



MANUSCRIPTS

# Manuscripts

## *Words on Fire*

It is impossible to escape this dialectic  
To be aware that one is burning is to grow cold  
To feel an intensity is to diminish it  
It is necessary to *be* an intensity without realizing it  
Such is the bitter law of man's existence

*Author Unknown*

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The editors and staff wish to thank the English Department for their support and encouragement. A special thanks to Dr. Hilene Flanzbaum, our new faculty advisor, and also to Shirley Daniell for her patience and suggestions. -MAC

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Cover Art and Sketches by Shuhong



*Dedicated to Eve  
yes, Eve  
without whom  
none of this  
would have been possible*

### Imprecision

In the beginning twenty-three horses appear as a drumroll; they are kicking dust storms up during a gallop, both beautiful and dangerous, across the surface of the Spanish savannah, the sound of sweat rolling off their backs, and the hot whistle of wind through each nostril, heavy and low, like a choir of moving bassoons ... next two eagles emerge, unreal, but melodic and sweet, from that cold silence of ice fields, a rhythmic beating of new wings, and the majesty of their white crowns, as they clasp talons in mid-air-- because this is love-- and they give themselves to freefall ... meanwhile, in the desert, a single cactus sprouts spines, foreboding, the sound of certain precarious rhythms, its harmony of green flesh surrounded by pins and needles ... and elsewhere a stream flows forth from out the shadow of a large rock, the small pebbles being transformed to fish, with fins and scales and everything, under the rush of cold water, the way it's done in music, everything coming to life.

There is always a rumble or a quake, the clatter of tectonic plates; always the short man with a trimmed beard, and the glow of everlasting light in his eye ... who stares intensely at a single page of music scribbled freehand, and even more intensely at a single note, as he stands at the edge of a cliff, waving his arms like a conductor, and smiling ... until from every tree must come a song, and then the first bud-burst, their voices rising in a great chorus of flowers ... storm clouds move on the horizon, and leaves begin to take shape ... feathers appear, and then fur ... birds are called into being, coyotes howling in the moonlight ... there are the dark eyes of Adam, and the inner thigh of a woman, melodic and soft, everywhere the ripple of beauty growing louder, more precise ... except ...

for that one dark note in a distant place, sustained  
where a hand, trembling slightly, reaches for an apple.

Mark A Clements

**Landscape with Grandmother**

She is stooped like a peasant  
in a van Gogh sketch,  
coaxing wild berries  
from a vagrant bush.  
Our shadows lengthen  
across the field.  
She stands,  
and the dress that hangs on her  
like a worn-out wing  
is struck through  
by stray beams  
of day's-end light.  
She motions, says—what?  
I don't remember.  
Or does she smile?  
I don't remember:  
I am watching the sun  
set at her hem.

Rusty C. Moe



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## Iowa Summer

---

*Linnea Leatherman*

It should have been a pleasant drive from Indiana to Iowa that summer. Our '63 maroon Ford Galaxy, its glossy finish ending above twin full moons that functioned as headlights, had a most modern innovation: carpeting. I loved the way it muffled the road noise, how cozy it made the car seem in the rain, and the way I could scrunch my forever-bare toes into the soft pile of that tan carpet. To a ten-year-old, we were the classiest people in town. What the car lacked was air-conditioning. But at least we had our first brand-new car, with its new-car smell, and that wonderful carpeting under my toes.

Driving to Iowa back then was an exercise in patience on the part of my parents. My older sister Cyndi and I never got along, and this was magnified by long periods in the close confines of the back seat of a car. We bickered and bickered until my father's patience wore as thin as spring ice, at which point my father swung his right arm over the back seat, waved it back and forth, and yelled at us to "cut it out back there" or we were "never going on a vacation again." This was actually an annual event, for we took a trip every summer, and every summer my father had to tell us the same thing. It didn't get any better as we got older, either.

The farm, overlooking the flat, fertile farmland of north-central Iowa, watched us through the hot Iowa sun as we approached. Familiar replaced unfamiliar. Alongside the road sat the timeworn, rust-red corn crib, decaying bits of cob bristling out of its broken-down sides like a scarecrow's hair under its hat. We always asked my father how old the crib was, and each time he would say he didn't know and why did we have to ask him again? There it sat, a lone sentinel along the road, the gatekeeper to the Anderson farm. Every time I saw it, I felt a familiar constriction in my stomach.

As we rounded the corner, we could see my grandparents' lane on our left, with the farm buildings waiting for us at the end. There sat the big black mailbox on the right side of that narrow dirt path, a road better suited to horse and

wagon than our spiffy new Ford Galaxy. The weeds in the middle of the lane grew better than the flowers in Grandma's garden, and she fiercely believed in her mission to keep those weeds under submission, sending Uncle Maurice out there on schedule to keep them in line. She was not as adept at keeping Uncle Maurice in line. The drive provided a means of escape.

As we drove up the lane and onto the little knoll where the farm buildings were located, a fur-covered cannonball propelled itself at each of us as we got out. Sputnik actually belonged to my Uncle Richard, who named him after the Russian satellite, but the dog spent most of his time at my grandparents' farm because Uncle Richard was one of those "rich Iowa farmers," the kind of bachelor who liked to travel as far away as Russia and let someone else take over his farm while he saw life outside the narrow confines of a small town.

Sputnik was black and brown, very short and squat, with a fierce countenance that belied his friendly demeanor. He was so square and solid that, when he hurtled toward you, you felt like he was a guided missile on a mission to knock you down and lick you to death. His duty done, Sputnik would always abruptly return to his farm dog responsibilities with an air of great importance, immediately forgetting the new arrivals.

At the end of the lane, Grandma waited impatiently during this imposition on her valuable time, hands folded across her chest, her thin arms and legs poking out from behind her cotton house dress to which an apron seemed permanently attached. Her black hair, not daring to turn grey, was tucked into an almost invisible hair net in hopes that it would stay in place in spite of the almost frenzied degree of activity in which she was constantly engaged. She swooped down upon my sister, gave her a big hug, and told Cyndi how happy she was to see her. Then Grandma rushed past me to my father, scolding him because it had been so long since we had been there, and then turned around and practically flew back into the kitchen to her important business.

Meanwhile, Grandpa shuffled over to Cyndi, his crew-cut grey hair bristling out of the top of his head like so many unruly weeds in a garden patch. While hugging my sister he turned to my father and shook his hand, asking about the drive and remarking that this was "the hottest summer on record" (it was always "the hottest summer on record"). Then he shuffled back to his tractor, slowly climbed aboard, and drove back out



into the field.

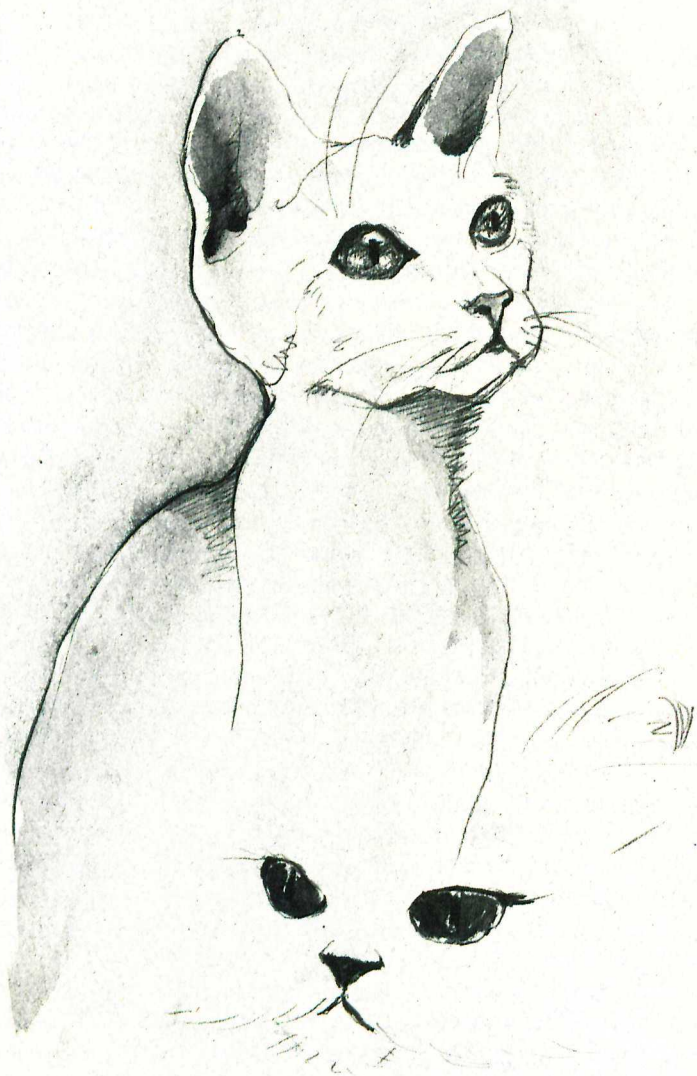
Uncle Maurice moseyed over to tell us about his latest painting, describing in great detail the symbolism represented in it which was obviously so far above our heads. This uncle, a charter member of the counter-culture of the 1960s, was very caught up in the anti-establishment rhetoric of that era. All of his paintings were bizarre, loaded with some esoteric symbolism he concocted in his "visions." He was proud of the patience he displayed while enlightening those who weren't "with it," so he now took his time reciting every particular of the metamorphosis of his most recent work of art.

Uncle Maurice's long brown hair, which always looked like the Andersons had run out of shampoo a little too long ago, hung down to his shoulders underneath the beaded Indian browband wrapped around his forehead. Fringe decorated the front of his suede shirt. Faded blue jeans provided for summer ventilation with their patchwork of holes. Brown leather sandals on long, narrow feet served as startlingly unorthodox work boots. After delivering his monologue, Uncle Maurice sauntered off to finish his chores, calling to Cyndi over his shoulder to join him after dinner on the front porch to sing with him while he played his guitar. It was because of her uncle that Cyndi eventually learned how to play the guitar herself.

The two-story white frame farmhouse, its green trim outlining the peeling paint in a feeble attempt to provide order, faced the east, regarding the barn, corn crib, pump house, and pig pens with a melancholy stare. The farm buildings clustered closely, standing together against any incursion from outsiders. Scruffy white cats skulked about, taking full responsibility for ensuring zero population growth in the mouse and rat families on the farm. Chickens milled about, hoping to find stray kernels of grain to serve as *hors d'oeuvres* to their meager daily rations. Black and white Poland Chinas snorted and grunted as they lolled about in the mud and putrid odors of their foul, fetid pig pen.

The front door of the Anderson house was only used for "real" company. We used the side door, which had a good view of the scraggly raspberry bushes, their thorny stems just waiting for little girl fingers and arms. This door also had a compelling view of the nearby rancid, rickety outhouse. I always said I could smell the outhouse from the corn crib down the road, but my parents scoffed at me (especially my father,





whose family farm this was) and said that I had an "overactive imagination." "Overactive imagination" indeed. Who could forget the smell of the slimy slop that lay buried underneath the sliver-saturated seats of the outhouse, the feel of the dark, dank wood that lay under your feet while you sat, the circumference of the seat encircling your posterior like a bull's-eye?

I was terrified of that outhouse. It was pitch black inside, a tiny two-seater with no ventilation whatsoever, and in the stifling Iowa summer the smell could make you faint even before you opened the door. But what really frightened me was that some day a chicken would come up from underneath while I was sitting in there, and peck me on the behind. I knew this was inevitable—Frankie Hinkle told me so. He said that, when he and his brother were at his grandparents' farm in Minnesota, his brother Jim was sitting in their outhouse and a chicken came up and pecked *him*, so I know it was just a matter of time before I met my own chicken.

I tried to avoid the outhouse. If I knew we were going into town, to church, or to some other farm for a visit, I would try to wait for that chance. But, most often, I would resort to using the white granite-ware chamber pot in the big bedroom upstairs. I didn't know until years later that everyone in the dining room below could hear the clank of the lid and everything else I was doing because of the grate in the ceiling between the dining room and the bedroom above it. Mother said she didn't want to tell me that everyone knew, because I would never have gone back to the farm again. I'm surprised my sister let that opportunity pass her by.

Once inside the side door and into the kitchen, the cold linoleum of the green and white speckled floor chilled my bare feet. I stopped at the water bucket, lifted the ladle and drank the lukewarm water, letting the ladle fall back into the bucket with a loud clang. Grandma scolded me for being so careless, and I ran off into the other room.

The downstairs had only four rooms, the kitchen and bedroom in the back, and the dining room and living room in the front. All of the floors in the downstairs were covered with the same dull linoleum that covered the kitchen floor. When it wasn't cold and clammy, it was hot and sticky. I was apparently the only one who noticed this, for only I ever went barefoot on that farm.

The dining room was huge, with easy chairs and a wood



stove on one side, and a long table and two very large oak china cabinets on the other. Tall windows looked out over the farm, bringing a lot of light into the room, making it the one cheery place on the farm.

The living room was small and dark, with a massive walnut upright piano towering over one end of the room, and a musty couch and chairs nearby that were similarly uninviting. Two windows that could have brought some life to that room were in heavy damask draperies, hanging oppressively over the only means of fresh air. Cyndi spent the bulk of the time she was indoors with my grandparents in the dining room; I staid in the living room, or in one of the two bedrooms upstairs.

On the dresser in my grandparents' bedroom behind the living room was a music box which played "There's No Place Like Home." Over and over I stood in that dark little room, alternately listening to the arguments interspersed with laughter in the dining room and the melody from the music box. The porcelain of the music box was cool and grainy in my hands, and the cold linoleum froze my bare feet.

During the day Cyndi went out with Grandpa on the tractor or picked raspberries with Grandma. Then Grandpa, Uncle Maurice and my father took Cyndi fishing on the river, coming home with pails and pails of bullheads. Cyndi helped the men filet the fish and then assisted Grandma in the kitchen.

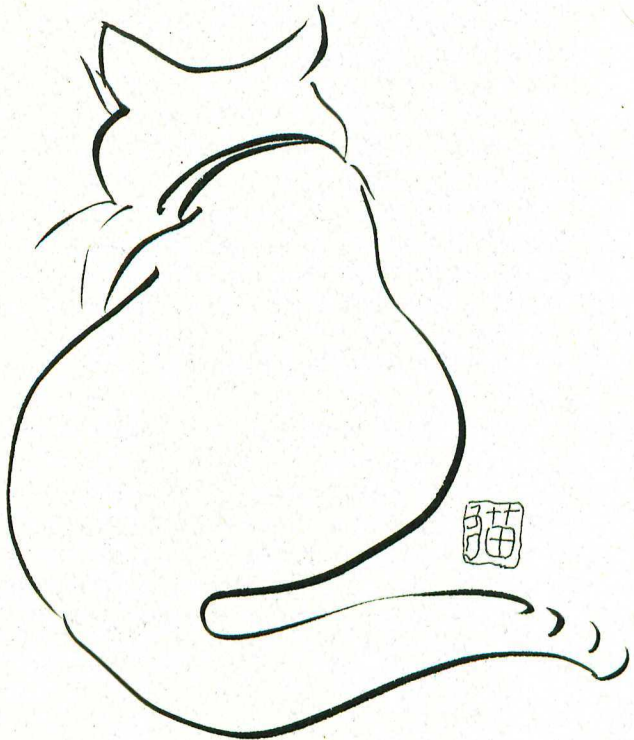
You could always hear Grandma cook. She clanged her pots and pans around, slapped dough on the counter, pulverized any meat with which she came into contact, her shrill voice rising above the cacophony of sound. You could depend on an argument going on in the dining room at the same time as the cooking and, not to be left out, Grandma would enthusiastically yell her contribution and then turn back to her work.

The high decibel level continued at dinner. Grandpa, Uncle Maurice and my father were always engaged in some heated discussion, plates slammed on the table, utensils clattered and crashed against the plates, and always my grandmother's voice penetrated the whole affair. The platters and platters heaped high with steaming bullheads, their millions of little bones hoping to make one last attempt to strike out at man, all seemed to rush at the only person who hated fish. It was as if all of the fish in the whole world had arrived, with their smelly slimy skin, their hated little bones, and their putrid flesh, intent on pushing me even further out of the Anderson family.



After dinner, Cyndi and Uncle Maurice went out to sing on the front porch. I slipped unnoticed out the side door, past the outhouse glaring at me in the twilight, and walked down the little lane toward the mailbox. I stood and watched the sunset, listening to the crickets, soaking in the last warmth of the sun on my arms, feeling the soft, warm dirt of the lane underneath my bare feet. Not until it was dark did I head back toward the house.

Nighttime on a farm should be as serene as a sunset. Not so at the Anderson place. The clank-clank of the hog feeders was a continuous lullaby, daring me to shut it out just long enough to fall asleep. The hogs grunting and chickens cackling, together with the ongoing argument in the dining room below, did not pretend to lull me to sleep. Even the rooster was confused about the time. He would crow off and on all night. You had to work hard at sleep at the Andersons, as hard as you were expected to work at gaining entry to their club. Neither was possible.



## Death On Wheels

---

Melanie McNamara

Hank raced down the sidewalk, his arms pumping furiously, his lungs laboring. He grinned as he whizzed past three blonde coeds, watching them scatter like a herd of long-legged gazelles startled by the sudden appearance of a hungry lion at their waterhole.

He looked back briefly when he reached the door, and all three girls were smiling benignly at him. Of course they would not be mad at him. He gritted his teeth in annoyance, wishing he could have pissed at least one of them off.

If he had been a football player, or even a pencil-necked nerd, they would have been mad. They would have yelled at him, cussed him out, or maybe even flipped him off. Anyone else would have angered them beyond belief zipping through them like that. But not him.

No, him they would never be angry at. They would pinch off their angry words, stay their gestures and recriminations—they would be as saints, but only for him, and frankly, it pissed him off.

Gritting his teeth, he yanked open the door to the computer lab and stormed inside, not waiting to hold the door open for them. No, they would be too grateful. He turned his back on them and headed for the computer lab room.

He was still gritting his teeth when he reached the computer lab, but it was more now from expectation than anger.

Hey, Hank, the lab assistant greeted him lazily as he opened the door.

Hey, Darlies, Hank returned the greeting with some surprise. What are you doing in the lab on a Friday afternoon?

Darlies stretched lankily, propping his feet up on the desk and heaved a sigh. Punishment, my friend, the big man lamented in a woeful tone. Dey is allus gettin de black men to do all de white boyz work. Massah sez I got to be doin work on



de weekend ifn I wanna be keepin dis job. An de college sez I got to be workin ifn I wanna be stayin in school.

Hank chuckled, amused at Darlies' slave dialect. Okay, okay, he said. I just wondered if Darlies the Dude had become Darlies the Dateless.

Oh, the lovely ladies I have disappointed for this weekend, the black man sighed. Lagenia, Kia, Heather, Lisa, Brenda—

There are only three days in a weekend, Hank pointed out. And only *two* nights, he added.

Ah, Darlies winked at Hank. The things I could teach you, my boy.

I'm sure you would, if I weren't in such a hurry, Hank said pointedly.

Darlies made a quick gesture of supplication, bowing his head low to the desk.

Ise sorry, massah. Yessir, dis heres one sorry black boy, he droned. Ise terrible sorry, massah. Pleeze don beat me, massah.

Hank shook his head in laughter. He could never be angry at Darlies. Of all the people he knew on campus, and for that matter, of most of the people he knew elsewhere, he was most comfortable around Darlies.

Darlies flipped the starter disk through the air, and Hank caught it neatly, almost reverently. The disk was his key to a completely different world.

Hey, don't spend so long in there today, Darlies called after Hank's disappearing back. The lab closes at 5 tonight!

Hank barely heard him, already off in his own private world. He settled down in front of his usual terminal and expertly popped the disk in, flexing his fingers while he waited impatiently for the busy light on the disk drive to go from red to green.

Finally, the angry red glow faded to a quiet green, and Hank keyed in his username, then his password. Again, there was a pause, though this one much shorter than the first. The drive made a short, grating noise, and then the cursor flashed twice, just like Hank knew it would.

It blinked once more, this time slower, and a message suddenly popped up on the screen:

GREETINGS, MURIK, HANK L.

LAST INTERACTIVE LOG IN: Oct. 29, 1992

\$



His last log in had been yesterday, but that was no surprise. He was in the lab every day on the VAX system. The dollar prompt was asking him what command he chose to give it. He almost grinned. If only the computer were human; it would never have to ask. With practiced ease, he keyed in his command.

\$ Telnet

There was a blink and a pause, and then a new prompt flashed on the screen:

TEL>

He answered with the code he knew by heart, the one that would actually get him through the door to a world he so desperately wanted to be a part of.

TEL>connect culebra.uccs.edu 2525

There was another pause, and Hank waited anxiously. Suppose someone had changed the code? Suppose they had shut down the line? Suppose—

CONNECTION ESTABLISHED:

Welcome to the Coffee Shop!

Not wasting any time, Hank typed in his name identifier. The minute his connection had been successfully established, the others on the line knew someone from his terminal had logged in. Now, it was just a number, but once he identified himself, others would recognize him, and then....

PIANO MAN SAYS HEY, FLASH! HOWS IT GOING?

WET VETTE SAYS HI FLASH!

JOE COOL PLAYS IT COOL AND SAYS NOTHING

ANGEL SAYS FLASH! \*KISS\*

JESTER SAYS WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

Hank drank up their responses, then thought about Jester's question.

FLASH SAYS GAZELLES!

Hank watched the screen intently as delayed greetings and reactions of confusion to his statement about gazelles flashed past. He enjoyed the camaraderie the others tossed at him, but he was waiting for one in particular....

JESTER SAYS GAZELLES?

MAJIKTHISE SAYS HI, FLASH

THE MASKED BANDIT WAVES AT FLASH

8 BALL SAYS WHATS THIS ABOUT GAZELLES,  
FLASH?

ROGUE SAYS HI FLASH GREAT TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

That was it! Rogue was on line tonight. Flushing slightly at her greeting, Hank ignored the statements about gazelles and the other greetings and typed in a personal to Rogue.

/p HEY MADDIE: WHATS UP?

He didn't realize he was holding his breath waiting for her reply until his lungs protested, making him gasp for air.

/p HIYA, HANK. SHALL WE SWITCH CHANNELS?

/p SOUNDS GOOD TO ME. 16?

He switched channels to 16 to talk with Madeline Cowen, also known as Maddie, alias Rogue.

HEY HANK, I GOTTA MAKE THIS QUICK. I STILL HAVE TO GET MY COSTUME TOGETHER.

SO YOURE STILL COMING? he asked somewhat anxiously.

WOULD NOT MISS IT FOR THE WORLD. AM I STILL INVITED?

ALWAYS, Hank typed.

I HAVE DIRECTIONS. I WILL BE THERE. HOW WILL I KNOW YOU?

Hank shifted uncomfortably. He had known this problem would arise. He gave it a few minutes of thought, then typed in his answer.

I WILL BE IN A COSTUME I CALL DEATH ON WHEELS.

OOH, SOUNDS JUST LIKE A MAN.

(LAUGH) AND WHAT WILL YOU BE WEARING? I PERSONALLY THINK YOU WOULD LOOK GOOD AS A NUDIST.

(LAUGH) THANKS, HANK. IT WOULD BE A CHEAP COSTUME. I WILL BE IN A COSTUME I CALL...NICE ASS.

WOW! I CANT WAIT TO SEE IT!

YOU JUST WAIT. SEE YOU AT MIDNIGHT?

MIDNIGHT, Hank confirmed.

With her usual inattention to niceties, Maddie broke the connection. Hank sat motionless in front of the screen, thinking about the costume party tomorrow night and wondering. Then he switched channels back to the public line.

VIPER SAYS GLAD TO SEE YOU BACK, FLASH  
STORMSHADOW AND WET VETTE WAVE AT  
FLASH.

JESTER SAYS SO TELL ME ABOUT THESE  
GAZELLES....



\*\*\*\*\*

Hank fidgeted nervously in front of the mirror, adjusting his cape and hood just right, hoping they would stay just right on the way over to the Student Union Center. The brisk October breeze would not be kind to his attempt at creativity.

He glanced at the clock, hoping that more than a minute had gone by since he had last looked, but it was still only 11:34. It usually took him about 5 minutes to get to the student U, but if he took his time about it...well, he might as well leave now. Maybe Maddie would be early.

He made his way as slowly as he could, but it still only took him about 8 minutes. The Student U was fairly crowded, and the party was in full swing when he got there. He scanned the crowd, hoping to see Maddie.

Hey Hank, a gypsy from his accounting class greeted him. Hank winced beneath his hood. He waved his scythe menacingly, but the gypsy merely laughed self-consciously and moved on.

Dammit, everyone knew who this spector of Death was. They all saw through his costume immediately. But couldn't they at least *pretend* and give him *some* anonymity?

Gritting his teeth, Hank approached the punch bowl and refreshment table. Under the pretense of enjoying a particularly mushy pumpkin cookie, he scanned the room for someone he could identify as Maddie.

Several punks danced in one corner, and Hank couldn't be sure if they were in costume, or if they had just decided that the Halloween party would be a good one to crash.

Two pirates conversed as they ladled punch into their paper dixie cups; Batman danced with a girl in a gorilla suit—at least Hank assumed it was a girl from the way Batman was holding her; a bum, a ghost in a sheet, a mummy, and another spector of Death all danced together; a donkey clomped around on the dance floor, looking ludicrous as the people within bumped and swayed into others; a scarecrow stood in the doorway, perhaps looking for someone, perhaps just blind behind the pillowcase (with its crooked eyeholes) that served as a mask.

Could that be Maddie? Had she been kidding when shesaid something about the Nice Ass? Maybe her pants had no seat. Or maybe she was referring to the fact that she would

feel like an ass in the costume.

Should he go to her? Should he wait and watch? Maybe he should have never invited her in the first place. Surely she would turn him down. But there was only one way to find out.

Carefully setting down his punch, he started across the crowded dance floor towards the seductive scarecrow. She didn't seem to see him coming—wait, now she was looking toward him. He tentatively lifted a hand, as if to catch her attention.

Just then, the donky blundered into him, knocking him slightly off balance and blocking his view.

Hey, get your ass out of...my...face.... He trailed off. The donkey paused expectantly, eyes staring out at him from deep within the false donkeyhead.

Nice ass, Maddie, he said quietly, forgetting the scarecrow.

The donkeyhead bobbed slightly in acknowledgement. That's a nice set of wheels, Death, came a somewhat muffled voice.

A silence descended that had nothing to do with the fact that the band had paused to switch numbers. Hank cleared his throat somewhat awkwardly, and Maddie laughed a laugh that curiously sounded nothing like the braying of a donkey.

Death on Wheels, she giggled. That's good. Of all the things I had pictured, this was not one of them. She clumsily motioned with one misshaped hoof.

Was she mad? Surely she was disappointed. What would she say? What would she do?

The band started in on a new number, this one louder than the first.

It's kind of stuffy in here! Maddie yelled. Can we go outside?

Hank nodded dumbly, realizing that she at least had the heart to let him down gently, with no witnesses. He turned slowly and made his way through the doors, a path clearing ostentatiously for him.

The cool October breeze was a welcome relief, and though the music was still audible through the open windows of the Student U, it was little more than background noise at the moment.

Oh, this feels much better. Maddie had taken off her donkeyhead and was shaking out her long chestnut hair. Hank



couldn't tell what color her eyes were in the dark, but they were sparkling in the streetlight that illuminated the sidewalk.

Hank decided to follow suit and pushed back the hood of his grim-reaper costume, propping his scythe up against his shoulder.

Who's the back of your costume? he asked to fill the silence.

Oh, it's just stuffed and mounted on skates, Maddie replied. She paused. I've been looking forward to meeting you for a long time, Flash.

Not as long as I've waited to meet Rogue, Hank admitted. I'm not what you...expected, am I, he asked, his voice thick. He waited for her to reject him.

Maddie smiled comfortingly, but with a trace of pity. You're a legend with everyone at Kent State.

Hank noticed without seeming to how she avoided the question.

Maddie nodded. Everyone talks about Flash—you're a hit! We all love your wit and charm. She was babbling now, but her gaze shifted left and right nervously. The donkey looked ready to bolt.

Well, I think I should get back. I'm supposed to meet Batwoman and Viper, too. She paused, her body already turning to head back inside. Are you...coming back?

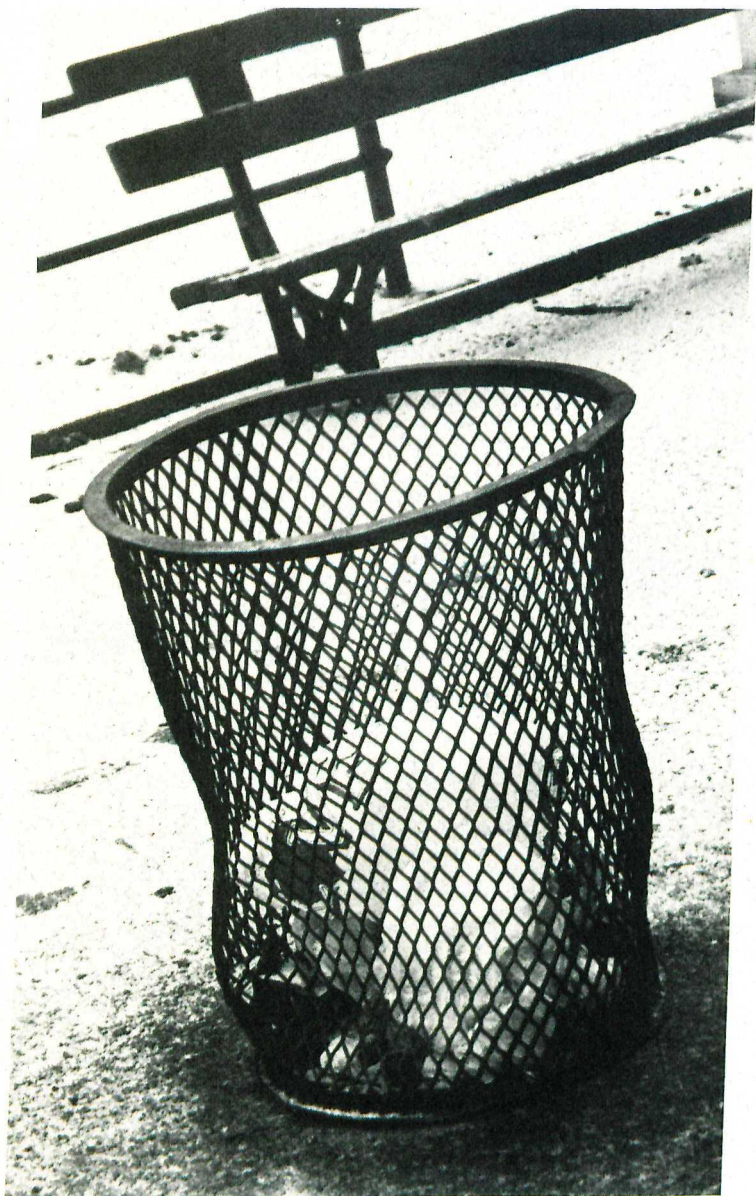
It sounded like she already knew the answer, but Hank shook his head anyway. I've got another party to go to. I just checked in to see my fellow VAX junkies. It was a forced lie, and she probably knew it. He wished he hadn't said it.

What are you going to tell the others at Kent? he asked. It was a foolish question, and he didn't know why he had asked it.

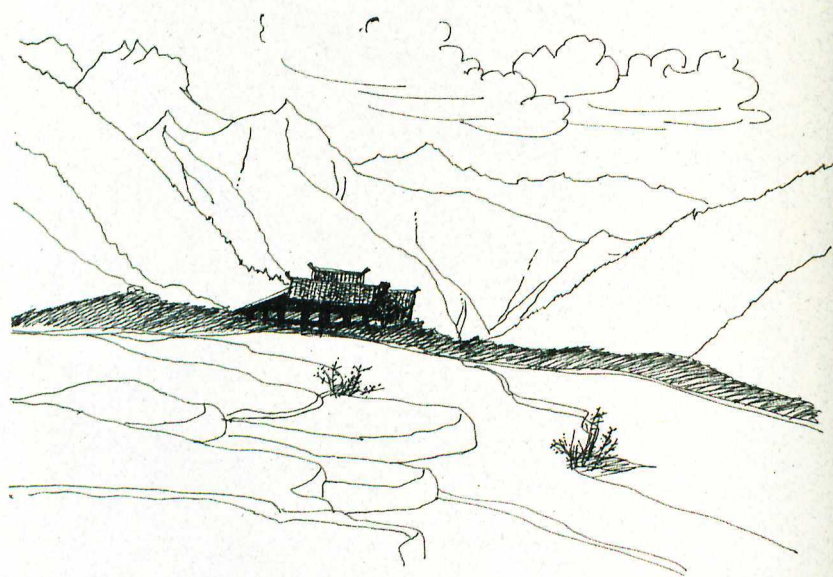
Just that I met the great Flash, and found he was as witty in real life as he is on the screen. Maddie grinned at him, as if he would be consoled by what she had said. He forced himself not to scream at her I don't need your pity! Instead, he offered a little wave goodbye.

Have fun at the party, he offered, but she was already turning to go back inside, dragging the donkey ass behind her. Hank felt as if he should be wearing the donkey costume so he could walk away with his tail between his legs.

Instead, he turned his wheelchair and headed back to the dorm.







Gestus

*I had wondered...what was holding the universe  
from cracking in pieces and falling apart.  
It is places like this monastery....*

-Thomas Merton

*...a choice made now, today, projects itself  
backwards and changes our past....*

-Czeslaw Milosz

only Brother Raphael—  
in the cheese barn since 1954  
when he entered at 32  
now guestmaster—  
knows my name  
forgets it soon after  
he shows me to my room  
#205  
no reputation or relationship  
to moor me

I am a fish  
whose tail and joy  
have hurled it ashore  
flailing, rubbery  
gills fan up  
slum  
slower, slower  
it realizes  
*breathe in*  
arches  
scales sprout thin roots  
it rises, slides  
among the alien trees  
that smile at the sun  
and tuck her to themselves

a grave 4 feet  
from where I've set  
the coffee cup—



true peace in drinking  
near men now soil  
in a stillness made of bones

a small leaf drops—  
let no thought  
hold it in the air

light & leaf  
the garden floor  
rustle scrabble scratch song  
sounds braiding collapsing clinging  
snap of wing  
claws on bark—  
my ear reaches to receive something  
long forgotten  
never absent  
leisurely wakened  
I sit being quietly eaten  
by this energy

too much is made of finding  
being found—  
freedom in being lost  
at last  
without anchor  
aim  
or purpose

shadow-striped wall  
a slight breeze—  
the wall sways  
the shadows stay

a wide path gives to a view  
of urgently ripening hills  
& a vast parquetry

of fields and pasturage  
I hear a sound  
slightly more prolonged  
than the crack of a jawbone  
at its hinges  
follow the rhythm—  
a cypress has died  
& in its slow rot  
has started to topple  
only to be stopped  
in its sideways keel  
by another tree  
green & keenly alive  
the one-note squeal  
is the dead tree swooning  
against the upright one

breakfast coffee in Tim's cup—  
I bring him to my lips  
this way

a door clasp  
a wasp on the path—  
gradually desire loses its appetite  
for itself—  
an eaten leaf  
knee-high wheat—  
the sense-seeking mind drops  
to an unheard pitch—  
flowers nursing at the breasts of a hill  
4 orange moths  
close & open their wings  
on a thin skin of mud  
a web spun between the limbs  
of two pine boughs  
caught to it  
a small dry leaf—  
far off an owl hoots



door slams  
an exit  
an entrance  
no matter—  
either creates the same  
sound & motion

Notre Dame de Melleray, France:  
after 8 centuries  
only so many plots  
in the burial yard—  
when a monk dies  
the oldest grave at the time  
is opened  
the remains are gathered  
& placed in a small box  
which is used to cradle the head  
of his unknown brother

take my ancient body  
eat hip & limb & puckering brow  
vein & palm & bellyplane—  
eat earth whole  
clean & radiant in readiness  
be freely eaten  
your bloodloam washing words  
over bones of white joy

yellowing leaves of a sapling  
move whole  
all at once—  
in a hundred years  
someone will be writing  
of a width  
I shall never see

slow susurrations  
of low-pitched Psalms

sung at Compline  
draw us deeper into the night—  
eyes on the sanctuary candle  
in its clear glass holder:  
body heavy in itself  
mind muttering endlessly to itself  
fidgety flame morrowed to dark wick  
eye to flame to eye to flame  
being received  
taking in  
received  
receiving  
taking taken

an eldermonk  
walks the cemetery perimeter  
I rise to leave  
he turns  
looks straight to my eyes  
says *Stay right where you are*  
entirely  
swings half a circle away from  
disappears through an open door

a scatterbrained rain blows in  
on a hijacked carousel  
flinging moist coins  
to the flowers of children  
with cherished hair  
laughs before the ark of the sun  
& her warrior daughter

before science  
psychology  
prayer—  
water  
dawn  
the willow



long shawls of shadows unroll  
over the hills' shoulders  
fields furrowed like Zen gardens  
& hazed with the dying day's heat  
air aflame with spice  
of earth's cycle  
finches scatter overhead  
beneath a skyspread of truest blue:  
a geometry of timelessness—  
I walk among the well-tended dead  
as casually as I roam with the living  
who carry a book or nothing  
or coffee in a white cup  
shabby bricks of monastery buildings  
beckon with a welcome as fresh  
as their mortar once was

beneath what I have seen  
far beneath the words I have written  
or spoken or read  
beneath the listening  
is a tinder that ignites:  
I have place  
as surely as do the sun  
drowning in its own water  
of fabulous color  
or the woods' wild perfume  
or the humidity that cloaks—  
alone  
I have place  
with others  
I have place  
& proceeding from this place  
I continue to be created  
the ineffable is resident  
in every step  
breath  
& mouthful of food  
I have taken  
there is no existence apart  
from this

Amma:  
meet us  
in the breath we breathe  
which is you  
destroy what is merciless  
seize us—  
we offer straw and dross  
receive them in fullness  
as your own true blood  
& bread  
& face

*There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity,  
a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity  
is Wisdom, the Mother of all, natura naturans.*

— Thomas Merton

**Rusty C. Moe**

\* a sequence of poems written while on retreat at the Abbey  
of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky



Sky Swallowed Smoke  
—for Arad BenCanaan

I

London: destroyed  
created and destroyed  
by the breath of its own exhalations,  
its subjects absorbing and diffusing  
with translucence in their march  
under condensed vapours,  
their cadence.

II

The sun conceals a cloud  
over those certain streets:  
theatricality in costume  
on Shaftesbury,  
and mannequins in doll dress  
on Sloane.

III

An occasional red passed,  
and the occasion was not mine:  
four wheels swirl exhausted smog  
and swallow the bloated corpse,  
a being among the dead,  
that destitute whore  
of coming and going  
never arriving.  
Its route is finite,  
decomposition regulated by routine,  
and this occasion is not mine.

While the pram moves on its own  
until we fall and are born,  
for the first time,  
the sky swallows smoke.

IV

Plummeting is the communal effluvium,  
a genocide reduced to haze:  
precipitation of congestion and density,  
subterranean smog.  
And I fall with those others,  
a drop onto the city  
a step onto this platform.  
And I begin the journey  
from this place to the next  
and there to the other.  
All are the same.  
And I become ingested  
devoured by my own self,  
in this simulacrum corpse,  
this functioning death.  
And I have stumbled ...

V

While buried alive,  
from now to then,  
it never begins,  
and it never ends:  
this fall continuous.

I shall not swallow,  
and I shall not breathe.

Kurt A. Lindsey



*from Outside My Window*

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*John Strott*

MARK

The woods, still and quiet. 5:15. Reverent almost. That sounds like John talking. Reverent. What is reverent now? Not the church. That's for damn sure. And not Father. He's the most irreverent person I know. The way he walks around the house everyday. Mostly half-naked. Wearing only the white fruit-of-the-loom briefs we won't wear anymore. The ones we kept in the top drawer in the bathroom. With a bar of soap. And Father. His baggy sides hanging down over the worn-out elastic band. His skin hanging down. His fat. He was trim when he was young but now he isn't, though he's-- it's-- not really fat. It's old age hanging on him, there at his sides, and he expects respect, reverence, from each of us. From John and me. That's bullshit. But I won't say that to him because we have never cussed around the place or spoken foul and I won't start now. I keep wanting to though. Steinmier would. He says whatever he wants. I respect that too, but Father wouldn't. He doesn't. I know he doesn't.

Snap.

I shouldn't have missed that. How could I step on that twig? That's what thinking will get you in this world. I told John about stepping on things, warned him. All those years ago. Before going to Butler. What? Four years now. And he's working on a Master's. Education is such bullshit. He comes home, wanting to talk about Kant, and he expects that I will want to. Whatshit. Kant. Like Kant ever knew anything about logic. That's what John wants me to believe and he doesn't even know I can tell what he wants when he comes easing up to the porch like he doesn't have anything on his mind. What word does he like? Agenda. Like he doesn't have his agenda. I can't stand the way he wants to force me to do his bullshit things. To think like Kant. That's what he wants.

But the twig. I need to pay more attention to where I am. Walking instead of this thing with watching out for him. And Father. I'm here killing deer. That's all. If you go off with the insane you're likely to become one. John is like that. Off with them, the professors, the insane ones. Claiming they know something I don't or Steinmier doesn't and I'm sick of that bullshit. What does John really know? What do any of us really know?

Not much.

Not the sound of a twig snapping. Those professors don't know the sound of a twig snapping but they know Kant. It would make me laugh if it weren't so durned sick. Not even knowing the world. God. If I could only get John away from that. From that world. If I could get him in the woods again. Like when we were young. But maybe that's not what's good for him. I care so much for him. My little brother. But he has his own life to choose and he chooses that fucking thing in the university. That false, dead life. Like the made up face of a woman in a casket, an old woman. Made up real heavy with lots of make-up and blush and all the things that seem real attractive to a man around here but they aren't and they're artificial like the glass eyes of a stuffed deer. Yes that's what they are. Mounted glass, and he buys into that stuff.

But maybe he's got something. I'm not happy and maybe he is.

The still air. It sits around me. Trees make dark forms. Almost like tall dead wood, shaped right nicely and whittled out into a form, almost human. Dropped into the ground from the hand of God. If I could know that. Standing there so beautiful though. Regardless of my ideas about them or coming to them and they'll be there for years more. Just waiting, standing there on and on and on. If I were a part of that beauty I would rest there too, for eternity. That's intelligence. That's form. All around the valley's lip. They stand there, huge and distant. Making the whole dawn react against them, and the way they stand there is really proud and clear and works.



What a beautiful dawn.  
Nearly gone now.  
It's so light today.

No deer today. I was too loud. But that's ok 'cause I don't have my gun even if I wanted to kill one. But I know they're here and I have my blinds prepared and when the season starts I'll be back and ready.

MA

When will Mark be in? I thought he would be here by now but he isn't. The chicken will get cold. Why can't he remember the time he's supposed to get here? I always could when I was going to my folks. Even after I was married they wouldn't have accepted this. It just doesn't show any concern. Any respect. He's already two hours late in getting here, and when he does, if he does, he'll be mad if I say anything about it.

It's so easy to go wrong with children and I've tried so hard. I think even Wally's tried hard, in his own way. But what a family he's from. A family that worked him from the age of walking until the day he left for the navy. A family, an old German family, who wouldn't care, who wouldn't be able to care, for its own child. That kind of a family.

Like Wally's story about boxing in the barn:

I was out there with Pap. We were standing without shirts. The light filtering into the manger between the wooden slats of the barn and it must have been that lack of light or something about the shadows because when I punched he missed my fist until it hit him squarely on the mouth. His whole mouth moved then. It was all so slow. His mouth moving and his bottom lip almost going at a counterangle to his face. And all of it slow. It all took place so slow. Like somehow god was slowing the film, giving it to me frame by frame. And Pap's face recovered from the blow in an instant. It was no longer angry but hurt and he started to swing at me; he shouldn't have, because we were just playing for fun and we were

not really fighting. That was all the entertainment we had then. No televisions, nothing like there is today and he was angry and it was as though his whole chest exploded in rage at my punch, at me. But I didn't mean to hit him as hard as I had and he hit me again and again and neither of us talked the rest of the night and I would have slept in the barn if it wasn't for Ninno coming out there with a slice of pie wrapped in her apron and asking me to come in and then laying it out, right there on the floor of the barn between the straw and the mud. Then she turned right back around and went in the house.

I guess that violence he grew up with is one reason I've let so much of it go on in our house. With me. Like when I lived with him on the farm. When we were trying to have a normal family and live together but after eighteen years I couldn't take any more of it and Wally still doesn't understand how I can hate and love him like I do for the violence he's done to me. Just like he can't explain the love and hatred he had for his father and I wonder sometimes what his mother Ninno went through out there on the farm with a man like Wally's father loose and raving around her like the worst of the animals and not being able to do anything about it except maybe cooking, baking. And probably even that was something to please him. And Wally grew up watching all of that. A part of it. Himself a part of the whole German darkness, no longer in Germany with Hitler but right here in Indiana, moving itself into a different country. But Wally still must be responsible and, though he never examines it, he just goes on acting. Not thinking. Like he's past the age of ever considering what he's doing. Past the age of ever coming to any understanding of himself or Moe or us or the boys because he can't. He's past that time in his life.

And I think of his mother. Of Ninno. Off in a nursing home which is being paid for with the money that comes from her own bank account. The account which started when the coal company, when Amax, bought their ground. That money sitting there all those years just waiting, as if it knew someday it would get called to pay for the sins of Wally's father. Knowing it is black money and all Wally's relatives want it; they only care as much about Ninno, about mother, as they do about getting their hands on the money themselves. That's why Jim and



Erma have kept her in that filthy, smelling trailer, the mobile home they bought with part of the coal money, until now. Now they've seen she will outlast it. She'll live past the money. She'll live past the money that his whole side of the family wants. Now no one will get it, and she's in a nursing home because no one will take her in except Wally. And not even that deranged woman would come stay with him in the farmhouse. Even at her age. At ninety-three. She still knows better than that. Without heat in the winter and without air conditioning in the summer. Wally keeping it just like the outdoors in there, not caring about temperature, except to stay alive. My oldest son is living in that and only the Lord knows how he will turn out.

Chum worried about that. About what the boys would think of Wally and what they would do when they got old enough to leave home. But I guess it's obvious with John because he's been away at school for so long it's clear he won't ever come back. Ever. Even on holidays he's slow in getting here, always with a reason. A paper for class. An extra day at work. He always has an excuse and I both blame him and I don't. Doesn't he think I've tried. And even his father's tried but we're only human.

But John has forgotten. I fear that's how he deals with his past. With his family. He forgets how things are and how they were. Especially with his father. John seems to get along much better with Wally than me now and I have this feeling that it's because John forgets things and he reads so many books. I think he reads them to forget things. Because he doesn't want his mind here. He wants it off with the poets and *their* stories and not his own.

Like those times in the closet. I couldn't believe he had forgotten that. The times Wally would push me in there, holding my head like a sack of feed. Pushing me in there and half-shutting the door behind him. Our bodies held up only by the pile of dirty clothes in the closet and the rage inside his father. And John coming into the front room of the farmhouse, seeing his father on top of me, hitting me with the back of his hand. Sometimes when I close my eyes I can still see that hand, big and hairy, thick with hair, coming at me. And Wally's rage so strong I thought it would consume both of us inside the sound of the sharp *slap slap* of his hand. Seal us up together there, inside the sound, like being closed up inside the center of the earth, without air or light. Only prayer. John would hear





that, see that, and he would hate his father for it. But now he scares me too, because he's forgotten the reason he started Tae kwon do. I could tell from the surprise on his face the last time he was home. The last time he came to Evansville. When we talked in the laundry room and we somehow started talking about the farmhouse and the dirt and he brought up the size of the closets. We both froze then, and I could see remembrance in his eyes as sure as I could see his truck in the drive. I thought, Dear Lord, don't let him remember, but he did. And it was odd, too, because he was so detached about it, so clinical. Like he was talking in a class. Giving an answer to a professor, saying Yes this is so. Using his mind and thinking, but not feeling, maybe.

Chum worried about the boys and I do too. But I don't know who to worry about anymore. Them or me. I worry most because I'm alone. Even without my John who was always with me, at my side.

#### FATHER

Two wars I've been in. The Korean and the Second. And Pap was in the First. The things he must have seen. I still remember him sitting in the kitchen. He would have his hands on the table I bought for Jim and Erma at mother's auction. He would look at me and talk about those years; they were so real to him that I almost wondered if he wasn't still living them somehow. Rubbing his hands together, talking into the air, at me really, telling about dodging into holes the artillery made in the ground. Telling about running from one hole to the next. Praying to God that he could make it. That he could find the hole soon enough. That he could spot it with his eyes and that his legs could carry him there over the rough terrain. He was even in the Argon Forest. He was there when it was empty, dead of life. Even the trees were dead. He said they were like toothpicks in the earth. No leaves. No bark. Everything touched by the fighting, by the bullets, by the shelling that went on. It's incredible that he could come back from something like that and live here normally. His mind was so strong. His will. It must have been to go through that.



That's like me, though, and Bill. I'll set the photo down by the lamp. It looks new there in the light.

I'll give it to John when I see him. Sara and I will go up there soon. Two weeks. Maybe. I should call her tonight and find out. He's started to ask me about the war. And we get along so well now; I don't know why really. If it weren't for this darn thing with Mark. It's funny how children turn out. I always thought John would be the rebellious one. The one who most likely wouldn't even get through school. But he got his degree at the same time Mark graduated. The exact same time. And Mark is nearly two years older. John even, come to think of it, got his diploma three weeks before. And Mark didn't even go to his own graduation. But he was sure happy to go up to John's. We did push Mark hard to be a doctor, I guess. But if there's one thing I'll say for his mother, it's that she wanted the best for her children. She didn't want them to end up like all the blacks and be on welfare. Having others supporting them. She wanted them to have the best education they could get. If we pushed Mark too hard, it was only because of that. Who would have imagined he would turn out like he did. Hating me, not going on to be a doctor, and staying out here on the farm in his old room. Why, he won't even let me get in his refrigerator. But he'll sure look through mine when I'm not there. He thinks I don't know it, but I can tell when he's been in there. And leaving his clothes all around the house. Mad if I even comment on them, let alone touch them. He would sure go crazy then.

Is the stove coming on?

And Mark won't even talk to me like I'm a person. After all I've done for him. Bought him two vehicles. A car and a new truck. Well, each of them new. What doesn't he get that he needs? He has it all. That's the problem.

Salt.

And all that staring he went through. Dad would've kicked me in the head if he caught me staring like that. Holding up my fingers all the time, just looking at them, going off into some kind of trance. Staying like that for who knows how long. Out by the barn or in the back bedroom. For hours sometimes. And

when I'd say something to him to get his attention he'd get so angry. Like I was the one.

No, not enough. A little more.

....Pap telling me how of a morning he would get up and shake the dust off his clothes. Brushing it off of his arms. Pretending like it didn't exist, I guess. That would probably be the only way to deal with it. To deal with the colored dust they were breathing. He told me that some of the men who went into battle wouldn't wear their masks because they didn't want to and they died. Right there on the spot. Colored gas in their lungs. Can you imagine that? I never want my boys to go through something like that. It would kill me. I told John when he was home about Pap and the stories he told me about the dust and gas during the war. We didn't face that in the Second. It was more like the Japs trying to sink our ship. With their insidious one-man or two-man submarines. Coming underneath us in the water. And it doesn't matter how big a boat you're put on if the hull goes. All the time we spent waiting. And knowing either a kamikaze pilot or sub would be coming for us. Invisible. Except for radar. We should have been able to pick them up on radar. At least that's what we were told, but who knows? And then when you found them you would have to shoot them before they got to you. Mark would really have done some staring then, if he had been through that.

WACO

She was born with the Texas dust  
under her fingernails; Daddy always carried  
bottle of sour mash in one hand  
leather belt in the other; Mama waited  
patiently at night by  
the window reading Gideon's and  
whispering softly.

Married right out of school to Bill she bore  
four children one miscarried; yellowing  
yearbook pages a collapsing figure that's  
all she wore as Bill  
hit the bottle and became  
Daddy. And she was Mama.

And then they met the Savior and His  
Church.

Yes He showed them the way yes He  
forgave them their sins and taught about how  
they will serve Him and the  
sacrifices they must make  
to be saved and join him in Heaven after  
the soon-coming Armageddon.

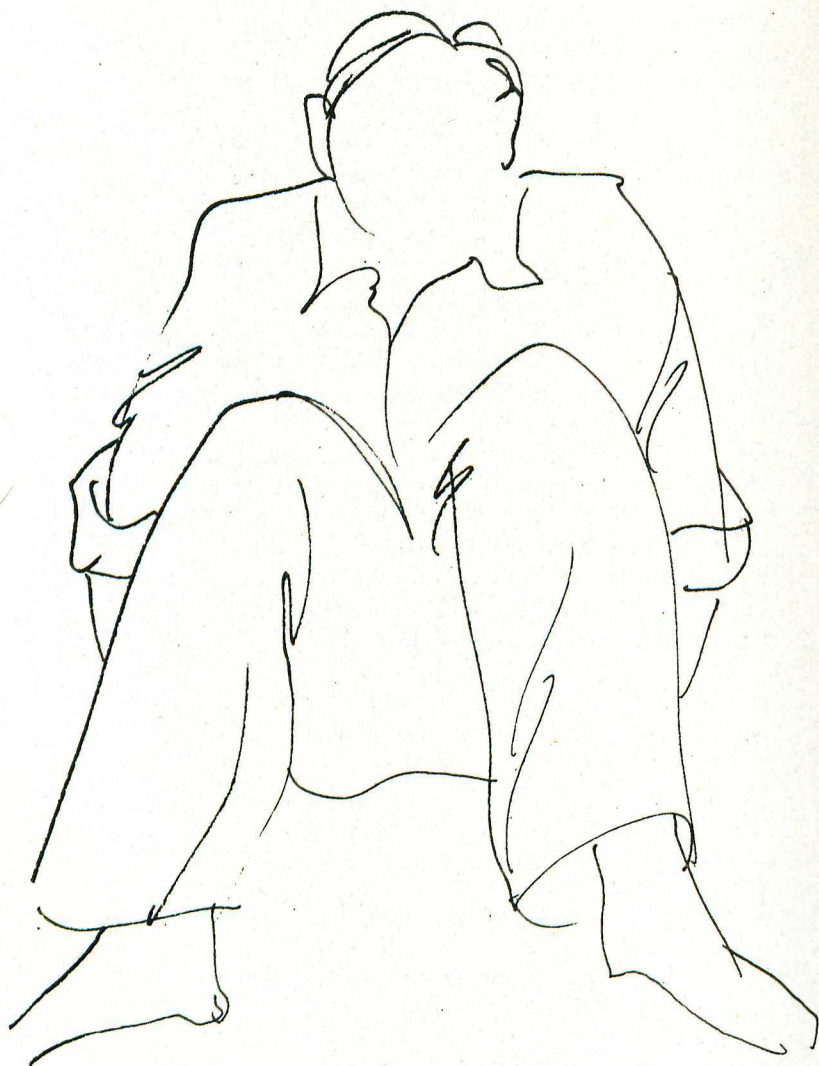
Something about that Texas dust settles  
deep into the blood of animals and  
starts a storm.

Listen.  
Listen.

(A storm is at the back door.)

Nathan Houston





Katabasis\*

Love does not  
give wing to anguish,  
but lies beside it  
in the same dry nest.

Rusty C. Moe

*Katabasis* is a Greek word that means, in essence, to go down under, into the darkness and tears and grief of all things.

### Orphan

I saw it  
on the path  
embedded in the cool mud,  
a can  
half in and out of the ground  
as if rooted,  
sprouted from a seed,  
spawned by the great maple overhead,  
or, perhaps, by the four-leaved ivy  
that sprinkled the ground,  
straining upward,  
arms open to emptiness;  
the can knows it does not belong,  
its cool red faded to pink,  
the letters  
in white  
barely visible in the shadows  
of the living canopy above,  
the wind breathing through the green.  
The can is nestled into the ground  
like a baby into his blanket.  
It is here in this natural world of living things  
that I pause to consider how the earth has  
adopted this cast-off, disguising it  
embracing it in her mud arms,  
giving it a home,  
raising a child that will not grow,  
'til the rains cover it in a heavy blanket of soil,  
and it sinks deeper into its unmarked grave  
of dirt and green and brown moss.

Shannon Murphy



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## Lost and Found

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*Tiffany Myers*

LOST: Bubble eye

Abraham only lived with me in my dorm room for two weeks before he started swimming upside down. He was my pet goldfish, so named after the fish that Arnold Jackson had on the TV show "Diff'rent Strokes." Abraham was an awkward black fish with shiny silver scales on his belly, and oversized pea-shaped eyes placed conspicuously on top of his head. His aquarium was made to look like a candy apple red bubble gum machine, and instead of the usual little flakes of gravel that cover the bottom of fish tanks, Abraham had possession of twenty or thirty small, round rainbow colored plastic beads. They were probably toxic, but at least they looked like gumballs. Immediately after I discovered Abraham's penchant for swimming upside down, I realized that it wasn't the sign of a healthy fish. I thought that maybe if I changed his water, he would regain his sense of gravity. But when I scooped him out of the water, he flipped out of the bright green mesh net and bounced onto the sink with a sickening slappy noise. When he hit the white ceramic, the pressure of the counter against his diseased gills caused his left eye to fall out. It just blew out of his eye socket, completely intact, like a misfired pellet from a B.B. gun.

FOUND: The Peanut Song

As I scuffed my untied royal blue Nike along the white chalk line that separated the forbidden goalie box from the rest of the playing field, I spotted Heather peering out from the goal's netting. Even though she was a girl, the boys had reluctantly decided to let her play the goalie position because she was the tallest kid in school. Turning to me, she began to belt out these words to the tune of "Clementine":

Found a peanut, found a peanut,  
Found a peanut last night.  
Last night I found a peanut,  
Found a peanut last night."

When she was finished, we both shook with laughter, and hardly paid any attention when Arron Vaughn (who was earlier spotted in a controversial playground make-out session near the sandpit tire swing with Lorrie Lennon) slammed the ball into the weather-worn netting behind the goal.

LOST: Lopped off at the knuckle

I could hear the girl who lived across the hall from me in Schwitzer Hall giggling and screeching, toying with her boyfriend by trying to slam her bedroom door in his face before he could get inside. She must have accidentally slipped her finger into the crack near the hinge, because when her boyfriend finally wrenched the door open, she wasn't laughing anymore. The heavy wooden door snapped effortlessly open, and sheared off the top third of her pinkie with it. It came off cleanly, right at the knuckle.

FOUND: Hard bone against soft wheat

Inching down the rickety wooden steps that led into my great-grandmother's basement, I felt my way along the cool cement walls until I reached the metal door of the storm cellar. Darting inside, I blindly felt around in the blackness above me for the string that would turn on the overhead light bulb. Grasping it with my thumb and forefinger, I clicked on the soft yellow light. Instantly, my eyes fell on a dusty beige plastic object lying atop the middle shelf. It was a prosthetic arm, complete with a rusted metal hook and a rod used for grasping. I ran upstairs, forgetting to bring up the jar of strawberry preserves that I had been sent to retrieve. Laughing at my wide-eyes and gasping breaths, my great-grandmother rested her doughy hand on my shoulder and explained that it had belonged to my great-grandfather who had lost his upper arm in an accident with one of the farm's threshing machines.

LOST: Amidst the angels

When we were freshmen, my friend Mike and I were borderline binge drinkers, hooked on Southern Comfort. One night, as he was walking me home from an evening filled with bitter "So-Co" and cokes, we collapsed on the grass in front of Ross Hall. Laughing, we ran our bare arms in the dew-moist grass, and moved our legs in crisp scissor motions, as if we were makingsnow angels. They were grass angels. Green grass



angels. The next morning, Mike told me that he lost his watch back on the lawn where we had been flailing around.

FOUND: The jig is up

The gentle creaking of the wooden staircase outside my bedroom warned me that my father was on his way upstairs to kiss me goodnight. Dreading the moment that he would crouch on the edge of the bed and singe my forehead with the heat of his lips, I entered into my nightly ritual of avoidance. With lightening quickness, I scooped the books off of my bed, scrambled to flick off the lamp, and wound my frilly lavender comforter around my head. Despite the pounding of my heart, I made an effort to make my breathing appear deep and even. My father swung open the door to my bedroom and stood rigidly in the darkness that swam around the doorway staring at me until I could feel his eyes pressing into my back.

"I know you're not asleep," he whispered calmly. "I always know."

FOUND: There's coal in them thar hills

The floor of the woods was canvassed with gray-green mosses that sprouted up silken green tendrils towards the bleak midwestern sky. The creek (or, "crick", as my grandmother called it) stretched endlessly past the trees, and wandered down the muddy slopes with nowhere in particular to go. Above the creek was a twisted gravel road that connected the nearby highway with a cornfield of dried parchment leaves that touched the outskirts of the trees. I walked down this road almost every day. There was always something new to see: the giant brown slug-like mushroom that was attached to the trunk of my favorite silver oak tree (we affectionately referred to it as "The Humongus Fungus"), the family of red-eyed salamanders that lived inside the drainage pipe near the creek, more cat-o-nine tails than the eye could see. Once, instead of looking around me, I looked down at my feet. Interspersed with the chalking chunks of gravel were jagged pieces of black coal, almost the size of my thumbnail. After I found that first piece of coal, it became a habit of mine to kick around the dusty gravel, trying to overturn pieces of coal from their hiding places.



LOST: Runaway

The entire inside cavity of my body felt hollow, like a Halloween pumpkin, scraped raw and made ready for carving. I knew something was about to happen. I could see it in the deep and angry lines that furrowed my father's forehead.

"You forgot to fasten the dog's chain this morning," he said. "Muffin's probably gone for good this time."

I bit my lip and tasted blood.

FOUND: A budgie suicide

My brother's friend Doug Strickwerda gave us his pet parakeet when he moved away to Wisconsin. The bird was a sickly yellow-green color, and always squawked and tried to peck me whenever I attempted to get close to it. His name was Cisco. We kept him in a metal cage on a windowsill in the back room of the house, because nobody really wanted to be around him. I was the one who found Cisco when he died. It was my turn to change the newspapers at the bottom of his cage, so I crept quietly up to the windowsill with a ragged issue of *The Visdette Messenger* in my hand. I even held my breath so that the bird wouldn't wake up and try to peck the flesh off the bones in my hand. I didn't have anything to worry about, though. Cisco had hung himself by flying through the rope that connected his slice of dull ivory cuttlebone to the cage.

LOST: Hand me downs

After polishing off my second piece of marble fudge cake on my sixteenth birthday, my mother pulled me aside with tears welling up in her soft brown eyes. Gently fingering the hem of her silky blouse, she shyly handed me a small purple velvet box. I snapped it open to reveal a gold ring with a rectangular black stone that had a tornado embossed on it. "It's my high school class ring," my mother explained proudly. "I've waited a long time to give this to you." The ring fit loosely around my right index finger. I wore it proudly until I lost it the next week while playing Field Hockey in my seventh period gym class.

FOUND: Basement indiscretions

The colors of the painting were the bright hues of summer: fireblaze orange, lemon yellow, azure blue, and the vibrant green of fieldgrass. They stood out in the uncharacteristically drab basement like unexpected wildflowers creeping out of

cracks in patches of caked, parched earth. Tugging on my mother's manicured hand, I pulled her down the smooth, dark steps to the storage room. My bare feet slapped noisily against the moist floor as I drug her over to the dusty corner of the basement where the painting had lain.

"See, mom? Here it is. I told you there was good stuff down here." My mother narrowed her eyes and examined the painting. The yellows, blues, oranges, and greens were brushed on in small fierce strokes, representing different colored leaves on an autumn tree. She raised her arm and gently touched the frame of the painting.

"Your uncle Billy painted this when he was about your age. That was the year before he died." With that, she abruptly dropped the painting, manipulating it so that the bright canvas faced the patchy gray wall. "I don't think you should show that to your grandmother."

LOST: An absentee father

Every summer when I was young, my family would take a trip across the country to visit relatives in Iowa. That year, my father didn't go with us because he said he was too busy with work at the office. He was a chiropractor. He was always busy. After the sweaty, sticky, uneasy ten hour drive to Storm Lake, Iowa, my brother and I tried to relax by swinging back and forth on my Aunt Teresa's splintery front porch swing. We drug our feet and drank grape Kool-Aid from A&W Root Beer mugs, while my mother answered a phone call from my father. He told her that he was sorry, but he didn't love her anymore and that by the time we drove back from Iowa, he'd be moved out. We cut our two week vacation a little bit short that year.

FOUND: A peanut

It took six hours for the girl who lived across from me in the freshman dorm to get the stump where the top third of her pinkie used to be sewn shut. Once she finally made it back to the dorm, her roommate glanced in the corner of their room and saw the severed pinkie lying discarded in the center of a pile of dustbunnies near the front door. Later, she told me that it looked a little bit like a circus peanut.



FOUND: The Muffin Man

Looking down at the smeary wooden table between us, my mother began to speak softly while tracing the pattern of the wood grain with her index finger.

"I don't know if I should be telling you this, but I think you need to know the truth," she sighed. "When your father told you that Muffin ran away... Well, that isn't quite the way it happened. He went to the pound, honey. Dad drove him there himself."

LOST: The games people play

My great-grandmother Miser always wanted to play Chinese Checkers with me. But try as I might, I never could stomach watching her play the game. It took so much of her concentration to decide which of the marbles to scoot across the board, that her expression would twist into a sort of doughy grimace. Her hands were knotted with age, and it took a great deal of effort for her to pick up the slick marbles. As she grasped the tiny brightly-colored spheres between her thumb and forefinger, her hand would shake with the force of her concentrated effort. And she was never able to lower the marble into its slot on the board. She always dropped it, causing it to make a hollow ping as it landed in its metal compartment. One evening before she had a chance to mention the upcoming game, I snuck into my great-grandmother's closet and grabbed the Chinese Checker board. Looking over my shoulder to make sure that no one was watching, I carefully slid the box under a floral print sofa in a forgotten back room. Later, when my great-grandmother started to rummage around in the closet for the game, she confusedly turned to me and apologized, not understanding how she could have possibly lost her checker set.

LOST: The taste of home

My brother and I stood motionless, frozen in time as the jumbo family economy-size jar of Prego spaghetti sauce rolled slowly off the precipice at the edge of our beige mini-van's open hatchback. It fell to the ground with the shattering of glass and a sickeningly wet "thwack." My mother, who had witnessed the whole scene, threw the bag of groceries that she had been carrying onto the lawn.

"Why weren't you paying attention? We don't have the money to throw away food like that! Who do you think

pays for all this? Your father? No. I do. I do!"

Here eyes, glassy with thick tears of frustration, snapped closed. Without another word, she regained her composure and walked straight into the house. My brother and I were struck paralyzed. The heavy scent of garlic and fresh peppers filled the air. Unable to move, I looked down at my new white tennis shoes and noticed a tiny stain of tomato sauce near the right big toe.



## Exit Wounds Are Big

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Stephen L. Rose

Driving north on State Road 3 into New Castle, I heard about the murder-suicide and smiled. A man, angry at his wife for leaving him, had shot her, and then blown his own head off while the children stood in the kitchen watching. I was working as a pre-med student at the local hospital, I was twenty-one years old, and I wanted to see blood. It was my third week in the Pathology lab. I had followed Dr. Shelly like a shadow, nodding my head and saying "Uh-hmm" at the appropriate times while Dr. van Kula told me stories about the old days. I used to sit on a black stool, carefully watching Barb screen pap smears; I stood over the small glass vials, staining slides with hematoxylin, but at that time I only heard stories about the thing that I really wanted to see.

"I remember one autopsy," Barb would start, "the guy had been dead for two weeks when they found him. I even thought I might get sick."

The stories never stopped. It was by far the most excitement that reached the Pathology Department, and my anxiety grew with each gruesome tale. Being an undaunted Quincy fan and having read many books by Dr. Michael Baden, I was well versed in the glories of forensic pathology. The time of death could be estimated from the body temperature or from the developmental stage of larvae deposited neatly in the corpses' nostrils. Strangling could be proven from the explosion of tiny capillaries in the eyes. Baden described his most famous cases: the determination of John Belushi's lethal dose, and the stunning von Bulow murder. Dr. Michael Baden had become a medical cowboy to me, outwitting both the enemy and his peers, always one step ahead and following the right trail. As I slid my time card into the digital clock, it was 6:55. Five minutes early- just as planned. I bobbed down the hall, bouncing on each foot. Suddenly, I had become Baden. I was ready. Murder-suicide- Bullshit! I'd find the real story. I'd know just where to look- check for lividity, blanching, rigor



mortis. Look at the eyes, and check for the hallmark bruises of a skull fracture. Dr. Shelly would be amazed, and I might even earn Dr. van Kula's respect. No, I *would* earn his respect. No longer would I have to hear about autopsy stories; this would be my story, my day. Just who the hell was Quincy anyway?

I hadn't gained a minute. Dr. Shelly was ready to pounce on me, and threw books and terms at me in amazing speed. Some books I had become familiar with and said so, but others, more technical, were also assigned.

"I'd like a three page report on gunshot wounds by 10:00," she said. "We're still waiting on the X-rays. We'll start at 10:30."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, having lost some gusto.

"In the meantime, go to surgery and get some scrubs."

"OK. Thanks, Dr. Shelly," I said, as I was getting up to leave. When I had all the books secured in my arms she added as an afterthought:

"You may need some shoe covers."

"Thanks," I said again.

I took the books into the tissue lab and set them at the desk. Barb was smiling. She knew I wanted this, and waited until I passed to look up from the microscope.

"She put you to work early, huh?" she said. "This is a big one."

"It's about time," I said. "I didn't think I was gonna get to see one."

"Shelly says we're only doing her. The sheriff wants a bullet match."

"They're that sure he did it?" I asked, realizing what a feeling it would be when I found out the real story.

"Yep. Kids saw the whole thing." Barb said, looking at her feet.

It was quiet for a moment, and then I turned my chair around and began to study the easy texts that Shelly had given me first, for review. Entrance wounds are small; exit wounds are big. Always check entrance wounds to see if the bullet was tumbling. That means that it hit something else first. Check entrance wound powder burns: small diameter burns for a close range shot; larger diameters for shots from further away. Know the bullet trajectory; find its path and reconstruct it. I moved on to the harder texts, toxicology tests to match powders, tissue burns from the bullet, and various descriptions of bullet

types and their signature wounds. I paraphrased most of the three pages, and spent a great deal of time staring at the black and white photos of gunshot wounds. Each location on the body had its own section: gunshot wounds to the head, to the chest, to the arms, to the back.. Each photograph was digested by my eyes and filed somewhere in my head. I would be able to identify these things for Dr. Shelly, tell her how she was shot and at what distance. At 9:00 I closed my books and walked down the maze of hallways to the Surgery department. I followed the red, blue, and yellow direction arrows painted on the floor tiles, but never once felt my feet touch them.

The charge nurse ushered me through the doctors' lounge and into the room where the scrubs were kept. They were light green and stacked in piles according to size. I grabbed an X-large shirt and pants and the nurse left me alone to dress. The scrubs were worn and comfortable. They hung from me as an old coat would hang from a scarecrow, transforming me from the all-white look of a student into the hurried, scrubbed look of a doctor. I stuffed my white pants and shirt into a locker, folded a pair of shoe covers into my only pocket, and found my way back out of the department. I felt good; I looked good, and knew it. The people I passed looked at me with submission, strangers said "Hello" as they offered sheepish grins, and single women gave me seductive smiles. I was a doctor, or so they thought, and at no other point in the last twenty-one years had I so desperately wanted to be one.

I knew I had time to spare, so the X-ray department seemed like a good place to spend it. There were girls there looking for rich husbands, and women far beyond my age looking for bragging rights on the young future doctors. The pre-meds all knew this, and each one loved it. Right or wrong, we spent a lot of time there flirting with the technicians, absorbing every trace of desire that they let escape as if it were some incredible redeeming potion. I strolled through the waiting room, fully conscious of the stares and whispers of old women as they tried in vain to identify this new young doctor.

"Whoa, look at Dr. Rose," Heather squealed. "Did you come over to doctor us?"

Heather and Angie looked at one another laughing. "He looks like a doctor, doesn't he?" remarked Angie.

"Uh-hmm." Before Heather could get these words out, I felt her fingers close tightly, and pinch the bottom of my ass.



"Shit! You are completely nuts!" I screamed.

By this time they were both cracking up, leaning against the thick plastic handrail that ran along the hospital walls, then doubled over covering their faces. When Heather settled down, she asked, "Oh, I bet you're doing that autopsy today."

"Yep, 10:30. Dr. Shelly's still waiting on the films."

"Tina and I just finished them. They're in the processor. My god is she big. It took both of us and two policemen to position her on the film," said Heather, holding her short arms far apart to add dramatic effect.

We made our way into the processing room and Angie pulled the 8x10 X-ray films from the plastic tray at the bottom of the large, brown Kodak processors. She walked to the horizontal row of square fluorescent reading lamps, and snapped the pictures under the lock one by one. We stood close to them, staring, pulling even closer, then backing away. The ribs and vertebrae were white, and we could vaguely see the shadows of her skin and organs. One bullet shone brightly within her lumbar vertebrae, and another hung precariously just under the skin of her right breast. The last bullet appeared to be sitting directly inside the curve of her aorta.

"Got her in the boobie, baby!" Heather said, pulling the films down.

"Guess the one through her aorta got her, huh?" Angie followed.

"Guess so," I mumbled, already working out where the entrance wounds were, and from which direction she had been shot.

"I'm takin' these films to Shelly. You comin' Rose?"

"Yeah, right behind ya," I said, and followed Heather back to Dr. Shelly's office.

I stopped in the tissue lab to pick up my report, and Barb was already suited up. She even had her shoe covers on and a large plastic apron tied around her to protect her scrubs. She filled a small brown tray with stainless steel tools: scalpels, scissors, a long butcher knife, and a small circular handsaw. I pulled the report from under my stack of books and made my way into Shelly's office. She already had the films up on her reading lamps and, without even turning to me, said, "So which one was fatal?"

I was flustered and afraid of embarrassing myself, so I gave Angie's answer, although I could hear Dr. Baden and



Quincy echoing in my ear that there was more to this death than the obvious let-on.

"The one in her aorta," I finally answered.

"In the aorta? Does that look like it's *in* the aorta to you?" Dr. Shelly looked at me with a strange mixture of amusement and pity. "Actually, it's sitting outside the chest wall. Probably held up by a rib or it would have gone through. That one killed her though- not bad."

She motioned me to sit down as I handed her the report. She thumbed through it slowly, reading every line, examining it as a cat might examine a mouse. When she finished, she said, "Good, I expect you to help me now."

Ha! Help! I couldn't believe it. I was going to run the show. She'd see. I was ready, primed, and my muscles were tensed. I was saddled up and ready to ride.

"What else are we looking for here besides a bullet match?"

"I don't know," I answered, once again stumped, and silently cursing myself for my own stupidity.

"Cancer, pregnancy, HIV, any sign of active disease. The husband may have killed her for a number of reasons, and a plausible one might be that they both planned it. It's imperative to check her hands for powder burns- she might have killed herself, or even shot at him first. The police report says that he shot her in the back three times, and then shot himself once in the head. Are you ready?"

I said that I was, and she yanked the X-ray films from her reading lamps. We met Barb in the hallway and walked toward the morgue. It was located in a small room near the back entrance to the hospital; the first door on the left for easy hearse access. One large refrigerated locker sat against the left wall. It was stainless steel and had large handles located in the middle of its two doors. On the right wall were some cabinets and a large sink. At the center of the room was a large white table lined in stainless steel that tapered to a drain in the middle. The corpse lay atop metal buckles that held her above the sink and allowed the blood to flow into the drain correctly. There were two policemen leaning against the locker. One was in plain clothes and carried note pad and pen. The other wore a two-tone brown polyester uniform; a Canon AE1 35-millimeter camera hung around his neck from a multi-colored cloth strap. The coroner, a tall man with an enormous stomach, stood at the

head of the table in a dark suit and tie. He ran the largest funeral home in the county, and looked tired and bored this morning. I took my place next to him and became overwhelmed by the smell of fresh lilies.

"Hi guys," Shelly said, in her I'm-really-not-this-stuffy voice that she reserved for strangers.

They all said "Hello" and resumed talking about baseball, corn, and county fairs. I stood among them for a few moments, until Shelly finally introduced me as a "young doctor-to-be." I liked the title and felt my shoulders straighten a little under the soft green scrubs. Doctor-to-be. Wait till they see me, I thought: my hands opening the bullet trajectories, my eyes carefully studying the wounds, checking and re-checking. Then, finally, I'd find something- anything- that they'd overlooked and point it out modestly, all the time realizing my own sheer genius.

"OK, let's get started," Shelly said, approaching the corpse with a long, sterile scalpel. I finally began to study the dead woman. Heather had been right, she was big. Not big, but enormous. Large rolls of cold fat fell over the sides of the autopsy table, and it was hard to distinguish where one of her legs ended and the other began. her face was round and chubby, and her hair was a dirty blonde that just began to show some gray. There was dried blood under each nostril, and a small streak of it running from the left side of her mouth. One eye was completely closed, while the other lingered partially open as though she had just awakened and stumbled out into the kitchen.

Shelly's blade cut a deep Y starting at both shoulders, meeting at the sternum, and extending down to the fringes of her pubic hair. She retraced this cut a few more times and peeled back each half of skin. Large yellow fat globules clung to every crevice of her torso. I could see her rib cage held together with large red muscles, and below that, her abdomen, masked mainly by the large tortuous intestines.

"We'll start with the chest first," Shelly said. "Barb, hand me the snips."

Barb handed Dr. Shelly a small silver tool that resembled a pair of wire cutters, and Shelly began to work the ends around the bottom right rib. The next sound I heard was that of bone crunching. It sounded like a hollow twig breaking, and I saw that the rib had splintered under the snips. I turned away and



looked at the coroner, then the policemen, but they were oblivious, seeming not to even notice.

"Damn!" Shelly said. "These things are dull. Steve, do you want to see if you can get these for me?"

"Sure," I said, trying to sound eager.

I moved to her side of the table, getting another whiff of the lilies as I passed the coroner. She placed the bloody snips into my gloved hand, and I focused my attention on the next rib. I tried not to look at the corpse's face as I clamped on the next rib and squeezed the handles down hard. The blades were dull, and I tightened my grip as I twisted the rib back and forth, finally hearing the horrible crunch and splinter, and the deep hollow sound as I broke through. I began to sweat and lost my concentration. I felt as if I were torturing a neighbor's cat, feeling afraid I would get caught. Things felt wrong. I was no longer Dr. Baden, no longer the medical cowboy. The chambers to my guns were vacant, and a strong wind had blown the ten gallon hat from my head, putting it to rest in the dust. I was playing with a dead human the way a boy might play with a dead dog along the highway: poking, prodding, all the time afraid that the dog might spark back to life and catch him in the act. I regained control of myself and finished cutting the rest of her ribs, but I never shook the fear that my mother might soon open the door and rebuke us all for our behavior.

When the chest plate was removed and set upon the corpse's knees, the police photographer went to work on the heart. He moved around the three different angles while Shelly held the heart and used a silver probe to show the point at which the aorta had been severed. She placed a small plastic ruler next to the wound while still more photos were shot. The policeman then took a few pictures of the bullet that had lodged ventrally in her chest before Shelly extracted it, and dropped it into a small Ziploc baggie. Dr. Shelly cut all around the heart, slicing the vena cava, aorta, and both pulmonary vessels. She shook the heart over the sink until all the blood had drained and then dropped it into a large metal pan that hung from a round white scale. Barb recorded the weight, and Shelly rattled off the height and width of the heart just as she began to make long, thin slices through it. She stopped after each one and held it in her hands, feeling for anything unusual.

"This is called loafing," Shelly said to me.

"You cut through each organ like a loaf of bread, looking

for any abnormalities."

Barb saved one slice from the heart in a large metal bowl, and put the rest into a clear plastic bag. One by one, all the other organs were loafed, and each time a small section was saved in the bowl for cellular analysis. Dr. Shelly didn't find anything unusual, but she never stopped instructing me. She explained how each organ functioned and how the tissue design played a part in it. I pulled on the short, thick muscles of the heart, and she explained that the small, round nodes in the lungs were "histos." These developed as a result of the disease called histoplasmosis, which nearly everyone in the Midwest would catch at one time or another from pigeon guana. When she opened the gall bladder, her face lit up and she said, "Ah, what beautiful stones. Barb, save these for the students."

She dumped them in my hand. They looked like large kernels of seed corn suspended in dark green bile. As I placed them in a plastic urine sample vial, she was halfway through the chemical formation of gallstones, losing me quickly with her catalog of knowledge. I was overwhelmed by the information, frightened by the sight, and when she opened the intestines, I became a little sick from the strong smell of vomit and excrement that seemed to draw the scent of fresh flowers out of the coroner's suit. Like a cowboy wearied from saddle sores, I was humbled to see the reality of forensic pathology. I knew that my swashbuckling autopsy voyage was not going to take place. The body was not just the victim of a crime that needed to be solved, but there was something more that continually brought my eyes to her face. I couldn't get over the fact that this was, or had once been, a person.

"Damn, it's not in there," Shelly said, as she dropped a small dorsal portion of the spine into a large, vacant space where the intestines once lay.

"Maybe it's more ventral. Steve, could you hold her shoulders up for me?" Before I knew it, both of my gloved hands were pulling hard on the cold shoulders, trying with everything to hold the corpse up.

"A little more," Shelly said.

After a heavy tug, the large dissected flaps of fatty skin that used to be her breasts slid from the table into my lap. Shelly hadn't seemed to notice, but I thought I heard the policeman laughing.

"Feel at L4. Can you feel my fingers?"



"Yeah," I said, running my fingers along the spine.

"Damn. Still nothing there. I'm gonna go a little deeper."

I looked back again at my lap. I could feel the blood dripping from her open chest onto my shoe cover. It felt like rain dripping from a gutter in a summer thunderstorm. It made a smart splatter with each drop on my covered sneaker.

"Am I through? Am I through?" Shelly was shouting.

I looked up in time to see her white gloved finger wriggling through the hollow abdomen.

"You're through," I said in a weak voice.

"Shit! Still nothing. The God-damned X-ray shows it at L4. We'll have to go lower."

The circular handsaw whirled to life, and I once again smelled the gritty bone-burned air that reminded me of a dentist's office. A few moments later, Shelly succeeded. The bullet had melted into the smooth curves of one vertebrae. She held it up proudly before placing it into yet another Ziploc baggie that the plain-clothes officer handed her. The policeman looked tired, and disappeared quickly after collecting the last slug. Barb handed Shelly a large curved needle tied to a thick white string. Dr. Shelly began stitching up the Y incision nonchalantly. The stitches were horribly uneven and looked gross and macabre. For an instant, Shelly looked like Victor Frankenstein laboring over the monster, toying with life and death, performing unspeakably grotesque deeds under the cover of a dark room. The boundaries had become blurred. Life and death no longer seemed as distinct as before, but were now meshed in a long intricate tapestry. I felt that I had tampered with some natural law; crossed some hidden line not meant to be crossed. The face of the corpse was with me for days, always asking me, "Why?" Why had I decimated her body, sliced through her spleen and uterus, collected her gallstones in a plastic urine container? I had no easy answers for that image of a face, and none for myself. Questions of an afterlife came upon me like waves, pelting me harder each time I was left alone with them.

My cowboy outlaw days were over. I could no longer gallop headlong into the unknown, brim pulled low, spurs pinching the black animal beneath me. My pistols would no longer be cocked back hard, ready to jolt forward. The wind had blown the dust from my eyes; the sun shone down hard

that afternoon. The realities of autopsy glimmered clearly for me then, and distinct images radiated brilliantly before my eyes: the dead victim's face in a horrible crime; a woman, a daughter, and a mother.



### To Illustrate a Point

Take, for example, a test tube; its long body  
Straightening up for science, the tight curve of its bottom  
Under lab lights, and the slender clarity with which  
It conducts itself in all matters. It knows nothing  
But the utmost propriety and etiquette,  
The need to be exact, dutiful without question,  
Devoted. And yet it is infinitely happy  
To be a test tube, flaunting simple graces,  
Its struggle, the feminine struggle:

How to be recognized as both  
spirit and intellect, rather  
than as an object of beauty?

Then take Dr. Kornberg of the Nobel,  
Biochemist, who tunes in to the world  
Of DNA and enzymes, listening for the voices.  
Who loves the test tube, who asks it daily  
To hold in its womb those fantastic concoctions  
Of Dr. Kornberg. His large hands  
Move across its surface at play, a slight shake  
Or a swirl, and its insides begin to dance...

No more doctor, no more doctor! whatever it is,  
It is growing inside me and I can't take it, the electricity,  
The populations of enzymes going to work at last,  
Like so many migrant workers on the railroad,  
Laying down tiny tracks, one molecule at a time.

Where does it lead, where does it lead? Is this  
What they call the Westward expansion, doctor?  
I can see them bringing in the railroad ties  
One by one, the sweat on their brows  
Their Latino smiles. A group of Chinese  
Are driving in the spikes; the Irish  
Are resting. I think they are singing, doctor,  
Can you hear them?

"Quiet now, quiet," says Dr. Kornberg.  
"No chit-chat during the experiment;  
I am trying to hear what they are saying."  
In a moment, the scientist  
Holds the test tube closer, gently strokes  
The long back and whispers to it,  
Half expecting the thing to smile.  
Cups his hand over the mouth of the test tube,  
And inverts it, admiring the vessel from every angle.

Such objects, crafted with technological perfection,  
Make the good doctor feel young again! The river inside him  
Begins to flow, and the girls  
With their soft cheeks from high school, and the young noses,  
Return to him as pictures, voiceless, attractive.  
His memory begins to moisten.

But doctor, your experiment...the enzymes...  
They have chosen a leader and are organizing.  
I think that they are dissatisfied. Is this  
How you will be remembered, doctor?  
As being unconcerned with employee welfare?

But those young girls, suspended there in his imagination,  
So far away now, and discussing politics in the cafes  
Of New York. Not the way he remembers them,  
As figures with bright smiles and shine,  
Their posture, and if you could only touch them,  
Then the thrill of discovery. Not like here,

In a micro-world, where Dr. Kornberg, his scientific mind,  
Calculates and contains himself, remembering at the end  
Of each work day, to close the mouth of his test tubes  
With a tight cap, and place them on the storage rack,  
Like so many objects of his affection.

Mark A Clements





## Running With Scissors

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*Tiffany Myers*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Abby Martin, 23

Pete McDonald, 23

The action occurs in the apartment of Pete McDonald and Abby Martin. It is Sunday morning, around 9:00 am. The time is the present.

SETTING: This is a typical low budget apartment, encompassing only a bathroom, two bedrooms, and a multi-purpose room which functions as living room, dining room, and kitchen, all rolled into one. From the audience, all that can be seen is the living room/dining room/kitchen area, and closed doors which lead to each of the other segments of the apartment. The furnishings of this room are sparse: a tacky thrift store couch and beaten coffee table being the only essential parts of the set.

As the play opens, the audience sees that this apartment is obviously in more disarray than usual. The kitchen sink is piled with dishes, the couch cushions are misaligned, and the coffee table is covered with overturned wine bottles, two empty glasses, and a large stack of magazines. By all appearances, a celebration of some sort seems to have taken place here. Articles of clothing are also strewn haphazardly across the room. The conspicuous presence of a pair of men's boxer shorts on top of the lampshade, and a women's brassiere draped across the arm of the couch further suggests that something more has taken place here.

(As the lights come up, we see Abby Martin stumble out of her bedroom. She is wearing a bathrobe pulled tightly around her body, and moving with the cautious steps of a person with an obvious hangover. As she stops to survey the condition of the



apartment, she moans slightly and makes a frantic attempt to gather up the clothes that are scattered about the apartment. Her arms full, Abby opens the door to her bedroom, tosses the clothes inside, and slams the door. As she crosses back to the couch, she turns her head, suddenly aware of noises coming from Pete's bedroom. As the sound becomes clearer, we are able to distinguish Pete half singing /half humming a gaudily ornamented, completely cheerful version of Beethoven's "Ode To Joy" from behind his bedroom door.

Her hand to her head, she makes her way toward the kitchen. Opening a drawer, she takes out a bottle of aspirin and begins to fight with the child-proof cap. Finally opening the bottle, she counts out two aspirin into her hand and opens the cupboard to get a glass. Finding none, she systematically begins to open every cupboard in the kitchen, ultimately realizing that every glass in the apartment is lying dirty in the sink)

ABBY: (To herself) I told Pete it was his turn to do the dishes! What does he think I am? His maid? His mother?

(She stares at the sink, stares at the aspirin, shudders, and pops the pills into her mouth. Gingerly, she begins to chew as her face twists into a wince.

As Abby is wiping off her mouth with the sleeve of her robe, Pete bounds into the room from his bedroom. He is obviously in a good mood. He is wearing nothing more than a pair of brightly colored boxer shorts and a terrycloth robe which is untied, hanging loosely at his sides)

PETE: Morning, Roomie!

(Pete crosses over to Abby and whisks her into his arms. Abby's body remains limp and unresponsive as Pete throws her back into an exaggerated dip. As he moves to kiss her on the throat, Abby attempts to squirm from his grasp. She succeeds in escaping his embrace, and tumbles backwards onto the floor)

PETE: (Moving to help Abby up) Whoops, there!

ABBY: (Refusing his hand) I can do it myself, thank you.  
(She stands)

PETE: (Shrugs) Have it your way. (Pete crosses over to the kitchen)

Hey, you want some breakfast? My treat, Ab.

ABBY: No.

PETE: (Oblivious) I could really go for some pancakes.  
Oooh! Waffles! Waffles with butter and syrup and...blueberries.

ABBY: (Abruptly) I said no, thank you.

PETE: (Ignoring Abby's protests, Pete begins to rummage through the refrigerator and the kitchen cabinets, pulling "ingredients" from the shelves.)

Of course, I'm not too sure what we've got left in here. Let's see... What can we make with mayonnaise, marshmallow fluff, and beef noodle soup?

ABBY: (Exploding) I said no! No breakfast, OK?

PETE: Geez. I guess someone got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning.

ABBY: (Muttering under her breath) Got up on the wrong bed is more like it.

PETE: (Not hearing her, as he is clanking around in the kitchen, busily opening a can of soup)  
Hmmm?

ABBY: Nothing.

(Abby watches Pete noisily grab a pot out of the sink and pour the soup inside. He is clearly making much more racket than Abby's hangover can stand)

Pete, what are you doing?



PETE: Making soup?

ABBY: It's nine o'clock in the morning.

PETE: What? You want some too?

ABBY: (Crossing over to the stove, she switches off the burner and removes the pot of soup)

Don't, Pete. Just...don't.

PETE: It seems to me that somebody here is just a little bit crabby this morning.

ABBY: Crabby? I'm *crabby*? After last night, all you can say to me is that I seem crabby this morning? Let me tell you, Pete, "crabby" doesn't even begin to describe what I'm feeling right now.

PETE: Oh...I get it. A hangover, right? That's tough. Myself, I *never* have hangovers. I'm one of the lucky ones, I guess. I can just drink and drink and...

(He examines the bottles on the coffee table)

Boy, we really did drink last night, didn't we?

ABBY: Three bottles.

PETE: Three bottles. It was quite a celebration.

ABBY: That's what I thought it was supposed to be.

PETE: What does that mean? Don't tell me that you didn't have fun last night. You sure looked like you were having a good time to me.

ABBY: I'm going to let you in on a little secret here, Pete. *Anyone* who drinks three bottles of champagne is going to look like they're having a good time.

PETE: Right. So what's the problem?

ABBY: You know very well what the problem is.

PETE: Abby, I don't have the faintest idea what you're talking about. Oh, wait a minute. If you're talking about the dishes, I can explain...

ABBY: You have an excuse for everything, don't you, Pete? And, no, even though I can't believe you forgot to do them again, I am *not* talking about the dishes.

PETE: Then what's the problem?

ABBY: Oh, I see. That's the game we're going to play now. You're just going to play little Mr. Innocent and pretend that last night didn't happen.

PETE: What? I'm not trying--

ABBY: That is just like you! You seduce me, and you don't even have the decency to apologize. Typical.

PETE: Whoa! Hold on there! Could you run that last part by me again? The one about the seducing?

ABBY: Don't try that with me, Pete. I'm not stupid. I know when I'm being seduced. And last night was a classic seduction. I don't know why I didn't see it then. God, I am so stupid! I come home to find flowers and champagne waiting for me, and I actually believe you, Pete, my roommate and supposed friend, when you tell me that you just want to celebrate my first article getting published? I can't believe I didn't see through that. None of my other roommates ever gave me flowers and champagne.

PETE: Abby, you used to live with two other girls.

ABBY: That is not my point! Don't change the subject. We're talking about you and how you purposely seduced me.

PETE: I did not!

ABBY: You did too!



PETE: I did not! You seem to be forgetting that I was there last night, too. I know exactly what happened.

ABBY: AHA! So now you're admitting that you did this on purpose. It wasn't the champagne, was it? You've been planning this all along. Oh, yes. Everything's clear to me now. I finally get it. You've just been pretending to be my friend all of this time, hoping, waiting, for the right opportunity. You probably only agreed to share this apartment with me to get me into bed with my room next door to yours.

PETE: (Sarcastically) Oh, that's it Abby. Yes, sir, you've really hit that one right on the head. Ever since I met you our sophomore year in college, I've been secretly planning for last night. For the past five years, I've been pretending to be your friend so that I could wait until you got your first article published, get you drunk, and jump on you so that the next morning I could ignore you. Jesus, Abby, you know me! You know that I don't have the patience to go through five years of foreplay.

ABBY: Look, I don't want to talk about this any more. We both know what happened last night, and we both know that it's never going to happen again. It was wrong and we both know it.

PETE: Wrong? Why was it so wrong?

ABBY: You know as well as I do that there comes a certain point in a relationship where sex is too...weird.

PETE: Thanks.

ABBY: You know what I mean.

PETE: No, I don't think I do know what you mean.

ABBY: I mean, this is not something I need in my life right now.

PETE: And how I feel doesn't make a difference.

ABBY: Oh, don't give me that. This should be quite a relief for you, me ending things like this. Now we don't have to go through that awkward stage where we tiptoe around each other pretending to be happy.

PETE: Forgive me for throwing some reality into this situation, but is this your idea of happiness? What's your idea of ecstasy? Throwing punches?

(In an attempt to break Abby out of her mood, Pete playfully boxes around her. In the grand tradition of Muhammad Ali, he bobs, weaves, and jabs in the air next to her.)

Abby remains motionless, trying her hardest to appear unamused)

PETE: Aw, come on, Ab. (Pete offers a feeble smile, and Abby giggles in spite of herself)  
By George, I think she's got it! (Pete punches Abby lightly on the arm)

ABBY: Hey! (Abby returns his punch, only with slightly more force)

PETE: Hey! (Pete hits her back even harder)

ABBY: (This makes Abby furious. Not playing anymore, Abby punches Pete on the arm with all her strength)

PETE: OW!

(Pete rushes toward Abby. Thinking that he is about to kill her, Abby gives a shout and attempts to move away from him. However, she doesn't make her move in time, and Pete forcefully grabs her by the shoulders and spins her around)

ABBY: If you lay one hand on me, so help me, I'll—

(Abby is unable to finish her sentence, as Pete stops her mouth with a kiss. Caught off guard, Abby succumbs to Pete, and begins to put her arms around him. Suddenly realizing what she is doing, she shoves Pete away)



ABBY: (Wiping off her mouth) That was completely uncalled for.

PETE: (Confused) But...I thought...

ABBY: You thought wrong. Haven't you been listening to me? I'm not going to let you do that to me again.

PETE: Abby, I don't think you're being fair.

ABBY: Fair? I'll tell you what isn't fair. It isn't fair the way you used that cute little boxing trick on me. Did you think that I would find that even remotely funny?

PETE: Well, maybe a little...

ABBY: Well I didn't. Besides, Pete. You know as well as I do that this is no time for jokes.

PETE: (Recovering) That's where you're wrong. A little humor is exactly what this situation needs. But not on my part...

ABBY: Let me get this straight. You're telling me that I don't have a sense of humor?

PETE: Not about this you don't. In fact, you don't have a sense of humor about a lot of things. About most things. Really, Abby, you need to lighten up.

ABBY: What?

PETE: You heard me. You can't stop analyzing things long enough to just sit back and be happy for awhile.

ABBY: I do not over-analyze.

PETE: You do so! And you're just about the least spontaneous person I've ever met.

ABBY: And I thought you knew me.

PETE: But I do know you. I've know you for five years, Abby, and never in all that time have I ever seen you do something the least bit reckless...Until last night, that is. And the truth is, you can't handle it.

ABBY: So you're telling me that the key to my happiness lies in just letting go and doing something crazy?

PETE: Yes!

ABBY: Something crazy, like, oh I don't know...Throwing away my college degree in psychology to join a band? Would that do it?

PETE: What are you trying to say about my band?

ABBY: Oh, nothing. Lovely bunch of fellows, really. Whose idea was it to call the band "Fleshy Bologna," again?

PETE: It was mine, and I don't see your point.

ABBY: You can dish it out, but you can't take it, eh Pete?

PETE: I can take it, all right. I've been taking it from you ever since we moved in together. I've been listening to you spout off about my joining that band for so long, that I can't even hear the words anymore. It's like a song. Abby's little song that she keeps playing over, and over, and over. But now that we've finally got all this out in the open, I think it's your turn to listen.

ABBY: I don't see what you could possibly say that would justify throwing four years of college away on a whim.

PETE: A whim? Is that really what you think?

ABBY: Well it wasn't exactly a shrewd financial decision.

PETE: Maybe not. But I'm something that you can never be while you stuff yourself behind that receptionist's desk all day.

ABBY: What's that? Happy?



PETE: No, not happy. Happy is too easy. Puppies make you happy. Finding five dollars in the street makes you happy. I'm talking about something more important. I'm talking about...fulfillment.

ABBY: You sound like my father.

PETE: I sound like *my* father. But I'll worry about that one later. I'm on a roll here. Now, here's my point. What are you?

ABBY: Excuse me?

PETE: I mean your career. What do you *do*?

ABBY: I'm a writer. You know that.

PETE: Aha! If you're a writer, then what are you doing answering phones all day?

ABBY: I work for a publishing firm.

PETE: You're a receptionist for a publishing firm. You don't work for them. There's a difference. See, a writer writes. On the other hand, a receptionist only has to look good in a short skirt.

ABBY: (Flattered) Do you really think I look good in a short skirt?

PETE: Are you kidding me? But that's not the point. A great visual, but definitely not the point.

ABBY: What are you trying to get at, then?

PETE: It's simple. Why are you settling for a job as a receptionist when you call yourself a writer?

ABBY: Pete, I have enough reasons to wallpaper my bedroom.

PETE: I take it you're talking about your rapidly growing collection of rejection slips.

ABBY: Yes, and thanks so much for reminding me.

PETE: Stay with me now. Why do you think that your writing gets so many rejection slips?

ABBY: I would hardly say that I get "so many" ...

PETE: Whatever! Now listen to me for once. I'm trying to tell you exactly what your problem is. You don't get this kind of opportunity everyday, you know.

ABBY: Let me get this straight. You're going to tell me what "my problem" is?

PETE: Right.

ABBY: Well, by all means, enlighten me.

PETE: I think I'll do just that, thanks. Your problem is that you're a lousy writer.

ABBY: What did you just say to me?

PETE: You heard me. I said that you're a lousy writer. But I've recently come to a very important realization about you.

ABBY: A realization? About me? Why bother if I'm so lousy? God, Pete, I can't believe you're saying this to me. I thought you were my friend.

PETE: I am your friend. That's why I've been keeping quiet about this for so long. For the last five years I've been reading your stories and watching you get your rejection slips, biting my lip the whole time, dreading the day when I would finally have to tell you how lousy you were. But the funniest thing happened the other day. This article. The one you got published. I read it and I realized an important thing: You're a lousy writer...with potential.

ABBY: Potential? I've been working on becoming a writer ever since I read my first Dr. Seuss book, and now you stroll along and inform me that all I am is lousy...with potential? This is all I've ever wanted. I even took that crummy receptionist job right out of college so that I could have more time to write.



(Composing herself) Why am I even listening to you? What does your opinion matter, anyway? I'm published now.

PETE: Lots of lousy writers get published.

ABBY: Oh, sure. Now I get it. You're jealous.. Ha! You're absolutely green because I'm actually good at something. Admit it! You've finally realized how empty and pathetic your life really is. You're nothing but a second rate musician in what barely even passes for a band. You just can't stand living under the same roof as a published author, can you? Especially when it's a woman, right? Classic. This is so classic. You're attacking my writing because you're intimidated by my success.

PETE: Abby, you only got one article published. One article doesn't make anyone a success. Especially not *that* article.

ABBY: Oh yeah? What suddenly make you an expert on the arts? You don't even know how to play an instrument.

PETE: I'm working on that. What are you doing to fix our lousy writing?

ABBY: I don't have to take this from you.

PETE: No, you don't have to take this from me. But you're going to. Now look at this stack of magazines here. Twenty-three copies of your first published work lie here on this table.

(He thumbs through the magazine on top of the stack)

Here it is. Called *Running With Scissors*. So what's it about?

ABBY: It...It's about...

PETE: Yes! It's about passion, and risks, and danger, and above all it's about having the courage to forget all of your mother's warnings and daring to take a pair of scissors out of the drawer and run around the sofa with them pointing straight towards your heart. I didn't make this up, mind you. It's all right here. (He taps the article)

And it's all right *here*. (He taps her head)

But Abby, for God's sake, it just isn't *here*. (He taps near her heart)

This is a good story. The best I've ever read from you, in fact. But how do you expect it to have anything more than "potential" when you don't put any of yourself into what you write. You write about passion, and risks, and danger, and running with scissors, but you've never done it. How can you expect anyone to read this and feel emotions that you're too afraid to feel?

ABBY: I resent that. Just because I don't choose to take risks everyday doesn't mean that I'm afraid to.

PETE: Oh, really?

ABBY: Really.

PETE: Then do it, Abby. Do it!

(Pete rummages in a drawer for a pair of scissors and thrusts them towards Abby)

Take them! Prove to me that I'm wrong!

ABBY: (Abby reaches out a hesitant arm, but abruptly pulls it back)

This is crazy! Why are you doing this?

PETE: (Frenzied) Come on, Ab. It's not hard at all! See, watch me.

(He runs around the couch with the scissors, making wild cutting motions in the air)

(Taunting) I'm running, Abby! I'm running with scissors!

ABBY: (Unable to stand it any longer) Stop it, Pete! Stop it!

PETE: (He stops abruptly, dropping the scissors)



That's what I thought. You just don't think you have it in you, do you? Well, I have some news for you. We've been best friends for five years. I've lived with you since we graduated. I know you better than you think. I know that more than anything, you want to be able to bend down and pick up those scissors. I know you want to let go, Ab. That's why you're so mad at me about last night, isn't it? Last night you let go for once in your life and forgot to worry about the consequences. I didn't make you do anything you didn't want to do last night. You wanted to run around the couch with scissors, and God help me, I let you.

ABBY: That's great Pete. Just great. I can't believe that you're telling me that I should be happy that I lost control last night. It was the worst mistake I've ever made in my life. Don't you see? Everything's changed now.

PETE: What do you mean?

ABBY: You know what I mean! A nightmare. That's what this is. It's like one of those dreams where you run and run, but you never can seem to get away from whoever's chasing you. Only, I can't just wake up and go on with my life. This *is* my life.

PETE: Abby--

ABBY: No! Don't you get it? After five years of friendship we slept together. Now how are we ever supposed to have a normal life? We live together, for God's sake. We have to face each other every night and every morning.

PETE: What's wrong with that? Just because we're sleeping together doesn't mean that we're not still friends.

ABBY: We are *not* sleeping together. We slept together. Do you catch the difference there? It's in the past tense.

PETE: You're such a writer.

ABBY: Ha! Some writer I am. You even said it yourself. You think I'm some sort of control freak in my writing? What about my life? I need to have control over the events of my life, just

like I do over my writing. But now there's nothing I can do. I lost control and let something happen that never should have. It's over and done with. I can't exactly rip the last couple of pages out of the typewriter and start over again. It's too late to start over again.

PETE: This is what I don't understand about you. Why do you think that we have to start over again? I know that I'm crazy for saying this, but I want things to work out for us.

ABBY: "Us?" Oh, I see. Now we're an "us," are we. You see? This is exactly what I didn't want to happen. One night of sex--

PETE: Incredible sex.

ABBY: All right. One night of fairly incredible sex and you think that you own me or something. I want my life back, Pete! I don't want to have to worry about dating someone I live with. I can't! It's too hard!

PETE: I don't see what would be so hard about it.

ABBY: Ok. For instance, how am I supposed to bring back dates to the apartment now?

PETE: In all the time we've been living together, you've *never* asked one of your dates back to the apartment.

ABBY: But what if I wanted to? And worse yet, what if you decided to bring home one of those... "friendly"...girls from one of the various dives you're always playing at? Do I pretend like nothing ever happened between us? Do you pretend like nothing ever happened between us?

PETE: I would never do that to you. Jesus, you're neurotic! And I do believe that you're forgetting one more important detail about last night. You kissed me first.

ABBY: I most certainly did not!

PETE: You kissed me first, and you know it. So there's no way I'll let you put the blame on me for last night. Why? Because I was not the one who did the kissing.



ABBY: (Accusingly) Oh, you didn't, did you?

PETE: Well not at first, at least. But the first kiss is the important one. I never in a thousand years would have laid a hand on you if you didn't do it first.

ABBY: (Grudgingly) Well, maybe I did...start things. But it was your fault for letting things go as far as they did! You should have known that I was drunk! I didn't know what I was doing.

PETE: You knew perfectly well what you were doing. I can't believe that you'd accuse me of taking advantage of you.

ABBY: So you're telling me that you've never thought of me...in that way...before last night?

PETE: Well...sometimes. But that doesn't mean that I planned any of this. You know, when you first suggested it, I thought that this whole living arrangement thing was going to work out just fine. Even though I sometimes thought about you...in that way...I convinced myself that we could just be friends. That was the way it was supposed to be. But, no! You had to go and ruin everything with that little flannel bathrobe of yours.

ABBY: What?

PETE: You know what I'm talking about. That robe. Ever since that first morning we moved in together, you've been prancing around the apartment in that little flannel bathrobe of yours. How is a person supposed to concentrate on friendship when you walk around looking like that? No one is supposed to look that sexy in plaid flannel.

ABBY: (Defensively) Oh, yeah? And what about you? You don't even have the decency to cover yourself.

PETE: Cover myself?

(Realizing that she is speaking about his open robe, he wraps it around himself, belting it securely)

ABBY: Much better. I never could understand why you insisted on flaunting yourself around the apartment like that.

PETE: Flaunting myself? Oh, that's rich.

(As he delivers the next speech, Pete moves toward the kitchen. Talking all the while, Pete grabs the bottle of aspirin, pulls off the lid, and shakes out a handful of pills into his hand)

You know, you'd think that a person with a degree in psychology would be able to handle a relationship with a woman. Just one woman. How hard could it be? People do it everyday. It's just, "Hi. How are you? Great. Let's go out." No problem, right? But, no. I have to go off and pick the single most incomprehensible female on the planet to start up with. Start up. Jesus, that makes you sound like you're some sort of car or something.

(Without even attempting to look for a glass, Pete pops the aspirin into his mouth and effortlessly begins to chew them up. He delivers the next line with his mouth full)

Gentlemen, start your engines!

ABBY: How can you do that?

PETE: What?

ABBY: That! *That!* That's the reason we could never be a couple!

PETE: Because I spout off extended metaphors about cars? I don't even know why I did that. I hate cars. I don't understand how they work, either.

ABBY: No, no. That! The aspirin! It only goes to prove my point that we are totally incompatible.

PETE: Forgive me for not following a word you're saying.

ABBY: No. It doesn't matter anymore. I don't care if you follow me or not. As of this moment, this discussion is over. Do you hear me? Any type of relationship between us is completely



out of the question. The best thing for us to do is to just pretend like nothing ever happened last night. We'll just clean up this mess, and move on with our lives. Above all, you are *never* to mention a word about last night again.

PETE: What? Where did that come from? You're the one who seems to want to fight about this. This isn't a problem for me, Abby. God help me— when I woke up this morning i was actually happy about what happened last night. Silly me, but I thought that our relationship was going somewhere.

ABBY: Relationship? The only relationship we can possibly have now is strictly business. I need a roommate to split the rent. Even though I have every right to throw you out on your ear after last night, I have to let you stay. So all I need from you is the rent money at the end of the month. Not your so-called friendship. Not your opinions. And certainly not your bed.

PETE: You're not being reasonable.

ABBY: I'm not, am I? Well, I don't expect you to understand.

PETE: You're the one who doesn't understand. Can't you hear what I'm saying? If you think I'm going to barricade myself in my room until you decide you need me again, you've got another thing coming. I'm not like your typewriter. You can't turn me on and off whenever the mood strikes you. This is not over, Abby. Much as you'd like it to be. I'm not going to let you leave things like this. Don't you know what last night meant to me? It wasn't just sex, it—

ABBY: I thought we agreed never to talk about this again. I don't want you to say that word around me again. Not around me, not in reference to me, not in spite of me. Never! Now leave me alone! Please!

PETE: Fine! If that's what you want, fine! (He heads for the door)

(Playfully) But I can't help it if it makes you crazy to think about...SEX!

ABBY: Shut up.

PETE: Sex!

ABBY: Shut up!

PETE (Simultaneously) ABBY  
Sex! Sex! Sex! Shut up! Shut up, shut up!

(A moment of silence. All appears to be calm, as Pete starts to make his way to his bedroom. On his way there, he stops close behind Abby)

PETE: (Whispering) Sex.

(Abby shrieks in frustration and heaves a throw pillow at Pete, who has made a beeline for his room. He makes it to his room in time, and the pillow bounces harmlessly off the closed door)

PETE: (Poking his head out the door)  
Missed. (He slams it shut again)

ABBY: (Fuming, Abby throws herself down on the couch. She groans and places her head on a pillow near the arm of the couch. Trying to relax, she reaches her hand under the pillow to find a more comfortable position. Feeling something underneath the pillow, she confusedly pulls out a small piece of fabric. Shocked, it dawns on her that she has pulled out a pair of her underwear.

She holds the underwear in the air in front of her for a moment, too stunned for words. Finally, she begins to chuckle. These chuckles then become all-encompassing laughter. By all appearances, Abby has lost her mind)

PETE: (Overhearing Abby's laughter, Pete stands near the doorway, watching her. Abby remains unknowing of his presence)

ABBY: (Slowly, Abby's laughter turns into tears. Breaking down, she begins sobbing on the couch)



PETE: (Not realizing how much Abby has been affected by the night's events, Pete moves over to comfort her)  
Abby? Hey, Abby. (No response from Abby)

Oh, Ab. I'm sorry. I didn't know. I mean, I didn't realize that you took all of this so seriously. No, I didn't mean that either. Bad word choice. I just... What I mean to say is, if I did this to you, Ab, I'm sorry. Hey? Come on. We'll fix this. If you want us to go back to how things were before last night, well, that's what we'll do, then.

(Comforting her, Pete grabs the nearest thing to a tissue that he can find and begins to wipe away her tears. Suddenly, Abby grabs his arm, realizing that Pete has mistakenly used the pair of underwear as a handkerchief. Horrified, they stare at each other in silence. After a few moments pass, they begin to laugh. Realizing the humor in the situation, they laugh hysterically until they become exhausted)

ABBY: (Timidly) I don't want to fight anymore.

PETE: I don't want to fight anymore, either. I'm sorry about all of this, Ab. It wasn't fair for me to expect you to automatically want the same things I do. If a friend you want, then a friend you've got. Nothing more. No strings attached.

(In a brotherly gesture, Pete puts his arm around Abby)

That's it then. Friends. Just friends, nothing more.

(Abby and Pete slowly turn and look at each other. Pete sheepishly grins and kisses Abby lightly on the forehead. They both face forward for a few moments without speaking. Abby then turns and begins to stare at Pete. Pete glances confusedly at Abby, and Abby suddenly grabs hold of Pete's shirt and throws him down on the couch. Springing on top of him, she kisses Pete passionately)

BLACKOUT

(As the lights come back up for the curtain call, Pete and Abby are caught still kissing on the couch. Aware of the applause, they break apart, bow embarrassedly, and hurry offstage)

THE END