Take thought:
I have weathered the storm
I have beaten out my exile.
—Ezra Pound

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PREFACE

No, I cannot tell you what I want;
I cannot show you what I mean.
When we love, we love in obscurity;
If we speak, we speak from exile.

A paltry set of circumstances makes up a man's life,
and the sum of all his memories. No vaulting visions, no
grand epiphanies, but vacuous, absurd tableaus, photographs
of naked infants on bedspreads, frozen smiles, forgotten
jokes, old men reclining near comforting bedpans, leather-
bound, collecting dust on shelves, provincial and self-
indulgent as home-movies; nostalgia and the sweet regur-
gitant of cemetery worms.

You read now. I, at sometime, in some place, once wrote.
You have your family, lover, friends, your sins, ambitions
and fears; I have mine. You cannot see through my eyes or
speak with my voice, I cannot stand in your place, nor would
want to. I can only touch you through these few words that
we both understand, and at that soft underbelly of spirit;
where thought should be uncommunicated lightning, and as
quick to strike and burn.

I can meet you only on that narrow ground we both have
crossed before; footsteps of commonality impressed on the
various soils of our experience. Let us search it out, and
quickly. Let us name it, now.

. . .Here extend another path, upon which you may appre-
hend my footsteps, and I, yours.

- k.g.m.
Scene I is set in the cab of an old pick-up truck, two seats, and back window, and some form of gear shift. Lights go on slowly as the sound of a truck pulling over and stopping on the side of a highway, becomes louder. Lights officially go on as the boy (Trevor) jumps into the cab next to the driver (Dan). Trevor is about twenty years old, dressed in old clothes carrying a duffle bag. Dan about forty-five or fifty dressed as a Black workman in large blue overalls; he is a solid man, strong, and still exhibits a great of youth in his mannerisms and movements. As Trevor has hauled himself up into the truck and pulled the duffle bag in behind him, the lights are all the way on simulating just before sunset at the point of dusk.

TREVOR: Oh, thank you very much. For awhile I didn't think I was going to get a ride before dark.

DAN: Yea, getting pretty dark. 'Fraid nobody was gon' t' see ya out there.

TREVOR: (Trevor pulls out a cigarette) I was afraid of that myself. Mind if I smoke?

DAN: No, man, your privilege.

TREVOR: You like a cigarette?

DAN: No thanks, man. Don't smoke.

TREVOR: (Trevor lights his cigarette, settles back for the ride) How far south you going?

DAN: I ain't going very far. Only down as far as Unionville. Just got off work from the canning factory up near Federalsburg. (Signals behind with his thumb.) Just goin' on home. How far South ya want t'go?

TREVOR: Eventually, I want to get down as far as Atlanta, but the rides have been short so it might take me another day or two. I am going down to see a friend of mine who is there. I thought I'd go help him with his work.

DAN: What part the North ya from?

TREVOR: (Laughing) How'd you know I lived in the North?

DAN: (Does not react to laughter) Just standing on the road I know'd ya was from the North. Ya got that look 'bout ya. (Laughs to himself.) People from the South like ya don't live too long. Yea, I used t'work up North, I used t' drive big rigs outaide Cleveland (thoughtful) Yea, I like da North. What part of da North ya from?

TREVOR: Just outside of Boston. A place called Cambridge, Massachusetts.

DAN: Oh yea, Cambridge? (Laughs) Bout a year I
DAN: Well you just keep on lookin'.

TREVOR: Well, I'm still looking.

DAN: (Joking) I believe you. I've been looking almost five years now but can't find that one right. This letter, I started thinking about how I could get to Atlanta. Never really been through the South before, but more than that, you know, more than that I thought maybe I could help somebody 'cause I've had it pretty easy and all, and I know that. (Puts his feet up) So yesterday morning I called up the guy at the job real early and told him I'd quit him. He could keep the rest of the pay check and I packed the duffle and by eight o'clock I was thumbing down the Mass Turnpike on my way to Atlanta. So here I am.

TREVOR: (Pauses) And ya ain't got no place to sleep tonight?

DAN: No, but I've got a sleeping bag and I normally curl up by the side of the road.

TREVOR: (Another pause) Well listen man. We ain't got much. We ain't got much at all, but if you'd like a roof over ya head, you're welcome at my place, if ya wants.

DAN: Yea. Yea, that would be very nice. Thank you very much.

TREVOR: Well I tell ya man. We ain't got much but that don't bother ya, ya're welcome. Sides that man be grits I got a bottle over the kitchen shelf and it is Saturday so we can have ourselves a good time. All right?

TREVOR: All right (with grin. Both of them laugh happily. Lights dim and fade out.)

FAITH: (Standing and turning away from Mother). Hey there. Hold it you niggers. (Fires shot into the air.)

FAITH: (Another pause) Well listen man. We ain't got much but that don't bother ya, ya're welcome. Sides that man be grits I got a bottle over the kitchen shelf and it is Saturday so we can have ourselves a good time. All right?

WILLIAM: (Holding the gun) Hurry, hurry man. (William turns, looks at the Second Boy. They all run off to the right. End.)

MOTHER: He ain't happy now. Look at the way he came in this mornin'. He's tired and worn out and he's scared. Faith. He's scared, it was Baltimore that done that. It was Baltimore that changed William. Ya go up there with him like he wants and you'll come back scared and running too. I tells ya Faith, don't go t' Baltimore. It ain't what ya want. Pee beginn' ya.

SECOND YOUTH: (Holding the gun) Hurry, will ya? Hurry. Someone's liable to come along.

FIRST YOUTH: Hold on brother. We're doing the best we can.


WILLIAM: (Holding the gun) Hurry, hurry man. Hurry.

SECOND YOUTH: Come on, William. Don't get tight. We're doing the best we can.

FAITH: (Standing and turning away from Mother). Yea, you're right. William is scared but William don't "yes suh" nobody. He ain't nobody's nigger cause William ain't afraid to fight for what is his, He's a leader, he's got respect and Baltimore gave it to him. Don't ya see, . . .

MOTHER: You can't understand that. Up in Baltimore you can't have a nigger no more. (Turns to Mother.) Yea, you're right. William is scared but William don't "yes suh" nobody. He ain't nobody's nigger cause William ain't afraid to fight for what is his, He's a leader, he's got respect and Baltimore gave it to him. Don't ya see, . . .
(There is the roar of an engine, of the pick-up truck outside. The Mother wipes the tears from her eyes with an apron -- turns back to the stove. The back door opens. Dan walks in, hugs his wife, kisses her on the forehead.)

DAN: Woman, It's Saturday night and your Dan's gettin' drunk. (Throws his head back and laughs, provokes over to Faith, kisses her on the forehead and pats her on the head.) How's my beautiful daughter? (as he reaches up to get bottle on highest shelf at the far end of the kitchen.) Though ya was goin' out tonight, Faith? A beautiful girl like ya ain't stayin' home on a Saturday night with her relations, is she? (goes on holding glasses over on table and goes over to her, puts hands behind her back.) The only thing good and I mean really good comes from ole' ya ramblin' 'round ya can stop ya drinkin' when ya stop and ya dun all ya figuring and ya know what ya want and then ya settle down.妈妈, all that travellin', drinkin' around, that's good, cause ya always runnin' away from one place and runnin' to the next. But there ain't no peace of mind in dat. Peace of mind in when ya find yerself a home. Always make sure ya can stop. Some people dun somethin' when they runnin' so they can't live decent, so they can't ever stop, so they can't get that peace of mind. Ya know what I'm talkin' about, Faith? I sure hopes ya do. (starts walking back to his seat.) Ramblin' only good if it teaches ya, Faith, ya live, ya drink, Faith, ya decide. When William comes, ya decide. (Pause)

FAITH: I think I'm going.

DAN: Well that's all right then, Faith, When's William comin' back?

FAITH: I don't know, Father. He said he'd be back tomorrow mornin', I guess I go then.

DAN: We're gettin' up to go to church, if William wants, he can eat breakfast with us. Then ya all go, but I want us all to be together before ya leave. That ain't mean much.

(Dan turns around almost in tears.) Dan, you can't . . .

FAITH: (turns around almost in tears.) Dan, you can't . . .

DAN: I ain't gonna talk 'bout it no more. Now we're gonna all forget our troubles and I've gonna get drunk. Anybody want to join me, there's a bottle whiskey in this bottle, but I ain't gonna talk 'bout it anymore. You want to. Your Father turns around, serves the two of them dinner.) Ain't ya all gonna eat with us?

FAITH: We're all ready eaten. We kept this warm for you. You're late tonight, Father.

(Dan enters drying his hands on a paper towel, not paying attention until spoken to. He feels at home)

DAN: We're all ready eaten. We kept this warm for you. You're late tonight, Father.

(Trevor enters drying his hands on a paper towel, not paying attention until spoken to. He feels at home)

DAN: Yes, we got it talkin' and I must get out late. Got some bread for us, woman? (Mother goes and gets two slices of bread.)

FAITH: Trevor puts his plate and stands up -- picks up plate and starts to take it over to the sink. Well, if you want to hate me for being White, there is nothing I can do about it.

DAN: (Still eating) Faith don't hate ya cause ya White - she's just testin' ya. She don't mean no harm.

FAITH: (Cynically) You just don't find too many

DAN: Trevor, I'm going down to Atlanta to meet a friend of mine. (Threw away the towel and returns to his place.)

TREVOR: You hitchin' the whole way?

DAN: interrupts: You, he is, (laughs) I told him it'd be mean, but I don't think he believes me.

FAITH: Oh, I believe ya. I just can't afford to go any other way. Besides, it's interesting.

DAN: Yes, man, but have ya ever been hurt bumin'?): I mean really bad? I mean so bad that ya just didn't know whether you'd just ever survive?

TREVOR: (Joking) Had the daylight beaten out of me in Omaha last summer.

DAN: (Turning a mouthful) Oh yea, I been through Omaha, Where was ya in Omaha?

TREVOR: Up in the northern part.

DAN: Oh yea, up in Omaha (laughs) - they got things kinda mixed up. All the Whites live in the south and all the Black folk live in North, Black folks got ya, huh?

FAITH: Well you came to the right place for revenge.

TREVOR: I don't understand, What do you mean?

FAITH: (Looking the other way) I mean the South.

TREVOR: I'm not going to Atlanta for revenge. My friend is helping with voter registration. I am going to help him.

DAN: You hitching the whole way?

TREVOR: No, you hitching the whole way? I mean so bad that ya just didn't know whether you'd just ever survive?

DAN: No, I can drink my whiskey. It's Saturday night woman. Why don't ya have a glass too? Come on, now. (Yours some more into Trevor's glass - goes and gets a glass for Mother.)

Mother to Trevor: You sure ya got enough to eat, now? Ya got a long way to go tomorrow, ya might as well eat good tonight.

DAN: No, Thank you very much, but I couldn't be happier. Can I help you do the dishes?

FAITH: (laughs) No, I don't the dishes for Dan and me for twenty years now, I thinks I can do it, but thank you though. (Car door slams outside.)

TREVOR: Yes, I guess, Probably stay with my friend till I can get a room.

(Kitchen door opens. In walks William. He has a coat on, a neat but old pair of pants, alligator shoes, Afro haircut. William seems to be helping with voter registration. Alligator shoes. William surveys the situation with silence.)

DAN: Well come on in, William. We're gettin' drunk, William. We got a glass here for ya. (Starts to get up.)

TREVOR: Saturday night. Just as sure as clockwork. Old Dan, my Father. Old Dan. After finishing his White man's week, six days at the canning factory for a buck seventy five an hour. The week-ends and all he wants to be is another drunk niggar with a couple white buddies (signals to Trevor) to keep him respectable, (Turns to Faith.) You comin'?

FAITH: Yes, but let's leave in the morning. We can all have breakfast together before we . . .

DAN: We're leavin' Now, Come on.

TREVOR: If you want me to go, we're gonna have to leave in the morning.

DAN: God damn you. God damn ya. I gotta go now! (William turns and leaves.)

Whites down here who are willing to treat a Black man decent. That's all.

(An ad for an old car outside stops the conversation.)
MOTHER: Don't go William. Just stay with us a little while.

WILLIAM: (Turns on his heel, speaks to Faith.) If I wait till mornin', you'll go.

FAITH: Yes, I said I would, (Pause)

WILLIAM: All right. All right then, I'll go tell 'em to come back in the morning, (William exits.)

TREVOR: (Stands up.) I think I'd be better off on my way, I think you've got enough trouble with- out me here.

DAN: (Looks up.) Don't let it bother ya. This happens every time he comes down from Baltimore.

(Noir of engine of a car leaving.)

WILLIAM: White boy? What you know about Cambridge, to- nuthin'.

(In walks William.)

FAITH: (Trevor, 3/, William.) That's right, Mother. I killed the cop that killed you. (Rolls out gun as he speaks.) No White boy, you're stayin' right here.

(Mother bursts into tears. Goes into bedroom. Dan stands.)

DAN: William, ya ain't never gonna be free now. Ya can't ever stop ramblin' now. Ya ain't never gonna be free.

WILLIAM: I'm going to be free! I am free!

FAITH: (Nodding his head.) Ya ain't free, William. Ya ain't never gonna be free.

WILLIAM: (As Dan walks into the bedroom.) Nobody saw me. If nobody saw me, I'll be safe here till morning. Bill, White boy, you're comin' up to Baltimore tomorrow. You ain't leavin' tonight. I'll put you on a bus in Balti- more.

TREVOR: I don't know, I just hope. . . . . .

(In walks William.)

WILLIAM: Where you going White Boy?

MOTHER: William, don't bother him. Let him go, he wants to go; let him go. He ain't dun muddin'.

WILLIAM: He may know too much. What you know boy? What you know about Cambridge, to- night?

MOTHER: We ain't got nothin' to be 'fraid of.

WILLIAM: Oh you do, we. How'd you get here, boy?

TREVOR: I was hitching. Your Father picked me up.

WILLIAM: You been to Cambridge?

TREVOR: No.

FAITH: Leave him alone, He hasn't done any- thing. He's hitching down to Georgia - down to Atlanta to help a friend of his who's work- ing with Blacks down there.

WILLIAM: Sure, I know, You going to save the Blacks, White boy?

DAN: William, what ya talkin' bout?

WILLIAM: We got the radio on.

WILLIAM: You don't know, do ya! Everybody knows but you don't. All right then, I'll tell you. They are looking for a nigger on the bus. A White cop was shot about forty-five min- utes ago.

MOTHER: Oh no, William. Oh no, William, You don't go and kill?

WILLIAM: That's right, Mother. I killed the cop. That nigger thing lookin' for is your son. (Rolls out gun as he speaks.) No White boy, you're stayin' right here.

(Trevor, William, 3/., William.)

WILLIAM: Ya don't know what your sayin' man. Give me the gun. Give me the gun. Ya don't know what your sayin' man.

TREVOR: No. Turn yourself in. You can get off.

FAITH: We're not questioning your good intentions, man. We just right now the Black man can only help himself. Maybe if you learn what it means, really means to be Black man. It's just right now the Black man can't help himself.

DAN: (To the second.) You bastard. You can't help the Black man. You ain't never gonna be free. If you hadn't been here, I'd be free. If you hadn't been here, I'd be free.

TREVOR: I think I can help. I'm going to try, timore.

FAITH: We're not questioning your good intentions, man. We just right now the Black man can't help himself. Maybe if you learn what it means, really means to be Black man. It's just right now the Black man can't help himself.

DAN: (Comes out of bedroom.) William, ya know that I think ya dun wrong but we gotta help ya now. We gotta help ya get away. Your Mother is gotin' some chicken for you all t' tonight with ya to Baltimore. I ain't got much money saved (during this speech Dan puts cap back on whiskey bot- tle, returns it to the upper shelf) but I'll give ya what I got. When ya get t' Balti- more, ya take a plane up North and try t' get started up there. You take Faith with ya, ya hear? Don't let her get into trouble, But we decided we gotta help ya now. You're our son, We gonna help ya. Come on woman (calling into the bedroom) - get out there and get that chicken cooking. Faith, you get yourself packed. We'll be all ready tomorrow when your people come. Now if we hurry, we can get all the work done right there. Get some sleep - have breakfast together - then ya leave. But ya take care now, boy 'cause your my son.

TREVOR: How did you shoot the policeman? I mean did he shoot at you first?

WILLIAM: He was in self-defense but that don't make any difference down here.

TREVOR: It's in self defense, you ought to get yourself free. Otherwise, you'll be running for the rest of your life.

DAN: William's right. It don't make no differ- ence down here. I guess William's right. (Mother has gone out and started working on the chicken. We hear a sharp knock at the door. William, never has taken the door off its hinges. A Man knocks and there is a bang as the door is kicked in. A Man knocks and there is a bang as the door is kicked in.)

TREVOR: Can I help?

FAITH: (Voice from off stage) (Engine roars) All right. Come out of there, before we blow you out. (Runs to window. William runs out of the bedroom.)

DAN: It ain't jus cops out dere, Oh Lord give him the gun. They ain't jus cops out dere, They're copin'.

WILLIAM: (Servesena) Give me the gun, Give me the gun.

FAITH: No, Turn yourself in. You can get off.

DAN: Ya don't know what your sayin' man. Give me the gun, (Trevor passes for an instant then as the door is pushed open and three White men come in, in two in state trooper uni- forms, with shotguns, he tosses William the gun.)

FIRST WHITE MAN: Okay nigger - drop the gun before I blow your head off.

DAN: (Stands a: scrugg for a second then drops the gun - turns to Trevor.) You bastard. You White bastard. I told ya, ya weren't no good for us. I told ya, ya didn't know the ways of the South. Don't ya see? Ya can't help the Black man. You White bastard. If you hadn't been here. I'd be away. I'm tryin' to help, I'd be free. Who'll ya help now? Ya haven't helped the Black man, Oh Lord, you haven't helped the Black man. He ain't gonna live no better after this. Ya didn't help the White man - he ain't gonna never change. So who did ya help, White boy? Who did ya help?

WILLIAM: (To the second) The man.

FIRST WHITE MAN: Well look what we got here. (Pushes hat
off his forehead) Just you look and see what we got here. A White nigger. The man just told you. You ain’t Black and yo sure not White. You just a White nigger. Gonna save us? (Five or six White men come in the door.)

SECOND WHITE MAN:
(Screams out) Hey, White nigger, you gonna save us? (Bursts into laughter.)

FIRST MAN: We’ll let you go White boy. I seen lots of your kind before. (Laughs) Hey White nigger, you gonna save us? (White men pick up chant.) Hey White nigger you gonna save us? (As it gets louder, Faith and William join in. Trevor quietly leaves the stage and joins the audience.)

PARALYSIS OUTLINE

II. Situation

Horizontal I look at my books and think I should be a more interesting person than this. In my parent’s house I clean myself helpless until space measures by footsteps leaving me alone, even the bed does not know me. Portraits of curly young men I immerse in some flood, and feel instead winter creeping hand over hand over the windowsill...

II. Past

Conversation with several friends in Ohio where by impossible difficulties such as an orphanage in Tibet we are teaching one another distance until dreaming on the floor at dawn I float house-height above the beach where I am really lying, foot in low tide, a sandy blue-lipped drowned boy.

That afternoon visitors ignore the baby who lives here who smiles and smiles and breathes bad air.

III. Present

I believe I am making a scrapbook. Someone has asked for old poems. I squat on the floor of the garage on red burlap curtains looking through a big barrel looking through my papers I find the words for a love song written on an old paper napkin by a boy-friend two years ago I find an IOU for $2.35 from a boy who died in the summer war Then I find my old painful poems several shiny notebooks with ideas I can’t remember by myself.

I roll my brother’s bike into the driveway. The bike is red. The three kids playing next door ask are you the wolf? No. Who is the wolf?

Autumn wind pressing dry leaves down the drive before me as in Cleveland, Ohio, the same time weeks ago, street from one brick wall to another the sidewalk is covered with fallen though it’s summer, then someone steers from the topic as we pass the last wall, he brings up euthanasia and pours all images into the same abstract, but now I have been lying for three days in a bed that doesn’t need to love me and have found that it all goes in circles and that is no news.

IV. Response

It makes no sense so but isn’t this like running over an animal already dead on the highway, a dead goose, so flat, that the car feels nothing passing over
A WOMAN READS CAMUS
There are no more deserts
she says
she is still
guarding the body's doors
so nothing can come close
no thing
poor word understands void
only as ghosts,
absences in the house

she is afraid of the dark
because night is an empty barrel
because everything is taken away
and nothing appears, left-over

a black pit
swarming with bats
cluttered with ruins
without the bats, the ruins,
without even the outline
of a barrel

she concludes that men
let things fall apart
she is an empty house
with sealed doors
she feels dark and heavy
like a huge worn rock
waiting for the tide
knowing it cannot float

in dark silence
the ocean washes to the door
but in the dark, ocean
doesn't look any different
than night itself

men ask what is the matter,
she names nothing,
no words.

today she receives
a book with a clue
a gift from a man
a clue she already knows:

the damned aren't real
aren't unreal aren't,
or as she explains to
lovers who ask,
nothing is wrong
nothing is wrong.

- Lauren Shakely

DRIFT

unanchored,
yielding
to any current
current...
current
resistence
ebbng
listlessly
away...

field of grain
a softening rain
yellow-green

a gentle
half amusing
flutter by
me...

radio buzz
annoying bee

quintessence of butterfly
not gone
a smooth
aimless...

a whirlwind
a way
up on

as leaves
about me

slowly sliding,
slowly sliding,

I've
I've

at once

they spin

from here...
from here...
in, within nine

before...

and the gods
have beckoned me
to raise myself
from hiding
and take the right-hand road
when next I meet a beggar
in my wanderings,
in my wanderings,

my random travels
setting limits
setting free...

quiet chaos
quickly conscious

dulling down to dim desire
tasting briefly
becoming lost...

doubts that blur
but fail to vanish
swinging in the apple trees

water trickling
lightly tickling
mingleing with a lazy breeze...

misty morning
nearing noon

the day is moving on without me

images slip in and out of view...

freeing fully, folding firmly
fingers flowing forth from faces
glimmering in the distant sun...

one cold sky
one cold sky

with one cloud high
a place with but a vague existence

- John Whitt
Trees bend to the ground
While streams overflow their banks;
Winter lies dying.

STEVE CROUCH: Storm clouds
I guess I'd still pray for Billy if I thought it would do any good. But I cannot write him a letter. I can't see the page with trivialities and I'm certainly not going to find the time to write. The situation is right now. I should have just sent him a Christmas card and been done with it.

- John Anderson

TO BEGIN

One day you stop. You don't know why. You don't care, really. You just do. You look around and wonder, What am I not doing anymore? And you don't know.

Then it begins. You grow desperate to start. You don't know what. To start is all you need. You do. You don't know what you've started. It just begins until...

One day you stop.
DARK IS RIGHT

Awesome arches are room
And room enough to float
With subtle smoke
From golden bowls
Dimmed by tinted light
And on an incantation
Or soft sigh.

Apollo’s silhouette advances
Through yellow mists;
On strident strings
Heroic themes
In dorian scale
Refute the dark
And meaning winds,

Echoing in moss
Muffled caverns
Meditation mellows
My insistant soul
Veiled by red velvet
Dances with shades
On ragged rock.

- Louise Tate

My mother died as I shall die
Alone in an upstairs room
On a summer’s yellow afternoon
With old lace curtains swimming in the air,
A worn rag rug on a bare plank floor
An open transom above the door,
Two threadbare sheets on her father’s bed,
And two flies buzzing on the window-glass.

- Tim Cope

I am waiting
with folded hands
in a closet.
There is everywhere
the smell of moth balls
pressed flowers and lace,
Here now there is nothing
New.
And I am waiting
for the green of something
I remember --
not the dried green of thyme
boxed to preserve
but the green
I remember of grass.

I breathe now and am filled
with moth balls
and the cedar of the walls,
I am boxed
and they are boxed --
the pressed memories
dried roses and lace
wall paper rolls to patch
paper that has been painted over.

And I am waiting
in my wooden and paper box
for a door and for green,
Waiting
Forgetting among forgotten things
To unfold my hands
to feel for the cold of winter
to know the crystal and the white.

I am waiting now
For the green in the white
And to find a door
Through ice.

- Louise Tate
AN INFINITY OF MIRRORS

The summer closed hard that year. You could almost hear it fall with the leaves, clattering like brown paper to wet pavements. You could hear it falling with the wind and the afternoon sun, falling discernibly earlier every day, the ruddy disc aging to a feeble yellow as it bled across the month of September and stained the earth brightly in its wake. You didn't walk in that season, you waded, splashing through the leaves in the rustling ebb-tide of the year, brushing into the street ripples of fiery decay. It had rained for days, and you had the odd sense that even the streets were clean; they were shining black and smelled of still water.

And at times the sweet sauce of rain would coat the streets and sidewalks so smoothly that they shone like mirrors and shot the blinding sun into your eyes from a hundred angles, from corners and open alleys. And that intense blue sky... But now, anyway, you remember the way it was. And you remember the way Stacy used to dress, especially around the flat, in that long pinstripe shirt or a sweater and not much else except her sandals. And I would come wading in through the leaves and the dust every evening, freighted with half a dozen cardboard tubes and a briefcase and an arm’s crook-full of new paperbacks, my fingers giving out completely just as I got to the kitchen table and dumped the whole assortment down with a clatter and a sigh.

Men never tire of anything, unless it is done so repeatedly and so poorly that their souls can find not the smallest beauty in it. But we worked and loved well, and so I never tired of the walk back from the bus or the kiss on the back of Stacy’s neck there by the refrigerator, or the telling of the day’s events, outlines of new designs, and synopses of the new books. I never tired of it, I swear, and some of the most placid moments of my life were spent over soup and coffee and crisp gingham, waiting for the sun to burn itself out in the sea of flat roof-tops outside the back door, the pattern of light from the lattice kitchen window creeping higher and higher and dimmer and dimmer on the blue stucco wall.

And Stacy would sit quite calmly, respecting always my silences, watching the movements of my hands or glancing out the window with me. I think we must have picked that flat because its back wall faced the west. I don’t recall, actually. But she would sit in quiet deference to thought, waiting easily for my cue of words, always nimbly to follow it.

“Did you look over the synopsis to that poetry anthology?” I asked.

“Mmm,” she nodded through a mouthful of coffee, “Beautiful. I think the forest design will be right for the cover.”

“Appropriate?”

“Yes.”

“Not too...” I groped at the air, “...light, maudlin?”

“No, I don’t think so. Depends on how you handle it. Keep the colors broody...”

“Mmm,” I agreed. “What do you think of this?” I tossed one of the new paperbacks across the table to her. It was a new James Kirkwood novel, I had finished the jacket design for it a month earlier, she picked it up, inspected front and back, fingered the cover.

“It came out well, don’t you think? Printer did a nice job on the mid-tones.”

“You notice anything different?”

“Well...” she hesitated, “looks a little, uh, simpler than I remember it.”

I snorted. “It should. You’ll notice they cut off half the collage from the right-hand corner.”

“Uh, yes,” she studied it a few minutes in silence, “Any reason given?”

“Yeah. Detracted from the author’s name, or something. And they switched the position of the title at the last moment. Isn’t the effect I’d intended at all. Look at the size of that blurb copy on front. Can’t see half the background detail for it.”

She sighed, “Uh-huh, I think it still works, though,”

“Well,” I blew across the surface of my coffee, “no use worrying about it now. It’s gone to press.”

She smiled and put the book down, folding her arms, “Any new come in today?”

“Mmm,” she asked, “A cute little couplet just came to me,” I explained, scribbling it down:

The phrase popped full-grown into my head and hung there, waiting, I reached into my briefcase for my small, green notebook and flipped to the first empty page.

“Mmm?” she asked.

“A cute little couplet just came to me,” I explained, scribbling it down:

That I could have seen more clearly
what went on behind those eyes;
the gears that turn the universe
somewhere behind the skies.

She grinned over the Truman assignment, “I hate history, You’re so limited with
than I am already."

They were simple printer's proofs, without titles or authors' names. They were award-winners, old casual acquaintances, each one a two-dimensional image of what little I had dimensions. On the wall in front of me was a framed collection of my favorite jacket designs, some of which were yours, including those I had used for research. I pulled some sketches out of my briefcase and scattered them across the board, sizing up the final design, plus a tiny chunk of the royalties, if any. I think I'll ask a lot for this one. It'll take some time.

I smiled at her, and we didn't speak for several moments, the silence punctuated by my scratchings into its tube.

We made love a little later, and were perfect together, as usual, I could almost feel her smile in the darkness afterwards, smiled back. "Happy?"

"Consensually," she mumbled sleepily. "We really are unusual in a way, I think."

"Hmm? And in what way might that be, young lady?" said, kissing her neck between words.

"Oh, I don't know, we're just so good together. Do you ever get to feel that we're part of one another, you start to take on yours? It's funny, I often wonder if that sort of thing would happen."

"We were always pretty compatible, miss," I said, pulling the sheets tighter around us.

Winter came up quickly. You could hear it in the cold contradictions of the flat, in the wind past the shutters. You could see it creeping in the icicles down from frozen cornices, scattering prismed light across the floor of my tiny studio. And on the weekends I would shelve on our short sidewalk and come in puffing and sweating from the cold.

Stacy brought something hot to drink and followed me into the studio.

"I'd like to finish that layout today," I said, nodding towards my drawing board.

"What?" she inquired, leaning gently on my shoulder.

"As usual, dirty for the layout, fifty more if they decide to use it, a negotiated contract for the final design, plus a tiny chunk of the royalties, if any. I think I'll ask a lot for this one."

She nodded. "Have you read the stories yet?"

"A couple of paragraphs, here and there. All I need, really. Anyway, what I want to get across in the design is an effect of hundreds of reflections interlocking, you know? You see the effect in burber shop mirrors sometimes."

"Mmm, yes, I know what you mean. The infinity of mirrors...

"Exactly. It's fascinating. Two mirrors facing and reflecting one another, the image of the first reflected in the second, and back again, and so on. You always imagine that you could look straight down that corridor of images, you would see at its end -- well, what? Some devilish face staring back at you, or some spot of whitest light or deepest blackness, you know, some visual representation of infinity itself, Disturbing. But of course when you move to look down the corridor, your own reflected image blocks out the view, standing to one side and trying to peer doesn't help, because the slightest angle of vision cuts the corridor's end off from sight. Any photographic device installed between the mirrors, no matter how small, would still necessarily blot out the crucial center point with its own reflection."

I demonstrated with my hands. "It's a sort of Pandora's box, permanently locked by the laws of physics. No matter how small, would still necessarily blot out the crucial center point with its own reflection."

"It's a fascinating idea, Nat. I'm sure they'll like it. Do you still have the synopsis? I'd like to read it sometime."

"I grinned at her. "Ah, now everyone who sees this would react that way, I'd consider myself a success."

"You're a success with me," she laughed. "How about some dinner?"

We walked out past my framed favorites and into the kitchen, where soup was boiling on the stove, and later we watched the sun die out among the snow-covered roofs beyond the back door, she looking out the window with me, quiet, waiting. We finished our coffee, folded our arms, and looked across the table at each other, my rhyme came back to me... That I could have seen more clearly... That I could have seen more clearly... That I could have seen more clearly..."

Stacy squinted down at my sketches and chewed the back of her hand.

"Very. It's a fascinating idea, Nat. I'm sure they'll like it. Do you still have the synopsis? I'd like to read it sometime."

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It seemed childish and absurd now, how beautiful she was, the day's last light and my own face reflected in her hair and eyes, And a little later we would make love.

Night came quickly in that season. You could see it creeping up the street with the lighting of the street-lamps, in long, endless rows, hear it in her soft breathing next to me in bed, echoing my own.
I never blamed you,
You, who think I might have blamed you,
I never blamed you.
At least, I do not blame you now.
Maturity is Destiny's only master.
And if my bones are set cross purposed,
the cockswain in my skull
must parallel the oars
by calling swift clean even strokes,
and must remain a constant sentry
against the spasms of a sudden catalepsy.
No man is an island,
God knows that's true enough when all's said and done,
but I am my own person
belonging to no one but ourselves,
navigators who reckon the sounds of a
of a northern continent, marking the bays
of distant hounds on the jagged coast,
and seeking passage to a warmer tropic
with spiced and gold, incense and mirth.

- Tim Cope

a shoe box, or maybe a tobacco pouch,
anyway, I need somewhere
to lie down and think about everything:
a separidian for my soul.

- Bill Whitmore
Gentlemen:

I am an artist and, as such, a man of great sensitivity. I am telling you this that you may understand the profound grief I feel in having to take this action, I want to assure you that I am not one of those people who try to have relatives or friends committed simply to get rid of them, it is indeed with regret that I must ask you to accept my wife into your care, I have tried to help her along as best I could, but I have at last been forced to realize that my endeavors have been inadequate and that her problem has become so grave that I will be negligent in my responsibility as a husband if I failed to seek attention for her. I probably should have taken this step months ago.

I shall recount the history of this case in the hope that what I say here will convince you that my wife needs your services. Also, this may be of help to you in treating her should you accept her case.

As far as I can tell, my wife's difficulties began when we were told that she could not have children. We learned this about a year ago after her miscarriages, Having children meant a great deal to her and she was understandably very despondent. For a while she wouldn't do anything but gorge herself with food all day, I tried to persuade her to do something that would take her mind off her troubles, She even refused to go to parties (she had always enjoyed partying) because she was becoming obese, a result, of course, of her excessive eating.

I suggested to her that we could adopt a child, but that simply made matters worse. She became adamantly that she did not want to raise anybody else's child and that the presence of such a person in her household would be a constant reminder of her inadequacy. I couldn't reason with her.

Hoping that time would heal, I waited patiently for my wife to recover from the effects of her ordeal, However, she failed to improve. She even took to drinking behind my back, encouraged by our maid who, I discovered, was a completely shiftless woman bent on reaping the maximum profit from her relationship with my poor wife.

Mrs. Kaufmann (our maid, a widow) treacherously wormed her way into my sick wife's confidence with false expressions of genuine sympathy. For several weeks Mrs. Kaufmann and my wife kept themselves busy with daily shopping trips and with the project of redecorating the entire house, except for my studio, I would not allow them to interrupt my work. I tolerated this activity, expensive though it was, until I found that some of the expense was for large 'bonuses' for Mrs. Kaufmann. These bonuses included substantial amounts of cash and some rather lavish gifts of fine clothes, furniture, and the like.

I could afford all of this quite well, but I could see that my wife was being used and that her new-found friendship would sooner or later do her great harm unless I intervened, I confronted her with the problem and she took my interference very nastily, I am afraid that I did not handle the situation especially well, I couldn't persuade her that she should resume her associations with her more worthwhile and truer friends, She simply cling to Mrs. Kaufmann and went into a demonstration of absolute rage when I suggested that the woman might have to go. At that point I had no idea how I should proceed, I was forced to let the matter drop, but you can imagine my concern.

However, the breaking point finally came when I ascended from my studio to the middle of the day about a week afterward and found my wife and Mrs. Kaufmann very much inebriated and carrying on in a pathetically frivolous fashion. Soon thereafter I learned that this sort of thing must have been going on regularly behind my back. I found a collection of bottles which proved that the consumption of alcohol in the household had risen to a level which could be explained only in that way. This evidence served only to assure me that I had been right to sever Mrs. Kaufmann's connection with the household immediately upon discovering her in that drunken scene with my wife.

My wife protested vehemently at my dismissal of the maid, She cried rather bitterly and claimed that I was depriving her of her only friendship. Naturally I felt very deeply for her, but of course I had to do what was right.

Actually, she seemed to be recovering well after this incident, I even persuaded her to attend a party given by some friends of ours. Unfortunately, the influence of Mrs. Kaufmann had not worn off and I was unable to keep her from overimbibing. She became uncontrollable and we had to leave early. I must assume a large part of the blame for this incident for attempting to force her back into social life too quickly.

Later that night I was awakened by the sound of her crying and I found her curled up in front of the door to my studio. When I finally stopped her crying she told me that she had wanted to see my paintings but she couldn't find the key to the door. In took her in and showed her the paintings, explaining each one individually. Her interest came as a great surprise to me since she had never shown any concern about my art before. She seemed particularly drawn to Words, an abstract depicting a resolution of the struggle between silence and sacophony.

After that night she came to the studio frequently while I worked, She would just sit watching me and I would explain what I was creating. I was pleased that we seemed to be coming together and that she was coming out of her shell, I began leaving the door unlocked while I worked so she could enter whenever she liked. She even had friends in and brought them down to the studio, It appeared that she was making rapid progress and I was gratified to see that, I'm afraid I became overly optimistic and I have come to regret that feeling profoundly for the damage it has caused.

Yesterday morning I went to the studio to find that I had left the door unlocked for the night, I entered to find that Words had been savagely slashed, utterly mutilated, My wife admitted the deed readily and seemed to feel no remorse.

She has continued to go about in a seemingly normal fashion, But I am compelled to recognize that there is something terribly wrong with her. It is ironic that depth of her sickness has been revealed to me in its fullness only when she finally seemed to be coming around. I am certain that you will understand my despair and will admit the necessity of placing my wife under your professional care, I will make myself as available as possible for consultation. I want to offer as much assistance as I can to you and to my wife, Sincerely, - John Whitt
He walks on into
The dawn
Emerging from the gray
That precedes,
The gray that made phantoms
He had not felt great fear
He had only been afraid, a little
The gray land
Had shown him only shapes
He could scarcely discern
His fertile imagination had caused
Both the little fear
And whatever moved him onward
Until the gray land had lightened
It was perceptibly brighter
Presently
Though still in the black
And while of early dawn
He discovered his shadow
Passing over the ground in a
caricature image of himself
The image followed him, even preceded
him in his wanderings
The shadow was cast on whatever
he came near
His darkling alter ego took many
forms
All of the same mold, though
none of the same
Splashed on concrete
Swishing through the grasses
Mocking as it danced on walls
Rippling at the bottom of a clear
pool on whose surface...
I held my own memorial service, a memorial to fantasy. The strangers buried him two hours later, just as the rain ceased to fall. ‘Corinna, the storm, we must know.’

The chilling air was filled with portentous elements so befitting to my reason, I ran from the hated place, scattering the sand in blind panic, I experienced true loneliness. Then I saw the fog parting ahead of me - my apertures to reality, I was through the door, and the security of the mobocracy so necessary to my existence. But halt! I had been deceived. I had escaped. I had been led to the hated threshold of the graveyard. I was lost in a past I did not know: a past where my mother, my sister, my father, and I (an infant) lived in a home on the mainland, so far away in distance and time. Yet he lived in its remoteness. He told me once, in a lucid moment, about his mother, about her death, about his irrational voyage to the island with Heather and myself, misery.

I was drawn into its midst by a powerful force, shadowy. I wanted to run, but some phantom hovered behind me, bracing me, retaining me, inviting death. I looked around me - nothing but dull slabs of stone wearied by weather, staring into space, repulsive in their blankness. Then, a transformation. I, I'm not sure, I'm searching, but some of the feelings have faded and the fog thickened. Soon I was enveloped by its evil shroud, with the spirits of the sea whispering unseen in the gloom. The spirits encircled my soul and lifted me to a point just below their realm. It was all so odd. I felt mania and depression.

A stray ray destroyed it all. Once again I saw harsh, grey slabs. My original feelings returned, and I knew it was wrong to lose myself, but it seemed so necessary to resist. Is there reason to resist now?

I held my own memorial service, a memorial to fantasy. The strangers buried him two hours later, just as the rain ceased to fall. ‘Corinna, the storm, we must know.’
FOR MISS DIDWICK

Never having been in the right place at the right time, the Borealis have stumbled just constantly outside my field of vision. Of course, I'm not prone to stay up at hours when such phenomena most frequently occur, and I reside in platitudes where such do at spurious and vagabond intervals. I have been known, especially when humming a nocturne to refrain from catching or wishing upon a falling star.

But something I do do—on Easters and other odd mornings of early uprising is observe and exalt the gentle ascension of the single star that matters moving through the forelight into morning.

"...and other odd mornings of early uprising is observe and exalt the gentle ascension of the single star that matters moving through the forelight into morning."

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It will be because his voice and he will be so long to a more distant seat. Sideways, with crab's gait, by the straight lean kind, bulbous of head, butt, nose, he looked better sitting or orbiting, hand-me-down, launched and never recovered, a consolidation of flesh, bubblous of head, butt, nose, he looked better sitting than standing, and when buffeted by the straight lean kind, as he usually was, he moved sideways, with crab's gait, to a more distant seat.

If he is remembered—
And he will be so long
As drowned men rise,
It will be because his voice
Because whatever thoughts
His mind could shape,
And when he read words
He made love to them
From the deep dark caverns
Of his loneliness,
I remember him too
For his juggling feats—
All that bulk moving under
An unavailing poem,
Making it cleave the air:
While he danced, airy with desire,
He said: "...Furthermore, if turned on its side, its two stanzas become twin mountains. It is, you will notice, a woman, waiting to be tuned, played—Or do I presume?"

-Paul Bennett

AS DROWNED MEN RISE

He was the strange one
With a surname no one
Could remember to clear
From his palate, and a given name
That sounded farther out—
Orbiting, hand-me-down,
Launched and never recovered,
A consolidation of flesh,
Bubblous of head, butt, nose,
He looked better sitting
Than standing, and when buffeted
By the straight lean kind,
As he usually was, he moved
Sideways, with crab's gait,
To a more distant seat.

If he is remembered—
And he will be so long
As drowned men rise,
It will be because his voice
Because whatever thoughts
His mind could shape,
And when he read words
He made love to them
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He said: "...Furthermore, if turned on its side, its two stanzas become twin mountains. It is, you will notice, a woman, waiting to be tuned, played—Or do I presume?"

-Tim Cope

JAUNDICED EVENING

Hoyt thought to himself that it must have been close to one——maybe even one-thirty. That evening he had picked up the kids from his mother-in-law's at seven. During the summer, they were over there all day long. David, the oldest was still not twelve years old, and his younger brother Allen could not have been much over ten. Hoyt was not certain. Perhaps sextant, something like both camp.

Then there would be a problem with the youngest, John. But this summer they could spend every afternoon over there, as long as Skipper's mother did have a pool in her back yard.

As Hoyt walked into his own dirty kitchen, he wondered why Skipper's mother could not keep the place cleaned. Both of his parents were dead, and so he looked to Skipper's family. He felt it their duty to take care of such situations and he would, "Goodman Skipper," he mumbled to himself, bad paper. "I have made my bed, and I have sulked."

Hoyt turned around and opened the freezer part of the refrigerator. The yellow color that Skipper had insisted on for her kitchen appliances still hurt his eyes. The only other person he knew that had that color refrigerator was Skipper's mother. "Haven't you got any goddamn originality? Besides, that yellow makes me puke."

Hoyt mechanically reached for the ice tray. The tray was frozen to the freezer, and he gave a good yank. As the tray came free, water spilled to the floor——the cubes were not fully frozen, "Shit."

Hoyt threw the dish towel on top of the piddle and left the ice tray on the counter, half-filled, half-frozen. Walking to the sink, Hoyt poured the diluted whiskey down the drain, being careful to save the two half-cubes left in the bottom of his glass. He filled the glass halfway with whiskey, the rest with an already opened bottle of Canada Dry Ginger Ale which he found next to the toaster.

At a loss for excitement, Hoyt moved to the living room stereo. He crouched before the record stand and searched for something appropriate. He knew that he was looking for one record in particular, but could not remember which one. He finally sat down on the floor cross-legged and thumbed through the records one by one. He finally found his Caterina Valletti album, "Someone Happy."

A year before, he had heard that song on every radio station that he listened to. Valentine's Day, Father's Day, his birthday——every occasion he could think of he had asked Skipper for that album. She never took the hint, so he finally bought it for her birthday that February. He fumbled with the turntable until he got the record down and in place.

As the song came on, he walked to the mirror above the fireplace. He hated that mirror, but she had insisted on it. Turning away, he instead walked to the side windows. He unbuttoned his pants and pulled down his shirt. He reached inside his drawers and freed his binded crotch. Rubbing his hand over his lower abdomen, he thought to himself how remarkably well preserved he was. True, he was only thirty-four, but he still prided himself in his excellent physical condition. He played tennis every Sunday with Skipper at the club, handball on Tuesdays and Thursdays during his lunch hour, and made love to Skipper every third night. He was glad for his occasional business trips that helped him vary his sex life.

He walked back to the mirror before tucking in his shirt. Putting his drink on the mantel, he stared at his own reflection for a moment. Then quickly, without thought, he unbuttoned his shirt. Stepping back to the center of the room, he put his hands on his hips, running his hands over his torso, Hoyt threw back his head and gave a short bark of a laugh. He quickly rebuttoned and tucked in his shirt. Putting his drink on the mantel, he stared at his own reflection for a moment. Then quickly, without thought, he unbuttoned his shirt. Stepping back to the center of the room, he put his hands on his hips, running his hands over his torso, Hoyt threw back his head and gave a short bark of a laugh. He quickly rebuttoned and tucked in his shirt.

He sat down and listened to the album all the way through one side. He had timed his drinking to finish with the record. He regretted that Skipper was not there that evening. It was a third night.

He climbed the stairs with his hands on his thighs, taking the stairs slowly, but two at a time. Following the house, the kids were already around the hall to the right, he came to a closed bedroom door. David, the oldest, shared the room with the youngest, John. The room next to theirs was Allen's. Hoyt walked to Allen's door and turned the knob carefully. As the latch clicked, Allen sat up in bed. "Who is it?"

"What are you doing up?"
"What do you want?"
Hoyt felt awkward. He did not know what he wanted. His awkwardness became hostility. He could see Allen sitting in bed, almost leaning forward toward him. Friends thought Allen "handsome."

"Leave me alone." Allen could not make his words match his feelings. "What do you want?"
"What are you doing up?"
"What do you want?"
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"What do you want?"
Hoyt stood on the front porch, and perused the neighborhood of fifty thousand dollar homes. The light was on across the street. He felt rather like a fool with his one hand in his pocket, the other holding a drink, but resigned himself to have a good time nonetheless. He stopped under the street light on the other side of the street, and looked toward the lighted house. He could see no activity, but walked up the brick walk to the house just the same. He tried to look through the curtains in the windows, but trying the doorknob and finding it unlocked, decided to go on in.

"Dave... Charly, anybody home?" Receiving no answer, Hoyt stepped into the hall. He heard the television in the family room in the back of the house, and walked back to see who was still up. Just before he entered the room, one of the neighbor's kids walked out into the hall. He could not remember the name, but knew that she was Barb and Al Harris' daughter.

"Oh... gee Mr. McIntyre, you scared me... I'm baby-sitting tonight."

"Dave and... oh, the Rays aren't here, huh?... I saw the light on and thought there was a party."

"No, they're down at the Norris' party."

Hoyt wondered why he had not been invited. Even though Skipper was not there, he could still have gone. He had been to many of those parties without her, and besides, he was a relative. Hoyt looked at the girl. She was fifteen. She still had braces, but Hoyt could see that she would soon be looking much better.

"Thanks," he said.

"Should I tell them you were here, Mr. McIntyre?"

"No... say, which one are you?"

"Peggy."

"Oh yeah... Peggy. Listen if you need some more jobs... you could sit at our house sometimes."

Hoyt put his hand on Peggy's shoulder.

"No, I really don't think so, Mr. McIntyre. My parents really don't want me to do much more sitting."

I mean, I've got lots of work in school this year and... well, you know how it is..."

"With Skipper away I thought I... well anyway... so long..."

"Bye Mr. McIntyre. I'm really sorry."

"Yeah..." Hoyt quickened his steps as he heard the door. He was glad to get back outside to the night air. Skipper and he had made love in the wet night grass in weather like that. "That Peggy's got a nice little ass," he thought to himself. "To bad she's one of the neighbor's kids," he laughed to himself. He stopped beneath the streetlight again and looked down the street to the Norris' house. He really had not been back on the cocktail party circuit and thought he might as well start again that night. "To hell with Skipper," he said aloud as he walked slowly down the street, he walked into a tricycle in front of the Triscaro's house. "Low-class wops shouldn't live in this place anyhow."

"Giving the tricycle a shove with his foot, he sent it rolling into the street."

There were no cars in front of the Norris' house, but there was notice emanating nonetheless. Hoyt reasoned that the party must have been one of those spontaneous ones, just neighbors, and no longer felt badly about not being invited. Without reservation, he walked up the house and stepped inside without knocking.

The party was of a spontaneous nature. It was to celebrate the Norris' day-old announcement of their daughter's marriage. The daughter, Nancy, was a junior in college. She had been dating steadily for the last six months. It's hardly her duty to take care of those brats of yours, but still, Mom feels a certain responsibility. . . We don't. Leave us alone. Please."
"Andra, I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"As far as we're concerned, the whole thing died with Skipper. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to check on something in the kitchen."

Left, standing alone with his drink, Hoyt looked around the room for the bar. He thought of going after Amanda, but noticed that Rob was now watching him, Hoyt moved slowly to the porch where a Negro in a white jacket was mixing drinks at a make-shift bar. With a fresh drink, he carefully stepped down the steps onto the patio in the backyard. Nancy was sitting alone on a white porch chair. Hoyt sat down on the brick paver beside her. "You happy, baby?"

"'Oh Uncle Hoyt, I'm sorry."

"Sorry? About what? Why you've got a great husband there, isn't he the one that's going to law school?"

"That's not what I meant, Yes, He's the one. ..I'm sorry I didn't come home. That was the week that I. ..well that was when I found out."

"You know that doesn't matter to me. Your mother was a little upset that you weren't there, but that's only natural, baby," Hoyt pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it with some matches he found on a table near Nancy's chair. After he had smoked it for a few minutes in silence, Nancy took it from his hands and took a drag herself. She gave out a loud snuffle and wiped her nose on her arm. "Now, Hoyt. Hoyt, I'm so sick of all this. I wish I could just move in with you."

"Don't think your husband would like that. Think your mother would like it even less."

"Why's she so mad at you, anyway? You'd think it was your fault the way she talks."

"I sure as hell don't know. Occurs," After a few more moments of silence, Hoyt picked up his drink from behind Nancy's chair. After stirring his drink, he licked his wet fingers. "She was always like that -- your mother that is. I don't know what it was. Probably damn jealous."

"'D'you ever date Mom?"

"'Once. Hell, she was so frigging. ..oh forget it, babe."

"No, Uncle Hoyt, What is it?"

"'Ah, You're like your aunt, Yeah. She could make me talk. Made me forget those goddamn snobs," as Hoyt squatted whiskey through his frost teeth, Nancy took a sip and did likewise. They both smiled with delight. "No, your mother was against me from the start. Then when Skipper and I...got mar-ried, .." Hoyt waited for Nancy's reaction. He did not know whether she knew the particulars of his marriage. Nancy gave no indication either way.

"'Yeah, but she's not like that with me,"

"Give her a chance," Hoyt laughed. "No, she's careful about who she's a bitch to," Hoyt thought that perhaps he should stop; it was her mother he was talking about. But again he found himself drifting. They both stood up together, Nancy took off her shoes, and the two stepped out into the wet night grass. Hoyt stopped by the swing hanging from the huge oak tree. "Yeah, You look like your aunt. She used to walk out of those parties without telling me," Nancy sat in the swing. Cradling the rope in both hands, she leaned far back to look up into the sky, faint with stars. Hoyt, standing behind, closed his hands over hers. Leaning over her, he kissed her softly on her neck. She stood and faced him. ..They embraced through the swing. Taking both her hands in his, Hoyt kissed them and then placed them on his chest. Then giving a quick laugh, he said, "We'd better get you inside before your mother notices that you're gone." They stood for a moment in the cool night air before walking back to the terrace.

As Nancy ran the last few feet ahead of her uncle, she called over her shoulder, "Hey Uncle Hoyt, I'm gonna have a sip of your drink." Nancy took a good gulp and then handed Hoyt the glass. The two walked to the door of the porch.

Giving her a slap on her bottom, Hoyt barked, "Get your ass inside!" Nancy laughed as she ran up the steps to the porch.

Hoyt did not walk into the house. He stood looking through the door as Nancy re-joined the party. There were too many people whom he did not see, too many who did not want to see him. They had all shown at the funeral, and he had received them all as friends. It made his blood boil to think of them. He took a sip from his now almost empty glass.

Hoyt walked quickly to the back gate. He could never remember how the latch worked on it, and it took him almost a full minute to get it opened. Once opened, he walked out onto the newly re-surfaced driveway. He sat down on top of one of the garbage cans and took off his shoes and socks. Holding his shoes by the laces in his left hand, his drink still in his right hand, he walked slowly down the center of the smooth, almost sticky driveway toward the street. Once beyond the front of the house, he cut over for the street light on the far side of the street, Hoyt threw the now completely empty glass. It had been the same glass that Skipper and he had received in a set as a wedding gift from some aunt in Ashtabula. It had been something of a miracle that it had lasted as long as it had.

Forgetting his shoes and socks on the tree lawn, Hoyt turned and sprinted back to his house, still marked by the lights burning on the first floor. He stopped abruptly before he entered the house until he remembered that it was he who had left the door ajar. He closed it firmly behind him and bolted the door with the chain. He then slowly running around the downstairs, turning off the lights. The kitchen was still a mess.

Hoyt then returned to the hall and began to climb the stairs quickly, taking them one at a time. The fluorescent light in the upstairs' hall bathroom illuminated the hall enough so that he had no trouble finding his way to the master bedroom. He flicked on the light and scanned the disheveled room. Clothes and magazines lay over the floor. His bed had not been made for weeks, but Skipper's twin bed on the other side of the nightstand remained neatly made, untouched since she had died two months earlier.

Hoyt stepped to the full-length three-way-mirror that he himself had installed for Skipper when they had first moved into the house. Quickly he undressed until he stood naked. Then, lighting a cigarette, he moved quickly about the room, picking up his dirty clothes as he went. As soon as the room was cleaned, he made his own bed, pulling the bedsheets over the pillows tightly. He then stepped into the bathroom where he vigorously brushed his teeth for several minutes.

As he entered the now dimly lit room, he stood for several moments in the doorway, his hands on his hips. Then, slowly running his hands over his torso, he threw back his head and turned off the light switch with a quick jerk of his hand. Then, giving a quick bark of a laugh, he ran for the bed, pulling back the covers, burying himself as he rolled over the faded yellow-colored sheets of his wife's bed.

-THE TOLLING OF THE BELL-

Out of the crowd, the infinite vision:
the face - the turning leaf of the inviable,
the fingerprints of God upon my temples,
the White Adam,
cursed with the fear that kills,
the fingerprints of God upon my temples,
the liftings and fallings
across concrete shoulders,
the liftings and fallings
across concrete shoulders
in infinite machination
here, and in all tiny human haunts,
and in each space between
all the movements of sky,
of wing against air.

McWalter  - Keith McWalter
What Exile from himself can flee?
To zones though more and more remote,
Still, still pursues, where'er I be
The blight of Life -- the Demon Thought

- Lord Byron
(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto I)