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Exile
Fall 1995
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40th Year

Fall Issue
You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

Ezra Pound
Breughel Again, Brussels

She scoops the frites into the paper cone,
Arms like melting wax.
Oily warmth glowing yellow.
Kermess.
I eat, walking,
scenery sliding down my throat.

Circling.
Midnight in a crowd,
We move together.
Around lipstick and frizzed hair,
Men with scars,
Arab boys with smirks
Pinching butts.
Moving

Around the rides with Techno music.
Americanized.
"Le Splash"
"Le Rock"
"Youpi!"
Steel rotations.

A boxing match is about
To start.
I stop
Next to a tall man in a fez.
He turns and shows me
His golden teeth.
At the Kermess, you have to keep
Moving or you'll slip under.

Slot machines.
Dart games.
Herrings and chestnuts.
Cotton Candy.
Fleshy Women, oiled,
Edible.

Flemish laughs,
French whispers
And sex noises in corners
Behind the stands.
In the painting,
A man in a bodkin with an erection.
Here, pareil:
Spandex and hard-ons.

"Le Splash"
Again.
Lights and motors,
Screams of thrills
Of the circling carnival machines.
Clunk and fall.

Spinning again.
Upside down
In Flemish, like Breughel.
"Le Rock."
A boy in a suit, slicked,
I looked too long
And he follows me.
I can feel my hips swaying.

French whispers:
C'est marrant, hein, on tourne.
Cement littered
Mayonnaise and frites,
Waffle fragments
Greasy napkins.

Screaming mouths.
He is following me,
My hips move nervous.
A woman with one arm.
A boy with an eyepatch.
A cigar, ash in my hair.
I turn
And the crowd is rushing at me.

He is there, his gray suit,
With a rose.
I have to turn back,
Moving with the others
In our circle.
And he is beside me.
for play with whitman

face it
passion is a cold lobotomy
except when I read you
soft soulful singing shell
its advocate
his reconciler
her conductor
and my lover
(being precedes not shell
nor shell precedes not being)
bearded bard
minstrel minister
you always
accept when I read you
other crawfish toy with me
flirt twelve inches below sea level
waves distort and wrinkle my view
i surge forward to paw them
and they skirt backward
but you
you always accept when I read you
i surge backward to paw you
and you rush everywhere to greet me
bursting through fluid space
exploding through water time
simultaneously
my future my past my life and my lover
and you soul shell become still my present
lifting drifting floating bloating
with life and time
you know
not dry stream nor net
for you always
accept when I read you

alex e blazer '97

Saeta Sunday

Miles Davis hearkening the lost
sensuality of Spain, you at the stereo
toning the volume of his trumpet,
blissfully dripping in your shower towel.

What else do I need, my own
backyard cabaret, my personal quintet
of Harlem heroes sweating, straining
at their art to please me? When you,
cheeks the hue of cherry wine,
hair glistening more sweetly than Monk’s
piano keys, sway before me
in a syncopation unique, sans melody.

Carl Boon '96
An Abbreviated Life

Born J.H. Doe in K.C.
Went K-12 in L.A.
Got B.S. in C.S.
from O.S.U. in ‘89.
N.A.S.A. hired at 25K.
I.B.M. V.P. at 60K to put O.E.D. on C.D.
R.O.M. (His P.C. had 40 gigs R.A.M.)
Drank 2 kilos MD 20/20 last P.M.; B.M.W. hit semi at 80 m.p.h.

Mike Westmoreland

Anthem of Governor’s Bay

I often believed that my greatest power was the worldly knowledge you lent me in my youth. It assured me that my life might prosper out of Governor’s Bay. Now the tide creeps away from those summers of hurried talks on the hot docks of the bay, and becomes faded like the teak of an antiqued yacht.

Across the inlet, a stately mansion was built. It stared into the sound, and often the land marked itself for drunken navigators. It was here where you and your wife threw Gatsby-style galas, inviting club members and island folk from the Gold Coast communities of Eaten’s neck, Quogue, and East Hampton. I watched from my launch boat as couples mingled their ways across the pristine lawn to where you and Mrs. Faircloth sipped dry Martinis and greeted with unnatural hugs. Later, you discussed your hatred for those well-dressed events. You told me about your youth, and an October afternoon at Yankee Stadium, sitting high in the nickel seats when you caught a ball barehanded from the legendary ‘Mick’ during his final games in the Bronx. Your memories of youth were precious. You never spoke of your wife, except when she refused to join you during your afternoon hunts for Bluefish off the banks of the island. She called it mundane; sitting hours in a fishing chair, beer in hand, waiting to reel in finned seafood. I was fourteen when you called your wife’s name as you stood on the afterdeck of your yacht, and triggered your life away.

You spoke to me only on the weekends when you arrived with your long-haired Sheepdog named Beaches; both of you awaiting your delivery to Insanity. He occasionally perched himself on the bow of my launch, as I throttled an Evinrude fifteen horse through the harbor, dodging the wakes of larger seacraft. Governor’s Bay was nested in the banks of the Connecticut River, which emptied itself into the Long Island Sound across from Montauk Point. It was my home and yours. The harbor ran deep into the coast, turning itself into a fresh water river within five miles of the pebbled shoreline. Governor’s was the home of fresh and wealthy executives and old money families. Its beaches were occupied by lavish whitewashed weekend cottages that could have been used as year round palaces. Yours was on a bluff, where white waves crashed against the jagged rocks below your lawn. It was a weathered mansion with forest-colored awnings, wrapping around the veranda that was blanketeted by towering oaks.

My father restored an ’81 Boston Whaler and made it into a launch boat. He crafted a cushioned seat that curved around the body of the boat with plenty of space for sailbags, coolers, graying fathers, and their pampered daughters. On both sides, was the name Harbor Son, painted delicately with a deep red glossy paint. It was designed to hold a much larger outboard than the small Evinrude motor mounted to the stern, but harbor police enforced a no wake zone on all boats. My job required me to bring families, young couples, and fish-hearty men to their moored boats in the harbor. I made most of my money through tips handed down to me from the teaked decks of Hatterases, Chris Crafts, Bertrams, and various modern sloops. At sundown I collected

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my passengers from those floating pavilions, and brought them to a dock by the club-
house, where they discussed their latest Caribbean adventures over a bottle of
Chardonnay.

Yours was a fifty-two foot Grand Banks, white with a navy blue hull. Insanity
was nestled in between smaller vessels, making it appear royal and important. The fly-
ing bridge shot skyward, and had a sophisticated panel of controls which you controlled
to maneuver her on your escapes to Block Island and the Vineyard. It was this passion-
ate boat which lured you away from your home atop the bluff, and gave you a delicate
feeling of youth.

I picked you up on the lee side of your home, where a jetty calmed the water,
and created a small inlet. Every Saturday at ten. That was the routine. You boarded and
bellowed a huge welcome with Beaches by your side, tongue out and tail wagging. He
loved the salt in the air.

"Graham, my boy. How’s business? Right on time. Hear anything this morn-
ing? Anything ‘bout the blues bitin’?"

"Ah...yeah. Some guys out at Lighthouse Point said they were really snappin’
all morning. “Round eight or so. Don’t think you’ll have any trouble, Mr. Faircloth. Ya
always know where they’re hiding out.”

"Hope so, my boy. Really hope so. Rough week in the city, son. Need to get a
little r ‘n r. Don’t you get caught in that nine to five crap. Ain’t worth your time. Get out
into that country, smell the mountain breezes. Heck you’re what...fifteen? Ahh, what I’d
give... Best years of your life, Graham. Best damn years:"

"Actually, fourteen, sir. Wouldn’t mind going to college someday. Somewhere.
I don’t know."

"Nothing beats an education, son. But you get your best just from livin’ every-
day. Being happy by being yourself. That’s what it’s all about."

"Yeah...well, I guess so."

Together, we cruised through the harbor, the crisp breeze rattling masts and
main sheets, stewing them in the silence of the morning hours. I asked about your plans;
the travels you intended to make with Insanity after the summer months passed, alone.
You mentioned how tempting the Maine coast was in early autumn as the maple leaves
turned a brilliant auburn; the trees draping over the inlets of Bar Harbor and Portland.
You told me your independence was a rare privilege after marriage; that every once in a
while you needed a dose of privacy, away from Governor’s Bay, separate from your
home atop the bluff.

We stopped by Brace’s Bait ‘n Tackle so that you could pick up fresh chum,
and maybe try a new lure. I brought you to Insanity and helped you aboard the elegant
yacht, and waited for my return commands. I wondered where Mrs. Faircloth was, and
why she didn’t keep you company on those day long travels, but you seemed satisfied
by yourself.

“Well, I’m off, my boy. Gonna catch some rays, gonna catch some game fish.
Have a good one, son. Don’t spend too much of that cash, save a little.” Once aboard,
you always chuckled and cracked a beer, then waved me off.

“Thanks, Mr. Faircloth. We’ll see ya around six, and don’t worry, I’ll be on
time.”
exile

busy with the caterers, and her preparation for your Labor Day gathering, but you said nothing else. I returned a dusk and heard you cry her name, but found you lying, clenching a pistol with fresh blood saturating the teak of your Grand Banks. In your other hand, you held a note which read “My youth is eternal. I simply...lived.”

****

After seven years I come back as a young man who dreams beyond that summertime harbor. The opening line of my graduation speech read, “A humble man once told me there is a feeling of eternity in youth.” I stood in an ivy filled quad and tried to capture your spirit with these words. Later I marched to Pomp and Circumstance with the Green Mountains surrounding, entering a feared adulthood. My professors spoke in white classrooms about the dimensions of a novel, Breugel’s satirical paintings, and Pavlov’s discovery about dog saliva, but no one had mentioned this phrase to me. I sought you as a mentor, someone whose charmed talks were worth more than a tip received on the fueling dock during a scorched 4th of July. A week before that summer’s end I watched you die from a skiff you traveled on with me as your launchboy, with me as your friend.

Jamey Hein ’96
Crosses

Tired of crank out windows and prefab paneling,
she grips the armrests of her chair
when summer's heat presses too close.
Then, she writes letters. Under her pen
epistles of accusation and apology
appear in her tiny, tight handwriting,
to the father she could never please
and the mother who couldn't care.
She writes to save herself from them.
They are letters she will never send.
When she tears up a letter, she also rips
the sheets beneath – afraid
someone will read the indentations
and see what haunts her, keeps
her in that chair in a trailer with a man
she cannot love. He does love
her – that's his cross to bear.
But she knows it, and that is hers.

Liz Bolyard '96

Raccoons at the Cats' Food

I know I shouldn’t ignore them,
but it's much easier to continue
chopping garlic,
to pretend that they
aren't at the screen door
gobbling cat food
from our wide, metallic bowl.
I can hear them crunching,
grunting irreverently as grandpa
belches at Thanksgiving dinner.

I often watch
their feast before intruding.
Raccoons dine as if they were
stuffed animals
attending a child's tea party.
They sink back on haunches,
potbellies protruded,
and scoop up cat food
with almost royal grace.
Our cats watch this banquet,
perhaps paradoxically amused
at the raccoons' gradual enslavement.
Only twice have I caught
'Cisco bristling. She must know
that their castes stem from our favor,
And that humans always
have loved cats best.
Cat dependency probably
began with the Egyptians, but raccoons
newly live from garbage cans
filled by our decadence.

Sometimes I slip off
my sneaker, stare down
an approaching thief
and then, Thunk,
hurl it at his portly body.
He cowers to please me
and ambles off toward the woods,
keeping one eye fixed on his meal.
I wish I could drive
them away, force
them to forage
for berries and fish,
revoking their indenture.
But, already they’ve trampled
a path from their home,
through the weeds,
right to the kitchen
door.

Jennifer Rudgers ’96

Father Federico

The ridges of folded strata, trace of Cuban cigars
furry knuckles, worn, well-used, with a scratch
on the left thumb base where Rocky played too rough,
ruddy, dark, talkative, holy hands.
He shakes the gold watch down on his wrist,
tucks the handkerchief into his pocket, tugging
the sleeve of his purple vestments back
where it belongs, folds his hands in prayer, pauses.

Hot quartz, shells, magma under feet, excitement,
sizzling, the place is going to erupt.
Father, let’s take a vacation to Aruba, feel
the spray on your face, hold a tall cool glass...
Lips moving, deep in prayer, out of habit he chimes,
Watch your language, you are in the House of God.

Trish Kiel ’97
Dream Poem 1

Had another dream about you.
Filled me with double rainbow happiness.
The moment became a multi-faceted gem,
skin felt so soft,
eyes big deep,
shifting from green to blue, hazel to black. We lay;
in a field of daisies pansies pink roses wildflowers.
I ran my fingers through your hair
as it turned from long brown to
short smooth fuzz.

The dream was not about growing old together,
it simply was one perfect moment
stretched to infinity.

Colin Bossen '98

Virgin Mary in Kentucky

I’m standing in a K-Mart parking lot feeling just plain dumb.
The lawn chairs march by, trundled across the asphalt by corpulent
men in camouflage. Large breasted women cuddle small lumps
of children who bounce up and down with each determined step.
Closer and closer to Mecca.

They have grown accustomed to slowness. Time moves across
their bodies like a sensual massage. They are prepared to wait
all night. Toys for the baby, the last of the diapers
and a bottle of coke.
This is the place to be.

Old friends gossip on the curbside...Mary’s rosary’s turning gold.
Sarah saw the priest last week about Mitchell. Not everyone sees
her here, you know. Dick didn’t see her last year. A pack of boys
terrorize the girl in the shiny shoes and frilly socks.
A festival of light.

The sidewalk is narrow but the march has begun. To step out of line
now would be costly. The sidewalk empties into another lot.
The crowd spills into the open space, splashing in the mud,
dancing over puddles. Statuesque in the frenzy of this celebration.
A fine mist presses down.

Closer to the prophesied time, 11:53 PM. Excitement is passed
like a lit stick of dynamite crackling and sputtering
its way to explosion. Choruses of Ave Maria, swelling and thrusting
the collective group to watchful anticipation.
Her time has come.

Flashes of light, and I feel nothing. Gasps. A small child, he could have passed for Jesus
in a Sunday School learner, whispers, Where is
she? Is she here? Momma heaves him up for a closer look
and the pop of lights from cameras illuminates his cherub face.
Has he seen her?

Is it possible that in the tangled branches of the tree,
against the backdrop of stained glass windows and symbols of faith,
he has been fulfilled? The throng empties in a slow and solemn march,
retracing the narrow path to the K-Mart parking lot.
Faithful disciples.
I watch long enough to see the last camera bulb flash, final confessions pass among friends. I look again at the picture in front of me, tree branches still and the quiet light filtering from the painted windows. I turn for home, glancing back, hoping She will appear.

Amy Ard ’96

"she" bruises poems on-
to your silk back. you
say “stop it! quit it!
they hurt, and they drain.”

* * * * *

at the first tunnel
the buddha, teacher,
waits for the thesis
called om, my god, the

life force-you, broken
boxed and late, crawl through
primordial ooze
and tadpole to punt

the seed
to pooh
to goo

in vicarious you
slit punta
we’re thru
the shot glass
slicked with tampax
and the metaphysical note of
the lobotomized jig

is up and out
through our nostrils

and you, drunk with your own
lackadaisically apportioned maculation,
tunnel your vision
to the phosphorescent protrusion
rutting the blue off the gill
of the only fizzed fish still strong enough
to pull the emasculated and hysterectomized
fisher thing into the already lyed in
jacuzzi creek
crossing beneath route fifty-two
Visiting Uncle Ernie

i

When Uncle Ernie and Aunt Pauline still lived at the farm, we'd drive the forty miles every weekend to see them. Ernie'd turn on the TV to boxing and posture his eight arthritic fingers best as he could into fists, punching with the boxers while Aunt Pauline fussed, telling him to watch his heart. He'd roll his eyes at us, but reach over and click off the set.

ii

Aunt Pauline would take my mother out to show her the garden or get the mail, and mom would come back puffing. I can't keep up with that woman. Then Pauline would go to the kitchen to make bread. Dirty Bread Uncle Ernie'd call it—said she kneaded it with her feet. When I was very young my eyes would get big every time he said that; then he'd wink at me.

iii

My dad would go pump water for her. They didn't have indoor plumbing until Uncle Ernie’s third stroke, and then reluctantly. Ernie was proud of his outhouse. A two-seater, and carpeted too. Clean, and it don't even smell in the summer. He'd show us 'bout every time we visited. Then he'd take my dad to the fruit cellar to drink a beer, thinking he was pulling one on Pauline. She'd smile and keep kneading her bread (with her hands, not her feet).

iv
Ernie would show dad his mining helmet with the lamp on top. Pretty fancy, huh? and tell him about his first job in the mine when he was ten years old, tell him about the shaft collapsing, and him barely getting out, Hell, I didn’t all get out. Left two fingers down there. They’d laugh and Ernie would pound him on the back and tell dad about digging graves, by hand, after the mines shut down. He’d say he figured he’d been in more graves than anybody else walking around.

Ernie and Pauline were married seventy-five years, longer than lots of people live. When Pauline was ninety, she died in her sleep. Ernie started failing. Six months later he was in the nursing home. We’d visit him. He’d be lying on the edge of that single bed. Dad would ask him how he was sleeping, and Ernie would look at that empty spot next to him, Oh, I don’t sleep so well no more.

A Capuchin Monk

We were once as you and you will be as we. –sign in the Capuchin crypt

At the open door to this sacred chapel, he encourages change from tourist-class gawkers by shaking a plate of percussive coins and grunting in anger if he’s ignored. He hoods himself to care for this church and to face the hordes which flock to it solely to glimpse its dismembered monks.

Friars conceived of a baroque decor. The ceilings are graced with their sacra in stars. Femurs frame ribs nailed in scrolling arrays and intricate garlands of vertebrae. Some robed remains were left intact, hands poised in prayer or holding a cross. Their heads are pillowed by piles of ulnas, and around them are mountains of other arm bones.

It is his brothers’ skulls which flank the altar, and their scapulas hang as shields round a painting of Jesus extending his flesh-covered palm. So daily the door monk hallows this place, fills vases with blossoms, and waters his pots of spider plants issuing shoots of new life. He knows this crypt holds his ultimate worth.
Jurgen Moltmann, the tenacious German theologian of hope, greets me in the morning. He scratches the leftover sleep from my eye in a fashion no pallid Baptist preacher could approximate. He's blasted Kant, and Schopenhauer, too, and he's gearing up to slam God head-first into his concrete mat of condemnation. What a furious transition from the spell of Saturday afternoon, my feet propped up, my knees balancing an easy beer. Saturday night, a red Corvette so confident around the curves, no seat belts, and Sunday morning, a vacuous, viscous Volvo heavy on the highway, pursuing the crimes of the Lutheran Church. Who changed lanes? I feel like a hostage confined to the realms of tedious claims of faith before breakfast. Where are you, Wallace Stevens? Your citrus images, your New York Times spread out against the kitchen table? I am envious of your ease.

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Old Man and the Marriage Party

He totters on three wobbling Legs across the manicured lawn. He stops to wipe his etched brow With an old yellowed handkerchief.

A lonely pit reaches out, beckons The cane — the man crumples. The Samaritan swoops in, Using the lifeguard grip.

Body heaves, ribs shudder, Bones creak, life is leaving him. He huddles on the doorstep, Between here and where

Life is easy and no more. He wants the fight to be done. The marriage party in the backyard Pays no attention, gaudy blue hats,

Silk flower bouquets, wine, and baby's Breath mingles among the crowd. The old man turns toward the party, Yearning. His hat has fallen off,

His left lens, cracked. He turns to The Samaritan and begs To be left alone. The party Roars on, and the old man

Closes his milky blue eyes. A dark cloud drifts overhead.

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Carl Boon '96

Trish Klei '97
Cowboy Up

He bought his son's boots upstairs in the western Salvation Army, size four and a half. He cleaned the dust from them with two quick slaps of his buckskin gloves and even found tiny spurs under a shelf behind a spider's home. He spun the jagged wheel like a miniature propeller, and it squeaked at first, then whirled in the shimmering afternoon sunlight. As he approached the counter, floor boards creaked at the weight of his boots, and he heard the same sound within himself. His denim was tarnished the color of the soil and his face was creased and worn like a stone from a dried out creek.

"This all for ya'?” The young woman asked the cowboy, but her face had more questions for this man.

He lowered his head and gave her a humble nod then muttered, “mm-yep.”

"Aren't these the cutest things.”

Again, a nod.

"I'm just so glad someone's getting them. Oh, and you got the spurs too.”

He tucked up his chin and brushed his left thumb underneath his Stetson reaching behind him with his other hand as if to sling a pistol.

"Oh. It's five all together.” The clerk cocked her head to the side trying to look in at the cowboy but with his hat tipped over his eyes she could not see past it to his face. She popped some buttons on the old hunk of metal on the counter and a drawer blasted out, starving for green paper.

The cowboy slung a crumpled wad of cash from his back pocket.

"This for your boy?” The clerk, not a day over eighteen, dropped her head only to see the brim of his hat, and hear the husky tone of his voice from a small shadow of his face.

"See if I can teach him to ride.”

"Is that down at the pee-wee rodeo thing at Rosebud Farm?”

"It is.”

"That's my daddy's farm.”

"Is it?”

"Shoot I ain't kiddin',”

"You're Malone, are ya?”

"Yes sir, and it's nice to make your acquaintance cowboy.”

He pushed his hat up with his trigger finger to let her see who he was.

"Damn! Well, I know you. You're Tommy Shepherd!” She jumped up and down with excitement.

The wiry man removed his hat and graciously bowed with a grin.

"The two time world champion cowboy, standin' across the counter this whole damn time.” She shook her head in amazement. “My Daddy sure's gonna' be happy to see you.” She slapped both hands on the counter.

He watched to see if anyone was looking at him. No one paid him any attention. They knew him years ago. But they don't talk up anyone's name when they leave the sport. Only in the highlight reels. Only the clips that show those cowboys tossed up and mashed into the ground.
The cowboy watched the two of them meeting eye to eye like a bear to a squirrel.

“Fine.”
“Well that’s fine. What is it that they call you?”
“Clint, sir.”
“Clint. Well, Clint, you can call me Bill. I’m your friend.”
“It is nice to meet you sir.”
“Bill.”
“Bill!” Clint shyly smiled and tucked his head into his father’s leg squeezing the denim firmly with both hands.

“He’s got strong hands, Shepherd, you can see that already.”
“Can ya’?”

Wickets puffed up his lips and gave a reassuring nod, then smiled at the sarcastic tone of Shepherd’s voice.

“Are you here for a stay?”
“Just a day or two. We’ll be on our way to Sacramento afterwards.”

“Ah yes, you’re going to see your grandmother.” Wickets reached inside of his worn down leather coat and produced a piece of caramel candy and handed it to Clint.

“It’s good to see you again, my friend. Come, let me show you what I’ve done to the place.” Wickets handed his friend a cigar and directed them to the door.

They strolled along the open acreage of Rosebud and Wickets pointed at the exiles.

“You mind your manners in here, this man is an old friend.” He pounded three times, next to the giant brass door knocker on the towering wooden door. An Old Mexican woman answered and attempted to ask their business. The cowboy quickly declined her mixed English with a “no gracias” and proceeded through the living room, tugging his miniature rodeo star with him.

Wickets was a mountainous man. He was sitting alone, in his living room, under a giant set of bull horns mounted on the wall. Mr. Wickets had organized and sponsored many of the world championship contests but was now retired from that. There was a massive oil painting of four Indian scouts on horseback surveying a setting of the western frontier. Shepherd cherished this painting. He stopped at the door to watch the picture stare back at his friend. Shepherd bought that painting a long time ago. When the money was there. It was quiet, the air thick with the smell of cigar, and Wickets sat like a cast iron sculpture at his throne in the den.

The Cowboy entered with his son.

“There any good ridin’ to be had here?”

Wickets lifted himself from his chair. An elevated grin turned into a belly laugh. The floor boards were stained oak and they all cracked as Wickets approached his guests. Mr. Wickets embraced his cowboy friend and held him. Then a hand shake. The cowboy laughed and held him in his eyes.

“Shepherd, you slippery little man.” Wickets covered the cowboy’s shoulder with grip of his hand. “I thought you had fallen from the end of the earth. I write you, I call, I even sent a fax to that mixed up publicity agent you used to talk to’ Wickets tilted his head downward. He bent his knees and lowered his giant frame to the boy. “How are you there?”

The cowboy watched the two of them meeting eye to eye like a bear to a squirrel.

The cowboy chuckled and tipped his hat to customers. They passed, asking each other who he was, and he could hear them.

“Well I sure would like to see that boy a yours.”

“Hey, Mr. Shepherd.” Malone laughed. “My daddy will be pleased.”

“I was hoping it would be a nice surprise.”

“Shepherd creaked toward the door, smiling and bowing to the folds in the store...

“Oh, Tommy.”
Shepherd turned.

“Thanks, for coming here and everything. I know my daddy will be happy.”

Shepherd winked to her, followed by a comforting grin and took long strides out to the street. Inside he could hear Malone. “That was Tommy Shepherd. The Tommy Shepherd! World champion cowboy, folks...”
everything with his cigar before explaining it. They were between the house and the largest stable. The junior rodeo was to be held in the center paddock, nearest to them. On the other side of the barn was another paddock with a stallion in it.

"Why are the ribbons up a day early?"
"It has...become such a...a town event. Christ, I think that they will turn it in to a village holiday around here in the years to come. It's a lot of hoopla for just a one day joy ride for little boys."

"Turned it into a money game didn't you?"
Loose gravel kicked up some dust at their feet when Wickets stopped walking.
"Clint, my young friend. If you run over to the stable there you can take a look at that stallion we have. He's in that field there."

The cowboy watched Clint peer up at him and Shepherd dismissed him with his eyes. Clint ran to the far paddock and jumped onto the railing of the fence.

"I'm sure in some trouble Tommy."
"What are you crying about?"
"This is no joke. I'm afraid I'm in over my head."
"Oh yeah, how deep?"
"Woah, deep enough." Wickets lifted his arm up to just under his chin.
"I guess asking you for help is out of the question."
"Why? You too?"

Shepherd held his arm high above his head, bent his wrist, and flattened his hand. Totally relaxed he grinned as if he knew things would get better.

"Is that right?" Wickets scratched his head. "What about all the publicity?"
"No."
"Forgotten."
"Jesus."
"Yep."
"There's gotta' be somethin'."
"Huh, like what?"
"Shit, I don't know. You gamble all of it away."
"Some at the beginning. Then, after Helen passed...well I just ran out after a while."

"What about your agent, and the sponsors?"
"Vultures."
"Really?"
"I don't really spend my life around a man who does everything in the world for personal gain. Besides it makes me nervous to talk to a someone who always has a watch on and a pen in their pocket."

"Well it probably don't make them feel real good to do business with a cowboy who carries a loaded pistol in his car."

Shepherd shrugged, then watched as his boy reached out to feel the stallion.
"Careful with him." he shouted. The stallion snorted and pranced, then backed away quick, letting his eyes roll back to white. Shepherd inhaled a deep breath at a sight that was all too familiar. That horse pulled back, jerking, and whining with a high pitch that hit the cowboy in a place close to his heart.

Wickets threw his cigar in the dirt and stomped on it.
"You gonna' tell me what happened?"
"What? With me?" Wickets shrugged his shoulders and straightened out his jacket, adjusting his overall appearance. "I got too many horses. No one wants to buy 'em. The business ain't the same anymore and I can't compete with the other sponsors."

He kicked gravel over his broken cigar and ran his fingers through his silver hair. "It don't make you one bit nervous does it?"

"Shit. I been banged up much worse than any bank would do me."

The stallion threw up his hind legs, then pranced around the paddock. "You stay clear of that fence now, you hear? He's just showin' off for ya'." Clint nodded back to his father, then returned to the wild horse.

Shepherd spit in the dirt and dropped his cigar.
"That's a fine Cuban there buddy, you better finish it."
"You got any whiskey?"
"Wait, I'm not done about the cigar."
"I met Malone today."
"So it's whiskey you want."

Shepherd smirked at the red face of a long time companion.
"My damn daughter won't stay in school. She took her money and opened her own store...sellin' junk that no one wants."
"Junk?"
"Yeah, well, she seems to think the past will make her future. Let's have that drink before dinner."

Shepherd whistled and Clint cranked his head around with an attentive smile. Shepherd waved him in as the two men turned and made way toward the ranch house.

The burning sun slowly sank at their backs, as the boy ran behind, trying to catch up.

Malone listened through the kitchen window, half cringing and half amazed through the kitchen window, half cringing and half amazed.

The steak burned black and spicy over hot coals out on the porch. Malone, in the kitchen, dug her hand through a salad bowl, tossing freshly sliced vegetables with green lettuce, then adding dressing. Outside by the fire the settling dust and sleepy sun kept the two men company, while the young rider watched the fields of horses play and tufts of long grass sway in the evening's breeze. Ice swirled in the short glasses of brown water and the men spoke of their Texas past.

"You rode a big mother, as I recall, by the name of Bear Claw. Was that it, Bear Claw?" Wickets sipped from his glass and watched the sky.
"Ssht. Sona'bitch cracked my sternum in three different spots. Threw me, then put his skull square into my chest. Laid me up against them metal bars, got me to where I's just crying for help. 'Cept I couldn't say nothing, not with my chest caved in like it was. Believe me I was trying."

"Yeah, that was the last that bull ever went out, I think."
"Um hm, it was. Matter a' fact, a fell' down in Fort Worth sent me a box full a frozen steaks in the hospital sayin it was the last a' Bear Claw."

Malone listened through the kitchen window, half cringing and half amazed.
that a man could live to speak of such stories.

"How 'bout that night in cow town with the Leary brothers."

"Oh, Jesus." Shepherd coughed and jiggled in his chair. "Holding you off a' that tall skinny one was harder than riding any bull, that's for damn sure."

"Yeah, well I's taken him on as God intended. Fist to fist. I didn't resort to braking no whisky bottle over that big one's head, like someone I know."

"As I recall you were not the one get'n pounded and spun like some hairy Italian was making a pizza out a' you all afternoon."

"Jesus, Tommy when you turned and smashed that big one over the head he fell like a ton a' bricks." Wickets smiled and carried on. "The skinny one just opened his mouth wide in amazement, so that's where I put my fist."

They shook their heads, moved slow in their chairs, and thought silently with the birds' songs, sizzling steaks, and the rushing water of the sink in the kitchen.

"Of course it was that silly damn fool idea of yours to sponsor that gig with the mean black boy."

"What are you talkin' about Tommy?"

"I'm talkin' about Midnight, you simple son of a bitch."

"You asked to have him. So I fixed it so you'd pick him. I figured there'd be no dispute about who the best damn bull rider in the world was if Tommy Shepherd could stay eight seconds on Midnight." Wickets poured himself another and added an ice cube. "Clint my friend. Come here and listen to your daddy tell us a story. He's gonna' tell us the story of Midnight."

Shepherd sipped his glass, then finished what was in it. Then he let it alone on the table beside him, so the ice would have time to melt. Malone leaned in from the kitchen window with her ears up and ready. Wickets flipped the steaks and sat down with a full drink and young Clint crawled into his spacious lap.

"I was gettin' old. Gettin' to where my bath tub filled with ice was the only place cozy enough to lay down in. I think that bull Midnight had been rumored to've killed a man right there in the ring. Killed a rider just like that. Crippled a clown too. I'm not mistaken. I bought a spanking new outfit for that ride; all black with tassels and silver studs. I thought I'd show 'em all. What's eight seconds anyway? I'm tellin ya', I'd done better."

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around the center ring. He changed his walk to a slow strut and that made his daddy smile.

"Shoot I couldn’t do a thing like that I..."
"It’s not gonna’ get any easier."
Shepherd stared at Wickets. He was not smiling. "Now I’ve got a commitment."
"That’s right." Wickets nodded and turned toward Clint. The two men faced the boy as he approached them. "And you are a man of your word."

Malone helped to set up the pigs. Big sloppy suckers that smelled like shit. They whined and squawked. They made ill noises. Malone got dirty and smelled like the pigs but the children loved her for it.

Wickets told jokes and shook hands. He raised money and showed off his horses to people that would never buy them. He smoked his cigars. He spoke louder than the others.

Shepherd, the cowboy, watched from the judges platform. Elevated, so he could see his son. So his son could see him. He shifted his weight with his right hand holding his belt buckle. His left hand tipped up his hat so he could see better.

Clint was up for his first ride. Malone picked him up and helped secure the pig. Clint wedged his hand inside the leather strap and pounded on it, like he’d been told. He nodded and they released him.

Fast and building up speed, straight ahead, not making a single turn. Its front legs buckled. The pig and pee-wee rider hit the red dirt face first. They disappeared in a cloud of dust. Clint lifted his face from the earth. Raw, and skinned with rock and dirt.

Cry boy, Shepherd thought. It’s okay to cry now. It is never going to get easier. Now pick yourself up. Cry.

But Clint did not cry. He stood, boots wobbling in the ruts of the ground. Not one tear rolled down his soft face. He spit dirt, then rolled his tongue around his lip to clean the soil and blood from his mouth. Eyes met with his father and he smiled. Teeth soaked red and stained brown, he swallowed the rest.

Murdoch Matheson ’96

Fragments
—a series of short poems

i.
A sound sustained indefinitely
Om
breathed by ancient
goddesses birthing the universe
purest poetry

ii.
ground up mashed minced mulched pulped flesh
turned to paper
painted with graphite then ruined

iii.
lack of perception
constant dream states
natural ends of breath

iv.
jealousy and flowers
words thrown together, without images

v.
cut adrift from the world
bread is smooshed
the short order cook is too hot

vi.
been eating too much and acting too little

vii.
off some back back road in the middle of
green grass trees
grows a new fresh spring

Colin Bossen ’98
Rigidly ordered, the bearded guard led me to a shadowed room then pulled aside a panel of black allowing the cloudy dawn to unveil human forms encased in glass.

Living trees had been felled and carved to wear the clothes of Venetian dead, and here they stood alone or paired, baroque displays, bored by time, locked within this noxious cell.

I logged with word and awkward sketch

Long hidden details of fabric and fit.
I counted beaded bodice pieces,
drew skirts held wide by padded hips and the placing of laces, ruching, and feathers, and rows of dimmed metallic gimp.

One chiseled frame wore Carnival clothes:
floor-length black cape over rich velvet coat, buttons embroidered yet not meant to bind, and a three-cornered hat over a painted white mask— hard to the mouth, in traditional form, then continued below by a beard of black cloth.

His case blocked our view of the Grand canal, so my guard became cloaked in his own wooded mask and, tired of watching the plod of my hand, stared through a dirty, uncurtained pane at an open-air courtyard in lifeless collapse.

Then under their bearded human forms, I saw by the motionless leather shoes industrious worms had started to work— their boring task so precisely done, that the sawdust was piled in uniform mounds as though pinched through the waist of an hourglass.
A Poem About The Photographic Imprint I Would Leave
If A Nuclear Bomb Hit Nearby As I Took Out The Trash
One Night

Take the trash out, dad says.
Grudgingly, she grips the two sides
of the plastic parcel and with a heave
hauls it over her shoulder. She
pauses at the door. A plane rumbles
overhead. She dashes on tiptoes
towards the end of the driveway,
hoping to make it before the bomb hits.

She thinks of her family, and the future.
How close would the mushroom cloud
have to be to incinerate her on contact?
Will she be discovered thousands of years
later as a Pompeiian, a shell of a person
walking the trash out next to a battered Buick
in the driveway of the remains of a house in
West Virginia? Will she be a great mystery
like the Ice Man, arrested in the prime of her
development by nuclear war? What will they
say about her neon green shoelaces and high
tops? Those things will last, won’t they?

Trish Klei ‘97

The Crazies I’ve Called

I have a reoccurring nightmare that one day Bryant Gumble and Willard Scott
will actually duke it out on the Today Show. I don’t think it’ll actually happen, but
sometimes when Bryant asks Willard for the weather report, he sort of rolls his eyes at
Katie and acts all mighty and smart over Willard. My husband thinks I’m turning real
freaky, and that I should go back to work at the gas station soon. It will be a while
though, because my C-Section a month ago really put me under. The doctor in the deliv-
ery room decided to do surgery at the last moment, because Ralph Joseph Potter, Jr.
wanted to come into this world feet first. I knew he’d be ornery, just like Ralph Wayne
Potter, Sr. Since my husband’s working two shifts at the factory most days, I just talk
baby talk all day long, and clean and cook and sometimes watch the talk shows.

I think those shows get a lot of bad rap sometimes. Sally Jessie Raphael is not
all about transvestites who are gay but want bisexual partners. My husband always used
that one example - he hates Sally and her red glasses, but she really cares about her
guests. One guy was reunited with his son yesterday after thirty years of being separat-
ed. I cried while I folded Joe’s diapers. We call him that because one Ralph is enough,
especially since it’s Ralph, Sr. It’s not that I don’t love my husband, I do, it’s just that he
likes to boss me and control me like nothing else.

My sister lives in the same town as us in Beauford, Tennessee, twenty miles
outside Nashville. She told me Ralph wasn’t good enough for me, but the man works
hard and doesn’t drink. That’s sure a good enough man for any woman. You won’t see
me on Sally or Phil, ratting on my husband because he doesn’t kiss me and hug me
even. Those women are just crazy. But I like to watch them, because they do more than
Joey, who just cries and wets his diapers. They keep me company during the day
when Joey’s napping and I’m dusting our tiny apartment. One woman was a little too
too nice though, on Geraldo!, because she gave her husband permission to have sex with
her friends. Now, I know that Ralph’s messed around before, but I really think that if I
ever caught the girl, I’d shoot her dead. Of course, Ralph denies things always. Working
two shifts three days a week gives him some time in between to do his dirty work. I’d
have to be a real smart one to ever catch him.

Speaking of smarts, they had a baby on the American Baby Show, and that
baby was pointing to colors at the age of one! The mother was one of those real ritzy
moms you see that wears denim jumpers from L.L. Bean. I wear sweats, and Ralph
always rags on me for that, saying that was sure a lot sexier when we met in Nashville
with my leather mini-skirt. I always tell him that babies and leather just don’t mix, but
he says I’m a woman full of excuses. My sister Nancy says the same thing, but she’s
usually talking about me staying with Ralph.

Today Nancy is coming over with a friend. It’s someone she wants me to meet
that will “change things for you, Alena.” I put Joey down, and for once, his crying stops
after only a few minutes. I hear the knocker and run to the door. It’s Nancy and an older
woman, about my mamma’s age. She is very tiny and short, with reddish hair. She
smiles at me, and I let Nancy and this woman inside.

“This is Bevvie Lane, Alena, she’s from Corporate Enterprises out of
exile

Nashville,” Nancy says. She picks a piece of invisible lint off her red blouse. Nancy is thin, beautiful Hollywood actress. God, I feel dumpy.

“Hi, Alena, your sister was talking to me the other day that you might like to work at home.” Bevvie looks at me and smiles. The gold chain around her neck glistens with the pretend wealth of middle-class people.

“Yeah, Alena, I thought you might like to do some work calling people for Corporate. You know, keep your mind busy while you watch little Joe.” Nancy looks at me, her face reddening. I know and she knows that she has always been trying to take charge of my life. She’s a year younger than I am, but she always has the right answers, or so she thinks. She fought the hardest to keep me and Ralph from getting together. Even when we were in the church parlor, with pink taffeta and lace flying in the bustle of three bridesmaids and flower girls, she was telling me that this could still be stopped. I ignored her then. That was my plan now.

“Alena, basically we’d have you calling customers, taking surveys, etc. We’re hired out by lots of different companies to do this kind of phoning to the public. There really isn’t much training involved, and you’d make five fifty an hour.” Bevvie smiles at me and smooths her woolen suit.

I look at Nancy. I know Ralph will let me take the job, especially since we need the money, and he could make sure “I wasn’t screwing with any man” if I was stuck at home, as he often tells me.

I realize we are still standing by the door. “Uh, do you guys want some coffee?” I ask. Without waiting for an answer, I move into our tiny kitchenette and pour three cups from the lukewarm pot. It’s the breakfast coffee, but since this lady is coming to offer me a job, I don’t bother to warm it up. I look out into our living room, where I can see Phil running up the aisle in his studio to talk to an audience member. Nancy and Bevvie sit on our country blue love seat, which doesn’t match any of our other second-hand furniture. Behind Bevvie I notice a wrapped up plastic diaper that I was throwing away just when they came. I can’t help laughing about what must be going through her mind right now.

Bevvie looks over at me, ignoring the stink coming from behind her. “You know, Alena. I was at our branch office in Beautford, and Nancy called me up and told me to ride on out with her to see you. I’m hoping you’ll be interested. We could use some non-crazies working for the company.”

I want to tell her that I am crazy, and that the killer-bee personality might take over now, but I decide to behave. Instead, I avoid her question and ask, “How did you two meet?”

“She brought a woman over from Corporate Enterprises. She offered me a job calling people for this company from right here,” I say, walking to Joe’s playpen where I could really turn your life around! I tell him up to take him into our bedroom. He wriggles slightly in his little yellow sleeper, and then lays quietly against my chest. I walk into our bedroom and put Joey in the crib. Ralph walks in with his napkin still tucked into his shirt.

“How much?” he asks. I tell him, and he walks back into the kitchen without a word. Any silence like this usually comes before a major explosion, and I frantically try to figure out what he could be mad about. Instead, I am surprised. In the kitchen, he wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead. “Take it,” he says.

Three days later I’m cradling Joey while he sleeps. Nancy has called me already this morning and asked me if I’ve gotten through the manual. For once, I’m a step ahead of her. I motivated myself to read the whole thing yesterday, and I just got back from a required test at the branch office. “Impressive, Alena. I’m proud you’re doing this,” Nancy said. I knew she was really thinking, Now, if you’d just dump Ralph, I could really turn your life around! A woman at the office handed me my first assignment this morning. I am to call up people and ask them information about their CD players. I put Joey into his crib, and then turn on the T.V. While Bob Barker turns people’s lives around with his giant magical wheel, I start calling people to make their lives a little more hectic.

I have been warned that people will hang up on me most of the time. They do with my first ten calls. On the eleventh call, an older woman picks up the phone. I tell her I am doing a survey, and she asks me to repeat myself. I do, and she says, “Why, yes. I’ll help you.” I’m so relieved, I forget for a moment why I have called. I ask her if she has a CD player. It turns out that this questionnaire is going to be short and sweet, because the lady only owns an eight-track. “But honey, my daughter owns a CD player. Don’t know why; she works all the time. Doesn’t seem to have time to even call me, let alone listen to tunes.” I thank the woman and hang up. I call a few more numbers and get either answering machines or slams. I suddenly feel very isolated. Me and that old
woman with her eight-track. Everyone else is busy.

*****

I call Bevvie the next day. “Everyone hung up on me except three people, and none of them had CD players,” I complain.

“Well first, you need to call people after dinner, which it says on page four of the manual. And secondly, you just have to make yourself heard,” she says. “That’s the secret of this business, Alena. You let them know you’re not out to sell them stuff. You just want to help create an informed American public. Let them know that their opinion is important.”

This is quite the motivational speech. Helping America stay informed. I look down at the bit spit-up stain on my t-shirt. I don’t feel much like an important bearer of information. Oprah reaches all these people with her show, and I’m certainly not in the same category as her.

While Ralph sleeps on the couch with Joey, I start dialing for my next assignment. This time it is finding out people’s restaurant habits, and what they expect from “the dining-out experience.” Again, slams in my ear and stupid answering machines. Until I finally hear a man say, “Hello?” I catch my breath and then give him my spiel as fast as I can. He laughs and says, “Sure.”

“How often a week do you eat out?” I ask.

“Hardly ever,” he says. “I can’t afford to. I’m in grad school.”

“Well, I guess the next question will seem pretty stupid then,” I say. “But do you enjoy lower priced fast-food or higher priced sit-down restaurants.”

He laughs again. “McDonald’s.”

“Okay, low-low priced,” I say. “Do you generally eat out with someone, or alone.”

He hesitates. “ Alone. Like I said, school and everything. I’m kept busy enough with that.”

I ask a few more questions, and then thank him. As I start to hang up he asks me why I’m doing this.

“Just for a company that does surveys for other businesses. I have to take care of my baby at home.”

“You have to?”

I start to feel angry. “Yeah, he’s a month old. Who else is going to do it?” I say.

“Sorry. I just meant that when you said I have to, you didn’t sound that excited,” he says.

“Sorry,” I say. “I’m just a little tired.”

“Perfectly understandable,” he replies. We say our good-byes and hang up. I sit for a minute in my chair. He is one of the few people I’ve called who actually seems like more than a voice. I wonder why he doesn’t have somebody special. He seems like a really nice guy, and I don’t buy that crap about being too busy for everything but school. I want to call him back, but I hesitate, and walk over to the living room. It’s none of my business, and he could get me fired.
one thing, but that was terrible. I feel so awful, like I should have done something, said something. I make a few more calls, and then go through my lists. Of the two-hundred numbers I've called in the last week, I've gotten only twenty-seven results.

I look at these names again. At least ten of these people actually told me something interesting about themselves, or asked me about myself. I wish I could talk to these people again and find out what some of them are really like. There is a lot of loneliness out there.

I give up calling for a while, and shakily pour myself some coffee. A woman is on Maury Povitch crying because her sister always comments on her weight. Get real, that's what sisters are for. A least mine is. But I sit down and watch the two anyway. I start to realize, that even though these people's ridiculous sob stories happen to everyone everyday, these talk-show guests at least have an audience to cry with them. Nobody gives a damn about public opinion on CD players or windows, but the few people who do take the time to answer my questions just want an audience. I think it's time that I talk to Ralph.

Ralph, I need an audience," I say as he stuffs a hot dog with mustard and chili piled high into his mouth.

"I'm tired Alena," he says. "What do you want?"

I know this will be difficult. I look at the rooster clock over the stove. Almost midnight.

"I need an audience to listen to me. I'm not asking to be on a talk show or anything. I just want to invite a few people over for dinner. Have a conversation, 'cause you're usually tired and... "

He looks at me as if I'm crazy. "What the hell, Alena. I come home from working all day long, and you want an audience? Give me a break. Tell it to the weirdos you call everyday."

I stare at him. He has set himself up very nicely. "I do. Besides you do have an audience, Ralph, on your lunch breaks." The words pour out before I can stop them.

"You think I don't know what goes on behind my back, Ralph? This is a small town," I say, walking to our bedroom.

He follows me with quick steps, but I pick up Joey, who is sleeping in the crib, and put my finger to my lips. I know Ralph is running one excuse or denial after another through his puny little mind. He's an easy person to figure out. Just an ordinary lady's man with a nice body.

He looks at my face for a minute. I'm thinking that he has probably decided on the truth-but-with-great-remorse approach. "Alena, I'm really...

"Look, Ralph, this wasn't what I wanted to talk about tonight," I say. I can't go on with where this conversation is now headed without crying, and it surprises me that it hurts so much. "What I really want to do is ask some of the people..."

He interrupts me. "Alena, I don't sleep with her. We eat lunch together sometimes. That's all. Promise."

He's lying. But I don't tell him I know this. "Okay, Ralph, I just want to know if I can call some people over for dinner sometime." This has turned into a power of will, because I only want one audience right now. I want Ralph. I don't really care if I ever see these people that I call — but I need Ralph to say yes, to win just once.

His face looks as though he will cry or scream. He wants me to weep for joy and tell him how glad I am that he isn't having an affair. I refuse to play his game.

"I don't sleep with her, Alena," he says again.

"Ralph, I can hear your shit some other time. I'm asking you something else now."

"What?" He sits on the bed. I put Joey back in the crib, who miraculously has stayed asleep the whole time. For once I seem to have Ralph's attention. But is this the kind of attention I'm looking for?

"I want to invite a few people over whose numbers I've gotten through this job. I know it sounds really corny, but I've talked to some really lonely people over the line, and I'd like to have a few come over for coffee or something."

He looks at me like I've gone over the edge. I wait impatiently. Just say yes, Ralph. Then it will be over, and we can move on.

"Invite a bunch of loonies over who have nothing else to do but talk to you on the phone?" He is amazed. "No way, Alena. That's stupid. Do you know how many crazies there are in this world? The hell they'll come near you and Joey."

I've heard the word crazies before, Bevvie. It seems to be the word for both the strange and the lonely. Only the people who are busy and don't have time to think can use that word. Ralph's protectiveness, which is one of his few merits at times, now disgusts me.

"Just forget it, Alena. We're not going to talk about it." He takes off his work shirt and pants and walks towards the shower. I follow him. "You can't stop me, Ralph."

"Bullshit, Alena. Just try it." He strides into the bathroom naked without looking back.

The next day I am feeding Joey, and then I begin the weekly ironing. First my blouse I wear to pick up my assignments at Corporate Enterprises, then Ralph's work clothes, and put my finger to my lips. I know Ralph is running one excuse or denial after another through his puny little mind. He's an easy person to figure out. Just an ordinary lady's man with a nice body.

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His face looks as though he will cry or scream. He wants me to weep for joy and tell him how glad I am that he isn't having an affair. I refuse to play his game.

"I don't sleep with her, Alena," he says again.

"Ralph, I can hear your shit some other time. I'm asking you something else now."

"What?" He sits on the bed. I put Joey back in the crib, who miraculously has stayed asleep the whole time. For once I seem to have Ralph's attention. But is this the kind of attention I'm looking for?

"I want to invite a few people over whose numbers I've gotten through this job. I know it sounds really corny, but I've talked to some really lonely people over the line, and I'd like to have a few come over for coffee or something."

He looks at me like I've gone over the edge. I wait impatiently. Just say yes, Ralph. Then it will be over, and we can move on.

"Invite a bunch of loonies over who have nothing else to do but talk to you on the phone?" He is amazed. "No way, Alena. That's stupid. Do you know how many crazies there are in this world? The hell they'll come near you and Joey."

I've heard the word crazies before, Bevvie. It seems to be the word for both the strange and the lonely. Only the people who are busy and don't have time to think can use that word. Ralph's protectiveness, which is one of his few merits at times, now disgusts me.

"Just forget it, Alena. We're not going to talk about it." He takes off his work shirt and pants and walks towards the shower. I follow him. "You can't stop me, Ralph."

"Bullshit, Alena. Just try it." He strides into the bathroom naked without looking back.
to land in jail for him. Something will happen, though. I order a coke and lean back in the dank, worn booth. The place is deserted at 11:30 in the morning.

The waitress sets down a glass, and I fiddle with the zipper on my purse, so that she won’t recognize me. Inside my coat pocket, I’m carrying two hundred dollars and the phone numbers of Mr. Feinland and all of the other lonely people I’ve ever talked to on my job. I also have the phone number of the Nashville bus station. Today I don’t think I’ll need to call these people, though. My audience is here.

Julie Christine Johnston ’96

Contributors’ Notes

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