then in sleep and light —
Parishes we'd name Lincoln, even Grant! —
Though for a time struck clocks would strike us dumb,
The present, past, and future closing doors
That only opened when we turned away,
This aftermath effected by the Cause,
Our Stoic code Aurelius and a cross,
Our memories seared with history and myth
Beyond the good and evil of the war —
Antietam's Bloody Lane, the Devil's Den,
Armistead, hat-on-sword, leading the colors up
That slope where thousands fell upon a name
And Cemetery Ridge received its slain,
Petersburg's winter trenches, long and deep,
Then overwhelming numbers, Sayler's Creek
And Appomattox where a conquered Lee
Rode Traveler through salutes of blue and gray,
The whole war but one battle in a strife
Unending still, the country's great divide,
Tense armistice with snipers, picket lines —
And yet so many gone before their time,
Those farm boys doomed — Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont! —
Sowing with stones the lawns of Arlington
Where, pensive, at a post he cannot leave,
Last guardian of the Old Republic's tomb,
The ghost of Lee surveys the Union dead,
His shadow gray where blue wool stained young bones
Forever buried deep in southern soil,
Fable and fact in endless combat coiled:
And all across the South's blood-seeded fields,
The ploughshares, beaten back from melted swords,
Turning up settled relics of the war,

Exhuming with their bright abrasive blades
The scattered Minié balls and gilded hilts
Or buttons stamped *US* or *CSA*,
Brass letters worn away by rust and rain,
There, too, the planters' chapels, crumbled, burned
By men a pure high righteousness had made
Angels of their own rage that freed the slaves,
The altar's stolen chalice, pyx, and plate,
The shot-out azure panes of Mary's face
All twinkling in their shards, the Virgin's tears
(The splendor of their Anglican restraint!),
Tears for all her children — black, white, blue and gray —
Fort Sumter, Appomattox, prelude days:

7

Yet what of this plain farmhouse never named
Like Old South mansions called Felicity,
Mount Bountiful, Heart's Rest, the Muses' Grove,
Arcadia, New Eden, Avon Glade,
Belle Mont, Fair Haven, Stronghold, Reverie,
Clear Vistas, Tanglewood, and Waverley —
But only *home*, only a dwelling-place,
Familiar spirits — bellows, tongs, and wood —
The Lares and Penates of our hearth,
The kindled memories so far beyond
A world in which the dead are left for dead
While rigs pump up from under sea-floor sands
And bedrock the remains of layered graves,
Agribusiness in bondage to machines —
Their rattling chattel chains — topsoil worked thin,
Strong chemicals the Mississippi drains
From northern farms, a toxic underflow
Spreading The Dead Zone further in the Gulf,
Great kills of crab and flounder, shrimp and bass,
Bottom-rotting or scooped by swooping gulls,
The bumper crops of protean new strains,
The blight and pests that weather every change,
Unplanted tracts left fallow for a price,
Slaves of the banks and futures and the exchange,
No garden near for this day's corn and beans,
No family graveyards but the graves of farms

Once seamlessly beseeming, apt and fit,
Collations of the gods of sod and star,
Like-mindedness and loving-kindness one,
Both comely and becoming, well in hand,
The culture of a cultivated earth,
The coulter's tropes no curses can reverse,
Tillers grown still to take in the long view
And keep the ancient sabbaths of the land,
Playing the fiddle brought down from the wall,
No longer hung on crooking willow-hooks
The pioneers wedged deep in fireside stone,
Songs with Scotch-Irish, English, southern roots —
"Carry the News to Mary," "Sally Ann,"
"Frosty Morning," "Over the Waterfall,"
"Lost Indian," "Sourwood Mountain," "Shady Grove,"
"Wild Mountain Thyme," and "Sugar in the Gourd" —
The words and music keeping souls attuned
Through evening when the shadows gather in
Plowmen walking their tired plow-horses back,
No bells rung hard for slaves or tenant-serfs
But goat bells tinkling deep in pasture grass,
Each human life a human sacrifice,
Its modest state the right estate of man,
The trusted customs, valid habitudes,
A village made of names recalled and lost,
Proportioned to those roles this roll proclaims:
The farms of Martial, Horace, Penshurst kept
By Sidneys whom Ben Jonson praised the best,
Appleton House of Fairfax and de Vere
Where Marvell taught the daughter of those walls
Its history he'd commemorate in rhyme,
Croft's Saxham and Worth's Durrants, G.N.'s Wrest
Where Carew saw a "usefull comelinesse"
Grinding "the Yeallow Goddesse into food,"
Coole Park where Lady Gregory walked with Yeats,
Home places celebrated in their time,
Even flawed Woodlands dreams of Gilmore Simms
That Donald Davidson would dream anew:

8

And now as my own dreaming nears an end
And rocking slows to stillness on the porch
I lay my fiddle down in quiet hope
That one day we might fully know again
God's hospitalities, sojourning zones,
Old houses like my fireplace, starry hearths,
The candles and the anthems and the choirs,
The song of was and is and yet to be —
Elegant delegations of a love
From Mind to minds undisinherited,
The givenness of magnanimity
Whose breathless essence breathes a universe
Expanding and contracting to its end,
The prime rhyme turned and turning, fixed adrift
Between the stuff of nothing and the One,
Pegasus drawing the Plowman toward the Lyre,
His twinkling wings appointed star by star,
Cain's wheat and Abel's lamb near Eden's trees,
Both spared the altar-fire of stalk and blood,
New grain on the cedared peaks of Lebanon,
The bones of Joseph carried home at last,
Jerusalem's breached walls of rubble-stone
Rising again in Nehemiah's eyes,
The pelican of David and the owl
Flying beyond the wilderness and ruins,
Noon deserts where the dunes will flower out,
Those early rains and late that never fail,
Christ's private writing published from the dust —
While Ceres in the breasted haystacks sleeps
Until she wakes to Saturn's second reign
When Justice comes to raise a world debased,
Descending with a wind now mild and kind,
And farmers see what they were last to see,
Her scales balanced again with coin and corn,
Our cause not red, white, black or blue and gray
But only graded shades of meadow-green
As daybreak burns off darkness from the land
And all we long have longed for draws us home,
The ripened light, the harvest of the stars,
First fruits that only dawn-time tilling yields,

Astraea's rays over the golden rows,
The fall's last twilight leaving fields and hills:

Author's Note on The Dwelling Place

The Dwelling Place is a poem in the ancient "pastoral" tradition as well as in the tradition of the "country house" or "country estate" poem traceable to Horace and Martial. It makes use of history as well as myth and, as a pastoral poem, presents, at times, a happy picture of country life; at other times, however, it addresses and depicts suffering, war, death, problems of modernity, other evils, and other themes. It differs from every other country estate poems in English in having as its setting not an English or Irish manor or the mansion of a plantation in the antebellum South but a family farm and farmhouse, in this case in my native north Louisiana.

The pastoral mode of the poem and its central themes are also deeply rooted in the southern agrarian tradition. The poem tries to evoke a world that may well lie just beneath, beyond, above, beside, within, or barely out of sight and reach in relation to what we are perhaps too quick to call "the real world." As Coleridge said of Wordsworth, the poet — in his true self — has the power to pull the scales of custom from our eyes so that we may once more see the world in its persisting wholeness and in all its primal wonder.

T*he Dwelling Place* is dedicated to traditional north Louisiana farmers and to Fugitive poet and remembers agrarian writer Donald Davidson (1893-1968). Two immediate sources of the poem are Davidson's own country-estate poem, "Woodlands, 1956-60," Woodlands being the South Carolina plantation home of southern man of letters William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), and M.E. Bradford's essay "Donald Davidson and the Great-House Tradition: A Reading of 'Woodlands, 1956-60.'"

Of particular interest in Bradford's essay is his quotation from Lewis P. Simpson's *The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature* (1975): "as nearly as the South had a center in the Republic of Letters following the age when Monticello was such a place, Simms's plantation (called Woodlands) was it." The wrongful dependence of that plantation system in antebellum days on chattel slavery is addressed in my own poem.

The Dwelling Place is divided into eight numbered sections. These sections may be characterized as follows: (1) Introduction

— the speaker, his family, the setting, and the invocation of the Muse (Astraea); (2) Description of prehistoric north Louisiana and surrounding areas north and south thereof; (3) The Indians; (4) The Settlers; (5) The Planters; (6) The Civil War; (7) Modernity; and (8) Conclusion — including a return to the Introduction's setting and Astraea, then ending with hope for a renewal — or a new vision of — the human condition insofar as that is possible in a fallen world (noted in the poem's "final" line).

The Muse of the poem, Astraea (Star-Maiden), is the virgin goddess of Justice with her scales. When The Golden Age ended (some say also the Silver), Astraea was the last divine being to depart from the earth, and the last human beings she departed from were the farmers. She then became a constellation. Her return to earth would signal a return to The Golden Age — something like Eden in Christian terms.

The speaker is a farmer in present day north Louisiana. He is well educated, a fiddler-poet, and is in accordance with the pastoral tradition that grants to its rural speakers a knowledge of things usually beyond what a farmer or shepherd would need to know in order to perform his daily tasks.

Readers might recall the conversation between the shepherd Pierce and the shepherd-poet Cuddie in Spenser's "October" eclogue in *The Shepheardes Calender*, an eclogue on the nature and role of poetry and the poet. Cuddie and Pierce discuss Maecenas and Augustus Caesar, seem well-versed in the classics and Greco-Roman myth, apparently have at least indirect knowledge or intimations of Plato's philosophy, and discuss the major poet's attempt to rise from the pastoral lyric to the epic poem — as did Virgil, Spenser, and Milton.

The speaker in *The Dwelling Place* also has at times the voice of an Old Testament prophet, such as Amos, a simple shepherd and a tender of sycamore trees who was inspired both to know and speak of things beyond his normal ken. The speaker's voice is indebted as well to voices in Blake's prophetic books and the rhetoric of southern Fugitive-Agrarian poet Allen Tate.

The Dwelling Place is structured as one long catalogue, and within the poem-as-catalogue are local catalogues: Indian moons, titles of antebellum hymns and slave songs, the names of manors praised by other poets who wrote in the country estate tradition, Civil War battles, names of southern plantations, and several more.

All of the items in these catalogues are real and of their period so far as the author can tell. Two exceptions are some of

the names of the southern mansions and some of the artwork of the planters. As with T.S. Eliot's names of Tarot cards in *The Waste Land*, the reader will find in these catalogues real names and subjects together with invented but likely seeming ones, introduced for symbolic purposes.

The ultimate philosophical-theological nature of the catalogue as a literary device going back at least to the list of ships in Homer is implicitly argued throughout: its invocation and evocation of pure being, things perceived as *what* they are and *that* they are (with a divine Maker also presumed). It should be noted that "the dwelling place" of the title, a north Louisiana farmhouse, unlike other dwelling places in the country estate tradition in English, has no name but *home*. Whether the poem as a catalogue with catalogues is effective or simply tedious will be up to the reader to determine.

The poem, though long, is, grammatically, a *single sentence* as is Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. There is no period (.) in the poem. The colon functions in the flow of the poem as a weir does in a stream, slowing the poem at crucial moments but not fully impeding its onward going as a period (like a dam) would do. The last line of the poem rounds back onto the first; thus, the poem is both a circle and a line, the ancient symbols of eternity (the circle) and time (the line) or idea and history. In fact, one might wonder whether the poem is a "sentence" at all since it has no period, cycles back into itself, and, thus, but for the mortal reader's necessary abandonment, has no end.

Throughout the poem are echoes, translations, and transpositions of details from earlier poems in the country estate or pastoral tradition and from other sources. One example is at the end of section 6 where a north Louisiana plowman turns up sunken Civil War relics. This detail comes from Virgil's *Georgic I* where an ancient Roman farmer does the same. Historical echoes include the phrase "overwhelming numbers" in section 6, words taken from General Robert E. Lee's well-known General Order No. 9 (Farewell to the Army of Northern Virginia), an order issued at Appomattox but with implications that go far beyond its original use and context.

Certain symbolic images may be followed through the poem. Three examples are wind, stars (including constellations and the zodiac), and fire. The old trope of "versus" as the poet's turning of verses and the farmer's (or poet-farmer's) turning of rows is also woven into the poem from beginning to end.

Music and paradox, too, are important in the poem. When

sound begins to challenge sense as central to a word, phrase, or line or when paradox is used frequently to indicate that we have reached a point beyond which language and the mind may not be able to go, then we know that the brink between a golden age or perfect garden and our age has probably, at least for now, been reached. Nevertheless, a reader may perhaps be able to peer over such a brink into what English poet T. Sturge Moore (1870-1944) once called "the unknown known." The poet as Linker whose metaphors are devices of a deep (re)-connecting between all things is also present.

In addition, *The Dwelling Place* can be read as a defense of poetry in the spirit of Sir Philip Sidney (who is mentioned in the poem) including a defense of the deep interrelationship of poetry and the natural order, especially farming (culture and agriculture). It is a poem about poetry and poetics in addition to other subjects.

Finally, speaking more personally, *The Dwelling Place* brings together themes, phrases, tropes, and strategies that have appeared in many of my earlier poems as well as in the poems of poets who have influenced me and to whom I owe a literary debt of one kind or another. *The Dwelling Place* seems like a culmination that has been coming for a long time. I prepared for writing this poem by reading — for several years — earlier pastoral verse, country estate verse, and scholarly commentaries on such verse for nearly a decade. Especially important were the works discussed and cited in M.E. Bradford's essay.

*

The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of light
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.

William Blake (1757-1827)

— David Middleton

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Talking to My Body, My Body Talks Back: Left Leg

It's still here. The pencil point. In my left thigh,
halfway down between my hip & knee.
James Hettis thought it funny, his 4th grade
brain didn't know he'd become a part of me
forever. Since then, every time I see
my leg — in the bath, running by the sea —
James is with me, smiling. I didn't cry.
I knew somehow that was what he wanted.
I didn't tell the teacher. Instead I stayed
calm until he turned away, poked and taunted
the girl in front of him in line — who did cry,
much to his delight. Attention was paid
to a sad boy who needed it more than I.
The lesson I am taught by my left thigh.

Talking to My Body, My Body Talks Back: Right Hand

Like a toothed saw through meat, it cut me ragged.
The bread knife I've dreaded since I got it.
Innocent gift from my innocent son, who thought
it would tend only toward good, just cut
what it was meant to cut, bread instead
of flesh, the pink tip of my finger gashed
deep. Blood gushed, the white counter dyed red,
towel after towel soaked it up fast
as my almost stump could pump it out.
It was a slip, a blip, a moment's quick
misstep that could have cost me more than it did.
I marveled at my hand, the cutter, not
the cut, how strong it was, heedless and free,
and wondered what else it might do to me.

Postcard From Purgatory #1

Dear Mom, it's fine here, I'm surprised to say.
Much better than I thought it would be.
My room is clean, though the hotel is seedy.
The roaches are small and sleep during the day.
The pool is full of algae and slime,
a thick stew of *goo chartreuse*. Yet I find
swimming in it cures my blues. There's no time
to wallow in guilt and rue. They keep
us busy. Gentle devils cheer as we
fail and try, time & time again, to climb
steep hills of garbage, compost of our sin —
we get to the top and slide down again.
When we run on hot coals, I come in first.
It's no spring picnic, but I've seen worse.

Athar C. Pavis

The Virtual

You say it's something you can't stop —
I watch you watching as news pushes forward.
There is no respite from it — you keep up.
Meanwhile you live a life in beta version,
temporarily, you say: a virtual clipboard
holds who you really are. Will it be there
when finally you paste that latent person
on you somewhere?

It is as if a beast holds you in thrall,
hungry for time, like a black hole for light —
in automatic downloads, you control
nothing, in fact. Meanwhile the sun goes down,
another day has passed, another night
in pixeled hype. If you could hear again
the hush, and taste the brimming afternoon
like wiser men

in these defeated times you could still find
the old philosophy that YouTube misses,
the richer days Duke Berry left behind,
a contemplative look upon the world —
if you put down those surrogate devices
and listened to streets waking, the slow sweep
of that twig broom past centuries have heard
awaken us from sleep

you could, you would! I'm powerless myself
and have no clear idea of how it happened,
why the sun below the clouds is not enough
to lift the lidded universe you live in.
The paradox is this: the world that beckoned
become an algorithm, a Trojan horse,
and you a fake explorer stuck within
a life not yours.

I've searched what I can search, but my search engine
can find no clue to its causality
unless, encrypted in a devil's bargain,
you've made a deal to save yourself from life.
Meanwhile the trees are blossoming. I see
awaiting you, still fragrant, the full sky,
vast oceans — and no hyperlink enough
to satisfy.

At the Market with Philip Roth

"Children are always disappointing,"
one friend announced.
And so are parents — expectations —
only the moment counts,
the "pointless meaningfulness of living,"
you say, and you are right.

The way the fish in rigor mortis
shine silver on the counter,
fruit overflowing in street markets,
figs bursting at the center,
the spectacle of their abundance,
seed-filled, in purple splendor.

Something about the saffron-colored
girolles piled up beside
eggplants, in polished black, and bulbous,
returns me to the world,
its cornucopia of things passing,
pointless, but what I need —

Because I want, despite the children,
disappointing or not,
this paean to the earth it raises
so many live without —
and every day a thing of beauty
I had not thought about.

Noces

in difficult times, for H. from Camus

It's about seeing in the vacant lot
beside the broken glass and paper clutter
a rhubarb plant, and how fenced earth begot
three poppies growing there beside the gutter.

How red their petals are against the grey
of lidded skies and days on end confined,
as if their luster promised to repay
the passerby who stopped, a life defined

not by relentless soliton-like days
mowing all whitecaps in fixed amplitude,
but by these crests of feeling as intense
as rhubarb sprouting doggedly, displays
of things so unexpected in our mood —
these poppies pushing three heads through a fence.

Nicholas Pierce

Pig Roast

I keep my brother company till after midnight,
then slink off to bed, tossing and turning
through my dream of a story he told me,
of how he saved his neighbors from a gas fire,
banging on window after window till, at last,
he found their bedroom. In the dream
I'm the one scrambling around the house,
barefoot and shirtless, shouting "Wake up!"
His eyes are bloodshot, his face smoke-blackened
when I rejoin him early the next morning,
donning thick rubber gloves to remove the roof
of the slow-cooker, so that he can mop vinegar
onto the pig, its flesh now a deep red,
the meat so tender one leg all but tears away
when we flip the animal onto its back.
He checks the thermometer. "Nearly there,"
he grunts, shoveling more hot coals onto the fire.

People begin to arrive at noon. By then
we've set up the waterslide, a sheet of black plastic
running the length of the hill that stretches
from my brother's backdoor to his workshop.
One boy begs to go first. We urge him to wait,
having turned on the hose only minutes ago,
the water still steaming as it cascades over
the uneven ground, dividing into channels,
pooling in ruts — but the boy is already lathering
his body in dish soap, already sprinting toward
the slide, laying out, his scream of ecstasy
becoming a scream of pain as he tries and tries
to extricate himself, flopping back and forth
like a hooked fish, sacrificing his palms
to keep his chest off the heat. We all laugh,
even his mother, who meets him with a towel
at the top of the hill. "Can I go again?" he asks.
My brother cuts up the roast pig in his shop,
a dog under each corner of the workbench,
lapping up the oils that spill out. The more

he slices off, the less the pig resembles an animal,
the easier it is to eat. We all gather on the hill
after dinner — everyone except my brother,
who heads down to the wood platform he built
for this occasion. I keep my distance, imagining
all that could go wrong when I see the spark
of his lighter, hear the hiss of the first fuse.
The mortar shells draw stunted parabolas, erupting
just as they begin to arc back toward the earth,
showering red, white, and blue sparks before
disintegrating into smoke clouds. After a while
I find myself watching the crowd, not the fireworks.
The burned boy passes his hand through the flame
of a tiki torch, moving too quickly to get hurt.

Inlaying a Butterfly

He works in stages,
routing an eighth of an inch
at a time, stopping

when half an inch deep.
With a chisel, then, he walks
the edges of this

shallow cavity,
cleaning up the scalloped walls,
taking care to keep

the tool vertical
as he taps a wood mallet
against its butt end.

*

A butterfly joint
will slot into the hollow,
ensure the oak slab,

a future table,
doesn't split apart. Even
moisture in the air

can cause the wood to
expand. Did you know, he asks,
men used to break rocks

simply by pouring
water over wood wedges
hammered into cracks?

*

He seeks to preserve
each tree's unique character,
believing defects

give wood its beauty.
On his left index finger,
just beside the nail,

is a memory
of his close call with the saw,
a scar he's grateful

won't soon go away.
It reminds him that some cuts
can't close on their own.

*

When she neared the end,
I got to be so jealous
of the furniture

he made our mother,
that he could transform his love
into an object —

solid, tangible —
while all I had to give her
were the same cheap words

we all resort to
when a loved one is dying,
when language fails us.

*

Five years between us
and only half-related,
my brother and I

are still learning how
to be close. He brushes glue
on the joint's back side,

then, hesitating,
hands it over, letting me
pound it into place.

Only one more step:
to sand the butterfly till
it's flush with the slab.

James Reed

What All You Don't Need

The guy with big feet likes slip-on shoes. He's probably dead. A whole table's his size. Loafers and mules, Barley thinks people call them. Open in back like wooden shoes worn in Holland, which has never made sense. For one thing they're noisy, *klok-klok* every step, and then there's the question of how they stay on, or what's worn in winter. Ice-skating goes back maybe five hundred years. He thinks he's seen paintings. Why bother with footwear no use half the time?

A woman leans forward, holds her cigarette wide. It smells raspy and sweet even in the cool breeze. Fall's sneaking up but not yet in the leaves. She points at a pair. "Them are four bucks. I'd take four if you want."

"Just looking," he nods.

He's a runt, if she'd notice, with feet almost dainty, as hard to fit all his life as this fellow's whose shoes are laid out in neat rows. Sizes 13 and 14, but only one of the latter. A dead guess or gamble: there's no wear and tear. With his duck-footed walk all his heels were sloped low. Dents deep as golf balls cushioned his toes.

The man's sister or mother stands in the yard and gathers a hose. It's one of three stretched on the lawn. One's black, one is gray, and she's looping a green one over her arm. It's shiny and loose like it's fresh from the store.

"The gray one is longer if you got a big yard. We'll toss in the sprinkler."

A man on the driveway says, "No, this'll do," and flips through a few bills like he's dealing out solitaire.

"I left it out back. I should really go get it." She hauls in a coil and yanks at another.

She could be a wife but too nearly resembles the woman, still smoking, in charge of the shoes. They both wear flower-print dresses Barley'd expect of his grandmother, but the one in the yard has added a sweatshirt. It's bubble-gum pink with a view of Mount Rushmore. Her hair's thin and windswept and stained yellow-brown. He guesses her fingertips are about the same color, but she's working the hose and he can't really see. She's definitely tired. Her face is fatigued. He can't place her age, but his own plus or minus ten years could be right. And possibly low-ball. Neither one of these two has led a charmed life.

The man on the driveway is bored with his money. He takes out his phone. Panels of light sweep under his fingers.

Other dresses and sweatshirts sway from a coatrack you'd find in a narthex or fellowship hall. A woman with legs as straight-stiff as bedposts walks finger by finger across all the hangers. Her face is a fist, as if she is sniffing. She inspects every item for flaws or some difference in color or texture. Perhaps she wants style. Nothing he sees comes close to her size.

The sisters, if anything, have shrunk over time. That's his guess. Their legs are old sticks, and their dresses are nothing but dust and dry wind.

His own whiskers aren't hair, the older he gets. Fishing line is more like it, four pound test, monofilament. Fingernails, maybe, or toenails — they're stronger — slivered and twisted and wrapped tight as twine. Polar bear fur. Colorless, pale, dripping wet green in harsh light and pool water.

"Let me fetch you that sprinkler." She offers the hose. "I won't be a minute."

He looks up from his phone as if he's forgotten. The surprise of the hose is a weight on his arm. He raises his wrist so the bend of his elbow won't let the coils fall to the ground.

"Stay here," she says.

He stares and says, "Sure."

She starts around back but her sister calls, "Wait!" and flattens her cigarette left and right with her toe. "His statues," she says. "We should let them just go."

"I told you that. You cried and whined No!"

"But you're right. I been thinking. Every one of them's ugly."

"That's not new overnight."

"Don't be suspicious. I'm coming halfway."

She tugs at her sweatshirt and examines the clouds. They do not threaten rain. "I'll have to pack them. This might take a while." She enters the house by unlocking the door.

"We never done this. People walk through your house, they might take advantage." She flicks at her lighter but only draws sparks. "I am due for a new one." She draws his attention to charcoal gray slippers as round as pontoons. "Boiled wool," she informs him. "That means they're German. Good for winter," she says.

At the coatrack the woman holds a dress by its hanger across her own chest and then tries another, left hand to right hand like semaphore flags. Nothing fits — that's the message — but she

blames the colors. “My complexion,” she says, “simply isn’t done justice.”

“He was so cold and freezing those last couple months.” She comes up with a cigarette. “And big as he was, he’d sweat all the time.” Her thumb spins the wheel, but the lighter is useless.

Barley hands over his.

“Thank you,” she says.

A stream of fresh smoke, and she’s looking relieved.

“You’d be surprised what all you don’t need.”

The man with the hose has picked out an egg timer. “That sprinkler,” he says, “I’ll take this instead.” He shakes it as if he expects it to rattle. He nods when it’s silent and lopes down the driveway.

“I’d taken a quarter if he’d thought to offer.” He’d bent like an insect, climbing into his car. It’s round as a gumball, with room for just him. “I bet he wants it for playing charades.”

“Time’s up,” Barley says.

“What’s surprising he thinks is the lack of men’s clothes. There are the shoes but no shirts or trousers. No belts or old jackets, no bathrobes or ties. Nothing you’d keep or donate to charity for being too good to just throw away. Not a garment in sight you’d take for a dollar or let yourself dicker on price to get a small bargain.

“You’re slight,” says the woman. “You might take a sweatshirt. They’re not all just girly.”

The stout woman stiffens and decides she’s not done. She returns to the coatrack and paws through the goods so everyone hears the quick scrape of the hangers.

Barley shrugs. “Check shirts run the gamut of what I will wear.”

“Solids and plaids?”

“Risky,” he says. “I have never once owned a sweater.”

“Mae’s always felt chilled. That’s old as dirt. Ever since she was little.”

Barley gives a hard shiver and grins a farewell as he turns to his car. He’s half a block down, but he parks and strolls because some form of exercise might do him some good.

“Hey! You forgot.” She’s poised with his lighter for an underhand toss.

“Keep it,” he says. “I’m trying to quit.”

She laughs, shakes her head. “You’re just tenderhearted. I know that’s a fib.”

Pierre de Ronsard

Translated from the French by Terese Coe

Uncommon Woman

I won't compare your beauty to the moon.
The moon is fickle — your desire is one.
Even less to the sun. The common sun
gives light to all, and you are never common.
Your kindness is paid with jealousy and wrath.
This is not flattery. I mean to praise:
you are yourself, unique in all your ways;
you are at once your God, your star, your path.
Those who make the least comparison
merely presume, or else their reason's gone.
Your mind and spirit beyond all commonplace,
either you hide a fiend I cannot see,
or else you're meant to be a paragon,
or well you may be Pallas, or one of the Graces.

See To It

See to it the wine is as chilled
as icicles in frozen air.
Send for Janne, who is as skilled
on lute as her voice is soft and fair —
she can play while we three dance.
Barbe must also come again,
her hair the pièce de résistance,
her ringlets wild à l'italienne.

You see the day is almost gone?
Never mind some later time!
Fill my cup with good Bourgogne —
why not invent a pantomime?
Curses on the sick at heart!
Doctors make me saturnine.
Sound of mind's a simple art:
simply flood my brain with wine.

Ode to His Lyre

Your wood so soft with mold, too sick to sing,
I grieved to see your desolate condition,
you who added song to the royal feasts
and enchanted guests with your musical tradition.
To return to you your native strings and wood,
to hear your natural sources of tone and soul,
I sacked Apulia and pillaged Theban Greece
to restore you with the spoils that will make you whole.

David Southward

Sunday at the Carpet Emporium

The showroom walls of Shabahang & Sons
shimmer with rugs: prismatic tapestries
whose dyed-wool hues and petaloid designs
serve as a backdrop for the heir, Behzad,
to ply his trade. Sporting a merchant's smile,
he greets us with a manicured handshake
and summons an assistant with his eyes.
"Functional works of art," he deems his rugs,
beseeching us to feel their thickened pile
brushing our palm-flesh like a camel's hide —
to rub our hands across their matted nap
and watch for dark reversals in the sheen.
He points his helper to a waist-high stack
of tribal 6 x 9s, at the ends of which
the two men stand — turning rugs like pages
of an ancient manuscript. In perfect sync
they grip the corners, peel the fabrics back
to reveal, slice by slice, a Persian fruit
as fathomless in its geometry
as if it were the sum of one's own life.
"You like?" Behzad pauses, noting our taste
for saffron twined through blues and burgundies.
"Go on," we urge. We want to see the whole
of his inventory; we won't be satisfied
until the last persimmon leaf is flipped.

When the last is flipped, the men start turning back
the inventory, firmly satisfied
we want to splurge; they know how far we'll go
sorting through blues and twining burgundies
before we pause. "You liked this," notes Behzad,
tapping our rug of choice — the sum of life
fathomed in its geometric play;
a slice of Persia densely veined, like fruit
peeled in a back corner of paradise.
We sink our hands in its plush manuscript:
a page on which two men might stand or turn
their chairs at the end of a tribal 9-to-6 —

their china stacked with helpings, points well made
or meeting with reversals in the dark.
We rub our eyes: across this matted land
where camels never ride, nor palm fronds brush
beseechingly one's pile of thickened dreams,
can a rug redeem? The function, the work of art
is a summoning of vistas like the sky's —
its handsome greeting, one of many cures.
The sport of trade, the smile of merchandise
serves Behzad, who drops back in thin air;
as wooly petals ply their dyed designs,
our shimmery Mastercard's prismatic chip
suns the showroom walls of Shabahang.

Mornings with Sammy

He used to barrel out the sliding door,
careen across the deck, vault and soar
over the steps to crash at the maple's feet.
He'd lunge toward its boughs — as if to eat
the squirrels who paced the branching world above.
Sniffing the ground-scents like a drunk in love,
he'd track each odor to its source and lick it —
then bound into the border garden's thicket,
his white tail whisking hostas, ferns, and mint
like a fur tornado. Anxiously, we'd squint
to watch him slalom through our lily wands,
drape slobber on the rhubarb's giant fronds,
or brave the rosebush, thorny hackles raised.
Sternly I'd call his name; he'd look back, dazed
for a moment. But noticing how sparrows
alighted from the sky like hostile arrows,
he'd spring to action — chase them off the fence,
start barking with a clownlike vehemence —
as if to show me no work was so hard
as proving oneself master of one's yard.

These days his routine is more sedate.
He'll breakfast, nap till seven (maybe eight),
slide off the couch and glance up, mucus-eyed,
to let us know he'll have a look outside.
A few steps past the threshold, there's a pause.
He sniffs the air. Nostrils tensed, he draws
decaying fumes of everything that grows
into the laboratory of his nose,
sifting the wind for signs of fresh turf wars
with ears blown back like little semaphores.
There's no more need to trample leaf or limb.
Now the garden's treasures come to him —
sensations once so hurried and erratic
becoming denser, marbled and chromatic.
It's comforting to watch our grizzled scout
stand rigid on the deck, almost devout,
savoring — like a book too good to last —
the stirred-up fragrances of summers past.

Staying at Dad's

Picture a house so quiet, you hear time
    absorbing each day's measure of the sun,
and through French doors, the tinkling of a chime
    (to indicate that happy hour's begun)
links day to day, to week, to month, to year.
    Now ask yourself, *How long have I been here?*

Neighbors carrying cocktails walk their dogs
    on retractable leashes, while round the cul-de-sac
a ten-year-old in training blithely jogs.
    You sit in the driveway, watching squirrels snack
on birdfeed meant for woodpeckers and doves
    to fortify their hurried, hungry loves.

Out back, a filter roams the burbling pool.
    Beyond Dad's lot, a steel-wire cattle fence
tempts cows to wedge their heads through barbs — and drool
    into his birdbath font some common sense.
Their shrubby field, hemmed in by pine and palm,
    cushions the freeway's roar. That keeps Dad calm.

Come in. This shrine of white and cream and bone,
    whose lofted ceilings store forgotten prayers,
is tranquil — save for the infrequent tone
    of casters on the wicker dining chairs
rumbling across stone tile. In rainy weather,
    a jigsaw puzzle slowly comes together

on Carol's tabletop, while Dad reclines
    to watch the news, his finger poised on MUTE.
At four, she'll crack the ice; he'll pour their wines;
    they'll raise a toast to show how resolute
the leisures of retirement can be.
    Heroic, almost. Have a glass; you'll see.

Swimming in Walden Pond

My suitemate at the conference rapped my door
at five a.m. Through darkened streets we ran
in trunks and T-shirts, allied in our plan
to beat the tour groups. This was '94

yet I still see the clearing through the trees:
its granite glint, a mirror to the sky.
A crow's caw scours the beach as Tom and I
wade into Walden's stillness by degrees,

till a last plunge swashes its cold caress
against our necks. Hushed voices — all we know
of Alcotts, Hawthornes, Emersons, Thoreau —
swirl through our fingers. Steeped in sacredness,

we try not to disturb the moment's power;
our circling pathways ripple and converge
while, through the pines, we watch the sun emerge
with its full blaze intact. For half an hour

we drank that sunshine, as our bodies drew
inscriptions on the slick of its white beam,
knowing too well our dream, like any dream,
would end soon. Gooseflesh drying, what to do

but brush sand from our feet, pull on our socks,
run back to Concord? Chilled and soggy-toed
we hugged the shoulder, passing on the road
a school bus — slowing, sighing like an ox.

Tree Swallows

Leaving their nests to feed and fly and play,
    the swallows begin
        hovering over the river at midday:
    white bibs with black wings, weaving in
and out of one another's wakes, they call dibs
    on mayflies as they graze
        leafing willows, glide and swoop
    upward in a corkscrew loop-de-loop
to an aerial summit, where they pivot
    into a death-defying plummet
        toward their shadows in the dappled water.
    Back and forth, they flit and tease;
frisky tacticians — no warier
    than fighter pilots scrimmaging
        in formation above an aircraft carrier
    finishing a mission.
You love to watch the scamps
    mount pretend attacks, as you wait
        for a precious, flyby glimpse
    of the turquoise on their backs.

Those streaks of blue! — those sequins
    glinting like abalone shells
        embroidered in coat tails;
    those dragonfly neckties
skimming the surface of the afternoon
    with skipped-stone frequencies;
        sound waves
    splashing one's body
in the *plink* of piano keys; coruscations
    like knife throws — minnows fleeing
        from cavernous reefs. *To swallow*
    and be swallowed: oh, how
this planet has made us
    idiots for beauty! Pawns and purveyors
        of aesthetic (if not artistic)
    accidents of mutation, we fall behind

in making of the swallows'
half-balletic, half-ballistic
circus routine, a tune
or dance — a mural, a romance
of language linking mind to mind. Is this
why, hours from now,
you'll sit in a chair
and stare at a desktop screen, repeatedly
asking, *Is this? Is this what I mean?* Too aware
of the danger (while people live at odds
in the rising smoke
of half-extinguished gods)
you'll create through the night:
feeling your way
to a river where even the blind might see
the passerine
advancing, tree by tree.

Michael Spence

All Ashore

Get off me! The sailor throws an elbow back
Into the face of the guy who's hooked his neck
With a grimy arm. The sound — sharp as the smack
Of a salmon slapped down on a flat rock —
Is a short burst of music: the crack of a stick
On a piñata. We see his elbow strike
The right tune for the guy's face to leak
Like a ruptured vegetable. An encore blow makes
The arm release the way the lid of a box
Pops open when a sharp whack breaks
Its hinge. Most of the people in the bar gawk
And roar at the show; many have wanted to deck
The guy themselves — his glares and trash talk
Made them retreat to corners where the black
Of shadows is thickest. Now they watch this dick
Hit the floor like a lumpy, rumpled sack
Thrown off the back of a garbage truck.
The Shore Patrol's been holding off: the trick
To breaking up a fight is "let them knock
Most of the shit out of themselves, then pick
Up whoever's left." So the SP, for the sake
Of safety, lets the sailor have a quick
Shot of whiskey to celebrate his vic-
Tory — the cheering crowd of alcoholics
Might make his apprehension problematic.
Like the last note of an *opera comique*
Applauding the performance, we shipmates click
Our mugs to peace in our time and throw them back.

Considering

Considering how ignorant I am,
I'm doing pretty well — I got this house,
A car that's not too old, even a slice
Of yard out front, though dandelions claim

The ground the grass once covered. Too lazy
To dig them out, too cheap to hire a gardener;
I know my neighbor doesn't like it. Who cares?
My wife's the one who did all that, but *she* —

I use that word so I don't have to say
Her name — decided there were better fish
To hook than a carp like me. She's right; what cash
I ever earned I turned to booze the way

Jesus did with water. (She hated my jokes,
Especially the religious ones.) She found
A proper model in her pews, a bland
But clean-cut hygienist who promised to take

Her away from all this . . . from my all this
To his, that is. I hear she's happier.
So do I get some credit for that? The beer
I swallow this morning scours my mouth with its fizz.

It isn't that you're stupid, she used to tell me;
You lack ambition. I thought her bible frowned
On worldliness, I'd answer; I might offend
Her god if I chased after Mammon. *You could try*

*To become a manager — why work on the line
Forever?* It gave me time to think, I'd match
Her tone. *About what?* About how much
I love you, I'd grin and blow a kiss. *You complain*

That you don't like it, she'd sigh; *you could try to get*
A better job. I had grown way too old
To be a wunderkind, I'd reply. I had called
It wrong when I chose a dumbass gig I thought

Was only temporary — but that final dawn
My ship came in, it had turned into a scow.
I turned my back on that sea and its promise. Now
I keep my gaze here on the pier I'm standing on.

She'd said, *Your attitude is blue as your collar:*
I have to leave before I drown in your gloom.

This house seemed small for us. I've got more room
Since she took off. So why does it feel smaller?

Robert West

To Jeff Daniel Marion

Reading your poems about
your father, pondering how
they weave in and out of your
portrait of these abiding
mountains, I wonder what you
now make of death. Twenty years
ago I watched my father's
father begin his last and
longest vigil beneath a
Blue Ridge valley, walked away
in a wind unconsoling
and cold. Heard the preacher's half-
credible promise, but was
deaf to the too-familiar
hills, their boast of victory
over gravity, blind to
the marriage they'd already
made of earth and sky. These days
I've strayed long enough from high
country to marvel at what
these landscapes testify: that
the preacher's words were worth more
than wind, that blessed are those
who lie down among mountains.

Roanoke, VA
Nov. 2004

Gail White

Orthodox Easter

If Beauty is your breaking point, the Greeks
Have got a church to sell you. It's all gold,
Enamel, chanting, candlelight. It speaks
To me, the skeptic, and I'm nearly sold.

But faith without its doubts is love without
What Milton calls "reluctant, amorous
Delay" — only the golden glint of doubt
Makes dusty dogmas turn auriferous.

So many times I've almost been enticed
By faith and in the end said: That's not you.
But fashions change: Old garments look like new,
And doctrines youth rejected have sufficed.
Chrysostom tells me Death bit down on Christ
But couldn't swallow him. I hope it's true.

Feeding the Feral Cats

Three at the door tonight —
big ugly orange one,
two gray and white —
staring reproachfully
over the empty dishes:
Where are the loaves and fishes?

And I put out some food,
having no more excuse than that
I might be heaven's feral cat —
driven by cold despair,
not seeking warmth or bed
or even entrance there —
but sure of being fed.

Claude Wilkinson

Birds That Serve as Still Lifes

Indeed, the prerequisite is death,
and though the both of these
I'm recalling are common enough
crows, maybe found in a winter field,
then hung by the swarthy stems
of their legs, their scapulars
ruffled from Petrine crucifixion
and their satin primaries masterfully
splayed in Andrew Wyeth's
gouache and ink study, none,
neither pink-necked fruit dove
nor emerald-damasked cuckoo
has ever seemed too precious
a sacrifice for our lasting admiration
in one fashion or another, whether in
a milliner's abstraction of flight,
in Audubon's ironic conservancy,
or Daedalus's plan of escape.
It was the avian part of the angel,
you see, which Jacob wrestled for —
a thing divine in them that's always
been our truest desire. I've already
confessed my own early trespasses
of quelling the radiance of waxwings
and redstarts, along with all the many
others untitled and forgotten, not
for the exultation of making pictures
to be adored in museums, but
just to hold and behold lives
lived so much closer to heaven.

The Translation of Enoch

In retrospect, when I dreamt almost nightly
of flying as a child, and of course,
without any referents of Apocrypha
or Midrashim back then,

what I must have been hoping for was
to so please God that he
would lift me till I, too, "was not."
Now I have the illustration of Hoet

and the lithograph of Blake — visions of how
it very well could have seemed.
Yet they, and even John Copley's *Ascension of Jesus*,
though lovely in their serenity

and sentiment, don't feel right to me.
My raptures happened
mostly during some state of unreadiness
c oupled with the bliss

and horror of being ripped from this life.
Maybe Hoet's and Blake's Enoch
is to be presumed already seeing those gates
of pearl, past that breathlessness

and vertigo I always suffered ascending. Maybe
my diluvian dreams were merely
in the realm of swooning, thus why always when
just about to break paradise's plane,

I shuddered and tumbled back to our fallen world.

Water Strider

Dirt roads puddled
after warm evening rain,
became a sort of

Mississippi Lourdes
quickened with the miracle of these
Jesus bugs

flaunting that
mustard seed faith, skittering
over their ochre universe

like small sepia stars
in time-lapse photography.
Though Gerridae

is the more
intellectual title, since when
have reason

and the less than
possible ever had anything
in common?

I mean, who
offers to feed thousands on
insufficient fish

and a couple
of bread rolls or decides
to catch up with

one's storm-tossed
boat by foot? Perhaps not
coincidentally,

in a kind of
cannibalistic Communion,
the bugs even take

of each other's bodies
for their earthly preservation.
As for their walking

on water, there are
those who will hold that the gift
is no more than their

evolution of balanced
design and millenary hairs on
such spindly legs,

while others surmise that
at least some chosen few are among us
who simply step and believe

James Matthew Wilson

Elegy for a Tow Truck Driver

I'd watch you, neighbor, skulk behind the stands,
  Forever called away from your son's game
By wrecks, locked doors, a million small demands
  That faded when the speaker blared his name.
  But every fresh at bat would end the same.
    Then you would call him over, try to coach,
    Though all could hear the thinly veiled reproach.

We did not really understand the love
  Your son and daughter seemed to have for you,
But were relieved to see you take your glove
  And play a game of catch, or tie a shoe,
  Or other things that normal fathers do.
    They eased our conscience, when we heard you curse
     And judged, however bad, things could be worse.

So also, when we heard your wife had gone,
  We sympathized with her unhappiness.
And yet had thought that she might carry on,
  That, what we could not tolerate, she'd bless
  And soften your rough hide with her caress.
    But no. While you were curt and occupied,
    She'd found another who would warm her side.

One Sunday, in the springtime, after Mass,
  You staggered up to me, your face of frost
Speechless, as we stood in the greening grass.
  The months went on, and our paths seldom crossed.
  We heard by rumor what else you had lost,
    But nothing of the solitude and ache
    That brought the sleep from which you'll never wake.

O friend — if that's the word — I wish I knew
  That how you bristled through your years on earth,
Now that their mix of rage and cold is through,
  Was judged in someone's heart a thing of worth;
  That someone looked with fondness on your birth;
    That those you've left felt a judicious pain
    And would, if licensed, call you back again.

The Hidden Creek

The creek behind our house is lost in wood,
    A smear of algae green amid dark green,
    Present more as a sound than something seen,
As sunken bullfrogs croak their neighborhood.
Some days, the dried mud shows where trees once stood,
    The splintered, graying barrels bared between
    Orange touch-me-nots and arrowheads' floppy sheen,
Beneath the rough black willows' spangled hood.

This afternoon, I watched my daughter wade
    Into that verdant darkness, her old shoes
Testing each step before it took her weight.
She brought with her our clotted garden spade,
    Still useful but one she was free to lose,
In search of some rare plant, or frog, or fate.

Rejoice

You've known the roaring stadium
When, far downfield, receivers sprint
To catch the ball, without a hint
    They knew that it would come.

You've known the blushing on the face
Of children reading from the page
Who hustle swiftly from the stage,
    Embarrassed by their grace.

You've known, as well, the breaking voice
Of one who, dying on his bed
Can summon some old feat and shed
    His sorrows and rejoice.

You know, when darkness starts to fall,
Over the clashes in the street
As if a curtain of defeat,
    These things you must recall.

Planting the Perennials

Out in the autumn's muck and chill,
I've spent the morning planting bulbs in earth —
Deeper, I hope, than our squirrels' will
To dig them up and steal the next year's birth
Of flower and shoot
From hidden root
That lends the yard its blaze and mirth.

Knees blackened crawling in the soil
And knuckles stiffened with this final task
To end a season of hard toil,
I feel myself already want to ask
The clock to bring
New flowering,
To rush by winter's frozen mask.

This ache, unlike that of the young
Who lust for freedom and for fullness now
Thoughtless of duties, grows among
A sense of all I've wasted and of how.
The withered heart
Would make fresh start
As green retakes the ashen bough.

To govern mind and household well;
To know the mean that saves enough from more;
To find some worthy theme to tell
And write those verses I could not before;
Such things I want
Are those that haunt
Me as I stagger toward the door.

A Few Hours Apart

Some weeks ago, I heard a woman sigh
    She'd missed a single day of daily Mass,
As if for such transgression she must die.
    Her plaintive sorrow seemed to me pure gas.

Tonight, however, seated on a plane
    That pierces through a darkness vast and blind,
And takes me from that place where you remain,
    I wonder was my thought just or unkind.

Sentiments may be fragile like a glass
    And shatter under others' scrutiny,
But shattered though they are, they do not pass:
    On hearing reason's orders, mutiny.

So, streaming through such emptiness of air,
    I feel the homing weight of loneliness,
Which draws me through reflection back to where
    You try on for the mirror an old dress.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ned Balbo's six books include *The Cylburn Touch-Me-Nots* (New Criterion Poetry Prize) and *3 Nights of the Perseids* (Richard Wilbur Award), both published in 2019. He has received grants or fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (translation), Maryland Arts Council, and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts where he was a 2021 Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Creative Fellow. From 2015-2018 he was a visiting faculty member in Iowa State University's MFA program in creative writing and environment, and he has co-taught poetry workshops with his partner, Jane Satterfield, at the West Chester University Poetry Conference. Recent poems appear in *American Journal of Poetry*, *Christian Century*, *The Common*, *Ecotone*, *Gingko Prize 2019 Ecopoetry Anthology*, and elsewhere. For more, visit https://nedbalbo.com.

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David Cashman was born in 1947 in Morgantown, West Virginia, and educated in public schools in the Ohio Valley and suburban Phoenix. In 1970, he received a B.A. in English from Brown University. Subsequently, he earned a master's degree in Biblical Studies from Providence College. For 42 years, he taught high school English, simultaneously pursuing his ambitions as a writer.

His fiction and poetry have appeared in the *The New Yorker*, *Grand Street*, the *Catholic Worker*, and *Frogpond*, among others. In 2003, the Catskill Press published a selection of his poetry entitled *This Much*.

Christine Casson is the author of *After the First World*, a book of poems. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Literary Matters*, *Agenda* (England), *Stand* (England), *The Dalhousie Review*, *DoubleTake*, *Natural Bridge*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Fashioned Pleasures* (Parallel Press, 2005), *Never Before* (Four Way Books, 2005), and *Conversation Pieces* (Everyman's Library, 2007). She has also published critical essays on the work of Leslie Marmon Silko and the poetry of Linda Hogan and Robert Penn Warren. Ms. Casson is currently writing a book of non-fiction that explores the relationship between trauma and memory, and is at work on a study of the poetic sequence entitled *Sequence and Time Signature: A Study in Poetic Orchestration*. Her second book of poems is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry. She is Scholar- / Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.

Catherine Chandler, American Canadian poet, translator, and editor, has authored six poetry collections including *Lines of Flight*, shortlisted for the Poets' Prize, and *The Frangible Hour*, recipient of the Richard Wilbur Award. Her latest work, *Annals of the Dear Unknown*, an historical verse-tale, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. Additional information is online at The Wonderful Boat www.cathychandler.blogspot.com.

Terese Coe's poems, prose, and translations appear in Agenda, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *The Classical Outlook*, *Cyphers*, *Hopkins Review*, *Metamorphoses*, *The Moth*, *New American Writing*, *New Scotland Writing*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Review*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Stone Canoe*, *The Threepenny Review*, *the TLS*, and many other publications. Her book *Shot Silk* was short-listed for the 2017 Poets Prize, and her poem "More" was heli-dropped across London in the 2012 Olympics Rain of Poems. Giorno Poetry Systems, Vermont Studio Center, West Chester Poetry Conference, Barnstone Translation Award, and others have awarded her prizes and scholarships. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terese_Coe for information and links.

Aidan Coleman has published three collections of poetry, which have been shortlisted for national book awards in Australia. His poems have appeared in *Australian Poetry Since 1788*, *Best Australian Poems*, *Glasgow Review of Books*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review.*

Pietro Federico was born in Bologna, Italy in 1980, and currently living in Rome. He is a writer, copywriter, story editor, and professional translator. His poetry books: "Non nulla" (2003, Published by Ibiskos Editore, Empoli) winner of the prize "Il Fiore" Pistoia 2003; "Mare Aperto" (Published by Nino Aragno Editore, Turin, 2015) winner of the Subiaco Award 2015 and Ceppo Award 2017; "La maggioranza delle stelle – Canto Americano" (Edizioni Ensemble, Rome, 2020). Some of his translations: "Le storie più mute" by Katherine Larson (Edizioni Interlinea), "La ballata del carcere di Reading" by Oscar Wilde (Giuliano Ladolfi Editore), "Poems" by Martha Serpas (in *Testo a fronte* published by Marcos y Marcos).

John Foy's third book of poems, *No One Leaves the World Unhurt*, won the Donald Justice Poetry Prize and was published this year by Autumn House Press. His second book, *Night Vision*, won the New Criterion Poetry Prize (St. Augustine's Press, 2016). His poems have been included in the *Swallow Anthology of New American Poets*, *The Raintown Review Anthology*, and *Rabbit Ears*, an anthology of poems about TV. His work has appeared widely in journals and online. He lives in New York.

Robin Helweg-Larsen's poems, largely formal, have been published in the US, UK and other countries. Some favorites are in The HyperTexts. He is Series Editor for Sampson Low's "Potcake Chapbooks - Form in Formless Times," and blogs at formalverse.com from his hometown of Governor's Harbour in the Bahamas.

Roald Hoffmann was born in 1937 in Złoczów, then Poland. He came to the US in 1949, and has long been at Cornell, active as a theoretical chemist. In chemistry he has taught his colleagues how to think about electrons influencing structure and reactivity, and won most of the honors of his profession. Hoffmann is also a writer, carving out his own land between poetry, philosophy, and science. He has published six books of non-fiction, three plays, and seven volumes of poetry, including two book length selections of his poems in Spanish and Russian translations.

Charles Hughes is the author of two poetry collections, *The Evening Sky* (forthcoming from Wiseblood Books in 2020) and *Cave Art* (Wiseblood Books 2014). His poems have appeared in the *Alabama Literary Review*, *The Christian Century*, *the Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Literary Matters*, *Measure*, *the Saint Katherine Review*, *the Sewanee Theological Review*, *Think Journal*, and elsewhere. He worked as a lawyer for thirty-three years before his retirement and lives with his wife in the Chicago area.

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J. M. Jordan is a nearly-unpublished writer who recently began writing again after a twenty-year hiatus. He is a Georgia native, a Virginia resident, and a homicide detective by profession. He enjoys bourbon, Byzantine history, long walks on Civil War battlefields and (occasionally) sleep. His poems have appeared recently in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Modern Age*, *Image Journal*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Smartish Pace* and elsewhere.

David M. Katz is the author of four books of poetry — *In Praise of Manhattan*, *Stanzas on Oz*, and *Claims of Home*, all published by Dos Madres Press, and *The Warrior in the Forest*, published by House of Keys Press. He posts frequently on The David M. Katz Poetry Blog (https://davidmkatzpoet.com/).

Bob Kunzinger is the author of nine collections of essays, and his next book, *The Iron Scar: A Father and Son in Siberia*, is forthcoming in July 2022 (Madville Press, Texas). His work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Kestrel*, *the Southern Humanities Review*, and more, including several notations by *Best American Essays.* He lives and works in Virginia.

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2016 Press 53 Award for Short Fiction, was published in October of that year, and his first collection, *Hart's Grove*, was published by Colgate University Press in 2010. In addition, his fiction has appeared in dozens of other publications including *The Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, *Prism International*, *Event*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Antioch Review*, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* and *The Best American Mystery Stories. In 2018, he was awarded a Fellowship at MacDowell Colony.*

David Middleton is Professor Emeritus and Poet in Residence Emeritus at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Middleton's books of verse include The Burning Fields (LSU Press, 1991), *As Far As Light Remains* (The Cummington Press [Harry Duncan], 1993), *Beyond the Chandeleurs* (LSU Press, 1999), *The Habitual Peacefulness of Gruchy: Poems After Pictures by Jean-François Millet* (LSU Press, 2005), and *The Fiddler of Driskill Hill: Poems* (LSU Press 2013). Middleton's next collection of verse, *Outside the Gates of Eden*, will appear shortly on Measure Press. Since 1990, Middleton has served as literary executor for the late Alabama poet and essayist John Martin Finlay (1941-1991).

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, PhD is a professor, poet, and writer at Fordham University in New York City and serves as Associate Director of Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. Her publications include two chapbooks and seven collections of poems, most recently, *Andalusian Hours* (2020), a collection of 101 poems that channel the voice of Flannery O'Connor, and *Love in the Time of Coronavirus: A Pandemic Pilgrimage* (2021). In addition, O'Donnell has published a prize-winning memoir, *Mortal Blessings* (2014), and her biography Flannery O'Connor: *Fiction Fired by Faith* (2015) was awarded first prize for excellence in biography from The Association of Catholic Publishers. Her critical book *Radical Ambivalence: Race in Flannery O'Connor* was published by Fordham University Press in 2020. O'Donnell is the winner of the 2021 Paraclete Poetry Prize. Her winning manuscript, *Holy Land*, will be published in 2022.

Athar C. Pavis grew up in New York City, attended Mount Holyoke College and studied literature in France. She lives both in Maine and in France where she has worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is teaching at the Sorbonne. Her poems have been published in the UK, in Canada, and in magazines in the United States, including *Measure*, *The Able Muse*, *The Comstock*

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Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585) was attached to both the French and Scottish courts in his youth; he was later named royal poet for the House of Valois. He led the group of poets called the Pleiades, who looked to classical poetry for paradigms but wrote in French rather than Latin to encourage the development of French literature.

Sr. Tracey Sharp is a theologian and canon lawyer, and a member of the Sisters of Charity of Rolling Hills (California). Her community serves the needy in the Los Angeles area. She explores the wonder of creation through photography.

David Southward teaches in the Honors College at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His collections include *Bachelor's Buttons* (Kelsay Books 2020) and *Apocrypha*, a sonnet sequence based on the Gospels (Wipf & Stock 2018). David's poems have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Light*, *The Lyric*, *Measure*, *POEM*, and *THINK*. He is a two-time winner of the Lorine Niedecker Prize and was selected by Mark Doty for the Muse Prize from the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. In 2019 his poem "Mary's Visit" received the Frost Farm Prize for Metrical Poetry. David resides in Milwaukee with his husband, Geoff. Read more at davidsouthward.com.

Michael Spence spent a hitch as a naval officer aboard an aircraft carrier then drove public-transit buses in the Seattle area for thirty years, retiring from the latter job on Valentine's Day, 2014. His poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Chariton Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *North American Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and *Tar River Poetry*. In 2014, he was awarded a Literary Fellowship from Artist Trust of Washington State. His fifth book, *Umbilical* (St. Augustine's Press, 2016), won The New Criterion Poetry Prize.

Robert West's poems and reviews have recently appeared in *Alabama Literary Review*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and the UK poetry webzine *Snakeskin*. A professor of English at Mississippi State, he currently serves as interim head of MSU's Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures.

Gail White is a contributing editor of *Light Poetry Magazine* and is widely published in formalist poetry journals. Her most recent book, *Asperity Street*, can be found on Amazon, along with her chapbook *Catechism*. Home is in Breaux Bridge, LA, where the cats are.

Claude Wilkinson is a critic, essayist, painter, and poet. His book, *Reading the Earth*, won the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award. Other honors for his poems include a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship and the Whiting Writers' Award. His most recent poetry collections are *Marvelous Light* and *World without End*.

James Matthew Wilson has published ten books including, most recently, *The Strangeness of the Good*, *Including Quarantine Notebook* (Angelico, 2020). He is Cullen Foundation Chair of English Literature and the Founding Director of the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at the University of Saint Thomas, Houston. He serves as poetry editor of *Modern Age* magazine.

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