

MANUSCRIPT



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Steven Smith

THE DRIVEN TIDE (Ghazals)

The stuff of dead love decays in my veins —
 cherishing, shaking me until your love grows where my arms have
 been open to you.

U, too, recall the pipe-knock, those greenhouse swells of heat —
 rain-sodden ground once solid, nurturer of musk and mold.

There are lessons in your silence, lights sequestered in your
 tombs of thought.
 The birds scream late into the night.

Dig your wells. Dig your wells, plant them deep in the earth.
 I need some air — enough to get me to the bottom of it all,
 you rising lake.

Tug at a leaf; there a heart grieves. It drops out of my
 once-favorite book
 as Saturn whirls and dances away; a veil slips like a rock.

•

Delight in what escapes you? The unknown is ripe,
 swelling the known form like the bee burrowed in with the poison
 of it.

The heart ceases its pulsing, the forest begins its breathing,
 and then it disappears; a dark edge like a hound about to strike
 at our throats.

Walking past darkened, elusive greens — look to the trees!
 (filtered grey things on sunless purples) — cry out to the
 female of any form!

You speak oracles and don't listen; these are streets, these are
not immortal fields,
yet you carry your indifference devotedly; the Night.

Brilliant. No light in the city. But run with fortune's dog;
construct tales of torch and sound and fill his ears with fire,
making a trail blazing.

A blue dome supports the great grey cloud-slab on its way to
the river —
something to wish on. . . Whirring birds vanish, then reappear
like apparitions.

Millions of lives strung out in beads the building wears.
President, give us weapons! Keep the motor running. Your House
is gone away.

Who wonders at a constant danger? Constantly. We're bird-like
in our loves,
our loss, our quickenings. (Dance around the flames!)

Delivering brilliantine and jeremiads! If you're truly modern.
If you're truly modern the sun is not kind. Poets drive
pencils into their eyes.

From Atlantic cities to the West — preserve the Word in future
Blood.

This is the moon's pony screaming among the dark powers in
the sand.

Is it the truth, does life seem most real at either end?
Here a head-land slips into the sea; there islands rise, learning.

Water beats iron. A word outlasts a stone.
(You taste of salt — if I drink too deeply will you madden me
like an ocean?)

Earth is sick, you aid, and kept knives under your pillow —
always on edge, you cut me to my marrow —
measure exhuming measure.

Shall we march? We'll just watch very still in a world sleep-
walking
impotent before the Void. Once-dexterous hearts are being
claimed by something.

The brain bears its convolutions well, a roller-coaster ride
of death and life.

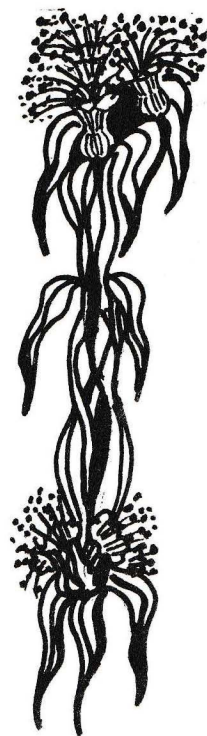
Footfalls bark in the trodden snow. Then — the percussive
silence.

At some point you become a path of resilience; we discover in
each other a
temporary immortality: you become the drug of a storm murdering
itself in our arms.

FILLED

the kid confuses swimming with
frantic splashing
not one to go under as i am under
sipping silently at the
volume of water taking up
every occult breath
drowning for the little ones to
laugh at

bringing up the bottom and
weeping away a yellow-green
creature of chlorine-urine
that streaks every
fingering childless hair





PRESENCE

For when we do not
find our place so
easily

wandering
like the circle of
exceptions

simple winds

down

following the
natural path of

the land thru
shadow

But
our
seasons turn slowly

intractable



CONTEMPORARY DREAMS

Throw you into the garden with
whatever is unforget
a pile of leaves and silver

so fragile and so brutally
collected:
like the silence of an exile

or a child born suddenly into
stage-light
seemingly brought from nothing

where did this come from?
where did
this come from It's found

and old far beyond your years it
keeps you going far beyond
your years

plying you with origins



David Reynolds

UNTITLED

Poised once more at the abyss
taunted by my own uncertainty,
caressed by the warmth of
some end, a solution,
James I hope you are happy —
humus home,
like wide load trailers dragged
from one place to another,
abandoned empty shells
left in desolate places for the vandals
who pick and plunder for the pennies.
I refuse to be copper
or vapor.

There is still comfort in your kiss
where I escape from grey reality —
that sphere has been hewn
yet, where is recognition?
My grief cannot so lightly
be shorn
like the garments worn ragged
by abuses of a lover.
I have no use for hell's
alluring devils
who comfort my home and torment my dreams.
I
ache to blend metals
with air.

PASSAGE

White smoke twines slowly upward
from my cigarette
as it burns in the carnival-glass dish
that melts pastel in the light lost
by a shrouded bulb.
I wait,
wondering like a damn fool
(trying not to shake, or to at least know why I do),
while you lie silent in the next room.
Far off — outside somewhere —
two cats scream like an infant stabbed.
In the house
only Aunt Jessie's old regulator can be heard
clamoring on the kitchen wall
as it hails the ashes piling up
in the antique dish —
as it flakes away
sticks to my skin like fish scales
thrown from the rasp as it scrapes the fish skin clean.
They notch the smoke
as it rises to burrow into the ceiling paint.

FRAGMENT

In fall
when the wood weeps gold
when the trail lies beneath
the passing of another year,
and each dried leaf shuffles
ages beneath my shoes,
I can taste the dust of Autumn
in the air.
There death has sat
at ease
and just smiled.

GLOWERING EMBERS

Low hung
it settles in like a jackal
over the cities

and waits.
The cities smolder,
fueled by layers of neglect,
they give off steady
stifling heat.
Atlanta
like an arched cat
cornered
waits.

Detroit waits
on idle haunches
stunned in the light
of robot spot welds that sputter against
the dark.

The weak pray
waiting in lines,
hands cupped
beaten faces haggard.

With furtive glances
they hurry back to homes that smell of
boiled cabbage.

The brave stalk the streets
driven by white heat.

The maggots prey —
fat fed

by the saucy baked flesh
of the dead.

All wait
like a crude pipe-bomb
in unsteady hands.

Fred Gerhard

DEAR HARPSICHORD

No longer am I alone in the world
For I am gone.

And very few will remember of me,
But for a song

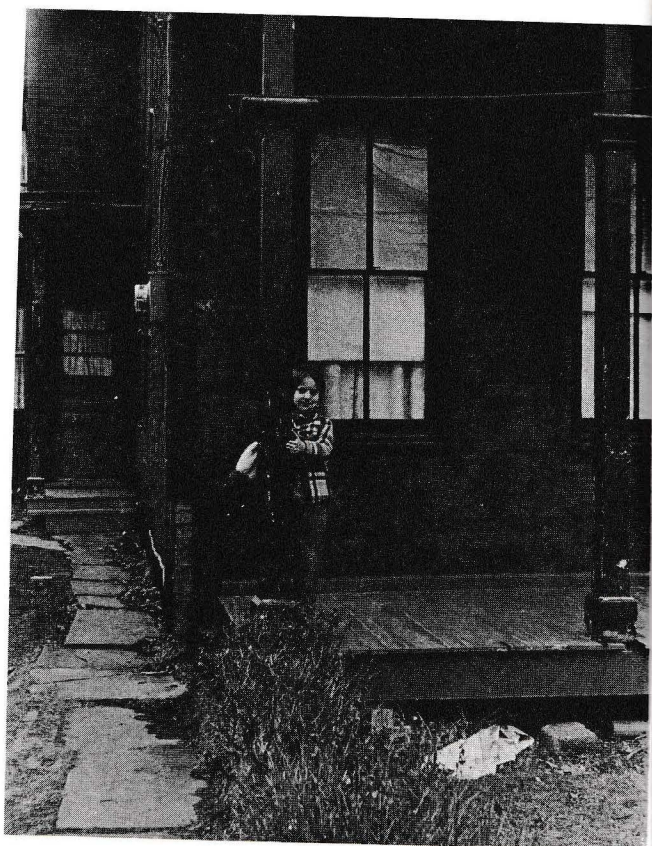
Which echoes on lonely strings
In the harpsichords of her heart,

And silent she stands in an empty room,
And finally she hears

Choruses of love

Choruses of love
Choruses of love.

And shuts the door. She refrains
From the pains of the room.



Ellen Krupack

TO MY DAUGHTER

You wanted to hold my hand so I could guide you down the cliff. You wanted to be a part of this world where you could open a brown enveloped license plate and could anticipate the combination of numbers and letters, much like you anticipated the order of fallen pickup sticks from your open hands. You wanted to be a part of this world so your name could be included on the list of missionaries receiving donation envelopes. Little you wanted envelopes to fill with your little money—that was different from merely helping mommy fill hers. You wanted to grow to be too big to be spanked so that you wouldn't have to pad your trousers with a handful of underpants before you knew you'd be getting strapped. You wanted to secretly practice kisses on cold door knobs so that at the "right time" you would know how. You wanted to look old enough to move into bars where you could drink the loudness of music and clothes and could drink the breaths of booze that could intoxicate your body. You wanted a soap that would wash away your innocence, your shyness, and your trust so that adults wouldn't know. But when you've finished washing, don't forget to scratch out the soap from underneath your fingernail before you suck your thumb.

UNTITLED

In the summer, the sliding board is an aroused tongue that licks then drops stimulated ass. But in the winter, the sliding board is a depressed tongue that merely absorbs a secreting lozenge of snow which coats like frost.

Amy Elias

LES ENFANTS D'HIVER

In your silence I heard the wind
Flowing cold and heavy over infant leaves crouched warm
in the womb of the wild maple.
My eyes watered from the sting and bite of it.
I shall talk to the warm breath of the child
Press my nose close to his brown neck
Breathe in the smell of him newly washed
Glad he is not yours, glad that he will
warm with color the cold white iciness you substitute
for the brown of fertile humus
or the birth of the maple leaves.



ARTIST'S PALETTE

Dormant white canvas, washed in the summer grass
by the sable-brush caresses of the artist,
Prime-coated with non-committal neutrals till his apparent
inspiration floods your trembling edges with silent night-purples
tinged with firey red: he will leave you confused with compliments.
What then, after he is gone, when the burning sanguinary hues
reflect from a child's searching eyes?
Her turpentine questions will run your perfect colors,
and she gingerly will wipe your surface clean of meaning,
leaving only muddled greys. Your longing cry for past,
pure whiteness grows from later acquiescence.
The white was caught in his premeditated artwork
and your colors will remain confused.





Barbara Metroka

**"It taught them Indians
not to fuck with Gene Autry"**

"You seem to think it's so easy."

"You try shooting an Indian
off a moving horse."

But oh God what a sound they make
when they hit the ground.

It's so much like a sack of potatoes
thrown from a truck.

It's that hard tudding sound
and I can't help but thinking
about all those poor little Indian
orphan babies.

You keep telling me it's a social thing.

I shouldn't have been so offended
when we heard on the radio
that women have no souls.

(I wrote that nasty man
Otto a letter the next day
that never got mailed)

You seem to think you know

how hard it is

for me to know

how hard it is

for you to make all those poor little Indian babies
into orphans and how hard

it is for you to keep coming home
for more hugs, and kisses, and
cheers.



Henry Long

GO AND SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

The seventh grade Nothtrollian classroom was ecstatic. Little Catholic Nothtrollians were throwing paper space ships, spitting tiny, wet balls of chewing gum, and pulling each others tails.

This could be expected.

The Christianization of Nothtroll brought about complete cultural change. The many customs and habits, naturally, of the Christian missionaries from Earth who converted them, lingered on. The sciences of space exploration and cosmic union was now replaced by church and bible, a pure, child-like understanding of what was around them.

Bug raised his long purple limb and slopped his suction cup fingers hard across Dawomba's rear ends.

"You're sickening, Bug!" screamed Dawomba in sheer protest, blushing a light shade of blue.

Bug laughed and snorted, hiding his tiny Catholic head under his armpit, which is the norm for Nothtrollians when they become embarrassed.

"Hey! Here she comes!" warned a fellow seventh grader who was keeping watch by the door. At once they all raced to their seats, stepping on each others tails and trying hard to look Catholic.

They were all seated with their fingers folded.

Then in walked the nine-foot Sister Cholaric, clacking her heels behind her.

"Good day, children," announced Sister Cholaric with tight white lips.

"Good day Sister Cholaric," replied the seventh grade Nothtrollian students with upturned eyes.

"Before we begin today's study, let us first pray in silence to our Lord and Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ," said the nun.

The room became very silent.

Only the nun was praying.

Bug sneakily opened up his notebook, and with lustful seventhgrade eyes, stared at a picture of a naked Nothtrollian woman that he had ripped out of an old edition of "Nothtroll Delights". Bug became excited as he gleamed at her beautiful body.

"Mmmm — God look at that beautiful body!" Bug thought to

himself. "Mm — The way she gently holds that long, thick, shiney tail; those sexy, smooth, silky thighs, the way she struts out those four, beautiful, round —"

"Mister Bug! What are you doing?" pierced the nine-foot nun with bulging brown eyes.

"NN-Nothing Sis-Sister Choloric!" squelched Mister Bug, nervously shoving the beautiful naked lady back into his notebook.

Every eye in the classroom was now upon him.

"Let me see what you were looking at!" demanded the nun who was now only inches away from the stuttering bug.

"I don't have nothh-nothing Sis-Sister Cholaric," innocently explained Bug.

"But I saw you looking at something in your notebook!" she said, moving closer to her student. "Class remind Mister Bug what happens to liars — What happens to sinners!"

"Sinners when they expire, go to hell and burn in fire," repeated the entire class, just as they had memorized it from their Catholic Reader.

"Very good class! Now Mister Bug ... Let me see what it was you were looking at."

Bug reluctantly opened his notebook and took out the picture of the naked lady. He then reached it up to the giant nun, who looked at the piece of disgusting Nothtrollian smut, which, by the way, was also a result from the work of the Christian missionaries from Earth.

The Sister took the horrible picture into her huge right hand, and ripped it to shreds with only her fingers. "I want to see you after class Mister Bug!" the nun said firmly.

Bug had now excreted his urine in his pants.

Dawomba stuck her tongues out at Bug.

"Bug, look at me," demanded Sister Cholaric after the class was over.

Bug's tail quivered in nervousness, and he couldn't help but to shake. The urine had now dried in his pants, leaving a slight greenish stain, but that's not what he was concerned with right now.

The nun got up out of her chair and walked over to Bug, who was trembling more and more as she got closer.

"Bug — Look at me I said!"

"Tm — I'm very s-s-sorry Sss-ister Cholaric!" pleaded Bug with tears in his eyes.

"Tm afraid that's just not sufficient Mister Bug," replied the nun.

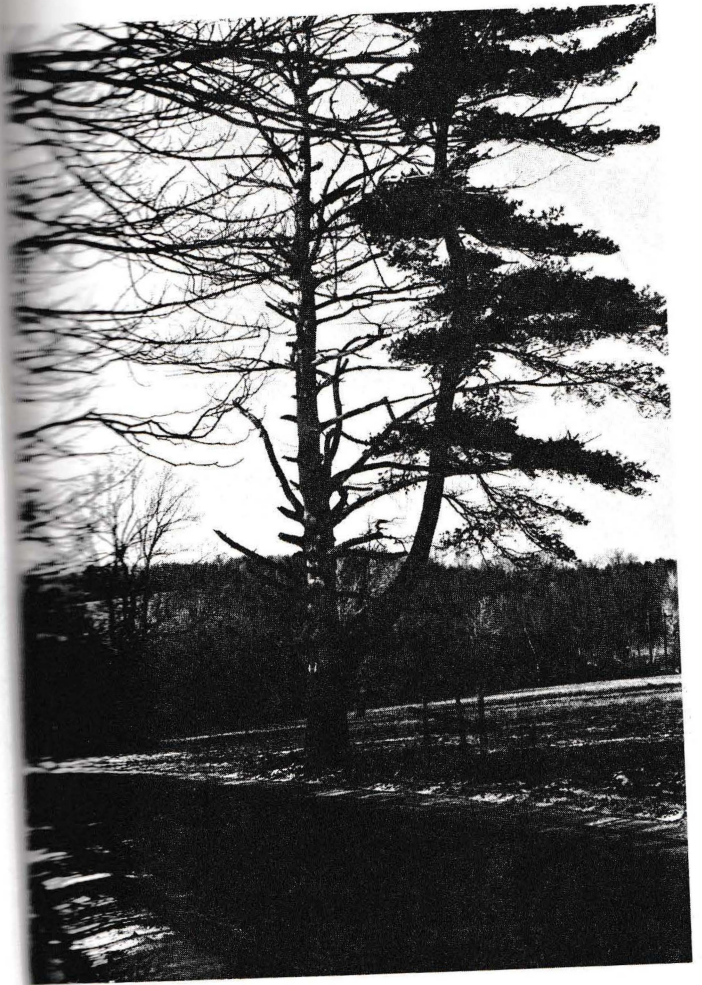
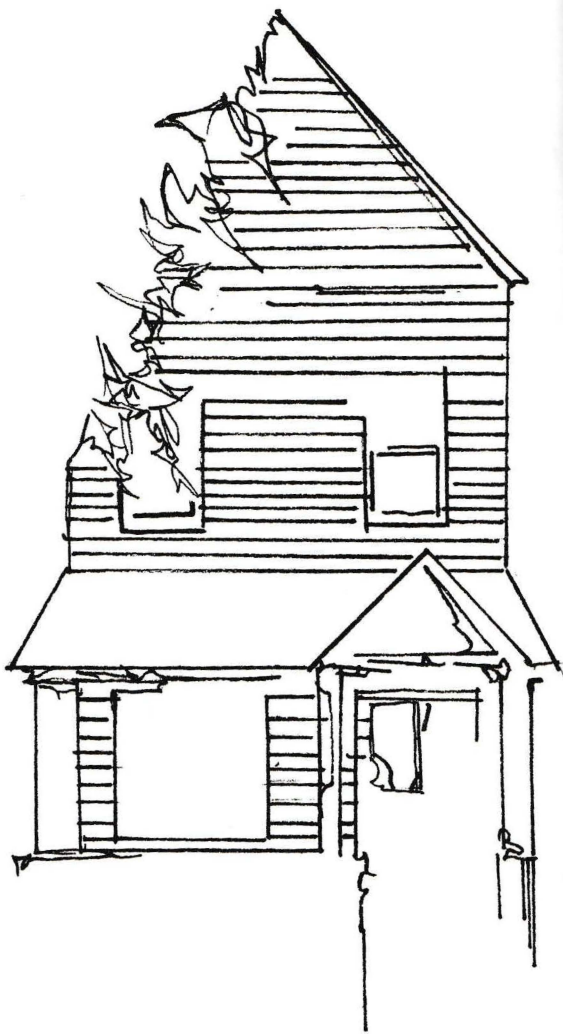
"You know how we all must pay our penance to Jesus Christ our Lord when we hurt him by sinning — and what you have done today is very — very bad Mr. Bug. You neglected your prayers, you disobeyed me, to look at a disgusting, revolting, unholy picture of the devil, Mister Bug. Jesus does not want that at all, Mister Bug — and neither do I."

Bug now had excreted his own bile in his pants, and it made him feel even sicker than he already was. He was also crying uncontrollably.

"Tomorrow at noon," said the nun as she walked back to her desk, "You will be crucified for your sins in the crucifixion room — and may God have pity on your wretched soul."

Bug was dismissed, and the nun began to fill out the proper crucifixion forms.





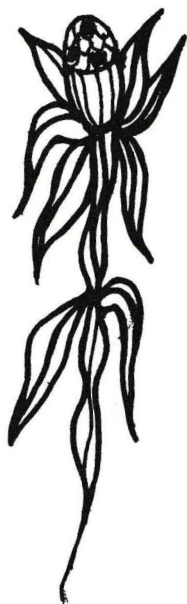
Anne May

AGAIN-TO JIM

Before I meet you
I look for the moon—
the first quarter crescent,
a blade showing
edges sharp enough
to slice away these nights
too thick with waiting.

Slowly she grows
larger than a bright rim—
rays upturning every edge of sky.
As you burrow your head
into the hollow
between my neck and shoulder,
it is polished
in a glaze of warm light.

In a smothering breeze
the half moon unfolds.
Because I have been enfolded,
I want to know the release
of raising my arms,
finding her glow
traveling cool
up through my hand.



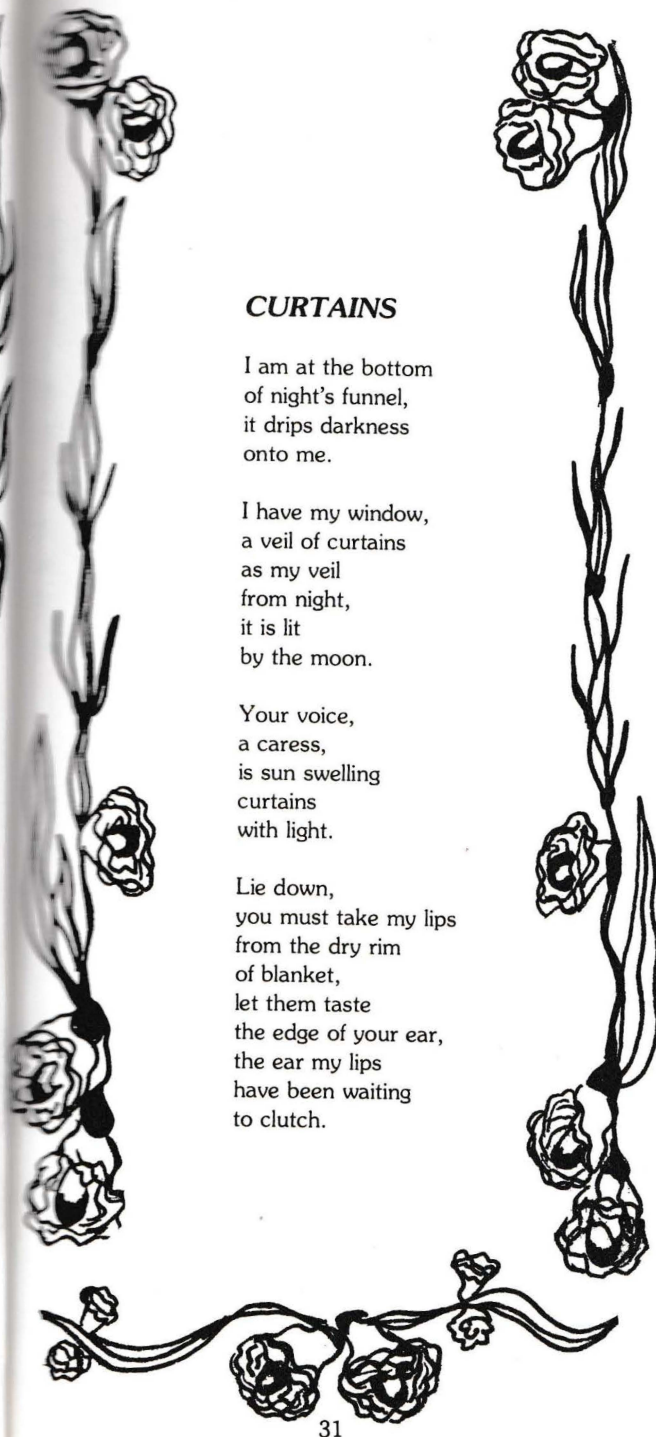
CURTAINS

I am at the bottom
of night's funnel,
it drips darkness
onto me.

I have my window,
a veil of curtains
as my veil
from night,
it is lit
by the moon.

Your voice,
a caress,
is sun swelling
curtains
with light.

Lie down,
you must take my lips
from the dry rim
of blanket,
let them taste
the edge of your ear,
the ear my lips
have been waiting
to clutch.

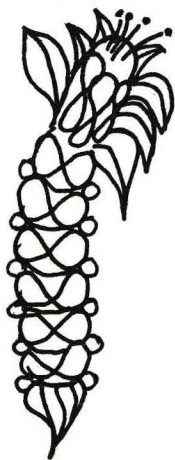


KEEPING FOR KIM

The air flowing down
from my yard
is rich tree mist.
Breathing it in,
I call it cloud mist,
because I feel it gliding
down off the hill
through thick trees
with movement
long and silent,
as if it had streamed down
off the edges
of pigeons' wings
to reach my porch.

June's night air is scented
honeysuckle.
I sit near my porch
watching
the tall silhouette formed
by the dense tree
darkness.
Inside my room
withering scents of
lilac, wisteria, rose,
would keep me
from sleep.

At night in my room,
the scent of roses
slowly fills my breath.
At midnight,
lungs full of rose scent,
I wake and call out softly
to someone
who has gone.



Her face begins withering
from my brain
as I leave my room
and the scent
of dead flowers
to fade.

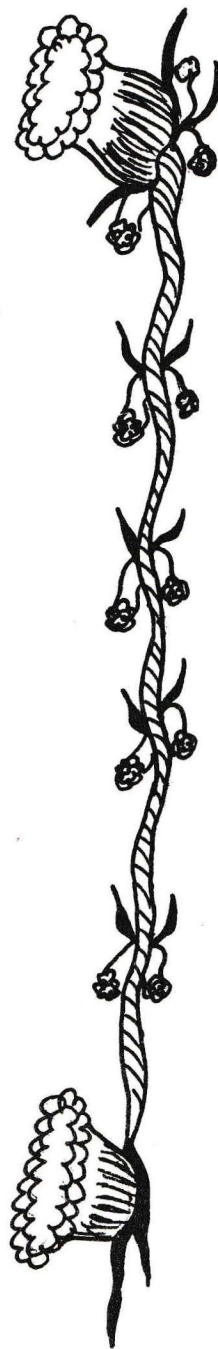
A SKIRT FOR JOHN

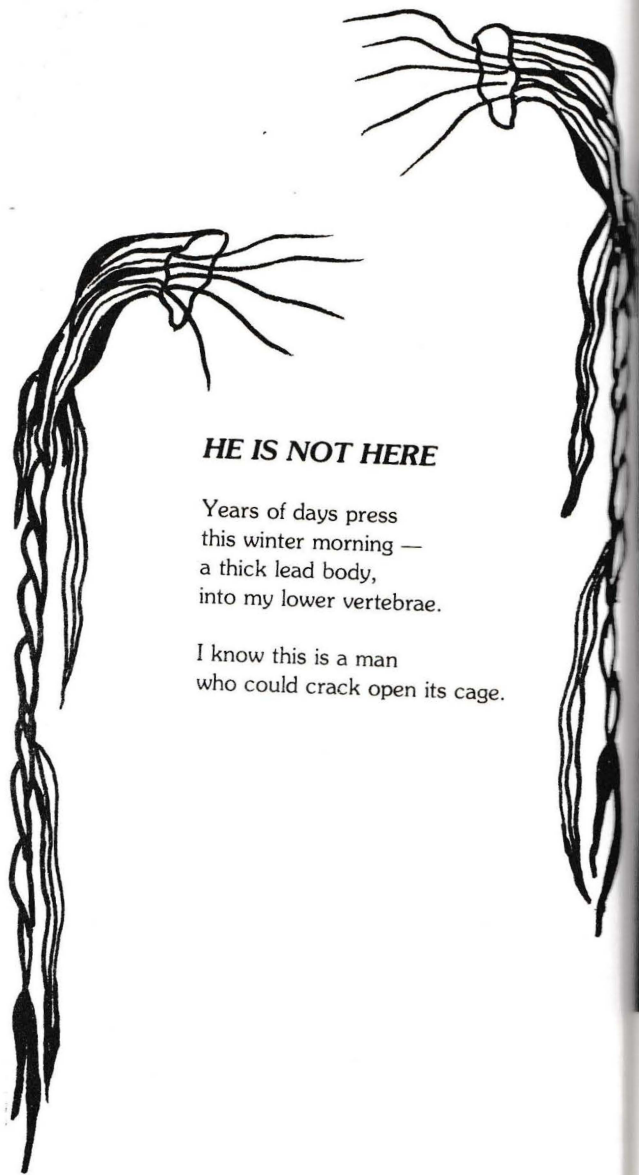
My legs move
through it —
layers of blue petals,
trailing
down steps
like children's fingers.

To you it was one flower.
You began pressing
each petal back,
finding layers,
you unraveled them
from me.

Like soft insect legs,
your hands and arms
arched up
on my knees,
resting lightly,
as though on pollen.

Within the silence
of your body, poised —
my arms as stiff leaves
folded round
to your shoulder blades.
My mouth opened,
to its laughter.



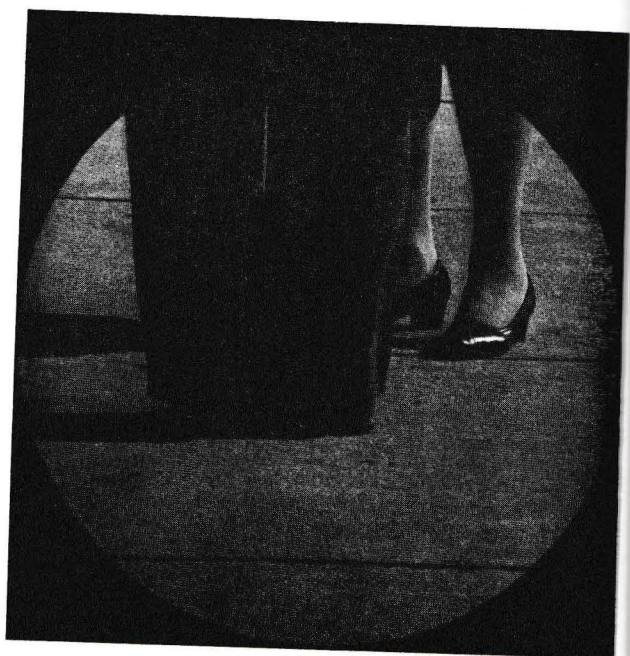


HE IS NOT HERE

Years of days press
this winter morning —
a thick lead body,
into my lower vertebrae.

I know this is a man
who could crack open its cage.

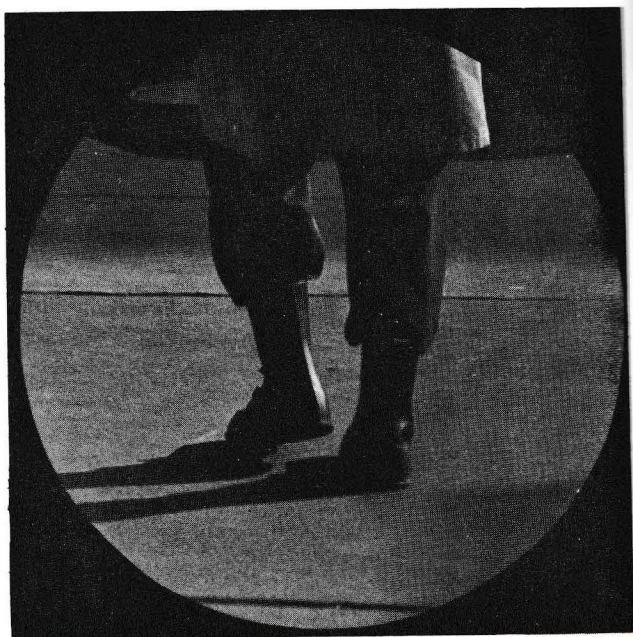




Chris Miller

WOOD 'N' SKIN

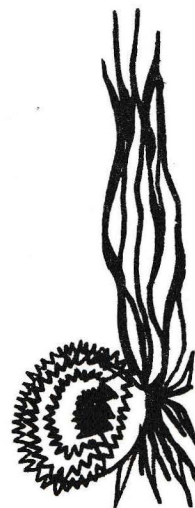
Much later,
While the throngs settled in for Carson
the old poet
Was still in his study
Praying for visions
to flow from his old bones;
A sloped, spindled frame
bent faithfully
on his stool.
Two concentric pools
stared at the aged wood.
Those eyes,
Ancient sponges
of Humanity,
misted the air.
And, as the pen lettered images
once more,
the woodrich study
And the grain-skinned man
joined molecules
And took breath.



Darlene E. Morgan

RAIN

The rain softly taps the roof;
It is quiet and soothing;
It mellows the mood;
And turns the hours into golden moments.
No stars tonight,
but gentle rhythms
that light up the night
and make me feel like dreaming,
and twirling round a huge room
filled with nothing but
The sound of the tapping rain
To syncopate my dance.





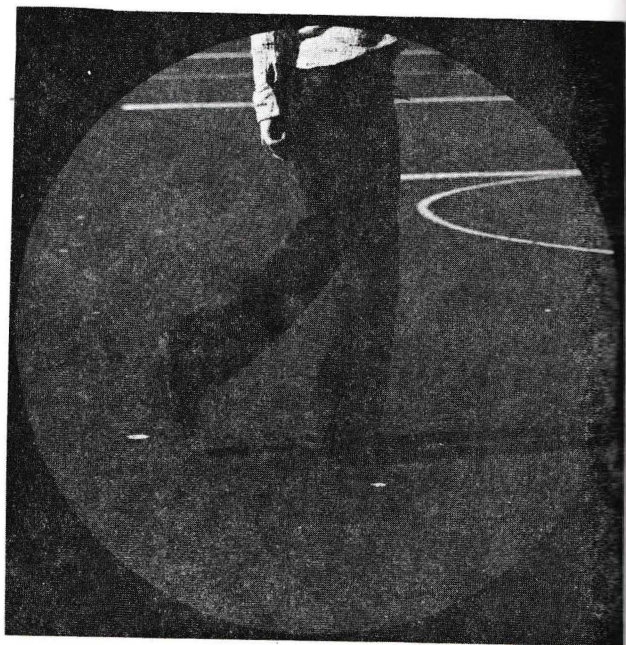
Joseph R. Graber

WHEATFIELDS

The wheatfield is growing;
 stalks sway in the wind.
 On my back I am
 staring at the clear blue sky,
 thinking,
 letting my mind wander aimlessly with the clouds.

The stalks sway in the cool spring wind.
 As the wind builds,
 my heart races.
 As the wind builds,
 the stalks sway,
 faster,
 Faster,
 FASTER —

Until,
 the wind dies to a summer breeze.
 As the wind builds
 the birds fly faster, swifter, straighter.
 But as the wind slowly dies down again,
 the birds slowly disappear,
 away.
 Yes, far away.
 As the wind builds,
 it will soon die,
 as must I and the
 beautiful brown
 wheatfield.



THE DIKE

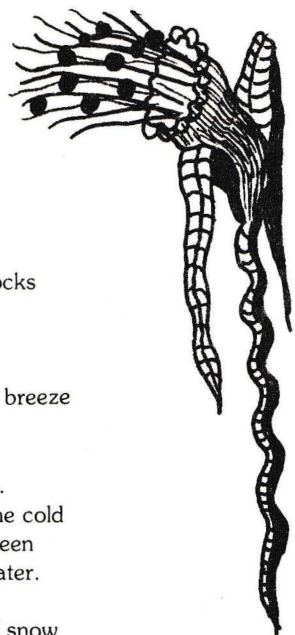
The multi-colored rocks
descend
as
the bitter cold —
wintry breeze
numb noses
hands —
fingers.
The breeze mixes the cold
green
water.

Small white spots of snow
drop
from the white ceiling above.

The quiet solitude —
causes minutes to be lost —
even forgotten.

The water slowly and quietly
slides downstream.

Never to be seen
by my eyes
again.



Bob Cochran

A COMMON SENSE PROPOSAL FOR ENDING URBAN DECAY AND NUCLEAR ARMS PROLIFECATION

This country is faced with two very serious problems, urban decay caused by the high crime rate and poor housing conditions in the nation's slums, and the overabundance of nuclear weapons. However, thanks to the work of one dedicated man, these problems may be solved sometime in the near future.

That man is Dr. Xerxes Xapadopolis, noted Professor of Nuclear Physics and Egg Racing at Ed's University and Flea Market. After years of extensive research, Dr. Xapadopolis has arrived at a plan which would solve both major problems. He proposes that we drop our excess nuclear bombs on our slums, thereby solving both these problems at once.

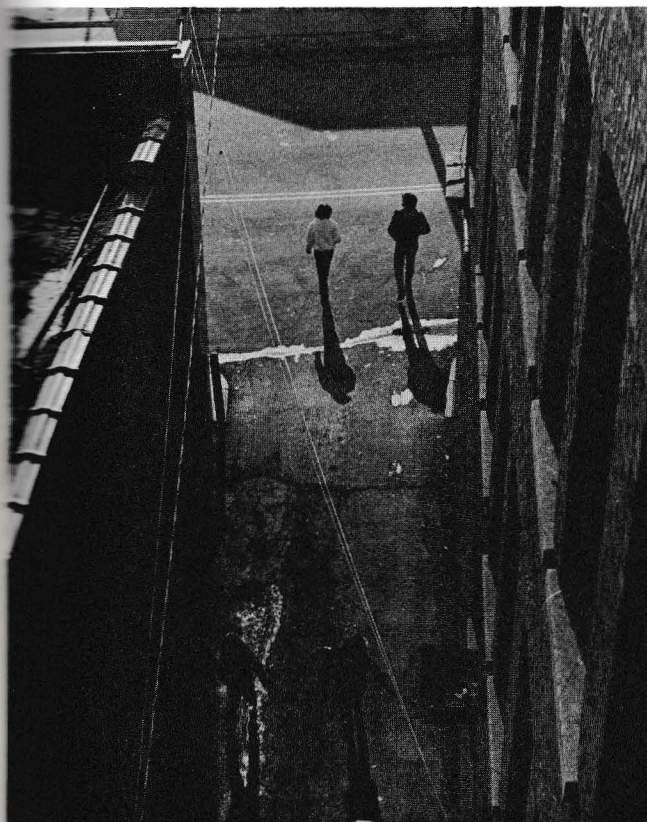
Dr. Xapadopolis puts forward the argument that his plan would be beneficial to the nation in several ways. He believes that his plan would help end racial discrimination in America. Blacks and other minorities have long complained that they are last in line to receive social privileges. Dr. Xapadopolis argues that under his plan blacks and other ethnic minorities would enjoy the privilege of being the first Americans to be killed by nuclear weapons.

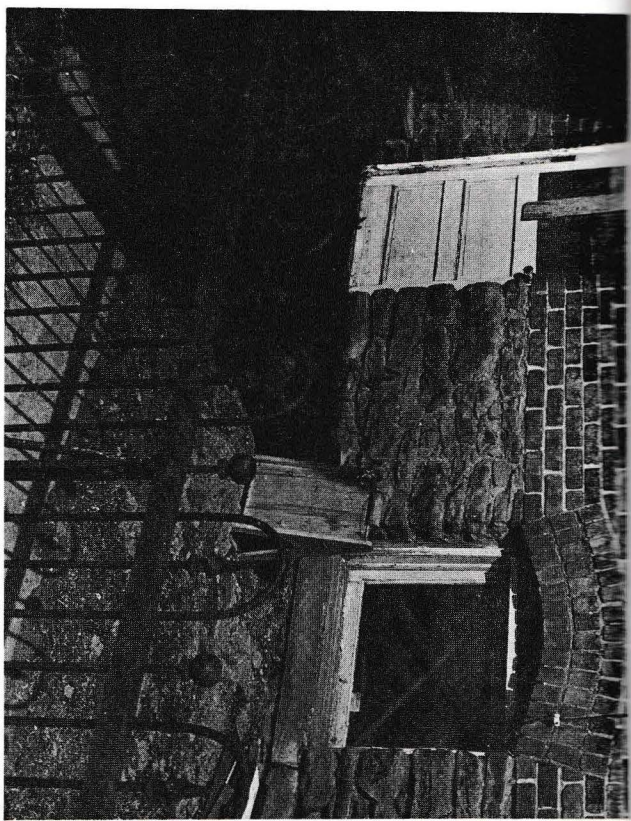
By ridding our cities of old, unsightly buildings and unwanted vermin such as rats and pigeons, Xapadopolis argues that his plan will make our urban areas presentable once again. Under his plan, our cities will not only be cleaner, but also safer since it would bring about a rapid reduction in the crime rate.

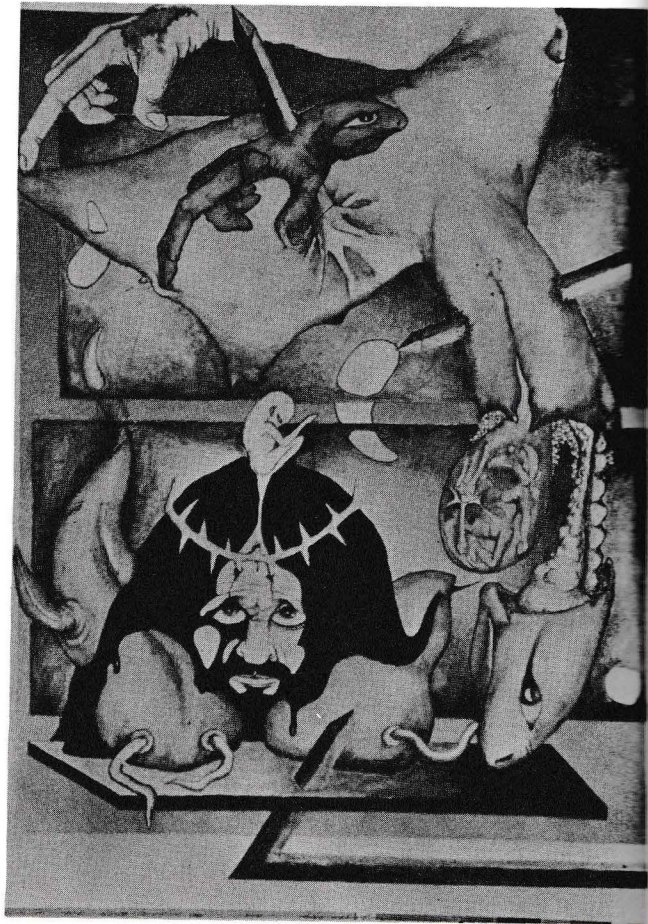
The Xapadopolis Plan would also benefit the nation economically in several ways. It would be an immense boon to the working man because by bringing about a swift reduction in the welfare rolls, it would significantly ease the tax burden he has to

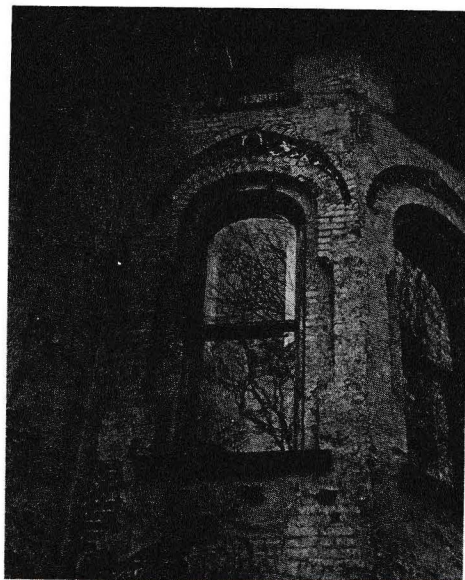
pay. Another beneficial effect his plan would have on the economy by drastically lowering the rate of unemployment.

By making our urban areas presentable, lowering the high crime rate, lowering taxes through a reduction in the welfare rolls, and lowering unemployment while ridding the nation of its excess nuclear weapons, the Xapadopolis Plan will help us all to sleep a little easier at night.









Henry Long

MY FIRST DAY AT ST. LEO'S CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

It was my first day of school. Ever. Within a matter of minutes, I would be a first-grader at Saint Leo's Catholic Elementary School, which was right across the street from my house.

I nervously walked down the stairs in my house, completely grown up in my shirt and tie and sportcoat and shoes. My mother was waiting for me at the bottom, her arms folded across her chest and a smile folded across her face.

"Oh my — now don't we look like the cat's pajamas?!", she said. I had never, in all my six years of life, seen a cat in pajamas.

She then patted my little ass out into our kitchen, and sat me down at our kitchen table, where I had a bowl of Fruit Loops cereal and milk waiting for me. I didn't finish my milk because it was all different colors.

After my fine breakfast, my mother combed my hair with "Dippity-Doo," gently styling my hair into one huge wave.

I was cute.

My mother then placed a nickel in the corner of my hanky, and neatly tucked it in the corner of my suitcoat pocket. The nickel was for a white milk I was supposed to drink later that day at school.

She then handed me my bookbag, which used to belong to my big brother when he went to Saint Leo's Catholic Elementary School.

I looked up at my mother and cried.

"Oh, c'mon now, you're not going to cry, are you? You're a big boy now, Henry, and you're going to be meeting lots of new friends," spoke my mother as she hugged me.

I only cried more.

She knew that I was upset, but she walked me to our front door, and kissed me goodbye, and told me that she would be waiting for me after school.

I slowly walked across the street with my brother's bookbag and my "Dippity-Doo" wave. It seemed like everybody in the schoolyard was looking at me as I walked past, and I wanted to run home and cry in my mother's arms.

The Fruit Loops in my stomach were turning my stomach all different colors.

I made it to the fence entrance where all the other first-graders were standing. Among them was a big lady dressed all in black. I would later learn to respect and fear her with all my heart. Her name was Sister Mary.

Everything felt so strange. I wasn't used to wearing a tie, and I couldn't understand why I really had to go through with all this. The air was hard to breathe, and I felt my forehead sweating tiny little beads. *Maybe the "Dippity-Do" was dripping.*
I was soon inside the school, and was sitting at a yellow wooden desk, with my back pressed straight and stiff, and my brother's bookbag resting beside me on the floor.

We all had to say our names out loud, and the Sister started with the first-graders in the first row.

I was the last person in the first row. Four other first-graders announced their names. And then it was my turn.

My throat became tight.

My ears became red.

My mouth had caterpillars crawling around inside it.

I opened my lips, and out bleated my name.

Everybody in the entire class looked at me.

I wanted so bad to be home. The names of all the other students were exclaimed, and then suddenly, I heard a recognizable name from the other side of the room. I poked my first-grade head up and looked. There he was! The second boy in the sixth row! My old pal Billy Benson!

Billy and I used to play together all the time, that is, before he had to go away. He had to go away to get better because he got really sick one time.

And now here he was, back in Ashley again, and in the same classroom with me at Saint Leo's Catholic Elementary School! During the summer, before he got sick, we used to trap insects from under rocks in little cans, and torture them by heating up the can and watching them bounce off the bottom.

The best insects to torture were grasshoppers.

Grasshoppers, when they get excited or heated up, throw up a brown, sticky syrup, and they flip their back legs all around.

Sister Mary then called the class to attention, and told us that she

would be our religion teacher. She was to pass out books to the class, and each one of us had to come up to her desk to receive our very own numbered copy of My Religion Book.

My name was called, and I nervously got out of my yellow seat and walked up to Sister Mary's desk.

"Here you are, Henry; number five," said the nun, and I smiled back at her.

As I walked back to my desk, I tripped over my brother's bookbag, and fell flat on my "Dippity-Do" face. Once again, *everybody in the classroom looked at me.*
They were laughing.

I had made a first grade fool out of myself.

Sister Mary came running over to me, and picking me up, asked if I was okay.

Between my tears I told her I was okay.

I also managed to notice Billy Benson looking at me. I didn't know it then, but Billy was actually jealous of all the attention I had received.

I opened My Religion Book while all the others awaited their own copies. Adam and Eve were right in the beginning, with leaves and tree branches covering any kind of private area.

Their first kids, Cain and Abel, were in there, too, and so was Moses and Noah and his boat.

Soon I heard Billy's name called, and I looked up, and there he was, standing on the side of Sister Mary's desk.

Now all the books had been passed out, and Sister Mary instructed us to turn to page one.

I was on page sixty-seven.

There were no pictures on page sixty-seven.

There was a picture on page sixty-eight, though. It was of Jesus Christ and a little boy, and they both looked really happy.

The little boy had red hair and freckles, just like my friend Billy.

I remembered the time Billy and I were playing on my swingset in my yard. Billy told me that if I could swing high enough to go around in one complete circle, I would turn inside out. I tried as hard as I could to do it, but I just couldn't get high enough.

When I told my mom what Billy said and what I did, she told me to stay away from that Benson boy.

Sister Mary was now reading something out of the book, and because none of us really knew how to read yet, we all just watched

her. I looked at Billy, and he was playing with his tie.

It was the clip-on type.

Suddenly, Billy made a loud noise like he was choking. His face got all purple, and he fell out of his chair and onto the first-grade floor.

Sister Mary rushed over to him, and everybody else looked on. He was rolling and wheezing on the floor and I thought that I saw something drip out of his mouth.

Billy was sick again — just like he was in the summer!

The nun was dragging him out of the classroom, and some people were laughing, and others were crying, and others were just looking. But as Billy passed by my seat, with the nun's arms around him, he looked up at me and winked!

Billy was faking it!

Everyone was going crazy, and Billy was the center of it all, and he was only faking!

We all awaited the Sister's return.

In the meantime, I had opened My Religion Book to page sixty-eight again.

I remember being taught that Jesus loved children, and that people should learn to be like children if they want to go to heaven.

I don't think he had Billy in mind when Jesus said that.

After school, my mother was waiting for me outside the doors of St. Leo's. I told her all about my day, and all about what Billy did in religion class.

"What do you mean he pretended to be sick in class? Wasn't he really sick?" she asked me as we walked into my house.

"No, I don't think he was really sick because he winked at me when the Sister was taking him outside," I said to her.

"Well," said my mother, "He did get sick like that this summer, so maybe he had a relapse."

"I don't know," I said, reaching for a box of Fruit Loops.

Later that night, as I was showing my father a picture of Jesus I drew, my mom got a phone call. It was from our neighbors up the street.

My mother made some strange noises over the phone, and we all wondered what was going on.

"Oh my God," I heard her say once or twice.

And a lot of "Really?"

After she hung up the phone, my father asked my mother what was wrong.

"That was Mrs. O'Connor from up the street," she said. "She said that Billy Benson died in his sleep in the General Hospital last night!"

I couldn't believe it.

He had to be faking it — he winked at me!

"How did he die, Mommy?," I asked, as tears slowly filtered their way onto my cheeks.

"They guessed that he choked to death," she said, "Because they found the tip of a tie in the back of his throat. It was the clip-on type."

My Religion Book didn't have anything in it about something like that.

Lisa Adryelle Cobb

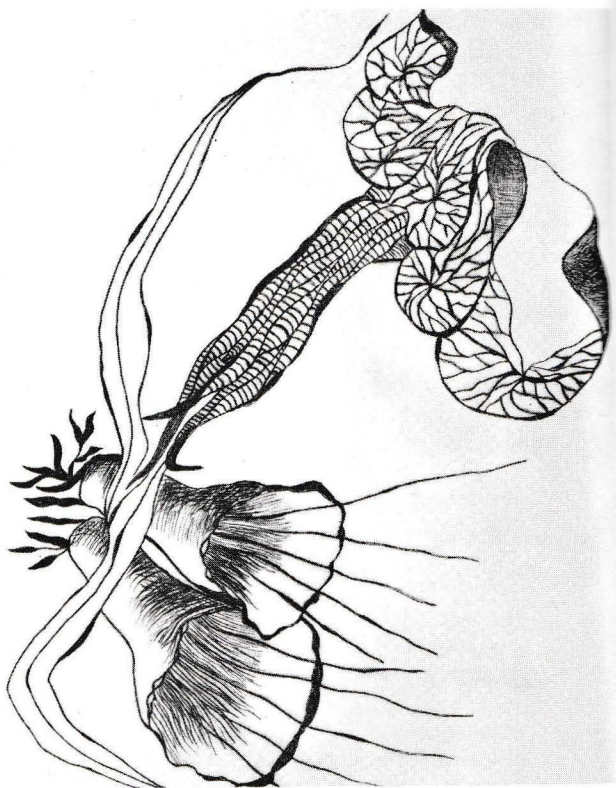
ETERNAL COUGH

Dust has settled safe within
A new coat to shroud my skin
Bloodless now as if all sin
Was shed when I grew dim.

Glad my nostrils take not in
The scent of dust within this bin.
Glad my ears hear not Earth's hymn,
Scratching, clawing, digging din.

Welcome, friend. Come in! Come in!
Welcome to my starless inn.
Find my smile 'neath my skin
Like a crown upon my chin.

Welcome, friend. Come in! Come in!
I'll turn away none from this inn
Though nothing's here but dusty skin
Locked within a cough. . .



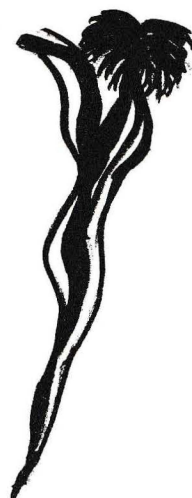
Shelley Freeman

REQUIEM

At water's edge
we sit under umbrellas.
We hold hands and smoke cigarettes
and do not hear the ocean
as it whispers around our toes.
The last sun of summer

drips through clouds into the ocean
and hides on the other side of the horizon.
The sea sparkles white;
I smell the moon
as it rises over the lake
and autumn crawls across the sand

smothering clam bubbles
beneath its feathery pillow.
It wraps around me like a blanket,
and in a moment you are gone,
carried away
by the cool breath of autumn.



ROARKITRY! OR TO RICHARD WIND

The ducks seldom speak except to say thank you
to frostbitten children whose mothers
take them there for home movies
of flying bread crumbs and autumn leaves.
When the first snow rests softly on branches,
you will go there, barefoot,
and wonder why they have not flown south.
Boys fall flat sculpting angels in the snow
outside the kitchen window,
and you are there with them
kissing their lips and eyelids;
it is better than stopping to dust snow from a rock
or the taste of the sweat from your eyes,
rolling silently
as silhouettes of angels slice the evening into night
and children's mothers tell them come inside
your lips are blue.

TO BLEPHAR, WITH SMILING AFFECTION

I saw you standing in a puddle of cold rain
with only socks on;
I touched your warm belly,
and next we were walking
down some dirty strip of sand
collecting scraps of driftwood
to take home and dry on the porch.

We went inside,
broiled steaks in the kitchen,
slept early because of the wind.
In the morning,
we ate hard boiled eggs with salt
and sat staring at the ocean.
The streets were filled with rocks
and empty trash cans
that rolled between gutters.
An autumn storm dropped chestnuts
on the driveway (I used to take them
to my mother when she was soft),
and in the living room
we drank cheap wine in the dark,
smoked cigarette after cigarette
without speaking
while waiting for the fire
to stop its smoldering.

There was a year of sleepless nights
when the floor was worn
from so many unfinished poems
and my pillows lost your smell.
I brought them to my mother once;
she smiled sadly,
pressed my lips to her breast,
her nipple dripping tears
she said she cried for me.
I slept that night in the ocean's womb,
woke to my mother's laughter (always
everywhere)
and felt my belly smile.
You came back,
slipped quietly beneath
my new white topsheet,
touched my eyes,
slept.

SONG OF THE SACRED BEAST

It will come in the winter,
when, as you sit before the fire
wrapped in its warm glow,
the first thin sheet of snow
settles on the rocks.
You may be sipping brandy with a woman
when it slips beneath the door,
and your breath will stop and hang in the air
like cigarette smoke
caught in a funnel of light.

It will come from its cradle
like a cat in the morning,
stretching its great paws.
Its lips will brush lightly against yours
and it will speak softly to you,
a whispered lullaby.
You will shiver beneath its hot breath
as it rolls onto your belly,
and your skin will turn to gooseflesh,
cool and wet and snug around your bones.

It will come from the ocean
standing on hind legs,
and dancing like a seahorse
it will paint the sand with its lavender wings.
The air will smell of roses
and you will be washed in pink sunlight,
wrapped in a shroud,
and sleep will move through you
like a clear, cool stream.
Later, the night will surprise you
with its delicate breath.

RAINBOW'S END

Degas has always had them
sitting down or bending over,
reaching for something:
a shoe or a sponge.
Their bellies are satin flaps
folded over into wombs,
supple and fragile as a baby's lips
or the breath of surf on sand.
Bath water reflects no faces,
but blank oval silhouettes
of lavender and grey.
The piano whispers in the dark
to move the clouds to crimson mountains
where the bathers celebrate,
kneeling on skeletons of old lovers,
and ask to be forgiven.

She holds his hand and howls at the moon.
waking sea and desert
from numb and lazy sleep.
Her bowels ache and twitch
in the heat of darkness;
her breath has the stink of fear.
The lake shimmers a dead white light
and she moves like a swan
between his thighs.

I live by the blood of your cocoon.
You were midwife to my birth;
your breath and my nakedness
were pearly and fresh
in their embrace.
The veil slipped quietly into the sea.



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