

3rd bed

self-replicating page



3rd bed

A polished floor, whatever the wood, is always the best thing to dance on, and, if you want to give a ball, and not only a crush, you should hire a man who, with a brush under one foot and a slipper on the other, will dance over the floor for four or five hours, till you can almost see your face in it.

—*The Habits of Good Society*, 1860

In the days of political intolerance in France, where the opinions of men and women were in danger of leading them to the guillotine, gesticulation was used to take the place of speech, or rather to conceal an utterance. No one could testify in court to the meaning of a gesture, although its significance was seldom misunderstood. Of the remnants of this mode of communication, the shrug, the most offensive of gestures, remains in use by thoughtless, or vicious persons. It is, however, in the worst possible form. It may be made to signify anything.

—*Manners, Good and Bad*, Abby Buchanon Longstreet, 1890

To balance yourself upon your chair...to extend your feet on the andirons; to admire yourself with complacency in a glass;...to laugh immoderately; to place your hand upon the person with whom you are conversing; to take him by the buttons, the collar of his cloak, the cuffs, the waist & c; to seize ladies by the waist, or touch their person;...to beat time with the feet and hands; to whirl round a chair on one leg...

—*The Gentleman's and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment*, Elizabeth Bayle-Mouillard, 1833

At length we are forced to shut our ears, and close our eyes, and in despair endeavor to cease from either seeing or hearing; and thus may we find relief.

—*A Manual of Etiquette with Hints on Politeness and Good Breeding*, Daisy Eyebright, 1876

SUBMISSIONS

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MARC KIPNISS

ALLEGORIES OF BLEEDING FEEDING

He took his needle-nose pliers to the pillow and, wad by wad, removed layers of it. The layers were of dense fiberfill and stained red all the way through. Deep red. Like the sunset he saw out the window. And saw.

Shadows draped off the roofs of houses. The trees were denuded, with clawing branches. Clusters of dead leaves blurred the edges of the street. Demonic children kicked the leaves into the air. They bared their fangs and trampled shrubs beneath their cloven hooves and ransacked the neighborhood while flapping their wings and smacking their—

He turned from the window, walked into the kitchen, fixed himself something to eat. Sitting on a bar stool at the counter, he cut his pie-wedge slice of pizza into smaller pie-wedge slices and smaller pie wedges and smaller wedges. Then he spun around so fast that the top of the bar stool came off and he went spiraling up, and over. And down.

•

The bell rang. There was demonic laughter. He lay unconscious on the floor and heard nothing. He had pictures floating through his brain—of his children, who no longer lived with him, and of his wife, who had custody of the children—but no sound.

The bell rang again. The demons laughed louder. He rolled over on his side. He was still delirious, still dreaming... He'd hurt his thumb. His family had returned. They lived together once more. They sang songs together and ate candy. Only his thumb, or another finger...

It was the house where he grew up, the basement. The ceiling was unfinished. A leg stuck through a hole in the ceiling, between two beams. The leg was in a stocking and slightly deformed.

He stood under the leg with a feather. The leg wasn't ticklish. He tried again but the leg didn't move. Dust motes fell into his eyes but the leg just wasn't ticklish.

He listened to his mother open the dryer door above him. And close it. And slide out the lint filter. She was licking her thumb and running it along the filter. He had seen her do this before. He could see her doing this again, above him. Even with the sound of the filter sliding back in, and of the clothes tumbling around, he could imagine what-all went on, what-all he didn't see—the sound of his mother scraping something, a trace of fuzz on her upper lip, his father's penis pressed against the mesh.

•

An hour passed. The demons stopped ringing the bell. They stopped laughing and ringing and singing and flapping their cloven—

He came to, with a gauze bandage on his pinky. And a headache.

I could have used that pillow, he thought. It could have come in handy.

He stayed on the floor. He stared at the base of the stove, the curling linoleum. There just might be something back

there, he said to himself. And there was: he found marbles and desiccated insects and a book of matches. He also found that one of the marbles—when he stood up and held it to the light—bore a ghostly reflection.

Hemogoblin, he thought. *Halloween.*

•

In the spring he went down to the basement to check on the furnace, which didn't seem to want to turn off. He didn't see any power switch on the furnace, only a few rats underneath it. There weren't many cobwebs on the rats, so he figured they hadn't been unalive very long.

He walked upstairs with his hands full. There was a ragged scar on his pinky. He closed the door to the basement with his hip. The furnace let out a deep belch.

He wrapped the rats in foil and set them on the radiator like baked potatoes. Then he went outside with a salt shaker. There were lots of slugs on the ground. They might have thought it was just hailing. At least at first. For a moment. Until they felt themselves contracting, drying up.

When he came back in his salt shaker was empty. The potatoes were cooked, too. He could tell because he unwrapped them and saw their tails, how charred they were, and their eyes, their beady black potato eyes.

Later, he looked at the wall, at a picture of his mother. Or rather: at a picture of his father. Or rather: at a picture of both his parents...

He tore the foil into tiny fragments and sprinkled them over the radiator, which got all glittery. Then he went outside with a pepper shaker. On the ground was a toad. It might have thought the snow was just very dark. At least at first. For a moment.

When he came back in there was charred glitter on the radiator. He licked his thumb and placed it on the radiator with a *tsst*. After this he sucked his thumb.

Some of the charred glitter was now on his tongue. The taste of it made his eyes roll up, toward the ceiling. He saw the features of a face there. A bearded face. The face of his father.

He brought a chair over. It was rickety when he stood on it. But the ceiling was coated with popcorn. He picked at it and the beard on the face disappeared. He saw his mother's face now, her eyes and her nose and—

There was a furry wire hanging out of his mother's mouth. He twisted it into a loop, then started eating the popcorn. It tasted buttery and made his hands slippery. Or rather: he buttered the loop this way, with his buttery hands. Or rather: the chair kicked out from under him. Or else—

The furry wire unlooped as it disappeared into his mother's mouth. There was charred glitter on her chin and lips. He went up on his toes to try to kiss her. His toes were slippery, though, and he lost his balance...

He thought the floor wouldn't burn. Then, board by board, the flames broke through. He danced about, but couldn't get away. His wife and children weren't there—it was the house he grew up in again—and no one was singing songs or eating candy.

Clinging to the ceiling fan, he spun around. The fire reached up for him with its hungry fingers. He raised his knees and the corners of the room went by, all four of them, faster and faster.

The fire reached higher, to his groin. He started to lose his grip. Fine veins of pain spidered through his testicles. He heard the blades of the fan cracking. The pain spidered through his whole body. The crackling fire engulfed him. His eyes rolled up, and back.

And forth.

The chair was in pieces. He had landed on the chair and caught it on fire. The legs of the chair weren't ticklish so he cut them into smaller pie-wedge layers and smaller pie wedges and smaller wedges, until he had a book of matches. Then he stood at the window. There was a spicy taste that he couldn't account for in his mouth, a bloodshot sun rising over the housetops and obscenely green trees.

JASON NELSON

DISEASES OF THE HORSE

Vesicular Stomatitis

a fever begins (skin), sporadic and reemerging

Equine practitioner is walking fast and slow
or running and falls from breath, from practicing.

Transmission: endemic in warm released
by what's hiding in deep
grasses introduced by motion

a lesion blisters (virus), swells and breaks

Veterinarian forces ideas of healing and infection
into the horse, the mouth, the nostrils, the coronary bands.

Human Risk: sunlight destroys risk and creates
risk and hauling and producing return
to horses then humans then horses

death occurs (sometimes), and others live

Equine practitioner quarantines only the virus,
the virus and the horse parts attached.

PATHOLOGY AND PATHOLOGIC ANATOMY

A degenerative process begins,
early and adherent.

The rods and cones disappear. lumens
first affected, first contracted

A secondary change reaches the layers.
nerve-fibers, optic nerve atrophies

Course Pigmentary has obliterated
and with, perhaps, the exception
Prognosis a slight eccentric preservation.

The disease remains stationary.
The narrow field continues.

Treatment Any suspicion of syphilitic taint.
Strychnine in full doses.

DISEASES OF THE HORSE

The Strangles

A treated foal is as specific
as a field of vaccines. And soil mediates

the change from moving. Horses want
to harbor the outbreak of Pneumonia, fertility
problems, Endometritis, and the galloping

desire to stop. Only being healthy enough
to play host, serve pathogens, and replace air.

With abscesses come a period of hesitation,
an incubation, a rush of legs beginning
in a small corral. With respiratory distress

comes an understanding
that beyond this line of barbs is another fence.

In the prairie any contact creates wind,
and horses lost the spring
to breath long before infection.

ALAN DENIRO

THE FRIENDLY GIANTS

What better symbol of the future could there be than this madly rushing machine, turned loose at full speed between two paste-board landscapes, steered by a charming woman?

—Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace*

The giant has a beanie cap on his head, and rides a tricycle large as my bedroom. The giant is obviously a child, beginning to lose his babyface. The family of giants is the only one on our well-trimmed block and we all feel grateful for the cultural experience.

They seem friendly.

No one's talked to them yet. I have my shy telescope, pointed at their lawn and their massive white cape cod. They had to take a double lot because of the size. Their size needs. The child giant steps off the tricycle in a tantrum with an unseen parent. But I see it all. I wonder how many others in his neighborhood have similar telescopes, similar voyeuristic appetites.

Maybe appetite is too strong a word. Curiosity. Healthy curiosity.

The giant enters the screen door of his house.

•

On Saturday, while the housewives of the block have extra time, they bake identical fruitcakes for the new giant family. They leave them on the doorstep, piling a diadem of fruitcakes onto the welcome mat, big enough to make a pup tent.

I spy the cluttering fruitcakes in my telescope, and note in my diary: *Did the Welcoming and Steering Committee plan this explosion of fruitcakes? Or was this a spontaneous outburst of congeniality? Will observe.*

By twilight, rains come, water in its crazy falling, turning the gifts into a sludge of batter, slimy candies, dates and apricots.

It's summer. I imagine that next summer I'll have to get a job, hopefully one that will allow me to read *Sky and Telescope* for large quantities of the day.

I fall asleep at the helm of my bedroom window.

•

When I wake up, I realize I've overslept. The Charming Woman has already begun her motorized tear through the neighborhood, nearly upon our street. The Charming Woman deserves some explanation. Every Sunday morning, when most of the block prepares for church, she speeds down our street in a car that I have nicknamed Death. It's a convertible. The car is not black. The car is garishly colored in a pink coral.

I know the woman is charming because of her scarves. Someone painted the scarves as starry skies. When she speeds past, the scarf wrapped around her head becomes a miniature pocket of night. Different stars with different coordinates—sometimes a dark blank space in the sky. One is a

highlight of Jupiter and the Galilean moons. Another captures a nebula.

I know astronomy. I can speed read her scarves with help from my camera. Only charming people can hold and be contained by such fabrics.

The Charming Woman never goes to church and never stops, at least anywhere near us. I don't blame her. She usually wears a raincoat. I am terrified of her and yet I lust after her. Lots.

I notice as the Charming Woman roars past, the family of giants—mother, father, and son—sits on their neatly trimmed and large lawn. The front doorstep is wet. Perhaps the father hosed down the fruitcake sludge.

They aren't going to church and they don't have lawnchairs. I don't blame them for either misfortune. I don't physically go to church either but I watch an Eastern Orthodox televangelist every Sunday noon, the only one in our broadcast range. I'm sure our Religion Committee on the block would welcome me or the giants into the fold, if I approached them with such an intent. As the Charming Woman cruises past, I ready my still camera and my timer. Three shots for good measure.

As always, she stares straight ahead. Her age is thirty or forty, and she wears UV blu-blocker sunglasses, somewhat too large for her face. But this too is charming. Her UV protection against deadly cosmic rays.

The giant family waves at her, click, in unison.

Click, unbelievably, she waves back still looking straight ahead, click.

Her hand like the neck of a crane.

•

I develop the photos. The giants' waving makes me sad. The block reveres the Charming Woman but never acknowledges her. Making eye contact with her, I might explode. A wave of her hand could set continents adrift. Or I could die. I didn't nickname her car Death in some willy-nilly fashion.

•

The giants hate me. The boy on his massive tricycle scurries on the sidewalk, slowly chasing a cricket.

Why are people so cold? I write in my diary. *Oh wait, I am too.*

•

Tues. Wed. Thurs. I cut myself three times, one two three, buckle my shoe. I place the blood in a ziploc baggie. I'm considering sending my blood to the Smithsonian, for posterity's sake.

But then I realize—it's my astronomical work that will make me live. The sky is for everyone.

•

The giant father doesn't work, like me. I'm pretty young. I'm no longer mad at them. Perhaps he's a writer. I write too! In a diary. I'm sure there are many giant publications that I could investigate if I have the time. Perhaps I could write for guidelines.

Friday I develop the picture of the Charming Woman's scarf. Came out just as she waved. Like the commercial told me: I saw what developed. She has a brilliant ring on her ungloved hand. I'm nearly blinded by looking at that

photo. A supernova hanging outside the perimeter of a pocket universe.

The constellation in her scarf is Virgo, and I hope she still is.

•

Sunday is bizarre.

I hear the Charming Woman's Death from a distance and I ready my telescope and camera. She doesn't speed past as usual. I repeat, like every other known day. Instead, she slows at the giant's house and pulls into their driveway.

The block hushes. Telescopes whirl. She exits her car. Click. Her dress—which I've never seen until now in its entirety—is opal, pure sheen. She rings the doorbell, which has to be as large as her opened palm. Click. After a few seconds she's ushered in, and the door quickly closes. Click.

I'm so flustered and bamboozled that I forget about the Happy Orthodox Hour, a troubling yet calculated choice that leaves the eternal state of my soul in a precarious position.

I mark the time by eating a packet of oyster crackers each hour.

My supply of oyster crackers is nearly endless.

The block returns from church, children play bleak soccer on the astroturf lawns, and nothing changes at the giant's house. I barely breathe, much less move my position.

•

God, I want to crush her into my arms.

•

The block's mood swings. The frozen pendulum moves and swings. I know that in church, the block prays for the giants' souls, especially the child's. Nature is better experienced—by Nature I mean lawns, picket fences, death cars—from a more innocent perspective. I, too, try to maintain a child-like disposition.

•

By Monday my window bleeds transparent blood. I know it's blood since I open the window and taste it. Like water, though slightly acidic.

All liquids are blood. Frozen water, caught in the rock of comets, is blood. Blood is everywhere, and when the red giants simmer lots of light years away from us, the hydrogen and helium spewing out of the star's core is just another name for blood, leaking into the vacuum. The same vacuum surrounds us, all of us, even the Charming Woman, still in the giant's house doing godknowswhat.

Death still parked in the giant's driveway. Nothing changes. I'm changing.

•

The next week, the neighbors commiserate on the sidewalk outside the giants' house. It's not the executive board per se; the meeting is impromptu. The husbands smoke their cigarettes as they come home from work, hands shaking. I think at first that this is a happy unity tide in the block. But no one is happy. The wives bring their prams and talk in hushed tones. I can't read lips but their lips barely move. I take a few pictures for good measure, but I'm not happy either.

The Charming Woman has made everyone unhappy. I take that back. The giants—although they are still technically newcomers, and gain some amnesty from that—have made everyone unhappy.

All week, the sky is too cloudy for observation, though it doesn't rain.

•

Next Sunday, it rains.

I burn my TV with kerosene. The fumes don't bother me, not really. The patriarch's face melts on the screen. Rain, rain everywhere. The entire block is morose as they don their raincoats and look funerary during church-time.

Death doesn't come speeding down our street. Of course not. Death's still parked in the giant driveway.

In the silence below me, I think, why can't she do anything?

In the diary I write *everyone wants to confess their sins and secrets to her, silently, as she passes by.*

Time to crawl out of the window in the rain. I take my telescope, my camera, twelve packs of oyster crackers. I doubt that I'll be back in my room ever again. The girl in the tower. Who needs it?

•

This is the first time I've been outside in ages. I wear my black galoshes, my black cape, my black dress, my five mood rings, which are all black. I can't help it if I'm a parody of death. The block fashion committee would disapprove, but they are all out of the rain, dry. Praying for the end.

I walk the three blocks, hiss at a stray dog, jump in a few puddles, limber up for what comes next. I do some stretching exercises. Then the friendly giant's house looms in front of me, and Death in front of that. Its coat of peach paint is dull in the grayness and the rain.

The windows is unshuttered, though I hear laughing inside. Framed in the window is the giant family and the Charming Woman playing Monopoly. They all laugh, in unison. The board is supersized. Pails of hot chocolate rest on the four corners of the board. What else did I expect? The Charming Woman's piece, the Dog, is as large as her stomach. The giant boy helps her move the Dog, rolls the dice, moves the Race Car into the jail. The figurine of the Race Car isn't the Hasbro standard piece; it's a perfect replica of Death, down to the peach coloring. Oh no, the Car is in jail. The father rolls snake eyes. He has the Hat but instead of a bowler Hat he has a version of the boy's beanie cap.

Did I mention both the giant wife and the Charming Woman are in silk pajamas? I can see the heavy curve of the Charming Woman's breasts through the translucence.

She is happy. She has abdicated.

Suddenly the giant boy looks at me. His mouth is agape. The mother shakes his shoulders, what's wrong, what's wrong?

Turning away, I open the door of Death. The Charming Woman's purse is on the front seat. I slide into the sneaksin, I mean, the snakeskin seat. This car and its contents is a part of me. It's always been a part of me. I look through the purse. I find a dildo, a tranquilizer gun, a real gun with real bullets, a packet of Certs.

I look behind me. Many of the neighbors are standing on the sidewalk with no umbrellas or raincoats, staring at me.

I'm an awful travesty. But I'm also necessary. *Go on, go on*, they seem to say. *You need to drive, for the Charming Woman secedes*. Though they say nothing and I could be kidding myself.

I'm not surprised the keys were in the car. I start the car. I wave goodbye. Death rumbles below me, my blood burns.

•

Death drives the car, really. I'm just a passenger with my hands clenched to the wheel. The speed nearly kills me, but doesn't. Speed is fast.

I like the diet of Certs and oyster crackers.

I take many pictures of the circumference of the world. I drive across both oceans, across deserts, rain forests, tundras, prairies, and, yes, suburbs. The world spins around me. I am a celestial object. Is this what the Charming Woman recognized with the giants? Someone that she saw on her way on the x coordinate in the world, that made her nostalgic for a long lost place? A solace, seeing a giant in such a normal place?

I know, that word normal. I don't think that the neighborhood language committee would ever use such a word on me.

Maybe she was tired. I get tired but can't sleep, because I'm trying to persevere.

•

Once a week, I course through the old block, and each time I wave. Sometimes the husbands and wives wave back, though I don't think they recognize me. I think they mistake me for the Charming Woman. I guess that makes me one.

The giants stay indoors. The Charming Woman could be inside with them, still playing Monopoly, passing through the square circumference of the game. Maybe she's cashed in her earnings.

A troupe of dwarves has moved onto the other side of the block. Do I have the nerve to introduce myself?

They seem small, and kind.

M. S. FODHI-DA-ZEN

BEASTS & MEDICINE

It is the singular problem, in fact, that since the beasts have come to live among us, we have yet to find a safe way to administer what we know, and that of which they are sometimes fatally ignorant, of medicine, in order to heal the deep wounds they are known to inflict upon each other. The employment of teams of men, sedatives in great quantities, subtle traps & cinctures of all kinds, have yet to produce any effect.

An occasion on which one was seen lumbering down a city street late one night, howling in that alien tongue, left us one injured man. Although it should be remarked, he only came to cut himself out of a confusing apprehension which caused him to trip and fall on one of his instruments.

The beast, indifferent in its pain, made its way from the scene and was only discovered the next morning, dead, in the vicinity of the first neighborhood known to have accommodated their recent appearances.

THE SITUATION OF THE DOGS

Two people celebrating an ostensible marital success were in a car picking its way along a dirt road between the main house and the barn of an estate not belonging to them. A dog zagged across in front of the car as it crawled forward, and came to a stop upon the slight wheeze of the brakes. As the car attempted to inch to the other side, the dog zagged back and again stopped. This continued for some time. Finally, the passenger, with the object of removing the cur, by physical force if necessary, from the path of the car, got out and came around to the front, only to discover two dogs: the first, lean and small, frozen in its posture of interruption, since the brakes had just sounded; and a second, of the same breed and size, but of the opposite sex, curled on the other side of the path, dead. The situation of the dogs was more serious than the passenger had at first thought. He went to the dead animal, lifted it off the ground—but a consideration interrupted him, namely, that the animal might have been diseased, or dead for a long while, and that having touched it, cradled it, with both hands and arms—but then, where had that other mutt gone off to?

MYTHS

Myth about my physique

I fasted often as a child, not for want of food, nor from stubbornness, but due to a natural compulsion to emulate the forms I saw imprisoned in eddies of desert dust. “Liberate them!” I would shout, already by the age of four. It is told I would shout: “Liberate those forms!” In this way, I trained my bones never to hide.

Myth about my poetic

The poets of my region are Deaf chrestomathers. Their congress is an impermeable cushion hidden in a nearby forest.

Myth about my feet

The veins remain blue to honor the coals.

Myth about my hair

The scholars are trying to shave my head. It is told that because of my hair my shape changes at whim, and that for this reason I have access to the attributes of the ghosts.

Myth about the cult of my name

Only three members at any given moment.

Myth about my stature

It is told I was born riding half a nutshell, and right away I was a giant among the insects. I was easily accustomed to being the tallest creature, and so, as my knowledge of all the forms increased, it became necessary for my bones to double and triple in length, to remain a head above. I stopped as soon as I was surely taller than the fabled human-sized praying larva, when it takes its notorious fighting stance. No uncorrupted story exists telling of its height after metamorphosis.

TEX KERSCHEN

THE STORY OF AN ARM AND A LEG

The problem I have with telling you all this is that I don't want to tell you what you already know. Becky has been fucking Peacock and Henry. Typical, however, neither of them have done anything about it. But Becky hears about it almost every night. Them whining, acting sullen.

*p.s. Dear Editor,
Please send both of my contributor's copies to my mother's address.*

Doing the Peacock isn't as popular as it once was. A short dance craze in the early part of the year. A favorite among bar bands and t-shirt makers. Three steps. Shirrtail untucked, elbow in the air, ass in the street.

Hiss. Mutter. Buff. Teenage kids mark up the fence at Peacock's place with graffiti faster than any army of bums can paint it off. They mark up the street signs. If the marks don't get painted off others will appear. Guns will fire in the late half of the night. The cops will show up with drug dogs and flashlights. Revelations will occur; gardens will get trampled and sicced for personal use and courtroom evidence. Guest bathrooms will blush and tremble under the floodlights and reagents of the methamphetamine teams. But the

kids won't shoulder the load—they scatter like cockroaches. Becky skims through the news, page after page, looking for her ad in this week's paper. There it is. Her ass, hanging over the words, *Come Have One at the Ice House*.

The *Tile Owl*—bright yellow, bespectacled, is more than just the mascot for Henry's 24 hour tilework and grouting company. It lights the pines at the street corner of Dearth and Admonition. Henry's business is a shoestring operation, a venture into corner-cutting and the do-it-yourself mentality, a one-man band. He uses a toothbrush, muriatic acid for bleaching purposes, trowels, and a caulk gun he keeps inside a custom made plastic holster on which he's had his name, HENRY, printed.

Many of his patrons are real estate agents looking for last minute cosmetics on a shaky property, a gleaming bathroom or southwestern kitchen floor in a shanty on the corner of Foreclosure and Seized Property. Embittered housewives hire him for the noises he makes around the house. The joints in his tile are watertight, his spackle as perfectly matched as a skin graft on a burn victim. But without any rise or discoloration.

Peacock enters Becky's house through the back door on Sunday afternoon. The screen door slams behind him. He turns on his heel, leaving a black checkmark on her linoleum floor. Here you go Becky, he says, handing her a little bundle. Becky almost drops the present. Out of shock. She reels backward with the thing in her arms in a way that suggests a conflict of gravitational pulls. She falls back, then forward, and just as he begins to yawn and look away she stops suddenly and

carefully sets it down on her kitchen counter. 16 years of orderly work in the county crazy bin have given her the instincts of a television wrestler. She can dance, thunder, tip-toe, and hula without ever looking like she's dancing at all. Peacock has got the thing wrapped in a cornflower blue baby blanket as a precaution against the February chill. A vibration runs down its length. It purrs like a radio with the sound pulled down.

What is the idea of this? Becky asks him.

It is what it is, he says, Not much more to it. You got any green apples?

She motions toward an empty bowl on the side of the sink.

You know these apples have been sitting here for a while. You been eating at all? He asks.

Stay out of my business Peacock.

Feel this, he says, An apple skin shouldn't be soft like this. This feels like elephant skin.

I don't ask where you go when you're gone. Be advised Peacock.

Has Henry been coming around? He asks.

There's more to it than that, she replies. Becky stubs out the cigarette she has just lit. Her plan is comprehensive—total subsidization. Men to buy her lotto tickets. She drinks for

free at the Ice House in return for some modeling she did for them several years ago. The gift that she's set down on her kitchen counter can't sit there once she starts to strop the plates. Her policy is athletic, suds whip up into ripped up pillows, and water splashes across the kitchen streaking the air with rainbows. Her metal dishes clank and chime against one another.

Becky tends the mentally ill, changes bedpans, and operates the force-feed tube for a living. Peacock drives a souped-up Mustang LX.

Where am I supposed to put this thing? Becky says. She seldom lets Peacock any further into her house than the kitchen. He tracks in all kinds of things.

That's not a thing, it's an arm, he says. It's going to work for you, and I'm giving it to you whether you know it or not.

But you got this thing tied off with kite string. The one side looks like a sausage and the other side looks like a bunch of turnips.

Fingers, he says.

Big fingers, she says.

They're swollen.

A greenish-white bar runs across the fingers just above the knuckles. At the knuckles the skin has been hidden away beneath a tectonic chain of gold-plated rings. There's dirt beneath the fingernails.

Becky sees a million white dots and crescents on the back of her eyes. A gold crown stamps her vision. Her eyes, here Peacock and Henry agree, are the same mixture of brown and green as bayou water. She makes sure to snare Peacock's eye before she begins, and she speaks slowly, as she does when she comes across a patient in the spell of some horrible delusion, drinking from a bedpan or jerking his chicken-leg into a medicine cup, Couldn't you have washed it first?

Monday, at the visitor's desk at the county mental hospital, Henry finds out that Becky's taken a sick day. He tries her on the phone but she's not there.

Becky holds Peacock's arm like a baby in her bosom. Keeps it wrapped like a baby at any rate. The fingers kept some of Peacock's smarts, pulling at the string at the top of her peach blouse, tugging on her nipples. They work from instinct. A lot of what she saw at the hospital was just moving on instinct. Like a worm in dirt. Some of them would start moving like a worm that got coffee spilled on it. God damn it! she would say, Look at yourself. A grown man in his own slime. Are you going to stop that or am I going to have to get somebody?

Henry met Becky on the job. He heard that she had dirty tile in her bathroom. He stretched the job as far as it would go, billed her for a day. Each morning on the job he came in a little earlier, hoping she'd still be in her bathrobe. Her defense broke down 4 a.m., day three when she heard the scraping and met him in the door of her bathroom, lips parted.

Peacock's little trick is popular around the neighborhood. Dudes come around to watch him tear off his other arm and set it back in place. They stand on the corner and lazily pull at their own arms. Peacock turns to T.I., Texas Instruments, his buddy who does his betting at the horse track.

Once again, Peacock tells T.I., Bet in small denominations only. It looks like the easiest thing in the world, but it ain't.

I know how to bet, T.I. says.

I wasn't talking about betting T.I., I was talking about pulling these arms on and off. You see everyone doing it nowadays.

Peacock grew up on a peacock farm. His souped-up Mustang LX with custom spoiler and rewired stereo system can get up to 160 mph. The arm he gave to Becky was his left arm. Even now, it coos like a baby.

Where'd you get the idea? T.I. asks him.

I was thinking, Peacock says, that there ain't much use for two of a thing unless you're Moses.

Noah... T.I. says.

These guys, Peacock says, Don't have the brains for this kind of operation. It's in the wrist. The way I finesse it. It takes thinking. They think you can just go at it out of the blue, herky-jerky. That's why they can't get it. Just gotten stupider as far as I can tell. Look at that guy, he says, Sure his hand is off at the elbow, but look at the thing. Bleeding everywhere.

Greenhorns.

Wanna-bes, says T.I.

Pretenders.

Peacock opens his car door with his right hand. He gets into his car and leans out the window waving a bill in his right hand. T.I., he says, Fifteen bucks on God's Glory. T.I. takes the bill. T.I., Peacock says, You owe me five if we lose, you keep it if we win. Peacock grabs the wheel with his right hand and dusts it off. He puts the car in drive and cruises away.

Tuesday afternoon, Henry finds out that Becky's left work early with Peacock. I've had enough, he tells Becky.

He says he wants a showdown after what Peacock did to Becky. Becky yawns. Her telephone is ringing. Hold on, she says, I think that's my work calling.

I want a showdown, he says, Being that you liked it.

Becky dials her mother on the phone, but her mother isn't home.

I don't need no gun, Henry says, But he better bring one because I'm going to shoot him.

Uh huh, Becky says, I wouldn't want to visit you in prison. Henry thinks for a while. He drinks a Lone Star at the Ice House. Later he walks his two dogs, German shepherds,

Dragon and Boxer. He considers removing his own leg. A leg has obviously got more to it than an arm. More power if nothing else. The problem is with work. He has a lot of work to do all of the time. Not like Peacock, holding court on a cellular phone, drinking big gulps at the gas station, parading around in his car. Henry's got work to do. How is he going to lay tile when he's forced to lean on something all day long? Henry says, Well, it looks like he's got me over a barrel.

Wednesday, Henry hangs around the hospital courtyard talking to the mental patients. In addition to their psychological inversions, they harbor a long list of physical infirmities and maladaptions. They are short, disproportional, stumpy, hunched. Their faces are fleeting, ghoulish, unevenly hairy. Crimped arms, played hands, reticulated fingers. Their legs are hyper-obese, curdled, and flaccid. Then there are the scarecrows—flesh waxy and pulled tight to the bone.

Henry doesn't have much to choose from. Blinky, the Good Doctor, Manatee, Orange, Potato Bag, and Wobbles are each tall and strong enough. The orderlies gave them these names. They make more sense, biblically. Their real names have slipped into the files and the files have slipped into the archives. One side effect of the medication is that it erases short term memory. Each client gets the same prescription: two anti-psychotics, one lithium, a saltpeter tablet, and two aspirin.

All the inmates celebrate their birthday together on the first Monday of every other month. The orderlies fix their ages by their looks. And for the birthday party—one bran

cupcake apiece and the *Birthday Song*. The orderlies watch for stealing and fighting.

Manatee is belligerent and Wobbles won't make a deal. The Good Doctor takes too long to consider the ins and outs of the offer, by Henry's way of thinking. Potato Bag has a tactile obsession, as the Good Doctor calls it. He's always stealing things to rub against the skin on his inner arm. He goes for texture. Usually harmless things, cotton balls or feathers or hair. He has been caught a few times in the act of raking his skin with a sharpened bobby pin or a length of steel wool.

Where'd your name come from Orange? Henry asks.

I'm always puking, Orange says.

Let me see your legs, Henry says. Orange seems nervous. He undoes the drawstring to his sweatpants and lets them fall to the floor. Legs like burnt hot dogs.

Potato Bag, says Henry, Come here. Potato Bag drops what looks like a live bird and slouches over to Henry. Henry looks him up and down.

Potato Bag, Henry says, What do you want more than anything?

Touch me, Potato Bag says, Here.

More than anything in the world? Henry asks.

Pussy, Potato Bag says.

Henry leaves the hospital satisfied that he's made a deal. He gets home and gives Dragon and Boxer his table scraps—liver. He takes a chamois from the garage. He leaves the chamois soaking in baby oil overnight. Delivers it to the hospital on Thursday in a box marked "PUSSY".

Peacock's arm is very warm to the touch. Almost hot. From the bruises on the bicep and tricep muscles, it looks like he must have wrenched it off with his other hand. The bruises don't heal. Other than that, the arm works fine. Becky uses it to for the dirty work. Smashing roaches, scrubbing the toilet. It lies beside her in bed at night.

Henry arrives at Becky's house around three in the afternoon on Saturday.

Henry, Becky says, Something about you is smelling funny.

Henry pulls out the thing he's brought her, peels off the newspaper it's wrapped in, steps back and appraises the moment. He puts his arm on Becky's shoulder tenderly and directs her gaze to the ground with his free hand.

Consider the economics of the moment, he says. She stares at it, nonplussed. A leg, in disrepair, with newspaper clotting in the blood where it's been removed.

God dammit Becky, Henry growls, Do you know how many more horsepower this leg is worth than that chickenbone Peacock brought you? This thing can pedal a bike. What can you do with that arm anyway. Knit?

JOHN BRANSEUM

DOPPELGANGER

Two months before his thirteenth birthday, he went through a period of insomnia where his heart beat too wildly for him to fall asleep. In a sleepless haze, he opened the refrigerator one night and, illuminated by its garish orange glow, clawed his fingers into hamburger casseroles and stuffed his mouth with icy potatoes and clots of congealed beef. Then, not satisfied, he pressed his face against the damp kitchen windowpane.

Staring out, he saw the broken hulk of the tin-roof shed, the pen of pugs sleeping in little heaps; mist wafting from the cowpond and the barn cats slipping neat as needles in and out of the mist. His face rubbed side-to-side on the cool windowglass, like a cat stroking itself, and his blood ran so fiercely warm with restlessness that he walked down the long white hallway, his footfalls furtive on the mouse-colored carpeting, and stopped breathing outside his parents' door. His father snoring, his mother still; and while they lay there he watched his mother's spirit rise like steam curling off a radiator.

Naked, gossamer, her limbs tapering into fine points, her mouth open needleteeth; he watched the spirit float from the bed, twirling dancing as it passed through him—cold as a hook in a chunk of pig fat. As cold now as he was hot before, he followed it.

It dragged its fingertips along the walls, leaving faint oily smears and then they were outside. There the spirit squatted and grunted, emptying its bowels of a glimmering heap, as bright yellow as antifreeze, which hissed and sank into the earth. He watched until other spirits came, backlit against the sky like burning pieces of paper.

Heedless of the noise he made, he ran inside and threw himself on his bed, leaned over the side, vomited brown dribble on a Spiderman comic book, and wiped his mouth on his pillow, burying his eyes as deeply as he could. Never again did he get up when he shouldn't nor was he hugged by his mother without some nervousness.

His mother died, a year after his father's third and final heart-attack. In that year he was by her side the entire time, and indeed there in the last hour. Not once did he see her spirit slip out again. He tried to lose himself in work: steel factory worker, auto mechanic, warehouse clerk. He tightened valves, changed oil pans, and forklifted boxes as if caging himself in. During this time and before and after, he had a series of lovers. While they slept, he would stare at them in a fascinated, desiring horror—their eyes so turpentine clear when awake that he wondered if they knew and was sure they did not.

He was haunted by the violent grace of the creature he had seen, the moth and kerosene scent of it. When he folded a shirt, he would remember it squatting, the flex of its muscles like the lapping of the material. Or he would trace a crevice in a stone and see it, the mother not-mother that had NOT SEEN HIM—which had been unaware of anything but its own terrible self and desire, that had vented its watery bowels and thrown its head back in a silent howl, its transparent sugar-cup skull and the hot blue flame sputtering inside. Even

if it had hurt him, he had wanted it to see him. He had hated it all these years (though he never NEVER hated his own mother—was just a little nervous).

Then he met the woman with whom he did not tire of talking. She was soft just right and had rootbeer colored eyes and liked to laugh. On their wedding night, he lay there and listened to her sleep, put his ear to her forehead and belly, against her thighs, and after a time he felt her spirit rise though he did not see it. This time the spirit called his name, clicked off the syllables, and said, “Come here.”

MOVERS

We love our city because the air is cleaner than most other mid-sized cities. One look at Houston or Dallas and we bless the stars and the sky they hang in. And we know our city. Every Sunday, Alice and I pile into the PT cruiser, study a city map, and pick a street to explore that we haven't been on yet. I mean really explore. We walk and snap pictures and talk to the neighbors. Afterwards, we cross that street or neighborhood off the map.

We know where to find the gravel strewn alleys with the oil-soaked cardboard boxes, the bushes clipped to look like Brahma bulls in front of the Federal Post building, the locations of all three Dairy Huts (which sell the orange sherbet cones), and the small mom and pop diners that know how to fry fish. We've left bits of our lives on those streets like Hansel and Gretel left bread crumbs. First kiss here, the Big Fight there. And when I stand in these places, where I know such and such happened, it's like the dead moving through me, that kind of chill. Oh, our beautiful city. It has dogparks and shotgun houses, clear water lakes stocked with trout and bluegill the size of puppies. It is beautiful and shining and most important of all, safe for the children.

Or so we think.

Every other evening, instead of frozen meals, I come home

from Roth Accounting and kiss Alice who's off from teaching. Together, we make dinner. I handle the meats and she the vegetables. This day, as soon as I step through the door, she asks, "Did you hear about the birds?"

I chuckle. "No, Ms. Hitchcock. What about the birds?"

She doesn't laugh and that is the first thing that scares me. Alice laughs easily. It's why I married her. "Turn on the news," she says.

What the newscaster has to say is that all across the city high spiraling cries are sounding over traffic and downtown cafes. An ornithologist from the university identifies them as sea birds. Other experts explain "Low pressure front," or "Radio waves."

Thing is though, thing is, nobody sees a single bird. Their cries are there but the birds aren't.

Other sounds follow. Howls and barks, then the sound of machinery whirring. Our lawn, once green, immaculate, withers overnight and grows a coat of ash. Traffic piles up mysteriously. Wildlands and parks flatten as if terrific storms no one has noticed has ripped through them in the night. And the water?

I turn on the tap and an orange bubbling goo slithers into my coffee cup (a ceramic item with three ducks and the caption "You're Oarsome").

I shake my head and turn the cup end up. Alice hands me a mineral water. I hate to join that club. Everything in me cries out no. Paying for water? But I alleviate my conscience by buying the jugs at Krogers rather than the fancy French stuff.

"What are we going to do?" Asks Alice.

I shrug. "Cope."

That's easy to say but then the "people" appear. It's a month

before the first jostling. A presence no one sees rudely pushes through the morning queue to the city bus, knocking old ladies aside, tumbling toddlers. This disruption is quickly followed by others. Suddenly, our whole city is invaded; elbows tossed, food snatched from our tables. We hear them talking but it's muffled as if through several walls. We feel like eavesdroppers.

One night, I roll over to hold Alice and find her body hot and ready. My eyes are closed. I keep them that way. That's how we like to make love, the mystery of each other. I know something is wrong but in the heat of passion I ignore it. When I open my eyes, it's another woman there, body unseen but body felt. Alice is asleep on the other side of the bed. I've made love to someone else.

Circumstances take their toll. My blood pressure skyrockets. Alice has hollows under her eyes. One of the children stumbles into the kitchen, hand bleeding, hurt by something he can't explain. We would have been long gone but all along the continent people are reporting the same phenomena. It isn't just us.

What are we going to do? We ask each other, scared as if slowly being pushed toward the edge of a cliff.

Then the sound of a sea appears.

There is a salt and fish smell in the air.

But, again, nothing visible to the eye.

We begin to cough and spit out shells. Pea-sized mussels appear in our stool. Throughout the day, there is the sound of construction afoot, of massive buildings rising up which block the sun. Our river has turned dirty and is thick with rust. It is becoming harder to find one another in all of this. What seems like a few yards' distance is crowded with innumerable obstacles.

This morning, Herb Edwards and I buy a boat. This afternoon, we gather our families and drive to the sound of the sea.

Invisible water laps our feet. Alice unloads the children from the station wagon and we pile our goods on the boat. We drift off on the gently tossing waves wondering where we will go. The odd thing is, the further away we get from the city, the more we begin to see: the beating wings of seabirds, the glow and shape of a city that was never ours.

MICHAEL BURKARD

GHOST TEXT:

OKAY, OKAY

THE WOMAN IN THE KLEE MUSEUM

FIVE

WELCOME TO KENSINGTON ROAD

STILL,

ONE IF BY LAND

DOG'S EAR

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

INSIDE THE SPACESHIP NEAR THE END OF THE MOVIE

CHRIS AND I ATTEND THE SAME MOVIE
THINKING OF THE SAME MAN AND THE SAME WOMAN

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

BUT LET'S GET BACK TO CHRIS AND CHRIS' MOTHER

GHOST TEXT:

For a long time
I was the only
child in my
neighborhood.

can't comb hair
at night

turning
a shoe over

“a piece of paper
and a book
up at the house”

“talk about the part of
me who disappears”

OKAY, OKAY

Okay, okay. I am driving out to find you. I am going to kiss you again. About to kiss you. Kiss you for an hour before we are found or turn ourselves in. The sound of an “s” and the sound of a “t.” Kissing drives right down the avenue and straight into the dream. No sleep is necessary. But I wake up with the window propped on my knees, reading the window like a night book. Then I remember our discussion of kissing. The woman in the Klee Museum. The clerk who made too much change. The man who asked where could he find other ghosts...

THE WOMAN IN THE KLEE MUSEUM

“C” died. Someone in the alphabet is always dying. Each letter climbs down into the grave like a lost cloud before a moon cycle or a door cycle completes. Yes, “K” hung out too long. Yes, “N” was too lazy (simply eating the marijuana without even heating it). Yes, “M” exclaimed “Placebo!”—was never heard. No. “C’s” parent never followed. My shirt convinced me very very quietly she was following on a local road, she would turn up in the darkness of the reading, she would understand my wish and my choice. But the road made it easy and I found my way to the museum’s rooftop, and I peered through the skylight until I could read who owned which painting. One had been painted onto burlap, one had been compared to unhappiness. But I could hardly read the writing.

FIVE

Chris writes *White Hour* as a complete book. He includes clocks, for me and me alone he also includes a bag. My small panther peers into the same empty valise which received genuine compliments the other night when it was not empty. Chris has not included enough light, so we agree to meet downtown—after a fact, after a lamp. The table in the wee corner with the flask of the gone moon daring us. We had four, no, five drinks. Then we went sideways. Then we talked about five. We drew 5 as often as we could. We exchanged math stories and someone—not a fan of moonlight—overheard us and looked at us like we were terrible. We asked someone else to dance. I make five out to be black-and-white. What do you make it out to be? At five in the morning, unable to sleep, I try writing in an old notebook. The card of the inn is there. It is gentle with shadows and it is the day. I can't make out the signature on the back of the card. I don't know which what tape I mailed "them" which "they" say "they" received. The last four words of the card read ". . .when you are here." The fifth word from the end looks like "when" too. The second when—if it is when—I am not sure—the second when almost looks like well. Five edges of the moon look back at me through the window because I have stared much too long at the one low moon. And I haven't worn my reading glasses to make out "when." I never wear the glasses enough. Interesting mistakes are made. Unlike here, the mistakes are usually more interesting than what was there.

WELCOME TO KENSINGTON ROAD

Dear Herr T. Tranströmer,

It's pretty tough when you are asked to join a house at the last minute. Such a fate befell me on Tuesday, which happened also to be All Hollow's Eve. Whatever that means.

I find lists which I can't comprehend: "Blue Rangers," "god acting anonymously," "the invasion of spelling," "Draw B's man who talks too fast—like me and John" (with this last one I know at least what the first half means, but I haven't ever seen the man—I know also who I mean by John—but how the two of us, why the two of us...).

I like houses where when you come in the front door there is nothing but space for awhile. There are a few candles on a nearby/final table. And this next part is easy: a friend or two, a James and/or a Lisa, greeting you—it is to be their house, this is the rumor. Mary is across the street. Linda is on a nearby corner. So many gentlemen are exchanging papers that none of us friends notices the bicycle.

There is no part for me in this house. I am an envelope, and late at that. No, just an envelope.

That's enough.

It seems easy.

I will buy a dog for them. I will recover completely. I too will understand "Welcome to Kensington Road," and I will partake of this understanding.

Yet there is always an insidious invective underneath a love-list, a delivery, a kindness. Spokes spoken. Double facts. High windows and late sun too across streets.

STILL,

don't you think math is too easy? Too blank (my mother is blank, my book is blank, my blank is very blank).

My verbs are weak (don't tell my heart).

I hate the son of my insurance man.

The heavy load of the eye aims its futile crossbow at the boy who has called from a new poem. What a booth, what a cell to not tell everything to your own heart from.

Tell someone: the photographer left his story on Clive Street.

Or was it *Olive* Street?

This is will count.

Like the no in my bottom crown.

Like the nurse who shops at lunch.

You have made her female, not me.

I was the one who tried saying hello to her.

I had a photograph of my childhood (with a d) underneath my arm.

A childhood would be ridiculous without a d.

ONE IF BY LAND

I can't see myself
—I've eaten two car stories.
I asked a friend to pose at the base of a skyscraper
—but he said he didn't want to become a souvenir.

There is no more alone time in the world
or time out.
No more corners.
A tree breaches a fact in a sister's sleep

but no one else is troubled.
If I could just observe for awhile—
so much to promise—
so much to clear up.

Yesterday the cars I saw looked like tribal
lines—a funeral was slowing ebbing around
a corner. I could see flowers in the wrong sky.
The sky was wrong because it belonged to the sky.

DOG'S EAR

Has made, has not, has too—then the light overhead doesn't really flicker or dim—but it reminds the room of February—a snowmound upside down on a stranger's ceiling. Just when it seems almost plausible to get away with getting to the film late, or offering sex to someone from my past who remains in the past (a sexual fantasy in which one returns to a street and actually stays there—the sex stays there too, in the house-where-the-writerly-couple is away at least a third of the weekends of the year—a young girl watches an old clip of *Invaders from Mars*—two letters in the alphabet stand for one—she wants to rent the old thing now—the barbed wire marks on the back of the bad-guy and bad-girl necks in the film—even the mother and father become bad-girl/guy—the father actually cycles through an entire lifetime of personality change after a post breakfast walk to examine the dune, to examine the dream—in the film the boy's dream is the dream of a boy's life—because it brings him round straight to a truer mother—Tessa says she based one of her composition notebook/texts/landscapes—What *are* these things anyway?—upon a letter sinking in the sand, and then another letter, until letters of the alphabet like people were reduced to true difficulties—there just wasn't as much to go around as you would think or as it appeared—the end appeared and Tessa said she wanted to watch the film one more time sometime next week, but then from a hill)—and in the past the hill climbed near a farmer's yard, and when you leaned into your mother or father's neck or the haphazard neck of a cop on the chance you lived in a very strange town where you could and would want to lean there—well from that hill I see an animal too, maybe a progression, and unnecessary wilderness.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

I see a punch coming toward me.

I see my father has not heard from my brother who for some reason is in California, where he rarely is, and even rarer is my father's lucky intuition my brother has been abducted.

I see a dream where the shadows of the snow reveal the old part of the cemetery to the wandering couple instead of revealing the new stones area, and since the couple is each alive, one unto one and one unto another, I see them as hunting for "new stones."

Not meant to be a typical dream or zone. I am talking more for myself, using dream the way you might use a street or a landscape or a small yard where you could rest. A small where sumac could make me.

I see Boston, I see France, I see Asta's underpants.

I see a man living in Mexico half the time and living in a flame-lie the rest of the year.

See the even confined brown dollar. Bigger money is better.

Michael, Linda, little wire.

Not meant to name no one or anyone or no one else.

Belinda.

Be quick.

Don Quix-it.

I will never see you again.

INSIDE THE SPACESHIP NEAR THE END OF THE MOVIE

It isn't true. We've had a few mean words—mean like the light of the doll. Drew the “boat, town” (baten—byn)—then in a meaner-than-a-childhood Bill spoke up from the back: “And why isn't that done?”

About six miles from the night lamp you can find the boat and the rope and the string and the gloves and the shovel they used to

1) not identify themselves to “Chuck” or any patriot with a name like that (“Chip,” “Sonny”)—all except one face dressed in a blue shirt. The house's heat where they started from was blowing too hard for so early in the winter and you can see if you look a little closely that the shirt is actually billowing just a bit. The face is billowing slightly too. This is because of eating and fluids and not the heat. The blue color billows like someone telling him don't do this right now. It will ruin a friendship. You are going to wake up in the middle of the so-called-night and realize you are waking up in the middle of the so-called-night.

2) Stop abruptly leaving the Sunday meal. No one understands the alternatives better or more shapely than you.

**CHRIS AND I ATTEND THE SAME MOVIE
THINKING OF THE SAME MAN AND THE SAME WOMAN**

But we don't tell anyone and we don't tell each other. The movie rocks with childhood and war.

Across the smallish city I have discarded even the "Heartbreak Hotel" EP my Uncle Rudolph and Aunt Alice had bought for me. Or had given me \$1.29 to buy. Or it's the photograph of Presley wearing a raincoat, a profile, and it's black-and-white and even grey after you see the yellow lettering. And Across-town in still another smallish city the landlord is running out of the garage with his hands held over his eighty-year-old ears.

Chris and I buy a notebook calendar together at the intermission, instead of candy. We talk about it. We drown in the indecision.

On page forty-five-or-six Presley is facing the camera with some brick in back of him. There's a woman wearing a kerchief to his actual right. There's a partial face behind a partial newspaper over his left raincoated shoulder. He's even wearing a thinnish tie. He looks like a black and white version of some other actor now or since then. Or he looks like a brother or a cousin someone up or down the street has. Has but later.

It's the same photo session. It's too late.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

Someday I want to know the woman in the kerchief. Someday I want to know the object and the source or the other shadow up front. Someday I want to give my halfway hellish greeting cards to miracle workers. I am asking you for change he says. Maybe I should put a blue towel in this.

Some ideas occurred to me. I am just trying to write some things down. Like: Chris' knee touched my knee. Like: hey, Jimmy's hand came out of nowhere for said Mason Dots™.

One evening at the Exeter in Boston in a thick throng I asked for Mason Dots™ right after someone waiting impatiently for his popcorn said "Mason Dots™. NO ONE eats those things anymore."

And there I was. Still in his shot ear. Buffoon for an evening. Sitting down too to watch the movie (Antonioni?).

**BUT LET'S GET BACK TO
CHRIS AND CHRIS' MOTHER**

Don't drink too much coffee, but there's another photograph I am interested in. Eva Hesse is standing with her father at an opening at the Graham Gallery in New York City. There is no way I am not going shopping before this rare winter day of sun stops. Driving to drive and driving to drive slowly.

The opening of "Abstract Inflationism and Stuffed Expressionism."

It's getting hot and it's getting darker.

New York. March 1966.

I may not be much but I am all I think about (quote/unquote).

March 1966. My life is collapsing very fast. It's a mess.

Frank O'Hara: one last time I love you.

We love you (quote/unquote).

John Yau writes/talks: "solitariness is the one thing we have in common."

Yau *on* O'Hara. Provincetown. FAWC. The year 2000.

STACEY LEVINE

FRANCES JOHNSON

chapters from a novel

ONE: RAY GARN

Frances Johnson sat on her front porch, listening to the radio in the dark. She wore a blue dress.

Beyond the dank wooden porch, night was heavy. Frances walked into the living room, listening. A train lumbered across a nearby trestle, halting as it reached the center of the weak bridge. The train would follow a tricky, meandering route that would probably lead to another state.

Frances was an expressive woman in many ways.

There were so many people and things to think about and understand, such huge compendiums of circumstances.

Sometimes Frances was afraid for no real reason, it seemed. Often times, waking in the middle of the night, she was uncertain who she was. Frances did not like that. Stumbling to the bathroom, she would fear that who- or whatever she might be was not appropriate or would cause a calamity of some sort—and that was the most frightening thing of all. Standing on a little foot-rug, she would calm herself by rubbing her limbs briskly, hoping that heat would fill out her body and make it more dimensional.

“We can’t know the future,” she said to someone, then hung up the heavy telephone.

Outside, the porch swing creaked.

Frances had a suitor, Ray Garn. Ray was fine, though sometimes

his enthusiasms were hard to understand. The two had been together for quite some time, making vague, halfhearted plans for the future.

Ray was mild-tempered, and things generally went well. Once, though, they traveled a few miles south to search for the sea—just that once—and Ray hid behind a wall for hours, causing Frances to feel a kind of fury.

It had been a long, tall wall that rose up to hide the sea shore from the road. Ray squatted next to it, smoking, smiling, and looking up at Frances, when she found him, as if it were all a game, as if he had made her worry on purpose by hiding. She got so angry that she smacked him, hard, on the jaw.

He laughed. “Frances, it was just a joke! You know—hide and seek? Well, now you can hide, if you like.”

Frances did not want to. She preferred to go into the cabin and play a game by herself with a bowl of salty water. Sitting alone brought such relief that she locked Ray out for most of the trip, feeling deliciously private as she imagined him standing on the bare shore, close to the freezing waves.

She saw through the cabin window that Ray had resorted to taking a walk, though the wall prevented him from looking at the sea—assuming he liked the sea. Gusty-cold winds ripped at his sleeves and hair.

At last Frances left the cabin to join him at the far end of the wall. At first they said nothing, but soon they were sharing some hard crackers and butter, sitting in the wild grass near the fence, chatting amicably and joking, shouting into the wind.

That evening he came into the cabin bedroom, which smelled cheerlessly of mothballs and skin. He lay next to her for a while, then, levering upon bent arms, rolled atop her. She heard a tiny click: his eyes shifting. Moments passed before Ray rolled away.

“It doesn’t make sense to me,” she said toward the window

framing a dark, gelatinous sky. “Two adults in the middle of the night...one lying on top of the other...?” Frances felt out-of-sorts.

“Yes, it’s strange,” Ray agreed.

They fell asleep.

After the vacation, the pair got along fine. Days came and went quickly, as if fleeing something—perhaps the present, with its burden of waiting. Frances and Ray said they would not argue again. While not exactly gloomy, Frances often regarded Ray with a puzzled sensation. He was a close friend, though on some days, she simply forgot about him. Her parents did not seem to like Ray, though, she noted; on the other hand, he was thoughtful, dependable and good at bicycle tire repair.

It seemed she loved Ray.

Whom did Frances Johnson love?

One night, she looked at the door.

Ray was there. He looked down over his broad, tanned face.

“If things keep going the way they are, well, I think someday soon there might be a revolt!”

He was referring to their town, Munson. Years before, it had been called Hutchinson-Munson, after the pair of entrepreneur brothers-in-law who founded the city upon a dream of a prosperous smelter. That business had failed for countless reasons, the Florida weather being only one of these. Still, the brothers-in-law strove to become famous, because they feared sudden death and nothingness. Soon they became joint mayors of the town, writing a pamphlet about the region’s volcano and its stolid beauty before fleeing the region. Now, the town was simply known as Munson.

Munson was isolated, though at its border stood a sister town, Little-Munson, which was poor and weak. The people there always seemed to struggle for the simplest things.

Ray expressed irritation about Munson, because, as he put it, the town preferred to forget—or perhaps hide from—the world.

Others, including Frances, were inclined to feel the same. Certainly there were worse places to live, towns that lacked even a council. But Munson had a strange air; besides, it had too many unspoken rules.

“Oh, Ray, who’s going to revolt? There’s no one to revolt,” she said tiredly.

Frances did not care about Ray’s life before she met him. Neither did she bother to inquire about his former girlfriends, including Fluff Davis. Ray didn’t usually mention Fluff, but at times, Frances saw him looking at a photograph of a girl holding a napkin sitting near a rough-looking, older man: her father, who had been prominent in a long-ago war. Ray’s attachment to the photo did not bother Frances.

He opened the door. “Hmm,” Ray began. “There’ve been plenty of revolts through history—peasants revolted during the reformation in Germany. Ha! They thought Martin Luther was on their side.”

“Please, can’t you take that discussion to your friends or brother?” Frances grew tired of Ray’s references to war. “Give me some advice. I need something for this problem of mine.” She shut her eyes and lay back on a beige sofa.

“What is it, Frances?” He sat nearby.

“Oh, the not-sleeping, I guess.”

“Yes. It’s awful for you! What can we do?”

“All those pots and pots of coffee to wake me up! I feel sick, thinking of it. And the sleeping pills to get me down at night—I don’t necessarily like taking them, you know.”

“I know. Well, can’t we—”

“My heart could even burst! Could it?”

“Oh, no, Frances, no—that doesn’t happen.”

“Look at my eyes—these eyes are tired. I can barely get up in the morning.”

“Frances, let Palmer help. I’ll call him, and make an appointment for you.”

Frances scowled. She said, “Just stay here, Ray? Let me lie in bed, with you on one side, and the telephone on the other, just for the night! Please.”

Ray laughed. “Ho, I suppose that might be all right.”

“Oh, thanks! And Ray, don’t talk about Napoleon, all right?”

“All right.” Ray took off his clothes. He was plump, and that pleased Frances. She turned away, though, thinking of other things—her insomnia, the strange nonsequiters she overheard neighbors saying through the phone lines, and her dog. Immediately, she fell into a hapless, jagged doze, only to wake moments later, frightened back from the horizon of unconsciousness, for she had seen a turtle there.

Munson was hard on folks, she guessed, tossing in the bed, punching back the stiff coverlet. There was a sense of shame in the town, though it was hard to say why. It was difficult to find another point of view, too, since Munson didn’t much care for newcomers. Companies and industries—ones that made gadgets—rarely settled in Munson, or the adjoining Little Munson, for that matter, though they headed in sure droves for other Florida sites.

Frances recalled passing along Munson’s chief street that day and seeing a tattered, blowing poster on a pole asking as to the whereabouts of Josh White. He had been, she recalled, an argumentative boy of about thirteen; two years ago, Josh White had gone to find his dog, who had run deep into Munson’s nighttime streets. But the dog was not lost. In fact, it had been detained by one of the local sheriffs, and that night there was a mix-up, and the dog fell dead, though no one would say why. Josh White got mad and fought loudly with his mother all that week in their home on a pine hill. Over the next month he grew more upset, walking through the town alone, hurling dirt chunks at the

Hodgkins Movie House and other businesses. Finally, Josh White's state of mind seemed to turn: when spoken to, the boy now would only open a wet, rosy mouth to scream. After a time, his mother took him to Ohio. Soon, the boy returned on his own, and shortly after that, no one ever saw Josh White again. Secretly, Frances had been a bit envious of the teenager, if only because she wanted to leave Munson too.

Lately, Frances was thinking of various plans to leave the town, but they seemed to her shaky, laughable plans.

Ray pulled back the bedclothes, and Frances' nose whistled with air. The atmosphere in the bedroom was one of contained quiet, as if the little room itself were keenly balanced on a pole. And at the other end of the pole, creating the balance—what was that? Maybe all the pills and pots of coffee, Frances considered wryly, turning over, eyes open.

She looked up. Everything seemed all right.

“Asleep?” said Ray.

She made no answer, and soon heard a muted scratching, the sound of Ray picking at his front tooth. She dozed.

In the late morning, Frances and Ray dressed together and unrolled their town paper. The sun was high and bright. Frances had wakened rather easily, with less exhaustion than usual, and with a burst of energy, she giggled at something Ray said.

Then, there came the sound of a blast. The house vibrated. Another booming noise seemed to burst hollowly into itself, causing both Frances and Ray to yell reflexively as the bedroom window shook. In the yard, a small wooden fence toppled over.

Frances rolled her eyes to the ceiling. Yes, it had happened again! A volcano was situated in the sea just outside Munson, though she so often forgot. Sometimes it rumbled. The vibration manipulated the ground so that much trembling occurred, followed by fierce winds, and sometimes fires. During an eruption, steam

puffs occasionally even dotted the sky. At times, townfolks referred to the volcano as “Sharla,” but just as often, they didn’t think about it at all.

The house rattled with the moaning wind, and, in spite of herself, Frances was frightened, her heart beating hard enough that she felt the pulse in her eyes. She looked around the room: but where to go? “How awful!” she cried, diving onto the bed next to Ray.

“It’ll probably be fine!” he shouted reassuringly.

They lay still. The sounds of sleek wind continued; briefly, the sky dimmed. Fist-sized chunks of rough rock tumbled across the roof onto Frances’ front lawn. It’s as if another world has come crashing into this one, she thought.

Ray clutched a tissue. “That damned volcano!”

“Let’s just wait,” she said.

They did.

By and by, light eased into the room again. The pair relaxed, then fell asleep; and after waking, Frances felt better for the extra rest.

“Ray,” she muttered dreamily then, looking to his glossy eyes, “I don’t think I’ve ever asked you directly. How old are you?”

“Thirty-six. And you?”

“Thirty-eight. We’re the same age, really.”

They smiled together.

Ray stood, remarking, “Why, you look as helpless as a little girl, all wrapped up in that blanket!” and moved to the bathroom.

Frances reached for the whisk broom and dustpan in her bedside table and began to sweep the floor. She eyed the black telephone angrily, aware of a hot, serpentine sensation at the back of her throat, caused by Ray’s words. At times, she thought, he was maddeningly superior, or flatly unsympathetic in a way that made her want to strike out.

Frances looked through the living room window, facing the yellowish light, glimpsing what appeared to be a large dog lying in the street. She turned away, shivering. All the nice things about life, she mused, they're nice because we compare them to all the ugly, awful things—like threatening winds, and the sun—the sun? And fury, she finished to herself. She spoke aloud, “Is fury such a terrible thing?”

“What, Frances?” Ray answered, sitting, jiggling his sock right side-out.

She leaned at the window frame. The anger abated, and Frances looked toward town, past Ann Street and other homes rife with stillness. Without thinking, she turned to the bed and kissed Ray's cheek, then kissed it again and again, an activity that made so little sense to her that she could not stop, since each kiss was the failed beginning of a new chance to understand the thing itself.

Ray waited, looking at his shoes. “What will you do today?” she asked.

“Don't know, Frances. Maybe I'll call Kenny. I'll work. I think I'll take a little walk! And I'll make an appointment with Palmer too—for myself; I think, Frances, that you might do the same.”

Frances scowled.

Ray left, and Frances latched the screen door behind him.

She picked up the telephone, not sure who to call.

She considered dialing her mother's number and heard a screeching tone in the phone, then the sound of folks laughing. Frances sighed and hung up. The phones often malfunctioned in Munson. Raising and dropping her arms with sudden fatigue, she recalled, as if from long ago, the deep pleasure of sleep.

As Ray suggested, Munson was frustrating in many ways. Yet the world beyond it, and beyond Little-Munson, was too complicated to imagine. Understanding this as a schoolgirl, Frances often had stared at classroom maps.

“And why look at a map?” her teacher, Mrs. Cover, had said, whirling past, laughing, hips swinging, her dress swishing with the noise of its crooked seams. Sometimes the teacher reached out to adjust Frances’ undershirts; “The earth spins round and round, making us sick!” she sang; “And the earth knows how to trick us, too, so pay heed!” Most townfolks felt similarly, Frances believed; but the larger world was overwhelming in its commotions. The world was not for her, nor for anyone in Munson. Yet at once, the outer world seemed glamorous and delicious, at least in magazines.

FOUR: MARTIN FRENCH

When Frances was born, she had had a disorder. Her face hung strangely, and still did slightly to this day. She had a low eye. Her mouth had sagged to one side. The disorder was named for a Belgian man, and with it came problems. But fortunately for Frances, when she was nineteen years old, a young man named Martin French appeared. Martin was a stranger to the town, and so everyone there avoided him suspiciously, though he had such a light, smooth air that folks soon forgot themselves and wound up flocking to Martin French after all. His eyes squinted in such a way when he smiled that he created a stir in town—especially with Frances' mother, who told him about electrolysis for the first time in his life.

Martin and Frances met outside the post office toilet, and there discovered a shy sense of camaraderie. They saw a potential together, and began to keep company. But Frances worried how Martin perceived her. Finally during a dinner at The Cove restaurant, she asked, "Martin, what about my face?"

"That's how you are. It doesn't affect me," Martin said, chewing his dinner. Frances smiled to herself, sensing the remark was portentous. Something would come of her friendship with Martin French, she was sure.

When they were married it seemed almost a lark, or, for Frances, a chance to see if everything wouldn't turn out right in life after

all. And for a month or two, things were effortless, indeed—just like Martin’s smile—requiring so little effort that in fact life became featureless to the point that now the period was rather irrecollectable. Yet it was not hard to recall the awful thing that happened. In their small apartment near the edge of the beach barrier, Frances began to notice that Martin ate large numbers of figs and later grew gruff and explosive; this became a pattern. The heartlifting feeling—the feeling of being saved—that Frances experienced a few months before had disappeared; instead, she sensed a sleek escarpment right next to her. One night, Martin asked her to play a distasteful game, and she refused. On yet another night, he lay pillows on the floor for her to walk upon, in a gesture to signal that in her life she should only know softness. Frances wondered about the marriage. Sometimes when Martin toweled near the bathtub, knees and back bent, arms outstretched, he seemed feminine, especially with his tiny hands and feet. He also seemed unreachably manly to Frances, protected by the tough barriers of his skin and nose.

Frances had begun to discover the quiet adventure in knowing another human being, and with this came the desire to flee.

Try as she might, Frances could not know what the marriage meant. She decided to ask her mother about it over a game of cards.

But the mother dragged out the discussion for hours with strange circumlocutions about birds interspersed with unhappy remarks: she was not attentive to Frances’ concerns. That night, Martin told Frances that he would rather have a heart attack than live with her. She responded, “Could that be because of my face? Or yours?” For it seemed that Martin’s face had changed too, and was now beginning to hang lower, like Frances’, if only slightly.

“It is not because of anyone’s damned face,” he yelled.

“I don’t know what’s happening,” she said, and then Martin

French buttoned his robe and left the apartment, never coming back, though at times he called from phone booths.

During this period, Frances sat on the sofa of her old apartment with the westward-facing picture window that took the full brunt of the sun each day, and cried to herself. She tried to write down her feelings with a pen, but the pen wobbled too much.

Her mother urged Frances to apply for a job in a local laboratory to take her mind off the situation. They stood on Frances' porch one night. "Your life is strange," the mother said with distaste, leaning against a beam, cuddling her desiccated fur stole, not minding the heat. "I wonder if you'll always be alone now?"

Frances did not know. In the meantime, keeping busy was a good idea. There were so few jobs in Munson that Frances took the laboratory position, performing the dissection of caterpillars and slicing their tissue with a hand-cranked, circular steel blade.

It was then that her face slowly changed. As she worked many hours in the lab at the edge of town, the face's sagginess seemed to lift. At moments, she even looked lovely, as an orderly once remarked in the empty cafeteria. At first, the face-shift was imperceptible, though undeniable. She considered that the happy, inverted sensation she felt upon first meeting Martin French had merely been a counterweight to the fear of dying. The ongoing, sickish feeling caused by their alliance had not been the best sensation Frances had ever known. But it had compelled her.

"Why analyze it, Frances?" her sister, Valencia, had said one night, leaning over a steel bowl filled with skinned pears. "Freeze that bastard out of your life, and then go down to Ming's for a drink."

Ming was the local tavern proprietor who lived alone at the furthest edge of Little-Munson, where he tended a family of doves.

"I can't exactly forget Martin. I wonder about him," Frances sighed.

The sister snorted, then poured a mug of sugar into a mug of water: Valencia liked to experiment with cooking. Valencia was adamant, but Frances could not be hard-hearted. She did not forget Martin French, and sometimes mentioned him—albeit dryly. Her face improved, but other things got worse. She lost the ability to sleep then, and took to sitting on the porch at night. Skin eruptions began. So did an unpleasant awareness of her womanly side: that she was often making the small, repetitive movements of tidying and storing that were low to the ground, where the edges of things seemed to inveigle her to disappear.

Yet she tried to find a place for herself, and spent a few months associating with a group of young people who called themselves “Ears”—for they spent their day hours at Ming’s tavern, listening to music on a powerful jukebox. Frances pretended to be comfortable with Ears, laughing at their jokes and wearing full, pink skirts when with them, but deep down, she felt out of sorts.

It was as if the disturbance that had caused her face to sag now slid inside her, so that, while her outward appearance improved, another kind of imbalance—a potent one—took its place. Frances knew the sessile, raucous sensation inside her was some kind of a tug-of-war, and each day she grew a stranger woman, less appropriate than she should be.

She asked Palmer, her physician, about these occurrences, and he contextualized the phenomena helpfully by saying, “Frances, sometimes things just happen—and we don’t understand why!”

FIVE: WILL MORST

Ray and his brother Kenny were due at the house soon, part of the weekly routine for them all. The coffee Frances had made that morning was now a thick slurry of grounds and sugar. From her seat by the stove, she stared down into the pan. How funny it would be if she served this syrupy substance to Ray and his brother, and watched their confusion as they looked up from their cups, mouths puckered! She laughed hard then, eyes squeezed shut.

After heating the pot on the tiny, low stove that required her to stoop when cooking, she drank the coffee down. She needed energy. When Ray and Kenny arrived, she would set food out for everyone. Kenny was a fireman.

The telephone rang in long, magnificent peals, and she sprinted to stop the sound. “Hello, dear!” It was Frances’ mother, with a clattering behind her. Mrs. Johnson liked to collect wooden oars, and sometimes she bumped into her living room wall, where the oars hung, and from which they often fell.

“Mother, I’m busy.”

“I wanted to remind you. Please buy a coat, Frances. That wind today was a killer. Winter’s coming. I bought a coat for myself today—fireproof!”

“I bought a coat, Mother,” she answered, “—leather.”

“Oh, for crying out loud! Why did you do that!?” The woman took the news of the coat rather hard. “Of all the coats in the

world! But leather! Leather won't protect you from wind or cold! Leather itself is cold. It'll burn, too, and it's not dressy. You've got to think about enhancing your looks—why, at your age, you already have eye-wrinkles. Buy a coat, Frances.” The mother hung up.

Frances returned slowly to the kitchen, daydreaming, sitting, recalling the delicious fraud of feigning illness for one full year at school. During that experience, she sat on her narrow bed for hours, playing an unassuming game with cardboard and needles, a game with no competitors and no ending. The plaited silence of the house would seem to thicken then, reflecting a lurking condition there of general mendacity, which Frances desired furiously to realign.

One day during that year, Frances ran inside the house after watching a low storm move in, and there saw her father sitting at a rough wooden table, eating a freakishly large apple. His head in half-shadow, the father stood, winked at her, then left on a trip to an unfamiliar shore.

When the man returned, his form a silhouette in the bright doorway, Frances squinted. He carried a large-headed doll and a bottle filled with creatures from a lake. Pouring the bottle into a tank, the father showed Frances and her siblings the blue water with its engorged, half-grown eels and stiff newts, and he stated that the miniscule fish were known as “foolers,” for they were too tiny to have the usual organs of fish at all. But they appeared mysteriously in puddles after rain, he explained, their lives simply beginning wherever they saw fit. The fish were eager to live, it seemed.

Frances' mother did not care for the blue tank, and expressed her opinion while standing against the hall telephone table, as Frances and her siblings sat on the street curb. Inside the house, the mother cried, shaking her fists into the sofa cushion, railing;

she went to bed while Frances' father slept through the afternoon in a wooly chair. After supper, Frances woke in her room and saw her mother grasping the edge of the door with sudsy, pink fingers. "Dammit!" the woman whispered fiercely, helplessly into the dark. "I just hate those damn fish."

"Are you afraid?" Frances intoned like a robot.

The mother answered yes, adding that she was worried that she could not control her own outbursts, and it seemed the fish induced these like an allergen. The mother could sense the perilous fish even when she stood on the roof.

As her mother continued to sob angrily, Frances watched in her white nightgown and then the mother rushed across the sitting-room, hoisted the fish tank in her arms, running, tripping across the rug to noisily hurtle the entire container and its contents down the kitchen sink. Most of the fish slid away, though the larger creatures struggled in the drain trap, she doused the area with vinegar and threw the bodies away.

It was not a wholly unique evening for Frances, but she wondered what meaning the episode had, if any. Hours later, before sunup, she had not determined any, and stepping on cold stones through the kitchen, she scraped her fingertips in the drain, seeking, without success, any remaining miniature fish.

Now, Frances leaned back on her stool. Stirring the viscous, scalding coffee, she considered her family. They, and other townfolks, too, lately urged her to find another man besides Ray. "He's not the best you can find," her mother said, while her father stood pigeon-toed at the rear of the house, scantily nodding. Frances thought that perhaps, in a way, it was true. "Good men—rare 'round here as pickled hooves!" once joked her aunt, an older woman who had died in bed with her hands in the air.

Many Munson men were bachelors. The same went for Munson women, and, furthermore, the women seemed always

to be retiring from work and life. Frances often saw neighbors busy in their homes, peeping into the streets from curtained windows. Munson had few social events, aside from an occasional formal dance; infrequently, the town erupted spasmodically with a wedding.

Frances looked down halfheartedly into a pan of broth.

It was nearly dark. Ray and his brother appeared at the end of Mary street, walking home, their small steps loping and rhythmic. The brothers slammed the screen door.

“Why do you always say that?” Kenny, Ray’s brother, said shakily.

“It’s damned true!” said Ray. “What else? You’re always coming down with an ailment, be it the sniffles or indigestion.” Ray removed his stiff coat. “Some people are born weak: you were.”

“I don’t like it when you say that!” the fireman cried. “I’m as fit as anyone at the station.”

“No, you’re not,” Ray replied coolly from the chair.

Kenny took off his shoes and lay back stiffly on the sofa, wiping the thin hair from his forehead. He shut his eyes and murmured angrily: “Agh!” He sat up. “You think I’m weak? Who wanted to drive us all to the gorge last year? I did! But no, you insisted on driving the whole way, and made Frances and I sit in the back seat like children! I should have forced you to relent, but I didn’t!” He shook his head, then bent it with great disappointment. “Do you ever think that I don’t like being bossed around, that I want some control over my destiny?”

Ray nearly choked, then laughed. “Your destiny! Kenny, you take almost nine years of dawdling and whining before you take the fireman’s test, and you talk about controlling your destiny? God!”

The remark silenced Kenny. Frances sat quietly opposite them with a small green cup in her hand, eyes flickering. She did not

care to enter the dispute. She stood and looked through the kitchen doorway and out the back window, past the small rocks strewn through the grass. At the rear of the yard, the bushes rustled and moved. She sighed yet again.

So many creatures ran there: voles, mice broods, cats as small as the palm of a person's hand. There were litters of other animals, too, running across the yard—and badgers—that were there every night, along with other critters that no one thought of killing, so they ran free in unprecipitated excess and, Frances perceived, a sort of vanity.

She went to the window, straining her eyes, seeing them surging through the foliage, a river of pelts. She made a face: if she peered out the back door, she might smell them. Walking to the fireplace, she stooped and wondered aloud, “Is this open?” grabbing the flue handle.

“What did you say, Frances?” Ray asked, leaving the room.

She did not close the lever, but left it raised.

She thought of her own dog, Missie, a terrier, who one night had run from the house and, Frances believed, joined the hordes of animals outside, and Missie had never come back. Frances knew Missie was still out there in the wide mantle of bushes that extended into the alley and far into other groups of streets, because every so often she would hear Missie giving forth a half-bark. But for all Frances' whistling and calling, Missie would not come back. There was nothing Frances could do, and though she put a bowl of food in the backyard for the dog every night, which Missie—or someone—ate, less and less of the food was consumed as time went on: maybe Missie was learning to eat a new diet, perhaps one of prey.

“But I miss her so badly!” Frances often said to folks when she went shopping in town. And this became a kind of refrain.

Frances looked at Kenny reclined on the sofa. She rubbed dry hands together.

Kenny said, "There's a fellow named Morst—Will Morst, at the station. He likes you, Frances."

"Who?" she said numbly.

"Will Morst! You know who I mean. Why don't you come talk to him? We'll have some cookies!"

She looked at Kenny with disbelief. "Not another man!" She began to laugh with quiet intensity, bowing over. It was so funny!

"Be quiet, Frances," he said.

"Oh, Kenny." She was suddenly severe. "I don't like new relationships; they're not my idea of great fun."

"Well, then, what is your idea of great fun?"

She gave him a hard, withering look.

"Frances, just because I try to help you out—! There are men besides my brother—and you could meet them!"

She stared at him hard. "Kenny, does it ever occur to you that there are ways to mask despair—turn it into vivaciousness and even purpose?"

"Not really. But despair—well, that's—"

"What?" Frances challenged.

"It's a sin!" he posited. Kenny seemed rather delighted about something, and sweat shone on his forehead.

"Oh, Kenny, that's old hat." Frances flopped back on the stiff sofa cushion. "I'm not talking about ideas you picked up on the schoolyard; I'm talking about trying to make it through this life!"

"Make it through life—?" he asked. "What's wrong, Frances? You seem happy enough."

"Happy? Like Curly-Dawn?" she answered in a nasty tone. Curly-Dawn was Kenny's girl friend.

"What's wrong with Curly?" he said. "She's saving her money. She likes it at the post office." Kenny rose and headed to the kitchen, perhaps seeking a cup of coffee, adding aggressively from there, "At least she's a lady!"

Frances shrugged, turned red, and pulled at her gray skirt.

“She listens to music in her home,” he added. “Hey, Frances, what kind of show are you running in this kitchen?” He indicated with a finger how the room lacked a kettle, pans, a spice rack, and the like.

She smirked. “Kenny, I need someone to talk to...someone very smart!”

“Smarter than me?” Kenny grinned, poking his head back through the doorway.

She sighed. “You’re right—I’m not like Curly or the others. I’m different from the girls who walk into town with your fireman friends, who dress up every morning in sandals.”

“But deep down, you must want something fresher out of life!” Kenny cried.

“Occasionally, I have behaved those ways,” she mused evenly. “But my heart isn’t in it, Kenny.”

He glanced through the doorway. “Well, you’re young, and you’ll soon begin. You don’t have to be exactly as those girls are, either, Frances. Relax, and the real Frances will shine through!”

She shook with brief, hysterical laughter.

“It’s never too late to be a lady!” he said, unwrapping a lump of cheese.

Frances thought. Sometimes, coming home from afternoon shopping, she stared at her image in the dark-tinged hallway mirror: the creature she saw in the skirt and blouse was strange. If she was not a child, then surely she was a type of girl. But she was not a girl, nor was she a married woman, by any means. She had no offspring, and often browsed through boating magazines; with her mouth-wrinkles she seemed almost an older woman; but she was not. Her belly burned lavishly, sometimes, and she could be aroused to hear anyone at all speak her name or cough. What was a girl? She never had considered herself a full woman; in any case,

women seemed prone, in the end, to homeliness and illness. She was not that way—not yet. Was she unique?

With a flat, disengaged expression, she stepped toward Kenny, who held a broken cracker in one hand.

“Kenny, when I was four years old my mother told me, ‘You’re all alone in the world,’ And what do you know: that turned out to be true!”

He stared, then drank down a very small glass of water. “You’re a nice girl, Frances. Come meet Will Morst.”

DANIEL COSHNEAR

I'M SCARED, MS. HUGHES

So much for early retirement, high seas adventure, solitude. My stocks crashed through the floor, my options petered out. I sold my boat for half what I'd paid. For chrissakes, I said, more or less to myself.

Shut up, she said. She was a manly old woman, whiskers, eyes sunk deep in the ravines of her face. She looked as if she'd seen it all, and she said, It doesn't get any better than this.

Who are you?

Dolores Hughes, appraiser.

She looked me over. You have the skin of a child.

I'm going to be inconsolable.

Go ahead, she said. Go ahead and feel my gums. She opened wide. Put your whole hand in.

Um. I don't think so. No.

Go ahead. It's a one-time offer.

Um.

Wait, she said. Roll up your sleeve.

•

I had many downs and few ups, well below sea-level, but at least the rain stopped. My home, at least, is high above the

street. Sometimes it held me captive, bare bulbs and egg-white tunnels that looked yellow. Broken bird, me. I was sitting on the toilet. What's real, I said to the concave space for soap on the wall of my tub/shower. What's real? There was a knock on the door.

One minute.

Thirty seconds, she said. Ms. Hughes.

Usually I fuss with the way my shirt is tucked in my pants. I forgot to flush. I slammed my hip on the corner of the dining table, crushed my knee on the coffee table. When I opened the door I saw she'd lifted one of my impatiens from the long box on the deck and she was sucking dirt off the white roots.

Are you going to ask me in?

I swallowed. Hello Ms. Hughes.

Dolores, if you don't mind. I hadn't noticed her aluminum quad cane waiting at her heel. What's that, I said.

The left one gets tired carrying the right. She tilted her head to the flight of stairs. Seventy-six stairs, she said. You're special.

What's wrong with the right one?

She rapped it with her knuckles, same sound as the door. Nothing, she said.

You're old enough to be my mother's sister.

I had boys like you. Dozens. She used the cane to pry me out of the doorway, then walked in. She stopped after four steps, seemed to be studying my bookshelf.

Can I fix you a drink, Ms. Hughes? It was a long quiet, long enough for me to wonder at my choice of the word, fix.

You have The Bible on the bottom shelf.

It's the only shelf tall enough.

You have three paperbacks about breastfeeding.

They're not mine.

You're special, she said. I'll have a beer, or a Fresca if you have one. Something cold and bubbly. She giggled. There in hardcover, she said before I could leave the room, *The Collected Stories of Mavis Gallant*. Who are you trying to impress?

I said, I expected a different life, time to, you know, notice things. Solvency.

What about that drink?

I knew I didn't have Fresca. In the kitchen I was tucking my shirttails the right way when I heard her say, If I'd have known him sooner, he'd've never bought that silly skiff.

What?

•

It felt important to get to the bathroom, to flush. She sat on the center of my sofa bed, seven and a half feet from my bathroom door, eleven and a quarter feet from the toilet.

I have club soda. I have some scotch from New Jersey. I leaned in the threshold and caught her smiling at the blank television screen. Ms. Hughes, I said, are you all right?

I guess I could use the head, she said.

No, I said. Please wait!

I see. She winked. Well, we better get to it quickly, before I get uncomfortable.

•

The Afterglow: My high school wrestling coach said smiling relaxes the muscles in your face. So smile. Give me fifty, marine style, smiling. I couldn't stop. If it hadn't been for my mandibular frenums my face would have turned inside out,

the smooth moist pink me out. It doesn't get any better than this, Ms. Hughes.

That was pretty cool, she said. Pretty naughty. Do people say that anymore? She said, I have to run. You're special.

Why do you keep saying that?

Dozens of boys, I had dozens. It's all I could say to keep them out of trouble.

Don't go, I said. It was hard for her to sit upright, sound of rusty something. Sound of something dripping. Don't go, Ms. Hughes. I'm scared. What about that drink?

Oh commitments!

I ran to the kitchen, searched frantically. I had to pause because a perfect arrow of sunlight was glancing off a perfect shoulder of tomato. How long would it last? I'm scared.

Don't be scared. At least you don't have a boat anymore, she giggled.

I'm scared, Ms. Hughes.

Then be scared, if you must. It took her no time to reach the bottom of the stairs, hop onto her bicycle. Her voice was weak, like an almost smell of celery, like that part of a dream that seems like part of another dream. I heard her say, But listen, and then I heard the everyday song of crash and hiss.

JESSICA TREAT

MEAT EATERS AND PLANT EATERS

My cat is in the driveway, gnawing on fine bones. The rain has begun: a warm muzzled sound, large soft drips, not the rapid dark downpour of yesterday. Everything wet and green, sopping, soaking.

My cat comes in, sits on the desk where I write. His paw leaves a pale red print on the page. He wants to be scratched behind the ears, he splays himself belly-up for extra attention. He thinks he lives a fine life and he does. Inside he is petted and catered to; outside he lives the secret life of a hunter.

Meat Eaters and Plant Eaters: my son has divided his dinosaurs into two collections, counts how many he has in each. Plant eaters are more potbellied we learn; huge stomachs and intestines needed to process all that scruffy plant material. Meat eaters are leaner, tougher, their bodies efficient hunting machines. My son likes the meat eaters best: their jagged teeth, fierce open jaws, arms outstretched for prey. He prefers predators to prey, words he's recently learned.

But in the morning: "Mom? What is that? What did I step on?"

And I clean his bare foot and the rug, now bloodstained, of the gizzards our cat left behind during the night. My son stares at what I flush away. "Was it a mouse?" "Yes, I think so."

It's summer and the dead things are multiplying: mice, a chipmunk, and if we are very unlucky: a small bird, its downy feathers floating in the house for days, like milkweed seeds come to rest.

The cat has retired to the closet, kneads a sweater that's fallen over the tips of shoes. The pawing sets him purring, and soon he is curled into himself to sleep away the day.

"Are we going to die?" We are brushing our teeth, a ritual my son performs reluctantly, especially in the morning. "Are we going to die?" he asks me again.

"Yes, but...not for a long long long time, not for maybe 100 years—"

"NO! We're not, we're *never* going to die."

Silence—we're both thinking—and then the question again: "Are we going to die?"

I hesitate—he's only five. "Yes, but—"

"NO!" and he pounds me on my chest. What he doesn't like me to say he tries to pound right out of me. I know I need to talk to him about not hitting when he's mad, but for now I take the pounds. I go soft, evasive: "Maybe we won't die..." He must know I'm just saying that because he wants me to, I rationalize.

"Never. We're never going to die."

"Maybe—"

"Maybe means no. We're not going to die."

And that decides it. For now anyway. He's off to his bedroom, where his dinosaurs are. Crraak! I hear them crashing into one another, the Tyrannosaurus charging the Triceratops, but the Triceratops has horns and a thick skin, he may be able to get away alive. The swift meat eater catches him by the back leg, his teeth sink in; he bites a huge chunk of Triceratops; the poor plant eater will slowly die.

•

“I’m just going to drink water,” my son tells me over lunch.
“And why is that?”

“Because if you drink water, you won’t die.”

I nod, wondering how he’s reached this conclusion, then remember a book we read recently about the human body: we can live for so many days without food, but without water, we die. I pour another glass for him, glad that he prefers water to soda, at least for now.

•

From my window I catch sight of our cat in the field outside. I watch him circle something in the tall grass. Quietly he paces, his circle tightening, closing in, and then quite suddenly he leaps, back arched. He’s got something—though I can’t see what—between his paws.

We find the something on the bathroom floor—this time abandoned, not eaten or opened, not even a bloody scar: a tiny brown field mouse, its tail a long wire. My son stares at it, watches as I gather it in a paper towel. “Is it alive? Are you going to let it go outside?” I nod, though I’m unsure whether it’s dead or just stunned. I take the small bundle downstairs to thrust out the back door under the bushes outside. The mouse is still warm through the towel.

“Did it get away? Did it run away?” my son asks.

I tell him that it did, though I didn’t really see.

•

Big plant eating dinosaurs gulped down stones as they ate. The stones stayed in the gut, helping the stomach muscles grind leaves and twigs into a soft sticky stew of plants. Dinosaurs, such as Apatosaurus, could digest this stew more easily,” I read from the thick book we got from the library, *All About Dinosaurs*.

“Apatosaurus used to be Brontosaurus. Read about the meat eaters now, Mom.”

“Allosaurus had large eyes, nearly twice the size of those of the much bigger meat eater, Tyrannosaurus Rex... Above the eyes was a bony flap forming an eye ridge, possibly to shade its eyes from the sun... Allosaurus had about 40 teeth in its upper jaw and 32 in its lower jaw. They were up to 4 inches long and their front and back edges were sharp and serrated, like steak knives, for slicing through flesh. As they wore out or broke, new teeth grew in their place...” I read on. The words do not seem to be putting my son to sleep; he’s alert, intent on processing anything new we might learn. Our cat slips in the room through the closet door. He’s found his way in, as he usually does, through the crawlspace that leads through the attic, the attached garage, to the outside. He jumps onto the bed where we’re sitting, slinks past us, his fur brushing against us in turn, as he makes his way to the end. He kneads himself a warm spot, and soon he is curled into himself, purring softly. My son likes that his bed has become the cat’s favored resting spot.

“Shut the door Mom,” he tells me as soon as I close the book.

I do, and from the other side I hear him slip out of the bed I’ve just tucked him into, slam the closet door closed, then slip back in between covers. Now the cat is trapped in the room—no secret passageway to the nightworld outside.

Most likely he hasn't realized this yet. I wonder how long he'll indulge my son, tolerate his constant stroking. For now they lie, two warm bodies fitted into one another: one purring, one stroking, soon twitching and dreaming.

JEFFREY ENCKE

FORAGING THEORY: DUNGENESS

A haze of eggs—as always, it begins
in vivo—wafts into a patch of sea grass.

Pile perch interrogate kelp beds,
then return to their circling. To be

a barnacle, never to be turned
on one's back. We can not smell

the metallic mesh of loop traps.
The waters warm with sun,

and our hearts race, the stroke
volumes of the aortas increase.

In the spring, Olympic snowcaps
melt and the rivers teem with trees.

The teeth on our claws wear
with each meal. Our eyes, rotating

on stalks above the mouth, watch
for predators during predation.

Some call this blindness. A faint green
light above, and these inarticulate

chemical texts. We employ
a cost-benefit model to regulate desire.

Large clams, while meatier, promise
low returns for the long-term.

We eat our young, competing
with starry flounder and lingcod.

Rotating a bivalve, one finds a soft spot,
a point of entry. Blue-trimmed pincers

cross in prayer. Send us a gaping mollusk.
Alongside spawning rockfish and Chinook,

our larvae hitchhike on jellyfish,
deep into estuaries, toward the heartland,

where someday, with spiny feet,
they will scratch our name in mud.

KRILL

The centuries turn. Algae gathers
around floating ice tongues,
sheer tips of frozen rivers
inching by the year—a meal,
a subglacial grammar.

Sometimes our bodies
shrink about us,
and the waves crash close
to our stomachs, sacs behind

blackpearl eyes. We breathe
through our feet. In moss and lichens,
sprouting from the skins of rocks,
tiny wingless insects feed in the sun,
which reflects off low clouds,
and the skyline disappears.

Beneath the ice-capped ocean,
an archipelago of mountain tips
stretches to Tierra del Fuego
and into the Andes.

Dreams of land bear woodlice
and pillbugs nesting under treebark.
The musical skins of fur seals
bring isolation. There is no solace

in wealth or being first. Within
our bodies, ten blue and green organs
light our path. When warm,

we become poisonous, a watery mirage by night,
an orange ghost rising from green
depths, then sinking away from day
to avoid baleen whales. Against the cold
rule of science, our age

can not be measured. The nerve cord
contains an electric remnant,
and the pericardium, beneath
the shells of our backs,
a secret. We molt frequently.

MAILE CHAPMAN

REVISITING MANSFIELD PARK

Miss B., displeased with her sister, led the way.

After a time all seemed to feel that they had been there long enough. The lower part had been now entirely shown, and Mrs. R., never weary in the cause, would have proceeded further, if her son had not interposed with a doubt of there being time enough.

“For if,” said he, with a proposition, “we are *too* long in going over this in the house, we shall not have time for what is to be done out-of-doors.”

Mrs. R. submitted, more fully agitated, more temptingly open to all the sweets of the pleasuregrounds, and as by one impulse all walked out.

“Suppose we turn down *here* for the present,” said Mrs. R.

“Query,” said Mr. C., looking down at himself, “whether we may not find something to employ us *here*, before we go farther? I see great promise.”

“J.,” said Mrs. R. to her son, “I believe my wilderness will be new to all the party. The Miss Bs have never seen my wilderness yet.”

No objection was made. All were attracted. Mr. C. was the first to move forward, to examine the capabilities of that end. Mr. C. was soon followed by Miss B. and Mr. R., and when after a little time the others began to form into parties,

these three were found in busy consultation. Miss C. and Fanny seemed as naturally to unite, and after a short participation in their respective difficulties the others left them and went on. Mrs. R., Mrs. N., and Julia were still far behind, while the aunt, having fallen in with the housekeeper, was about to come undone.

Poor Julia was the only one out of the nine not tolerably satisfied.

•

“This is insufferably *hot*,” said Miss C. when they had each taken one turn on the terrace and were drawing for partners a second time. “Shall any of us object to being comfortable?”

“Not if I must look at Fanny,” said E., with the smile of an affectionate brother. “What have you got on?”

“I might not have such another opportunity all the winter,” thought Fanny.

But soon enough E. was distracted by the sounds of a late arrival.

“Hey day!” said E., “here’s company. ‘Tis C., I protest! There are his own two men pushing into his back quarters. This is quite a surprise, Fanny. I shall be very glad to see him.”

The smiles and pleased looks showed how welcome was C.’s sudden resolution of coming to them. A very cordial meeting passed between C. and E., and with the exception of Fanny, the pleasure was general; and even to her there might be some advantage in C.’s presence, since every addition to the party must rather forward her favorite indulgence of being suffered to sit silent and unattended to. She found, while they were at table, a happy flow prevailing in which

she was not at first allowed to take any part. But Dr. G., warmly urged by the two sisters, was soon in possession.

Afterwards Fanny, feeling more due to herself, returned to Mr. C.

“I have not thought well of Dr. G. during the time of our play,” she said. “I then saw him behaving, as it appeared to me, so very improperly and unfeelingly, not seeming to care about my satisfaction, but only for how he exposed himself.”

“My dear Fanny,” Mr. C. replied, “let us not, any one of us, be judged by what we appeared at a period of general folly.”

“As a *by-stander*,” said Fanny, “perhaps I saw more than you did.”

“Very possibly. Nothing could be more improper than the whole business. I am shocked whenever I think that we could be capable of it.”

Then—“Fanny,” he said suddenly, “I hope I do justice to my sister...I think it very possible that we might, one or both, be desirous.”

He then proved himself unspoilt by his earlier sociability.

“You will be persuaded, I trust,” he said. “I confess myself sincerely anxious that you may.”

Fanny was too well aware of it, to have anything to say. Happily, she desired that connexion quite as warmly as anyone.

AN IMPORTANT MOMENT

That day, by chance, I had worn the red and blue Halston dress given to me by my aunt Phoebe; with it I wore the white patent leather headband and the white A-line jacket that make me look like a more normal Catherine Deneuve as filmed by Roman Polanski.

I always dress with this much attention. I believe that colors matter, that they construct a moment or a mood. It is particularly important, I think, to be on one's own color terms during big moments, which is why I am glad that I was wearing what I wore that day. White, when paired with red and blue, is the color of destiny in the mental palette that I use in my very precisely planned wardrobe combinations. Colors always send a message. For instance, I doubt I would really click with a new acquaintance, even a beautiful and kindly new acquaintance with strawberry-blonde hair and hazel eyes, if when I met her she was wearing a yellow dress and happened to be framed in a yellow room. That's because the yellow would imply that she is waiting passively for her destiny, and I'm not terribly interested in people like that. I like a bolder personality, and primary colors, I have found, are usually worn by those who go out to meet life more aggressively.

As I was well aware of my color choices that day, it was

with a funny feeling of expectation that I saw him on the steps of the public library building downtown—an attractive grey-haired man in a blue suit with a white shirt and red tie.

We pointed to each other—both dressed in red, white and blue. It was ironic. We smiled. It was then that I realized who he was: the President of the United States.

This was the first and only time that I ever saw him in person, because almost immediately his secret service men led him away. It was sad to think about his loneliness among all that crowd. Our mutual attraction was very obvious, and it would have made sense for us to be able to talk privately. We would have had a lot to discuss.

But I am familiar with unfairness; even I have experienced that kind of thing.

After he was gone, I stood for a moment looking into my compact to see my face as he had seen it. This confirmed that I looked as crisp, as stylishly 1960's as I felt. Then, knowing somehow that he was still thinking of me, I went down the steps, holding my white patent-leather handbag in a poignant way, remembering the regret in his eyes and speculating how our interlude would in the long term affect him, and so potentially the rest of the world.

ALIA HANNA HABIB

SLEEPER

He allowed her to remain very still, to say very little, to do the least amount. He asked her no questions, or when he did, he did not expect her to answer, or to answer well. He did not try to get her to look at him. He did not make her feel him looking at her. He cooked for her, from time to time, but he was not surprised nor suspicious when she did not eat his food. He bought her things, from time to time, but he did not look for these things in her house or on her person. He did not wait for her to introduce him. He did not make her seek him out. He appeared to her whenever it seemed she noticed he was missing. When she decided to leave him, he stopped appearing, although she did not tell him she was leaving him. She knew he would not look for her or ask for her, and for this she was most grateful.

thirty minutes, february 17, 2000

GIFT #1

He gave her something she wanted, without her having to ask, and so she carried it with her in her dark bag. Yet she felt (more and more so as time went by) that he did not give it to her because he wanted to give it, but because she wanted so badly to have it, or because he did not know what else to do. Or maybe he did not want to hear her ask for the thing, as men in her life often did not like to hear her asking. She enjoyed receiving, of course, but she would have enjoyed it more if she knew he enjoyed giving. He is tall, thin, and beautiful. In the picture she carries in her mind, he is bending over with her the small, dark thing, she unable to ask, he unable to refuse.

fifteen minutes, november 30, 1999

DIFFERENCE

He thanks her for describing him as young though he knows he is not. She blushes, knowing that she is and he would like to be. Now youth stands between them instead of age. This is a more comfortable position. His thanks tells her she has something he wants. Her blush tells him she knows this. And so the best she can do is keep her head bowed as she reaches for his hand, and let herself walk with him as he goes to the park.

ten minutes, revised, february 3, 2001

DADA and ULTRAIST poems

translated by WILLARD BOHN

THEO VAN DOESBURG (1883-1931)

LOBELIA I

On my table
there is the sky:
stars—white on
lilac bluee
On my table
stands a jar of ink
Lies a dirty
piece of string

The sky is so
deep
the sky is so
high
the sky is so
round
round
round
the sky is so
bluee

The stars are so
white
white
white
This is the sky
This
This
This

GUILLERMO DE TORRE (1900-1972)

VOLUTE

My puff of smoke rope-dances in the sky

Smokers of fog
search for their hookah among the fleece

Avionic aspirations
striate the epidermis
of the absorbed horizon

Beneath the pneumatic bell
life's echo withers away

In the lake
the clouds are boats

Passing by
sadistic locomotives
unbraid the fugitive hair
of the zodiacal palm trees

HAZE

The wind gesticulates

The wood sings psalms

Astral rain

Avionic weavers

spin the northern mist's

nostalgic flax

Rainy painters

varnish the anchored meadows

She has put on

the resurrected rainbow's

heptachromatic necklace

Autumn

Solitude

Absinth

There is an androgenous haze

And the wilted horizon

casts its petals to the wind

RAFAEL CANSINOS-ASSÈNS (1882-1964)

MAY

The May clocks
have sown the evening
with roses and birds.
Above each tree
a night of green stars trembles.
Dawn begins to rise
from the women's legs.
So soon...
The water is full
of broken fans.

NIGHT

All the forges
pour their ashes into the sky
The last fire has been extinguished.
All the firemen on duty
are inspecting the scene.
With their genital extinguishers
the police dogs
water the evening fire's
still warm ashes.
The last dome burns in the moon:
but these flames are lit cigarettes!
The city is safe!
Blue smoke everywhere!
All the houses were consumed:
but they have saved all the hammocks!
In the newspaper headlines:
—“Fire Claims No Victims”—
but all the men
have lost their sight!

JOAN PÉREZ-JORBA (1878-1928)

MY LOVER

THE DEAD HORSE

I inhabit the ground floor of the building in my soul's swamp

My lover has left without a word.

There's an evening shot to hell.

But not life.

A dead horse is lying on the sidewalk

pool of blood

Why that swarm of children around my thought?

“Zézé, look, he moved.”

And those prowling eyes? My lover has left without a word. And those

prowling eyes?

A lamp turns off in my sadness.

So much the better.

I light my cigar and envelop myself in smoke.

fumeux

POEMS of the SUBTLE ART
TRANSLATED by BROOKS HAXTON

The *ars subtilior*, or “Subtle Art,” was one of the first avant-garde movements in the West. The movement arose out of the dire conditions of the fourteenth century—the Black Death, the reign of two simultaneous Popes, and the various crises of monastic, legal, and academic corruption that followed. A circle of composers in the south of France, taking advantage of new systems of musical notation, began to compose highly ornate and bizarre secular pieces, experimental musical settings of obscure, whimsical, and perverse poetry. The compositions were harmonically bold, with a rhythmic complexity almost unparalleled in Western music before the Twentieth century. Unlike other progressive composers of the Middle Ages, the *ars subtilior* composers did not merely innovate, but made a kind of cult out of their innovation. They composed, often, under assumed or anagrammatic names; they wrote pieces in which several texts were to be sung simultaneously against each other; they set poems, particularly, describing their own brand of willfully obscurantist perversity, which they called “smokiness.” Though there has been some speculation that the “smokiness” is proof of mediaeval psychedelic, this is unlikely (opium was eaten, not smoked); more recently, it has been suggested that the “smoke” is supposed to be both conceptual and physiological—a kind of effluvium released by sizzling chemical humors which caused the brain to be hazy, obscure, and irascible. This term, with its clouded and uncertain meanings, sums up their experimental art.

The only names associated with these poems are those of the composers who set them to music; these composers may or may not have also written the texts.

—eds.

JOHANNES SYMONIS

SMOKE NOT SMOKE

When smoke has wrapped itself in smoke,
I smoke, for not to smoke
makes fools of brothers in the smoke,
who smoke, and have me smoke, my head
turned in a curl of smoke, as if smoke
wound me into smoke, yet not past reason:
smoke I must, and I do smoke, but not
the bilious smoke that makes a fellow
in the smoke ill-humored. Harmlessly,
I smoke. I trouble no one, but abstain
by virtue of the smoke from mayhem.

Not to smoke proves nothing,
and to smoke proves nothing more.
I have spoken words of smoke,
and no harm comes of them.
By smoking I would neither prove
what smoke is, except consolation,
nor seek any tribulation.
My delight is wreathing smoke.
Friends, let smoky souls repair
in pleasure where we can abstain
by virtue of the smoke from mayhem.

If I could, I'd clear my head
like Socrates, and gladly leave
my smoking brain unclouded.
Then, my thoughts would no more
smoke, nor snare themselves in smoke,
but now I am perturbed by smoke,
my heart confused in smoke I feel
I cannot hide and dare not show:
I may be victim yet or culprit,
yet though fickle I abstain
by virtue of the smoke from mayhem.

Note: *Fumee*, or smoke, in 14th-century French, suggested by association: vapour, odor, daydream, foolishness, anger, grief, pride, and drunkenness. Multiple meanings made the word and its cognates appealing to a group of writers fond of verbal play and repetition. The school of poets and musicians known as the *Fumeux*, or Smoky Ones (the dreamy, foolish, angry, drunken, proud ones), wrote experimental songs with lyrics of uncertain meaning and musical settings odd for their rhythmic shifts and harmonic dissonances. Because no word in English denotes the range of meanings in the Old French *fumee*, this translation gives a literal reading of the word as "smoke." "Fume" sounds close to the French and indicates anger, vapour, and odour, but without connoting drunkenness. In English "fume" also loses the image of smoke that permeates these poems. The sense of anger without drunkenness or foolishness in the action of fuming changes the tone and feeling. For a translator, as usual, no solution seems possible, but the rich associations with smoke in more recent English, though distinct from those in French, still sustain the play of repetition.

SOLANGE

SMOKERS

By way of smoke the smoker
smokes whose thought
is smokier than smoke is
hidden. Smoke by way of smoke
he smokes, for much smoke
makes more smoke more pleasing
till in thought, by way of smoke,
smoke smoke the smoker.

FRANCISCUS

PYTHON, PHAETHON

Python, body rank with venom,
your blood is your father's bane.
You take hate as your birthright
for the blue ethereal car,
causing the very Sun to fire
his hot arrow into Phaethon, Python,
you who work against your father,
flower of the world, such woe.

Note: The poem in French begins by repeating an ambiguous name, *Phiton*, a variant spelling of the name of Phaethon. In Greek myth Phaethon was a demigod who tricked his father, the sun god, into letting him drive the solar car. Zeus killed Phaethon with a thunderbolt to save the world when the sun went out of control. Reference to a venomous beast suggests that *Phiton* is also a variant spelling of *python*, python. In this poem Phiton must be the first son of Gaston Febus, the count Gaston III of Foix and Bearn, who liked to be compared to Phoebus the sun god. In a fit of rage Gaston murdered his eldest son, whose mother, princess of Navarre, he had repudiated thirty years before. This song, written in the court of Gaston, blames the son for wanting to displace his father, like foolish Phaethon, and for a snakelike treachery inherited, it would seem, from the former countess. Since the song survives among musical manuscripts preserved by Gaston's court, contempt for the murdered son and for his mother must have been encouraged by Gaston himself.

JEAN VAILLANT

FRIENDLY BIRDSONG

The wood-notes of the nightingale
make true lovers glad
until the cuckoo pipes up
just to be discordant
with his note of envy,
Cuckoo cuckoo, all night
long, off-key, to make
the nightingale sound ugly.
She in her turn then cries,
Kill him, kill the cuckolder,
quick! snare him, spear him,
disappear him. So she
sings in lieu of love.

And if it please you, sweet
lark, may you cry then
to the lyre among lilies,
of the liar among lilies:
You who lie among the lilies,
let your dying words be
God! o God! among the lilies—
you whose cries now prick
the nightingale to pray
again, Quick, kill him!

Let the cardinal in red robes,
and the quail, whose call is loud
and girlish, and the blackbird
on the black branch, all sing:
Kill the culprit, chill him,
do him, do him in, undo him,
execute the lug and lose him.
Now! let's picnic in the woods.
Let's pick the hazelnut.
Come sing in friendship:
Friendly, friendly, friendly
ever be ye birds and gods of love.

WILLARD BOHN is Professor of Foreign Languages at Illinois State University. He has authored numerous articles and some nine books including *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928*, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, and (last year) *Modern Visual Poetry*. In October, SUNY Press will publish *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous*.

JOHN BRANSEUM lives in Louisville, KY where he works as a stock analyst and technical writer. He spends his spare time weight-lifting, feeling guilty about being Catholic, and fanatically playing Uno with his love, the poet Cynthia Arrieu-King.

MICHAEL BURKARD's *Unsleeping* was published in February by Sarabande Books, and New Issues Press will publish *Pennsylvania Collection Agency* in March. His poems have recently appeared in *The American Poetry Review* and *Jubilat*. He teaches in the MFA program at Syracuse University and at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Among his books are *Entire Dilemma* (Sarabande, 1998), *My Secret Boat* (W. W. Norton, 1990) and *The Fires They Kept* (Metro Book Co., Los Angeles, 1986).

RAFAEL CANSINOS-ASSÉNS and Guillermo de Torre together founded the Ultraist movement.

MAILE CHAPMAN lives in Syracuse, NY. Her work appears in the current issues of *Post Road* and *Best New American Voices 2000*.

DANIEL COSHNEAR is author of a collection of short stories, *Jobs & Other Preoccupations*, to be released by Helicon Nine Editions in Fall 2001.

ALAN DENIRO's fiction and poetry have appeared in *Fence*, *Altair*, *Rattle*, *Artful Dodge*, *Willow Springs*, and elsewhere. He has taught a speculative/fabulist fiction writing workshop at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, and edits *Taverner's Koans* (www.taverners-koans.com), a poetry resource and ezine. He lives in St. Paul, MN.

THEO VAN DOESBURG had two passions: Constructivism and Dada. With Piet Mondrian he founded the De Stijl group in Holland and published their journal, also called *De Stijl*. Under the pseudonym I K. Bonset, he wrote Dada poetry and published the review *Mecano*, reserving a second pseudonym, Ado Camini, for his Dada criticism.

JEFFREY ENCKE, at work on a manuscript tentatively called *Hydrography*, recently purchased three goldfish, naming them Filippo (after Marinetti), Ezra (after Pound) and Bishop (after Elizabeth). His other major writing project is his doctoral dissertation, *Manifestos: A Social History of Proclamation*.

M. S. FODHI-DA-ZEN is at work on a bibliography of all writings in any way related to Yuan Hao-wen.

ALIA HANNA HABIB lives in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been published in *Mudfish* and the *Columbia Review*. She is currently working on a collection of interrelated prose pieces titled *Objects and Comforts*.

BROOKS HAXTON's most recent book, just published, is *Fragments*, his free-verse translation of Heraclitus; his next book, in October 2001, will be a collection of original poems, *Nakedness, Death, and the Number Zero*; and his translations of *Selected Poems* by Victor Hugo will be published for the Hugo bicentennial in February 2002.

TEX KERSCHEN lives in Houston, TX. He is a curator at the Artcar Museum and the singer for Japanic.

MARC KIPNISS holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Washington. His stories have appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *Salt Hill*, *American Letters & Commentary*, and many other magazines. A chapbook of his short-shorts, *Reptile Appliance*, is available from Broken Boulder Press (www.brokenboulder.com). He has fiction forthcoming in *Wisconsin Review*, *Wind*, and *The Silver Web*.

STACEY LEVINE is a freelance writer living in Seattle. She raises tropical fish. She wrote *My Horse and Other Stories* (1994) and a novel, *Dra*—(1998), both published by Sun and Moon Press. She is working on a new novel, *Frances Johnson*.

Work by **JASON NELSON** has appeared in or will appear in *Plazm* magazine, *Speak* magazine, *Paragraph*, *Verse*, *Washington Review*, *Cross-Cultural Poetics*, *Phoebe* and others. His hypermedia can be seen and heard at www.heliozoa.com/concuss.html and at the *3rd bed* webpage.

JOAN PÉREZ-JORBA was one of the principal literary and artistic links between France and Catalonia during the Twenties. Situated in Paris where he edited a journal called *L'Instant*, he published several books of poetry and criticism. Pérez contributed to numerous reviews in both French and Spanish, including *Dada*, *La Revue de Epoque*, *SIC*, *Messidor*, *Plançons*, *El Cami*, and *Noi*.

GUILLERMO DE TORRE founded the Spanish Ultraist movement together with Rafael Cansinos-Asséns. His essays and poems appeared in a wide range of Spanish periodical, including *Grecia*, *Ultra*, *Vertical*, and *Comópolis*, and in French publications such as *Ça Ira*, *La Vie de Lettres*, and Francis Picabia's *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*.

JESSICA TREAT is the author of two collections of fiction: *A Robber in the House* (Coffee House Press, 1993) and *Not a Chance* (Fiction Collective Two, 2000). Her stories have appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *Quarterly West*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Green Mountain Review* and *Ms*. She lives in Northwestern, CT and recently received an Artist Fellowship Award in Fiction from the CT Commission on the Arts.

About the Format of this Journal

3rd bed is printed in Garamond, on acid-free paper. It is perfect bound, with a sturdy binding that should withstand years of use. Its dimensions are 6 x 8.5 inches. Robert Bringhurst, author of *The Elements of Typographic Style* and a delicate soul, suggests “The proportions of a page are like an interval in music. In a given context, some are consonant, others dissonant.” He supplies algorithms and ratios to determine which formats correspond to which chord. At *3rd bed*, we are pleased to be a diminished fifth.

Bringhurst writes, “The diminished fifth is derived from the pentagon, its ratio $1:\sqrt{2}$. In nature, pentagonal symmetry is rare in inanimate forms. Packed soap bubbles seem to strive for it but never quite succeed, and there are no mineral crystals with true pentagonal structures. But pentagonal geometry is basic to many living things, from roses and forget-me-nots to sea urchins and starfish...” The diminished fifth corresponds, finally, to what Bringhurst calls the “self-replicating page” (see chart). That is, a page from this journal folded in half inverts the original ratio; folded again the original ratio returns.*

We would like to go beyond Bringhurst, however, beyond even the sea urchin, and point out that the diminished fifth was, throughout the Middle Ages, a forbidden interval. It was the sign of all imperfection. Medieval choristers had a rhyme about it: *Mi contra fa: / diabolus in musica* (Mi against fa: the devil in music); they would chant it while skipping rope near the pyres of shrieking heresiarchs. There is a legend that the

*Bringhurst writes: “Each page shape has a counterpart with which it alternates. If a sheet whose proportions are 5:8 is folded in half, it produces a sheet whose proportions are 4:5. If this is folded once again, it produces another sheet whose proportions 5:8. In the same way, the proportion 1:2 alternates with proportion 1:1. The proportion $1:\sqrt{2}$, corresponding to the diminished fifth and the augmented fourth of equal temperament, is the only one that alternates with itself.

“In musical terms, these alternating proportions form *harmonic inversions*. (The harmonic inversion of a fifth, for example, is a fourth, and the harmonic inversion of a minor sixth is a major third.) The total of each such pair of intervals is always *one octave*.”

desire to avoid the diminished fifth produced counterpoint and harmony in Western music. The earliest harmonies were perfect fifths; much chant was sung in parallel, two voice parts always remaining a perfect fifth apart. When sung thus, however, there was always the danger that at some point, the chant would stray onto a tone that would require the diminished fifth, and the static harmony would be ruined. At these moments, instead of singing in parallel, the chants would deviate, pulling away from each other, swerving to avoid the forbidden chord, and so counterpoint was born. Seen thus, all of Western harmony, all of Western polyphony, may be seen not as music, but as a silence—as a not-singing, an avoidance, a nervous dance around that one suppressed and omnipresent interval—like the old British couples in houndstooth who ate toast and drank Horlicks while London was bombed from the air. —All of our symphonies and concerti, our motets and berceuses and barcarolles, in this view, are reduced to nothing but an anxiety about that one forbidden chord: the diminished fifth—the scathing tritone—the sea-urchin's song—the failure of bubbles—the devil in music.

This may account for the sweat on your fingertips; for your desire to press this journal to your bosom, to read it in a snake pit; to fill out subscription cards for all your friends and relatives—but all the while weeping, weeping...

PAGE PROPORTIONS AS MUSICAL INTERVALS*

octave	1:2	1:2	C—C'	<i>double square</i>
major 7th	8:15	1:1.875	C—B	
minor 7th	9:16	1:1.778	C—B \flat	<i>narrow books</i>
major 6th	3:5	1:1.667	C—A	
minor 6th	5:8	1:1.6	C—A \flat	-1: ϕ
fifth	2:3	1:1.5	C—G	
dim. 5th aug. 4th	1: $\sqrt{2}$	1:1.414	C—G \flat C—F \sharp	self-replicating page
fourth	3:4	1:1.333	C—F	
major 3rd	4:5	1:1.25	C—E	- ϕ :2
minor 3rd	5:6	1:1.2	C—E \flat	
major 2nd	8:9	1:1.125	C—D	<i>wide books</i>
minor 2nd	15:16	1:1.067	C—D \flat	
unison	1:1	1:1	C—C	square page

*Chart based on Robert Bringhurst's in his *The Elements of Typographic Style*.