

1979

Overtures - 1979

Lauralyn Rae

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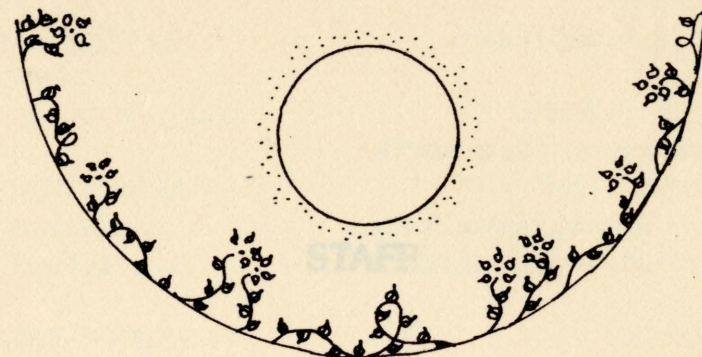
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OVERTURES





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*I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.*

— T.S. Eliot
“Preludes”

Special thanks to Apocalypse advisor and UNI post-in-
residence, Elizabeth Libby.





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Around these images, and cling;
The notion of some infinitely gentle
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"Preludes"

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Special thanks to Apocalypse advisor and UNI poet-in-residence, Elizabeth Libbey.

PETER FERRY	
<i>Writing Friendly Letters</i>	5
PAULETTE ROESKE	
Anonymous Notes to Stephen	10
Death of a Thief	11
Two Mallards: A Love Poem	12
Plot With Alternative Endings	13
r.m. rembacz	
Ebb Tide	15
HARRY HILD	
If You Were a Poem	16
To Keep a Poet Warm	18
A Private Bridge	20
ELIZABETH PETERSON	
House Call	22
We See Right Away	23
A Food Thing	24
FRANKLIN E. JONES ³	
<i>from: notes from the wayside</i>	
Barbara: To You and I Survivors, Unfolding	25
Hard Time	26
Vera	28
CYNTHIA POE	
Light	32
The Counselor	33
This is the Living Room of the Atlantic Ocean	35
Bird	36
MARK PERLBERG	
The Bewitched Mill	38
The Inn	39

SARAH ROLLER	
Flight	40
Dying is Not Death	42
RICHARD DAVIS	
Ambiguity	43
The Rat	44
ELI EHRENPREIS	
Returning Waves	45
RON SIVILS	
Inner Circle	46
JERRY PENDERGAST	
Portrait of Blanche DuBois, Abbreviated	49
Portrait in Progress	51
MARYANN GELLER MOISE	
Losing	52
In Fog	53
THOMAS KERTH	
<i>Now I Lay Me Down</i>	55
LIBBY NEIDITCH	
Needlepoint	61
PO'ETRY	62
JIM ELLEDGE	
Episode	63
EDITH FREUND	
Don't I Get to Initial Changes in the Contract	64
Going Home With Mary	65
A Last Word	66

Writing Friendly Letters

One day that March I got thirty-two letters in the mail. I've always enjoyed getting letters, though I really haven't gotten too many in my life and of those I've gotten, not more than a half dozen or so haven't been disappointing once I've read them. But I still like to get them. Maybe it's seeing my name written by so many different hands or typed in so many different scripts. I'd hate to tabulate the number of mornings I've wasted waiting for the postman and only, more often than not, to find that he has nothing for me because the two or three people who might have written don't know where I am or have already written and are waiting for letters from me. But that realization only comes after the postman. In college I would frequently cross the campus between classes just to check my mailbox and I ruefully remember the day that I saw four letters through the little window and got so nervous I couldn't think of my combination and had to go upstairs for it, only to find on my return that all four letters were actually for Alexander Bone in 222 instead of me in 322. And how many anxious moments I've stood in line at American Express offices watching the girl thumbing through the S's and shake her head. Once my mother forwarded a church newsletter to me in Cadiz and I spent the better part of an afternoon reading it. I'll read anything with my name on it. I looked forward to both my eighteenth and twenty-first birthdays because I knew that with each I'd become eligible for an increased amount of junk mail. I don't mind junk mail at all and always read it thoroughly and conscientiously. Recently one bank offered me a tennis racket if I'd deposit a certain amount of money and another offered to restring my racket if I'd deposit a smaller amount. I tried for days to figure out a way to take advantage of both opportunities, though I didn't have enough money to take advantage of either and, in fact, don't play tennis. I didn't rest well until both offers had expired. These days I have fewer and fewer friends, or at least fewer friends who are inclined to write and, living at home as I am, I'm not even getting letters from my mother anymore. So, I was sort of tickled to get thirty-two letters in a single day.

Actually, thirty one of those letters came in the same envelope and they all sounded pretty much like this one:

Overtures

NEIL LUKATCH	
The Photograph You Took Ten Years Ago	67
Farm Couple, Belgium, 1914	68
LINDA ORR	
No Exit	69
The Sequel He Tells	70
RENNY GOLDEN	
Am I My Sister's Keeper	72
ENID POWELL	
Omissions	73
LAURALYN RAE	
Your House	78
Picasso's Mother and Child	79
DON HOFFMAN	
Easy Roses	80
He Loves His Cat	81
Iguanas in Chichen-Itza	83
Guidobaldo Thanks Elizabeth	84
ALICE RYERSON	
Island Courtyard	86
One of the Many Mansions is a Park of Pain	87
The Visit	88
contributors notes	91
photo credits:	
r.w. peluso	pages 14, 48, 77, 90
Jeanette Lukaszow	page 31

Overtures

March 3, 1972

Dear Mr. Shears,

We are now to the chapter on writing friendly letters so that is why I am writing you. Everyone here in seven-three is just fine and we all hope you are fine, too. Some people miss you because the teacher who took over gives us more homework. I am pleased to inform you that we are number one in the conference in basketball in seventh grade and number two in eighth grade with a good chance to take it all.

You may be sorry to hear that Rodney Mills who was in eighth grade and on the basketball team was killed in an automobile accident. The team was pretty shaken up and that may be why they lost to Emerson. Many kids went to the funeral and school was out a little early.

Sincerely, Roger Davies

Eleven of the letters, all from boys, mentioned the success of the basketball teams and of those, four, all from boys on the team, used the phrase, "a good chance to take it all." Twenty-two letters told me of the demise of Rodney Mills, who I don't remember. One letter was two pages long and told me in some detail just how each member of the class was behaving. Another letter from a hateful child named Rebecca consisted of seven sentences and, because they were constructed strangely, I studied them and discovered that the capital letters taken together spelled "fuck you." Four letters described vacations past and future. One from a boy named Lester had a postscript, It said, "P.S. As of right now I still haven't gotten that book on rockets that you sent for."

All I really needed to do was send back a general note of appreciation, something that could be thumbtacked to the bulletin board. But, my conscience is a demanding if erratic task master. So, I made a pot of coffee and sat up all night and wrote thirty-one individual replies. My resolve faltered a bit along the way, but I stayed with it until I was done. I even sealed each in a separate envelope and addressed each personally in care of the school and meticulously attached a stamp to each as I finished it. What a pleasure it was to see that orderly stack of letters growing in front of me. What a sense of mission and accomplishment I felt. Actually, I wrote thirty-two letters that night counting one I sent to Baxter and Co., Publishers of Children's Literature in El Paso with a personal check enclosed and an order for one copy of *Rockets and Rocketry* from the "Glance Toward Tomorrow" series.

And they were good letters, too. Not much repetition and not much breezy fatuousness. They were weighty. They were serious letters. I read each one I'd received over carefully and gave it some thought before replying. My early efforts were pretty long and I admit that they grew briefer as the evening progressed, but I tried to make every word count. I explained to Scott that I'd been negligent and that I'd now sent for his book and that I hoped he would enjoy it. I inquired of another kid if he'd gotten the glasses I'd recommended he get and gently admonished him not to read in poor light nor to abuse the priceless gift of eyesight. I wrote several short essays on citizenship and civic duty, others on dependence and independence, respect for your peers, maturity, and the necessity of fender reflectors on bicycles in rural areas. I drew an analogy between teamwork on the basketball court and successful classroom relations that I liked so well I used it twice. Along about two-thirty I even got witty for a while, though I'm afraid I wasted it on a couple of kids who probably wouldn't understand. I discreetly inquired about grades, behavior, and peer and personal problems and I think I was very convincing and sounded very interested. I soothed, flattered, encouraged. I even apologized a couple of times, though that proved a bit humiliating. I tried to answer sincerely all questions put to me no matter how empty. I complimented Rebecca on her cleverness, but suggested that she find more socially acceptable ways of employing it as our country can always use bright and independently minded young people with the kind of leadership ability she so often exhibited. Toward the end of the evening, things got a little out of focus and I wrote a sternly serious letter on drug abuse to a little girl who probably wears nose plugs when she polishes her shoes. But, on the whole, I thought I'd done quite well. I'd referred to the *Bible* several times and *Huckleberry Finn* once and had quoted not only Jesus, Moses, and Mark Twain, but Leo Durocher, Mahatma Gandhi, Thoreau, Thumper's Mother, and H.L. Mencken.

When I finished it was light out and my mother was already up and about. She came and stood in the diningroom doorway looking at me, buttoning her robe, and then went into the kitchen and put some coffee on. I was sitting at the diningroom table smoking cigarettes and watching my stack of letters. It kept falling over. I turned half of the letters one way and the other half the other way, but it still fell over. If I arranged them in two stacks, they wouldn't fall over but I didn't get the same sense of

satisfaction out of them that way. I finally searched until I found a rubber band large enough to go around all the letters and then sat and watched them some more.

Staying up all night is a fine thing. I wish I could do it more often though, of course, if you do it too often it's no longer so fine. Fatigue affects your senses just as the coffee you've been drinking affects your nerves. You can walk down the same street at eight o'clock in the morning that you walk down every morning at eight o'clock, but it's not the same street at all. The smells are different. You notice things you wouldn't ordinarily notice. The sun is an all together new experience. You're something of a tourist in someone else's moment and you can smile just a little smugly to yourself as you watch people emerging from their front doors because you know that you haven't passed the night doing anything quite so mundane as sleeping. That's what I did that morning. I walked down to Paulina Street to mail my letters afraid, I suppose, that if I waited until I'd slept some and eaten, I wouldn't mail them. I took a shower and shaved first. It was a mild morning. The breeze was gentle and it was going to rain instead of snow. I thought about getting a quart of chocolate milk and some doughnuts at the grocery and going down to the beach to eat them, sitting on the sea wall. I didn't, but I really should have. After I'd done the breakfast dishes and seen my mother off to work and before I went to sleep, I read again the thirty-second letter I'd received the previous day. It was from a woman named Joan, the music teacher three doors down the hall.

Dear Bill,

New York is a horrid place, I just hate it. And the people are horrid, too, when they find out that you're from out of town. I had the abortion this morning. It was all very routine and businesslike, like going to the dentist or having a wart burned off. They used a vacuum thing that just cleaned me out. They let me rest for a couple of hours and then we came right back to the hotel in a cab. It seems very impersonal, but I guess that's the best way and the way I'm going to have to learn to look at it, too.

My father's down in the bar now getting drunk. I think he's taken this thing harder than I have. I'm supposed to be resting and he'd probably be upset if he knew I was writing you, but I felt as if I had to. Now, I'm not so sure. All the things I was going to say seem so obvious. I'm just very depressed and very anxious to go home. I guess I realized before I even

knew that I was pregnant that it wouldn't work out. I didn't really expect you to marry me and am not sure I would have married you had you asked. I don't know what either of us could have done except this. I just wish that you'd written.

Joan

It was after three when I got up. I ate some toast and drank some coffee watching Dinah Shore. Some time during the day it had indeed rained. Enough to pockmark the snow, though not to melt it.

Anonymous Notes To Stephen

1

You have an interesting face, Stephen,
nice teeth.
The largest men are boys, shy
with a woman.

2

You are so thin, Stephen.
Your hands flap on the ends of your arms,
only safe with a book or cup.

3

I see you've gotten a haircut, Stephen.
It was a mistake.
Your face is too frankly present.

4

In a dream you said
"I love you." I said
"Get some sun, Stephen,
your hands are too white,
too stark against my thigh."
He prayed for fair weather.
His nose turned red.
This is the failure
of Stephen.

5

We must have a strictly intellectual
affair, Stephen.
Your words are quick and light.
I record them briskly to read
later when I feel desire.

Death Of A Thief

I am a person with no sense of history.
I worry at thirty
about the body I live in,
no sleep and shaking hands,
the madman who tries to steal my daughter.

At eighty the thief will drag his chair
to and from his eggs,
move his spoon between the bowl and his gums,
the motion slowing like a metronome
because it must.

Then I will rise untouched, slapping my firm thighs,
and hold the child high and wet above my head.

I count the bells when the clock chimes,
but there is really nothing to verify.

Two Mallards: A Love Poem

They move where they choose, I think,
clever feet resisting wood and rock
in the uneasy lake. The surface
should be simpler, but still I suck
the wind until they round the pier.
There was no real need. I'm safe
against your body on the bank.
Women in their summer shoes
totter between lilacs in the park behind us.
We don't speak to anyone.

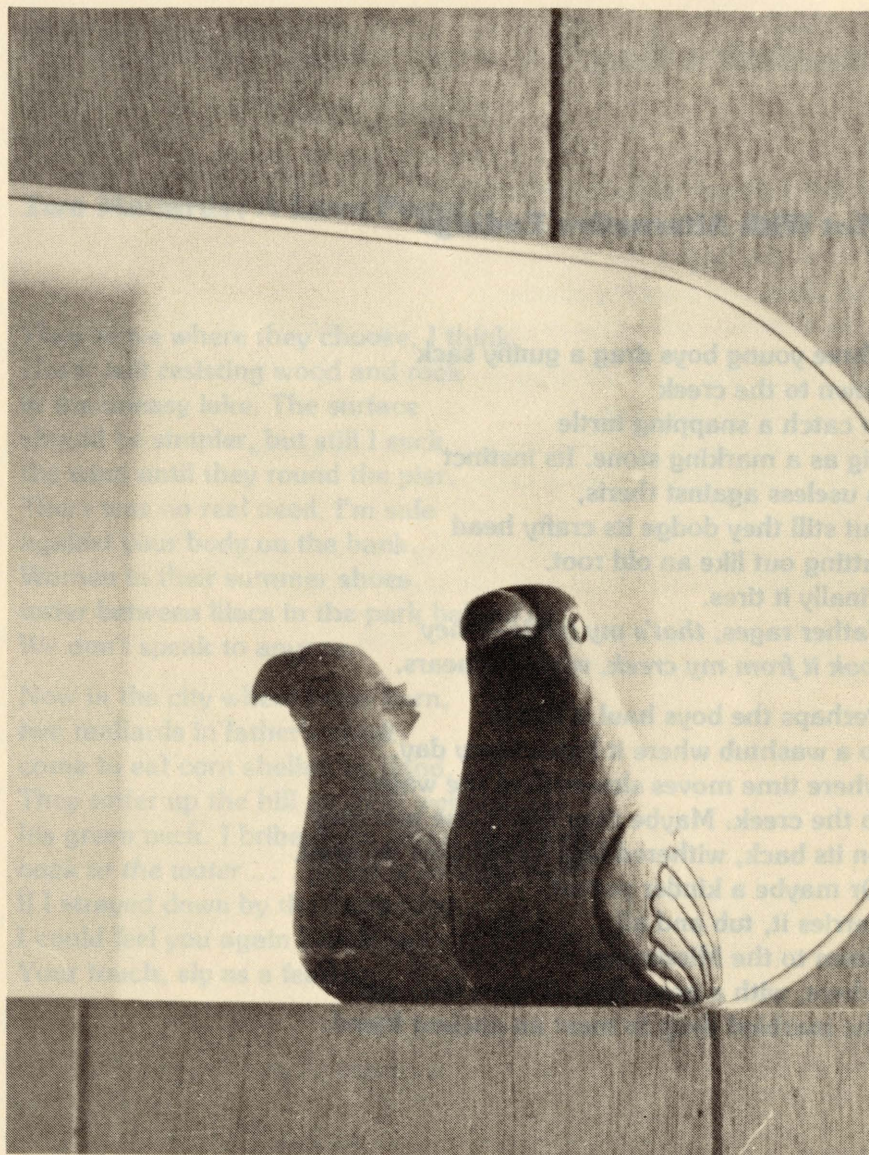
Now in the city where I was born,
two mallards in father's creek
come to eat corn shelled by hand.
They totter up the hill on their webbed feet
his green neck. I bribe them closer, but think
back to the water . . . going is so easy there.
If I strayed down by the footbridge,
I could feel you again beside me.
Your touch, sly as a feather.

Plot With Alternative Endings

Three young boys drag a gunny sack
down to the creek
to catch a snapping turtle
big as a marking stone. Its instinct
is useless against theris,
but still they dodge its crafty head
jutting out like an old root.
Finally it tires.

Father rages, *that's my turtle—they*
took it from my creek, when he hears.

Perhaps the boys haul it home
to a washtub where it hates every day,
where time moves slower than the water
in the creek. Maybe they find it one morning
on its back, withered legs folded over its shell.
Or maybe a kinder parent
carries it, tub and all,
down to the Mississippi
where, with a great flap, it spins through
the marbled deep to meet an ancient friend.



r.m. rembacz

Ebb Tide

From A Drawing By Kerr Eby

Blessed be the Father
who gave up
his only begotton sons

to be crucified
on a Belgian Gate
nailed to the iron
by the judgement
of a teller-mine

to die on an alien Golgotha
annointed by the sea
and caressed by the sane

and to be buried
bloated in a plastic bag
marked "unknown"
without the promise
of a third day.

Harry Hild

If You Were A Poem

If you were a poem,
I would hear your sweet words
And taste bitter.

If you were a poem,
I would hear of love and friendship
And feel hate.

If you were a poem,
I would be struck by your similes
As the March moon strikes a shiny Buick —
Smashed by your metaphors
Crouching in the dark, bunching in the dark
But I see nothing.

If you were a poem,
Yes, if you were a poem
You would paint pictures,
Build worlds
Pick vegetables
And love.

But, you are a poem
Aren't you?
And wouldn't you tell me
You were And I believe you
As I believe in illusion and the wholeness
of things
misperceived.

But you are a poem aren't you,
Your parts are perfect,
Syntax, scansion,
Wrought from precious iron
Carved and crowned with dental care,
You are thought
Out.

If you were a poem,
And you are
You've picked a funny place
To hide.

To Keep A Poet Warm

Quickly, the hawk turned the night
Windy cold.

As Chicago nights are wont
In the space of a couple drinks
In the space of a couple
In a bar.

She spoke as words
Spoken by poets before
They were a business.

I listened
To her hand in her black ruffled hair
I watched
Her eyes, dark and starless clear
Freeze phrases
Alive
And I wanted to be cold.
Alone
With a winter woman
Weathering a night.

We sat tight together
In the privacy of escape.
I wondered about the weather
I talked about my garden
She flapped a mitten in my face.
I mumbled about the summer,
May, June, July, August,
She asked for more ice
I rambled about my roses
She wheeled about and
Caught me
Mid November
And I was cold,

Together.
With a winter woman
Weathering a night.

She spoke the things
The wind wanted.
She listened to her words
I listened to the whirl and welter
As we became
Unlikeley lovers on a wintry night.

A Private Bridge

A Private bridge
The Whitewater River
A late August afternoon.

A maiden
An older man
Sit, feet
dangling, quietly
Aware and unaware
Of their place in an oriental drawing.

They sit and watch
The willow-speckled water
Rush away under a river-spanning barn.

You like going better, don't you? she asked

I guess, he replied.

Why?

He thought: Coole Park and Rafferty's Cellar,
Abelard bridges, Dryad's peace and
September sun on Taishan pools.

Maybe because it looks back at us.

The water wrinkled a reflection of the young girl's
Face and begged more
Clarity

He thought again
and remembered:
Time and crystal gods in cut glass.

Maybe because it's poetic, he angled.

Poetic?

He thought again,
Looked deep within the laughing
Whitewater flowing beneath
This very private bridge.
Faces, sounds and voices took
Turns at smiling
Then smoothed into a pool
Before a fallen willow branch.

Let's change sides, he said.

Is it time for coming for a while?

Yes, he said.

Why?

It's easier, he replied.

A river is a little more
And a little less
Than the answers to questions from
A Beautiful
Young woman.

House Call

I won't ask how you are.
I've heard, I can see.

she sees my eyes are
lightless

Shall I tell you our news?
The raspberries are ripe.
We went to Wisconsin.

days by the phone
in hell

Is there anything I can do?
Wash the windows?
There's a book I just read —

nights awake
going over and over
where we went wrong

I'm sorry.
Look.
I've brought you applesauce.
Mama's apples, Grandma's recipe.
If only you had my shrink.

my friends

Time heals, they say.
When it can't get any worse,
it can only get —

my friends

Come let us worry together.
Come let us cry.

are
strangling
me

Overtures

We See Right Away

they are lovers
or will be

the serious smiles, the meaning silences
the way they spread their towels just so on the sand

his fingers on her cheek invite
she combs his hair

yes & they walk with arms around each other
as if this day will never come again

this seagull, that sailboat
this sun

a boy leans forward, studies them
an old girl shuts her eyes

Overtures

A Food Thing

1. Frank, whenever I'm on a mountain with a head-spinning bottle of bourbon, whenever I squirt limejuice in a salad — which isn't often — I think of you.

Frank, I like you best on a mountain, in salad.
Stay.

2. Steve, whenever I buy Oreos and stack them neat as Marina Towers on a plate — which isn't often — I think of you. "I'm setting up housekeeping," you said. "How many forks should I buy? How many spoons?"

Steve, wherever you are, may you have a house-keeper.

3. Joey, Joe, I think of you — your ribs, your stew, your stroganoff, your burgundies "as necessary as clothes." I still use your recipe for roquefort dressing, just enough oil to mash the roquefort in. Still roast chestnuts, make waffles, drink wine.

Joe, Joe, I think of you. You cooked with joy.

Franklin E. Jones³

from notes from the wayside:

Barbara: To You And I Survivors, Unfolding

Last time it ended in Spring,
it is fitting now that the dying of the year
exposes itself, androgynous, amoral
chill,
myriad earth-burnt leaves, everywhere
ground crunching beneath my shoes,
thick roots and naked limbs
getting ready for long sleep,
whatever the 'magic'
they know
when to enfold themselves,
shut their vulnerable eyes, slow cells
against the neutrality of winter raging,
tough,
oblivious of each other,
as if they know how
to respect,
carefully,
themselves.

from notes from the wayside:

Hard Time

The feeling now
is like you did something wrong, seriously
and you went to prison,
locked away,
the iron bars shut, clang — resound, echo forever
everything vibrates,
shocks you,
you shudder,
trapped with yourself,
memories of loss
like a block falling into the sea, gone
except the pain, absolute,
there is nothing left to do
but take a deep breath,
and even though you cannot — you must
forget the outside,
the real world, her world,
but you melt to your knees, trembling
more profound than anything, it seems,
she is free,
you try and weigh the years between you,
her world is forbidden,
laughing with friends,
not at you, but with the joys
of pleasures and good wine,
wine is forbidden,
is what got you into trouble to begin with,
there is only silence now
except for your breathing sobbing noise,
other men are disgusted with you, uneasy,
“Shut up, sissy mother fucker!”, they say,
they are settled,

simply, ‘doing time’,
knowing no other choice
but madness or suicide,
doing time,
seeming forever,
writing on the walls.

Vera

Through the wide, open window the full moon hung like a cordless, electric balloon. The plain, sheer curtain blossomed a moment and fell straight again. Fireflies flashed like confetti.

"Sweetheart, I want you so much." Vera swayed, silhouetted against the bright night sky. Slow fingers fondled the front buttons of her dress that descended into a hushed heap on the floor. "I love you, Baby." Vera glanced at the radium clock glowing upon the mantle, ticking.

His skin surged softly as the thin sheet slid away, receding like a smooth wave. Vera's knee leaned luminously. The half size bed dipped. Springs crunched as she lifted her leg and mounted him. Carefully, she kissed him on his open mouth, parted, as if her were about to speak. Her hands pressed down on his pillow. His face radiated between them.

"Shhhh," the tumescent tip of her tongue skimmed the inner ridge of his lips, "don't say anything. I won't, don't worry, Darling." Her mouth brushed and licked his eyelids, eyebrows. "Shhh, it's okay." Hands probed. "It's okay." Her fingers found him. Carefully, folding him moist and warm within herself, she shuddered and sighed. The curtains breathed. She inhaled as if to dive a deep distance and rising, rocked gently against him. The bed creaked like a swing from afar.

Hobby-horse, giddyup!

The silky sheet of sheets glowed in the moonlight. A night bird cried in the distance, shrill. Creamy thin slivers streamed across the moon. Through the veil of rising curtain it seemed to move, float, and fall again.

When had it rained? The fresh scent of warm ground and wet grass brimmed and spilled through the window. He somehow imagined a myriad movement of small crawling creatures.

Cocoon . . . drown.

"Yes, oh yes." The luster of her face framed the window. The neon moon shuddered through filmy waves of fluid heat. One star dangled like a bright bobber in the sea. "I love you, oh I love you, so much." Her flushed face gleamed in the moonglow. Were those tears?

A pale profile melting his cool custard pillow. Her shadow stretched across the floor, rocking. A bowl of ripe, radiant fruit flowered on the table. A pallid, unlit candle gleamed against the mantle wall.

Through the flux of rippling shadows he could just barely tell when her eyes opened or closed; her pale pupils like pearls glinting beneath a salty sea. Then as clams shut softly, he squinted, searching through the currents of her face coated with the moonlight. The pained look made him wonder.

"I love . . .", Vera's hands fluttered like white moths upon her breasts.

The curtains crept upward, blossoming. A churning, swift spiral of clouds whisped and crowned the moon's head. The aura around her head billowed like cotton candy twisting on a paper stem. The sound of leaves rushed like small hands, applauding.

Vera moaned.

Toes curling, his fingers clenched fistfuls of sheets.

"Shhh." She leaned lightly on her elbows. Her fingertips brushed his hair, soft like a dandelion gone to seed. His hair tingled her moss smooth hands. "Oh, you're so very beautiful."

He flinched unnoticeably as fine strands of her hair tickled his ear like kitten's fur.

She rose slowly and groaned a low sound as a boat moving through a distant fog while she slipped to her knees beside the bed. Her chin lowered as she shuddered and stretched for her crumpled dress. Fumbling with buttons, she stroked his sex. The satin residue of her warm moistness gradually dried upon him.

He yawned. Beyond the man in the moon smiled.

"Balloon."

"Yes, dear sweetheart." She touched his eyelids as they closed and hunched above his body tugging the sheet. Suddenly she trembled and descended dreamily, nudging against his sex. Her tongue flashing flame. Her mouth like seafoam. "H'mm, my darling, precious person." She looked to smile at him, but the rhythm of his chest rose and fell like a ship's hull. His eyes closed, calm pages.

A car door slammed. High heels chattered, clicking clumsily. A cobweb quivered, alarm. Stirring, she quickly covered his sugar bright body from the moonlight, tucking the sheet about his shoulders and chin. She rose and tiptoed toward the backdoor, buttoning her dress, swaying. The plain bulb blared. Her lashes flickered. The wall mirror blushed. A festival of fingers lunged at her hair like spiders. A lock grumbled and snapped.

"Hi, everything okay?" The woman's broad back loomed like a tree trunk.

"Yes Ma'am, everything's been just fine." Vera shuffled papers and books.

The big woman smiled. "Listen, Willy's waiting to drive ya home," a dog barked outside, "but is it okay if I pay ya next Sunday?"

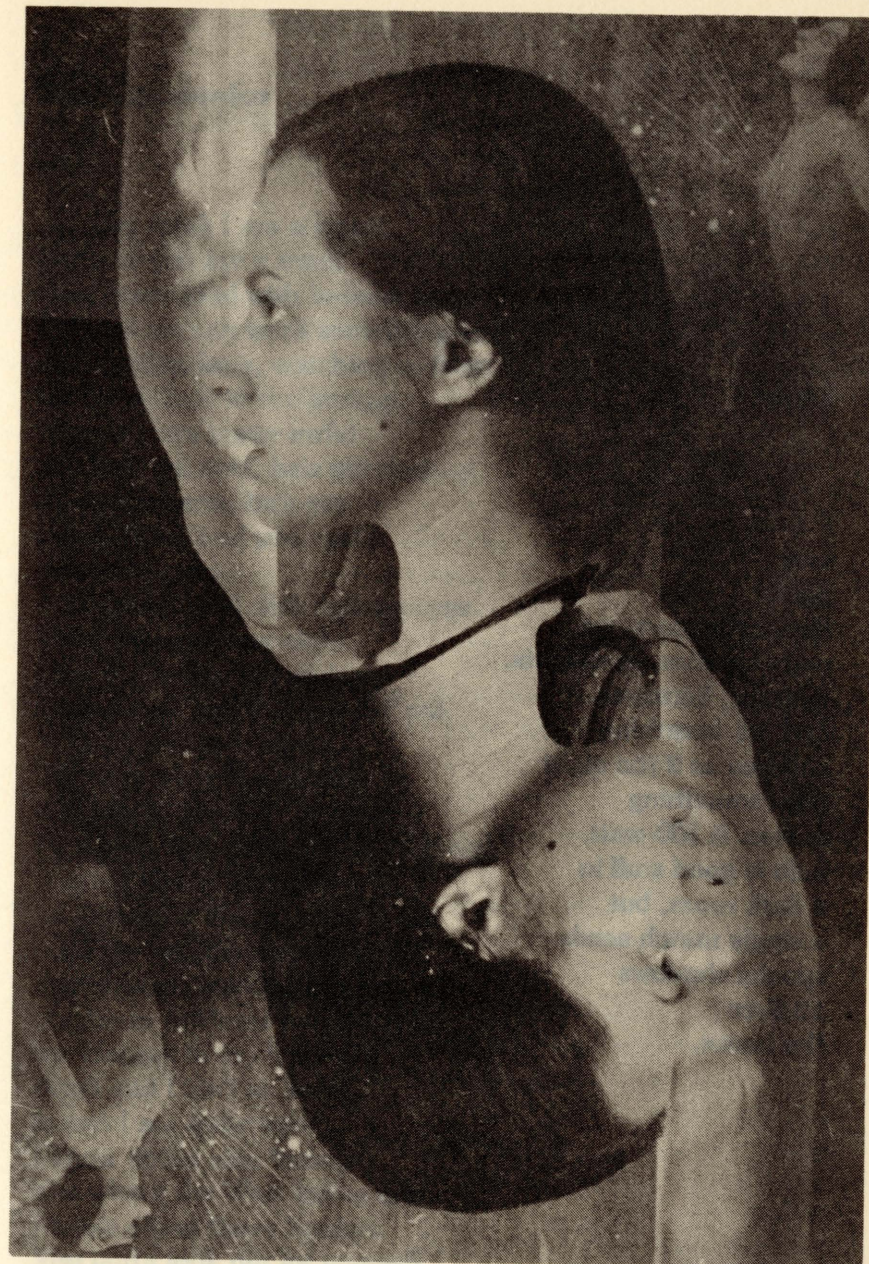
"Sure." The bottoms of her feet cooled in the plastic smooth sandals. The curtains creeping out of the window waved at the moon.

"Ahhhhuh, will ya look at that?" Long limbs striding across the room leaned down at her son, "Ahhhhh, isn't he just beautiful?" Branches bending, she kissed his forehead sprinkled in moonbeams. "Wow, to think that he'll be beginning school next month, already. Did he say his prayers, Vera? He always says them."

"Yes Ma'am, we said them together." Vera tucked a light scarf between the books hooked under her arm. "I'll see you next Sunday then, Ma'am."

"Yea, next Sunday. Five o'clock, please." Her dusty shadow darkened the boy's face. Outside the wind and leaves clashed, cascading. "Oh God, isn't he just beautiful, Vera?"

"Yes, Ma'am," her moist palm cupped the cool doorknob, "He certainly is a lovely boy."



Another Tom
You ain't so bright,
you and your big mouth

Light

I
love
light.
Under the stars, we
carry candles, flashlights,
lanterns, kerosene,
and fire-breathing
children as if the night
were something
to fear. A 500-watt
bulb is good stuff in
a dark room, but
a single match sends
spooky shadows
all over
the house.

The Counselor

. . . you think I am a worm.
I believe you are a toad,
a fat green toad with balloon eyes.
Perhaps we can work something out
with Snake, here, watching us from
his hidey-hole in the ground.
Y'know, he's pretty awful
and he's got cool, he's got that
sly slick charm, he's got
savoir-faire, and you, well,
you are a toad.
A fat green toad with balloon eyes.
You make noise at night.
I am the leastest of all but
listen to me just this once ol' pal
or you'll regret it 'cause
I've been lying low all this
designated allotted time I've
been awarded, listening and learnin',
reading Books and becoming
an Educated Worm, peering out
from the teacher's apple at the
chalkboard, working the slot
machines in Vegas and playing
the clarinet in my brother's
Band and I ain't so naive,
in fact I am quite wise.
I know about nine innings
and where the West Indies are . . .
I know about those Snakes.
You gotta look out for yourself,
Brother Toad.
You ain't so bright,
you and your big mouth

always open to catch a fly.
Listen, those flies are pretty
crafty in their own little slick ways;
maybe you'd be safer
eating dirt
like me.

This Is The Living Room Of The Atlantic Ocean

This is the region of stabilized cold.

Snow falls into the mermaid's brittle Snow-White
black hair and clunks like rock against the
rim of her coffee cup.

She is the victimizer of many small things,
of living rocks and
patient seaweed. Above the icebergs
birds fly, fly and think of their
unborn eggs. On the shore people dressed
not warmly enough stamp their feet
and huddle in a circle, shouting
for the dance to begin.

She sings to the sailors: Is this where music starts?
What notes are blankets? What chords enclose the body
and what riffs strum the empty stomach to sleep, or
drink, or meat, or dance? Where does noise leave off
with its whine, the wind-tongue that whispers
night? And on the far eastern shore —
who is that small elf with small eyes and small
feet who sneers go back, with his small eyes clenched
in fear and palm spread flat against the sand?
And on the far western shore — those two entrepreneurs, dressed
as clowns. Which is the Riddler and which is the Joker?
They stand side to side, cheek to cheek, arm to arm,
breast to breast, and their mouths converge not
into a kiss but a smile. They may not be the
bandleaders but they have coins in their pockets
and they can buy popcorn and wine.
Everyone on the shore is an alcoholic. All the snow is
so pretty as it falls.

Bird

There was, I recall, this
fantastic bird.
All brilliance, colors, and
it sang in code:
the music, understated, underrated
by most I knew, was enough
to ride along, as a melody
rides a stringed instrument,
careful chords, and a carnival
in the background, always
the carousel bobbing foolishly
but prettily: ten wooden horses
flecked with stale yellow paint,
old babies astride, laughing, up-and-down
to the careful chords so out
of place in such a place.
One-two
One-two-three
four
Halt. Creak. Stop.
And then once more.

It figures that I
would become enamoured
with the cheap pretty yellow and the shapes
of old babies' bald heads:
fascinated by their odd and willful design
I'd forgotten, as you may recall, this
fantastic bird.
All brilliance, colors too, but
it sang in code.
The riders grew impatient with it
and ourselves.
The riders bled, had dignity, sat in mountains

of shit and called ourselves KING-OF-THE-HILL,
grew fat or thin and died.
the bird continued to sing.
The riders threw rocks at it from our respective graves.
It wavered and fell.
The riders wept then, already dead, still weary.

Of course the bird surprised us.
Already dead, still weary, it
continued to sing.

It sang in code.
The ridiculous beautiful bird.

The Bewitched Mill

A Painting By Franz Marc

Water falls upon the great wheel,
and at the gather pool beneath the mill
blue animals drink.
And birds on branches flash and sing
in the arch of falling water.

Some beasts have come to drink
that they may never die;
others to be whole again.
But some move out of the woods
toward the rumor of the dusky waters
so they may not forget, down the fall of years,
the possibility of exultation.

The Inn

After traveling for days we came to an inn. At first
we were unaware of its great size because we arrived
at night and mist was swirling. We took rooms in a
kind of Victorian turret, but in the morning, when we
walked outside to explore the grounds, we found that
there was no end to the inn. Its towers, walls, seemed
to spread everywhere. We walked all morning through
wet grass and never came to the end of the place. It
was maddening. The world was suddenly like a photograph
completely filled with this inn, and oddest of all,
the place didn't even have a name.

Flight

The robin presses into the grooves
of the alley
first started soft and orange
resting
fallen unrepaired on the cracks
sleeping perhaps
with that one eye watching
the sky
beak open without a song
waiting with wings
outspread
to remember flight
and leave the crack
that won't heal.

The next day his body is flatter
trying to disappear
into the ground
stranger to him than the air
that won't take him up
but keeps him on the surface
visible
unflung into air that transforms
him into a leaf fluttering or shaking
sparkling with shadows.
He has no dirge
but the color that fades
as he presses into the ground
uncomfortable in his bed,
eye open,
he dreams a sleepless dream.

The third day he no longer makes
the concrete
round
or uneven with his softness.
He lays still
his toes separated
into sections.
Overnight
his tail feathers raised
in defiance like a tombstone.
Those brown slivers
now erect
grown out of the crack
now an opening for his flight
as the wind blows the feathers again
and again — repairing.

Ambiguity

It swallows me,
Pulling me into the center.
I become it.

The black blanket hypnotizes me,
Its magnetic field pulls me into its center
Devouring me.

Once inside it,
It changes.
It is a rainbow of many colors.

It expels me.
I stagger away.
It is the night again.

I move closer
Of my own choosing
And it is a shower of colored strokes.

Now, inside it
I am changed.
I am a rainbow of many colors.

Dying Is Not Death

Intimate suffering spills
across the room and drowns
the ones too close to choose
ones that will never leave
the room but will carry the room
inside of them to float to the top
and feel the filling room again.

The last cough, the endless choking
breaths, the damp hair that clings
to the forehead, the eyes that stop
seeing, hollowed glass shells
that move up into the head
with each wave of intimacy that sends
the body into another compulsive act
that should never be shared.

The room is wet with pain and only one
will stand it; and only one will leave it.
The others drown.

The Rat

The rat was on the bus tonight
Jumped for my throat
And vanished.

Last night I shivered on Clark Street
Headed towards your apartment out of habit
And remembered you were gone.

It is midnight.
I see the rat with your blue eyes
On my window sill.

These fading yellow walls
Are cardboard
Caving in
Covering me,
But the rat is biting from the outside.

Closing my eyes,
The rat is there
Walking around me.

Eli Ehrenpreis

Returning Waves

Winter screams in, crashing waves
Seaweed strands
Freeze on the soft shiny beach.

Chains and keys
Sound like telephones cry tonight
But sound along a curving road
The attic, the mirror by the window.

Stairs yield to Poseidon's limbs
Which clatter up breaking there
Carved things reveal death
Salty wind carries in.

Inside winter stops.
Old dust and books lie random on the floor.

The attic waits for me through wind and cold
Battered not by memories revealed
In nights that stretch forever.
Instead, the waves and winter's cunning skills
Break the heart in tidal clocks
Like diving birds.

Inner Circle

Iron gates in an arch of stone
guard the entrance
to this island surrounded by streets.

Passing through the wrought iron gates
the three of us
find ourselves in a separate world.

This street,
these houses,
don't belong to the rest of the city.

We move
like timid invaders
held in awe by the imposing structures.

As if individually carved,
by unknown hands,
the houses eloquently state their style.

Some blend with the night,
as if that were their purpose,
while others cut through the darkness
to stand out in quiet defiance.

Some breath with life
and some lie in somber stillness
where the shadows are their shrouds.

We speak of money and power,
of love and hopes,
of who we are
and what we think.

Between the laughter
and the frowns
our conversation takes many roads.

A Portrait Of Blanche DuBois Abbreviated

He laughs at a passing thought
about a pleasant memory
Laughter fills the still air
like an intrusion.

The dim street lights
hold their own space
with shadows between.

"The night is something
you can touch," she says.
Smiling in agreement
I turn and watch
her curled, brown hair
waving softly on the warm breeze.

Footsteps wading in waves of color,
dried leaves on green lawns,
sounds of crickets
and the sour sweet scent
of autumn air,
accents our journey.

We end our walk,
returning to the harsh lit streets
of our hotel
leaving the mansioned isle behind us.



Jerry Pendergast

A Portrait Of Blanche DuBois Abbreviated

You sit
In your room of many sorrows
A drunken poker game
On the other side
Of the curtain
Spanish curses
About a filled
Inside straight
A Southern Gentleman
Would never do that

You take a cerebral train
Back to Belle Reve
A servant
Brings Brandy
Alexanders to the parlor
For you and
The Pitboss
The high school
Quarterback in your English class
Rings door bell with book in hand
Your servant
Shows him in you
Walk to the door, tell him
"Why don't you go get a soda honey"
Handing him change
"Come back in a few hours, and I'll
Tutor you for awhile. I
Got some business to take care of right now."

"Deal, damnit."

"They're so vulgar

Except for Mitch." You

Imagine the bedroom redesigned

Maybe then your sister would

Remember "who she is", leave the New

Orleans French Quarter, and Stanley

"Gimme some more whisky."

Maybe Mitch can take you to

A honeymoon suite with candy cane windows

Above a crystalline lake

"How many cards ya want?"

Portrait In Progress

There's a canvas

And a nude woman

Outside a farmhouse

In a dust storm

The shifting gusts

Disarrange her moist hair

Press the painters ears

Against his head

It's hard for him to hear

The currents

Inside her

Losing

For Sally Bidstrup Southern

When the car hit the embankment
cigarettes flying hairpins stabbing
wadded tissues dashboard releasing
clock & speedometer, the force of
cheekbones smashing through windshield,
your wrist went limp, the valium leaking
out like oil

& for weeks I couldn't walk
home alone odor of morphine
& antiseptic followed me to bed
& I saw you torn & stiff on the
asphalt amid flashing lights &
sirens, the pale attendants wrapping cloth
around your arms, absorbing that part
of you that formed puddles on the bridge.

I understand what it means to give up.
Blue tattoo over your heart
you limped from bed to bathroom
leaving a dotted line of blood.
Boredom. (Love of Life Love of
Life Love of Life.) Boyfriends
who brought turquoise bracelets
or hashish from Lebanon. The endless
cigarette. Suntan oil. Living
without an address.

Your daughter calls you at night.
You can't hear her. Angry, she rattles
the sides of the crib upsetting her easter basket —
the eggs spill out, uncooked, yolks
& whites running together.

In Fog

"I love mushrooms. I love everything about them. They remind me of my youth." - Galen Geller, December, 1978

In fog

In cutdown 1913 model T
ford no battery no starter
no windshield no backseat
he skims dry creekbed out
of Petaluma wet hillsides no
stars moon out of focus ring
leading nowhere loses steering
wheel & hurtling aimless
ship lost in ice, turns midair
lands soft as trapeze artist
stops to gather mushrooms in
pockets jams wheel on & heads
for Tamales humming.

50 years later Christmas he
sautees shaggy manes* in a dim
kitchen in Sacramento. Wife
steals drinks down the hall
son ties flies in his room
daughter cruises with boyfriend
while he labors over butter over
spatula over length of flame.

Madison Fund brings lousy returns.
Brown will drive him out of
business. There will always be
a peach market but even after

*a kind of wild mushroom

Now I Lay Me Down

Eddie stared at the empty plate, wishing it were full of cookies but knowing better than to ask Mrs. Sanger for more. It was the one caution his mother had given him before going to the hospital. Be polite, she had said, and say thank you if she gives you anything. But don't ask her for goodies.

He gulped the rest of his milk and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. Mrs. Sanger clucked a mild reproach.

"You ever have any babies?" he asked.

Mrs. Sanger tilted her head backward and laughed, a warm, rippling laugh that reminded Eddie of the way grandmothers laughed on TV. He wished she were his grandmother instead of just a next-door neighbor. "Of course I have, Eddie," she said. "Mister Ralph and Mister Ernest are my babies."

This puzzled Eddie. He had always thought of them merely as two nice men who came to Mrs. Sanger's house occasionally to mow the lawn or paint a room or sit and drink coffee on weekends. He could not see how the two grown men, both the age of his father, could be her babies. Especially Mr. Ernest, who was so fat.

"Did it hurt?"

"Oh, it hurt a little, I guess," said Mrs. Sanger, "but not so bad. Mom-mies are willing to go through it to get the children they love." She ruffled his hair and smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, Eddie. Your mother will be fine. She had you, didn't she? She made it through that OK. Besides, she's not due to have the baby for a few months yet."

"I know," Eddie said. "I just don't want it to hurt so much."

"Well," said Mrs. Sanger, "you could pray for her."

"Don't know how," he said.

"Of course you do. Didn't you ever learn to pray in Sunday school?"

"I don't go to Sunday school," said Eddie.

Mrs. Sanger stared at the boy, shocked. Five years old, and probably never seen the inside of a church, she thought. And then people wonder why there's trouble in the world.

"It's easy," she said. "All you do is talk to God. Tell Him thank you for all the good things you have, then ask Him for what you want or what you need."

the last pear tree collapses
with blight after the final
bartlett surrenders from watery
breakdown after his heart stops
pumping through plugged arteries

& the beefeater runs dry & the
ripening bowls trap mildew &
Emil can't talk packout & Galen
takes the jeep & the graphite rod
& the princess reel to Bozeman
when Nanno escapes with the boy
who washes cars & the wife
has insulated herself with vodka
& yeast for the last time,

there will still be that night,
the fog the moon & those mushrooms:
pastel remnants gardeners clip small
boys kick & no one eats wild but
him shadowed in the kitchen after
dark pushing the spatula like an old
car slicing soundlessly through fog
heading for home.

"But how do you talk to him?" he asked. He imagined talking to God on the phone, His voice deep and gentle. Or visiting Him at His house. A big house, painted white.

"You just kneel down," said Mrs. Sanger, "and clasp your hands together like this." She intertwined her fingers into a double fist with a grip so tight her fingernails whitened.

"That's all?"

"That's all. Of course, you must only ask for big, important things like health, or strength, or courage, or wisdom."

"Oh," said Eddie, who was planning to begin with a request for more cookies. "Do you have to talk loud?"

"No," she said, smiling. "In fact, you don't have to talk out loud at all. God knows what's really in your heart. Just open your heart to Him and He'll understand."

"And he'll give me what I want?"

"If you believe in Him with all your heart, your prayers will be answered."

Eddie thought about what Mrs. Sanger told him. It seemed too easy, too obvious. If praying really worked, surely his parents would have told him about it; surely they, themselves, would have tried it. He had heard his mother complain many times of the pains she was having already, of the strict diet the doctor forced her to follow, of the medicine she always had to take, of the limitation of her usual activities, such as bowling, or dancing, or even smoking. She had had no problems with Eddie, she often said, but this time . . . Had she prayed, he wondered?

Still, there was the look in Mrs. Sanger's face when she told him all about God and praying. There was something about her eyes that said she really believed it would work, that she had seen it work.

That night, Eddie's father returned home alone. "Mom will have to stay in the hospital tonight," he explained to the boy.

"Is she having the baby?"

"No, not yet. She's just being tested."

'Tested,' Eddie thought. He rolled the word over in his mind as he stared into his father's tense, weary face. "Is she OK?" he asked.

"Sure she is," said his father, his dark eyes once again joyful and quick. He grabbed the hair at the back of Eddie's head and gave it a playful shake. "Tomorrow she'll be home again, and in a couple of months you'll have a baby brother or sister to play with."

"I hope it's a brother," Eddie said.

"A little girl would be nice too, wouldn't it?"

"Naw," he said. "Norman's got a little sister, and she's no fun. She always wants to hang around with him, and he's got to take her everywhere he goes. She always cries, too."

"Baby boys cry too, you know," said his father.

"Yeah, but we could be friends. We could do things together."

Later, when his father had put him to bed and turned out the light, Eddie slipped from under the covers and knelt in the darkness. He clasped his hands together tightly as he had seen Mrs. Sanger do. He waited silently, shivering a little, unsure of how to begin.

"God?" he whispered. He waited. No answer came, so he continued. "My mom's in the hospital. She's going to have a baby later. Please don't make it hurt a lot." He started to rise, then, as an afterthought, fell back on his knees. "Oh, yeah, God? Please don't give me a sister. My friend Norman's got one, and she just cause trouble. I don't think I'd like a sister, even if Dad says I would." He waited, unsure of how to sign off. "I guess that's all I want," he said. "Just Mom to be OK and not a sister. Thank you," he said, and climbed back into bed.

He lay awake a long time, wondering if God had been listening.

His mother did not return home the next day, nor the day after that. Eddie asked how long it took to be tested, and his father explained that sometimes it took longer than expected, but that they would just have to be patient if they wanted to be sure the baby would be healthy. Eddie wondered if he should try praying again, but he decided that, if God really were all Mrs. Sanger said He was, He would have heard the first time. And if He weren't, it would probably do little good to try again.

That night, strong hands shook Eddie awake. "Eddie, get up, get dressed," said his father.

"S'matter?" he asked, sitting up and scratching his ribs.

"Just get up. You're going to Mrs. Sanger's."

"Now?"

"Yes, now!" his father shouted. Eddie had never seen him so frantic, so disoriented, as he dashed about the room searching for socks, shoes, pants. Finally, he pulled Eddie from bed, wrapped a heavy blanket around him, swept him up in his arms, and hurried next door. Clinging to his father's shoulders, Eddie drifted back toward sleep.

Mrs. Sanger was already waiting for them in her housecoat, holding the front door open and squinting for them in her housecoat, holding the front door open and squinting in the porch light.

"Thanks a lot, Mrs. Sanger," said his father, dumping Eddie on the living room couch.

"Oh, don't mention it," she said. "You just hurry along to the hospital and don't worry about anything here."

"I don't know how long I'll be. I'll call in the morning if I'm not back by then." He covered Eddie with the heavy patchwork quilt Mrs. Sanger had laid out.

"Don't worry, Mr. Ehrens. Eddie will be fine here," Mrs. Sanger said, pushing his father from the room. "You just hurry."

Eddie was curious to know what was happening, and he meant to ask Mrs. Sanger when she returned from standing in the front door, but his eyes were too heavy to hold open. The slam of a car door and the roar of an engine came to him faintly as in a dream. Slowly the sound faded and was gone, until only a light "tap . . . tap tap tap . . . tap tap" could be heard.

He opened his eyes and squinted into a dazzling white light. Before him sat God at an immense marble desk, busily writing with a great white plumed pen. "A brother, a baby brother," God muttered, writing the words with the quill pen, its tip tap-tapping on the parchment paper. "I'm hurrying as fast as I can," said God in a warm, high, liquid voice. Eddie recognized the voice as Mrs. Sanger's. "Just a minute, I'm coming," said the voice, but this time without God's lips moving. Something brushed past Eddie's cheek and he turned to see what it was, but when he turned back God was gone. He sat up, and in place of the great desk was the patchwork quilt his father had covered him with.

Mrs. Sanger pulled the heavy door open. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Ehrens," she said, breathless from her dash to the door. "Is everything . . ." Eddie saw over her shoulder the dark, dull eyes of his father. Their rims were reddened, and his face was shadowed from a day's growth of beard. For a moment, perhaps no more than a second, nothing was said, no move was made. The slow, wooden ticking of the mantle clock was the only sound to be heard in the room, blending with the soft patter of rain outside. It was nearly dawn, and Eddie could see the sodden trees and bushes sag limply in the faint light.

Eddie stared at the two, staring at each other. He held his breath, waiting for the moment to pass, wanting to cry out to his father and tell him of his dreams, but seeing something in his eyes and face that told him to wait.

"Mrs. Ehrens — she's alright, isn't she?" Mrs. Sanger asked.

"She's OK," said Eddie's father. "She's resting." He lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper intended only for Mrs. Sanger's ears. Eddie leaned forward, listening intently. "They tried to save the baby," he heard his father say, "but they couldn't." Mrs. Sanger said nothing. Although her back was turned to him, Eddie could sense her sorrow; he could see it mirrored in his father's dark face, in the slight droop of her square shoulders, in her hands hanging limply at her sides. "The doctor said it was a little girl," said his father. "Said he didn't know what went wrong, just that it happens like that sometimes. One's as easy as falling off a log, and the next is all wrong right from the start."

Eddie's cry startled them, a small, frightened cry of anguish. They turned to find him huddled on the couch, his wide eyes staring at them with guilt and sorrow. His father glanced at Mrs. Sanger then hurried to the couch to take his son in his arms.

"You heard?" he said. Eddie nodded and buried his face in his father's chest. His eyes burned, and he began to sob. "Don't cry," he heard his father say, rocking gently. "Mom's OK. They did everything they could to save the baby, but she was just too young."

"Where is she?" Eddie sobbed.

"Mom? She's still there, resting."

"No. The baby."

Mr. Ehrens hadn't expected the question, and he had no ready answer. He held Eddie tighter and rocked him as he searched for a way to explain death to a five-year-old.

"She's with God," Mrs. Sanger said for him, "in Heaven. She'll be happy with Him there. He had a reason to take her to Him. We may never know why He took her, but God knows. He has a reason for everything He does, even if we don't know what it is."

Eddie's shoulders shook convulsively with uncontrolled sobbing, and he clung more tightly to his father's rough jacket. How could he tell them that he knew the reason, that he *was* the reason for his sister's death? It wasn't fair, he thought, it just wasn't fair. How could he have known that God would hear his prayer and that this was the way He would answer it?

He tried to picture God cuddling the baby, loving it, but no image would form in his mind. Instead, he thought back to the previous winter when his dog, Mickie, had died and his mother had told him that Mickie was in dog heaven. He knew better, though, for he had gone into the garage against his father's orders, and he had seen the dog, frozen solid, in a large cardboard box.

"Sh-h-h," his father whispered soothingly. "Don't cry anymore now. It'll be alright." No, Eddie thought, it would never be alright. He could never tell his father what he had done. This was not a broken window or a mitten dropped down a storm sewer. This was something more, much more, something which his father could never forgive.

Eddie tried to swallow the lump deep in his throat, but it only tightened all the more. His eyes swollen, his cheeks stinging from the zipper on his father's jacket, he gave in to the crying and the wracking sobs that carried him deeper into his father's embrace. He wanted to scream "I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry . . ." but he knew it was too late for that.

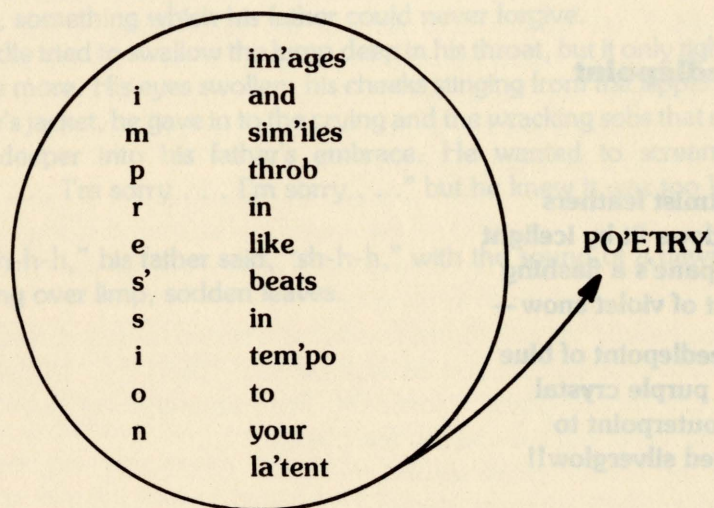
"Sh-h-h," his father said, "sh-h-h," with the sound of a dawn wind passing over limp, sodden leaves.

Libby Neiditch

needlepoint

frostmist feathers
windows lit by icelight
the pane's a flashing
print of violet snow —

a needlepoint of blue
and purple crystal
in couterpoint to
muted silverglow!!



Jim Elledge

Episode

To a child huddled
against a tranquil earth, rows
of corn stalks intensify
the disturbing, vacant aisles.

His FATHER (pacing
at the edge as slow
grass trespasses
into the willing field

Sullen shafts in solid
Indian file strain
like bones beneath the weight
of the flat, Illinois sky.

His FATHER (sweating
and wrecking through
the palisades, his face
mangled by mission

Fenced humidity bulges
with pollen that, pilfered by one
flick of his quiet tongue,
melts as it touches, sizzling.

His FATHER (hoarse
with pursuit aisles
away, flailing
like a bloodied hound

Don't I Get To Initial Changes In The Contract?

Previously I thought
I was the party of
the second part meant
more in the clinical than legal
sense of it

now the definition of me
has changed and I am
recognized

halcyon I
neither envied nor
yearned

did what I could
let the rest go by
yet now I am
expected to rejoice

for future joys
unexpected/unreceived

I could walk the entire
length of hell and never
find a punishment more clever
than reprieve for the prisoner
who has died

Going Home With Mary

We ride across town with Mary
taking her home down
the boulevard and under the el
turning from the broad
way into the Good News neighborhood
moving through shadow and light
tree and street lamp
sure of eyes behind curtains

Never before
going home with Mary
into that black eye of the city
to the concrete arms
of the 1890's mansion

Step inside here
and up those mahogany stairs
to the core of it
where sits an enormous woman
wearing the paneled walls
like a shawl

Deep in the darkening room
massive as she
she is the welcoming heart
rocking the beat of the city

to and fro she rocks
Mary lights the lamp
"My grandmother" Mary says
"She's very old — but still
she never was a slave to nobody —"

A Last Word

Terminal is
where the planes come in
where the road ends where
the corridor turns where
the stairs play out
on shadowed lawns

Terminal is
the last voice last
word maybe
coming fast as
feathers slow as
lightening clear
as cheese into
the grinning mouth

Terminal is
where no hand reaches
back no
voice calls no
fist pounds oak
& bronze only
the sky reaches
and endures

The Photograph You Took Ten Years Ago

Leafless branches tangled,
sun just risen refracted.
If it were color, it would fade,
rays of tortured sun lose definition.
But caught black and white, propped
on your desk, icon of your room,
it lives over you, more than you.
Your hands clutch your face, sight
is a wooden finger at the eye,
movement tightens the mesh.

A son more distant, a woman
less possibly a wife, at night
sheets entangle thrashing ankles.
No help to scream, beg. Days
shackled, tyrannized by dreams,
you walk hobbled, eyes cast down,
arguing with phantoms,
who have forgotten you.

This you hope will kill you,
who only care for
what's beyond care. This
tree's rooted in an extinct world,
branches that caught the sun
are petrified. Like landslides,
dead rock that buries, your past
happened to be where you were.

Farm Couple, Belgium, 1914

Excellent that we without
a thought or much of one
sit, watching the sun
beyond the sill across
the long flat ground begin
to drop. How easily
color is withdrawn
from us, thrown
red splashes against sky.

It's not that they
didn't find us; they
never looked. The land
burned but only along
the path they marched.
Father was brought down
working the field, a target
for practice. Mother's
quizzical eyes stopped.

All is ours now. During
the too clear days, we sit
in the hot farmhouse
cultivating a way
of looking through windows.
Though night will throw us
at each other, we
have taken precautions.
Nothing should be new.

Linda Orr

No Exit

1

Her in a small town in Pennsylvania
my "moving" dream found me again and began
the fresh invasion of my doorless room.
Last night I called too long a distance

to hear a friend's gentle reminder
that I am no longer there. In New Haven,
I am afraid I will no longer be my only variety.
In New York I would never sleep.

This week I thought No One had taken over
but I found myself last night
gliding around the rink
and this morning my homeless dream, home.

2

Numbers barely visible on unfamiliar doors,
"no outlet" signs where "no exit" means more
to me and still no path from one hill
to another without going through the hollow.

This time of year the golden trees are ambiguous
and all desire. They flake and peel
to bark. I may have lost my grandmother's
bracelet in the move. And when my parents die,

I will keep referring back to a point that stays
empty, as if the loss of leaves
will piece the houses across the ledge in,
and discoveries will not be so slow coming out the same.

The Sequel He Tells For Alexandre Aspel

1

I try to follow. Yes, once
I dreamed about a bomb.
I ran home from school to late
to catch my parents.
The streets were still.

He left with them — Paris, 1940 —
on foot or in carts,
piled high with a mattress or two,
like whales dragged inland.
He left and was left by
more barges of men than could be saved.

The parades I'm used to
break and mend themselves
a thousand times
over the exception, the man
pointed out by a bullet.

2

As a child he filed by schooltables
where corpses thawed
while the Russian earth
digested last year's.
The soldiers Red or White were one giant
stepping through town.

For me bodies are always wakeable.
Sometimes I want them to stay down
when they fall. I want to touch
or watch somebody dead. I resented
the stranger in a stained shirt
who stood up, unmurdered, and took his gun.

Even the men in my own family
betray me: they wander off
like our dogs
the day before their deaths
to the place they plan
to lie down in.

3

In Paris, down the street from the daily
shootings, he finally learned to sleep
six hours. He got up, dressed
and biked to work on the day
his closest friend wasn't there
to meet him for coffee.

His face wavered
for only a minute in the steam
of the cup he held.
The wind never got the smell out
between buildings. Here the Mississippi
is the wind's runway:
you'd think it would lift him

as small now as then, his white hair,
fuller than his shoulders.
In good weather he walks across the bridge
for coffee and unsalted fries.
He apologizes for giving me dreams
that still might come true.

Am I My Sister's Keeper

the moon holds the mirror,
the one eye that watches night.
an African woman squats in
mustard dust, rocking, rocking
a dead baby. tiny lips, dry
prunes, forever suck the air.
we are diminished. inaudible
winds toll the slightest bells.
it can only be felt. in america
such deaths must remain as
indelible as the late movie.

these sisters scratch the ground
desperate; the edgy eyes of ghetto
curs with hungry puppies.
the unspeakable sadness of
the mothers, their life sucked
away by dying infants.

well what do you see when
you look in the mirror?
call it guilt or a wound
that won't heal. I have a
family of faces I cannot touch.
eyes, lips I do not kiss.

just on the edge of sleep
I remember my kinship.
some nights when the stars
blink open their eyes, when the moon
cradles the blind night
and watches,
I feel them die.

Omissions

He prepared for bed as if appeasing an enemy. First the gentle yet firm folding down of the spread. Then the triangle of sheet and blanket to set off the pillow. In contrast, he brushed his teeth with a violence and urgency as if to say, "Don't push me too far."

Once in bed, his heart pounding, he lowered his head onto the pillow and lay on his back for a moment, deliberately exposing his mid-section. The rules satisfied, he turned on his side, brought his knees to his chest and covered his head. Please, he mouthed inside his head. Oh please.

All right. I'm willing to listen. Let's try it back a bit earlier. Dinner?

Let's take it through dinner.

He deliberately chose the restaurant at random. First he opened the city Guide to restaurants by location. Wherever his eye first focused became the area. Then he flipped to the section divided according to types of food and again let his eye focus suddenly. Tonight it would be Chinese on the north side of the city. It was dim, as he expected, with plain wooden tables and unsmiling waiters. He said "one" firmly and was pleased that he did not smile apologetically. The menu was overly large. Although he frowned in a pretense of thought, he had already decided to be safe with egg roll, steak and pea pods. He divided the egg roll into precise thirds and ate slowly, wiping his mouth at intervals. Although the rice was sticky he kept to his six cups of tea. He had difficulty controlling his lips, however, and pressed the rim of the teacup to his mouth for some extra moments.

Traffic had thinned by the time he headed for home. He found a parking place, made sure it was the night to park on the east side of the street, walked to the drug store for his paper and after-dinner mint, inserted his key into his door lock and breathed a sigh of satisfaction. The evening had gone well, so far, and he still had his paper to read. He did, briefly, lean his head against the wall of his bedroom before turning on the light, and fought down a question of trying to crowd his throat. No, he said in his mind. No.

He is beginning to be troublesome. I have gone through a great deal to place him in his proper setting, with reasonable tools for living, but just as we are about to get on with it, he fights me. But I am not without pity. If it's his whole damn day he wants, he can have it.

Good morning, Mr. Chasen. Like they say, if it's 8 a.m. that's Mr. Chasen coming through the doors. 8:01 and it's someone else."

"Good morning, Daniel. Yes, I suppose I'm punctual to a fault."

"No — no. Does me good to know you're going to come through that door."

"Well, I thank you, Daniel. That's very nice of you."

"Mr. Binder's in already. About 7:30. Now that's a new one, don't you think? Him early like that?"

His throat went dry, and he coughed to cover his shock. He felt his mouth moving and hoped it was a corroborating smile. He wanted desperately to press his handkerchief over his lips, but didn't want to enter the office with it bunched in his hand or pushed back into his pocket. He kept trying to swallow.

When he stepped into the large reception area he could see a shadow in Binder's cubicle. He was in there all right. A dark hump like an Indian burial mound.

He entered his own space, a few doors south of Binder, and realized, when he put his briefcase on the desk, that his perspiration had left dark welts on the leather where his fingers had gripped the edges. He tried to smooth them into each other, but the lighter areas refused to darken. Time would have to do that, he thought, and meanwhile he would have to hold it in another place so as not to permanently mark it.

He became aware of noises that were — inappropriate. Whisperings. Low-throated laughter. The swish of cloth on cloth. He didn't want to stand up because his head would be easily seen over the edge of the plastic panel separating the cubicles. He slid his chair closer to the divider. The sounds were coming from Binder's area. Definite murmurings. He squeezed his hands together. Colors flashed through his mind like knives. The sounds were trying to coalesce in images that he fought to keep abstract. But there was no mistaking their meaning — the two scales of voices — pitch — depth. He breathed through his mouth, nostrils pinched, his lips and tongue drying. He sat, hunched, until he felt rather than saw a change in the light. Someone had turned on the main overhead fixtures and cold fluorescent white sheeted the area. Then he saw Maureen Paley's bright head bob past the partitions, the outline of her figure distorted against the panels. He unclenched his fists and slid his chair quietly back to its position behind the desk. He opened his drawer and stared blankly at the neat tray of pencils and paper clips. Then he

pressed the brief case to his face and inhaled deeply.

That's enough. The rest can be easily imagined. No surprises. So back to bedtime: knees to chest; cover shielding his head.

He has kept his mind carefully blank as if to entice sleep like a gas into the empty space. Though he has become adept at keeping visions from seeping through cracks in his attention, he suddenly is aware of odors. One is Binder's pipe. He can smell the bite of its smoke, taste heat in his throat. He rubs his nose. Now the odor is sweet, a scent of musk — apricot perfume, cutting into the smoke and entering the passages leading to his eyes and tear ducts. He presses a piece of sheeting against his nostrils and squeezes his eyelids until white and green lights invade the blackness. He relaxes the lids; breathes a couple of times through his mouth, then carefully tests the air in his nose. Just the empty smell of the sheets. He waits. Suddenly wide awake. His nostrils dilate. Milk. He can smell milk.

He carefully draws the sheet and blanket away from his body as if someone else is in the bed and must not be disturbed. With the same slow movements, he eases out of bed, opens the bedroom door and pads into the kitchen. Most of the furniture and utensils are rented, except for the bed, bedding and personal items. He had insisted on an all-electric apartment and appliances although he never cooks. "Are you sure there's no gas," he had persisted. "I can always smell gas."

His nostrils expand, testing. Milk. His eyes dart about the kitchen. He never drinks milk. Not even cream. He sniffs the soapy residue under his nails. The milk turns to perfume. To gas. He holds his breath, presses his palms against the refrigerator. Stop. He spreads his fingers like spikes against the steel. Please stop.

He pulls open drawers until he comes to the one holding a few cooking utensils, including a paring knife. The landlady is particularly proud of outfitting the kitchen even to a paring knife. He removes it from its setting, not disturbing the rest of the drawer's contents, and brings it back to the edge of the bed. No. He brings it into the bathroom and sits on the edge of the tub. He is serious, but an almost-smile keeps his lips gentle. Slowly he presses the side of the paring knife against the soft white underside of his wrist. The skin indents. He presses harder. Finally, he turns the knife so the point meets the skin. He jabs suddenly and stares at the blood smearing his wrist and dripping over. There, he says, as if reassuring a child that

it didn't hurt at all. There, he says again. He watches the blood drain for awhile, then leans down and sniffs it. Metallic. He feels some on his nose and rises to look in the mirror. His smeared nose brings the smile into full position. You see? He says to the mirror. Why wait.

He puts the knife down on the sink counter and goes into the bedroom where he removes a clean handkerchief from a stack in the bureau drawer. He drapes the handkerchief over the wrist where it quickly soaks up blood until it's entirely red. He soaks another handkerchief, then takes a third and, using his teeth on one end, ties it tightly above the wrist until the skin is bleached and the wound ceases to flow. Then he rests on the edge of the bed thoughtfully watching his wrist.

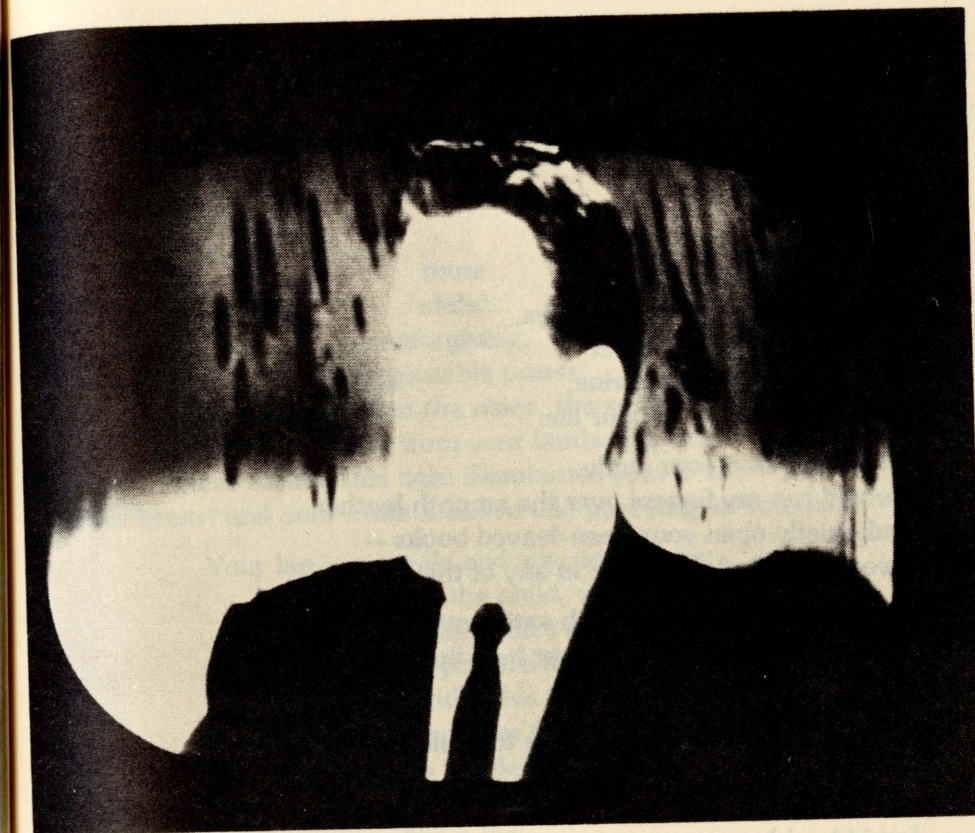
He has no rules to guide him. He cannot remember the rules of tourniquetting, how long, how often. He cannot remember if one wrist can do fatal damage. He is pleased to have a brand new choice — a real decision. He can go to sleep and let morning bring its answers. He can call a doctor or a hospital. His chest expands. He is eminently in control of the situation. He is smiling as if he will never stop.

He is, if the truth must be known, daring me. I am sick with indecision. I thought I knew every detail of his existence. I have watched him and he never deviates from the rules. I don't know who put the paring knife in the kitchen drawer, or why he remembered it. It is on such small omissions that a life often depends.

His wrist is greenish green. He waits.

We wait.

Either way, I'll be late for work, he says to no one in particular. He rises. Puts the soaked handkerchiefs into the bathroom hamper. Takes the paring knife back to the kitchen, drops it into the sink, releases the tourniquet and waits until a few drops fall on the blade. Then he turns to the telephone on the wall. An emergency number is pasted to its side. That efficient landlady, who didn't exist even a few pages ago, has printed it. He phones the hospital to explain the unusual turn the evening has taken. Then, one hand gently, but firmly, supporting the other, he seats himself facing the door, the smell of blood in his nostrils.



Your House

I could never find myself
in the calm hours of your days,
Or step upon your carpet
of delicate gold, deep wine,
Rich as the flavor of your life.

If I walked into your study,
I would run my fingers over the smooth leather
and quietly open your linen-leaved books —
I would not find my name in any of them.

The mahogany gleams with satisfaction.
The fire in your hearth cannot help but chill me

Within brick walls,
too square, too massive for me to scale,
Lies your garden
of secret fragrance,
forbidden bloom.

Picasso's Mother And Child

mute
stolid
unforgiving,
unforgiveable power.

You have sucked the roses, the sunlight,
the very breath from your landscape and
these colors, this light illuminates your flesh,
your breast and your arms massive and unseeing as boughs.

Your lap is a cradle and was born to be;
A temple for the child, who,
nested in the safe valley of flesh,
Senses that you are not him
as he cuddles his foot,
And becomes free
to juggle
his world
like a top.

Easy Roses

I suppose I sent him roses
for his wedding,
for his grave;
for whatever the occasion,
it was festive.
It was final.

But, oh, uncertain roses
never seal and never silence.
For whatever rite we witnessed
(bed of marriage, bed of death),
you have risen from the roses
in a bridal resurrection
like a Lazarus in lace,
and you dance
in dust and distance
with your bride and I
beside you.
Not quite dead,
but much diminished,
you return and turn again
to collect and re-collect
unburning ashes of unburied loves.

Oh, there are no easy roses
when the married won't stay buried
and the buried won't stay dead.

He Loves His Cat

I have been held
like the cat
you hold like that.
I know the hand that smooths,
pretends to sooth,
the hair, the brow —
those fingers fluttering
like fireflies that try to flame,
but make no difference to the dark.

Just so,
pale fingers flutter near my eyes,
pretending to illuminate my darkness.
They do not.

The pretense of caress
is countered by that quiet hand
whose long, still fingers close
with all the grace of *rigor mortis*
on the belly, thigh, or throat.

Dying to escape,
I ape a safe complacency;
like the cat,
I purr in desperation,
hoping to deceive
until I can perceive
an egress,
or a weakness.

When you hold your cat
like that
I see his eyes grow wide;
I see his eyes grow mad
beneath the hand
that strokes his head,
that spreads his fur,
his frightened fur,
while all the while
the other hand,
the relentless hand,
holds the cat
like that.

Iguanas In Chichen-Itza

A twelve-month tall and a winter wide,
the grey temple confines in silence,
millennial silence, beside the green jungle,
the jade jaguar.

Adored by tourists
and ignored by priests,
the jaguar ages into artifact.

The beating heart no longer beats for him.
No more do practiced priests
from patient breasts
tear beating hearts
for him.

And yet
the heartless sun still shines
and impotent divinity wreaks no revenge.
The jaguar is no longer dangerous.

Beside the green jungle, grey iguanas,
never luminous, loved, or feared,
invade the sacred precincts.
Grey iguanas, old as stone,
despite the jaded jaguar,
make his shrine their nest.
And they survive,
despite the jaguar's decadence,
survive in spite of odds,
in spite of reasons,
and compel belief in
something like them,
ludicrous and loathsome,
something like a god.

**Guidobaldo Thanks Elizabeth
For Liz Libbey**

My one-eyed father
had a penchant for defenses.
When he built his fortress
on this formidable hill,
he was not thinking of the view,
having lost perspective
when he lost his eye;
he was immune to vistas,
unimpressed by panoramas —
a devotee of diagrams, he was
in love with lines,
with blueprints, plans and strategems,
devisings of assaults and sorties,
sieges and surprises. Yet secure
upon his unassailable, high hill,
he dwelt upon the battles in the plains,
the valley's flat distractions.

He was not concerned with beauty,
or his misbegotten son,
when he composed his palace
on this agonizing hill;
his eye was not upon the marrow,
rotting in my shrinking bones —
unable to negotiate a climb,
unable to accomodate descent.

Imprisoned at the apex
of this "wearisome, high hill,"
I dwelt in tears
in father's penitential palace,
where, defending and repenting,
we awaited distant armies,
seeking absolution for the sins
we could not be expected to commit.

Curled in the core of our heartless palace,
as the darkness coils in the depths of shells,
as the fire hides in the deeps of stone,
we waited.

Then
our mountain
trembled to transfiguration,
and our palace
reeled to brightness;
at the Advent of Elizabeth
we became
the radical center
of a reborn world

where
eccentricities converge
to forms conformable
and "all routes merge
in permanent *potentia*"

where
lithic logos
lights the mirrored floor
and flames the fountain
in the calligraphic courtyard

where
the blind man sees
the lame man leaps
and knows his armies
have been reconciled.

Alice Ryerson

Island Courtyard

The hens squat and lift up their feathery
little butts for the rooster:
Pow! and it's done.
They shake the dust out of their skirts
and go about their business.
Clucking.

One Of The Many Mansions Is A Park Of Pain

Loose at the edge of the water she wanders,
a meanderer in white wild hair
walking into a wilderness
of thin things which sing.
She hears the trees in the park
having their own fantasies
and the grass whetting its blades.
Those who neither slumber nor sleep
pluck at her out of legends.
It's dark among the monuments
and night has stretched out on the benches.

The things she's embalmed in
become frayed towards morning
but there are birds in the park
put there by God to clean bones
and as the night drifts away downriver
she is loosed into the beaks of gulls
flying higher than the fantasies of the trees,
flying and turning in a blue bow.

We are a flock of white balloons
following her circles with pale eyes.

The Visit

1

You have been here a month
when I come with a thin bag
packed with nothing
that could expect anything in particular.
I didn't bring a face;
the people here will arrange one for me.

I have combed my words:
'These trees are beautiful'.
But what position shall I stand in
to say so?

I look at you sideways.
Anxiety closes me like a stopper.

2

We eat a meal in easy postures
at a round table.
They pass the soup and crackers
but don't give out new faces yet.
Opposite, you're laughing
with your chair tipped back.
I toss on the surface like a cork,
unable to dissolve.

3

We climb through fields of stubble.
I cross the leafy places quietly,
I breathe as softly as I can
on an uphill path
because I'm turning into an antenna:
listening.
Stopping to pick up apples
I catch my breath to quiet it.

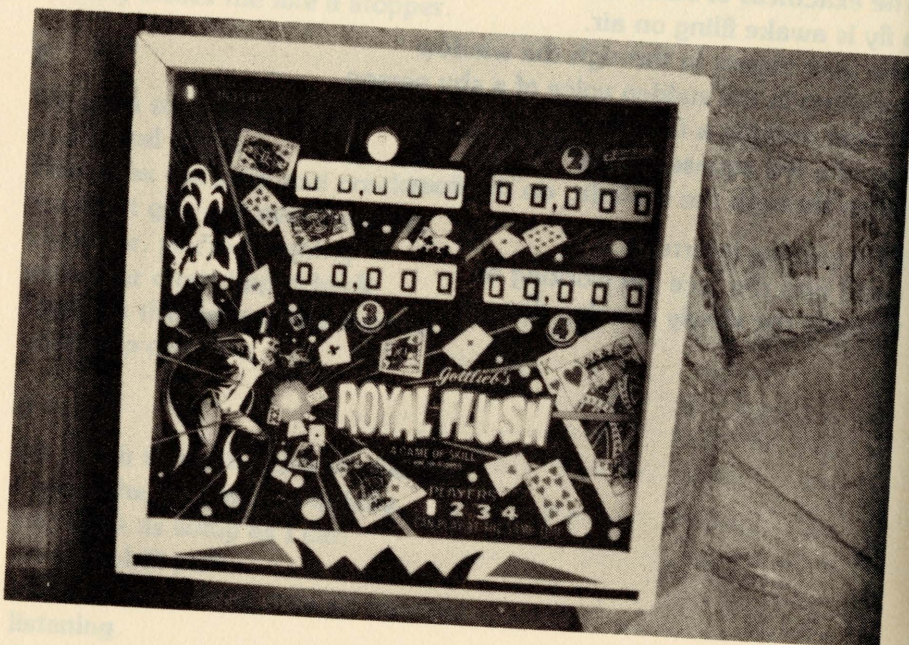
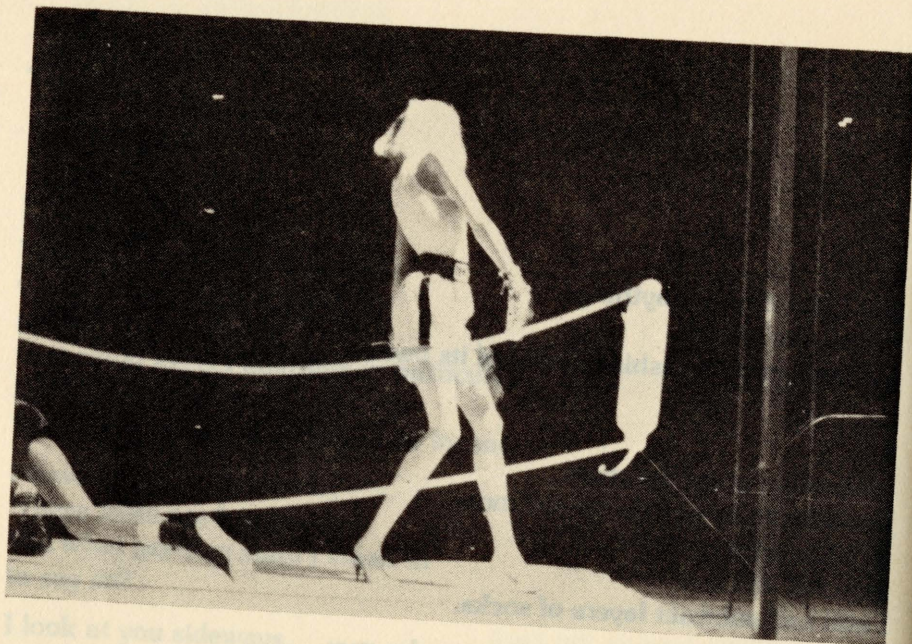
Am I tuned in to anything?
I think our silence
makes a minute rushing sound of its own.

4

Pretending great busyness
I nonchalantly wander to my room
to fiddle with comfort:
too cold too hot
I add and subtract layers of socks.

The exactness of small sounds consoles me:
a fly is awake filing on air.
The view comes in through the window
speaking in the sudden voice of a shy person.
I begin making a face for myself
out of a few squares of sky
fallen through the skylight, on the floor.

Feet coming interrupt;
and I turn the face I'm working on
towards the slowly opening door.



RENNY GOLDEN

Renny Golden is a professor at Northeastern Ill. University. She has been an educator for 15 years, working mostly on the west side of Chicago, as well as in the Maximum Security Prison in Walpole, Mass. Her poetry has appeared in *Literary Review*, *West End*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Hearsay Press*. She was recently a winner in the "All Nations Poetry Contest." She was a featured poet in an anthology published by Sunburst Press, Fall 1976, entitled, *Half a Winter to Go*.

LIBBY NEIDITCH

Libby Neiditch lives in Chicago, is married, the mother of three children, and a graduate of UNI. She has taught school, she writes music, and has just completed workshops in the Writing in Chicago program, with Harry Mark Petrakis, Paul Carroll, William Brashler, and Dr. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. She is currently preparing a book for children.

ELIZABETH PETERSON

Ms. Peterson's recent work has been accepted by (and in most cases appeared in) *Mati*, *Salome*, *Wind*, *Sailing*, *Cricket*, etc., *A Review of General Semantics*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *Kansas Quarterly*. She is a co-editor of *Rhino*, a magazine of poetry and short prose, and a co-chairman of *Poetry Forum*. She is also working on a novel.

SARAH ROLLER

Sarah Roller is a graduate student in English at Northeastern Illinois University. She has been published in *Poetry &*, *Mati*, *Out There*, and *Dial-a-Poem* in Venice, California. She was chosen as one of the ten finalists in the annual poetry contest sponsored by the North Shore Women's League in 1977. She was coordinator of the Oracle Poetry Reading Series sponsored by the Skokie Public Library from 1976 to 1978. She was last seen disappearing in the hinterlands of the Subtle after spending many years exploring the isles of Blatant.

TR KERTH

Born in 1948, TR Kerth spent his childhood in Elmwood Park, Ill. He received a B.A. from Western Illinois University and an M.A. from Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and he currently teaches English at Maine South High School in Park Ridge. Mr. Kerth lives in Schaumburg with his wife and two children. "Now I Lay Me Down" is his first short story to appear in print.

NEIL LUKATCH

Neil Lukatch has previously published in *Another Chicago Magazine* and has poems forthcoming in *Southern Poetry Review*.

LINDA ORR

Linda Orr's new book of poems, *A Certain X*, will be published next fall/winter by L'Epervier.

FRANKLIN E. JONES³

"We are all racing under sealed handicaps."

Pursewarden

Balthazar, Lawrence Durrell

The words that we say to each other are the most complicated things in the universe, metaphysically, beyond the atom or the star. Important. We should choose them wisely, but we sometimes don't. Every experience with love has brought me closer to knowing myself — in inches or in miles — toward becoming a more substantial entity, more capable of everything, always seeking not to repeat mistakes. These words are dedicated to all who have suffered love, unachieved. But, especially, to Barbara A. Battaglia, my lost mirror, who served me lovely journeys, however brief, turned keys, and rushed me light years toward myself. And, equally, paradoxically, toward looking outwards.

HAROLD HILD

Harold Hild was born and raised in Chicago. He has published in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Manifold*, and *Cardinal Quarterly*, has worked in film, and is currently interested in gardening and growing a better horseradish.

MARK PERLBERG

Mark Perlberg is the author of *The Burning Field*. His poems have been in many magazines, including *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, and *Chicago Review*. He is the current president and a founder of The Poetry Center at The Museum of Contemporary Art.

ENID POWELL

Enid Powell is currently collaborating on a non-fiction book with Pam Skeen for Houghton-Mifflin. She has published stories in *Mississippi Valley Review*, *Yankee Magazine*; poetry in *Colorado Quarterly*, soon to be seen in *Descant* and *Carleton Miscellany*; humor and essays in *Tennis Illustrated*, *Tennis West/East*. Ms. Powell teaches creative writing in a continuing education program. She has an M.A. in English with a Creative Writing Specialty from U. of Ill., Circle Campus.

r.m. rembacz

r.m. rembacz is a large, furry creature native to Chicago. He is a poet, author, artist, photographer, raconteur, graduate of the University of Illinois, and a translator of Polish poetry. It is rumored he will be elected King of Poland.

CYNTHIA POE

Cynthia Poe, an undergraduate student at Northeastern, has an almost unnatural fondness for musically inclined frogs. This is her first appearance.

LAURALYN RAE

Laura will graduate from UNI in April with a B.A. in English. She was an editor of *Thalassa*, the Wright College magazine, in 1973. She plans to continue writing short stories and poems.

PETER FERRY

Peter Ferry is a Chicago writer and editor.

PAULETTE ROESKE

Paulette Roeske teaches creative writing at College of Lake County, and studied last summer at the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop.

EDITH FREUND

Edith Freund lives in Highland Park with her husband, two cats, five children, one dog, too many cars for the driveway. She has been published in various literary journals, magazines, and newspapers. She is co-author of a non-fiction book on child care.

ALICE RYERSON

Alice Ryerson is the director of Ragdale, a place in Lake Forest, Ill. where writers and artists can go and work for limited periods of time. She lived in Cambridge, Mass. for many years, and is a psychologist and an archeologist, as well as a poet. Her poetry has appeared in many little magazines.

ELI EHRENPREIS

Eli Ehrenpreis is a double major in Biology and Music at UNI. He also studies classical cello. His interests include reading (especially short stories) and nature study.

DON HOFFMAN

Don Hoffman, Associate Professor of English at UNI, is making his debut as a poet in this issue of *Overtures*. He has, however, published articles on Medieval literature and addressed a variety of professional organizations: he is currently preparing a study of the *Tavola Ritonda* to be presented at the 12th Congress of the International Arthurian Society in Regensburg, West Germany. He is fond of cats and believes he is being pursued by hostile clowns.

JIM ELLEDGE

Jim Elledge was born at mid-century in west central Illinois. He now lives on Chicago's Near North side. His poetry has appeared in, or been accepted for publication by, *Beyond Baroque*, *Journal of Popular Film*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, *NewsArt*, and other U.S. and Canadian journals. His book, *James Dickey: A Bibliography, 1947-1974*, will be published by Scarecrow Press in the spring of 1979.

JERRY PENDERGAST

Born in Chicago on March 20, 1955, during a snowstorm. Grew up on the mid-north side before bulldozers made room for the "el". Went to three different high schools. Graduated from Amundson. Alumnus of UNI. Previously unpublished.

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