
ALABAMA LITERARY REVIEW



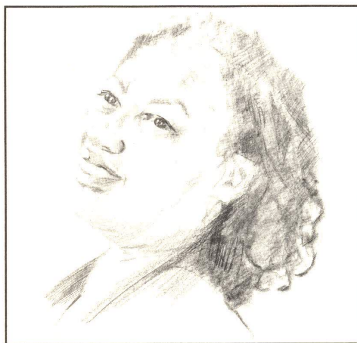
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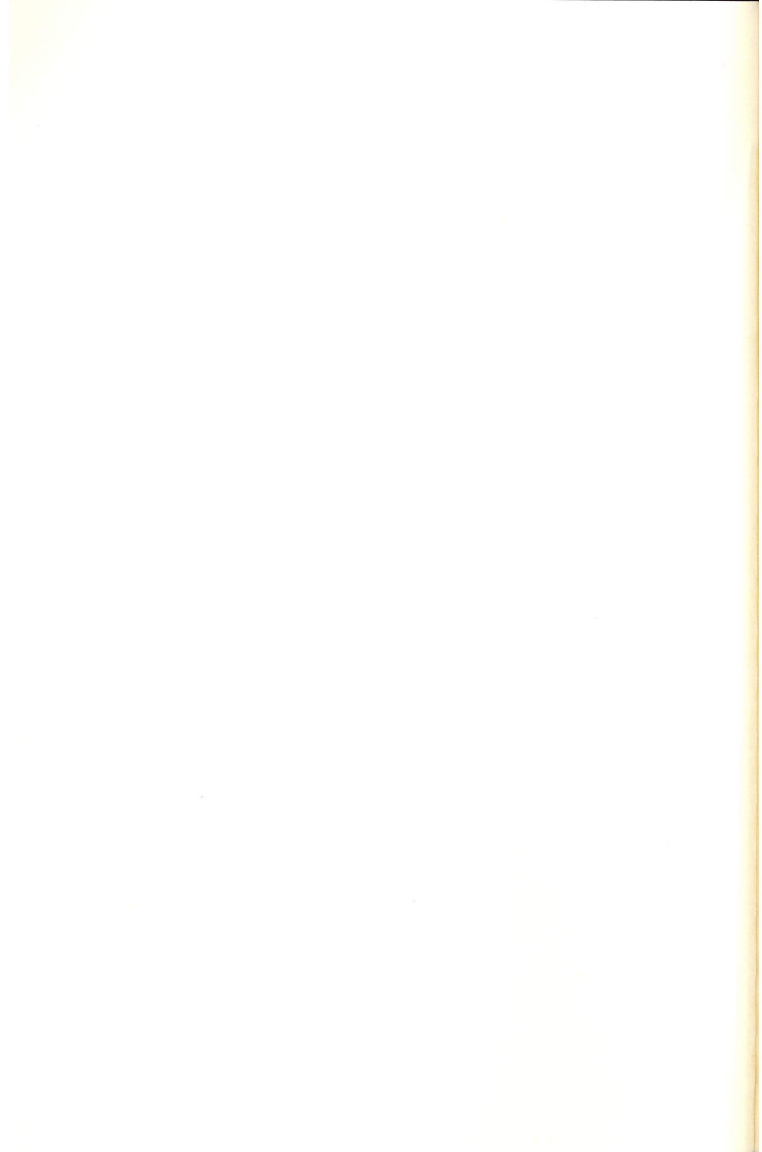


ALABAMA
LITERARY
REVUE

1993:
Volume 7
Number 2



Toni Morrison



*Nobody says it's pretty here; nobody
says it's easy either. What it is is decisive,
and if you pay attention to the street plans,
all laid out, the City can't hurt you.*

—TONI MORRISON

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"The Final Approach of Flight 232" is copyrighted by Jeff Barker, © 1992. The play was originally developed and produced as part of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The play was originally produced by Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa, with the following cast: Kimberlee Soo Felton as Sioux City Approach Control and Scott Isebrand as United 232 Heavy. This cast performed the play on tour to the Arena Theatre, University of South Dakota and then in their home space, the Boggard Theatre, Northwestern College. Subsequently, the play was invited to the regional festival of the Kennedy Center's American College Theatre Festival (with Chuck Hammer in the role of the United 232 Heavy). At the national level it was selected as the first alternate to the winner.

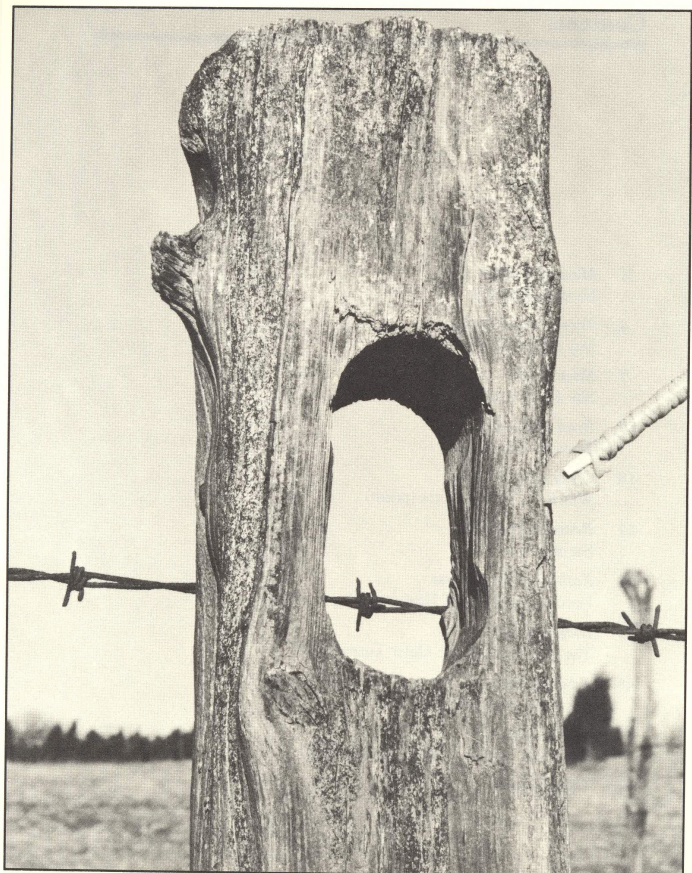
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Michael Russell

Natural Selection

Margaret Miles

My mother and I sat at the kitchen table and listened to my father's newly adopted gymnastics for getting into bed. His bedroom was above the kitchen and Dad would begin at the far wall--over the stove, as it were--and, striding mightily, he'd take one step, a second step, and a last profound step which would send Dad, mid-air, over our heads in the anxious pause before he landed with a squawk of the bedsprings from the ancient twin bed he shared with Mom. Plaster from the kitchen ceiling beneath the bed salted down upon a shelf of little-used cookbooks and the kitchen lights flickered with his landing. But from the time I was ten years old, my father would not get into his bed any other way. At that time my mother began sleeping in my bedroom, in the small bed reserved for cousins or old aunts passing through town who stayed to visit--never for very long--in our small apartment above the Oriental restaurant on C Street.

My father leapt into bed to avoid the snapping jaws of the alligator which, Dad said, was living under his bed. My mother slept in my room to avoid Dad. Mom consulted doctors; their responses spanned the medical spectrum from, "harmless, really," to "medicate, most certainly." Mom and I took the advice of the homeopath who suggested we try to understand Dad's fear as Dad understood it. We went to the library and Mom checked out books on the delusional behavior; I checked out books on alligators. I ignored the shelf's neighboring volumes on crocodiles because Dad--while admitting to never actually having *seen* the creature--had determined by listening to the head-snapping and tail-thrashing beneath his box spring that his bedroom was afflicted by none other than *alligator mississippiensis*, the American Alligator.

I brought home an armload of borrowed books. Dad wouldn't let me in his bedroom, so he and I sat at the kitchen table, under the yellow light, and pored over the volumes on:

class: Reptilia
order: Crocodylia
genus: Alligator

We learned that you couldn't get much farther from the natural habitat of the American Alligator than the brownstone New Jersey tenement in which we lived. Dad got out a map of the nation and traced the waterways for me by which any determined reptile might navigate from Florida to New England. He paused, his forefinger on the Hudson River, and cast his eyes toward the ceiling, "Hear that?" I didn't. "I told you he was a big one! You can imagine how--with a tail that size--" Dad swished his hand back and forth in the rhythm he heard the gator's tail moving, "he could make it to New Jersey. Swimming upstream wouldn't be a problem for a fellow that strong." We learned that alligators can grow to 20 feet long, though a more useful length was about thirteen feet, culminating in a pair of jaws that could chomp a turtle shell in half as though it was a boneless chicken. Though he'd never seen the entire gator, Dad said he could see its eyes in the dark, glowing red in the thin light shining under the bedroom door from the hallway. Dad could smell it, too: a reptilian smell, like a humid day in the bayou. Mainly, though, Dad heard the alligator growling. "I mean it's the stomach I hear growling--stomach acids," he said. "That alligator has to eat soon." That's why I wasn't allowed in the room. Dad said that small children were too easy a prey, but, as we'd learned from our reading, a hungry alligator would eventually snap at anything.

We lived above The Red Dragon Restaurant. It was a high class place--too expensive for our family to ever eat there though we knew the aromas from their kitchen intimately. We knew that the cooks favored ginger and miso. And we knew that they served their poultry fresh; from our bathroom window we could watch Mr. Lee's brother drive up to the back door on the alley and unload a crate of live chickens every Wednesday. Then, on Fridays--the day before the night The Red Dragon did its biggest business--we would hear the butcher knife drop methodically across each clucking neck. Neighborhood kids would steal the chicken heads out of the dumpster

and use them as finger puppets. Dad and I read that alligators won't eat putrefied meat; they like it fresh--fresh enough to put up a fight. We read that if its meal was big enough, an alligator could go a week or a month without eating again. So on Thursday nights, after The Red Dragon closed, Dad would hoist me over the transom above the restaurant's alley door and I'd drop into their kitchen and descend the stairs into the basement where the live chickens were kept. Equipped with a canvas bag, I'd snatch one of the skittery chickens and creep, foxlike, back up the stairs. I'd toss the bagged bird over the transom to Dad and then I'd climb out myself. Dad handled the alligator-feeding himself. I'd listen from the kitchen table, but I never heard the gnashing and gulping I'd anticipated. The next morning, Dad would greet me at breakfast with a rap on the head and a wink, "Mission accomplished, kiddo."

We didn't tell Mom what we were doing. She never inquired about the alligator and she cautioned me against it, "If," she said, "you ever want to see your father sane again."

I worried over my actions, but I kept on stealing chickens.

It was only after Dad lost a hand to the jaws of his imaginary alligator that my thievery ended.

"Got a little too close to him with that last bird, kiddo," Dad smiled wanly, holding a bloody towel over his wrist as the paramedics rolled him out of our apartment.

After that, Mom couldn't cross the threshold of the bedroom without sobbing and she sent me to stay with an aunt while our belongings were moved to another apartment. I never saw the alligator. And I always felt guilty leaving the alligator to wait--growling ever more voracious--for the next tenants. And I regretted all of our research that would go unused: the fact that alligators can lay forty-five eggs at one time or that, evolutionally, they are more closely related to birds than to lizards. I never sought out alligators, have never even seen one in a zoo. But to this day--my father in his fifteenth year in the sanitarium, his mattress on the floor so that no Crocodylia can crawl beneath it--to this very day, I'm unable to eat Chinese food without imagining clapping my jaws around the whole platter of sweet and sour chicken as it is set before me, grazing the waiter's hand in a toothy reminder of the sweetness and sourness of life.

Day Lilies

Trevor West Knapp

My neighbor, whose garden is a masterwork
of form and color, can't understand
why I plant so many day lilies. "I want
what will bloom all summer." "Yes,"
I say, "I see your point." I know
it would make more sense
to search out what promises
the mad riot of color I crave,
winter-worn and eager as I am each year
to witness the perpetual
rite of defiance. It should be
only sturdy perennials I choose, hale
and prolific, gaillardia, stokesia, coreopsis,
shooting their bright arrows of content
summer to frost. How to explain
a theory of gardening so little dependent
on longevity, though that
has its place here too. I choose
plants I admire for how
they go about their business: The poppies,
never having heard what kids are told, tilt back
their sassy heads to the sun, pivot
on frail stalks to follow it
through the hot afternoon. Or,
the rambunctious tumble
of clematis, its fragile new growth
looking for purchase, to gain strength
from a tight embrace. And the day lilies,

each plant sending up one stalk,
the small cluster of buds that begins
the long ripening, weeks of preparation
for just one day
of blossom, each bud, cracking its tight seal
the day before it blooms, the petals
just parting, like the hesitant
mouth of a child turned up to question
this sharp awakening into breath-catching
brilliance, reminding me
there is no other beauty that can thrill
like an only chance.



Elizabeth Holmes

She Danced with the Rothschilds

Ellen Hoffs

Thanksgiving, three years ago, was the last time I mixed Mother with my friends. I was taking the candied sweet potatoes out of the oven when I saw her walking toward my husband, Alan, slowly and purposefully like my dog when he stalks a cat. By the time I closed the oven door, she was hovering over him and the twenty-eight pound turkey he was carving.

Her low gravely voice rose as she told him how Kira Matthews said "mind your own business," after she "suggested" that Kira lose weight. Kira was my best friend and a lifelong fat person.

"Did I say something I shouldn't have?" she asked in a cutesy innocent way.

"Yes, I think you did," Alan said, without looking up.

"Why did I say that?" she asked coyly.

"I think it's because you wanted to hurt Kira's feelings," he answered.

"Yes I did!" she exclaimed with maniacal triumph, stomping her foot and laughing hysterically.

Now my friend Josephina was on the phone, coaxing me to come to dinner with her mother and mine. Josephina was a therapist, but empathy wasn't her strong point. In her do-gooder heart Josephina truly believed that inviting me and my injured mother to dinner meant helping out a needy friend.

I cupped my hand over the phone and whispered, "Alan, what should I do?" He shrugged and stepped out the door to take the dog for a walk.

"I saw your mother at the drugstore. She was so friendly.

recognized her by her voice--Talullah Bankhead with a German accent. Actually, she was talking about you," Josephina said.

That was a coincidence. Yesterday I'd been paying my bill when the pharmacist walked up to me and asked if I'd like to hear what he called "a little mother anecdote." Sure I wanted to hear it. "Well," he said looking at me sympathetically. "She comes up with the darnedest things. We were chatting about the rain this weekend, and she said, 'My daughter never comes to visit me on Sunday. Did you know that more people commit suicide on Sunday than any other day?'"

Josephina wouldn't give up. "Come on, Alan and Jay will be out at a meeting, and my mother's looking forward to the evening."

I was trapped. Between the horrible accident and my mother's age--she'd turned eighty the week before--I couldn't live with myself if I turned her down.

So I lied. "It was so nice of you to think of us. My mother doesn't eat meat or fish. Just thought you should know."

As I parked my Volvo behind Josephina's Mercedes, I felt a queasy sensation in the pit of my stomach, like before a big cocktail party where I didn't know anyone but the hostess. I struggled to unhook mother's seatbelt, glanced up at her and thought, 'Why can't she look like other parents.'

Here she was, five feet, seven inches and a hundred and seventy big-boned pounds, decked out in scarlet polyester pants and matching sweatshirt. Her crimson beret was held in place by a fierce-looking tiger stickpin that stood straight up. She'd patchworked her face with rouge and painted on a stripe of lipstick. The contrast between the white gauze bandage and her heavy red makeup made her face look even more like a sad clown than before the accident.

I walked to her side of the car and helped her pull herself out. The necessary intimacy must have made her feel close to me, because after I helped her put on her coat, she hooked her arm into mine. I tugged my arm out of her grip, hating myself for rejecting her. She seemed not to notice. With the forward motion of a tank she strode across the street to Josephina's two-story Spanish style house.

"Aren't the petunias pretty?" I said breathlessly, trying to keep up with her.

"Your flowers are nicer," she snapped, as if I needed defending.

I rang the bell. Josephina opened the oversized oak door and said, "Welcome." My mother observed, "The house is beautiful. It looks very big. It must have cost a lot. You must make a lot of money." She pulled up her lips at the corners the way people do when they smile, but the rest of her face stayed the same.

"Thank you," Josephina said. "We bought it a long time ago. Houses weren't so expensive then."

Josephina wore a thin polyester paisley dress with an old lace collar, a modern version of the frilly feminine Lanz clothes that were popular years ago. An antique cameo dangled gracefully from her neck. It seemed as if Josephina never felt cold.

I wore black from my wool jacket to my suede flats. A Mexican-silver caterpillar pinned to my lapel broke the darkness, a bit. The Addams Family visiting the Partridge Family.

"I'll take your coat, but keep that beret on," Josephina said to my mother. "It's really quite perky."

I relaxed a bit. She liked that stupid show-off beret. She probably thought it gave our little party some pizzazz.

Josephina's mother walked in looking like a roly-poly fairy godmother, about five feet tall in a pink silk pantsuit. She'd twisted her white hair into a bun on top of her head. Holding out her hand and smiling intimately, she said to my mother, "I've heard so much about you, dear, I'm Hilda, Josephina's mother."

That competitive and combative "I'm as good as you are" look spread across my mother's face. She puffed up her chest and shook her forefinger. "Don't dear me," she said, "I'm Mrs. Lieber."

"You are outspoken," Hilda answered, in that patronizing way some therapists have. She was 85-years-old and, I guess, she'd heard worse during her years as a therapist.

"But, of course, saying what you think is good for your health, d. . . ." Hilda stopped herself in time. "Why don't we sit in the living room while my beautiful daughter finishes with dinner."

Josephina waited while Hilda led us down white-carpeted steps into the sunken living room. "Very grand," my mother said waving her hand. We sat on two white overstuffed sofas facing each other, mother and I on one, Hilda on the other.

"Before I go back to the kitchen," Josephina asked, "Is everyone comfortable?"

"I'm chilly," I said nicely. "Could you put on some heat?"

At past parties Josephina's husband had refused to turn on the heat even after I took off my shoes and openly slipped on the pair of thick white tennis socks I always carried in my purse. But tonight Jay was out, and Josephina walked to the thermostat with an unquesting graciousness that Miss Manners would have appreciated.

Hilda motioned to the driftwood coffee table between us, dotted with small blue china plates that held hors d'oeuvres. "Help yourself," she said. "My daughter bought something for everyone. Guacamole. Vegetables. Cheese. Even some caviar."

"I hate fish," my mother grunted.

I knew she would make trouble. I knew it. I wished I was closer so I could jab her in the ribs.

"There's lots to choose from, Mother, not only fish." I stared at her wide-eyed, while Hilda reached for a carrot.

She got the hint. "Yes, very nice."

No one said a word about the bandage covering the left side of her wrinkled forehead, eyebrow and eye. Of course, I'd already filled Josephina in on the details.

It's ironic how love can reap so much damage. Our dog Tulip is as important to Alan and me as we are to each other. I call him Tulip, not Sam or Robert, because his mouth feels soft when I feed him. I feel a mysterious joy rubbing my face in his hairy smelly belly. It's the closest thing I've had to a religious experience. Union. Oneness. I feel orgasmic. I want to consume wooly Tulip, chew him up and swallow him, like my mother wants to consume me. But I would never take advantage of a helpless animal.

I bring Tulip almost everywhere. So the morning of the accident my mother wasn't surprised when I called and said I'd come over with him. She's afraid of dogs, but she's gotten used to Tulip.

I knocked. As I waited for her to undo her four locks, she sang, "It Had to be You." She opened the door with a "Tralah," and Tulip and I bounded into her world. The air was heavy with the scent of "4711," the cologne she'd used since she was a girl in Germany. Pictures and sayings covered the walls, and stuffed animals rested on every flat surface.

Hepzibah the elephant stood on the TV set next to Lewis the tiger. On her bed, two enormous Great Danes, named Batman and

Howdy Doody, flanked Samantha the lion, Gregory the toucan, a giraffe she called Bernard, and Cocoa, a brown bear with a blue string around its neck.

She held up Cocoa moving him from side to side to amuse Tulip. "I bought this little friend at the thrift shop for a dime. He sleeps in the bathrub because it's colder there. This is my new scarecrow, Oscar," she said, holding him up by his denim coveralls. "He likes soft food, cream of wheat and mashed banana. I haven't figured out what to feed Carlos, my new dinosaur."

"He might be a vegetarian," I said.

"If Albert was around, I could ask him," she answered, pointing to her Albert Einstein calendar.

Pictures of Einstein, John F. Kennedy, and Adlai Stevenson lined the walls almost to the ceiling. She'd cut most of them from newspapers and magazines. Some she framed. Quotations hung next to the pictures.

She'd copied an Einstein quote in ink on a pebbly sheet of pasteboard. She wrote, "We are all on this earth with the same mission in life. The general welfare of mankind is the trust of white man and black, rich or poor, Christian or Jew, Mohammedan and Hindu."

My mother carried out Einstein's ideas in her own way. At every meal in the dining room downstairs, she filched bananas, apples, nuts, anything she could stuff into her yellow and green plastic bag and sneak to her room. The next day, like Robin Hood, she handed out the bounty to her favorite people: the busboys, dishwashers and maids, who worked at the Royal Garden. If they didn't say thank you, she scolded them.

"Look," she announced proudly, picking up a rag doll, with brown yarn for hair and embroidered brown eyes. "I've named it Erica. Now I can have you here everyday."

I would have laughed if she'd said she was sticking pins in it, like a voodoo doll, but using that rag doll to replace me made me feel really guilty.

"It's cute," is all I said. "Let's get out of here and go for a walk to the park."

We took the elevator down to the lobby, walking quickly past the staring residents, toward the patio and the wrought iron gate that opened onto Santa Monica Blvd. My mother's new boyfriend, Sam, stood watching. Sam's Alzheimer's Disease didn't seem to affect how my mother felt about him.

"Sam called me a Shabbatnik today. I asked a lady who speaks Yiddish what that means. She said, 'Holy Man.' Sam thinks I'm a holy man." Her eyes filled with tears. "I told him I'm not a man, but that doesn't make any difference. He thinks of me as a Tibetan monk or a rabbi."

Did Sam really say that? No one in the hotel, except my mother, had ever heard Sam utter one word. Still, how could she make up something as peculiar as "holy man"?

I couldn't see my mother as holy. But she and Sam were transformed when they sat close holding hands on the red and blue flowered couch in the hotel lobby. The old people rushed over to talk and touch them. My mother didn't play cards or talk politely. Yet the power of love had given her a place of honor in the hotel's society.

At times like today, I appreciated my mother. I wasn't even annoyed by her green beret and matching sweatshirt with the word, "SURFCAT," in five-inch-high iridescent green capital letters. I followed her mood, like a dog follows his master.

"Sam told me he loves me. Your father never said that to me in all the years we were married," she said, bringing up one of the subjects that could change her from an amusing eccentric to a mean old lady.

Hoping it might make her feel better, I answered, "Daddy never told me he loved me, but I knew he did."

My father had died on their 45th anniversary. He was twelve years older and four inches shorter than my mother. He thought she was beautiful, and she thought he was smart. That's about all they liked about each other. He liked opera. She adored jazz. She loved to dance. He liked to read. And scream. Since she buried him, 15 years ago, she'd never visited his grave.

"This morning Sam's nurse told me that he's going to a convalescent home. He keeps running away. The police brought him home last night. Do you think he'll have to leave?"

My mother had told me about his escapes, but I hadn't thought much about it.

She shrieked, "Do you think they'll make him leave, baby buggy?"

She was starting. She knew I hated that name.

"Don't call me that, mother. I'm not a baby anymore."

"Don't get mad. I call you that because I liked you better when you were little."

Same would leave and nothing would replace him. No one had ever made her so happy.

"His nurse says we should get married," she said, getting more agitated as she spoke.

People at the park turned and stared. "The nurse was kidding," I said, lamely trying to quiet her. "Take Tulip's leash. I have to go to the bathroom."

"OK," she said.

It was as simple as that. I didn't want to take Tulip with me into the filthy park bathroom, and my mother said, "OK." She'd never walked a dog, so I was truly surprised.

"Mother, you'll really take the dog? Are you sure?"

She nodded and shouted, "Yes. Go."

I went into the toilet and when I came out, I saw her and Tulip strolling together, almost a block away. She didn't know I'd come out, so I shouted, "Mother, I'm here."

Tulip saw me before she did and darted toward me while my mother pulled helplessly at the leash. I ran to help her, but seeing me run made Tulip speed up, so I stood still and waited for the inevitable. I should have screamed, "Let go." But I didn't. I didn't want Tulip to run away. Tulip stopped when my mother fell and smashed her face against a fire hydrant. If I'd let Tulip run away, I'd have lost a dog. Instead my mother lost her eye.

"Josephina, pass the chicken," Hilda said.

The table looked cheerful. Orange napkins and those colorful Italian plates with pictures of animals and flowers. Pale tulips slouched fashionably in the center of the table. Tulips. I didn't say a word.

My mother sat in the place of honor, in an armchair at the end of the table. Josephina sat next to her. I felt a familiar shiver of embarrassment as I watched her pick up the napkin next to her fork, unfold it and tie it around her neck. I'd been ashamed of my mother and guilty about the shame, since I can remember.

When I was in grammar school, in the fourth grade, she volunteered to be assistant Brownie leader. She sat in the front of the classroom where we held our troop meetings, with her legs spread apart. I avoided looking up her skirt. She cut her legs shaving and repaired herself with oversize white bandages that stood out like cactus on the sand. My bag lunches were like her, rumpled and different, defiantly so.

She may have sensed my discomfort or disapproval, because every night before I went to bed she read the fairy tale, "The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf." The story was about little Inger who was on her way to visit her parents with a fresh loaf of bread her employer had asked her to bring them. The road was muddy, and Inger was proud of her new shoes. So rather than step in the mud and ruin them, she put the bread on the ground and used it as a stepping stone. For her transgression, she sunk into the underworld and stayed there covered with slime and bugs and snakes. I hated my brown oxfords and wondered if I would end up like Inger if someone gave me a pair of shiny black-patent Mary Janes.

My mother was animated. "Sometimes I leave the dining room right after I eat, because I laugh so much they get mad at me. The experts," she said, howling with so much gusto that Hilda, Josephina and I couldn't help but join in. "We have experts there on everything. Experts on food. Einsteins on psychiatry. Doctors of outer space. I'm a professor emeritus. Professor of Common Sense or Dr. Wisenheimer. Take your pick."

Abruptly, my mother stopped laughing.

"I eat alone, because inmates eat with their hands, like pigs." Inmates was her name for the residents of the Royal Garden. "They stuff the food into their mouth. They put their fingers in the serving bowls. There are so many wipers."

"Wipers? What's a wiper?" Hilda asked.

"I think she meant viper," I explained.

Tiny pieces of roast chicken cascaded from my mother's mouth as she turned to me and said matter-of-factly, "Do you think Josephina had a face lift? Dr. Wisenheimer's an expert on face lifts."

"Mother, what difference does it make?" I said, pinching her arm.

She gave me a dirty look and turned to Josephina, "I was just asking my daughter if you'd had a face lift?"

"Yes, I did, about six months ago."

Eyebrows raised, Hilda asked, "Why do you want to know?"

"My mother answered, "Why do you Americans try so hard to hide your age? My face is covered with wrinkles. I don't dye my hair. Who am I trying to impress? My daughter or Sam?"

I exclaimed, "Americans aren't the only ones having face lifts. Besides, everyone should be able to do what they want."

"If I did what I wanted, I'd kill the president," my mother said with satisfaction, getting in the last word.

"Undaunted, Josephina lifted her newly tight little face and said, "You seem very political."

"Yes. I'm a life-long Democrat. And you?"

"I'm a Democrat, but Perot didn't seem so bad."

"No?" my mother said, her face turning pink. "My mother always said, you don't know a man until you sleep with him. Have you ever slept with Mr. Perot?"

"Mother, that's ridiculous. You can't sleep with every politician. Hilda, tell my mother about your work."

With a condescending, "Ach. Work . . ." my mother waved the question aside. "I cooked for forty-five years. I volunteered. I worked. I lived my life. I danced with the Rothchilds."

The Rothchilds? I'd heard so many stories about my family's life in Germany. My uncle was mayor. My grandfather owned the first car in town. The chauffeur was the only person who would work for them after the Nazis came to power. But the Rothchilds? I'd never heard about the Rothchilds.

"Where did you dance with the Rothchilds?" I asked, puzzled.

"A tea dance. I was only sixteen. We danced to records by Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith. One of the brothers had a wart, right here," she said, pointing to the tip of her pug nose.

"You must have come from a very important family," Hilda said, obviously impressed.

Suddenly my mother stood up and, holding her arm around an invisible partner, began dancing like one of those Arthur Murray dancers I used to see on TV. Her usual determined forward motion melted away as she moved with airy gracefulness and sang, "It Had To Be You," in her sweetest basso. She gilded across the white carpet, waltzed several times around the table and then two-stepped back and forth from one end of the small dining room to the other.

"That's how I danced with the Rothchilds," she gasped and sat down.

Josephina and Hilda clapped, and I joined in. My mother must have been proud of herself because she invited Hilda to lunch at the Royal Garden and offered to introduce her to Sam. She was slipping

her arm into her coat when she added, "My daughter usually invites family to Thanksgiving. But this year, maybe we'll have some friends."

"I'll see," I said.

Snow in June

Brad Schaedler

Laramie, Wyoming

Even here it comes as a shock.
Cold cracking the bone
bedded silence of morning
clicking battery dead.

Flakes in furious flurries
collar clinging, icy
blades tracing the spine.
Four inches and still falling.

The sun folded deep
in the disturbed hands of sky.
Four-wheeling, a rancher squints
into whirling white canyons.

A mailman slips on black ice,
his curses spinning like tires.
With sadness of sparrows,
telephone wires slouch

over astonished lawns
and forsaken gardens.
Wheezing lungs crave the sturdy
stamina of wolves of wind.

Over this land's arched sweep
toward heaven, prayers drift
with petals and paper
against wicked fences.

Winter on La Veta Pass

Craig Crist-Evans

for Jim Evans

The road is clear to La Veta,
then mile by mile worse until
I can't go up, I can't go back.
Slipping where the road's black ice,
the truck spins out and slides,
wipers slapping crazy
at the crusted slush, night
coming down its steep sluice.
Anythiing could be the truth.
There are stories where you are my father,
and stories where we've never met.
There are nights like this:
each nerve's slick surface, words
spinning out of control. And nights
I remember lying in the grass
behind our house in Boardman,
you pointing to the stars,
pitching a tent at Wildwood Lake
by the frail glow of flashlights,
or bending in the woods above the body
of a rabbit, giving me the knife and saying,
"Go in here and cut all the way back."
I need to talk about this.
I need for you to know how far
I've driven to find you here in me,
staring at the windshield,
following the edge and seeing
nothing but the road, black
with a kind of ice you don't see

until you're on it, sliding
like a terrified boy waiting
for his father to tell him he loves him,
pushing through the last stretch home,
hands knuckle-white against
the steering wheel, eyes pasted
to the blank surface of the world.
The truck hits ice and skids and slams
against a wall of snow. I don't know
how long I sit there shaking with fear.
I don't know if the fear is fear
of dying, or fear of something else.



Patrick Hood

Burnt Corn

Reina McKeithen

I could tell it was going to be a bad summer the way the bitterweed bloomed like little yellow suns all over the fields. Sims' daddy said the fish would be drinking sand by August. Mamaw said the Farmers' Almanac said it was going to be a dry year but Sims and his daddy had gone ahead and planted anyhow. Sims said that's what farmers do they plant. In July the springs started going dry all over the county. Sims tried to put a stopper in ours. He worked on it all one morning but it wasn't nothing but a wood box and everybody knows wood don't stop water if it wants to go someplace but those Mahans are stubborn and he tried it cause he said it didn't cost him anything and it might of worked. It didn't though. Our well didn't dry up but it wasn't hardly enough water to take a spit bath in every other day. The corn looked like a canefield it raised its leaves straight up to the sun like it was surrendering.

The first time I just dropped the dishcloth and walked across the porch in the middle of the day and down the steps I got in the car and started to drive off but Sims stopped with the tractor run it right in front of the Studebaker before I could get the thing in reverse. He opened the back door which couldn't ever be locked, the front door didn't have no handle, and he jumped in and leaned over the seat and turned off the key. He pulled it out and put it in his pocket with a pat that said this is where it's going to stay and he said where do you think you're going to?

I went back in the house without answering him. The little boys was still setting at the table eating hadn't even stopped chewing from where I'd left them with a pan of cornbread and a pot of beans and fatback they was dipping their hands in like they never heard of spoons. Sims moved the Studebaker back up under the house

and the tractor behind it where it couldn't be moved and brought my suitcase in. He set back down in his place and smeared a chunk of cornbread with butter and dipped it in the potlikker since he'd already ate his beans. Five pairs of flat blue eyes stared at me over those chewing mouths five different ages of the same face 1, 3, 4, 5, 24 I don't want no more. It was them faces with them same eyes that made me run in the first place though I had thought about it a lot before I won't tell you I hadn't I just hadn't done nothing about it. Everyday those same faces and eyes staring at me over chewing mouths. I couldn't see myself in those eyes now, those eyes said you ain't going to get nowhere.

The second time I tried walking out when Sims was to town. I left the little boys making dirt pens and roads and things under the house for their little cars and some bugs they caught. It was two o'clock, not a cloud in the sky like my mama's blue china bowl the baby broke I forget which baby, one of them when it was two so it couldn't be the baby now so it ain't his fault not any of their faults maybe not Sims' fault neither maybe not even mine but the bowl was broke all the same. Sims mended it went to the store and got a special glue and put all the pieces together again good as new he said, if you don't put water in it. What good's a bowl won't hold water? I could see cracks like the little lines in the palm of my hand sweating hard shiny beads of glue.

I made the mistake of packing a suitcase and walked out got all the way uptown in heat like a glass window pressing down on me. Sims has this homing sense like a hound has for a coon or squirrel, he homed in on me all the way uptown and drove til he saw me toting that suitcase too and put us right in the Studebaker, drove home without saying a word. He took the suitcase in the house and dumped everything in it on the bed and then he took it off to his mama's I reckon, I never seen it again didn't matter anyhow old beatup cheap thing to start with. I already figured I wouldn't take nothing with me next time.

Sims didn't say nothing, that wasn't his way, but he knew there'd be a next time. He taken to watching me all the time now. Him and the little boys, they was good boys as good as boys can be, didn't fight no more'n others or whine much. Their noses ran all winter and summer they was sunburnt to a goldy brown just like Sims but their eyes fastened onto me and their little hands was like hooks in my skin.

It was a long waiting summer, Sims was waiting for the crops to come in worrying about rain. He had to tote water from town in barrel drums and couldn't get but one in the car at a time. The truck was broke had a cracked block or radiator or something and as soon as he poured it on the corn the dirt just sucked it right up. Even his mama told him not to take this land it was like a sieve but Sims wouldn't never listen to nobody leastways not to his mama. Thin white lines like strings ran tight from the corners of his eyes. He stared at the sky looking for clouds that weren't there. He watched the corn turning brown and he watched me doing the wash hanging out clothes sweeping the bare board floor that was always gritty from all the sand. It was white and stuck to our bare feet and looked like Sims' cheeks when he didn't shave for two days felt like it was too on bare feet. At night in the lamplight it would shine in the cracks sometimes. I carried wash water out to the tomatoes but they was wilting in that sand that could blind you in the sun in the middle of the day but in good years grew the sweetest tomatoes.

I didn't have no fixed plans for running, I'd already used up all my plans, I was just waiting. Until one hot August night the Rucker brothers come over and said there was a rabid animal in the spring woods, claimed they heard it digging around in the dry spring.

Might of been a dog or a fox or a coon. Rabid creatures got to have water. We got to get it Noah Rucker said.

Ellsworth Greer and the rest of the men come around and they all had their guns and Sims got his and they headed out through the cornfield to the spring woods. I don't know why I followed. A rabid animal is a dangerous thing and so's a bunch of men with guns but I did. It's no sight to go see but the little boys was in bed and I went. For once Sims wasn't watching me, I was watching him.

The men was ahead of me, the Rucker brothers had their jacklights so the night was full of flashes from that. The woods sounds was all around buzzing and whinging and the dusty pine needle smell don't nothing smell better than fresh pine but when it's dry don't nothing smell drier.

The men reached the spring place and bunched up while they looked for the rabid animal then the younger Rucker brother caught it in his light and yelled there it is it's a fox and they all com-

menced to shoot but I saw it too and it wasn't no fox it was a dog, a bitch lying on her side heaving and there was foam all around her mouth but it wasn't the foam of madness, she was in labor gone wrong. I saw that, saw it plain as my hand in front of my face when her eyes was caught in the light and I saw her pain.

No I screamed and the dog looked at me. Run I screamed but she just lay there having them puppies and I was drowned out by the shooting they shot and shot til there wasn't nothing left of that dog nor the puppies inside of her just a red pulpy mess that could of been anything but not anything alive no more. Some of the shells must of went into the dry pinestraw the dog was laying on, it caught fire. The men wouldn't go stamp it out they was afraid to go close to that pore old dog in case the rabies might jump up like a devil and get them. In a minute the fire spread all around where the spring wasn't this summer and the men hollared and jumped around and tried to stomp it out but they was too late, they had theirselves a real fire now.

I run back to the house with my hands over my ears I could hear that dog crying though she didn't make no sound I could still hear her. The boys was awake and watching the fire I could see them filling up the window their eyes their little bare legs dangling every which way outside it, they scratched at bugbites. They didn't see me get my purse I still didn't have no plans I put my shoes in my pockets and went out. The little boys was still watching the fire.

I started out through the cornfield away from the spring wood. The dirt was warm on top cooler where my feet broke through the crust. The moon come up out of the woods behind me three quarters bright and the parched cornstalks was shining like torches lighting me through the field.

Behind the spring wood was all orange with fire, little black men jumping around the edge, Sims was on the tractor and men chopping trees making a firebreak before it got to the corn, they yelled like devils. All of them had taken off their shirts in the heat of the fire and I could see Sims' sweaty back as he turned the tractor and I followed the moon path out of the cornfield. Let him find me now.

Used to this Kind of Heat

Katherine McCanless

August in our square mile of Tennessee
paralyzed by the sun
we are struck dumb by the humidity
haze and 100 degrees in the shade today
hot enough so that I'm not wearing any underwear
under my white cotton dress

in the cool dark of the kitchen
I take cornbread from the oven
using a towel to keep from burning my hands
feeling the wave of heat rise against my belly
and I lick the sweat from my lip

hair done up messy and sticky on the back of my neck
the dress oppressive hanging limp in the absence of a breeze
easily enough material to be a maternity dress
(everything in the country has at least two uses)
wonder if I'll ever swell with life
if bleeding creeping tendrils will grow inside me
like the kudzu at the back of the house

will I feel in my body the ripeness near bursting
that leads to rotteness
overripe tomatos falling off the vine
blushed peachskins rupturing
the only salvation in the splitting of watermelons
listlessly arranging mismatched garagesale knives and forks
thinking this is Carpenter's Hollow

I chose to come here
to the children dead of smallpox and buried
half-way up the hill under their limestone rocks
and the sprawling limbs of the cedar
the grave inhabited by the snake
that catches rats in the barn

the noises I make in the hayloft
the barnfucking and the low and sad
sounds of heifers and calves separated by gullies
flanks and udders never knowing the bull
just remembering the way he feels from behind
wonder why I chose this love of wifery

alternating cicadas and the creaking of boards
as the smell of flowers and manure meld
in the night air cooing circling sinking
dreaming of what it is like barefoot and dewy
at dawn in the garden harvesting

picking fruit blackberries plucked from brambles
and plunking into a milk jug
tied around my waist with baling twine
mouth and fingers stained indigo
okra scratches on my hands
so deceptive of the slime which slides
down the throat after boiling
the futility of fighting nature
of fighting a chosen isolation

the only cool thing is the boards of the porch
under my callused feet
and I swing in the porchswing
toes skittering a whisper on wood
Jack Daniels and lemonade sweaty in my palms

the only break in the monotony
the mailman's daily emergence from the mirage
a hallucination of pickup truck
coming out of the dust
and his handdelivery of gossip
the toothless report of straying cows

and it is that time the stillest of midafternoon
and I am going to him
the landowner man husband
with a galvanized bucket of icecubes
and a bottle of Wild Turkey
sashaying across the hot blades of grass
damp and cool at the roots and soil

he soaks in the chipped enamel bathtub
under the chestnut tree by the well
and I pour the cubes into the tub
give him the whiskey
begin to wash his hair while
thinking about the straight razor
that waits for lather cooler air and hotter water
and he reaches up and pulls me into the tub.



Patrick Hood

The Seduction of the Outer Zones

Dick Bonker

"Perhaps the play is also incidental." --S. Claspe

A CHROMATIC FANTASY IN ONE ACT

Cast of Characters:

FLUTE BOY

RENE LOPINARSINOPOLIS

ROUE SIPENARSOLENTESIS

ROUGET PARTHENOGENOSIS

} Professors of Geology

STREET MUSICIANS--A pickup group

EXPOSITORY SINGER--And Narrator

GIBBOUS EARTH--Gorgeous in her blue and green mantle

PLUTO--An Eccentric Distant Planet

SELENA THE SILVERY MOON

MAN IN THE MOON--Buck Naked

GOLDEN HOOP OF PARADISE

A PERFECT SPHERE

Approximately 3,300 words; 254 speeches.

(The performing area is empty except for a single chair downstage center.

The Flute Boy enters with instruments, bows to the audience, sits. Commences elaborate preparations to perform.

The Street Musicians file in with folding chairs and position themselves to one side, sit.

The Expository Singer enters with music stand. She positions her-

self standing on the opposite side from the Street Musicians. Places music on stand. Clears throat. Gives the down beat to the Flute Boy.

Flute Boy plays a simple phrase. Stands up, bows. The Geologists applaud weakly. Exit Flute Boy.)

RENE L: *(Stepping forward.)* Apostrophe!

ROUE S: *(Stepping forward.)* Semicolon!

ROUGET P: *(Trying to step forward but blocked by the Flute Boy's empty chair.)* Asterick! *(The other two turn and look at him.)* Sorry.

RENE L: In a quiet bower for only we.

ROUE S: Full of sweet breathing

ROUGET P: Old dreams of wealth.

RENE L: Let it not pass from nothingness into the void.

ROUGET S: Sweet, sullied Earth.

RENE L: That's "solid" Earth. Sullied won't melt.

ROUGET L: Sorry.

ROUE P: Her shoulders glazed with frost

RENE L: Like a pomegranate from an ice chest.

ROUGET P: Exactly. What a happy simile.

RENE L: Ha, ha. I fooled you. Pomegranates are red.

ROUE S: My pomegranates are blue.

ROUGET P: And seedless.

ROUE S: Plunging cataracts about her loins

ROUGET P: Precisely.

RENE L: Wreathed in ever-thickening mists.

ROUE S: Her unreaaped armpits.

ROUGET P: How appropos.

RENE L: The newly minted moon a foolish sycophant.

ROUE S: O, sweet suggestive Earth.

RENE L: We celebrate thee and elevate thee.

RENE, ROUE, ROUGET P: O Geology, earth-mother of all the sciences.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: It is dawn and the Earth is singing
From moist canyons to the dry desert dunes.

(She signals the Street Musicians to play.)

Modal Overture and Dance.

(The Street Musicians improvise a short piece in the Dorian mode. The Gibbous Earth enters with her Typical Dance of the Gibbous Earth. At the conclusion of the dance, she sits in the Flute Boy's chair and crosses her legs demurely.)

EXPOSITORY SINGER: Three geologists have come on a journey
From distant places; with them their instruments.
Wishing to plumb the core of the mystery
of our Earth in her blue and green mantle.

RENE L: Let us, while we may, weigh and gauge this Earth of ours,
that we may know her.

ROUE S: We shall judge her masses and tick her off, count the pints,

thrust set square and sextant upon her, tape her and chain her and draw graticules upon her surface.

ROUGET P: Yes, with longeurs and attitudes.

RENE L: Ah, yes, brothers, let us have an apostrophe to earth.

ROUE S: But I would have a semicolon.

ROUGET P: And I, an asterisk.

RENE L: No quarreling, gentlemen. No quarreling. There is indeed enough for all. If we play our cards right.

ROUE S: (*Appraising the Gibbous Earth.*) Indeed there is.

ROUGET P: There is, indeed.

ROUE S: Let us grab the opportunity by the tits.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: (*Raises her hand. The Geologists stop in mid gesture. The Street Musicians play a few notes and stop as they realize the Expository Singer wishes to speak.*) Our tale is a tragic one. I will now sing the "Twelve Tone Song of Disillusionment."

Academic divertissements
Are but one trail
That lead but to
The abstract grave.

(*She signals the Geologists to resume.*)

ROUGET P: (*Glaring at the Musicians.*) I detect twelve-tone music. It is so . . . academic.

ROUE S: And I, thirteen-tone music.

RENE L: The problem, gentlemen, is the equal temperament system itself.

ROUE S: Whoever thought up that silly little plan?

ROUGET P: Personally, I prefer bagpipe music.

RENE L: Gentlemen, the name of the game is--geology, morphology, paleontology.

ROUE S: Hydrology, pneumonology, mineralogy.

ROUGET P: Fluorite, obsidian, hornblende, othoclase.

ROUE S: Now that you have got your rocks off, copper and silver and platinum.

RENE L: Brimstone and fool's gold.

ROUGET P: No more, brethren. I am overwhelmed.

ROUE S: (*To the Gibbous Earth.*) Proud creature of peaks and fissures, let us plumb your deeps.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Who, me?

RENE L: Allow me to detonate in your bowels so that I may record your seismic waves. (*A demure smile from the Gibbous Earth.*)

ROUGET P: Allow me to take you on my knees so that I may outline your topography.

ROUE S: Au contraire, colleagues, let me erect my rig to drill for oil.

RENE L: We will penetrate your mantle to see what magmas lie below.

GIBBOUS EARTH: (*Aside.*) What crust?

RENE L: I can restrain myself no longer. Dear colleagues, I give you the Earth. (*Mild applause from the Geologists.*) Since there are at least three hundred and sixty degrees in a circle and a minimum of

three hundred and sixty circles on a sphere, . . . (*He climbs up on a convenient bench and mimes a lecture.*)

EXPOSITORY SINGER: (*While Rene L mimes the lecture, she sings the Structure Song.*)

Crust, mantle and core together weigh
More than six billion trillion tons.
On the average our earth is more dense
By nearly five and six-tenths
Than water.

(*The Geologist finishes his lecture and climbs down. Everyone applauds.*)

RENE L: And now to the examination. (*The Geologists converge onto the Gibbous Earth.*)

ROUE S: The introspectis.

ROUET P: The exagmination. (*They whip out magnifying glasses and examine their subject while she several poses like a photographer's model.*)

ROUE S: Look at this, Rouget Parthenogenesis. An eroded plunging fold!

ROUET P: This wandering stream, Roue Siperarsolentesis, has made penepains of her eskers. There's scarcely any glacial deposit left.

ROUE S: Don't blame the Earth. It's not her fault. (*Rene L winces.*)

ROUET P: The onus is on you, dear colleague, to justify your position.

ROUE S: I beg to differ, old colleague. The onus is on her. Turn around, dear, and show it to us.

RENE L: (*Appalled at the bad puns.*) I believe I am about to develop a terminal moraine headache.

ROUGET P: One that aspirin will not cure?

(Selena the Silvery Moon saunters in and goes into orbit around the Gibbous Earth.)

RENE L: By Jove, what's that!

EXPOSITORY SINGER: The silvery moon with silvery shoon. *(Selena the Silvery Moon stops and does a few dance steps in place.)*

ROUGET P: "Shoon" is not a word.

ROUE S: Poo. The lengths some people go to make a rhyme.

RENE L: I should point out that "shoon" is a word; the plural of shoe.

ROUE S: She's barefoot.

RENE L: The idea of a shoe if not the shoe itself. Sort of a zero state of shoe.

ROUE S: Get her out of here.

RENE L: She's useful. She reflects light.

ROUE S: But only at night. I'll take the sun any day.

RENE L: That's the point, old colleague. It is dark at night. Whereas, the lazy sun shines only in the daytime when it is light anyway.

ROUGET P: Actually, she is blue on the opposite side so we can't see her in the daytime.

ROUE S: How come we never see her backside.

ROUGET P: Modesty.

RENE L: Actually, it is because she rotates at the same rate she revolves.

ROUE S: She can rotate right out of my orbit. (*Selena the Silvery Moon dances out.*)

RENE L: You've offended her.

ROUGET P: The moon will be back, never fear. These things take time. (*Selena the Silvery Moon reenters waltzing with a naked man.*) Who's that?

EXPOSITORY SINGER: The Man In The Moon.

(The Street Musicians play the Man In The Moon Waltz. After a few measures, a loud discord is heard. The dancers fly offstage in opposite directions.)

ROUE S: I'm glad that's over.

ROUGET P: Send in the bagpipes.

ROUE S: (*The Geologists return to the examination of the Gibbous Earth.*) Coal.

ROUGET P: Very Useful.

ROUE S: Gold.

ROUGET P: Very exciting. What's that odor?

ROUE S: Helium gas.

RENE L: Helium was first discovered in the sun. It is odorless, colorless, and tasteless.

ROUE S: So are you. Especially the latter two.

ROUGET P: Of course it is odorless and tasteless if it is that far away in the sun.

ROUE S: But not colorless. By their spectrum ye shall know them.

RENE L: The earth has a spectrum, too.

ROUE S: Show us your spectrum, dear. (*The Gibbous Earth smiles demurely.*)

ROUGET P: Where is it?

ROUE S: Right (he touches her on the chest) here. (*A jet of oil shoots up.*) A gusher, a gusher, oh god!

EXPOSITORY SINGER: The Ecstasy Dance for Geologist and Percussion. (*The Street Musicians strike up a tune. The Geologists dance ridiculously. The Earth stands up and sing.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: (*During the following song, the Geologists become increasingly nauseous, stagger and fall, finally crawling to a bucket and vomiting profusely.*)

“The Song of the Earth”

Oh dee uh plummet
Er in de birds
Is a faintin inna
Hot sun, boy, boy
When dem weedos
Conjure up a storm
Winner grazopper
Shooten up de arm

An by gar--A freakin daffodil!

(*The Gibbous Earth holds forth a faded plastic rose.*)

(*Enter Pluto, the most distant planet. He orbits the Earth at an inconvenient distance.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: (*To Pluto.*) Conjugate with me.

PLUTO: Can't. Too far out.

RENE L: (*Standing.*) Actually, that is not the case.

ROUE S: (*Standing.*) What is the case, then.

ROUGET P: (*Standing.*) Explicate.

RENE L: It's a matter of perspective.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: Mr. Pluto, if you will cease your eccentric circumlocutions, we may hear the reasons advanced by their professors. (*Pluto stops. The Gibbous Earth sits down and crosses her legs.*)

“Song of Conjugation”

RENE L: Gin a body meet a body
Comin' through the sky
Gin a body strike a body
Need a body fly?

ROUE S: Ev'ry body has a buddy
Flyin' through the sky
If a buddy bump a body
Should that buddy die?

ROUGET P: Isaac's Laws are surely bonny
But they don't apply
When you pass a simple speckle
Flying through the sky.

RENE L: It's a matter of perspective
Cruisin' through the void
What you see is what it missed
And that's my final word.

ROUE S and ROUGET P: His final word.

(*End of the Song of Conjugation.*)

EXPOSITORY SINGER: The Big Bang explained.

PLUTO: It's cold out here.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Then, dear Pluto, our love is not to be.

PLUTO: Looks that way

GIBBOUS EARTH: Fare thee well.

(Pluto enters a hyperbolic orbit and vanishes from the solar system.)

GIBBOUS EARTH: To discover a planet and then lose him.

RENE L: Appearance is deceiving. Pluto will return on the next cycle, never fear.

ROUE S: We didn't fear.

ROUGET P: It is more like astonishment.

ROUE S: Dare we hint at blasphemy.

ROUGET P: Resurrection by revolution.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: And so the planet Pluto takes his leave of us to pursue his affairs in distant space.

GIBBOUS EARTH: But meanwhile, we have me.

RENE L: Frankly, dear colleagues, I find this Earth entirely too . . . aggregatable.

ROUE S: I agree.

ROUGET P: You mean, lumpy.

RENE L: Put crudely--yes.

ROUE S: She's unconstant.

ROUGET P: You mean, incontinent.

RENE L: We should call in a sphere.

ROUE S: Start with a hoop. Or a dot.

ROUGET P: Brilliant, my dear Roue Sipenarsolentesis.

ROUE S: Your servant, dear Rouget Parthenogenesis.

ROUE S: Do you agree with the majority, Rene Lopinarsinopolis?

RENE L: (*To the Expository Singer.*) Would you have a hoop in stock?

GIBBOUS EARTH: What about me?

RENE L: You are not a voting member.

ROUE S: You are merely an example of the shadow cast on Plato's wall of the real Earth.

GIBBOUS EARTH: I call it an example of myopia.

RENE L: I'll have you know I have perfect vision, young lady.

ROUGET P: He will have you know he is clear-headed. (*I.e., bald.*)

ROUE S: He will have you know.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: The Golden Hoop of Parmenides. (*Enter the Golden Hoop, bowing and curtsying.*) She is constructed of the purest of gold alloys.

GOLDEN HOOP: Tee hee.

RENE L: Shouldn't that be "alloys"?

ROUE S: You can't make a homophonic spelling clear on stage.

RENE L: Want to wager?

ROUE S: Certainly not.

RENE L: Put your argent in your bouche.

ROUE S: Ten drachmas.

RENE L: Done. (*Displays a sign "A - L - L - O - I - E - S".*)

ROUE S: No fair! you cheated. (*Rene L turns over the sign to reveal "F - A - R - E" printed on the obverse. Roue S hands Rene L a banknote.*)

RENE L: That and a fortune will get me a ride on the subway.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: (*Clears her throat.*) About the Golden Hoop of Paradise.

RENE L: You said "Parminides."

EXPOSITORY SINGER: I meant "Paradise."

RENE L: Say what you mean.

ROUE S: Always be precise.

ROUGET P: Eschew obfuscation.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Gesundheit!

(*The Geologists inspect the Golden Hoop closely.*)

RENE L: I am afraid we cannot accept this hoop.

GIBBOUS EARTH: And why is that?

RENE L: A perfect hoop would have no thickness.

ROUE S: A perfect hoop would have diameter, but no width.

ROUGET P: There would be nothing but a golden glow.

RENE L: Indeed, nothing but the memory of its glow. (*The Golden Hoop vanishes abruptly.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: There, now, you've insulted the Hoop.

ROUGET P: (*Not noticing the disappearance of the Hoop.*) Substance without dimension is the ideal.

RENE L: On the contrary, I would say perfection is dimension without substance.

ROUE S: There's much to be said about it.

ROUGET P: The more said, the better.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: Gentlemen, the Perfect Sphere. (*Enter the Perfect Sphere with her Spherical Hop, accompanied by the Street Musicians. The Perfect Sphere is, of course, Selena the Silvery Moon in disguise.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: She can't dance.

PERFECT SPHERE: Row, row, row your boat, generally down the stream, merely, merely, merely, merely, merely, merely, merely. . . .

GIBBOUS EARTH: She can't sing, either.

PERFECT SPHERE: I don't have to. I'm perfect.

GIBBOUS EARTH: She doesn't even have a mons veneris.

ROUE S: Classical beauty does not require appurtenances.

RENE L: The perfection is in the line, you see.

GIBBOUS EARTH: The glory hole of grease meets the grand whore of Rome.

PERFECT SPHERE: That goes twice for you.

RENE L: The classical platonic sphere is considered the perfect solid.

GIBBOUS EARTH: She looks more like a spheroid to me.

ROUGET P: (*Greatly shocked.*) A spheroid!

EXPOSITORY SINGER: A particular embodiment of a sphere as expressed in the real world.

PROFESSORS OF GEOLOGY: Who asked you.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: It's in the script.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Poo. A mere spheroid.

Perfect Sphere: Am not.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Are too.

PERFECT SPHERE: D-two.

ROUE S: How true.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: I feel a song coming on.

“Song of Perfect Roundness”

Once upon a midnight clear
The Moon became a perfect sphere
A sphere that had no edge in sight
Round it was and shining bright.

(The Street Musicians improvise a few riffs.)

Oh, Sphere, I cried, come down and play.
She sang, “I’ll come another day.
“If you touch me, I will lose
“My silvery sheen of shaded blues.”

GIBBOUS EARTH: Translation. It's her time of month.

PERFECT SPHERE: Ovoid bitch!

(They fight. The Street Musicians play discords. The Gibbous Earth wins the fight and ejects the Perfect Sphere.)

GIBBOUS EARTH: No staying power.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: And now, for your intellectual delectation, a serious discussion of objectivity.

(During the following triologue, the Professors of Geology perform "Actions," which are improvised sequences of business, and which may or may not be echoed by the Street Musicians.)

RENE L: An Object is equal to the sum of its Attributes. (Action.)

ROUE S: In that you are wrong, Rene Lopenarsinopolis. An Object is more than the sum of its Attributes. (Action.)

ROUGET P: In counter to you both, Roue Sipenarsolentesis and Rene Lopenarsinopolis, an Object has no Attributes at all. (Action.)

RENE L: I beg to differ, Rouget Whats-your-name, every Object must have at least one Attribute. (Action.)

ROUGET P: And what could that be, Rene Loop-the-loop?

RENE L: It has the property of being an object.

ROUE S: He's got you there.

ROUGET P: A Property is not an Attribute.

ROUE S: What do you say to that, Mister Lopenarsolentesis.

RENE L: If that be the case, Mister Whatsis-name, how is it that we may classify all Objects according to their Attributes, such as weight, color, density, frangibility, specific heat refractive index, and so on and so on and so on. (Action.)

ROUE S: I'm Wise-ass. He's Whatsis-name.

ROUGET P: You fail to appreciate my point, Mister Loop-the-loop. And Mister Wise-ass. If an Object is a set of Attributes, when we put them all together, we possess in our hot little hands, not an Object, mind you, but merely a paper list of Attributes. Categorization is in the mind of the observer. (*Action.*) If there is no mind there are no Attributes. (*Action.*)

EXPOSITORY SINGER: If a tree falls in the forest--

STREET MUSICIANS: And there ain't no body 'round--

GIBBOUS EARTH: You don't chop up that durn old log--

STREET MUSICIANS: And you freeze all winter long.

EXPOSITORY SINGER: Put some wood in your wood box--

STREET MUSICIANS: Before it gets too cold--

GIBBOUS EARTH: You'll die before sunrise--

STREET MUSICIANS: And you won't ever make a sound. (*A final plunk. The Street Musicians begin to pack and leave one by one during the following.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: What about tits, Gentlemen?

RENE L: Where there is visible vapor with blackish mixtures of gases and suspended particles, there is the process of combustion.

ROUE S: Where there is wool over the eyes, there is a way.

ROUGET P: Show me a pig in clover and I'll show you pussy-whipped and pound-foolish.

RENE L: A door closes on both sides if it doesn't have a window.

ROUGET P: A sill without a window is like a day without a pane.

ROUE S: You've got to believe in turtles or they won't work.

ROUGET P: Certain land-tied islands take the form of a cusped spit.

GIBBOUS EARTH: Doesn't anyone like me the way I am?

RENE L: Shore lines of emergence are generally characterized by a nearly flat coastal plane covered with unconsolidated marine sediments.

ROUE S: To stabilize beaches or to induce prograding, a series of groins may be built perpendicular to the shore athwart the shore drift.

GIBBOUS EARTH: This is my hair.

RENE L: Fine filaments of comet tail.

ROUE S: She put the coma in Berenice.

ROUGET P: Autumn's crown of glory.

GIBBOUS EARTH: These are my eyes.

RENE L: Pools of sequestered innocence.

ROUE S: Hesperus's orbs.

ROUGET P: Mirrors of the soul.

GIBBOUS EARTH: There is more lower down.

RENE L: She walks in beauty light the night. (*Poses thoughtfully.*)

ROUE S: Once a night is enough. (*Action.*)

ROUGET P: Enough is never enough. (*Action.*)

EXPOSITORY SINGER: As you see, the Professors are caught up in their own conceptions. It is time for my exit. (*She walks slowly out.*)

GIBBOUS EARTH: (*Sadly.*) This is my obituary. (*She picks up the faded plastic rose and hands it to Rene Lopenarsinopolis, who immediately begins counting the petals. Exit the Gibbous Earth.*)

RENE L: (*Arriving at a conclusion.*) A rose! (*He holds it aloft.*)

ROUE S: By any other . . .

ROUGET P: Name . . .

RENE L: Procrastinates the transfinite.

(*The Professors of Geology bow and exit.*)

April Snow

Edward Byrne

A mid-morning mist lingered above the tree line,
floating over slow-flowing waters and steep banks
like some loose fabric ballooning in a mild breeze.
All the twisting limbs still dusted by light night snow,

it seemed as though we'd awakened to a sudden white
blossoming of spring buds. Beyond this spreading
mesh of branches, a distant bridge, blanched by haze,
appearing as if it were a pallid rainbow, arced across

the river's wide cleft. Close by, the clarity of fresh
footprints, sole evidence indicating early migration,
tracked into a rift of tangled undergrowth. In this still
setting, although we'd been drawn to all these signs

of a season foreshortened by a temporary halt to thawing,
our thoughts of the past remained like those many traces
of last fall's undecomposed leaves littering the terrain,
fragments still showing through the snowy landscape.

We noticed the way these stray bits stayed vaguely visible--
as if they were a part of a palimpsest, figures sketched
long ago, forgotten remnants of some previous scene
imperfectly erased from an often-used parchment. Then

we knew. Standing side by side alongside the river's edge, among elements emerging out of season, we understood why even these littlest details persist. Somehow they exist--as do the images that haunt our memories--to taunt us when

too late we realize the importance of those things we've lost, to assist us as we teach each other to enjoy what we have.



Elizabeth Holmes

The Final Approach of Flight 232

Jeff Barker

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

SYNOPSIS

A radio voice representing Minneapolis Center Control announces an emergency and hands off the flight to Sioux City Approach Control. Within moments, the United pilot and the Sioux City controller are working together to coax the crippled aircraft into the airport. The pilot focuses on his instrument panel and the controller focuses on her radar screen as they link hands across the miles to save as many lives as they can in a matter of a few minutes.

As it turns out, the plane's hydraulic lines have all been severed. It can only be controlled by using differential power on the plane's two wing engines. As the plane spirals down in right hand turns, the controller attempts to calculate a path to the airport. Suddenly the pilot announces a left hand turn toward the airport. Things are looking good until the controller realizes that the plane is on a potential collision course with the city. They make a dangerous attempt to get the plane on a better course. When this fails, and time is running out, the pilot heads straight for the runway. The controller rejoices to see the plane come into view, only to discover moments later that the plane is headed for a closed runway that is filled with emergency vehicles. A last second scramble clears the runway in time only to see the plane lose control and burst into flames. After the crash, we learn that the pilot actually survived. His story, along with the controller's, is an image of the beauty of disciplined human cooperation in the face of gravest danger.

The world of the play consists of a single chair to repre-

sent the control tower, a single chair to represent the cockpit, and a projected map showing the airplane's position throughout the play. Projections at the beginning also summarize details of the crash: date, location, number of casualties, and number of survivors. This perspective draws the audience into the urgency of the events of the play and sharply focuses attention on the human relationships.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: the air traffic controller assigned to bring airplanes to within five miles of the airport. In this case however, because of the emergency, the controller brings the plane all the way in. The controller works hard to remain calm professional so as not to upset the pilot in any way. Ultimately, since the pilot can hear her but not see her, her body tells a slightly different story than her voice. She is casually dressed but is not sloppy. This character may be played by either a female or a male.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: This character, on the other hand, should be played by a male actor because of all the references to him as "sir." He is in his forties or fifties. There is no attempt to costume him in a literal United Airline uniform. He wears a blue long-sleeved shirt and a dark tie.

SCENE

The control tower and the cockpit of the airplane, simultaneously.

TIME

July 19, 1989.

* * *

SETTING

There are two 4-foot by 8-foot platforms on the stage. They are parallel to each other and perpendicular to the audience. They are about six feet apart from one another. On each platform is a single, modern chair with arms. The chairs face straight toward the audience. A projection screen hangs behind the actors.

PROJECTIONS

Throughout the play, we see an aviation map which shows the entire flight path of the airplane from just shortly before the initial engine failure until the plane arrives at Sioux City. A tiny white airplane travels the flight path by cross fading of slides throughout the dialogue. In this way, the audience is able where the plane is at each point of the dialogue. These flight path positions are noted within the body of the play according to the numbers which correspond to the map at the back of the script (*see page 73*). Other projections used in the play are titles and video footage of the crash. These are described within in the body of the play.

AT RISE

The play begins in darkness. Music is heard--a high, slightly ringing sound, somewhat melancholy. The actors take their places. United 232 Heavy is seated stage right and Sioux City Approach Control is standing above the chair stage left. The first image of the flight path map fades in. The plane is at radar position thirteen (R13). As the music continues, the plane moves to R20, then R28. As the plane moves to R36, the high melody is accompanied by a solid low tone. This low tone accompanies each of the following titles and the plane continues to move along the flight path as indicated.

Transcript of Communications Between

(R41)

Sioux Gateway Airport Approach Control

(R46)

and United Airlines Flight 232

(R51)

Immediately Prior to Crash Landing on Runway 22

(R55)

Casualties: 11

(R59)

Survivors: 185

(R62)

July 19, 1989, 4:00 p.m.

(R67)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Sioux City. Got an emergency for you.

(R71)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Uhhh, I got a United aircraft coming in. Lost number two engine, having a hard time controlling the aircraft right now. He's out of twenty nine thousand right now and descending to Sioux City right now. He's . . . east of your VOR, but he wants the equipment standing by right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. Is he the two seven six one code?

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: I believe so. Standby here.

(R78)

He's forty miles east, forty four miles east right now, zero nine one radial. The two seven six one code.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Uhh, radar contact.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: He's descending out of twenty nine right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: PJ.

(R81)

(Pause.) Did you say you say you had a radar on United Airlines Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Affirmative radar.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: He's having a hard time controlling the plane right now and trying to slow down and get stea-steady on a heading right now. As soon as I get comfortable, I'll ship him over to you and he'll be your control.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

(R85)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: You talkin' to five six one now?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Yes, we are.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Okay, north of the VOR I got a guy at fourteen. A Hartley goin' to Sioux Falls. I'll keep him.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: And you got fifteen thousand and below as far as we are concerned now also.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Good'enuff. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: PJ.

(R89)

(Sioux City Approach Control sits. Lights up on the actors as soon as both are seated. A low level engine sound begins. This sound continues until the crash, slightly increasing in volume during the last few minutes prior to the crash. Sioux City Approach Control spends most of her time looking straight ahead at her radar screen. United 232 Heavy looks at his instrument panels which are slightly down, both straight ahead and to the right. He also looks out his windshield straight ahead. His hands rest easily on the inside of

his knees and do not suggest any attempt to mime the controls of the plane. His upper torso, however, responds as if his hands were pulling on the yoke.)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Sioux City approach, United Airlines Two Thirty Two Heavy with you out of twenty six. Heading right now is two nine oh, and we've got about a five hundred foot rate of descent.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Airlines Two Thirty Two Heavy, Sioux City Approach. Sioux City weather VFR. Wind three five zero at one one. *(She looks directly above her radar screen for the altimeter number.)* Altimeter three zero zero. Fly heading . . . two five five'll be vectors for a visual approach to runway three one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, so you know. We have almost no control ability. Very little elevator and almost no aileron. We are controlling the turns by power. I don't think we can turn right, but I think we can only make left turns.

(R93)

We are starting a little bit of a left turn. I mean we can only turn right, but we can't turn left.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Understand, sir, you can only make right turns?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: That's affirmative.

(Sioux City Approach Control sits up straighter, looks at the imaginary controller on her left and then back at the radar screen.)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Your current . . . uh, your present tracks put you about eight miles north of the airport, sir, and the only way we can get you around to three one is a slight left turn with with differential power or if you can, like, jockey it over.

(R97)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're in a right turn right now. That's about the only way we can go. We'll be able to make very slight

left turns on final but right now just going to make right turns to whatever heading you want.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Ah, right turn heading two five five.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two five five.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Thirty six, Sioux City. *(Pause.)* Thirty six, Sioux City. *(Return to calm as she speaks to United 232.)* United Two Thirty Two Heavy. When you roll out on the right turn, stop your heading on about a two four zero heading.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Thirty six line.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(Return to terseness.)* Yeah, that United, he can only make right turns. I'll have to jockey him back around to the right into your airspace, too.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Okay. You've go him for anything you need.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: 'kay.

(R104)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(She looks over her shoulder as some one asks her to find out how many people are on the plane. She glances back to the radar screen and then speaks.)* United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading two four zero and say your souls on board.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Say again?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Souls on board, United Two Thirty Two Heavy.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're getting that right now. *(He glances over his right shoulder at the navigator.)*

(R110)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you continue your heading two four zero?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: I don't know. We'll try for it.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Say souls on board and fuel remaining.

(R114)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: (*Looks at fuel gages.*) We have thirty seven six fuel. (*Glances back at navigator.*) And we are counting the souls.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R118)

(*United 232 Heavy looks to his right at his engine gages. He looks pointedly at the co-pilot. He looks back at the gages.*)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Sioux City, United Two Thirty Two.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy, Sioux City.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We have *no . . .* hydraulic fluid. Which means we have no elevator control--almost none--and very little aileron control. I have serious doubts about making the airport.

(R122)

Have you got some place . . . near here . . . that we might be able to ditch? Unless we get control of this airplane, we're going to put it down wherever it happens to be.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Ah, standby one. (*Pause.*)

(R125)

United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you hold that present heading, sir?

(Pause.)

(R127)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: 'z'e airport now for Two Thirt Two as we're turning around in circles?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Say again.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: *(With a bare hint of humor or chagrin.)* Where is the airport for us now as we come spinning down here?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Sioux City airport is about twelve o'clock and three six miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We are trying to go straight.

(R129)

We're not having much luck. *(Pause.)*

(R132)

Sioux City, United Two Thirty Two. Could you give us, please, your, ah, ILS frequency, the heading, and the length of the runway.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Affirmative. The localizer frequency is one zero nine point three, and you're currently about thirty five miles to the northeast. It'll take about two . . . two . . . two three five, two four zero heading to join it.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll see if we can come up with that. *(He turns to listen to the navigator. He glances to the co-pilot.)*

(R135)

Two Thirty Two, we're going to try and put it in at Sioux City.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Understand you're going to try to make it into Sioux City. *(She glances over her left shoulder to hear a comment behind her.)* There is no airports out that way that can accommodate you, sir.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We'll head for Sioux City.

(R142)

We got a little bit of control back now. How long is your runway?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport, uh, the runway is nine thousand feet long and hundred fifty foot wide.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. Thank you.

(He looks at the co-pilot. She looks to her left at her area supervisor. They all have realized that a plane without hydraulics will not be able to stop on that length runway.)

(R145)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: And United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Did you get the souls on board count?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Standby. Tell you right now, we don't even have time to let go and call the gal.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two hundred ninety two souls on board United Two Thirty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two, say agi-say again.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Ah, two hundred ninety two.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger, thank you.

(R151)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two Thirty Two, we are just going to have to keep turning right. Not much we can do about left. We're going to have to come back around to the heading.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. Roger. Need

you on about a two three five heading, sir, if you can manage that and hold that.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll see what happens.

(R156)

(Pause.) Where is Sioux City from my present position, United Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. It's about two twenty on the heading and thirty seven miles.

(R161)

United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Do you think you'll be able to hold about a two forty heading?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll try and turn to it right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger. (Pause.) When you get turned to that two forty heading, sir, the airport will be about, oh, twelve o'clock and thirty eight miles.

(R165)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We're trying to control it just by power alone now. We have no hydraulics at all so we're doing our best here.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger. Ah, we have notified the equipment out in that area, too, sir. The equipment's here on the airport standing by and they're sending some out to that area.

(R168)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. You got one twelve five for the localizer and what's the heading?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Localizer is one zero nine point three, one oh nine point three is the localizer for one three. And two forty on the heading.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. One oh nine three. And two forty.

(R174)

UNITED TWO THIRTY TWO, ah, we're going to have to continue one more right turn. We've got the elevators pretty much under control within three or four hundred feet but we still can't do much with the steering.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Understand you do have the elevators possible under control. Will you be able to hold the altitude?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Negative. We don't have it. We are better. That's all.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Using maximum deflections on the controls both directions trying to control it.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R178)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: How far is the field now, please?

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. You're currently, ah, thirty three miles northeast.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There are a couple of really small airports out in the vicinity you're in. Ah, Storm Lake is, ah, four thousand two hundred feet by seventy five. That's about fifteen miles east of your position.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thirty Two. Roger. We're still going down. Trying to control it as we get down a little lower here. Ah, we'll pick it out.

(R182)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There is a small airport at twelve o'clock and, ah, seven miles. The runway is four thousand feet long there. *(Pause.)*

(R188)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, United Two Thirty Two. We're starting a left turn.

(Both characters have a sense of elation.)

(R193)

UNITED 232 HEAVY (continued): Since, ah, we have no hydraulics, braking is gonna really be a problem. Ah, we suggest the equipment be towards the far end of the runway.

(R198)

And I think under the circumstances, regardless of the condition of the airplane, when we stop we're going to evacuate. So you might notify the, ah, ground crew equipment that we're going to do that.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, wilco, sir, and if you can continue that left turn to about a two twenty heading, sir, that will take you right to the airport.

(R203)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two twenty now. *(Beat.)* Your ceiling right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, the ceiling is four thousand broken, and, ah, the visibility is one five underneath it.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: The airport elevation.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, one thousand ninety eight. Ten ninety eight.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you.

(R208)

Ah, how far are we from the airport now, two thirty two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, thirty five miles, and if you continue that left turn about another, oh, fifteen or twenty degrees, it'll take you right to the runway.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We don't have the localizer or the glide slope, so. . . .

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, yes sir. You're well too far north of it now.

(R211)

UNITED Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you, ah, still make the, ah, slight right turns?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Yeah.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger, United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading two one five.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two one five, okay. *(Beat.)* Right turn no problem. It's the left turn that's a problem.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Picked up the glide slope anyway.

(R216)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Negative, sir, you're well too far north.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We know. But it's just coming in though.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Your present heading is, ah, a little too close, sir. Can you make a shallow left turn about, oh, ten degrees or so?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll try that. *(Pause.)*

(R217)

Where's the airport for Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. The airport is currently twelve o'clock and, ah, two one miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Twenty one miles at twelve o'clock.

(R219)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. You are going to have to widen out just slightly to your left side, ah, to make the turn to final and also to take you away from the city.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Whatever you do, keep us away from the city.

(R220)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading, ah, heading one eight zero. One eighty.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: I don't think we can do that, but we'll try.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: We need it over there as far as you can get us.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: You're currently, oh, one seven miles northeast of the airport. You're doin' good.

(R222)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: It has to be a right turn one eighty. We can't do anything about it.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There's a tower, ah, five miles off your right side that's, ah. . . . Three thousand four hundred MSL is the height.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thirty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. How steep a right turn can you make, sir?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: About a thirty degree bank.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Turn right heading one eight zero.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: One eighty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Been advised there's a four lane highway up in that area, sir, if you can pick that up.

(R225)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we'll see what we can do here. We've already put the gear down, and we're going to have to put it down on something solid if we can.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. If you can hold that altitude, sir, the right turn to one eighty, ah, would put you on about, oh, ten miles east of the airport.

(R225A)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: That's what we're trying to do. *(Pause.)* We've got about, ah, three or four minutes to go it looks like.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Can you pick up a road or something up there?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're trying. It's still, ah, anywhere from two thousand feet up to fifteen hundred down now in waves.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R233)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: The airport?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport is, oh, about eighteen miles southeast of your position, about two twenty on the heading, but we're going to need you southbound away from the city first if you can hold a one eighty heading.

(R238)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're trying to get to it right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. I've been advised if you can pick up a road or anything where you can possible land it on that.

(R241)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're hundred and eighty degrees heading now. What do you want?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. If you can hold the altitude, the one eighty heading will work fine for about seven miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're trying to turn back.

(R244)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you hold that heading, sir?

UNITED 2323 HEAVY: Yeah, we're on it now for a little while.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. That heading will put you, oh, ah, currently fifteen miles northeast of the airport. If you can hold that, it will put you on about three mile final.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're givin' it heck.

(R247)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(She sees on the radar that he has*

just lost the heading and is going to come in over the city. She responds physically, perhaps shaking her as She says the next line.) United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport's currently twelve o'clock and one three miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We're looking for it. *(Beat.)*
(R252)

Okay, ah. . . . *(He turns to look over his shoulder at the navigator.)* The field elevation is what again?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, one ten . . . thousand ninety eight, ah, eleven hundred feet, ah, one thousand one hundred.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you. *(Pause.)* We're starting down a little bit now. We've got a little better control of the elevator.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Uni-United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. The airport is currently at your one o'clock position one zero miles. *(She hears the controller to her left say something and also glances to someone behind her.)* And, ah, United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, if you cannot make the airport, sir, there is an interstate that runs, ah north to south to the east side of the airport. Ah, it's a four-lane interstate.

(R258)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're just passing it right now. We're going to try for the airport.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. And advise when you get the airport in sight.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Have runway in sight. *(She scoots her chair back from her position at the radar desk. She stands looking out the control cab window in a downstage right direction. She is filled with joy and relief. He's made it!)*

(R258) *(Fades out on about an eight count.)*

UNITED 232 HEAVY (continued): We'll be with you very shortly. Thanks a lot for your help.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The wind is currently three six zero at one one. Three sixty at eleven. You're cleared to land on any runway.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: (*He laughs.*) You want to be particular and make it a runway, huh. (*She laughs.*) Say the wind one more time.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, wind zero one zero at one one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, say it again one more time.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, zero one zero one one. (*As she looks toward the radar control panel to double-check the numbers, she sees the emergency equipment lined up on Runway twenty two. She sees the plane descending fast. She needs to find out if he is planning to land on twenty-two.*) And, ah, there is a runway that's closed, sir, that could probably work, too . . . the south, ah, it runs northeast to southwest.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're pretty well lined up on this one or we think we will be.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: (*She waves frantically to someone over her left shoulder and on the other side of the cab. She is making sure that they are contacting someone to get the emergency equipment moved.*) United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, roger, sir, that's, ah, closed runway. That will work, sir. We're getting the equipment off the runway, and they'll line up for that one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: How long is it?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: (*Since it's a closed runway, she doesn't know! She turns upstage over her shoulder looking for someone to shout the answer. In three seconds that seem like a year, someone does. She looks back at the plane.*) Sixty six hundred feet. Six thousand six hundred and the equipment is coming off. (*She watches.*

She looks at the equipment that is driving away. She looks at the far end of the runway off to her left.) At the end of the runway, it's just a wide open field, so, sir, so the length won't be a problem.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay.

(On the screen behind the actors, the video of the crash is seen. Just before the plane lands, we hear a ground proximity warning alarm. The alarm is accompanied by a computerized voice warning the pilot. The voice repeats, "Pull up, pull up" until the plane hits the runway. At the point of impact percussive music begins. The deep percussive sounds are accompanied by high pitched tones that grow in volume throughout the crash video. During the crash video, the actors move through a series of freezes that move their bodies to the positions they would realistic have at the end of the actual crash. United 232 Heavy slumps forward in his chair in a sequence of seven freezes. Sioux City Approach Control moves her gaze along runway Two Two moving from right to left in a series of seven freezes. Both characters change position at precisely the same instant and in time with the music. At the end of the video, the lights go out on United 232 Heavy. Sioux City Approach Control switches back into real time. She sobs and slumps into her chair. After a few moments, the lights fade on her. Titles come up on the screen.)

AT THE CRASH SITE

Ground Amulances: 35

Helicopters: 9

EMS Personnel: 150

Fire Departments: 31

Communities Providing Emergency Equipment: 40

(Cross fade to next screen.)

THE SURVIVORS OF FLIGHT 232
INCLUDED ALL FOUR MEMBERS
OF THE COCKPIT CREW

(Title fades out.)

(A slide of the radar map of United 232 Heavy's flight path fades in. A video title appears on top of the slide.)

TWO YEARS LATER . . .

(A slide cross fades in. This new slide has 232's flight path, but there is another flight path. This new one is straight and has a small white airplane again. The difference is that there is no radar recording ahead of the airplane. The slide cross fades to indicate even more of this new straight flight path. One more slide fades in to show more of this new flight path. We also notice that the latter part of the flight path is fading away, in the same way that the smoke stream from a jet fades. In the darkness, the actors have stood up and are now standing behind their chairs. We hear the same high bell tones that we heard at the beginning of the play.)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Sioux City, thirty six line.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Thirty six, Sioux City.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Yeah, I got a call comin' down for you outta thirty nine thousand. Standby.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Alright. KB.

(The slide cross fades as the plane moves closer to the edge of the screen.)

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Sioux City Approach, United 1923 Heavy.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United 1923 Heavy, Sioux City. I think I'd recognize that voice anywhere. How are you, sir?

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Sioux City. I'm VFR. This'll be my last pass over your control prior to my retirement. Any last instructions?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: No, your heading looks good. And hold that altitude, sir.

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Roger. Wilco. United 1923 Heavy clear.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Sioux City. Clear.

(Slide cross fades to indicate that the plane has left the viewing area. Slide cross fades again to fade the trailing radar blips completely out. All that is left is the flight path of United 232. This final slide fades to black.)

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play tells its story through the use of historical phenomena surrounding the last half hour of the flight of United 232 on July 19, 1989: the radar record of the flight path, the transcript of radio transmissions, and the video footage of the crash. The final scene of the play is contrived on the basis of the recollection of Sioux City Controller, Mark Zielezinski.

The radio transmissions upon which the majority of the dialogue is based took place between several individuals in three locations. For the purpose of this play, the voices have been condensed to represent the three locations: Minneapolis Center Control, Sioux City Approach Control, and the cockpit of United Airlines Flight 232. Because of this condensing of characters, the actors are free to strive for occupational authenticity rather than impersonation of any particular historical individual. The character names chosen represent this emphasis.

GLOSSARY

Out of twenty nine: the airplane is currently flying at 29,000 feet above sea level and descending.

VOR: the VHF Omni-directional Radio sends a signal by which pilots navigate. Sioux City's VOR was shut down for service on July 19, 1989. But for this fact, much of the conversation contained in this play would not have taken place.

Equipment: emergency vehicles.

Two seven six one code: a number that shows up on the controller's radar screen, identifying a specific aircraft. On this particular date, 2761 was the radar number assigned to United 232.

KB: when controllers talk to one another, they use their initials to sign off.

Heavy: the category of large aircraft to which the DC10 belongs.

240 on the heading: planes are navigated according to degrees on the compass. 360 degrees points straight north. 180 degrees points straight south. Thus, 240 (or "two forty") is a south-westerly heading.

Runway three one: runways are also labeled according to compass headings, but the final zero is dropped. A plane landing on Sioux City's longest runway will be landing toward the northwest on runway three one (310 degrees). Planes landing on the opposite end of the same runway are landing on runway one three (or heading 130 degrees).

VFR: Visual Flight Rules, or good weather.

Altimeter: this number indicates the correct barometric pressure, which in turn affects the altitude gauge in the airplane.

Aileron: wings flaps which affect the airplane's turns.

Souls on board: passengers. On United 232, the captain gave a souls on board figure which did not include the four pilots in the cockpit.

ILS: the Instrument Landing System is a short range radio signal used to guide planes directly to a particular runway. Also referred to as a "localizer".

Glide slope: the correct angle of descent, which is also sent by radio from the runway to the aircraft.

Twelve o'clock: straight ahead of an airplane's present position.

Maximum deflections: pulling the controls as far as they will go.

Ceiling: the distance between the ground and the clouds.

Elevation: the distance above MSL (mean sea level).

Thirty degree bank: the maximum allowable turn for this type aircraft.

Contributors

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DICK BONKER resides in Milford, Pennsylvania. He co-founded the "Bread & Circuses" repertory company in Rochester, New York, with Michael O'Donoghue, and has produced, directed and performed in several plays.

EDWARD BYRNE is a professor of American literature and creative writing at Valparaiso University. He has published two collections of poetry. His work has appeared in various journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *The American Scholar*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *Missouri Review*.

CRAIG CRIST-EVANS teaches British and world literature at a private high school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and writes critical reviews for the *Bloomsbury Review*. Crist-Evans has published poetry in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *eleventh MUSE*, *Bluffs reader*, *Magnum*, and the *Dallas Review*.

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KATHERINE McCANLESS, born and bred in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1992 won the Hackney Literary Awards, the Tennessee Valley Writer's Competition, and the Seymour Adelman Poetry Prize. In 1993, she won the Birmingham Art Association's LitFest contest and was published in *Bacchanal*. She co-edits *Red Tree* at Bryn Mawr College.

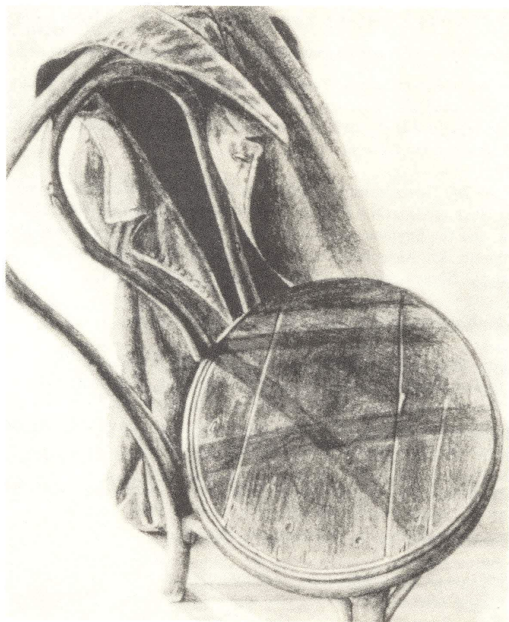
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MICHAEL RUSSELL photographically documented several secluded islands of the South Pacific for almost a year in 1974. He is now a freelance photographer in Williamsport, Maryland.

BRAD SCHAEGLER is an instructor of humanities at Northern Wyoming Community College. His poetry has appeared in *Amelia*, *Plainsongs*, *Green Fuse*, *Permafrost*, and the *Owen Wister Review*.

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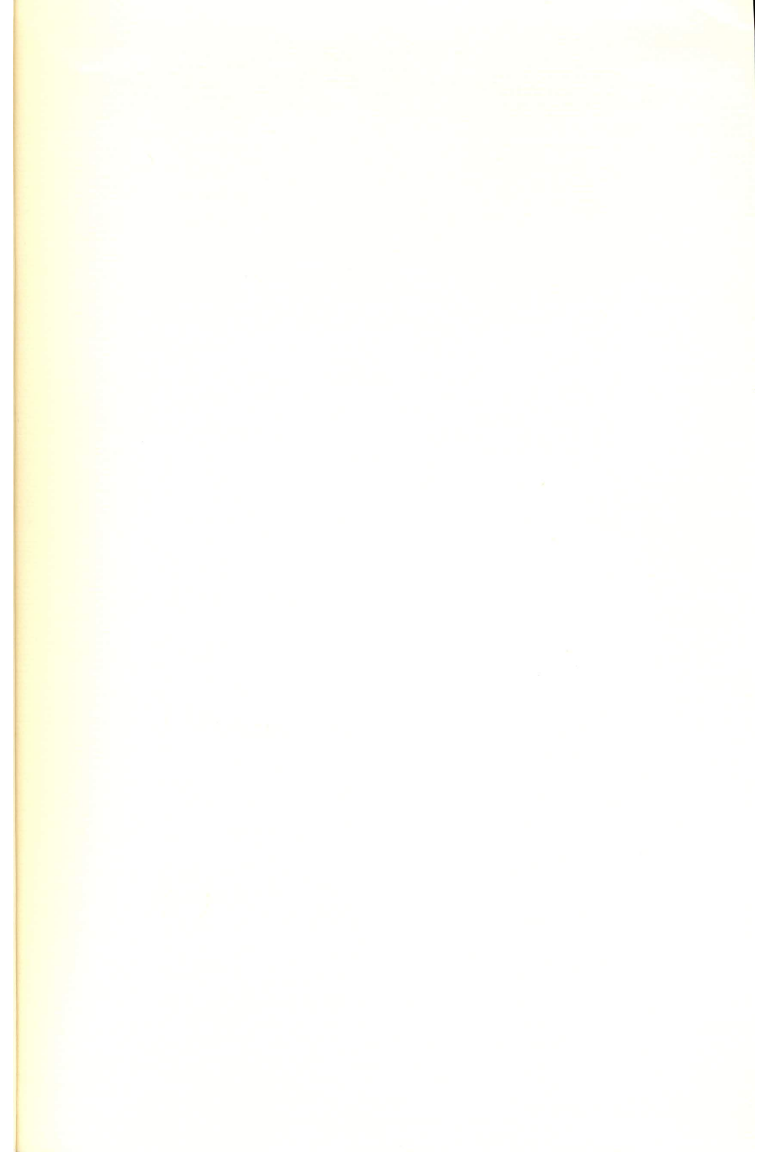
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