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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

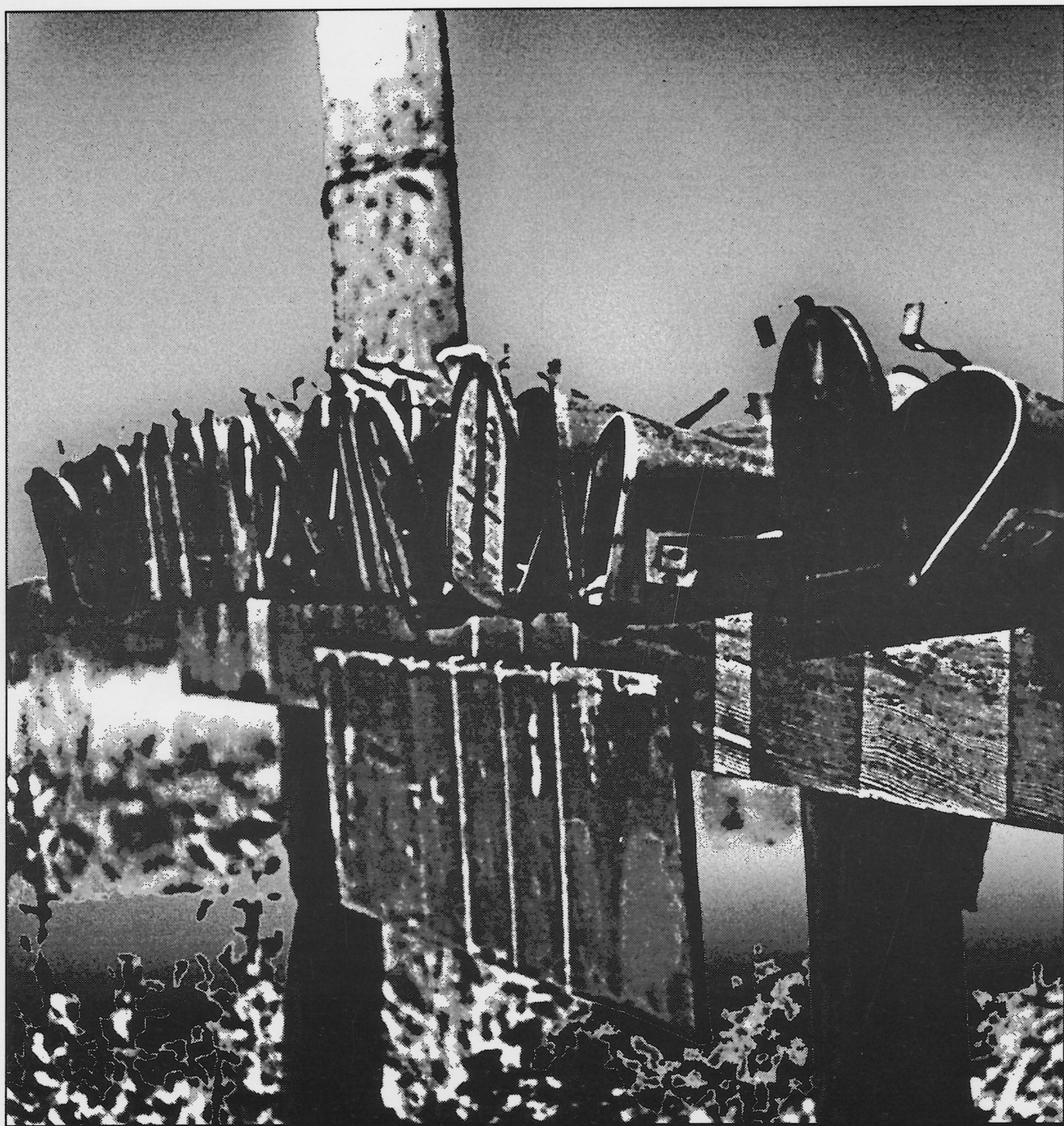
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SUMMER 1995

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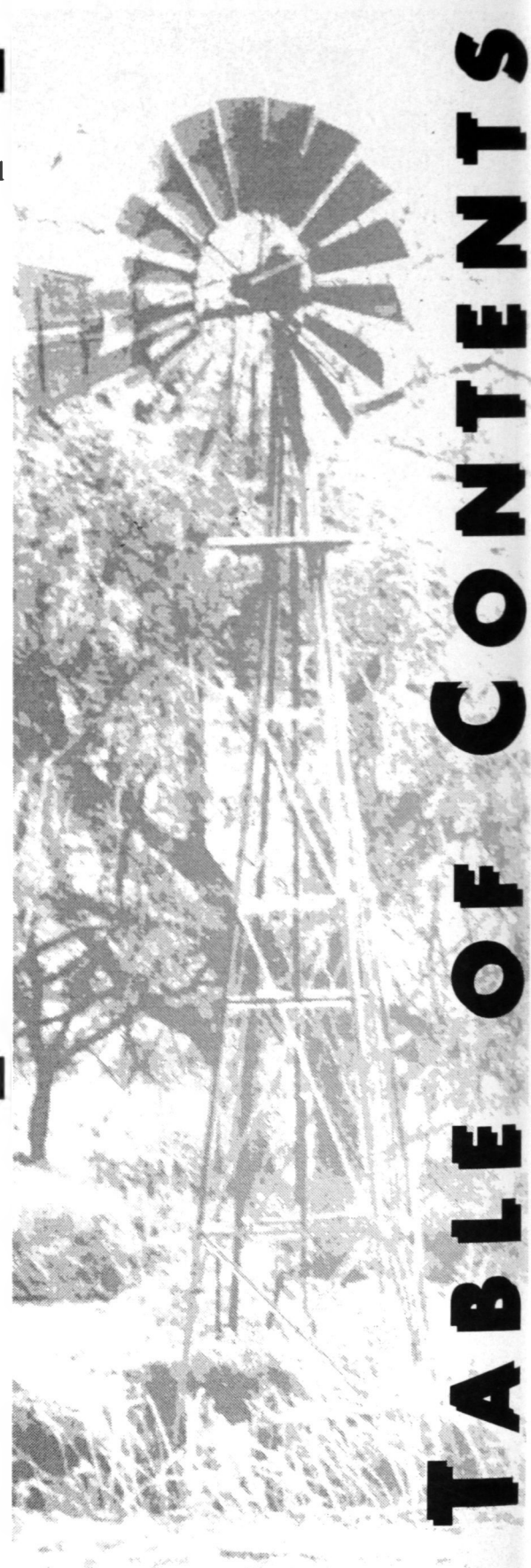


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ILLUSTRATED BY VELVET ROGERS

Road

by Diane Glancy

The fire of God is fallen from heaven,
and hath burned up the sheep.

Job 1:16

Behold now, I have two daughters which have
not known man; let me, I pray you, bring
them out unto you, and do ye to them as is
good in your eyes.

Genesis 19:8

She was on the road all the time. She couldn't stop traveling. She had to feel the land passing under her. She had one daughter with a sick child. Another daughter without a job. She had to keep moving between them. She could talk to her companion on the phone. How could they be close when she was always gone? He would ask. Well, she had to keep traveling and he couldn't always follow.

The road pulled against the hard things she had to pull against. The twenty-pound turkey her one daughter had bought when there were just the four of them and one was the sick child. She'd thawed the frozen bird in the bathtub in cold water all night. Her daughter's sink in the kitchen was not deep enough to cover it. She remembered her daughters' frustration and impatience. Her temper at being constrained in a small box of life. She wanted to kick against the walls of the apartment. Knock it down. Start over.

She had felt a tearing in herself as she worked in the kitchen with her daughter. She was angry because she'd worked hard to sew her life together and her daughters' problems were pulling at the stitches.

When was she coming back? He asked on the phone.

She remembered she'd watched television as she talked to her companion. Switching back and forth between the channels. There'd been a drought in Australia. Another drought in Africa. She remembered the kangaroo running. There were brush fires in the Blue Mountains in Australia near Sydney. Then she watched a baby elephant in Africa who couldn't stand.

I thought the lions were going to eat him, she said on the phone.

She remembered the mother tossing him with her foot to get him to stand. But, the little elephant couldn't stand. He had tried pathetically to follow the herd, walking on the knees of his front legs. Not even able to reach his mother to nurse.

She loved calling him her boyfriend. They were both grandparents. Their lives were established, yet there was that longing for companionship, for otherness. But their lives were separate. She was always traveling. Oklahoma to Missouri to Kansas to Oklahoma. Listening to the gospel on the radio. She went

to church while he was content to read the Sunday paper and say he'd like to go. Maybe someday he would go, but for now she went to church by herself.

There'd been another calf born. Was it Australia? Africa? He was hardly breathing in the hot sun. She remembered the drought again when she talked to her boyfriend on the road. The mother had lifted him in the air in her trunk and carried him above her head in the shade of a scraggly bush.

Then there'd been an elephant in labor. Her thin tail high in the air as she stepped backwards. She wouldn't go near her baby when it was born and another elephant removed the sack and saw it was stillborn. Still another elephant touched the dead calf with her back feet in an elephant ceremony, kicking up the ground as if searching for roots in drought.

The little elephant who couldn't stand was bigger than any calf the commentator had seen. He'd been cramped in the womb with his legs under him. He couldn't straighten his front legs. He'd rub his knees raw trying to walk that way and they'd get infected. And the little elephant still couldn't stand. He'd still fall over when he'd try to reach his mother for her milk.

But wildlife regulations and objectivism prevented the commentator or the park officials from doing anything.

She had looked away from the television. It reminded her of her daughter's child. The burning African fever she'd felt when she held her. Her daughter's father had come. Her former husband who'd left them stranded. She'd been in church when she heard a minister read about Lot who offered his daughters to the crowd instead of the men they wanted. But the men were really angels who only looked like men. They had come to tell Lot that Sodom would be destroyed. Lot gave them lodging in his house for the night and the Sodomites came asking for them. Lot offered his daughters instead. How could he? The angels could take care of themselves. But she knew a man could give his family away.

Then there'd been a fire. She said to her boyfriend on the phone when they talked again. Just like in Australia. The grass crackled. Maybe the whole continent would burn. The animal herds stampeded. A lizard climbed a branch.

She wasn't one for observation. She would have gotten in there and kicked dust. She would have gotten in there and prayed.

She passed a shed on its knees like the little elephant. A thicket of bright yellow leaves. A thin dog walking beside the highway. A flock of geese. A splatter of birds.

Yes, on the road she was in the outback. She was in the jungle. She was on a safari of fast moving cars. She was driving around the world. Crossing oceans. Switching between daughters as if they were television programs. She loved the migration over the land. It gave her a chance to think. To get away. To get perspective. To see where she was going. Cars were the parade of the highway.

She remembered the intelligent look in her daughters' eyes, but they hadn't developed their intelligence. Or their faith. It was there. It was just something they weren't using. Was it something she hadn't done?

For now her one daughter seemed remote and in one place. Not yet loose. Maybe it was the dullness of her marriage and the no-way-out life she lived. The demands of the sick child. An uncaring husband and father.

Her own father had also traveled. How often had he been gone? How he had wanted to fly. Then she'd had a husband who was the same. Did everyone want to be away from her. She'd had a relationship since her divorce many years ago. She'd had several relationships. But she felt that final life with someone wouldn't happen. That final man would not come into her life.

She had an aging aunt who'd been together with her husband over fifty years. It was strange how some people came into the world in pairs. They only had to spend a few years of childhood on their own and then they were with their mate all their lives. They only had to meet one another. They were so much like one person you knew when one died the other wouldn't be far behind. Following into the beyond.

In her aunt and uncle's house there was order. The last time she was there, the glasses for company had been unwrapped and boxed again with the cardboard sections. Everything was in its place.

They could wait all day to read their paper because they had such generous amounts of time. She had to grab what would be hers.

She felt their little vacuum she carried with her in the car. The ticking clock in their house. The quietness. The turning of a page. The cathedral cookies and divinity her aunt made, her cane hanging over the chair.

The morning sun was brilliant on the clouds. The geese and the sprinkle of birds in the clouded sky. The usual autumn when the cold mornings caused the sap to rise. Isn't that what made some leaves turn yellow, and others a shiny brown as if they were made of iron and rusted in the damp autumn mornings?

What would Africa be like in a frost?

She heard a pebble thrown up on the windshield. A truck passed on the interstate and she picked up speed to follow. A Batesville Casket Company truck. She passed some farmhouses, a flash of cattle, the lovely air.

There was a band of sky through the clouds. Sometimes she'd be thinking and the time would travel. Other times it took forever. A mile was a long way. And she traveled hundreds. She put her blinker on and passed another car.

There was a harvester in a field with a long nose. She remembered the lizard crawling up a branch to get away from the fire. Her legs felt hot and she turned down the heat.

The spitting fire of the African grasses. She was that lizard clinging to a branch. She was the elephant on her knees. Isn't that what living did? With its tongue of fire. Its cramped situations. She had gotten singed. She had gotten burned. Her daughter was in line for the same.

Her former husband had come to her daughter's apartment looking like he'd been to the Australian outback. How much had his jacket cost? How much had he withheld from them? The lawyer she got once cost her more than the court had awarded her. Then her daughters had turned eighteen and his meager payments were over.

He'd hardly looked at his sick grandchild. His daughter made him a turkey sandwich and he ate in the other room. Away from her, his former wife. Why had he even come? He only stirred up old ground. She could take him between her hands. Tell him she was more of a man. She could rip off his jacket and wear it herself. She could ask him with her words.

But it was in church she had dumped her anger. It was in prayer she had spoken her hostility. The unfairness of it all.

In their prayer meetings at church, there had been other women who cried, still in love with their husbands. At least she was over that. Yes, she could crawl up his arm like a lizard. She could eat his eyes.

Faith was a companion more than her husband had been. Faith was more than her boyfriend. It was faith that held her like the sun coming up on another field. The cornstalks in the field with their arms lifted as if asking the sky to pick them up.

She heard the men talk about their anger also. Sometimes it worked both ways. They didn't always get off either.

They were all like the little elephant with his tendons not stretched, walking on their knees. But the elephant had finally stood and nudged his mother for milk. She had thought, watching television, he'd probably die from the lions. She had felt every effort he made. Probably her son-in-law had noticed how intensely she watched the program. But, she had struggled like the elephant. Holding the pillow to her chest in her daughter's small apartment. It was what she had found out. She would have to bow her knees before God to get anywhere. That's why she had knees so they'd bend. That's why she liked driving. It kept her knees bent.

But she knew her own. Didn't the elephants know their own bones and when they found them they had a ceremony? She thought about her daughter who had a daughter who'd have a daughter who'd have. Weren't they bound together?

She was full of bitter memories and expectations at the same time. She'd had a husband who had let her down. A boyfriend who wasn't as adventurous as she was. Two daughters who were locked in frustration. An aunt and uncle facing old age and death. A television which could jump all over the world. A minister who said God's love rested on them all. A God who understood their ambiguity and hurt. The contradictions and complexities of their humanness.

She'd thought about her boyfriend that night she'd slept on her daughter's couch. After her son-in-law had gone to bed. Wakened at times by the child.

She felt brittle as leaves about to fall. Maybe she'd walk only a short time in the history of the upright, then return to her bed like an old aunt or sick child. And her spirit would separate to her maker like the interchanges on the highway. The forks in the road. The bypasses.

She drove on the highway and saw the cattails along the ditches. The thickets along the fences. The farmhouses. The crowd of cows in the harvested cornrows. Fields. The spattering of geese. The sky.

It wasn't that her boyfriend didn't want to go with her, but there was something missing in their relationship that she thought about and he didn't when their brittle bones embraced.

She wondered what she'd do with her aging aunt. They had no children. After her parents' death, they thought she was their child. She was glad the road was between them. She felt choppy as the surface of a lake she passed.

Was she becoming a man as she aged? She could keep up with them on the highway. She could drive with them after dark and keep going, rise early, move on. She could be part of the momentum of migration over the land. Not some wiggler over the road.

But why did she define that independent part of herself as a man? Her ability to drive. Her willfulness. Her self-centeredness. It was what she'd seen in men. She wasn't going to move over and make room for someone. She didn't have the patience to start over. To do all that again. Maybe she was becoming like the former husband she didn't like.

Maybe she could see her anger and strength as part of her womanliness. She had not discarded her caring for others. She felt her gentleness. Religion.

Where the divided highway was separated by some distance, the oncoming traffic moved like farmhouses along the road.

But it was a man's voice that emerged from her now as she traveled. She was her own friend. Women were women for awhile, then the man in them took the wheel.

Soon she'd stop for gas and call her boyfriend again from the road and they'd talk and there'd be that closeness she longed for. But when it came down to it, he would stay in his house and she would stay in hers. She'd still be on the road alone. The oneness of her aunt and uncle would not be hers. When she put her hand in a glove on a cold morning, it was her own glove she put her hand into. It was herself she fit into.

She would have to be satisfied. Otherwise. If she asked for a chair, she'd be asking for a table.

A room.

A house.

A country.

A name.

A story with meaning.

An afterlife.

She'd be asking for a God who heard and answered. Who wouldn't rage fire across the African and Australian plain. Who would show the world more clearly he was there.

Yes. Now the trucks were teepees moving on the hill. She could identify with Burlington and other names of migration. Tarps flopping like the lumpy run of a young elephant. His penis nearly reaching the ground. Ribbons of clouds over the fields. The little white pebbles of the cows. It was like switching television channels.

Every time the man ahead of her got on his car phone he slowed down. Why couldn't he talk and drive at the same speed? She took the mantle of father who had been a driver and put it on her shoulders. Now she imagined her father as a pilot over the humps of air. Those mounds in space the mound builders left when they traveled to the beyond. Those humps in the air a plane passed over.

For awhile she followed a man in a pickup with a sense of order. She felt the leaves. The shiny road. The precision of his driving.

While God was in his aloneness above the clouds, hoarding unanswered prayers in his lap, his wholeness sat on the road. The farm pond and fields. God of Lot who offered his daughters to the mob. Who made people full of flaws. Or let them get that way on their own. Who filled the earth with the autumn trees soaking in the light.

Sometimes a little elephant pulled through. She remembered his first wobbly reach to drink from his mother. The tears in her eyes. Her thought that her daughters and granddaughter and aunt would pull through. She would also.

Because somewhere over the fields she traveled, there was a God of the highway. A God of the road.

She felt as if she'd turned into the universe criss-crossing the stars. Yes, if there was one road left, she'd take it herself.

That Black Sunday

by Doris Andrews

I remember, oh how I remember,
That black day when you were three and I was even younger.
The lightning stretched across the black sky
As your blonde ringlets on top of your head
tossed to and fro on my lap.
The sermon was long and dull
As Brother Harries preached us into hell.

You began crying, then screaming,
And I-I-worried about what others thought-
Snatched you up and carried you outside,
Where I turned into a mother whose heart was black as hell.
I beat you
I beat you until the thunder stopped me in my tracks.

I wish I had been grown up when you were three.
Today on your 37th birthday you called and said,
"thanks" for being such a good mother, Mom.

The Application of Physical Attraction As a Device for the Natural Selection Process

Or Spreading Cheese from Racine, Wisconsin to Guymon, Oklahoma

by Gayla Chaney

She had never heard of Racine
and he had never thought of spending
a night in the panhandle of Oklahoma.
Wisconsin was just a synonym for cheese
and Oklahoma, just a name for
a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical
to all those who lived anywhere else.

But. . . call it Fate or Destiny
or a radiator with a slow leak,
but there he was, on his way to Colorado
for a ski trip with his cousin's church youth group
that he was planning to join up with, if
and when he managed to catch up with them,
provided he made it without a hitch.

Nobody wants to crack a block,
so, he stopped for repairs and gasped—
Helen of Troy or Aphrodite of Guymon!
The genetic pool was forever changed in a flash
of electro-magnetic attraction,
by the daughter of the antifreeze man
who worked as cashier at her daddy's store,

God works in mysterious ways.
Both professed, "I do," and did
what most young couples are inclined to do,
and made a crop of half-breed wheatfield Okies
who enjoyed pressing milk curd into cheese.
They started selling it, along with radiators
and antifreeze from their granddaddy's store,

when they weren't busy on the farm,
which was a long way from Wisconsin.
They visited there sometimes, their father's country,
just outside of Racine, dairy farms splotted
with near and distant relations, both foreign
and familiar with all varieties of cheese
to nibble or spread on bread on highways home.

"Next year," he tells his kids, "maybe we'll go
someplace instead of visiting cousins
and their dairy farms in Wisconsin, 'cause afterall," he adds,
after they have quieted down and are ready to listen
to their father's future vacation plans,
a cheeseball and a box of Ritz Crackers
bouncing back and forth between them,

"a farm's a farm, and a cow's a cow,"
their father says as their mother smiles,
"and tilling the land still takes a plow
in Racine same as Guymon. Maybe
next year. . . we'll go to the coast,
lie on the beach or rent a cabin
somewhere in the mountains.

Prisoner Of War

by Lisa Norris

It was difficult for Joe Yablonsky not to think about dying. He was 68, and a bad back had recently forced him to retire. He'd sold his bookstore to a much younger man who immediately installed a stereo system. Shoppers were forced to listen to exotic music, whale songs, and the sound of the ocean while incense burned by the cash register. It all made Joe feel strangely displaced, as if returned to the city.

The only thing that gave him any relief was walking. Standing, sitting, lying down—he was always in some degree of pain. But something about walking, whether it loosened the tight, sore muscles or forced the vertebrae into different alignments, or whether it was just because he felt more useful then, like he was going somewhere, doing something—at any rate, it worked. Sometimes, while Frannie was at work, he went for three, four walks a day, logging six to eight miles.

But it was August. Temperatures in the nineties kept him from going out as much. Forest fires burned out of control that summer, and the smoke reached the small northern Idaho town where Joe and Frannie had lived for the last thirty-six years. They were originally from Brooklyn, where Joe had been mugged in 1958, walking from the subway. The traffic that year, the summer heat and humidity and finally the mugging had made him decide to get out of the urban sprawl. Frannie hadn't been so sure. She didn't understand what they were dealing with, the sheer numbers of people who were desperate to survive, who'd do anything to anyone to get a little power. He, on the other hand, knew he'd been lucky. The muggers had simply knocked him down from behind, yanked his wallet from his pocket, and

fled. It would have been easy for them to do worse—slip a knife into his back or shoot him. So when he read the ad in the New York Times about the bookstore in Idaho looking for an owner, he convinced Frannie they should take the chance.

They arrived when the wheat was green, fertile fields rising and falling like the breasts of a sleeper, sheltering the clean town. They'd thought they might raise a family—in fact, the safety of their future children was the argument that finally persuaded Frannie, but she was unable to conceive, so they lived quietly, happy enough with the rhythms of plowing and planting, harvest and the burning of the stubble that surrounded them. Lately field burning was banned because of drought conditions and high winds. Joe sat indoors with the air conditioner going, reading everything that came in the mail, even the sweepstakes entries. He wrote letters to people who he hadn't heard from in years. He listened to the radio, his back stiffening.

Finally one afternoon he got the idea of walking up Shoulder Mountain, under the cool shade of the pines. It was the highest in a small range of green humps rising above the undulating fields of wheat and lentils and rapeseed on the Palouse prairie. He'd been meaning to hike to the top for years, but instead he and Frannie used their time to go to the cities—Spokane, Seattle, or Portland—driving the vari-colored Pontiacs they'd had over the years. Now, though, even in the Western cities there were increasing reports of violence—the same gang wars and racial tensions he was accustomed to hearing about in the East. But he and Frannie knew how to avoid the bad sections of the cities. And they knew they'd be returning to their safe haven in Idaho.

He pushed himself out of the chair where he'd been reading. The day was already hot, but the smoke had cleared. He imagined himself sipping cool water from

his thermos under the pines, seeing the Palouse, checked by farmers' plows, spread before him like a tablecloth.

He drove the Pontiac out of town onto the graveled roads. Small patches of trees appeared at the edges of wheat fields. He admired the neat houses perched at the tops of hills, horses grazing in their pastures. He and Frannie had thought of moving out of town when she retired, waking up to the songs of meadowlarks instead of the coarse chirps of starlings. It might be nice, though they liked living closer to the amenities; the older they got, the more important it seemed to be near the police and the hospital. When they were younger the two of them had once spent a week in an isolated cabin by a lake. There was no phone. Even though Joe'd been mugged in a place where, theoretically, help was available, he'd felt more vulnerable than ever before in that cabin. It was the only time in his life he'd wanted a gun. Frannie laughed at the irony. He'd been the one who always said the further they got from people, the safer they were.

The road turned to dirt and steepened, but Joe kept the Pontiac on course. Finally he parked on a wide shoulder. He walked up the road at a leisurely pace, looking off to the sides. Sunlight filtered through the firs, stippling the ground. Now and then, squirrels chattered, scampering across fallen logs. A grouse blasted up from the brush beside him, and he shouted, frightened by the explosion of wings, then laughed at himself. His laughter sounded good in the forest. He put his hands in his pockets, and peered into the dense vegetation more carefully as he walked. Several flickers sailed between dead trees in one clearing, and high in the pines he could hear the calls of smaller birds.

He'd just topped a hill and stood breathing heavily, admiring the view—golden hills undulating into the

blue-rimmed horizon—when he heard engines. Soon he could see dust rising below, spiraling upwards as the vehicles traversed the mountain road, and he cursed. He moved off the road into the woods. As the cars passed he could see they were full of young men with close-cropped haircuts. They looked at Joe as they passed, some raising their hands in greeting. Joe nodded, but kept his hands over his nose and mouth to keep from breathing the dust. After awhile, he could hear the engines die, then voices and car doors slamming.

He walked on, curious. Dust still hung in the air. Around the next curve he could see the cars. Young men milled about, laughing and shouting as if they were at a party, all of them carrying rifles and dressed in fatigues. As Joe approached, a stocky, dark-haired man who looked a little older than the others and was dressed in civilian clothes walked out from the crowd to greet him.

"What are you, ROTC?" Joe asked.

The man nodded. He was healthy and powerful, with a good strong-looking back. He wore a T-shirt splattered with paint spots, but beneath them the word "Judge" was printed.

"War games?" Joe asked.

The man nodded. "One team gets a head start to organize an ambush. Then my men walk down the road, trying to anticipate."

"What do the shoot, blanks?"

"Paint pellets," said the man, pointing to the spots on his T-shirt. "The goggles are to protect their eyes." He pointed to a cluster of men whose goggles hung around their necks.

"What about you?"

"I'm the judge." He pointed to the lettering on his T-shirt. "I walk in the back. Usually I don't get shot,

but someone got funny."

"Would it be safe for me to walk on up?" Joe nodded past the congregated men.

"Sure." The judge grinned. "We don't usually shoot civilians."

Joe made his way through the crowd. The men parted respectfully for him. He thought with enjoyment about how he would tell the story to Frannie. In a way he wanted to stop and watch, maybe walk with the judge. But in another way he wanted to get on up the mountain before all the young men did. He began to move faster as if he were racing them.

Soon he could no longer hear their shouts and laughter, and though dust coated the brush beside the road, the air itself was cool and refreshing. He took a deep breath and congratulated himself for gaining distance on the young men so quickly. Maybe he hadn't lost a certain athletic spirit after all. He'd heard of men just a little younger than himself winning marathons. His back couldn't take the punishment of jogging, but there might be some other way to make his mark. He saw himself in the winner's circle, his legs firm and muscular, head bowed to receive a medallion. Frannie stood to one side, pride bringing the blood to her cheeks so that her skin was pink and beautiful.

When he heard the report of a gun, he stopped. There was a crashing in the brush, and he yelled, "Civilian, I'm a civilian!" A deer leaped into the road in front of him, a blue paint spot over its heart, panting, wild-eyed, and was gone. He heard men's voices and laughter.

"Come out of there!" Joe yelled. "Goddamnit, come on out!"

Two young men dressed in camouflage emerged from the woods, their faces painted black. They pointed their guns at Joe, but he stood stubbornly with his

arms to his sides. "You're not here to scare the wildlife."

"We're taking you hostage, sir," the shorter man said apologetically.

The other man, taller, and with a broad face that might have looked innocent had it not been blackened for the game, spat tobacco juice. "Sure would hate to see that nice shirt all splattered with paint."

"Just be careful around his head, Mitchell. He doesn't have goggles."

"This is against the rules," Joe said, "Your judge told me. And what do you mean by scaring that deer? It—"

"Is he talking about Wally?" The tall one grinned. "Can you believe this guy?" The shorter man was staring at Joe and didn't respond. "I said, can you believe him, Saunders?"

"It's got to be Wally," Saunders said without turning to Mitchell. His blue eyes looked oddly albino against the black face paint. To Joe he said, "Wally wears that T-shirt as a joke. Once we get going, we try to play this game just like we would if there were a real war. How do we know you're not a spy? Even if you aren't, we have to ask ourselves what value you might have. We won't know that unless we take you for ransom. Maybe we could get some of our POWs back."

"Like Wally," Mitchell said.

Joe sighed, but he was beginning to get interested in the game. It was certainly better than reading his junk mail. "How long will this take?" he asked, glancing at his watch.

"Wars aren't timed," Saunders said. "We try to be faithful to that."

"And if I don't cooperate?"

"I'm sorry, but we'll have to waste you."

"Waste me?"

"Boom, boom," Mitchell said, pointing his rifle at

Joe's heart.

"Son of a bitch," Joe said, cheerfully.

They prodded him into the woods with their rifles and walked to a clearing surrounded by dense brush.

"What now?" Joe asked.

"I'm afraid we'll have to tie you up," the shorter man said. He took some rope from his fanny pack.

"Hold on," Joe said, getting worried. "I'm an old man with back trouble. You boys skip this part and I'll sit here quietly."

"What position would be most comfortable for you, sir?"

"Did you hear me?"

"It's a goddamn jungle out there," Mitchell said. "War." He put a new wad of chew under his lips. "Can't trust nobody."

"Not even you," Saunders said to Joe. "If you hadn't trusted Wally, you wouldn't be here now."

"I didn't know the rules," Joe said.

"You've got to read between the lines, old man," Mitchell said.

"Our commander says if there's an aggressor somewhere in the world then we're all threatened," Saunders explained.

Joe thought back to his mugging. If these young men had been present, he might have a healthy spine today.

"We have to be prepared as realistically as possible for the day we meet the enemy," Saunders said.

"Do I look like your enemy?" Joe asked.

Saunders looked at him critically. "You could be."

"I thought this was a game," Joe said. "Tying me up would be real torture. You don't realize how bad my back is."

"How do you sleep?" Saunders asked.

"Flat on my back," Joe said. "On a good, firm mat-

tress. And even then, getting up is a chore."

Saunders began to clear a section of dirt next to a fallen log. He took the butt of his rifle and scraped the dirt until it was level. "Lie down here," he said to Joe, "just like you would if you were sleeping."

Mitchell laughed.

"No," Joe said. "This has gone far enough."

Mitchell raised his rifle, but Saunders put a hand on the barrel, pushing it down. "I'm sorry about this. I really don't think we'll be more than thirty minutes. It would look pretty stupid if we cut a deal to get our POWs back and couldn't make good on the trade. Even if you were here when we got back our commander would chew us if we didn't secure you. He wouldn't want us to trust an unknown quantity."

"One half hour?" Joe asked. "Thirty minutes?"

Saunders nodded.

Joe sighed. "Well, tie me loosely." He pointed a finger at Saunders. "And don't forget. I'm doing you a favor."

He lay down on the dirt. "Got anything for a pillow?"

Saunders put down his rifle, pulled off his camouflage shirt and then the T-shirt beneath it. The sight of his pale chest embarrassed Joe, who glanced away.

"You can use this," Saunders said.

The shirt smelled of sweat, but Joe rolled it up to support his head. At least no one would say he was a bad sport.

They tied his hands and feet. Saunders was careful to ask whether the ropes chafed him, and adjusted them accordingly.

"Adios," he said, saluting before he and Mitchell disappeared into the woods.

Joe listened to the branches cracking under the boy's feet, marking the direction of their movement. Insects

hummed in the still woods. He felt silly. All this to keep from being spattered with paint. Still, there was nothing funny about having a rifle pointed at his heart. The boys had played their parts convincingly.

He was grateful that he hadn't had to go to war. A touch of asthma had kept him from joining the service, but boys he'd grown up with had died, some in World War II, others in Korea, even one or two in Vietnam. A younger cousin came back whole from Vietnam, but couldn't sleep without having nightmares; Joe's aunts had spoken of finding the sheets soaked through with her son's night sweats during the coldest of Pennsylvania winters. Given what Joe had missed, he supposed thirty minutes wouldn't be too great a sacrifice for the young men being trained in his country's defense. Besides, it was kind of exciting, like playing hide-and-seek as a youngster.

An insect crawled under his collar, and he lifted his tied wrists to brush it off. According to his watch, five minutes had passed. The needles of pines brushed the blue sky overhead, their cones dangling like ripe fruit. There was no wind, and the spot where Joe lay was entirely shaded except for a patch of sunlight across his legs which felt good. His closed his eyes.

In his dream, people whispered to him, but he couldn't make out the words. The people in the dream (his high school PE teacher? his father? he could barely make them out—) began to pour sand over him, lightly at first, then in bucketloads he knew would eventually smother him. The sand tickled and burned. He tried to make himself heard, forming sounds in the back of his throat.

The sounds woke him. Ants crawled along his arms and neck, tickling and occasionally biting him. He sat up and rubbed himself frantically against the fallen log. The wind had picked up, blowing smoke from the far-

away fires over the sun. An hour had passed. Joe considered the knot that bound his hands. His mouth felt hot. He spotted a sharp rock some distance away, stood gingerly, feeling the pain travel up his back, and hopped over to the rock, his spine jarring with the movement. At times the pain forced him to stop and rest. Finally he knelt beside the rock and worked the rope against it until it began to fray. He sawed doggedly. The rope came loose. He chafed his wrists and untied his ankles. He felt a little sorry for the boys, but they hadn't held up their end of the bargain. Maybe they'd been captured themselves.

He started back for the road, thinking of dinner and a hot bath. His back hurt from the effort of hopping and bending over the rock. He kept to the side of the road, ducking from bush to bush so the patrols wouldn't take him. He had to crouch behind a tree when one of them went by, a group of seven, moving quietly in formation. Joe's heart beat fast.

After they passed without seeing him, Joe gained more confidence. He began to walk faster. It was late afternoon. If he wasn't home when Frannie got there, she would worry. He pictured her going from room to room in their house, calling his name even though she would see the Pontiac was gone. After awhile she would call the police and the hospital.

If this were a real war, the soldiers would take his car, and he might never be found. He'd have to escape across the border, maybe go to Canada, living on wild roots and berries as the Indians had. At least this wasn't happening in the dead of winter as it was for the Nez Perce, pushed further and further from their homes. The white invaders—cavalrymen—had probably been boys little older than these.

It was difficult to move soundlessly in the dry woods. The crackle of dead leaves and branches made Joe anx-

ious. Normally, he walked with his spine straight, coming down heavily on his heels. Now he led with his toes and silently cursed his aching back.

Voices caused him to crouch behind a tree again, and he gritted his teeth against the burning sensation that traveled down his spine, radiating outward to his arms and upward to his neck. The voices drifted down from the direction he'd come.

"He'll be heading for his car," the voice said.

He heard a rustling sound and saw a strange soldier poking his rifle into the brush by the road.

"Yablonsky!" a familiar voice called. "Come on out! We've got your car surrounded anyway." Saunders emerged from around a curve in the road.

Joe hadn't told him his name they must have broken into his car and read it on something in the glovebox. The game, Joe decided, had gone on long enough, especially if the Pontiac was threatened. He was angry and tired. He came out from behind the tree with his hands up. "So shoot me. You said thirty minutes. I waited an hour. If I don't get home soon, my wife—"

"Shut up, sir." Saunders lifted his rifle. "The war's not over."

Mitchell came around the bend and guffawed. "Shoot the bastard."

"I tell you, I'm too old for this. If you boys want to go on playing, go ahead, but don't force innocent bystanders to be part of this. Now I've got to go home. My wife will be worried."

"The thing is, sir," Saunders said, "I can't vouch for your safety if you decide to go. Some of them have real bullets. They're not supposed to, but they do."

Joe stared at him, lowering his arms. "Young man, you have a strange sense of humor. I'm telling you, I'm sick and tired of this."

Saunders tucked the rifle under his arm and pulled a

pistol from his belt. He spun the chamber, shook out a bullet and tossed it to Joe. "I'm not kidding, sir."

"Who's in charge here, anyway?" Joe shouted. "Does your commander know you boys have bullets?"

Saunders didn't answer.

"What do you think you're doing up here?" Joe asked. "What do you think you're fighting for?" Aren't you supposed to make it safe for a man to walk wherever he wants?"

Mitchell laughed, and two of the soldiers Joe didn't know shifted toward one another, smiling.

"We're just playing, sir," Saunders said. "But we take winning pretty seriously."

"Your commander's going to take it seriously when he hears what you've been up to."

"You're making it imperative that we keep you here."

"We could turn him into coyote bait," Mitchell said.

Joe appealed to the other two soldiers who stood off to the side, watching. "Don't you boys know how much trouble you could get into? Threatening a civilian with paint pellets is bad enough, but real ammunition could land you in jail. Being ROTC doesn't excuse you from the law."

"Who told you we were ROTC?" Saunders asked.

Joe looked at them more closely. He'd thought they were all college age, eighteen or so, but maybe it was just the uniform.

"If you're not ROTC, what are you?"

"We're just boys, sir. Preparing ourselves for war."

"What war?"

"There's always war."

Beneath the black paint, Saunders face was fresh and earnest. He could be any local farmer's son.

"Where'd you get your weapons?"

"I can't tell you that"

Joe imagined grain silos full of automatic rifles and

explosives. He'd heard of a used car salesman in Idaho Falls who'd bought scraps from a nuclear facility—scraps enough, it turned out, to build several atomic bombs. Frannie'd been very upset. What if the so-called scraps had fallen into the wrong hands? She said they ought to write letters of protest to their senator, let him know how they felt about what the government called its "indiscretion," but Joe didn't see how it would help.

"We can't let the son of a bitch go now," Mitchell said. He moved toward Joe threateningly.

Joe still found himself unable to believe the boys weren't play-acting. He was only a few hours from home. Frannie was wrapping things up at the lawyer's office. Toys were strewn across front lawns, and soon parents would sit exhausted in front of their televisions. As the sun sank, sprinklers would come on in Joe's neighborhood.

"I'm going home now," Joe said. He turned his back on the soldiers and began to walk down the hill.

"Yablonsky," Saunders said. "That's Jewish isn't it?"

"Polish," Joe offered over his shoulder. He felt a warning chill prickling his scalp and stopped. "Who the hell are you?"

Saunders smiled.

"Who's your commander?"

Saunders shook his head. "Go on." He nodded down the hill. "You won't get far."

"What's the damn hold-up?" Mitchell asked. "Why not get him now?"

Saunders turned to Mitchell. "I say let him go on home. What's he going to do? Call the cops? They'd think it was all an old man's nightmare. Isn't that right Yablonsky? What would you think?"

"Sorry bastard," Mitchell said. "He wouldn't think nothing as long as his own ass was comfy-cozy."

"You know where he lives," Saunders said to Mitchell. "And now he knows you know, and he knows if he talks about us, we'll be coming after him."

"Slimy Pollack," Mitchell said. He fired a paint pellet at the ground in front of Joe. Joe backed away slowly, then turned and ran.

"You're dead, Yablonsky!" Mitchell yelled.

A contingent of men came at him up the hill. Joe's chest burned. He dropped to his knees, panting. When the soldiers took him by the arms he looked into their faces. He'd seen all of them before, in the photographs of uniformed young men on the pianos and buffets of retired friends, in the old movies of boys marching happily toward war. They were faces full of power and certainty, the excitement of conquest, faces which probably folded in on themselves from boredom when they got home.

In the distance, he heard a shot, and it made him think of the volley fired over his veteran cousin's grave, the only other close, live gunfire he'd ever heard. The mournful sound of "Taps" and the regular, inevitable rhythm of the soldiers marching in formation from the grave had moved him profoundly. But now the way the boys operated together, dragging him back up the hill toward Saunders, swarming through the woods, made him think of millions of tiny spiders bursting from their eggs, nests of rattlers awakening in their pits, maggots burrowing blindly into carcasses.

The soldiers brought him up to face Saunders. Joe breathed deeply, trying to calm down. "All right. You boys have just got carried away. I'll go home and forget about it. Okay?"

"Take him to his car," Saunders said.

"What the hell," Mitchell grabbed Saunders arm. "You're not going to let him go?"

Saunders didn't answer. The others obeyed him. Joe

walked between the two soldiers who held his arms.

"I don't have to listen to you," Mitchell said to Saunders. The boys were behind Joe now, but he heard the sound of scuffling, a few loud thuds, and a moan. The soldiers kept Joe moving. Before long he saw his car. One door stood open. Otherwise it looked all right. They must have jimmied the door open gently. With relief, he noticed the interior light was on. The battery was probably still okay. In a few seconds he'd be driving down the road toward home. He longed to reach into his pocket to feel his keys—in a sudden panic was afraid they might have fallen out of his pocket when he was tied up—but the soldiers still had a tight hold on each of his arms.

They stopped in front of the car and turned slightly to look behind them, awaiting further instructions. Saunders stood a few yards back and up the hill with his legs apart. There was no sign of Mitchell.

"You won't regret this," Joe said.

"I know," Saunders answered.

"I won't say anything to anyone."

"No, I expect you won't."

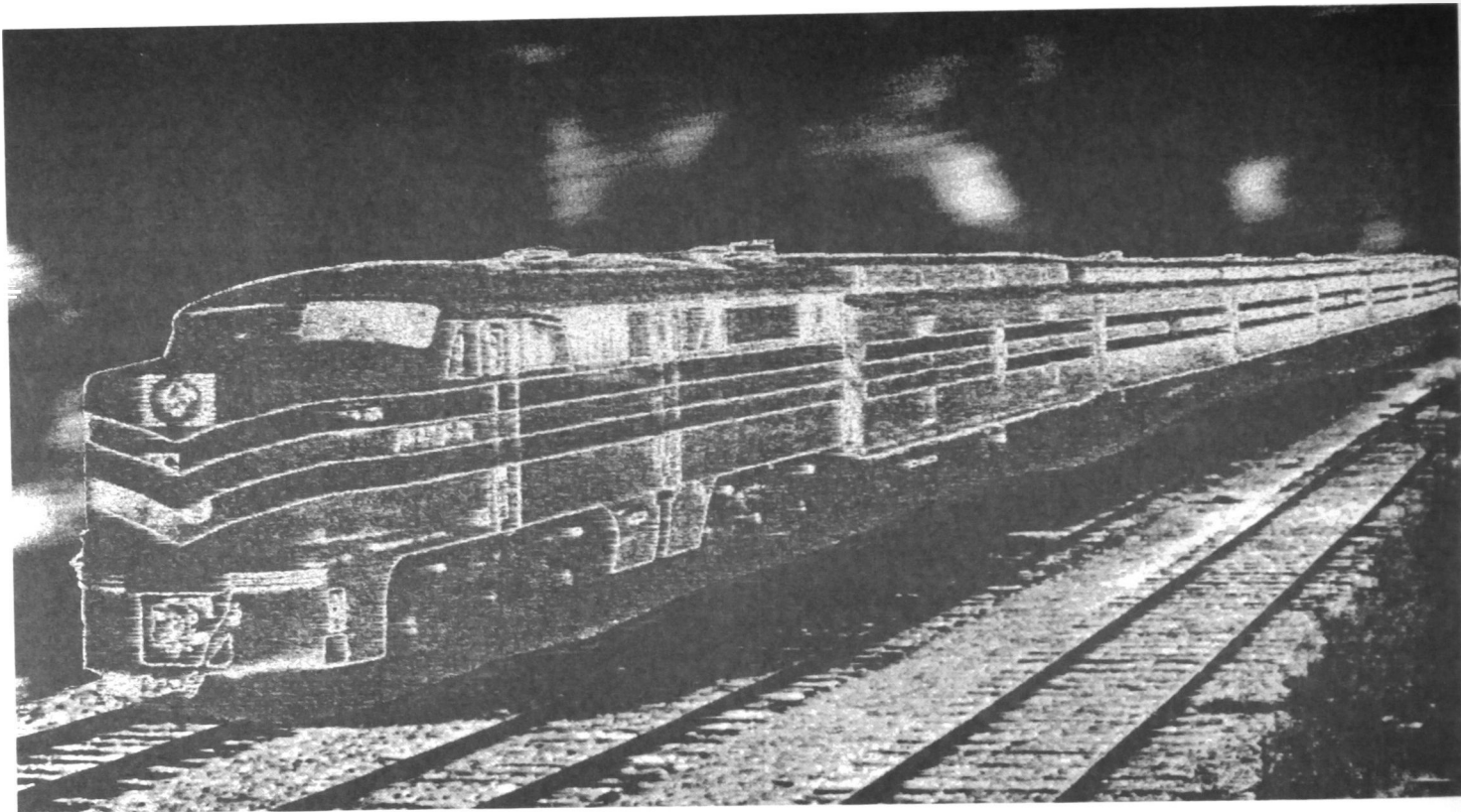
The soldiers still held onto Joe's arms. "They can let go now. I won't even tell my wife."

Saunders nodded at the soldiers, and they released Joe, who stood feeling dazed for a moment, rubbing his arms, then dug in his pocket and closed his fingers gratefully around his keys. He got into the car and started the engine. The soldiers moved out of the road as he turned the car around. He couldn't believe his luck. They must be ROTC after all, and afraid he might get them into trouble. They must have been playing with him all along.

Joe stopped the car and looked back at Saunders, who still stood on the hilltop, his legs apart. "You really had me going there for awhile."

Saunders smiled and waved.

Joe put the car in gear and coasted down the mountain, touching the brake occasionally as he headed the curves. He felt oddly elated. Though the car bumped over ruts in the road, he didn't feel the same electric jolts of pain in his back as he had on the way up. The walk must have done him good, despite the long spell on the hard ground, the soldiers' jerking on his arms, and his own dodging and running through the woods. Maybe he was in better shape than he thought. Maybe he'd make it into some winners' circle after all. Those boys were pretty good, he thought chuckling to himself; they'd been able to do what none of the doctors, even in Seattle, thought possible, making Joe bend in ways he refused at the therapist's. He wished he could tell Frannie about it, but he'd made his promise. In a way he wished he could go back up the mountain another day and get in on the game. Next time he wouldn't get caught. Next time he'd. . . but when he rounded the hairpin curve and started down the steep grade, there was someone next to the road—a boy who looked like Mitchell pointing a pistol at the car. Joe jerked the car away from Mitchell's side of the road. It bumped a tree trunk and sent a slide of rocks down the slope. Joe glanced in the rearview mirror and saw Mitchell still aiming the pistol. He turned the wheel and gunned the engine, moving down in his seat so his head wouldn't present a target. Something in his back caught and locked. He cried out, gripping the wheel, his teeth clamped together.



ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS HENSON

At the Station

by Charles D. Moskus

A dry faith brings us here,
sits us down on splintered benches
to stare at these abandoned tracks
broken by the weight of miracles
always heard but never seen,
they whisper off across the desert.
Our pockets sag with hours.
Our boots scuff invocations,
leather chants of hope
that wither in the heat.
No departing or arriving, only
waiting, the way these tracks
still watch for wheels, the way
we stretch abandoned arms
and yawn our souls to heaven.

The Trip

by Arnold Barnes

The three of us were inseparable. Fraternal twin brothers and a cousin. We formed a trio that played together, lived together, and yes, fought together, throughout our formative and adolescent years. Essentially, we were the same age. A bare four months separated us. Cornell and Cordell Barnes arrived on November 14, 1922. I arrived on March 12, 1923.

In the eyes of some neighbors and many kin folks, we were little hellions. Indeed, an adult cousin was heard to remark, "Separated, they are pretty good boys. Together, they are the meanest three kids in the world!" In the eyes of our parents, we were their "fine little fellers." In our own eyes and thoughts, we only aggravated those who annoyed us.

We grew up in the community of Babbs Switch, about half way between Hobart and Roosevelt, in Kiowa County, Oklahoma. We attended historic Babbs Memorial School, a one room brick school through the eighth grade. During these years, we learned the three R's along with a fascination for geography. We made good use of the well-worn and dog-eared *National Geographic* magazines in our small library. Indeed, we wanted to grow up to be world travelers; however, our world was essentially limited to Kiowa county. During those days of the Great Depression, money was scarce and there were no provisions for traveling.

We shared an insatiable curiosity. We had a compulsion to experiment and explore. We wanted to know what lay on the other side of the mountain. We walked the ridges and climbed the granite Wichita mountains. We investigated the sites of deserted homesteads and found many items of interest to us. When the home-

steads pulled stakes, they left behind numerous objects which caught our fancy. All these adventures led to new experiences, and brought on other dreams and wishes to explore and investigate. They led to our first ride on a train.

We lived near a railroad track. For many years, we watched the trains as they passed through the community. The Frisco was a branch line whose route was from Enid, Oklahoma to Vernon, Texas. The traffic was heavy during wheat harvest with several freight trains a day, all pulled by steam engines. Frequently, they would stop at Babbs Switch to pick up cars loaded with wheat and leave empty ones in their place. Passenger service was the "Dummy," which consisted of a combination engine and baggage car pulling a single passenger car. Every now and then, the Dummy's diesel engine would be replaced by a steam locomotive pulling a mail/baggage car and a day coach.

We loved those steam engines. We would hear one coming from far away and rush toward the track to wave at the engineer and crew. There were times they would give us a special toot on the whistle. This was an exceptional treat and delight.

When we were about twelve years old, it occurred to us that while we had watched those trains for many years, we had never ridden one. We started making our plans to ride the Dummy from the Switch to Hobart, a distance of about six miles. If the economy was favorable, each of us received an allowance of twenty five cents (two bits) on Saturday. We could attend a shoot-em-up movie for a dime and buy a large sack of popcorn for a nickel. With the remaining ten cents, we could indulge ourselves to a red Nehi soda pop and either a peanut patty or a Baby Ruth candy bar.

In our planning we decided that we could forego the soda pop in exchange for the train ride. The fare from

the Switch to Hobart was six cents, providing one was less than twelve years old! For those twelve or older, the cost was a dime. The answer was simple. We would lie about our age and save the extra money. We would ride the Dummy to Hobart, and meet our families that afternoon for a ride home.

The designated Saturday morning arrived. We prevailed on Matt Braun, owner of the store at the Switch, to flag the Dummy down. The conductor appeared at the rear of the car with his boarding step in hand. He gave Matt a scornful look and was obviously annoyed when three young boys were all that boarded. There were a number of people seated in the coach and we made our way to seats across the aisle from a friendly man and woman who had two children with them. The man had tickets in his hat band. I had read that this was the mark of a seasoned rail traveler.

As the train started to move, we looked out the window. It seemed that the elevators were moving and we were sitting still. We heard the whistle, or horn blow. From inside the train, it sounded like the bray of a jackass from far away. We were on our way! As we picked up speed, the telegraph poles flicked by faster and faster. We must have been travelling at least thirty miles an hour!

The conductor made his way down the aisle to our seat. He had on the usual railroad attire, including the flat-topped cap with the badge "Frisco" pinned in front. He had on a coat and vest. It appeared that all pockets on both garments were stuffed and bulging with various papers and other type items.

Still grumpy from having made the flag stop, he asked, "Where ye boys goin'?"

When we answered, he seemed even more grumpy. He pulled a pad of tickets from one of the stuffed pockets and proceeded to tear off three.

"Gimme yer money," he growled.

Timidly, three little hands came forth, each offering six cents. He looked at the money with scorn and disgust.

"How old are ye boys?" he snorted.

The moment of truth, or untruth, had arrived!

In unison we answered "Eleven."

Then, I volunteered, "We'll be twelve our next birthday."

Again the snort.

"Aha, triplets, eh?" He spat out the words. "Ain't never seen no triplets afore. Ye look older 'nuff to vote now."

With a grunt of disgust, and still peering at us over metal rimmed spectacles, he pocketed the eighteen cents. With considerable ceremony, he punched the tickets, and went back to his seat, still muttering to himself.

Across the aisle, the veteran traveller was grinning from ear to ear.

"We'd better hurry and get to town," he laughed, "Or you fellers will be having a birthday."

Adapted from the book *Short Grass and Red Dirt* by Arnold Barnes.

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Trails over Oklahoma

by Nina Q. Barnes

Once in ancient days, an old Indian and a few braves stood on the crest of the Washitas. Sweeping his arm before him from south to north as their gaze followed westward, the Indian indicated the valley of the North Fork of the Red River, where the rolling river snaked between jagged red granite bluffs, and mused that someday the white man would make a big lake there. A dust cloud grew toward them from the southern horizon, pebbles rolled under their feet, the roar of millions of hooves thundered up the valley, bouncing from wall to wall, as the very mountains shook. Further speech was impossible. The old man waved his arm, forward, in the timeless gesture, "Follow, quickly," gathered his quiver and bow and lept like a bobcat, from boulder to boulder, down to the valley floor. He would teach, the braves would learn, the difficult art of felling the buffalo with arrows, skinning it with knives made of flint, stretching, and drying, the hide for robes. When the buffalo milled in the river, the first arrow flew.

The Indian band followed and hunted, reaching the great salt lick and buffalo wallow where the sun beat down in ribbons of reflected white light, as far as the eye could see. Here they gathered salt in pouches of deer-skin, to carry back with them to their home in the Washitas. It was an ancient place, known to their tribes for many moons. They had named it: "Salt Fork of the Arkansas River."

1540-41. "El Turco," an Indian held captive by a Tigua warrior in the Tigua pueblo on the Rio Grande, boldly offered himself as guide to Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, the young captain-general of a Spanish expedition. Though he was angry and disappointed by fail-

ure to find the Seven Cities of Cibola, still the lust for wealth dulled his common sense. "The Turk" described the great cities of Quivira, far across the pastures of the buffalo, where immense treasures of gold and silver and precious stones could be had for the taking. In the spring of 1541, two hundred and fifty mounted Spanish soldiers, fifty-foot soldiers, and several hundred Indians, set out for Quivira. From the Rio Grande they marched eastward to the border of the present Texas panhandle, where the Turk misled them to the southeast, hoping to lose them forever in a timberless, waterless land. He longed for his home and the freedom he enjoyed among his own people, and he sought the opportunity to escape. Ypsopete, a Quivira captive of the Tigua, enlisted as a second guide, now passionately denounced the Turk as liar. Coronado put the Turk in irons, and sent back most of his troop, retaining only forty men traveling "by the needle" (his magnetic compass).

They marched due north, crossing the prairies and the Beaver River, entering into present-day Kansas at the site of Liberal, marching on to the Great Bend of the Arkansas, where they arrived on St. Peter and Paul's day, June 29, 1541. Marching onward to the northeast three days, they found on July 2, Quivira (Wichita) Indians who were hunting. Ypsopete spoke to them in his and their own native language. During the next twenty-five days, they found several villages of up to two hundred grass dome-shaped huts, the Indians engaged in raising corn and beans, and not precious metals or gems. Ypsopete was set free. The Turk was murdered. The troop crossed back over the plains (of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, to New Mexico and Arizona), returning to the Rio Grande of Nuevo Galicia province in Western Mexico. There Coronado outfitted a Franciscan priest, Fray Juan de Padilla. Accompanied by a small party, he returned to Quivira as a Christian mis-

sionary. Legend of Fray Padilla is that he Christianized and was loved by the Quivira: they with "many arrows" did slay him when he attempted to move into the Guas country to Christianize the enemy. Padilla was the first recorded martyr.

1601. Juan de Onate led a second Spanish expedition; like Coronado he was impressed with the agricultural opportunities of the fertile soil in Quivira, and potential value for Spain. He encouraged founding the town of Santa Fe, to serve as capital and trading center for Spain's northernmost possessions in the American interior. There is no record of further contact between the village Indians and the Spanish. But the horses, either lost or strayed from the the Spanish, swiftly multiplied in the habitat, providing the stimulus to revolutionize the Indians' way of life. (*Kansas: A History*. Kenneth S. Davis. NY: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc. 1984, 1976.)

(Through study of fossils of the horse, zoologists proved that the horse evolved on the North American Plains, migrated over the land bridge to Asia, then disappeared from this continent for six thousand, five hundred years. While Americans of Eurasian stock have been associated with the horse since Biblical times, we often tend to forget that Native Americans were pedestrian before Spanish exploration of the 1400s and 1500s re-introduced the horse.)

1739. French brothers Paul and Pierre Mallet are believed to be the first white men to travel overland between Missouri River trading posts and Santa Fe. It is believed that they followed Coronado's route below Liberal into present day Oklahoma: they reported finding on the riverbank, stones with Spanish inscriptions. France claimed all this area as part of Louisiana, by right of exploration. Spain claimed all the area by right of discovery. The Comanche claimed all the land by right of

occupation and ability to control and defend. Previous mountain people of the Rockies (Wyoming), the Comanche were nomads living in teepees and using dogs for pulling travois, when they captured the wild horse. Within two or three generations, they displaced the fierce native Apache and Pawnee with their overpowering ferocity and superior horsemanship.

1762. France ceded lands from the Mississippi River to the Rockies to the Spanish. 1763. France ceded Canada to the British.

1803-4. Louisiana Purchase. Thomas Jefferson, President, ordered an expedition headed by Merriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore this land which doubled the size of the United States, up the Missouri, into the Northwest. They were to gather map data and information on the fur trade.

1806. Gen. James Wilkinson, governor of the Louisiana Territory, ordered an exploring expedition sent out from St. Louis, led by Lt. Zebulon M. Pike of the U.S. Army. He continued into Colorado, discovering "Pike's Peak."

1819-20. Expedition under the command of Maj. Stephen H. Long, and a detachment headed by zoologist Thomas Say. They created a mapping and scientific report so badly in error, it produced a map which designated the entire Great Plains as: The Great American Desert. His descriptions included the phrases "...soil generally dry and sandy, with gravel..." compared to "...sandy deserts of Africa," "...the scarcity of wood and water," "...leave the prairies...to the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country." (Davis 24, 25).

1824. Fort Gibson established, built on Grand River.

1832. Well-known author, Washington Irving, returned from Europe after seventeen years, made friends of Latrobe and Pourtales aboard ship, escorted them in

America. Chance meeting on a steamboat on Lake Erie with Henry L. Ellsworth, (appointed commissioner to the western Indians), who, during conversation, invited Irving's group to join him, he asked Irving to serve as secretary. Irving and the others were delighted to accept this offer of a guided tour of the unknown within the Louisiana Purchase and eagerly landed at Ashtabula with Ellsworth, crossed Ohio, arriving at Cincinnati on September 13, a passage of twelve days river travel on the Ohio River. They proceeded by horseback via Independence to the Arkansas; they visited the frontier line of Harmony, Neosho, Hopefield and Union missions, arriving at the southwestern outpost, Fort Gibson, on October 8. With a company of Rangers, they began their foray beyond human habitation.

Irving wrote to his brother, Peter, "I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian Tribes, which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government. I should see those fine countries of the 'far west,' while still in a state of pristine wildness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist." (*A Tour on the Prairies*. Washington Irving, 1832. Reprinted: Norman, OK. University of Oklahoma Press 1956, 1962, 1971. Introductory Essay, p. xvii. Washington City, December 18, 1832.)

Of Ellsworth, he writes, "Our party was headed by one of the Commissioners appointed by the government of the United States to superintend the settlement of the Indian tribes migrating from the east to west of the Mississippi. In the discharge of his duties, he was thus visiting the various outposts of civilization."

Washington Irving was unique among American authors, in that he had been accepted on The Continent. His works had been appreciated by a ready audience,

and he was of some renown in his native America. This narrative was originally published in the *London Athenaeum* (1833), 137-38; reprinted in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, and copied from the latter by the *Arkansas Gazette*, June 26, 1933.

We should here, pause, and reflect, upon the astonishing import of the revelations imparted to the civilized world by the American author, Washington Irving, first to The Continent, via London, to the New World, via New York, and to the American Frontier via an Arkansas Outpost publication. Previous expeditions and mappings had resulted in fearful contradictions regarding the terrain and its inhabitants; even to the extent of labelling the area as akin to the Great Sahara Desert: The Great American Desert, a deadly uninhabitable region.

Here, in untrodden Oklahoma, vivid paintings of the earth, the waters, the peoples, the skies, were spun from the pencil of this man of optimism, good humor, enthusiasm, and high expectations, fanning flames of the same hope within the bosom of the thousands of migrant fearless parents, the wild outdoorsmen, and daring entrepreneurs, who made of that vast region, the pulse, heartbeat, and conscience of America, breadbasket to the world! Perhaps never has a populace been so influenced as by the descriptions of this one man, of the great beauty of the area, of the great bounty of the prairies, streams, and skies, quickly followed by similar published articles by Ellsworth, referred to as the Narrative; and by Benjamin Henry Latrobe's full report of the adventure with Irving and Pourtales in *The Rambler in North America*, 1832-1833 (2nd edition 2 volumes in 1, London, 1836) and *The Rambler in Mexico* (New York, 1836.)

1862-65. Civil War destruction took place in the eastern half of the territory. Many battles were fought, strife. Indians were punished for joining rebels.

1874. The Red River War stifles resistance and convinces the Indians to accept the sedentary life imposed upon them by the government. Troops from Texas, New Mexico, Kansas and Indian Territory, including Fort Sill garrisons, subdue Indian hostility.

1878. September. Northern Cheyenne led by Dull Knife left the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation for their northern homeland, pointing up the need for military enforcement of reservation law.

1879. March. Cantonment was established on the north fork of the Canadian River near the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation.

THE TROUBLE WITH KANSANS

Selected excerpts from *The Burden Enterprise*, Cowley County, Kansas: Levi Quier, C.E. White, W.D. Kella and several others went to the territory last week on a hunting expedition. They bagged one deer and a lot of small game. September 13, 1883.

Levi has gone to the nation with some other parties on his annual hunt. November 22, 1883.

Levi returned from the territory last Tuesday morning, having killed 10 deer and a bag full of birds. Levi was the daring hunter of these parts. January 3, 1884.

1884. Fall. Subpost of Fort Reno was set up north of present-day Guthrie at Skeleton Creek and the Cimarron River. Named Camp Russell, it was intended for winter operations against the Boomers, intruders into the unoccupied lands. Mostly black soldiers of the 9th Cavalry, they were vigilant in obeying orders. (When intercepted, these Boomers were escorted to the Kansas line, and were not prosecuted.)

1884. September. David L. Payne dies. Boomer leadership was taken by William L. Couch. He led 200 people to Stillwater Creek in December 1884. Dwellings were built. They were armed and determined to stay and "squat."

1884. December 21. Lt. M.W. Day led troops from Camp Russell, arrived Boomer camp at Stillwater 24 December. Day requested reinforcements. Boomers sent telegram to President Chester A. Arthur asking him to consider the validity of their claims. Arthur refused.

1885. January 11. Col. Edward L. Hatch left Caldwell, Kansas with a detachment of soldiers bound for Camp Russell and the Stillwater camp. Driving rain, bitter cold swept plains; they arrived January 17. Cavalry and infantry arrived from Fort Reno; Hatch moved on the colony 24 January, intercepting supplies and preparing armed conflict. Almost out of food, and to avoid war, Boomers surrendered. They were escorted to Kansas border. They continued to lobby for the opening of Oklahoma.

1885. June. Patrols continued to intercept isolated parties of settlers, apprehending and evicting them at Kansas border. They found few intruders, and the opening of Oklahoma to settlement seemed imminent. They received orders from Fort Reno for the abandonment of Camp Russell; troops left banks of Cimarron on June 27 and returned to Fort Reno.

The Burden Enterprise. We understand that Henry Quier started to The State with a wagonload of game to sell, and was to go back for Levi and the other boys and more game, but the soldiers mistook the old man for a Boomer and kept him 5 days, while they were rounding up more Boomers, and the game was all spoiled when they got to the state. December 3, 1885.

April 1889. Burden residents made the Run into Oklahoma Territory: Cameron Graham, Lewis W. Graham, William and Daniel Quier.

Mr. William Quier prepared to start for Oklahoma where his family will make their future home. Feb. 27, 1890.

Mr. William Quier of Crescent City, Okla. Territory,

who has been in the city for the past three or four days started for his home Monday. He came up for seed oats and corn. Rosanna Quier married Ben F. Mock Friday Feb. 20, 1891 at the office of Judge Berger at Guthrie, Indian territory. She is the daughter of Mr. William Quier who for many years was a resident of Cowley Co. February 26, 1891. Levi Quier donated .50 to the Wellington cyclone sufferers.

Spirit of the West, June 10, 1892.

Levi Quier and W.L. Hutton performed a duet at the G.A.R. banquet Tuesday evening, their performance was encored. *Spirit of the West* January 6, 1893.

Author's note:

In 1934, my father "skidded" a two room house across the wooden oil-derrick studded prairie, adding it to our humble home: a primitive garage, dirt floor covered with pine planks, tar-papered, divided and converted to a kitchen and living area. This doubled the size of our living quarters. After sealing together the two modest dwellings by cutting into each a common door, Daddy purchased 1x10s, cutting and building a bookcase from floor to ceiling in a corner of the new rooms. We children took from a box, his and mother's prized possessions, their books, one of which was a well-worn, faded, cloth-bound slim volume of Washington Irving.

The Last Day

by Gus Pelletier

It began and ended with basic numbers:
to Freihofer's horse-drawn wagon
by 8:00 in the morning, home at 4:00,
all for one single silver dollar.
From autumn to spring, in heat, cold,
slush and mud, each and every Saturday.

The carry-all, once full of pies or
cakes, could crush a young boy's arm.
There was dumb old Dolly, too,
the dull-eyed mare who'd often jerk
across the cobblestone streets
without so much as a whispered command.

Two boys worked the box-like wagon,
leaping off left, jumping off right,
in and out of whatever traffic, hazards
of sleet, rain and snow, up and down
a conspiracy of stairs. Yet, at its
best, it was greater than any sport.

It ended forever one Holy Saturday
when a virus hit and one of the boys
had to double up, grumbling until
he imagined the joys of twice the pay.
At day's end, such fancies collapsed,
his stipend then no more than it was.
In years to follow, sufficient income
came from delivering papers or stocking
shelves, but for now, the miserly dollar
would have to do. On that Sunday morning
after Mass, one boy gave his mother his
only gift: one single potted Easter lily.

Northern Hills

by Steven Frattali

The sun above the hushed and burning hills. . .

Domes of the silos flash in midday heat.
Against the distant yellow-green hay field
A bright green tractor is an aphid on a leaf.

I walk along the side of the highway.
The air above the melting asphalt strip
Quivers vividly like high octane fumes.

Farms cluster on the northern New York hills,
Hills cut and broken by their smooth highways
Or crossed by patched and rough macadam roads

Where loose stones spatter the car's underside,
Where blackberry and burdock choke the ditch
And cabbage whites in dreaming pasture air

Float in the bright sun. The upland lot
Is full of boulders and crab apple trees
And bounded with a rusted wire fence.

There on a listing grey fence post—rain-gnawed,
With moss along one side—a paper sign,
Yellow and rain-spotted, stiff and parchment warped,

Informs you Private Property. Keep Out.

Some Days the Metaphors Find Me

By Yvonne Carpenter

I sought spiritual exaltation
And searched for the hawks that Tuesday
But the wind blew hard even in the grove.
The feeders crowded round, big domestic

Creatures with slick hair and plump hindquarters.
My car swayed when a calf grew brave
Enough to lick it. His brother sniffed
The mirror. Teeth clicked on the door handle.

Suddenly the herd turned and all heads pointed
Toward the standing wheat. I looked
Where they looked. There stood coyote
Watching us with wild magic in his eyes.

Blanks

by Pamela Rodgers

Back a mile ago Frank had taken the exit for Carl's Junction and his Ford Taurus had followed the curve down the incline to the access road. Starling had pushed back her long red curls that needed trimming and had noticed Frank glance at the gold band of his Seiko glimmering in the afternoon sun. She knew Frank liked to show the watch off, sometimes by tinkering with it while he talked. Their evening together was just starting and Starling had already thought of Charlie, (of all things) of how his pickup truck was always so bouncy. Charlie didn't know about her situation either, but he had called about a week ago and said that he really wanted to see her, but his company was sending him to Louisiana for a while to work on some rigs. He didn't know how long he'd be gone.

Last night on the phone Starling had confided to her sister, June, about how kind and sweet Charlie is—at least when he's around. "Listen kiddo, I've got to go, my kids just came in the door." Starling had caught her sister off guard, but since the two sisters had always been close, June had called right back. As usual, Starling's sister cut right to the bone, "If you're in trouble, what's wrong with Frank. He's an accountant isn't he?" Starling could hear her sister pause just long enough to blow cigarette smoke out of her mouth. "Charlie's just a roustabout isn't he?" Starling had rolled her eyes. She knew where this was leading; their dad had worked on oil rigs a long time ago. "You know how Dad used to smell, like skunks." Starling didn't think Charlie smelled that bad, he had piercing blue eyes and a thick head of light blond hair, muscles too for someone who didn't lift weights. After they made love, he would cradle her like

a newborn. Frank had dead brown eyes. Starling didn't care for the fact that he was going bald either. They had only been to bed twice, and Frank had always finished long before she had and had fallen asleep right afterward. Charlie took his time.

Frank's Ford Taurus had traveled from Forest Bend, a town about 8 miles south of Carl's Junction. Starling Blake lived in Forest Bend in a 1973 model trailer in the Blue Bird Trailer Park down on Oak Street. She worked evenings as a cashier at the Dairy Dell Truck Stop out on Highway 40. She'd met both Frank and Charlie while she was working there. As the Taurus hums up the hill going into Carl's Junction, Starling begins toying with the idea of having a drink once they get there; just to break the ice, even though she knows, being pregnant, it's probably a bad idea. When they begin to pass Victorian homes that are the trademark of the town, Starling hears the voice of her mother, Marge, who had died almost ten years ago, "Women shouldn't drink at all if they're at risk of breast cancer." Though not a drinker herself, Marge had unbuttoned her own blouse as evidence and shown Starling the ugly scar.

The Ford's tires mumble over the brick streets of downtown. They pass buildings with plate glass bay windows displaying antiques, pastries, or other items for sale. Just ahead, the street dead ends at an old courthouse that has been refashioned into a mini mall. Marble statues guard the building's entrance way. Beyond the courthouse is a lawn and a thin line of newly planted maple trees. Beyond the trees, a hill covered with brush gently slopes downward. At the bottom, fields of wheat and scattered groups of homes extend until the earth curves and meets the sky. Frank pulls the car to a stop across the street from the courthouse. The building facing them is Miss Mary's Bordello and Respectable Shoppes which now sells shampoos, body

lotions, and soaps. "That's where we're going?"

Frank motions to the Yellow Star Saloon next door. "No, there."

Starling can hear the sound of piano ragtime. She raises an eyebrow and frowns. The look is meant to tell him she wants to go somewhere else, but he takes it wrong. "I told you it'd be a surprise." Reluctantly, Starling follows him through the huge doorway of the saloon.

As they had when she was on the phone last night with her sister, Starling's eyes roll. She notices the high ceiling inside the saloon. A mirrored bar stretches across the length of the room. Mismatched antique tables and chairs rest on a floor of inlaid blue and white marble squares. Couples sit at tables along the windows. Starling notices a man seated by the window next to the doorway. He's wearing a full length black duster coat and puffs a cigarette slowly. Across from him, another man strokes a thick mustache impatiently. This one wears a pair of brown leather chaps and a black cowboy hat. On the table where the two men sit rests a sawed off shotgun. The barrel is pitted and scratched—yet polished. Starling feels a chill ripple down her back.

"Let's sit over there," Frank points to the empty table behind the men with the shotgun. Starling begins to wonder if this is a joke Frank's set up, but she decides he's too dull to do such a thing. It seems strange that he wants to sit next to a table with a big gun on it when there are so many empty seats in this place. Considering what her sister had said, Starling doesn't want to ruin her chances. She follows him—unhappy even with the way he walks. On their way to the table she notices the walls are covered with animals. On a wooden shelf over the bar, the frozen stance of a fox waits, deciding if he should run or fight. Next to the fox, hangs a deer's head. A thick layer of dust covers the deer's eyes. It reminds her

of the way she had felt when she found out she was pregnant.

"I thought you might like sitting next to the window; you can watch the sunset." Frank says.

They take a seat at the table behind the gun. But as much as she tries, it's impossible to forget about the weapon on the table in front of them. Starling thinks back to the girl crying in the hallway in the 6th grade. The girl's Daddy hadn't checked to make sure the gun was unloaded.

A waitress stands in front of Starling and Frank, a tall girl dressed in an old fashioned barmaid's dress wearing an ostrich feather in her hair. "I'll have a C.C. on ice, and, Starling?"

"I'll have a Bud, I guess," she considers, could a sip of beer really do that much harm? Taking a deep breath and a glance out the window at the thin line of trees across the street, she realizes, she probably just needs a drink. How else would she ever have enough courage to tell Frank the baby is his? "I had a dream about you last night, she begins..."

"Oh really." Frank smiles, his right hand, fiddling with his watch again.

"We were cats and we licked a chair and the more we licked the chair, the more the color changed. Our owner thought we were painting the chair a different color, and made a big deal about it." Starling always loved trying to sort out her dreams, trying to make sense of them in some way. After awaking from the dream she had realized that maybe it meant she should give Frank some kind of a chance—like her sister had said.

"I see." Frank smiles, letting go of his watch.

Starling tries to enjoy the pinks and reds of the sunset but she wishes more than ever she were with Charlie sitting here. No, Charlie wouldn't have come to a place like this; Charlie would have wanted to go to the base-

ment in his brother's house, be there alone with her, and split a six pack of beer. Starling wants to be there now, but instead, she sits in a crazy wild west place with Frank, staring at the barrel of a sawed-off shotgun.

"Look at the menu." Frank says, while Starling imagines the shotgun going off in her face and everything going dark. She can feel Frank nudging her in the arm with the edge of the plastic covered menu. She takes it and finds a list of sandwiches, onion rings, and fries. After a few sips of beer, she finally has the courage to whisper to Frank, "I don't like them just leaving a gun sit out like this."

"Relax, it's just a prop, they use blanks." Frank whispers as the waitress arrives and takes their food order—hamburgers, fries, his rare, her's well-done.

The men who own the shotgun stand up as if getting ready to leave. Starling notices that each wears a sidearm as well. More surprising, the man with the chaps on, pulls his pistol out and begins to load it. He nods a drunken nod as if to answer yes, to a question that was not asked, stares down at the open chamber of his gun, and in the process, bullets begin to drop out on the floor. The man places his gun back into his holster, loses his balance briefly, then gets down on his knees and runs his hands along the floor for stray bullets. The other man searches as well.

The hamburgers arrive, but Starling's stomach feels tight under her rib cage. The smell of the food nauseates her. "Excuse me." Starling exits, walks down the length of the bar, and follows the pointing fingertip of a sign directing the way, through a hallway that leads to the bathroom doors.

The women's room is painted red inside and Starling leans against the wall. The room seems to turn. Starling puts her hands on her face and slides to a squatting position. She lets out a whimper hoping no one will hear.

Minutes pass. She closes her eyes and waits. The porcelain sink feels cold and the tap squeaks and chokes as it opens. The cool water feels good on her face.

Exiting to the dining room, she sees Frank sitting alone, smiling, wiping his mouth. All that's left of his meal is the bit of rare hamburger juice that had bloodied his fries. The men and the guns are gone. Starling apologizes. "I felt a little sick." she explains, and tries to take a bite of her hamburger. It tastes burnt and dry. It's almost night outside. In the distance, there are many tiny dots of light across the valley.

"Well, relax, have a sip, I ordered you a Tequila Sunrise instead of that beer. You looked like you needed something stronger. Anyway, I need to tell you something, Starling. It's stupid it's taken me so long."

"Well," she says, deciding whether this is a good time to interrupt him, a good time maybe to tell him about the baby and try to leave out the part about how she knew it had to be his.

Frank gulps his whisky. He stares at her and breaths deeply, "I don't know how to say this really," he pauses, "I don't think we..." he begins, but she doesn't quite hear him say the rest; instead, she notices the wall next to their table in the saloon—a wallpaper pattern of tiny blue blocks spaced about an inch apart over a yellow background. One block has a tiny red streak running through it; not a pen mark or a blotch, but a tiny, noticeable flaw.

"Air Is Between These Words"

by *Helen Maxson*

I have always been amazed that the flames devouring a burning log come from inside it. It was a jolt to learn that, despite appearances, flame does not spread from one burning object to another; it begins in a log's own stored energy, activated and liberated by an external source of heat. Astonishing.

Fire has been a life-long fascination of mine. I felt immense frustration as a twelve-year-old Girl Scout when a campfire would not catch hold because the wood was damp or green. With reverence I would coax the weak flame, trying to absorb into my face or hands any part of its warmth that I could. Later, it was chiefly for the campfires that I bought a well-made tent and embarked on years of camping trips. Too, I have treasured the wood stoves and fireplaces in my homes. Over time, I have developed a sixth sense about building fires, an intuition about how the logs must be adjusted to nurture the flames. I can tell where in a pile of burning wood the air must flow, and where one log needs close contact with another. I have wanted what these laws can give, finding nourishment in making a fire go.

Lately I've been burning a candle as I do schoolwork or read. Somehow I endow the flame with the power to lighten drudgery, ease pressure, vitalize routine, soothe

loneliness, and push back, at least a little, any gloom that gathers. Now that a flame's light and motion have become constant attendants on my work and thinking, I feel their absence acutely when I run out of candles. I have wondered what gives the flame its meaning for me. What psychic room does it fill so well, warming some negligent guardian angel to her task?

A while ago, I started reading poetry about fire to see what it could tell me about my fascination. As an English teacher and ardent fan of creative writing, I read a fair amount of poetry on a regular basis. I have

believed for a long time that there is nothing like a poem to express the unconscious. The suggestiveness of its imagery, the multiple meanings of its metaphors, the fluidity of its music derive from patterns in the poet's mind and seek out those in the reader's. In conveying meaning, the poem's elasticity molds itself to the reader's sense of things without losing its own integrity, making the reader's mind known. So, in wondering why I am drawn to fire, I turned to poetry, knowing that the things I noticed there would tell me about myself. Since American Indian legend is rich in symbol and centered on the elemental, I had a feeling that contemporary Indian

verse would say a great deal about fire. I was right.

In a poem called "Fire," Joy Harjo, a Creek (Muscogee) poet, writes:

a woman can't survive
by her own breath
alone



ILLUSTRATED BY COLE RACHEL

.
 look at me
 i am not a separate woman
 i am a continuance
 of blue sky
 i am the throat
 of the sandia mountains
 a night wind woman
 who burns
 with every breath
 she takes

Imagine burning with every breath we take! Do we really live that intensely? For Harjo's speaker, the breath that sustains life is also the wind that fans a fire. In seeing herself as a night wind woman who is "not a separate woman," she sees herself as serving life in general, using her own burning and breathing to support those of others. Women are crucial to existence, she is insisting. And fire represents a fundamental energy, I add, letting the poem shed light on my own fascination.

It is an intense life that the night wind woman lives and serves: her vitality is as potent as a fire is hot. She is continuous with the wind, even as she breathes it in. She is continuous with the mountains, even as she expresses their message. Simultaneously part of the subject she is writing about and separate from it as its observer, she finds the message of her verse in the breathing and burning that comprise her own life.

I cannot say that the flame of my candle casts my life in such glorious terms. But perhaps it does kindle in me the energy of things that live, and a kind of nurturing peculiar to women. Does the flame offer me the comfort that I try to give others as a woman friend? Maybe. Or maybe, like a poem that probes our psyches, a flame reflects us, male and female alike, back to ourselves, answering our needs as well as only we, ourselves, can.

Perhaps in describing a flame we are both subject and speaker, like Harjo in her poem. We are continuous with the flame, and, like the poet who, continuous with the wind, breathes it in, we burn in describing the flame, both part of and separate from it. I do know that no other part of my life excites me more than that small part of it reserved for writing, a process which expresses me as a flame expresses the energy of a candle's wick.

But fire isn't always constructive, as a poem by Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan, called "The History of Fire," makes clear:

.
 My dear one is a jar of burned bones
 I have saved.

This is where our living goes
and still we breathe,

and even the dry grass
with sun and lightning above it

has no choice but to grow
and then lie down

with no other end in sight.

Air is between these words,
fanning the flame.

There is a downbeat determinism to this poem that aims far afield of the nourishment I find in flame. But still, to burn is to live, here, as in Harjo's poem, asserting in Hogan's lament of death the will to live that both poems represent with flame. And for Hogan as for Harjo, to express is to burn: "Air is between these

words,/ fanning the flame.” Earlier in the poem, Hogan has described herself as “wind for the fire.” As poet she provides both wind and words, as Harjo does. But for Hogan in this poem, what is burning finally burns up. For her, burning is living is writing is dying. And so, even the poem will be extinguished in time. But extinguished how? completely forgotten? its relevance lost? The poem doesn’t explain; it simply asserts. And won’t there be other poems to replace this one? (Won’t there be more grass to replace the poem’s dry grass that lies down after growing?) It may be in the immortality of the expressive spirit and in the poet’s continuing love for her dead dear one that the poem faintly suggest ways of going on even after the burning burns out. Can art transform death to life? Can love? Does my hope for a happy ending reflect the hope that I find in the candle? I bought an amaryllis bulb a few weeks ago, knowing that its fast growth would bring me great satisfaction. Sure enough, the light green blades made appreciable progress each day. They grew round, gaining over a foot of height in a few weeks. A flame-shaped bud plumped out at the end of each one, traced eventually by two graceful, length-wise grooves that would separate its shell into two halves of a green claw. Then, from the claw’s grasp, a huge blossom slowly emerged. The red, cream-tinged petals unfolded in daily increments, each one a step in some mystic journey toward perfection. I knew that the flower’s opening mirrored some growth in myself, and that I cared a great deal that the plant thrive.

The amaryllis sat on a shelf next to my candle. Until I saw them side by side, I had not often thought of green plants and fire together, separating them into different orders of things. After all, fire is luminous and warming, while most plants do not glow, and suggest a season when no warming is needed. Furthermore, fire destroys plants, and the water that nourishes plants extinguishes

fire. Nonetheless, studying them together, I became aware that they engaged the same part of me, sharing some personal symbolism which I wanted to understand. A poem by Linda Hogan called “Geraniums” brought flowers and flame together in a way that helped me do that.

Life is burning
in everything, in red flowers
abandoned in an empty house,
the leaves nearly gone,
curtains and tenants gone,
but the flowers red and fiery
are there and singing,
let us out.

Even dying they have fire.
Imprisoned, they open,
so like our own lives blooming,
exploding, wanting out,
wanting love,
water,
wanting.

And you, with your weapons and badges
and your fear about what neighbors think
and working overtime
as if the boss will reward you,
you can’t bloom that way
so open the door,
break the glass. There’s fire
in those flowers. Set off the alarm.
What’s a simple crime of property
when life, breath, and all
is at stake?

In the geranium image, the energy of burning and the energy of growing are one. The poem is about liberating



ILLUSTRATED BY COLE RACHEL

them. In it, what gets burned up is not what lives, but what entraps or impoverishes life. Hogan would set the empty house afire in order to free the flowers. I think of my amaryllis breaking out of its claw. I think of my restlessness when the schoolwork becomes tedious. Can I be as contemptuous of my salary as Hogan would have me be? Is my inner flame weakening because I am not? Does my candle reassure me that my spirit will survive yet another set of compositions, burning through it one paper at a time?

In this poem, living is burning is singing ("The flowers" are "singing/ let us out"). Adding singing to the significance of burning points to one more aspect of my restlessness when I am working. Assessing other people's writing makes me eager to get to my own, eager to sing my own song. And the poem encourages my frustration

at having to wait to do it until there is time. Unlike the poet's dear one, the geraniums live and burn and sing in spite of death; they do not succumb inevitably to it. In fact, they are intensified in trying to defeat it. If one is not living fully, she has started to die. Living fully is an all-or-nothing choice here, and the poem strongly urges us to make it, reminding me how much vitality I would reclaim if I could spend my days writing.

If one remembers that fire resides, as potential, inside whatever will burn, a candle and a plant seem naturally related. Plants contain their own growth as they contain their own flame. After reading Hogan's geranium poem, it is not hard to think of the two energies together. In the poem "I Make the Fire," the Menominee poet Chrystos sees them as different stages of one evolution.

.
as I go to the wood shed
Tiny green feathers of new growth fir
curl & dance under my feet
Heavy winds last night
In my arms a sweet smell of cedar
debris from the shake mill
I'm a woman who carries kindling
& her past
as she prays.

The new growth fir that curls and dances around the poet's feet as she goes to the wood shed could wind up at the timber mill, and, ultimately, as kindling being carried to a fire. But now it is fragile and new and promising. And the mill is benign; its cedar debris smells sweet. One needs not fear its work. In timber terms, a shake is a fissure in a tree caused during its growth by wind or frost. In this poem, the winds have been heavy, possibly producing imperfect wood that will need to be milled. Appropriately, the poet carries, along with her kindling, her past. She will burn it to make way for her own growth. And as she makes her fire, she prays. The fir dancing under her feet, and the fire she will build suggest a holy rite that will bless the future it brings in.

I can't say I plan to cremate my amaryllis when its blossoms have gone by. But I know its growing seems a temporary version of the candle's burning. My sense of the flower includes its dying, while, though one candle gives way to another, I see a flame as changeless. It will appear the same as always when the next plant is growing beside it, the living energy that endures into the next stage of my life. The next stage. What encouragement I find in believing one will come, bringing me a little closer to whatever perfection I'm aiming for. And perhaps I do assume, like the woman who carries her past with her

kindling and prays, that my reverence for candle and plant will bless the journey whose stages they trace.

I remember how glad I was to find my current candle holder. The candle sits deep in a glass cup whose flared rim rests on an encircling stand. The books and papers I move around as I work aren't likely to catch fire. The flame itself reflects off the curved glass behind it, magnifying its own light. Sometimes candle and holder remind me of a lighthouse, shining its transcendent beacon on all the dangers of earning a living. Circle around this reef of discouragement, it says. Come this way to avoid that rock of fatigue.

In the end, despite the specific insights on the charisma of flame offered by my poets, I guess it is inspiration of a more general, and maybe more personal, sort that makes the candle so important to me. Uplift. Pleasure. Trust in the lighthouse. Delight at seeing my shelf washed in color as the flame shines downward through liquid red wax. Confidence that the order and elegance of vanilla fragrance can prevail over the chaos of too much work and too little time. Fascination that a small shape of bright light can bend and stretch and dance without diffusing into the soft surrounding glow.

Fascination. A spell cast by a candle in which many responses are woven. The musing gaze that enacts it is a mystic rite, the kindling of an inner flame that expresses the gazer's most vital self, encouraging that self to be.

The Open Window

by Kelley Logan

Casing places has always been the hard part.

You've got to be careful that there are no dogs, no silent alarms and no men; all of which could turn a profitable evening sour.

With women all you have to do is tell them to shut up and stay still and most won't bother you at all even as they watch you wipe them out; they count themselves lucky that you're just a cat burglar. It is also real good if you can find a way to get in that is hidden from the street or neighbors by trees, a fence or shrubs. And this house had it all—one woman, no pet and a perfect window.

I had gone around to the back where I found the window cracked. It was warm for June; she must have wanted some air and I thought, "God, how easy," put a jimmy through the crack between the pair of shutters, pushed up the hook and opened them. Then I looked down to make sure my footing was good, leaned back and put my right foot through the window.

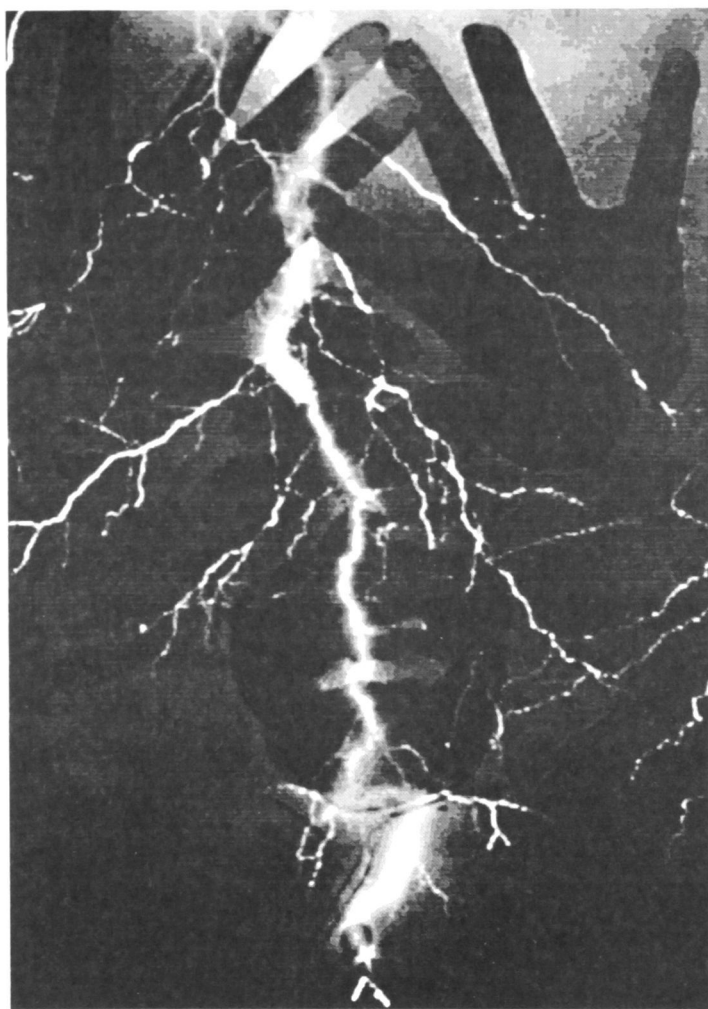
Then I looked up. She stood there naked except for a fine link, gold chain around her neck, her skin grey-white and glowing in the moonlight that filtered through the trees into the half-round window above the shuttered one I had just forced. She was muscular, her thighs taut and cut up like a bodybuilder's, her biceps curved like a smile as she brought the rifle up to her cheek.

"This is just a .22, but it has a clip. The clip is full," she said.

In that second, I believed with all my might that I should get my skinny butt out of there.

But as I shifted back to slide my front leg off the sill

and run, I looked up at her face. Her eyes and hair faded into the shadows becoming a part of the door behind her, leaving her to look like something out of comic books—a superhero, Valkyrie or god—all chiseled jaw and set mouth and terrible. But, just below her chain, a twinkling caught my eye. The wind blew the trees back and forth in the yard and as they blew back from the window, they let a pure stream of light through. With each pass the light caught and outlined a single bead of sweat that moved in stop-motion slowly down her collarbone, her chest, her breast, pausing for a moment at the top then turning left and trailing its way into a perfect curve, the light breaking like glass and loud.



ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS HENSON

When "The Eye Is of Little Service"

by Joyce Stoffers

One hundred years ago, a man put the finishing touches on a rustic cabin in West Park, New York. This was surely not a remarkable feat, especially in those days, but the builder was a most remarkable man: John Burroughs, famed author and naturalist, and friend and associate of Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, John Muir, and Walt Whitman. Burroughs named the cabin "Slabsides," because as he says in his essay, "Wildlife About My Garden," :

I might have given it a prettier name, but not one more fit, or more in keeping with the mood that brought me hither. A slab is the first cut from the loaf, which we call the crust, and which the children reject, but which we older ones often prefer. I wanted to take a fresh cut of life, —something that has the bark on, or, if you please, that was like a well-browned and hardened crust....Life has a different flavor here. It is reduced to simpler terms....

Although Burroughs had a more elaborate home, "Riverby," —just over a mile away—where he and his wife Ursula raised their son, Julian, Burroughs often preferred spending time and entertaining guests at Slabsides. On this centennial year of the cabin, now designated a National Historic Landmark, it is appropriate to examine the works of the man who created the cabin and to try to gain a deeper understanding of one of America's greatest naturalists.

That John Burroughs was an acute observer and chronicler of nature is well known. His patient observations were recorded with a meticulousness that illustrat-

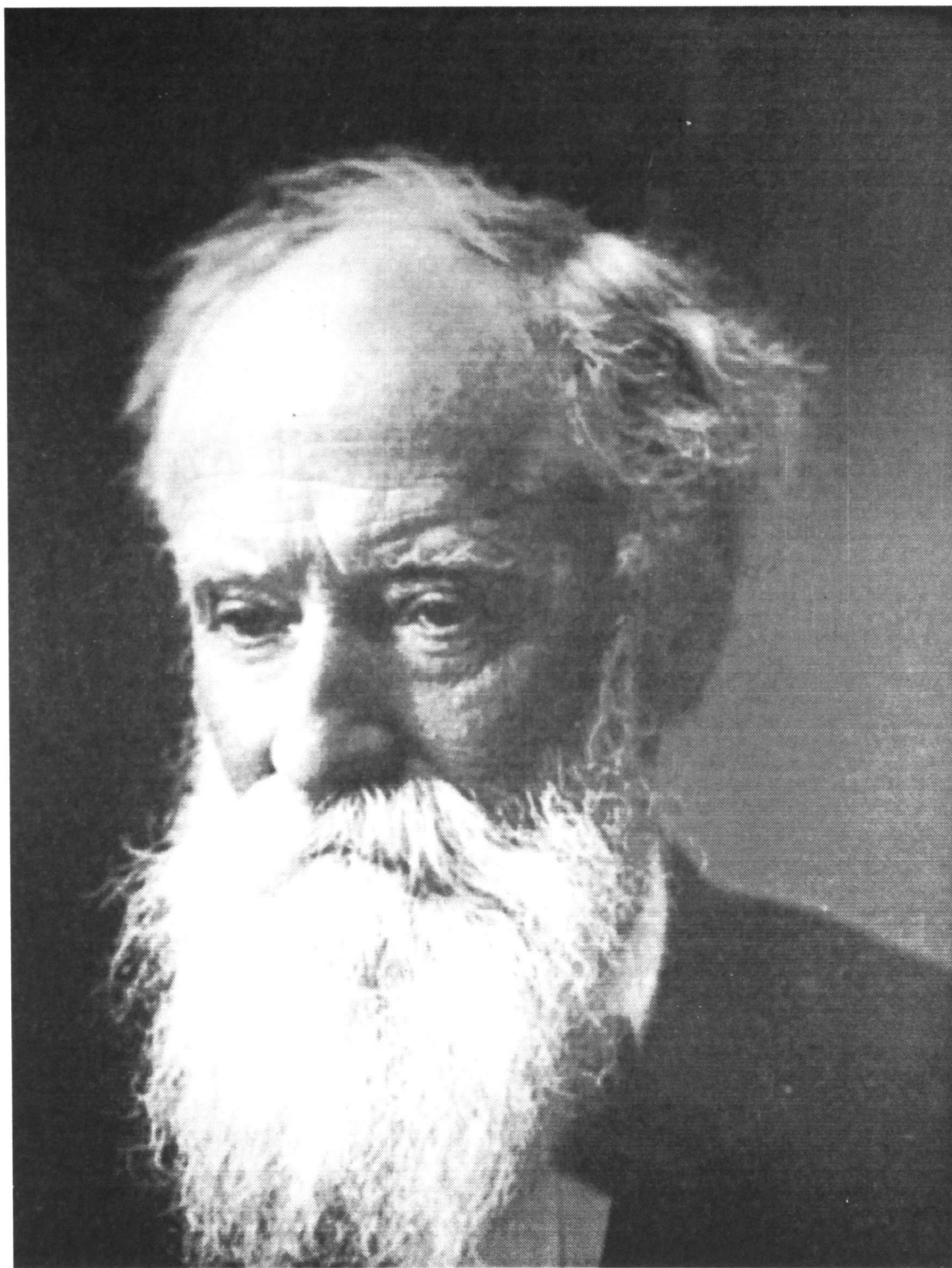
ed his intolerance towards the "nature fakers" of his day and looked ahead to the ethologists of today. Unfortunately, Burroughs' scrupulous registering of detail has caused readers to place the emphasis on the descriptive aspect of his essays at the expense of acknowledging their skillful narrative construction and philosophical content.

Of particular interest are essays in which "sharp eyes" Burroughs, expert in "the art of seeing things," evolves into a narrator acknowledging times, as in "Slide Mountain," "when the eye is of little service" (96). This Burroughs, conceding to the limitations of observation, is not the one we are most familiar with, yet he is by far the most interesting. When spectatorship, even of the mentally vigorous kind espoused by Burroughs, is translated into physical action, the dramatic quality of Burroughs' essays intensifies; they are transformed into lively narratives of less than ideal experiences, taking place in less than idyllic settings. Such is the case with "Birch Browsings," one of his most widely read essays.

"Birch Browsings" begins with a natural history background about the Pine Mountains area of southern New York state. After presenting this topographical overview, Burroughs devotes a paragraph to describe an 1860 expedition to the source of the Beaver Kill before he proceeds with what will be the main focus of the essay: the 1868 Thomas Lake trouting excursion. We learn that both trips are considered by Burroughs to be times when he "dipped into" the "wilder portions" of the region, and we learn that the earlier trip did not go as smoothly as planned; Burroughs and his companion had overloaded themselves with "a hundred and one superfluities," cooked and ate their fish in "a drizzling rain" with a "cold and protracted rainstorm coming on," and had to "tramp by an unknown route over the mountains." They do find shelter at a log house on Mill Brook just at nightfall,

but we get the general impression that the trip was somewhat disappointing and as the 1868 narrative is about to unfold, we can't help but expect an eight years older and wiser Burroughs will be relating a more successful enterprise.

What we get instead is not a narrative focusing on a successful outing filled with bouyant nature musings, but a tale of confusion and frustration, and of deceptive sense perception and lost direction. After receiving inadequate guidance from a young man, Burroughs' party of three find they have veered off course and will have to back-track. Nightfall arrives and they must set camp short of their destination, minus the hoped-for dinner of trout, and in an area that finds



Portrait of John Burroughs provided by Dr. Jim Butler, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Burroughs to be the target of annoying "no-see-ems" midges.

Although the next morning begins with a typical Burroughs rhapsody on the wood thrush, soon the

explorers are "bewildered" as a thick fog confounds them. It is decided that Burroughs should act as scout while the others stay behind with the supplies and await his gun signal. Burroughs the scout decides to follow a

spring run for his guide, but it suddenly disappears into the ground causing him to muse, "I had half a mind to be superstitious and to believe that we were under a spell, since our guides played us such tricks." But where Burroughs' eyes weren't proving to be of much help, his ears pick out the sound of bullfrogs, and by following their croaking, he finally arrives at the lake, although he first perceives it to be not a lake, but "distant sky." Once at the lake, he reports in the familiar Burroughs voice which has been rare in this essay: "The eye is as delighted as an escaped bird, and darts gleefully from point to point."

Burroughs is once again pleased with what his eyes see. The keen observer has regained his confidence and exults, "It was so good to come upon such open space and such bright hues, after wandering in the dim, dense woods!" But his selective observations soon prove to be of little use, for upon leaving the lake, this ecstatic visual reverie is immediately undercut with "a very ugly feeling of alarm and disappointment," and anxiety over "an emergency that seemed near at hand," for although he has found the lake, he seems to have lost his companions. He fears they may have been "misled" by his gun signal's reverberations, and that he must "undeceive them," yet he is the one in need of "undeceiving." His close observation of nature has led to confusion.

Thoreau warns of the limitations of this type of observation in one of his journal entries which Burroughs, in his later essay, "Thoreau's Wildness" says has "much truth and force" (221). One could almost imagine Thoreau directly advising Burroughs regarding the episode just described, as he says "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science into stone" (221).

Burroughs is similarly rendered ineffective, for even when he rejoins his partners, he is unable to expeditiously lead them to the lake. Rather than the refreshing lake they were expecting, he leads them to an "extensive alder swamp, evidently the ancient bed of a lake." By now "half-vexed and half-incredulous," Burroughs' comrades refuse to follow him as he sets out again; they will wait to hear from him before they continue. Burroughs admits he paid "little attention" to his course, which is obviously why he is having such trouble retracing his steps, but rather than accept responsibility for his capricious powers of observation, he masks his accountability by suggesting he is "more than ever disposed" to believe they "were under a spell." Seemingly bewitched by his ground level observations, he decides to gain a new visual perspective by climbing a tree. While this seems like a good idea, our narrator-guide continues to erode our confidence by questionably selecting for his lookout perch, a "decayed beech that leaned out over the swamp." Narrowly escaping injury as the tree begins to crack, he gains only a "momentary glimpse of the country," and no lake is in sight. He is still disoriented.

Burroughs' confidence in his powers of observation continue to diminish so that he finds himself imagining he is nearing the lake when he is still only in another alder swamp. The naturalist who usually hears beautiful and comforting bird songs now hears a creek he describes as "whirling away with a sound that seemed to my ears like a burst of ironical laughter." He turns back to return to his friends "with a feeling of mingled disgust, shame, and vexation." This "almost sick," "hungry, fatigued, and disheartened" man of "baffled purpose" records probably the most uncharacteristic Burroughs line of all: "I heartily wished myself well out of the woods."

Although the hikers eventually do arrive at the lake, and Burroughs regains his capacity for finding delight in

his woodland surroundings, because of all that preceded these events in the narrative, they are somewhat hollow victories. We are at best dubious about Burroughs' capabilities "to read the book of nature aright," (Burroughs qtd. in Wiley, 16) at least in this particular episode. Burroughs' comrades seem similarly shaken, for now as they are preparing to leave, he no longer is referred to as the scout. He has abdicated his authority, and the group, now without a leader, wanders in circles, and hold "Another deliberation and a divided council," until, as Burroughs relates:

one of the party swore an oath, and said he was going out of those woods, hit or miss, and, wheeling to the right, instantly plunged over the brink of the mountain.

The rest followed, but would fain have paused and ciphered away at their own uncertainties, to see if a certainty would not be arrived at as to where we would come out. But our bold leader was solving the problem in the right way.

This dramatic and successful mountain descent demonstrates Burroughs' realization that there is a time for close observation and reflection, and a time for impulse-driven, bold action. As he states in "Slide Mountain," there are times when "The eye is of little service; one must be sure of his bearings and push boldly on and up" (96). In "A Sharp Lookout" Burroughs similarly describes the "blind groping and putting forth of Nature in every direction, with failure in some of her ventures and the success of others....ceaseless experiments in every direction." This "inherent impulse to experiment, the original push, the principle of Life" (16) that Burroughs finds in nature resembles those characteristics he praises in his group's leader. Once the reader makes this association, "Birch Browsings" can be read as more than a well-crafted nature narrative; on one level it

becomes a metaphoric expression of Burroughs' understanding of the life-process itself, particularly with respect to the concept of evolution.

Although an admirer of Darwin's theory, certain aspects of the theory troubled him at various stages of his life. In *John Burroughs*, Perry Westbrook points out that in Burroughs' essay of 1916, "Life the Traveler," Burroughs is uncomfortable with the emphasis placed on natural selection's role in species evolution and suggests the necessity of some "primal push and aspiration" in addition to the struggle for survival." Burroughs is also uneasy with Darwin's recognizing "no innate or necessary tendency in each being to its own advancement in the scale of organization." In addition, Westbrook reminds us that Burroughs "quotes Emerson to support his stand: 'No statement of the universe can have any soundness that does not admit of its ascending effort'" (106); Burroughs could have just as easily used this quote in conjunction with the passage in "Birch Browsings" as the new leader forges ahead "over the brink of the mountain," or with the lines describing "the original push, the principle of Life" in "A Sharp Lookout." In excerpts like these, the truth of Burroughs' comment regarding Emerson's influence becomes apparent: "I read him in a sort of ecstasy. I got him in my blood, and he colored my whole intellectual outlook" (Barrus 41).

The spirit of Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance permeates a work like "Birch Browsings." Having faith in his own intuition, causes the leader of the lost group to go about "solving the problem in the right way." The leader at this point in the narrative exemplifies Emerson's "brave and upright man, who must find or cut a straight path to everything excellent in the earth, and not only go honorably himself, but make it easier for all who follow him to go in honor and with benefit" (Holman 536).

The leader in “Birch Browsings” utilizes his intuition and transcends the senses—even the normally helpful sense of sight—to reach his goal and to help his fellows. But Burroughs is less successful. Even two paragraphs before the end of the tale, when Burroughs states they were literally “out of the woods,” figuratively, he’s still in the woods. Upon approaching the settlement, things look “very strange” until they begin to “put on familiar features” as “Some magic scene-shifting” seems to take place before his eyes. This eerie mood is broken by the group joining in laughter over their “good luck” at arriving at their destination.

But Burroughs doesn’t end the essay focusing on their exhilaration. In the concluding paragraph he adds

a melancholy reflection on the nature of time and experience: “but if time is only phenomenal, as the philosophers say, and life only in feeling, as the poets aver, we were months, if not years, older at that moment than we had been two days before.” He feels they were aged by the experience, yet he quickly adds that paradoxically, through the infusion of the birches’ “suppleness and strength,” they are also younger.

At the conclusion of the essay, the reader is left with a paradox as well: the sharpest eye can still deceive. At times sight must give way to impulse, spectatorship to action. When observation leads to action, the adventure begins; the security of distance evaporates as the challenges of immediacy present themselves. As a result, the



photograph by J. Stoffers

possibility of mistakes, calamities, or defeat also presents itself. This awareness darkens the essay's mood. However, to selectively read Burroughs' works without giving adequate attention to those parts which do not fit the popularized ever-optimistic Uncle John, distorts his deeper vision by oversimplification, and undermines the ever-questioning and ever-evolving spirit evident in even an early essay such as "Birch Browsings."

Author's Note

Dr. Jim Butler, a professor of conservation biology at the University of Alberta, Canada, impersonates John Burroughs at performances, is an author, a prominent environmentalist and is often called Canada's deep ecology poet. Selections from his latest book, *Dialog with a Frog on a Log* will appear in the fall *Westview*.

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dearest uncle

by Laura Marsee

dearest uncle:
passed out
cold
on the couch.
the last remnants
of his fifteenth
vodka-and-grapefruit juice
cocktail
dribble lazily down
his stubble-peppered chin.
enormous sock feet
planted square
center in his
half-eaten supper
on the cracked coffee table;
creamed corn
and squashed peas stick
defiantly to the
cuffs of his
fashionably rumpled
levi's.
a murderous crimson
splotch
winds its way
south
across the front
of his
well-worn
flannel shirt,

making him appear
at first glance
to have been recently shot
in the chest
by a high caliber
revolver.
the television blares
pointlessly—
the radio, too.
the entire room in
hopeless disarray
around his oblivious form.
and
a few short steps away,
his typewriter:
sticky with random drops
of drying bourbon
and correction fluid,
thinly dusted
with the snow gray ash
of countless cigarettes.
scores of crumpled balls
of sad, white paper
scattered dejectedly
over the table and across
threadbare carpet
plead silently
to be reconsidered,
just like me.

Garage Sale Nightmare

by Keith Long

A couple of weeks ago I was bounced out of bed in the middle of the night by my wife, who seemed to be almost hysterically dancing about something.

"Is it a tornado?" I asked, trying to pull my way out of REM.

"No!" Anna replied. "Garage sale."

"Garage sale at 4:45 in the a.m.?" I asked unbelievably. I didn't even know there were two four-forty-fives. The only one I knew came midway through Jeopardy in the afternoon.

"Yes, garage sales. And you promised mom and me that you'd go with us."

"Okay, okay," I said, and felt my way through the night to the upstairs shower.

When I came downstairs, Anna and my mother-in-law, better known to kids as "Mossie," had commandeered the kitchen table and had a newspaper spread out all over. They were poring over it like a couple of generals planning the invasion of Omaha Beach. They had pens, pencils, pointers, and a look of determination that sent a shudder to my knees.

"Here's the plan," Anna said, mostly to Mossie, since I was considered little more than an innocent bystander. "Since the bulk of the action is going to be here (indicating with her pointer the middle of a map of town), we'll flank the action by starting over here."

"Right," Mossie said. "Then we can make a major push towards the northern part of downtown, efficiently blocking out any opposition from the east."

"Good, good," Anna said. "And at mid-morning, when the heat will be at its heaviest, we'll make a frontal attack on this area," she added, pointing towards one of

the up-scale additions in town.

By this time I was intrigued. I thought garage selling was just a matter of getting in and out of a car. "Gee," I said, "it seems to me like that would be the best place to start," pointing to the up-scale area.

"Bad maneuver," Anna said. "There's always good stuff there, but they're too proud of it. Give them three or four good hours of watching people walk away, and then they'll be ready to bargain."

"Yeah," Mossie said. "I once got a brand-new hamster playground and cage for only \$2. And they had started the day asking \$12."

"I didn't know you had a hamster," I said.

"I don't. They give me the creeps."

"Then why did you get the hamster cage?" I asked.

Both women glared at me with disdain in their eyes.

"Do you want to go or not?" my wife asked.

I nodded

"Then quit asking silly questions and making us late."

I wanted to pursue what I considered a perfectly logical line of inquiry, but then the girls were acting a little more illogical than usual, so I let it slide.

"Can I ask one more silly question?" I said, breaking the pre-dawn silence as we got into the car.

"What?" they said in unison.

"Just what exactly are we shopping for?"

"Stuff," my wife said.

"Stuff? What kind of stuff?"

"Stuff stuff. You know—the kind of stuff you need."

"And what might that be?"

"I can't tell you till I see it. I do know I'm looking for a ceramic red squirrel to nail to our tree. Now drive to 1903 Circle Drive."

"But we have real squirrels in our tree."

Both women glared at me through the dark. So I drove and didn't say anything else. As I approached the

residence, I saw a sign that said, "Garage Sale, 8-1 Saturday, no early birds."

"Pull in right there," Mossie said, pointing at a sliver of a space between a Volvo and a Ford Econoline van.

I parked. "That sign said no early birds. It's only 6:45. Maybe we shouldn't get out," I said.

I was too late. Both girls were already in the midst of stuff.

"They meant that for yesterday!" Anna yelled back, and began picking up stuff and moving it. I stood in the early-morning shadows and took mental notes.

Anna and Mossie were studying a table of old washer parts and lawn mower blades when I caught some of their conversation. "We're too late," Mossie said. "all the good stuff's gone."

"I know," Anna said. "I'll go pay for this and then we'll move on."

My wife bought a soap dish, an ice-cream maker crank, two blue bottles, and a pair of TV rabbit ears.

The next stop wasn't so crowded and the girls literally leaped from the car as I drove by.

"Find somewhere to park!" Anna shouted back at me, landing on the curb like a paratrooper.

By the time I got the car parked and had walked up to the garage sale, the girls had separated in order to cover more ground. Anna was at one corner of the stuff, looking at the remains of a stack of car tires. I didn't find Mossie right off, and, indeed, heard her before I saw her. She was buried upside down in a refrigerator box full of clothes. "Mnuppff," Mossie yelled. I called Anna, who grabbed one leg. I grabbed the other and we began pulling Mossie out of the box.

"Not all the way!" she shouted, once she was uncovered enough to be understood. "I can't get to the good stuff!"

We hit 42 garage sales that day, and picked up all kinds of good stuff. I even learned a little and managed to buy an air raft with the stem missing, a leaky Army canteen, 400 yards of nylon rope, a fifty-pound bag of rock salt, and a velvet portrait of Elvis that I thought would match the blue background of our den—all without having to break a dollar.

"Well," I said on the way home, "we never did find a ceramic squirrel, did we?"

"No," the girls said. "But there's always next week."

Watching the Clouds

by Alvena Bieri

My little brother and I used to love watching a blue norther coming in over the plains from the northwest. Maybe we'll get some real snow, we prayed, enough for rolling in, enough to make a snowman. Growing up in Kiowa County on a wheat farm near Hobart, we seldom did. We were like children in *To Kill A Mockingbird* who had to plump out their snowpeople with rocks and dirt. We had other weird weather experiences too, like watching the spring tornado that touched down at our neighbor's house and struck him just as he was going to his mailbox and the killer hailstorm that hit our farm one Easter Sunday afternoon, coming out of sickly green clouds, demolishing our hen house, and killing several of our hens.

But "watching the clouds" for rain on a late afternoon in spring is the most enduring of weather memories. I don't mean watching the clouds to discover funny shapes in them, like big, fluffy Santa Clauses or buffaloes blowing smoke rings. We anxiously peered up into the storm

clouds from our south porch where the cistern was, hoping we would get a really good rain on the wheat. My dad didn't worry much about the scarcity of snow. It was rain he watched for, hoping for a soaker, or a gully washer. Even a rain of half an inch he called "a cotton shower" would help.

A clap of thunder, and if we were lucky, those first big, heavy raindrops would land in the dusty grass to be followed by the wonderfully steady sound of more rain falling. And from the porch my dad would know how much it rained without even going out and checking the rain gauge.

When the rain stopped, my brother and I would go out to play near what we called "the baffle," a tiny dam built by the CCC boys to check soil erosion through the west wheat field. Rain brightened the whole world. Real water flowed through the ditch and even cascaded in little, tiny waves over the baffle. Bullfrogs croaked, crawdads crawled. Rain was a comfort, like a good supper on a cold winter night, or the comforting smell of the excellent straw in the homemade air conditioner in summer. Rain meant life could go on.

Craters

by Joey Brown

The rain was bad for driving and it was hard enough to see at night in the hills anyway. It was all right for the daytime, but at night Lindy couldn't see the potholes in the dirt roads once they filled up with rain water. She told him that it wouldn't have done any good to go out during the daytime, though. Then there wouldn't have been anything to see. She drove too fast when she did drive and she hadn't had much practice lately. Still, she had left the house, even though Seth said not to go. Normally Lindy would do anything Seth asked.

That made explaining that night to him impossible. The only way she had of explaining it to herself was that she was pretty sure she went a little crazy last year. It happened suddenly. She woke up early one morning, her arms tingling, and she could feel the blood pulsing through the heels of her hands as she lay awake waiting to make breakfast. For the next two or three nights she didn't sleep at all. Then another day later a panic set in. Lindy abandoned her cart with its head of cabbage, jar of crunchy peanut butter, and two pounds of ground chuck at the juncture of the meat and cereal aisles of the United Foods Supermarket and went home. She didn't leave the house again for forty-seven days.

It had happened during the winter at the height of deer season or Seth might have taken greater notice. He worked the fall and early winter guiding hunters through the hills of eastern Oklahoma. Lindy didn't like to get out much in the winter in those hills. People got killed driving on the ice. And they got shot on hunting trips, drowned on fishing trips. It seemed to Lindy that something like that was happening around them all the time. It had made the outdoors less inviting to Lindy as she got

older. So for two months after the panic, she kept closer to the house, and she tried not to move much when she didn't sleep, and Seth was busy enough with work that he was slow picking up on the change. Lindy leaned her head out the window of Seth's pickup as she moved it east over the bridge that crossed the Illinois between their place and the Harley's. Looking up, she could see nothing really but the rain as it fell into her face.

Glancing down at the road every few seconds, Lindy kept her attention on the sky. She couldn't see anything yet, but she expected the rain to break at any moment. She was afraid that arguing with Seth would have held her up until it was too late. She wanted to get out to the ridge a couple of hours early, just in case it all started before it was supposed to. So when he started in with "Lin, sweetheart. You're going to freeze to death out there," Lindy just said, "You're right, honey," and left it at that. Then she just walked out. She threw her bag in the truck and took off for the ridge.

But then Lindy had planned for this night for an entire year, a year before this trip to the ridge. Otherwise she would have really meant it when she told Seth she wouldn't go. Just as that tense deer season was coming to an end, Seth decided they should go to Houston for a vacation. For days before they left, Lindy was numb thinking about the trip. She knew she couldn't tell Seth that she was afraid to leave the house. But in the end, the whole trip came out better than she thought it would. On the way down, she had kept her face toward her window and had tried to quietly imitate Lamaze breathing techniques to keep from vomiting. But each day of the trip, a little at a time, Lindy calmed down. On their last day in Houston, when they had discovered the Quadrantids in the meteorite display cases, Lindy knew that she had found something to put her fears in focus.

Lindy had written a note to herself the day they'd come back from the Johnson Space Center. They'd had it in a big case with some other rocks. There had been a card displayed with it that had all the information about it neatly typed: Meteorite. 21.6 pounds. Original weight one ton or more. Discovered in Lost City, Oklahoma, January 9, 1970 after a Quadrantids Meteor Shower. Lindy had stood in front of the case long enough to memorize all the information. Then she wrote it down on a sheet of pink note paper and stuck it to the refrigerator with an Oreo magnet within two minutes of getting home: Quadrantids on January 4, the date they were due next.

It was about the most amazing thing to ever happen to Lindy. Meteors falling in Oklahoma. And she didn't live fifteen miles from Lost City, maybe not even twelve, and she'd been alive when it had happened, and no one had ever told her about it. It had taken more than twenty years for her to find out and Seth said he hadn't heard about it either. When she had first seen the rock, it hadn't seemed like much. She and Seth had both been a little surprised to see the meteorite, all the way from Lost City, such a painfully quiet place.

"Isn't that something?" Lindy had had to smile about it.

"Well, hon. When you've seen one moon rock..."

"It's not a moon rock."

"Space rock, then." Seth had leaned close to the glass for a second and Lindy thought he might try to get interested in the meteorite just for her sake. She looked toward the glass and saw the edges of her face reflected around the meteor. Next to hers, Seth's face was also reflected, sharply, with clear eyes. But he hadn't been looking at the meteorite. He instead made room for an impatient Korean family anxious to see more rocks. He

had smiled, but not the same as Lindy. He hadn't understood and she didn't, couldn't explain, and it had become another of the things they were never going to be able to talk about. For twenty-four years of marriage Lindy had put her life into his hands. Still she knew he sometimes saw her at 40 as he had at 17. There were still things Lindy knew she could never really say to Seth.

At those moments like the one in front of the case, Seth would push loose strands of her hair back into its braid and would hold his large hand against her throat. "Don't get too worked up about it. It's no big deal," he would say, just as he had said then about the rock.

But it became a big deal to Lindy. She became fascinated by the rock that had spent so many years traveling only to meet its end in the same hills where she lived. She'd gone back to the display and memorized everything on the card about the rock from Lost City. Even though he had asked a couple of times in the year that followed what the note on the refrigerator meant, Lindy didn't try again to talk to Seth about that trip or the meteorite.

Lindy looked down in time to maneuver the red Chevy diesel around the corner. Then she pulled it to a quick stop in the bar ditch just off the road. She took the keys and her canvas bag. The rain was stopping, just in time for the meteor shower she expected just after midnight. A whole year of waiting and the words, "just in time" were all she could think.

Taking two strands of the wire gingerly between two fingers, Lindy stepped through the barbed wire fence that marked the far northern rim of their property. They had a few thousand acres of wooded acres that were essentially worthless, except for the stretch along the river. Seth made their living from a concession where he rented canoes and took tourists on trips up and down the Illinois. Most of the time, Lindy was glad to see the sea-

son come. It was the only time she ever talked to many people. She listened to them say how glad they were to be away from the office, the factory, the rigs. They always talked of how tired they were and how the water and the green life gave them rest. Lindy always found herself reluctant to say what made her tired. And although she listened intently to each person who came to their concession, she never told anyone that the green hills frightened her. She never said that she sometimes thought that the scrub oaks were growing over her house, pressing it into the earth, leaving her trapped but safe somehow. She never went in the river much, except to dangle her feet in it once in a while. It felt like ice water to Lindy, even in July.

Getting there in the truck took several minutes, but once Lindy hiked back over the ground to the ridge she could see their house. South and back across the river. Really she could only see the lights glowing through the screen of scrub oaks. Seth was waiting up for her. He worried about her any time she went out of the house. It had always been like that, even before she got scared. She knew this would be a long night for him.

Lindy found a flat spot then took the plastic tablecloth out of the bag and spread it on the ground. The blue plastic had a rather large hole where frayed bits of the white backing stuck out. But it covered enough of the ground to keep Lindy from getting wet. She took the binoculars out of the bag, placing them beside her.

On her back on the slick tablecloth, Lindy could see nothing but sky. The clouds had given way to a pale smattering of stars. Lindy hoped they would fall no further. She could not afford to have the brief minutes the meteors would be visible to be obscured by stars that shone out of rights. She snuggled deep inside her coat, feeling the cold of the dead Johnson grass reeds through the plastic. The ground was frozen. Lying there made

Lindy think of an article she read once about funerals in Michigan. People who died in Michigan during the winter didn't get buried. They waited in storage until spring. She could remember telling Seth about it.

"Huh," he had said, "That's interesting."

"Interesting? Doesn't that make you sad?"

Lindy could remember watching him over the expanse of the kitchen table. It had been dark out, wind rustling the blackjack leaves. Seth had not been looking at her, but at his own hands as he worked a tiny skein of red thread around a hook and a fly head.

"Why would that make me sad? I don't live in Michigan."

"But you're going to die. I'm going to die." Lindy had watched his eyes that were still looking down and away from her. "What if this happens to us?"

A smile creased his sun-reddened face. "Stick me in the deep freeze out on the utility porch."

"Seth."

"Lindy, hon. Why do you get worked up about this kind of stuff?" He raised the tip of his middle finger to his mouth and severed the red string with his teeth. "It's not going to happen."

Lindy had held the magazine folded open, pressed to her chest. "I can't think of anything worse," she said. "Being gone, waiting to have everything put to rest."

"Lindy." Seth smiled and shook his head. He extended the finger toward her, the tiny fly with its tiny dead, black eyes hooked in the hard callous on the end of his finger. Lindy could remember that moment as the time a sick, tingling sensation started deep between her lungs and lasted for days.

Out on the ridge, several minutes passed and the ground began to feel less hard and less cold. Lindy was starting to get nervous. She pressed the knob on her digital watch to check the time. She put her hand through

the strap on the binoculars and twisted it around her wrist until the adjusting rims of the glasses were pressed tight against her arms. Lindy thought about Seth in the house alone, sitting on the edge of the bed or at the kitchen table, all the lights in the house on. She sat up and looked down at the house where he waited. Whenever had he been the one to do the waiting? They had lost two babies, twenty years ago while Seth had been in the Dakotas on summer wheat harvest. Stillborn twins were buried in family graves Lindy had not seen in years. She'd had to wait four days for Seth to call and in the end her mother had been the one to tell him.

If they had had kids Lindy wouldn't have worried about him when she sat on the ridge. If there had been someone else at home to help take care of Seth if she wasn't there anymore. Her mother had said the babies changed her. So after that wheat harvest, Seth had opened the concession, and he had not left her alone again except for the overnight hunting trips. He often told her how good she was at taking care of him, that he couldn't have made it without her. But Lindy often wondered how much of that were really true. She kept their house, spent all of her time taking care of him. Still she thought he could have gotten along with anyone who waited out the tours and hunts, who could help him clean and cook his kills, who loved him and his longing

to offer protection. Lindy did not know that it made any difference that it had been her, and not someone else. He had said that he could not live without her, but since that last harvest, Lindy had never moved far enough from his side for either of them to know.

It had never occurred to her to wonder before that moment, but just then the question became large and clear. What about the craters? Lindy looked down toward the river. She knew that the rock she saw in Houston couldn't have left a crater. It was too small when it got here. But suddenly she was nearly frantic with wonder about where the rest of it had gone. Somewhere it had been torn and burned and smoked away. Bits and fragments were ripped loose and there had been bursts of cold fire. And the rocks fell through an atmosphere that ate away at them. They flaked away and were gone. The very rareness of the air killed them, almost all. And most of them weren't even enough to make a dent in the ground when it was all over.

Lindy lay back again on the tablecloth. The spot between her lungs ached and she breathed hard. They had to come now. She couldn't wait any longer. If they only would come now, she would go home and tell Seth. She would tell Seth where he sat in the house, lighted and warm, afraid for her. But they had to come soon and she needed them to come soon. Now, Lindy breathed, if they would only come now.

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CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

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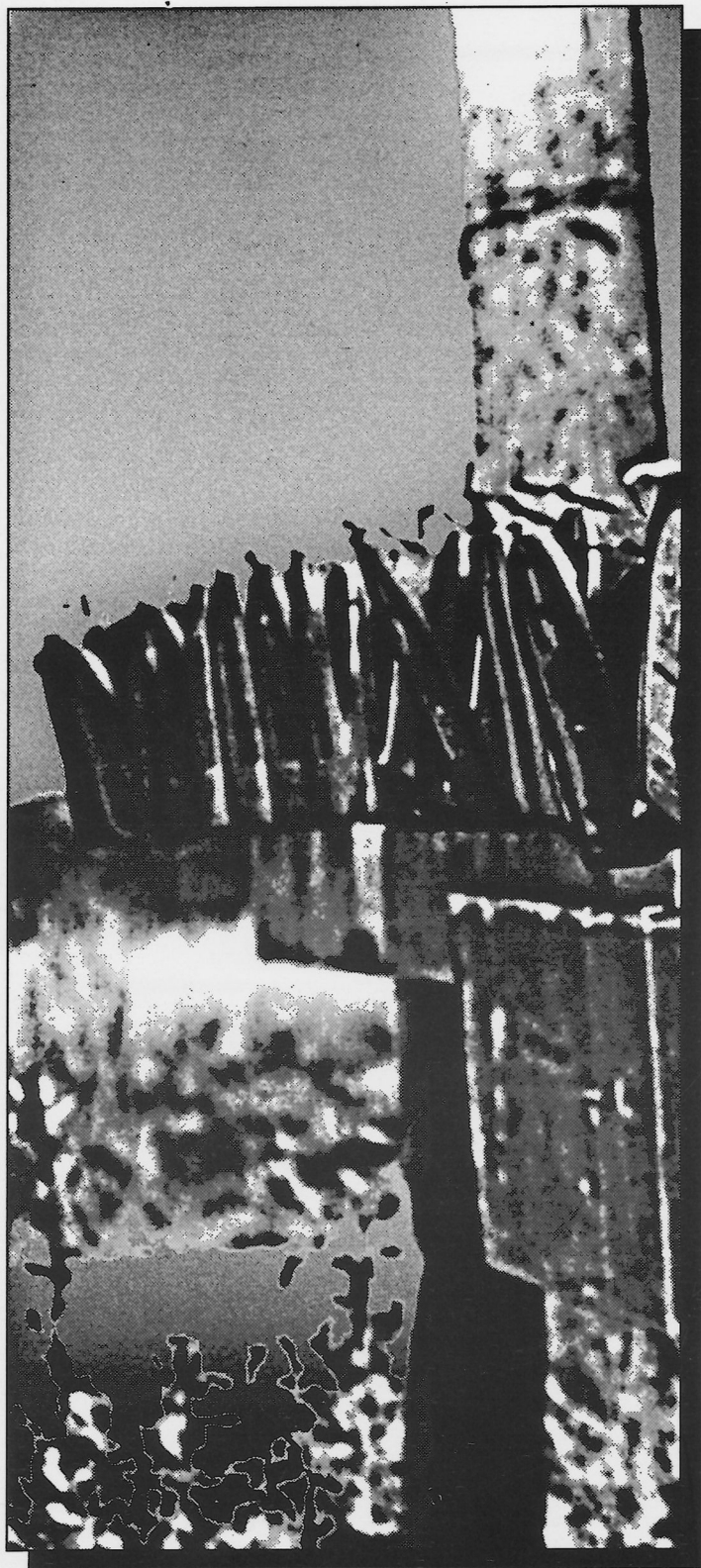
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