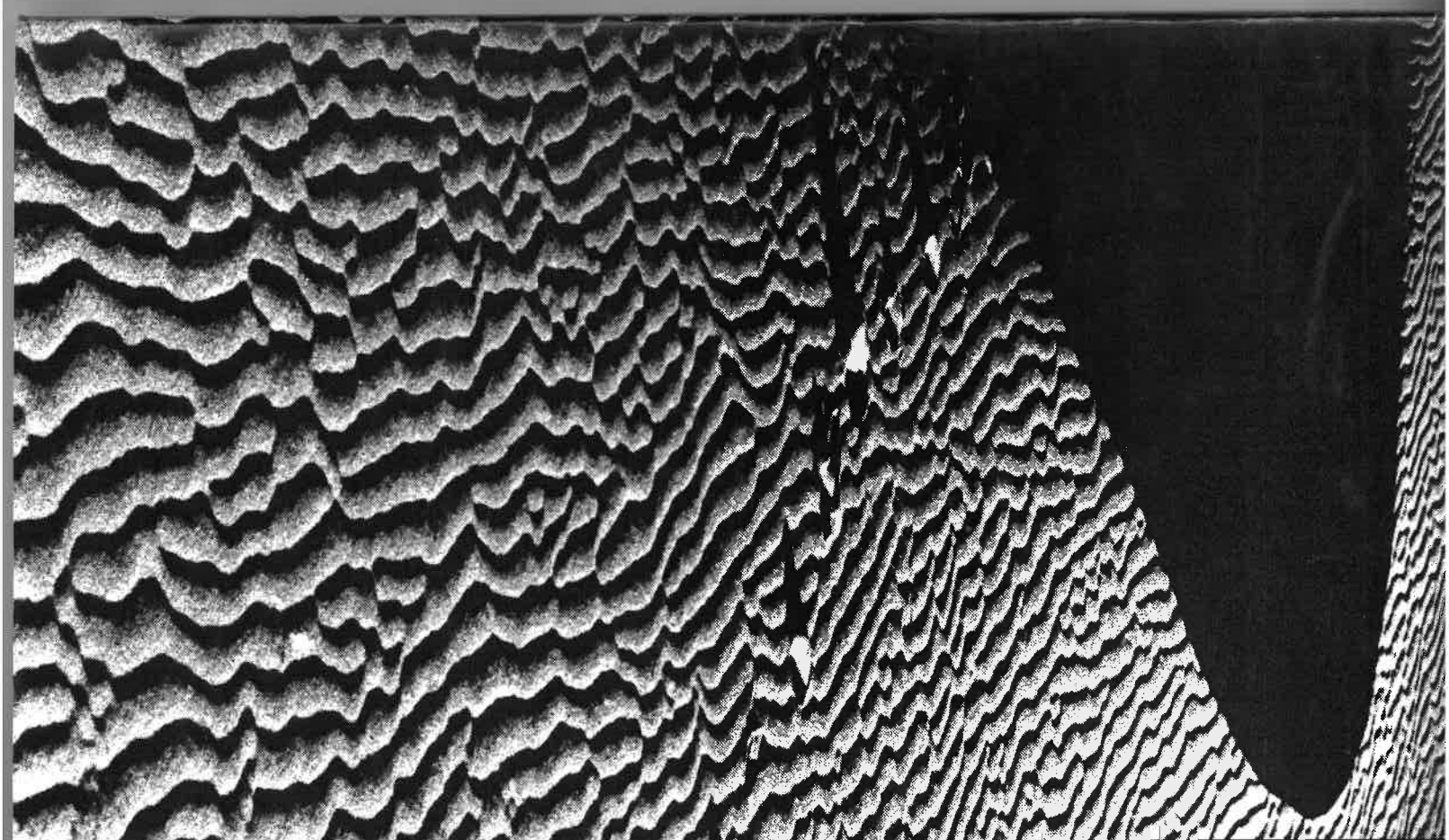

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Thin Air

Double Aught

Thin Air

Double Aught Edition
Volume IV Numbers 1&2 1999
Northern Arizona University

Aught- n. zero (0). Also, anything, whatever.

Thin Air has chosen to celebrate the Northern Arizona University Centennial and the new Millenium by selecting the title, Double Aught, for this commemorative issue.

Cover Art: Björn Brodersen's "White Sands #1"

Thin Air is published two times a year by the Graduate Creative Writing Association in cooperation with the English Department of Northern Arizona University. Our submission period is from September Ist through May Ist. Manuscripts arriving between May 2nd and August 31st will be returned unread. The editors welcome submissions of stories, poems, essays, reviews, illustrations and photographs.

Submissions should be addressed to:
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All submissions should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Submissions from other countries should be accompanied by a sufficient number of international postal reply coupons. Please query before sending book reviews and interviews.

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***Thin Air*, Issue No. 7**

Thin Air

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Fiction Contest Winner
Kristine Somerville

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Fiction Judge
Jane Armstrong-Woodman

Poetry Judge
Barbara Anderson

This annual contest, offering cash awards, is open to all writers and poets. Those works chosen were the best among entries. Winning pieces were selected based on style, content, and originality.

In Which My Mother Vacuums Flat the Budgie

Life's short and loud and scuzzy, but it
can tell a joke. I'm telling my mom about this
tipsy dinner party, years ago, at Ed's, where half of us
had once had parakeets, and were bragging how colorfully they'd
squawked their last. For instance, Mark's, in Cyprus,
the olive groves beyond the open windows
shimmery with heat, housecats
snoozing in the branches, and then the earthquake,
like three quick hiccups--the way Mark's father
staggered to catch the china cabinet as it began to teeter,
how the birdcage sidled along its drunken brink, sashayed out
onto the convenient stepladder of his skull, scooted to the ground
and burped. Out popped the parakeet,
up through the window, high among
the olive trees, to plunge as pink as birthday cake
into some tomcat's throat.
Or Barbara Lennox's, who loved to ride her granny's shoulder,
and watch her clean and cook, and one day
hopped off to the soup pot's rim, to peek
in through the steam, and ***splat!***
Tales I've since thought almost wholly awful, that night
we roared at, rocking in our boozy circle like a bunch of birdbrains
pecking at our reflection in the chicken stew. Of course, I told
the one about my mom and Pixie, our ancient blue budgie,
who sang his name and our address from room to room,
Pixie, 2 Heather Glen, Pixie, 2 Heather Glen,
and nested anywhere. The day he
got under the rug. How mom was vacuuming, and
flattened him. Tonight, I'm plying her with wine, trying
to tease her to a flush of laughter, but I meet instead
the thin resistance of a sigh: *Derek, when*

wa--I don't--Pixie? Her voice is soft and muffled,
her skin recently has feathered to a kind of ashen grey,
she frowns as if struggling to remember or else
struggling not to, I see her hands
tremble as she lifts a corner of her napkin,
to dab the gravy from her mouth, along its silk diagonals
it folds into her plate, I am her little boy again, a little heartless,
a little horrified, I am wagging my finger at the mess death
makes of things, saying, *That's life, mom,* saying, *Mom,*
look, mom, what's that under the rug?

The Flame Shirt

My best friend, Leo Simanski, is cursed. Instead of a sidewalk crack, which would be bad enough, he steps on a drowned boy's back. The body is sunk, face down, in neck-deepwater. He looks like streaks of melted Crayon color: tan skin, red trunks, black hair. The lifeguard's wave-making dive almost erases him. We all move to the edge of the pool to see the details come into focus as the body is brought to the surface. It's the super-skinny kid we call Red Beard for the zits he wears ear-to-ear.

Two other lifeguards lift his limp spaghetti body out of the pool. They set him on the hot cement. He has to be dead. We're all hopping from side to side, our feet burning. He's motionless as his skin fries like the egg we cooked on the ground the other day. In less than a minute the orange yolk turned the same shade of yellow as the blazing sun.

In first aid we learned if the face is red raise the head; if the face is pale raise the tail. Red Beard's face is chalky blue. They never said what to do about that. The lifeguards seem to know. One presses his mouth to Red Beard's cold-looking lips and tries to breathe life into him. The other pushes down on his narrow chest at the knotted bone in the middle. The rib cage crashes under his weight and then springs back. The lifeguard who dove when Leo screamed "Body, help, body" sits on a lounge chair in the shade, his head in his hands, sobbing. I've never seen a guy his age cry—he must be as old as my brother Rocky.

They work on Red Beard forever. His body stays motionless, his eyes wild, locked in place. His face is a shade darker, a solid pool-water blue. He's probably the first dead person we've ever seen. Worse yet, he's one of us. It could've happened to me. It could've happened to Leo. It could've happened to every single kid standing around watching. The thought makes me want to cry,

like the lifeguard. But I don't. I won't. I'm finished with all of that.

"He's gone, man. He's fucking gone," the pumping lifeguard says. His arms stay locked at the elbows; his palms, one on top of the other, remain attached to Red Beard at mid-chest.

The breathing lifeguard's fingers pinch the nose, but he doesn't lean forward to give another breath. "What do we do now?" he asks.

No one answers. We all look around. No one seems to know.

Leo stands next to me. His knee caps quiver like a skittish race horse. Little bumps cover his arms and legs even though he can't be cold; it's been over a hundred degrees all week.

"He's staring at me, Ellie. He's staring right at me," he whispers. He's looking hard at the body. There's a deep frown on his face.

I could lie to Leo, but why? He already knows the truth. Red Beard's eyes are fixed, dead-on, on him. Leo was the one who made up the nickname that stuck instantly. Leo was the one who spread the story that William, his real name, always carried a rubber in his high top, anxious to have sex. Leo was the one who tempted him toward the deep end even though he knew he was a beginner swimmer, terrible for his age. I don't know what happened next. I was at the snack bar buying a dill pickle. What I do know is that Leo was spotted in the crowded pool, talking to him minutes before he went under. Even if he didn't hurt him, he'll be haunted for sure. In the movies and on TV, ghosts always try to attach themselves to their last living contact.

"You're right, Leo. He is. He is staring straight at you. Shit," I whisper back. I push my glasses up and take a small side step to put some space between us. I know all about being cursed. I'm at camp for the terrible things I did at home. But there's no way I can be blamed for Red Beard. I wasn't anywhere near him in the water. I hardly knew the kid. We never officially talked. I'll help Leo out—that's what friends are for—but I refuse to be the object of the dead kid's wrath. Leo is on his own there. He can handle it. Anyway, ghosts are like parents, you don't have a choice.

Hours after the ambulance came for Red Beard, a few camp counselors tried to make the youngest beginning swimmers

get in the water. They stood on the cement steps in the shallow end and screamed so loud we heard them across camp. We thought there was another drowning and came running in a pack. The little kids' faces were as bright as their swimming suits. Some hyperventilated. We had them put their heads between their legs until the camp nurse arrived with paper bags. The little kids stood under the scanty shade of some scrub trees and exhaled boxy balloons that made an odd crinkly noise as they deflated and then refilled with air.

After a long counselor's meeting in the dressing room, all lessons were canceled, free swim closed. They hung a hand-lettered sign from the chain-link fence, above a rustly paddlelock that read "Gone swimmin'." They weren't in the water at all. Like us, they probably already had an unspoken rule to stay away from the pool. The area was tainted, jinxed, hexed, voodooed. Red Beard was a water spirit, looking for a new body to enter.

No one knows how he drowned in neck-deep water. All we have are rumors: an epileptic seizure that froze his brain and paralyzed his limbs, an intense allergic reaction to increased levels of chlorine, an invisible streak of summer lightning electrocuting only him, a suicidal overdose of Dramamine that put him to sleep in mid-swim, or, the most popular of all, someone (Leo's name often mentioned) quickly held him under until his lungs filled with water and he sunk to the cement bottom. We don't really know what's true, and the counselors aren't talking. They seem to have disappeared. No one plays "Reveille" over the loudspeakers at seven A.M. to wake us for the day. There are no announcements about canoe races across the lake, or rehearsals for the end-of-the-summer talent show. Camp's frighteningly church-quiet.

The counselors had been at the mess hall every morning to greet us with their cheerful voices: "Ellie, you doing fine?" "How goes it Leo?" But when we get there around nine o'clock, they've already eaten breakfast. No one dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts is sitting around sipping coffee or reading the morning paper or listening to the radio. We're adult-free.

Leo believes Red Beard's spirit will enter his body while he takes a deep breath in his sleep. He stayed up all night with a flashlight in one hand, a serrated knife in the other, and the mosquito netting tied closed. He kept his breathing shallow. Short

pants like pregnant women on TV in birthing classes. Ha-ha-ha. He-he-he. Now, dark circles ring his eyes, cowlicks swirl his hair. He wears the same t-shirt and shorts he wore yesterday even though he's a neat freak who despises germs. I told him before we parted last night that ghosts work evil in subtler ways, sometimes through others. I hate to admit that I'm right. When we sit with the kids who live in the bunkhouse across from Leo's—the same kids we've sat with each meal—they carry their food trays as far away as they can get. One of them says, "Leo doesn't know when to knock it off. Now someone's dead. Shithead."

Leo loved tormenting Red Beard. Once at this very table, he tied his shoelaces together. When he got up to throw away his leftovers, he fell on his face and taco pie went everywhere. Kids laughed. Maybe things did get out of hand in the pool. Maybe my best friend Leo Simanski is a murderer. Still, I'll stand by him. Mother said when she found out about Paula, "Good people can do bad things." She got it half right. Good people do bad things to bad people who need to be taught a lesson. Mother cried in her bedroom for what seemed forever. Rocky drove me to camp the next day; he had put in a few summers here for crimes my family never discussed.

Leo slams his tin cup on the table. Warm milk splashes all over his hand and my napkin. He looks from one end of the tent to the other.

"I didn't do anything," he yells at campers who stare at him. If their furious eyes were drill bits, he'd be a sieve.

"They know that. They're just being crap holes," I say to him. "You're all being crapholes," I yell at those who keep on looking at us. "Fat, messy crap holes."

Leo stuffs a triangle of toast in his mouth and talks through the mushed-up bread. "I might as well go home. Everyone hates me," he mumbles. He chews fiercely, swallows, and then yawns behind his fist.

"Don't. They just need time," I say, nicely. I bite a piece of bacon in half. "They'll get over it by the end of the day. I'm sure of it.

Old parent-music comes from the speakers hung on corner posts. "Leaving on a jetplane." "Taking the last train to Clarksville." "Riding through the desert on horse with no name." Songs about

travelling, about going places. There's no place I want to go. I'm staying here until the absolute last day. Then I might strike out on my own. I'm in no hurry to return home. Paula's parents wanted me out of the neighborhood. They sat at our kitchen table drinking coffee from my mother's china cups and talked about locking me away in a residential treatment center. My parents negotiated them down to summer camp or a psychologist. I didn't want anyone dredging up weird stuff from my past, so here I am in backwoods, Wisconsin, bestfriends with a supposed murderer. My parents would be so pleased. Maybe I'll bring Leo home with me. He can take care of Paula Rene Zicarelli the way they're saying he did Red Beard. I told Leo all about her perfect house, her professor parents, her brother who plays college baseball. What I did to her was on the tip of my tongue. We became instant friends because he didn't ask. He seemed more fascinated by my description of their house of artifacts. Every time her anthropologist parents travelled to Africa for a book they were writing on a primitive tribe, they brought back painted pots, baskets, stone tools, and wood carvings that looked like they were made by first graders. I always had to hear about their latest acquisition.

Here we have a cannibal, Eleanor," Mr. Zicarelli said of a picture of a loin-clothed native, his skin as coal black as the bark on the leafless tree behind him. Both parents called me Eleanor, not Ellie or Elle like I asked.

"I wanted to get a photo of his teeth. See how they're filed to sharp points. He resisted. The people believe that having their pictures taken robs them of their souls."

He waited for me to ask him how he got the man to open his mouth super wide, exposing his shark-looking bite. There was a long, uneasy silence before he continued.

"Guessing that the man loved to sing, I asked him if he knew 'Bridge Over TroubledWaters.' Everyone loves Simon and Garfunkel. Even cannibals." He laughed. "When he sang the line, 'Your time has come to shine,' he opened his mouth wide as you see in the picture."

"I thought you were supposed to be a silent observer?" He had told me this before. Anthropologists report; they don't participate.

He took my chin in his hand to raise my face toward his.

"And your teeth, Eleanor? I suppose they're little daggers too."

I snapped like I meant to bite him, and he released me.

Mr. Zicarelli mounted the black-and-white photograph in a diploma frame and hung it on the wall of his darkly panelled study along with spears, shields, and masks. I started swiping his less important pieces—wooden spoons, forks, leather pouches, a few beads, an old sandal, pocket-sized stuff like that—as payback for having to listen to his awful endless stories. He owed me. They all owed me. I kept the items under my canopy bed. I had a fantastic museum of my own for a while.

Leo finishes his scrambled eggs. He peers at mine with his beady, close-set eyes.

"If eyes are the windows of the soul, then yours are tiny portholes," I say suddenly. The Paula-like phrase spurts out of me. Her useless information and complaints drove me mad. It's too late to turn back from what I've said. I continue, "You blink constantly, so your eyes are almost always closed. I don't think I know you at all."

Leo thinks about what I've said for a moment and says, "What the hell are you talking about Ellie?" His greedy fingers remain ready to snap something off my plate. "Anyway, no one can possibly see your soul with those inch-thick glasses in the way."

I make my arm a strong stone fence around my food. In my other hand, my fork is a trident ready to gig him if he gets too close. If you don't protect your food you'll starve. One of the few times Paula was at my house she said that starvation is a slow and torturous death. My mother's house plants needed to be watered.

"Don't go getting weird on me. I need you now more than ever," Leo says flatly. He drains what's left of his milk and gets up from the table. "Let's go," he says.

"Yes, let's," I say, and try to smile. He's right; we do need each other.

The camp's lake is a flooded rock quarry. The sun-bleached boulders were lifted out of the giant hole and then left in a triple strand around the water's edge. Most mornings campers and counselors claim their own smooth curved stone for sunbathing or reading or listening to their radios. This morning the shoreline is

abandoned. Maybe it's the weather, hot, humid, no breeze. The canoes and fishing boats sit motionles in the coffee-brown water that looks like a sheet of stained glass.

I strip down to my one-piece bathing suit and set my folded glasses on a small rock next to my clothes.

"Ellie, no," Leo screams. "Don't go in."

"He's trapped in the pool," I say. I wade into the bath-warm water and then hit a sudden cold pocket. Shivers ripple down my spine. "This is the lake, Leo. Red Beard never even stepped foot in the lake. You know that."

A couple weeks ago, Leo had tried to lure Red Beard in by taking his transistor radio. He carried it high in the air as he moved deeper and deeper into the murky water. Red Beard stood on one of the largest shoreline boulders and yelled obscenities my brother would be proud of. He used odd combinations of slang for male and female private parts as if he couldn't decide which was worse, to be a cunt or a cock. The tinney-sounding music came from the tiny radio speaker. "Sky rockets in flight. Afternoon delight" played as Leo's head went under. Bubbles percolated to the surface. The water inched up his elbow, his wrist. The radio went down with his hand, and the music stopped. Red Beard jumped down from the rock and kicked at the pebbles on the beach. He spit into the air. He pulled his own hair. His face was splotched red-white. His pimples were a triple-strand of purple beads, like incredibly tiny versions of the lake rocks at night. Finally, Leo came up, gasping for air. He tossed the silent radio to Red Beard who glared at him as he caught it. He turned it off and on. Nothing. Then he ran into the woods. The branches snapped behind him to conceal the footpath he'd taken.

"What's the worst thing you've ever done," I ask Leo.

I lie down on the floating dock and dangle my arms in the warm water. Leo tugs his wet T-shirt over his legs to protect himself from the hot morning sun. He's a sun-hater usually lathered in Coppertone from head to toe.

I've never done anything bad," Leo says. "Nadda. Not a thing. No way. No how."

"Yeah, right. Saint Leo. You don't have to tell me about Red Beard if you don't want to. I can figure it out for myself. What'd he do, call you a faggot?"

"I didn't touch him, Ellie. I swear. Scout's honor." He gives the two-finger salute, and then folds one finger down to flip me off. For not believing him, I guess.

"Whatever you say."

"That's the truth and nothing but the truth so help me God." Leo stretches out on the warm wood beside me. He plunges his arms up to his elbows, trying to show me that I'm not the only one who's brave. He's the oddest guy I've ever met, not at all like my brother who is all boy. I've seen Rocky fart on a lighter to make a blow torch of orange light. I've heard him brag about wearing the same pair of underwear several times on both sides. And I've watched him smear thin lines of dog shit war paint on his face for fifty dollars and a joint. I told Leo all this. He almost threw up. Sometimes he's tough, even really mean. Other times he's what my brother calls a "wussy." What Rocky tells him is "don't do the crime if you can't do the time."

The smooth warty head of a turtle pokes through the water inches away from our faces. I squint to see it clearly. Yellow eyes flare, and, for a moment, I think they throw light rays at Leo.

"Ahh," Leo screams as if he's been delivered a fatal blow. "Fucking shit. Fucking shit. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck." He jumps up and dances around like the dock is suddenly a bed of red-hotcoals. "What the hell?"

"Relax," I say. "Turtle. The lizards of the lake." Another Paula-ism. She knows all about animals. I flop over on my back and tilt my face toward the sun. If she were here, she'd tell me about the ultraviolet rays. She'd describe my skin at fifty, tan, crinkled like a grocery bag. No, she'd correct. More like parchment. She's completely different from Leo who's afraid of everything: the sun, the woods, the water, a zillion different insects. Maybe he killed Red Beard to quit being so scared. Only now, he's more terrified than ever. Things never seem to work the way you plan, even if they start out okay. When I locked Paula in our basement storage room, I felt an unusual calm. My hatred faded as soon as I barred the door. God, she screamed forever, even though she had everything she needed: food, water, a blanket and pillow, a couple books, a candle and some matches.

"How can I relax? This place . . .it gives me the creeps," Leo says. He wraps his arms around himself to stop his trembling.

"If you didn't touch him, you have nothing to worry about."

"But you saw how mean I was to him," he says. He sounds like he can't believe his behavior.

"Yeah. I saw. Why'd you do it, Leo?"

"Why'd you do whatever you did?"

"A million tiny reasons. It was the way she talked. Acted. The way her house looked. It all made me crazy. I couldn't think of anything but Paula. I was supposed to feel honored to spend time with her or something. To get to see how the other half lived. Whatever. I mean our houses are on the same street."

One afternoon, she invited me over to help her family prepare an authentic Scandinavian Easter. We applied fussy diamonds, stars, and zigzags in hot wax with a toothpick to the eggsbefore we dyed them. They came out of the coffee cups of blue and red and yellow color with silvery, snow frosted designs. I should have gone home when we finished. Instead I played a game Paula had invented, a more elaborate version of twenty questions.

Each time I landed on a square that read "reveal another detail," Paula did. The person she was thinking of was male, twentyish, a miniature train collector, a cartoonist, and a superb athlete.

"My brother? Rocky?" He had a caboose he'd swiped from a hobby store on the shelf of his water bed, and he often drew a comic strip of nude women who fought crime. Their boobs shot small torpedoes. He even played softball on Sundays with his friends from AA.

"Your brother? He doesn't do any of those things," she said with a half-smile.

The red-shaded lamp cast a pool of pink light, giving her face a rosy glow. Even her brown hair shimmered. She looked like an image out of a Marshall Field's catalog. I sat across the game board from her where the pink light didn't reach. With my thick glasses and my unruly hair cut short, I looked like a cosmetic "before" shot.

"What do you know about it?" I answered back.

"Lots. Your brother hangs out with David Julian at the park all day instead of working."

"Not always," I said. I took a giant bite of shortbread; I talked with my mouth full. "Anyway, what do you have against

David Julian?"

"He's been to prison."

I shrugged and said, "That doesn't mean he's bad." I had gone with Rocky to visit him. I brought along a roll of quarters so we could eat from the vending machines lining the visitation room. For five dollars an inmate took a Polaroid of us standing in front of a wall painted bright, bright blue with bubbly white clouds.

"Right, Ellie. Going to prison means that you're an incredibly wonderful person. Come on."

"No, you come on."

Paula's trembling Yorkie, Molly McPherson Fry, tried to take one of my cookies. I swiped her away with a firm backhand. She yelped. You could look at her wrong and she'd squawk.

"Don't be so mean to her Ellie. Mother says cruelty to animals is a sign of deviance."

"Well you won't even touch my dog. What do you think that says about you?"

Paula hated Booker T, an Aussie-Blue Heeler-Beagle mix. She said her missing patches of fur and constant scratching was mange. The vet said they were "hot spots" and could be cured. It never seemed to happen.

"The fact that I won't touch your dog means that I have good taste," she answered. She sipped her steaming cocoa, and peered at me over the rim of the cup. She was always gauging my responses, doing fieldwork like her parents.

She asked me where Booker T came from. I mistakenly told her.

"Orphans of the Storm," I said. It was a renovated barn outside of town filled with aisles of dogs and cats in too-small metal cages. Greyhounds and Dobermans and Pit Bulls and Pomeranians and Tabbies and Siamese. I wanted to take them all home; it was impossible to pick only one. I chose Booker T because she has a blue eye and a brown. Depending on what side you see her from, she's wolf or dog.

"I bet you don't even know where that name comes from."

"No, it's just a name."

"A name taken from a D.W. Griffith movie starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish as sisters separated during the French Revolution.

"Very good, Paula," her mother said. She stood in the doorway with a batter-covered beater from her Mix-master in each hand. "Poppy-seed bread," she said, handing one to Paula, the other to me.

"Doesn't matter. Orphans of the Storm is just a fancy name for the pound," Paula scoffed. She licked a thin silver spoke.

"Sort of the pound," I repeated. "I mean, they all need good homes. But there the animals cost a lot of money. Booker was seventy-five dollars." My beater dripped all over my hand.

"The pound," she said flatly. "Brother tried to bring home a stray once. Remember mother? That awful long-haired Chihuahua."

"Oh yes. It looked like a large rat." She wiped her hands on a gingham dish towel, and then handed it to me. She pointed down at her Persian rug as if to say "watch it."

"Maybe it was a rat." Rocky had told me about a couple who had brought home a dog they found in a grocery store parking lot. While they were at a dinner party, it ate almost all of their cat and chewed through the front door. The police told them that it was a super rat. Another family in town experienced the same thing.

"I don't think so, Eleanor. Just a very ugly doggy." Mrs. Zicarelli returned to the kitchen where she was preparing tea for the women's symphony league. "Play nice, girls," she called over her shoulder.

I went home and curled up on my bed with Booker T. I got the fabulous idea to lock Paula away like an unwanted stray. I saw her caged. Her eyes were wide open with concern. Her lips drawn tight. Her hands white as they gripped the thin bars. Locking her away would make her feel insecure. She'd be a better person for it. The next day, I moved my museum of artifacts to the basement storeroom as bait.

Leo swims toward shore in an assertive American crawl. I kick and stroke hard to catch him. We swim side-by-side. He's a lefty and I'm a righty. Our faces appear in the triangle of our arms as we gasp for air. We see each other through a veil of water. Our eyes close again and we're in darkness. Finally, we stop, breathless, at the string of buoys marking the swimming area.

"What should I do, Ellie?" Leo's weight sends his buoy down and mine slightly up.

"All we can do is wait, Leo. Keep our eyes wide open," I

say. I lean hard on my big plastic float to lift him. We ride the buoys like a submerged see-saw. We take turns rising out of the warm water and into the hot air and then coming back down again.

The sun moves from behind the only cloud in the sky. The harsh light ignites Leo's shaggy blond-white hair. A head full of wild fiber optic strands frame his pointed nose and chin, those close-set beady eyes, and then lips. He blinks furiously. Tears form in the corners. The drops trail down his cheeks. They're followed by a steady stream.

"Leo, crying won't help," I say, quickly, wanting him to stop.

"I'm not crying, Eleanor." He gives my proper name the phony emphasis of Mr. and Mrs. Zicarelli, and then pushes me off my buoy. I fall back into the water and use my hands as flippers to float away. The sky looks like an overturned saucer, made of glass as smooth as the lake only it's really blue.

Leo and I see signs of Red Beard everywhere. A sunfish floats on its side on the shore. Leo hooks the pulsing gill with a twig and flings it on the rocks. The fish means Red Beard has power over the lake. He refuses to go back in the water. Outside the mess hall, a crow as big as the wild dumpster cats unravels a birds wormy guts. It haw-haws at us and then flies off with the bloody string trailing from its beak. Red Beard must be in there poisoning the food, tainting the water.

"I have a care package from my mom in my locker. Cookies, candy, beef jerky. I locked it away to keep it safe from the evil spirit. We'll eat there," Leo says. He speed-walks along the cypress-flanked footpath. The bare top branches taper to black points, making a dot-to-dot in the sky.

"Sixty-six," he says. He stops suddenly and we collide.

"What," I ask. I push him out of the way to take the lead.

"It's the sixth day of the sixth month," he says like he can't believe it.

"666 is the mark of the beast. Sixty-six means nothing at all, you simpleton," I say, becoming Paula again. "Sorry. Flashback." I don't explain that I'm afraid of becoming my enemy.

"Just die," Leo says. He pushes me into the lower cypress limbs. Thousands of dry tan needles fall to the ground.

He takes off running. I try to keep up, but my legs suddenly feel full of hot sand.

At his bunkhouse, he holds open the door, expecting me to follow. My head hurts, my eyes are wildly fatigued. Inside the cots, lockers, and trunks look hazy around the edges. I blink a couple times and look at Leo before my eyes refocus. He's wavering streaks of color, like Red Beard on the pool bottom.

A couple days before Paula-napping, I described my weird vision to her. She said in her professor-parent voice, I was seeing mandorlas, body halos, a popular feature of early Christian art. She asked me what I saw when I looked at her. I cupped my chin in my hand as if I were concentrating. Despite the vibrant oranges and yellows encircling her, I said the devil doesn't have a halo. She said of course he does; like me he was a fallen angel.

"I'll see you later. I need a nap," I say in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Go ahead. Desert me in my time of need," Leo screams. His face twists in anger. "If he gets me, then he's coming for you next, Ellie. He's coming after you for Paula. I'm sure she's poking pins in an ugly Eleanor doll. A doll with frizzy hair and giant frames."

The slammed door rattles the unsteady bunkhouse frame.

"All we can do is keep our eyes open," he mocks. "Yeah, right." He throws his sleeping bag at me. It unrolls, making a quilted red carpet leading away from the bunkhouse.

I walk so fast my glasses slide halfway down my nose. Looking out over the top of my frames, the half tent, half bunkhouse buildings resemble dark caverns. The arching tree branches are tidal waves ready to crash down. I knock into a trash barrel, and then a picnic table as I run. There's no stopping an angry Leo. He must've lost his mind in the pool with Red Beard. I won't tell. Not like Paula. She told everyone at school I freaked out over her collection of voodoo dolls from her parents' research on a past book. Their young women bodies wore tight floral cotton dresses tied at the waist with rope, but, from the neck up, they had black skull heads, painted green-yellow teeth, and wisps of dry straw hair. I froze when I saw them standing on the shelf above her four-poster bed.

"Mother says only the uneducated are superstitious." Paula grabbed my hand and pulled me toward her bed. She undressed

one of the dolls. "Nothing more than bound straw," she said.

"It doesn't matter what it's made of. It's what it means."

I'd been taught to avoid all sorts of weird occurences. Never step over a person lying on the floor. Never place a hat on the bed. Never put your clothes on backwards. If you do, wear them that way all day. Sleeping under a dozen voodoo dolls belonged among those things.

"You can have this side," Paula said. She patted the half of the queen-size mattress closest to the wall. "Out of reach." She laughed and turned off the ruffle-shaded lamp on the night stand.

When I shut my eyes, the skull-faced women's cannibal teeth chattered like wind-up falsies. They danced around a bonfire, coaxing the flames higher until that was all I saw—fire.

Mr. Zicarelli moved to block my escape out the front door, but his hands were busy, trying to fit together two old bones at the joint. I squirmed past him and ran home dressed in Paula's cowboy-patterned pajamas. I ran fast. The leafless trees along the street looked like taller versions of the voodoo women; I feared they'd turn me into one of them.

A letter is taped to my bunkhouse door. I got to camp a couple days late; I don't have any roommates. The girls' shadows in the bunkhouses on either side of mine reveal what they're doing. To the right, four sit side-by-side on a cot and share a cigarette. A small red coal glows brightly when one of them inhales. The smoke seeps through the window screen and slowly dissipates in the hot summer air. To the left, the girls dance to "Beach Baby, Beach Baby" coming from a portable record player. A girl with long, flopping braids holds her nose, raises her arm, and then wiggles downward like she's going under water.

I sit on my cot, lean back against a hill of pillows, and read what my mother has written: Booker's hot spots have cooled. Paula's performing with a summer orchestra at the local theater. Her brother might go pro. The Cubs and the Cardinals are thinking of signing him. Rocky has a new job installing home security systems. David Julian is back in prison. He violated parole.

David. David Julian. If it wasn't for him, Paula and I would have died. I'm sure of it. I had lured Paula to my house to collect her parents' treasures placed in a box in back of the basement storage closet.

"Go on," I said as she peeked in the dark room. It smelled of ocean brine even though we were a hundred miles from water. "Get it," I said, pointing. My arm trembled. I feared she'd back out. "It's all yours," I coaxed.

Paula ducked to avoid hitting her head on the top of the short door frame. "I don't see a thing, Ellie," she said. "It's too cluttered."

"Keep looking. It's all there." The small room was filled to the low-beamed ceiling with junk: a dress maker dummy, the stuffing exposed at mid-chest, a leaning tower of milk crates, a broken bamboo birdcage, and a couple of air conditioner units, the wire guts hanging out the back. The artifacts sat on the back shelf next to my mother's jars of stewed fruit.

Paula spun around. I saw the glint of her wide eyes, but the room was too dark to see her shocked facial expression.

"Don't Ellie. Please," she said.

I slammed the door, locked it, and moved an old steamer trunk in front, just in case.

Paula screamed for hours while I worked on my stamps upstairs in the kitchen. I affixed the stony faces of dead American presidents to tissue thin hinges and put them in my new book. Next, I alphabetized my record albums according to title and then changed my mind and arranged them by singer. I even made Rice Krispie treats and ate half of it out of the bowl.

Paula started making a god awful banging noise like she was pounding a two-by-four on the ceiling. I needed to make her stop. My parents were in Lake Forest visiting my sick grandmother for the weekend. My brother and David were supposed to be watching me. They partied all night. The last time I checked, they were passed out in Rocky's attic room. But they weren't dead.

David was already down there, dragging the steamer trunk out of the way.

"No. Don't. Please," I said. You don't understand."

"What in the hell's going on?" he asked. "You have someone locked up?"

I nodded, suddenly shy.

"Yes she does. It's Paula. Paula Rene Zicarelli." Her voice sounded raspy but close as if she stood beside me. She must've been talking into the door. I stepped away.

"You're in really bad trouble, Ellie. My parents are going to kill you. My brother will come back from school and kill you. I'm going to kill you. Be afraid. Be very afraid. You're already dead."

"Shut up," David shouted at the closed door. He kicked it to make sure Paula knew he was talking to her.

"What did she do to you, Ellie?" he asked. His hands were warm, dry, soft as he held mine.

"Nothing," I said. "Everything." The tears came in a rush. I told him about her dog, her brother, her clothes, her house, her grades, her parents. Nothing I had was better than hers. Nothing. He understood. His "Paula" was named Trent Webster, a guy who traded stocks on Wall Street, dated a catalog model, and drove a Porsche. He invited Trent Webster to his house when they were ten and shaved half of his head while he slept.

The basement was quiet, except for the faint sound of the radio playing upstairs: "Do you hear the trumpets blowing, Fernando?" a woman sang in a foreign-sounding voice. David removed my glasses. His face collapsed into a swirl of warm colors. I squinted to see him more clearly.

"Don't, Ellie. You have beautiful eyes. You're going to be a real looker. Just wait."

I took back my glasses to see if he was laughing—I was trying to get used to not being pretty—but his face looked soft, his eyes sweet. He meant what he said. He believed my looks would change. I wasn't sure. I told him about Farah Fawcett on the *Tonight Show*. She said people always complimented her big white smile. She confessed her teeth were chocked full of fillings. I told David my eyes were weak.

Ribbons of gray smoke seeped from the slats in the storeroom door. David pulled it open. The ribbons expanded into a thick black plume. Paula crawled out on her hands and knees, coughing. Books and a blanket and pillow blazed in a heap on the floor. The dressmaker dummy's half torso wore a shirt of bright yellow-orange flames. A flame shirt. That was how I felt about Paula. The most important part of me flared with envy. David Julian extinguished the fire. He liked me. He could never feel the same about her.

My mother closes her letter by saying that she still doesn't understand my behavior, but she loves me. She will always love

her "pussy kitty." She looks forward to my return at the end of the month. We will discuss my future then. I'm to take care.

I fold the floral printed stationery in a fat triangle and wedge it under the corner of my locker. Someday, maybe a hundred years from now, someone will find the letter, read it and wonder what Ellie Redding did to Paula Zicarelli and how it all turned out.

I wake up from my nap with my hair and t-shirt soaked in perspiration. Booker T. turned into a rabid wolf in my dream. His foaming jaw latched onto my arm, and he wouldn't let go. My heart booms in my chest from the terror of it. I'm all alone. The bunkhouse windows are the blank gray screens of old broken television sets. The only moving shadows belong to the cypresses and firs. A light breeze stirs the stale heat and sways the bare branches. Mushroom-shaped solar lamps lining the path to Leo's hide their weepy dance behind a wall of light. The air smells of wood smoke, of dampness, of something faintly rotten. His bunkhouse smells even mustier, like sweaty boys even though his roommates are gone.

Leo sits in the middle of his cot with his legs crossed, wearing an old army-green jacket. He ashes a cigarette in an empty soda can. Moths beat against the window screen. A portable black-and-white TV he must've stolen from a counselor projects a cone of silver light. Frankenstein's sad-eyed monster gives daisies to a pretty blond girl. Then he strangles her with his giant clumsy hands.

"You need to apologize to him," I say, not knowing where the idea came from.

Leo turns off the TV. Light bursts across the screen and then fizzles to a single fuzzy point that lingers in the dark.

"You're right," he says as he releases a small blue-gray cloud of cigarette smoke. "I've been thinking the same thing." He no longer sounds worried. He seems at peace.

An invisible string seems to pull us straight to the closed pool where we climb over the chain-link fence. The blue water shimmers as if another pool levitates on top of the real one. We sit side-by-side in lawn chairs and hold hands. Leo's hand shakes, which makes mine tremble too. We slowly say the drowned boy's real name—William, William, William—until it runs together and it

sounds like "ill-yum."

I close my eyes and picture Red Beard's dead body lying on the cement: the concave stomach, the wormy arms and legs, the knobby shoulders. I see a close-up of his face: the hooded eyes, the blue parted lips, the waxy skin. My heart pounds. Boom-boom. Boom-boom. Paula's face replaces his. She has the same heavy-lidded eyes that click open to reveal violet irises filmed over with thick yellow slime. Fireworks go off in my chest like I had wanted for her. I squeeze Leo's hand tight. He lets out an "oh." I don't want to see her anymore. I try to open my eyes, but hers seem to control mine. They're interrogating me; they want to know why. Why?

The thing is I thought fear would make Paula a better person. After my parents were told by hers what I had done, my mother sat on the edge of my bed and asked me if Rocky or David had put these terrible ideas in my head.

"Terror is a great healer," I told her, staring down at my chewed-down cuticles. I couldn't look my mother in the face. She sounded old, tired. Rocky had turned her hair gray. Without looking, I knew I had put wrinkles in her face.

"Where in the world did you ever get such an idea?"

"From your records."

"What?" She dabbed at her red nose with a Kleenex.

I reminded her of the Judy Garland song where she sings about a boy who drops her for a very beautiful girl. "Don't worry about me. Terror is a great healer." A young Judy speaks the line instead of singing it.

"Time is a great healer, Ellie. Not terror."

"Well, terror works quicker than time," I said, embarrassed that I had misunderstood the lyrics.

"William, William, William," Leo chants. His voice increases in volume.

Paula slowly fades and I'm able to open my eyes.

A June bug sizzles on one of the eerie bug zapper strobes housed in a lantern-shaped cage hanging from the tree branch above us. Light diamonds spread across its ridescent wings and then merge to a single lingering spark. Another even larger bug flies between the bars of the cage. It buzzes around the strobe before crashing into the light.

"William, William, William," Leo screams. He opens his eyes wide. His bangs are plastered to his head. He has a V of sweat on his shirt. His lips have gone white from his own private nightmare.

The June bug shoots out from the zapper in flames. The yellow light zigzags across the darkness, and then drops in a curl of black ash at Leo's feet. His body flinches as if he sits in an electric chair delivered the final jolt.

"Leo, are you okay?" I say.

He isn't listening. He tilts back in his chair to gaze up at the ash-white half moon shining directly above the bug zapper's long fluorescent bulbs. His eyes roll up into his lids. He tilts back even farther, his feet coming off the ground as he falls. A thin line of blood trails from beneath his white-blond hair and trickles into the pool.

The woodpecker is believed to call up rain, I read in my field guide as I board the bus headed to Chicago. One goes to Milwaukee. Another to Madison. The camp counselors have already called our parents and told them to pick us up in our respective cities.

Rain drums on the roof, drowning out an early round of "Beer on the Wall." The book is right. Through a porthole I rub in the fogged glass, I watch a woodpecker hammer at the trunk of a tree. In the distance, I see the makeshift stage strung with Christmas lights where Leo and I were to perform our end of the summer skit. The heavy palm tree fronds fan out on the ground. The paper mache boulders are clumps of wet brown-painted newspaper. Behind the stage is the murky outline of the thick cypresses. Leo and I were going to dress as cavemen and lip-sync to"Bare Necessities" from *The Jungle Book*. I liked the idea of dressing like one of Mr. Zicarelli's cannibals. I imagined sending him a picture of me wearing a loin cloth and two coconuts. I'd give him a big, toothy grin. On the back I'd write, "My time has come to shine."

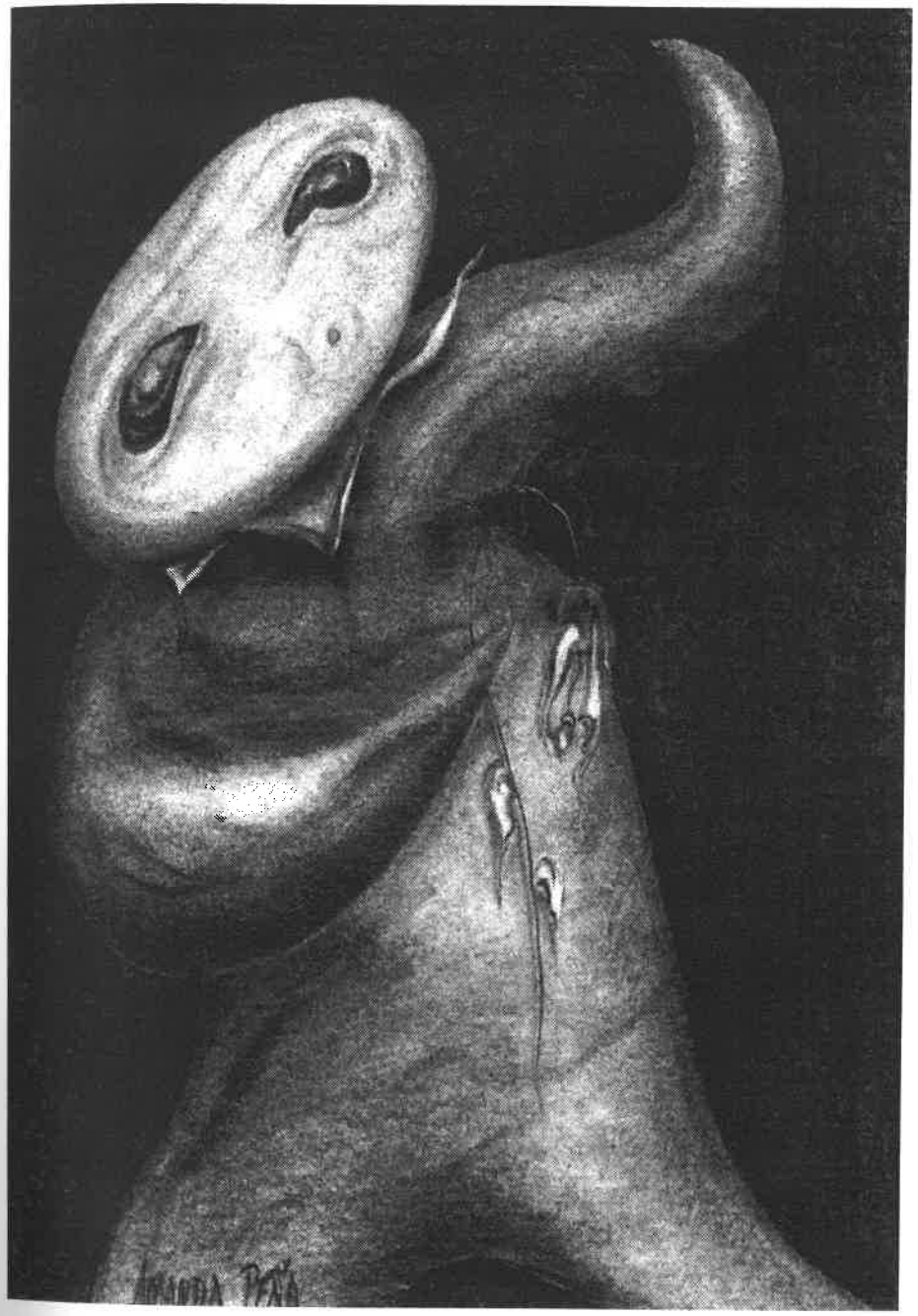
I hold a small stump Leo and I decorated in arts-and-crafts on my second or third day at camp. It's covered with moss, lichen, acorns, and leaves. I'm going to take it to him in the hospital when I get home. After I asked him a thousand times, one of the counselors finally said that he'll be fine. But I heard kids talking while I

waited to board the bus. The rumors are unbelievable: Leo's brain dead and has been sent to a nursing home for life. He has amnesia and thinks he's William. He tried to call the parents and tell them that he's reborn. He has constant seizures that send his body spinning like a dervish. The worst yet. I tried to kill him like they heard I did Paula. I went free because the police lacked proof. The truth is he needs lots of rest like me. If we get some sleep, we'll both be fine.

The bus hits a bump. Two small regal moths sputter up from a split in the stump.

"It's Red Beard's spirit," someone a couple seats behind me says.

The yellow beam of a flash light bounces around the inside of the bus. It finds the moths' frantic spins and follows their twinned flight.



Jan C. Minich

The White Lady

The baby is gone
and I don't have the strength
to continue the search.
I move over to the open doorway
where I can see the moon.
The baby's drowned in the arroyo
and the water is white,
like snowmelt carried in the moonlight,
and I pull myself up
and move over the surface
I know I can never leave.

I told my husband I was tired
of these mining towns,
I needed the ocean where I grew up,
the sound and the islands,
where we see mountains only in the distance.
My shadow leaves so frequently here
I no longer miss it.
Starvation's the calm, the minutes
before the northeastern blows in,
when the world becomes suddenly still
and you enjoy the stillness
because it holds the first few gusts
of maybe the greatest storm
you'll ever move into.
A few moments of clarity.
Euphoria. Stillness and the wind.

But the pain earlier, I don't think
I can ever put my baby through that.

She hasn't learned this is happening,
a growing community of dying children
who haven't the time to doubt.
The waves wash us out beyond the breakwater.
But these canyons never
let the miners who died here leave.
They're with you at night
when you move over to the open door.
They wander up and down
the walls of the river
looking for my baby in the current.

The owners sent my husband in
when it wasn't safe and he died.
Now they're letting us starve
and they won't take no for an answer.
Those who stayed can never leave.
In summer, when the river's dry
I walk the arroyo and listen
for my baby's cry, my only curse
on those who see me
see my pain as beauty.
How did she get in that river?

The moon is setting earlier.
The rock walls that haven't fallen
give me cover so I build
these small fires to light her way.
If she crawls clear, I'll hear her cry.
And then I can take my baby home.
We'll walk the tidelines
that understand when loved ones
return but are careful to walk
in the shadows of clouds moving in.
Small fires mark the narrow channel.
If there's no one left awake
we'll take our places undisturbed.

The passing freighter won't see us.
The moon's setting over the canyon wall.
She's here in my arms and we're going home
where the water is gentler.

Grand Union

Having exclamation-pointed her beauty
mark with an eyebrow pencil and pout,
she stood behind the conveyor belt
which dragged a six-pack from my hands
to hers. We were small-talking,
fumbling with our shyness and fingers
as she was busy miscounting the change.

She tells me she's engaged now
and I say I've just got back to town.
I'm awkward and mumbling like that child
over in the next aisle staring at me
with a fist in its mouth.
And while she is bagging
her ring catches the fluorescence
and that's when I find myself
looking away—but then I think
just maybe she's embarrassed too,
and as I turn back she places
her hands down, stacking one above the other,
covering the commitment she made
against my ever returning.

I think a lot about this sort of stuff
ever since our divorce
in details and images I wouldn't have believed before.
From that red smock she wore
with its ink-stained breast,
to how her hair was parted perfectly
like a scar across her scalp.
And, because of this, I'm reminded of my grandmother,

who from bed would reminisce
towards her childhood, until it seemed
she was again that child. Or like
when the one favorite scene from a movie

reloops resolutely in your mind
until it becomes the length of that movie—
all the extraneous has been removed,
as the spotlight narrows
to center the memory's moment.

And so it is now for me:
how it wasn't until our parting
that I was finally able to face her;
and that there are times, I'm sure,
in the quietness of the dark booth
that the projectionist believes
he too is a liar, that even the applause
among the audience below him
becomes the repetitious act
of two hands separating.

Arroyo

--for Phil Tate

I guess the closest I can come to imagining
one would be a ravine which, here in the east,
banks steeply to a stream where wild grapes
can still graze untouched and the oak trees
balance on one sturdy leg.

Here you can descend on your heels
like a pioneer behind a ploughhorse
where, if the sound of water isn't enough
to lead you, gravity will, until
you've reached the cupped bottom of the U
where the stream's no wider than the arc
of a triumphant piss and the native trout
congregated there stake the claim
as the stubbornest of fish.

Here, too, is where rimless tires,
shopping carts and even an occasional
appliance wedge themselves into unlikely graves.
    Yeah, I know, but it's the sad truth
of some peoples' idea of recycling
and not at all how I picture the chiseled
nobility of your southwestern desert.

But I gotta tell you Phil, it's still
some spot and where I'd have a photo

taken to send to you. And as I can
easily picture you there, tan and khakied,
posed with a spiral notebook in hand,
could you imagine seeing me sitting here
cross-legged and baiting a pole, deeply absorbed
on top of a stunned Whirlpool?

At The Desert's Edge

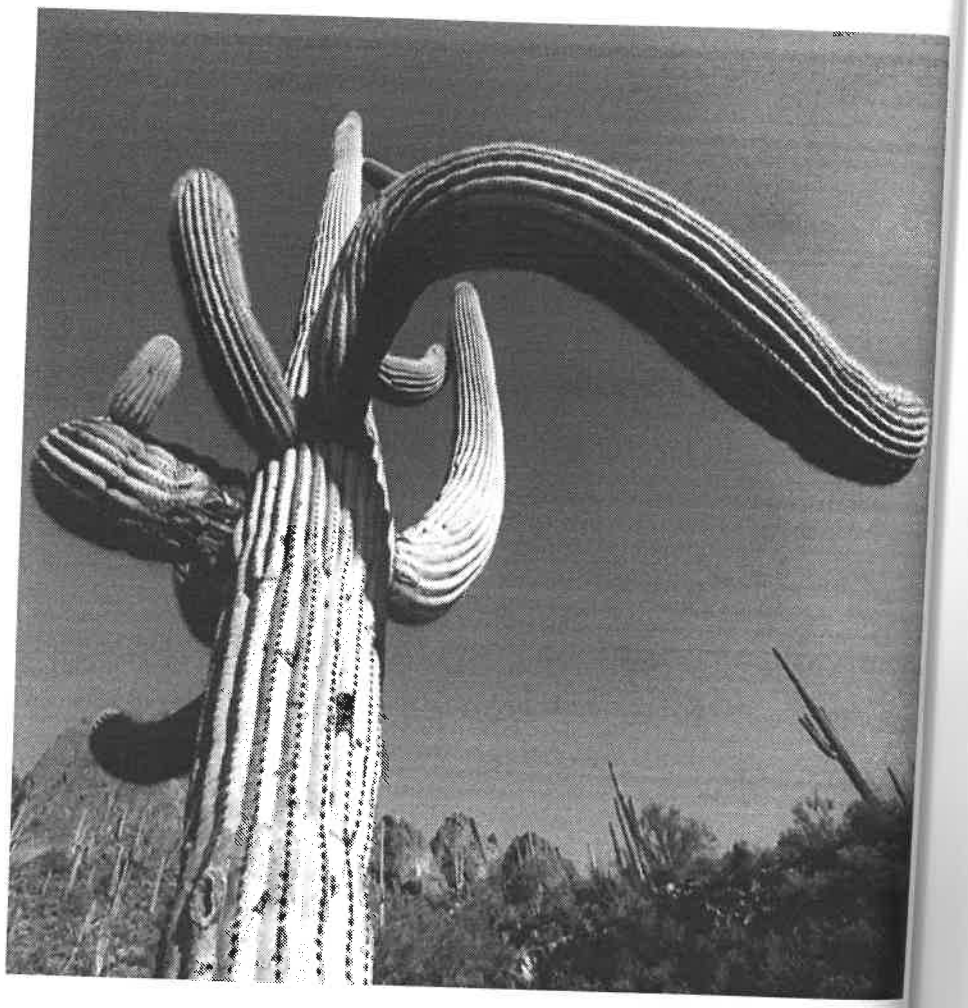
Watermarks burn at the margins.
You wake to the bitter sound--- A stranger
is predicting the weather---

For weeks, it is noon. Light continues turning
on its own wheel, withstanding reflections
as if they were the whole story.

You want to tell everyone your secret---
how much darkness is tucked in the crevice
of noon--- while the sky remains careful.

A stranger cannot read the bones
or prophesy in this silence.
Perfection simply isn't good enough.

Distance, ever after, closes in.
Lovely, ruinous, there will be rain
before sunrise---



Santo Luis, Gardener of Miniature Roses

God knows I've tried
to grow some here
in Tallahassee, like yours,

not a blemish or wilt,
each bud a perfect world,
the way you did on Ever-

green Street, South Gate, CA
but it's not a matter
of the green thumb, knowhow,

of the right fertilizer,
organic or non
of watering

of weeding
of keeping the snails
out of the beds,

of the right dirt mixture.
No, it takes your hands,
the years you sat on the rocker

on the porch, singing & talking
of fertile days in your fertile
homeland, of the smooth touch

of your breath,
kisses on the petals.
Only then can you witness

the plants' growth,
the opening of buds into flower,
like the gift of your hands,

a love for the simple pleasures
we try desperately
to grow.

The Parable of Stones

once the pebble struck
between the eyes--I saw

it come but didn't duck
behind the palm tree in time--

I felt the pain blind the eyes,
the trickle of blood down

the cheek, then the lightness
of the head, a world spinning

and next thing I knew
I was flat on my back

looking up at the faces of friends,
among them the culprit

who'd flung the rock--in his eyes
the fact that both blood and stone

had become one: a weight
too heavy for both of us

to carry our entire lives.

Freewriting, Late September

set down whatever wants to come out
without refining
or expanding
like dust settling into earth

trapping words
creatures that leave
their crabbed tracks in the dirt
of my father's cabin bare now for seven years
timbers rotting one corner sinking
in the swampy tongue of the hill

sit quietly
the page before you
the odors of another autumn
glowing in slender lamps on the wall
only minutes away from the hollow snort
of the dark

start anywhere
the yellow fuzz of the wind
as it sings through the shed with
its ripped out boards
its rusted hammer and cracked bolts
the slugs bunched up by the threshold

keep the hands moving
don 't think
always drawing closer to what you don't know

a space whose points are moved by transformations
not yet accounted for
some object toward which
all trajectories converge

as though anything could be said ...

last year someone kicked the door in
splintered the lower panel the pine
pure in its white seam
(they could have just turned the handle)
took nothing but the house
unbarred and shieldless to every claw

keep writing
begin with the road once smooth
now mottled with pools of stagnant mud

put the words down without judgment
demands
while the porch sags with the smell of cracked wood
pinning the crisscrossed memories
you recognize only long after
you have passed the right place
knowing you shall never come there again

(to begin is to meet one more possibility of silence)

say whatever leaps to mind
all wanderings
all bifurcations of sense
sharp prisms of surprise

a stack of books with moldy spines and edges
shredded by thin teeth

something appears you didn't expect to see

old jars a bottle of green slime
topped with a fine ring of brown froth

don't stop no matter what
(all things were together in a crackling
stew of seeds stirring the dark tang of birth)

the empty fireplace
its ashes caked into dense muck unwilling to burn
the interloper jeep that lumbers into view
with faces peering out of the windows
solemn lumps on the hunt

persist
without analyzing
evaluating
free to sample the dense clot of possibilities
the kitchen crowded with droppings and spiderwebs
dark matter entering the narrow apertures of
every hinge

one picture still hangs on the wall
carefully matted and covered by glass
showing a gate half opened
in a country field the distance blurring
into green and blue

straining

to grasp the whole
to apprehend
the dispersed and disparate filaments
of our constantly streaming flesh

press on
a flourish of motions

ending with preludes
the words themselves
spinning their urges out on a rag

I nudge the small bones
graying on the floor
and whisper goodbye
to the rats.

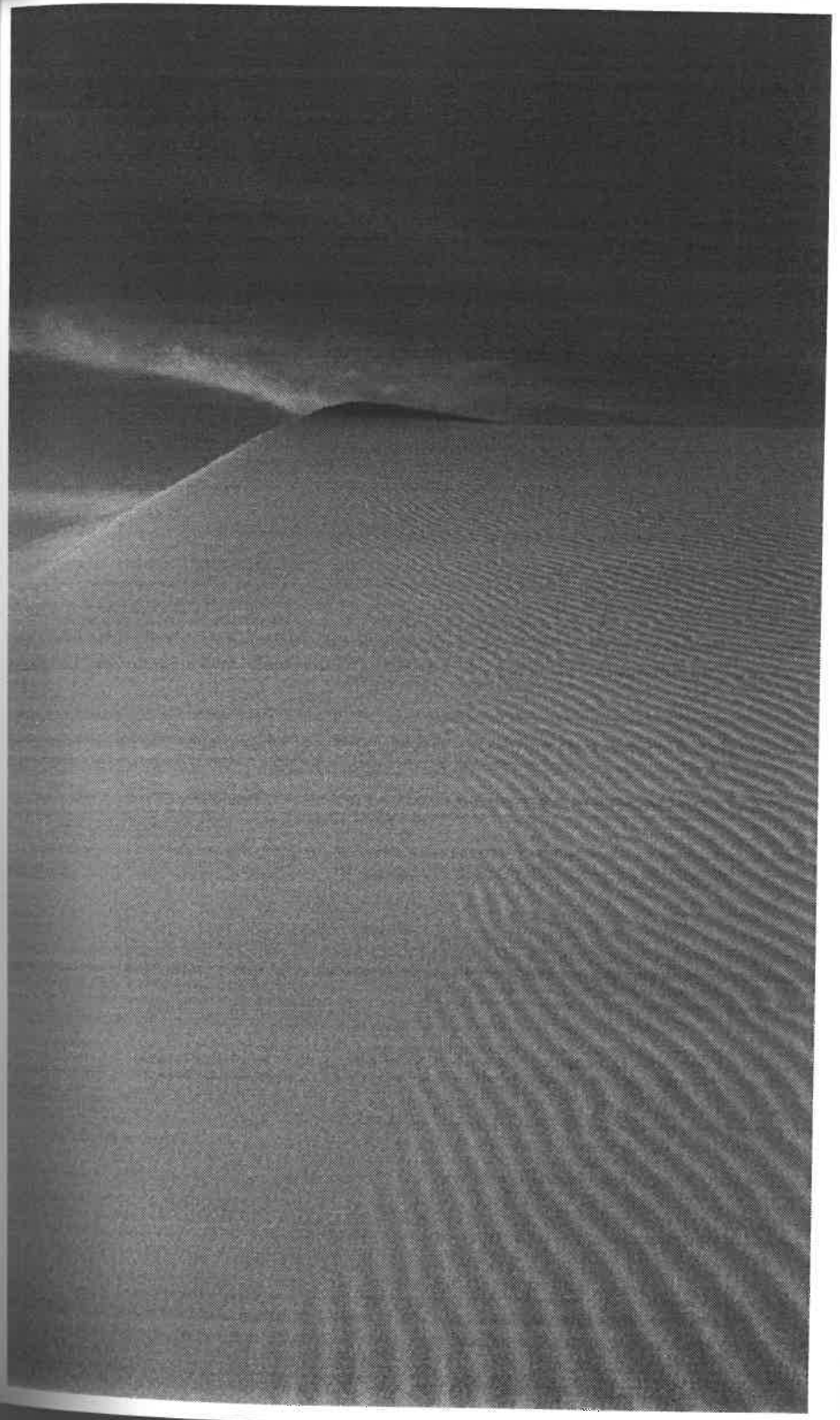
The Transformation of the Hummingbird

The quince are falling like green spiders, slowly from the bush,
your mouth the needle without a thread, I know
if you enter, twilight will enter too, gently as if sifting through
a dusty blind. We come and go, whatever

the old bitch says about carpets on Tuesdays. She's never swept,
and what we've done, she can't say. It's not this transformation
that stole the thistle from her lintel just as it began its web.
Why do I like the moon hesitating, the stars feathered out like birds?

Why do you not notice that women who wear mascara cry carefully,
their tissues smudged, the unfixed night. I see my face,
a cancelled stamp. I open the envelope and find the genuine article:

at my throat the green choker and your name. What else is new,
my old darling? Winter is coming, my whole body is turning
into snow and I turn towards you.



Terri Brown-Davidson

In the Bath, Patsy Cline Has Magical Dreams About Giants

They describe her as "ripe," as if she were a Hunt's tomato swimming in red sauce in its can. They describe her as "vibrant," when no one except me and Momma and my one other sister, too pathetic to mention, have seen her submerge herself for hours in the tub, steam flattening her permed brunette hair, a rosacea from the heat making her resemble a red-and-white patched monster when she finally bedraggles herself out, wraps herself in an acre long white towel and one of Momma's Turkish bathrobes because Miss Finicky's always in pursuit of "the best."

I'm getting used to seeing her in there. The last few times, I've had to pull her out when it's time for her gig at the roadhouse, slide my hands under her armpits, hoist that long white shivering body, towel her from head to toe. Sometimes she gets all sleepy then, bats those long black lashes until I'm so impatient I want to scream, buckles slightly and slips back down into the uppuffing curtains of Miss Sasson's Eau de Cologne Bubblebath and then what am I supposed to do?

I phone in for her. Cancel for her. Baby, I let her go.

Because, hell, I'm just your typical all-American-kind-of gal high school student, or I could say that's the fate I aspire to though, in my family, that'd be dreaming the impossible dream. Everyone in school knows about Patsy's shitkicker lungs, more powerful than any oilrig that goes rattling and shaking and vibrating along our highway. And a few wits at school have taken to calling her "The Baritone," which I don't think is funny at all, and they only say it because that Theda Bara throaty effect makes her sound sexy as hell flaming on Earth and they ache for her, those little boys do, I know it.

They don't know the real Patsy. The real Patsy, the genuine twenty-four-octave article, is only revealed in the bath. It's become a ritual we've refined and polished to a glittery silver sheen since those days we first started the practice as near-toddlers, though now even Momma thinks it's bubbled out of control, has taken to calling Patsy "neurasthenic" out of earshot as if those pearl-shaped little lobes of hers couldn't decipher decibels higher than any Saint Bernard or Basset Hound will ever, ever aspire to do.

Whole worlds have been erected and destroyed in that tub.

And only I know which one is real.

When we were little girls of seven or eight years old (the same age, not coincidentally, as Alice Liddell when Charles Dodgson began to photograph her), soaking in the hot water together, scrubbing each other's back with a bright green sponge Momma'd picked up on discount at Woolworth's, a slice of that world would emerge, layered with ice that shone blue as we examined it and was cracked in strange, brittle, perpendicular seams along its surface, like deep scars roughing an otherwise-lovely face. We were tremendous geography fans in those days and believed that North Dakota was the most exotic locale anyone might ever sojourn to, especially two penny-poor, white-cracker girls without a daddy. So I'd rub Patsy's back in that half-harsh, soothing circular motion she loved under glaring bathroom lights and stare at that ice tip until I could describe it perfectly, until we owned that map-tiny square of terrain, and we'd memorize it and remember it because we loved it.

"Antarctica," I called Patsy.

"Amazon Jungle," she adopted as my name.

"Antarctica, I'd murmur, squeezing out the sponge until tepid water dribbled down her back; smiling, glancing back, Patsy shivered; I tried to sound like my second grade textbook. "Antarctica, today we are journeying to North Dakota. It's a flat land, you know, characterized by a population that's spread out across the state, but it's more highly populated in its major cities, of course, such as Fargo and Grand Forks."

"Boring!" Patsy'd scream, furiously as the Red Queen in Alice; even then she was given to paroxysms of temper that amused me more than scared me; calmly I continued.

"But what is it about this strange, strange place that you

don't find in the textbooks? What is it about--" I paused.

I glanced around. The bathroom looked strange, but in a way I couldn't articulate. I tried again. "What is it about--"

"What?" Patsy asked. She examined me closely; I felt flushed suddenly, enervated, as if all my muscles had gone slack and wiggly as worms. I shoved away from Patsy a little, leaned against the tub back, the cold white porcelain top where we hadn't splashed water gripping the skin of my neck, supporting me, comforting me.

"Amazon, are you o.k.?"

The dizziness lifted and I looked at her to find her very intense eyes boring into mine with adultlike anxiety, concern. What'd happened? Even at eight, I was a morbid child; it occurred to me, just for a second, that I might've had a stroke, but that sounded too farfetched even for me, so I pasted a big fat smile on my face and nodded.

And truly, the dizziness seemed to have gone. Evaporated. Pouf: fini: finis-ville, as one of our artier French textbooks might've proclaimed. "I'm fine," I insisted, "fine," and in an instant I was enjoying again the fading warmth of the bath and sinking down into bubbles popping in pockets of foam under my chin and then I scooted up and resumed my washing of Patsy's back; smiling again, convinced the crisis had passed, she tipped her head forward somewhat sleepily, inviting me to scrub her neck.

Which I did. "But what is it about this strange, strange place that you don't find in the textbooks?"

I closed my eyes and the blackness wedged tightly along the outcurving blankness of my eyelids dissipated, turned scarlet, paled to the whiteness of day-old snow.

And I saw them. The town. The house. The woman. The man. I glanced across the road, messy with scraps of filthy, melting snow, to the field, arcing far away from my vision as any vista I'd ever glimpsed, a gold-red sunset igniting that horizon in bursts of flame that made the field look as if it were exploding under fireworks attacks, as if Roman candles and bottle rockets illuminated each other in a cacophony of gold and russet, emerald and auburn. I smiled to myself because it was pretty, feeling Patsy's back stiffen under the sponge. Studied the tipped-to-the-left sign planted in that field: Hettinger, North Dakota, Population 200.

And somehow I understood that what I was looking at was real.

"What's the matter?" Patsy asked, not turning around. "Earth to Amazon. Earth to Amazon."

And I knew I'd better start describing right then what I saw, or Patsy might start thinking I was lacking a few bottle rockets of my own.

So I told her. I escorted her up the curving driveway to the house, a huge, white, ramshackle affair built squarely as a barn. I led her across the rotten-wooded porch that made crackling sounds like a gently spitting fire beneath our boots when we crossed it. I indicated the clay pot of fat-headed gold and chocolate mums beside the "Howdy, Stranger" mat, a silly, soiled affair with one goose in a Stetson greeting another with a hearty shake of its wingtip. We wiped our feet on the mat, glanced at each other; the screen door creaked open; we ventured inside.

The man was gaunt as a polecat, with the starved, anxious look of some animal that's been trapped out in the cold too long, forgotten how to forage. I liked him, though, despite his downbeaten appearance, and I could tell Patsy did, too. He waved us inside with a palsied arc of his hand: we gazed around, appalled at what we saw: plates stacked with crusted food--old casseroles, hardened oatmeal, bacon that had petrified into something dark and tarpaperish and evil-looking--were scattered around the filthy wood floor of the living room; newspapers sat stacked in corners nearly to the ceiling; coffee cups whose contents were a thick, curdled cream of scum lay everywhere, some of them tipped, the sticky brown contents staining the carpet near the mugs. Glancing beyond the mess, which made me claustrophobic and crazy-scared at the same time, I spotted dishes in the sink stacked pell-mell to the ceiling; my throat seared with bile.

"It's Momma," the man explained, while Patsy squirmed at his side. "It's taken so much of my time, now, just to care for her... I hope you won't judge us on the dirt alone. Oh, here she is now. Take a seat, girls, won't you, please?"

And he shoved a pile of papers and books off the sagging divan, indicated it with a sweep of his oversized, trembling hand.

Patsy and I seated ourselves demurely: I knew her so well I could smell panic wafting musty off her skin, but I was willing to

listen to the man, thinking any weatherbeaten face with a smile that yellow-tooth-engaging must harbinger some fortitude, some incredible strength of spirit, Antarctica and I might learn from. And then I glanced up at the woman hobbling on her walker toward us and all beautiful intentions vanished into the living-room must that threatened to choke me silent because she was grinning like a mentally retarded woman and was filthy as a puppy that keeps soiling itself until its owners have the sense to clean it with a washcloth and her clothes were all crazy, a housedress imprinted with little cows sailing over fat, white clouds, snippity yellow moons.

And the crazy woman kept stumping toward us, slapping that walker down with repeated smacks on the dirty wood floor, as if this were a garden party and she, the gracious hostess, were anxious to receive us.

But the man sensed my reaction. Understood my reaction, no matter how fervently I struggled to hide it, for I was young but I didn't lack compassion and I could tell that this was a hellhole of a life these two people had sunk into, mired themselves in forever.

"Please don't mind Momma," the man said; his voice got all high and flutey, and I knew he was suffering. "And don't get the wrong impression; I'd be so sad if you did...I try to keep her clean, really I do, but she hasn't been right for years and between giving her baths and feeding her and watching her medication and talking to her and running this mess of a farm I seem to have run out of time and I'm permanently out of time and I don't know where it'll ever stop."

Then, to Patsy's and my horror, the man put his face straight down on his open palms and started to cry.

Neither of us knew what to say. And we felt bad that we didn't, but we were just little girls after all. And the man kept crying with his gnarled head lowered onto his hands and the woman, who by this time had found the chair next to her husband, lowered herself into it out of the walker, sat there grinning at each of us in turn while he cried. And Patsy and I glanced at each other and then looked straight ahead, trying not to see that woman's grin, but in a second the man had seized control of himself, lifted his face off his hands, and sat there wiping his cheeks with his palms and struggling, somewhat shakily, to smile.

"I'm so sorry, " he said. "I have no idea what made me do

that. I'm afraid I'm giving you the wrong impression...you see, I learned long ago that the dirt here isn't what's important, or even the way Momma is now. Though you might find it hard to believe, it's quite possible--in situations such as ours--to preserve feelings of-- of dignity, you see, of...hope. Maybe my wife can't communicate with me as she once did. Maybe she can't wash herself so good, or help me clean up this place, or even tell me that she loves me. But who says--who's to say--that the past isn't as important as the present? We think, just because we're living in some now nobody understands, that that's all there is. But when my wife was young--before she got sick--my God, you wouldn't believe how beautiful she was then. Spirited. She used to read all these thick novels I could barely understand, though I took to reading them after her trouble started, to get back a little of what we'd lost...but she'd read these big thick books, *War and Peace* and *Moby Dick* and *Little Women*, and she'd act out all the parts just like she was an actress, just like she was somebody and we didn't live out on a little farm nobody ever heard of in Hettinger, North Dakota.

"So, you see, she's the one who taught me what beauty is. Who taught me, really, how to hope. And what kind of ungrateful fool would I be if I turned my back on her now?"

"Besides, our lives are full of beauty here, " he added, reaching far to his right, seizing his wife's hand, squeezing it firmly while she smiled, a little shyly, and then broke once again into that huge, disarming grin. "I read to her now, and we have lots of records we play on the stereo, and sometimes--sometimes--" he flushed a little, here-- "Momma and I even cut the rug, you know: dance."

"But enough about me. About us. Who are you, you sweet little things, and why have you chosen to--honor us with your presence today?"

"Don't you know?" I asked.

"Why, no. Should I?"

"No," I replied, confused. "It's just that--if you don't, I'm not sure I do, either."

"Well, then, let's just start back at the beginning. What're your names, and where do you all hail from?"

"I'm Elvira Cline," I said, a bit more grandly than I'd intended, "and this here's my sister, Patsy." Patsy ducked her head in acknowledgement then stared, sucking her lower lip, at the scuffed

tips of her boots. "Though sometimes we call each other Antarctica and Amazon Jungle."

The man regarded her thoughtfully. Chewed the inside of his cheek. "Well, isn't that nice," he said, finally. "Doesn't that beat all. That your momma named you that. After--her. As--what? A kind of--homage?"

Patsy and I exchanged looks.

"I'm afraid I don't take your meaning, " I said.

"Why, after the singer! Patsy Cline .Your momma must've named your sister that for a reason."

"Is there a singer named Patsy Cline?" I demanded, more confused than ever.

"Only the best damned country-western singer in the entire world. With a voice, I swear, that'll melt the skin off your bones. Your momma never told you that? I can't imagine why."

Patsy and I shook our heads vigorously no.

"For Pete's sake, then, let's give it a listen, what'd you say? This is far too good for you to miss." Trembling, bracing one hand against his chair back, he stood up, shuffled to the dust-coated stereo against the far wall, slid a record carefully out of its sleeve, placed it on the turntable, edged the needle down. "This is called 'Sweet Dreams.' And you just won't believe how beautiful this woman's voice is."

From the first second I knew. How could I not? The way she yodelled out in the garage, testing out the acoustics when she thought Momma and I'd gone out for groceries. She had a way of caressing a note in that husky buttery voice, holding on until you felt you couldn't stand it anymore, every sinew in your body vibrating, and then diving headfirst into it until the impact, once you felt it, splashed along your body like ice water from the Bering Straits. Could make you cold and hot at once so sometimes you shook, hearing those sounds, couldn't accept that they came out of that little girl's mouth. It was almost inhuman, uncanny in its loveliness, in its power to evoke realms of passion far beyond our limited, circumscribed fields of knowledge. The scratchy record whirled and spun, and when the woman moaned, "I should hate you, my whole life through, instead of having sweet dreams about you," I felt like weeping myself and sneaked a peek at Patsy, who was only listening rapt because she adored a great set of pipes and this

woman could wail with the best of them.

"Isn't that fine?" the man tremored, after the last note had faded into the fetid air of that house. "That woman was an angel, a veritable angel, and oh--how she suffered! Just like Momma and me here. But you see, suffering's not all that bad. You learn from it. Grow. Miss Patsy Cline. Mymymy, what a voice."

I was so strangely affected by then by the song and that woman's way of manipulating me to tears that I missed, completely, the angel reference and the old man's choice of the past tense. And maybe Patsy herself should've caught it but she couldn't, I see that now, just like the voice on the tape recorder never sounds like the person who's been recorded: "I don't sound like myself," Patsy'd always say, when I played back her rendition of "Walking After Midnight," and she'd scrunch up her nose in that superficial way she had and then snap, "Shit, girl, I sound like the bad soundtrack to a B-movie," and she'd laugh and I'd laugh, more loudly than she, because what other choice did I have?

So that day--the day Antarctica and I explored that old man's house in Hettinger, North Dakota--was the day our geographical explorations diverged. She, thinking it was only some beautiful, sublime game we'd created together, swam deeper and deeper into mythical realms of giants and beheaded priestesses and dragons snorting fire from their dark, tunnel cool nostrils and women with flaxen hair that trailed behind them when they walked until some obliging little girl swept it up into a train, carried it for her: Patsy, being the dominant type, always did love fairy tales about submission and subservience.

And how could I ever tell her anything different? How can I tell her now? Although I don't consider myself a conventionally religious person, though I'd love, in fact, to be the anonymous high schooler who carries her sister's books from class to class when she feels too neurasthenic or bone-tired from singing at that roadhouse to do it herself, I'm too wise, maybe, too old in some way I may never understand, to question a vision of Heaven. And though I've seen the side of that mountain, watched the plane move forward logically, precisely, nightmarishly as the progression of any REM dream into that rock that reaches out to embrace her before the plane crumples and explodes, though I've seen all of that while washing her slim pale back, while Patsy murmurs fancifully about

giants lifting her weary body up to some featherbed in the sky where she'll be away from her dreams, away from the striving and ambition and the voice that strikes her as as much curse as gift, though I know she'll meet Charlie Dick someday and buy her white house with the yellow roses and become as revered as any person can before she dies, I keep this knowledge to myself, because I'm not God, I'm simply a lowly gatekeeper who's been entrusted with one small set of keys, and when that door opens someday, and Momma and Patsy and I are forced to move through it, I'll be ready, then, and we will.

Patsy's been soaking too long. Her face, seared crimson, floats just above the foamy surface of the water. I sit on the toilet lid, watching her. The door's slightly ajar, releasing fat billows of steam that halo us both in clouds while she talks, tendrils of her dark hair dripping down into the water, drifting with the sloppy waves she sets into motion with her hands. The slightly ajar door becomes pronouncedly ajar and Patsy and I glance at each other because we both know what's coming.

"Lord, girl," Momma says, straining her creased face, crimpcurled head, through the gap. "Don't you ever get enough of that soaking? I swear you're addicted to that game; I'll have to drag you to a shrink soon if you don't get your act together. You, so young too--with so much to live for."

"I'm just getting comfortable, Momma," Patsy says. "Just sorting the music out in my mind."

"You're sorting yourself into a prune," Momma says, and slams the door.

I grin at Patsy. And she grins right back. Just like when we were toddlers, bouncing in the tub. I swear we can't help it--this deep-running comaraderie that's always linked us. And then Patsy says, "Get into the tub, Amazon Jungle, and wash my back, good and pronto," and I protest with a flutter and say, "What? But, Antarctica, I'm fully dressed!" yet I shuck off my school clothes anyway and climb in beside her, scoop up the sponge from the edge of the tub, start scrubbing that beautiful beautiful back, and, before I know it, staring at the exact center of her spine, I'm nearly overcome with a dark feeling of foreknowledge; I thrust it down, tamp it down, and listen to what Patsy has to say.

"I'm thinking about giants again," Patsy murmurs, smiling

while I scrub; she reaches back briefly; I squeeze her slender fingers. "God, wouldn't I just love to climb up some beanstalk and settle myself on a featherbed that belongs to some big old giant and rest there awhile until I don't feel so overwhelmed, until I don't feel so tired anymore. What'd you say, Sis? Can we play that game today? Or maybe you'd like to carry my hair. Hell, I always did want you for a servant. Servant of the master! Will you carry my hair, just for awhile, so I can relax and then I won't be so tired anymore and I'll tell you when to stop?"

I scrub her back in small, delicate circles, concentrating so she doesn't suspect. "I'll carry your hair for you to kingdom come and back," I say.

And we both know I'd never lie.

We both know I'll always tell Patsy Cline the truth.

Generation XYZ Explicates Hamlet

I. The Hamlet/Ophelia Love Question

Can I tell you this in my own words?

That crazy chick
was *doing* that crazy Hamlet guy
and her dad ended it with one upside her dome,
so she chiropractored Hamlet - - no more back ache - -
cut him off cold,
so Hamlet was dissed and pissed
and kilt her nosy old man
and let that pale little ghosty girl go
ga-ga in the pond,

the two of them staring fishmouthed
his fashion glass on her glassy stream
like two drunk punks in an amusement park
where even the wine pours crooked
through ears and down a throat
so people never truly see or hear
or touch the truth of each other
choking their all on silence.

II. Revealing **Hamlet's** Democratic Sensibilities

Cool.
Some worm
eats through your king's squishy eyeball
then heart-attacks for fear
of the fish what's come to eat him
who gets chewed by the beggar
who poops them all out

everyone pro-gressed through his guts.

Willie's saying
we could eat our parents, you know,
like that dude in *Psycho* who swallowed his mother whole,
scarf our parents' parents' parents too,
even every historical decomposed dude,
woof them down like roach eggs in tuna
ail of them, all of us, going down that same final pipe.

Totally collective.

The O.K. Actor

He reincarnates Earps
And Clanton boys impartially,
Fighting the good gunfight
Over and over
On stage, screen, and television,
In four-walled mock-ups complete
Down to the last cockroach
And in cutaway barns
Where the walls go only up as high
As the stalls.
He shoots and dies
And lives to shoot and die again.
He climbs the walls of his corral,
And shoots the khaki-colored
Desert-lands beyond,
And dies again.

Gun Powder

Dream Head Diddler- Q: Can you see her dainty finger, with wee purple and gold nail polish scorpions grip the trigger?

Obsessed Imbecile Under Hypnosis- A; Yes.

Diddler- Q; Can you describe it for me?

Imbecile- A; Not yet, it's still smug inside the chamber.

Diddler- Q; Well, when did you first see it?

Imbecile- A; Before it was born, minted and encased.

Diddler- Q; You encountered it before it was fired?

Imbecile- A; SHHH Quiet. Combustion.

Diddler- Q; Can you describe what you're seeing now?

Imbecile- A; Well, it's out of the barrel or chute if you like.

Diddler- Q; and into the air?

Imbecile- A; Yes.

Diddler- Q; Is it faster than the nude iris?

Imbecile- A; No. It's much slower, like a spiraling football thrown by black and white reel players with leather helmets.

Diddler- Q; Ah ha, How does it look in flight?

Imbecile- A; MMM, I can really admire it's intricate mechanics, stealthy, glimmering and spinning. The Sun reflecting off her like sweat. Quite beautiful really.

Diddler- Q; Does it scatter, like maybe buckshot?

Imbecile- A; Yes.... and no.

Diddler- Q; Could you be more specific?

Imbecile- A; Well, I'd been explaining to myself that maybe it would open up, you know like one of those flags that say BANG! Or perhaps an umbrella or possibly the white banner of surrender or a snow hued gown the shade of cake. Something beautiful. You know?

Diddler- Q; So that was it then, the beauty?

Imbecile- A; No that wasn't it, I'm sure the beauty wasn't the point.

Diddler- Q; What was the point then?

Imbecile- A; Well, it appears that the point was on the front of the projectile.

Diddler- Q; I don't quite understand.

Imbecile- A; I'll never understand, but I've been bracing for this slug for quite some time.

Diddler- Q; Let me clarify this thing. You're telling me that you seen the shot coming?

Imbecile- A; That's right.

Diddler- Q; Why didn't you move out of the way?

Imbecile- A; Gun Powder.

Diddler- Q; What?

Imbecile- A; I Love Gun Powder

WHAT?
I Love Gun Powder
WHAT?
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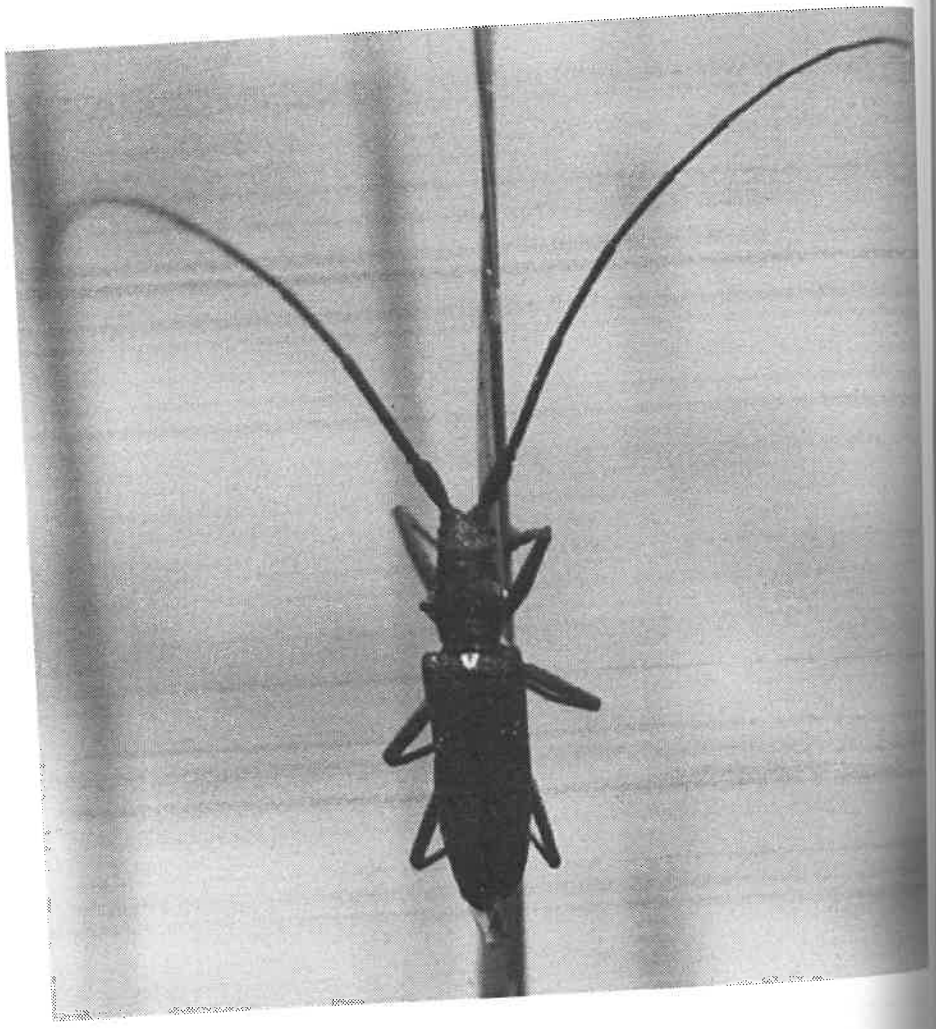


David M. Grant

Locale Wisdom: An Interview With Barry Lopez

Barry Lopez is a striking man. Not because of his stature, clothing, nor even his soft but deep voice. It's his eyes. I can't tell you what color they are, even though I sat barely two feet from him for an hour and a half one afternoon on the campus of Northern Arizona University. I saw his lecture later that night in the large assembly hall and then saw him the next morning in a small conference room at the University's union. His eyes stay with you, though. They penetrate. They look on you with a deep and powerful reverence. In some way, they bring you up to his level. Barry is rarely, if ever, deprecating towards others. They communicate to you that you have the power and the knowledge to be more than you are.

What follows is only a few sections of the talk I had with Mr. Lopez and four other men from the Flagstaff area. In the interest of brevity, I designate all interviewers with "I." I do not mean to de-humanize any of us, but rather to condense each of us to a single, amalgamated persona simply for the ease which it allows in conveying the discussion. All four of us had connections with a magazine or newspaper. When one said, "I'll just hang back for a little while and let these guys do the interviewing so I can talk to you as a person," Barry turned to the whole group with a very deadpan gaze and said, "You guys can talk to me as a person, too." Moments such as this never transfer well to writing and the whole talk cannot even translate to tape. You, dear reader, must come at this twice removed. But if I have done my job, you will not go away empty.

I: Are you on a tour in support of your new book (About This Life)?

BL: No. I don't like that idea that you can go and do the same thing over and over again. The people in the room create the talk and it

happens there. Then, people walk out the door and do whatever with it. They translate it into whatever. You know, it's just like reading a book. When you're finished reading a book, you put the book down and there's your son and you go over and... and you see him in a different way. You start to play with him or you bond or do something and you go out the door together. It's not obvious, but that happens because you read a book. The book wasn't about the boy or what they're going to do; it's about relationships... in such a way that a father can take that step.

It's the same with coming to hear someone speak. So somebody goes out and they say "I heard this guy speak, but I don't remember what his name was." But, that name is not important, you know? You're just feeding a set of relationships. So, to record it and have somebody listen to it... you can't record what happened. You cannot record what happened; I don't care what the technology is.

I: There's always more.

BL: Well, it's deeper. It's much deeper. The tape recorders have a skipper, you know? It just runs on the circuit. It picks up a couple of circuits and things, but there's no deeper operation.

I: Do you have plans for any future writings or travels at this point?

BL: I'm finishing a collection of short stories and trying to get things to fall into place so I can go back to Antarctica. I'm also collaborating with various other artists, musicians, dancers...

For me, the individual is not the genius. The genius resides in the community and it is made manifest in an individual. So, I like to see projects where it is impossible for an outsider to determine who made it. I think that's healthy when you have something beautiful and you just have to say, "Well, I don't know, we all just worked together and here it is."

I: Like the pottery you made near your home in Oregon?

BL: Yeah. The kiln, the big anogama kiln? Is that the piece you're referring to? That anogama kiln is a partner in everybody's work.

You really can't say who's responsible for what. That's exactly the deal.

That story, or a lot of that story, is about these things; about the meaning of community and being local and people like the guy I call Jack, you know, Richard. The genius that I see coming out of Dick/Jack is this awareness of the power of the local and what it means to use local materials, local clays and local wood to make pots that are used locally by local people and that the community just keeps turning on itself.

I: Given your travels, did that piece help you come back and maybe ground yourself?

BL: No, I don't think so. I think that, you know, I'm... some stories, for me, take ten or fifteen years before I can understand where it is going to go. And that was a story where the woman senior to me, the Wasco woman potter, I asked her, "I know you're firing these two big anogama kilns on the Coast Range. I'd like to go see one of those kilns." And she said, "You and Richard should meet." So, we met and I worked there for a couple of years trying to understand how to make the story.

People have said to me before, "How can you write so much about community and be away all the time?" Like I told this class this morning, the answer was right in front of me for thirty years. It was in front of my house. It's salmon.

The salmon, these fish, come up out of the gravel bars in February and they go down the McKenzie, down the Willamette, down the Columbia and then they're out in the ocean for three, four, five, six years and then they come back. That's how I work. I'm grounded in my home and I go a long ways out somewhere and I come back and that spawning is like the creating of an essay. And then I go out again. I haven't written many pieces that are anchored in Oregon partly because I want to remain invisible in my own home place.

I: At the end of Of Wolves and Men you said something like "The wolf doesn't have to be what we imagine him to be." I wondered if you could talk about that in relationship to your work with animals.

BL: Well, they're parallel cultures. They apparently are moving in the same spatial and temporal framework that we do, but that's our conceit. In order to control the world around us, we impose structures on it. That's what imperialism is, or the colonization of any landscape or people. It is the imposition of your own ideas of organization. It could be your social organization, religion, economics: these are all impositions on those who are different from us. You know where it has taken us in spite of the ideas during the Enlightenment such as the components of Western law that comes before the Enlightenment like a writ of *habeas corpus*: a basic understanding of individual rights with regard to imposition of law. We -- it has taken us a very long time, despite the documents that we generated at the end of the eighteenth century which were designed to give people certain, quote, "Unalienable rights." We had to develop language after that fact which said "This will also include blacks. This will also include women." So, we have a slow, difficult history of extending these ideas of the Enlightenment to other people and it's taken a long time to break down the colonial structure. I think we're on the verge of that with animals.

The irony here is that traditional peoples all over the world never abrogated their sense of moral connection to animals. These parallel cultures, world cultures, whatever it might be, are always incorporated into human culture. It's never seen as that which is different or which I have authority over or can control. So, here's our highly industrialized, highly intellectualized culture saying, "We will decide what women do - oh, okay, we can't do that anymore. We will decide what blacks do - oh, okay, we can't do that anymore. We will decide what animals do..."

So, we're right at this transitional stage where we've begun to realize that in order to have a, quote, "healthy" environment, you have to live with the environment - not impose your ideas on it.

I: You've talked a lot about culture and explored the connections between artistic or poetic research and social research. Would you consider yourself a social scientist in some way?

BL: No. People like me wander all over the world talking to other cultures, in essence saying, "What are you guys still holding on to that we've thrown away, that we might need?" The people I trust as

anthropologists who have had long-term contact with indigenous people are distinguished, I think, by two things. One is they do not want to join and know that they can't join. You can't be Navajo. You can't be wolf. You can't be Pindjindjarin. You can not be Yupik - Eskimo. You can't just go do that. You can't just overnight become Kikuyu.

What you can do is apprentice yourself to another way of knowing and then know better what it is you need. So, I see that characteristic jump out.

The second thing I see jump out with anthropologists I trust is that they know that senior people still have something worth listening to about basic human problems, like fidelity. So, I would say, that in my experience with anthropologists if you say, "So what do you think about this people that are not violently disturbed by Western economics," for example, what you see is people who have solved basic human difficulties which have to do with ownership or fidelity to a landscape or to each other. They've got all that worked out.

Now, that doesn't mean nobody makes mistakes. That just means they all know what to do and when they don't do it, they know they've made a mistake.

So, here we are. We're thoroughly confused about allegiance because we're victimized by a history of nationalism; "my country right or wrong." We're struggling, despite our so-called wealth, with very basic issues. We're very articulate when it comes to talking about how to be in power, how to take over, or how to run the show. But, when it comes to "How are you in love?" then all the tittering stops, you know? And you realize you're not talking about romantic love or some silly idea. At the very least in Western culture, you're talking about two thousand years of pretty serious religious history, for all of its flaws. Here comes this guy who says, "I really think there are only two things to pay attention to here. One is being in love and the other is forgiving." That's the New Testament. Whether you're a Christian or not makes no difference. It's a very powerful idea in Western history. What does it mean to be in love? What does it mean to be in love with a place; a reciprocal relationship with a place; to love and be loved with a place, with a group of people and a community? With each other?

Then, if you really understand that, you see that the most

radical thing a person can do today is to be local. It's easy to be international, you know, this business of being part of the world community; the global this, that and the other thing. The only people I ever hear talking about global enterprises are people who have something to sell.

The global village is a Coca-Cola invention. But, people who are concerned about the fate of their children understand what it means to be local and they can't be seduced by the thought that they're living nowhere. "Come live somewhere." They already know they are somewhere. You can't help but travel in parts of rural Africa or Australia or wherever and sense that even though you're out in the bush, somewhere that's remote, those people are right in the center of the world and they behave like they are. They're thoroughly and beautifully local.

I: When you live in a well-defined culture, you have generations of people behind you who have worked out things like how to grieve or to be married or how to interact with your environment and how to die. All these things are worked out for you, so you're cradled from birth to grave in a body of meaning; a mass of ideas about how to live day to day. But, in our American culture, we are bombarded with TV and newspapers, etc. and rather than a body of meaning that is complete and interconnected, we have cultural shards that are thrown at us. We have pop icons, whether it's the right shoes to wear, the latest lingo, or whatever.

BL: Well, that's what a consumer society is. The rate of change per unit of time in the traditional culture compared with the rate of change per unit of time in a so-called advanced culture is vastly different. In the same way that a person on the 461st lap of the track is sucking wind, that is what we're doing all the time, because everyday we have to evolve new behaviors. Not with regard to people, but with regard to products.

Consumer societies, like ours, are based on social disintegration. You can't have a consumer society and social integration. You have to have a high rate of divorce, for example, in order to make the society work. First, you have got to take social units apart all the time to create the consumers for products. Then, you take the family apart by perverting the notion of individual rights to

such an extent that you train young children that their rights are being infringed if they don't have their own TV, VCR, phone and all this. So, that's how you sell them there. Then, you go to the individual person and you create the sensibility about clothing that tells you unless you have this kind of shoes or this kind of thing, you're not valued. So, you subdivide the individual, you subdivide the family, you take the family apart to create these social units while kids ping pong back and forth between two fully equipped houses.

The things that socially integrate like sharing and loving are anathema to a consumer society. What you're talking about is affection for people who love each other and whose culture does not change dramatically over units of time and who take care of the things that create social integration. We don't do that in our society. We create these separate, consuming entities. The society is frantic because all the energy that should be going into being with each other is going into figuring out relationships with a lot of things.

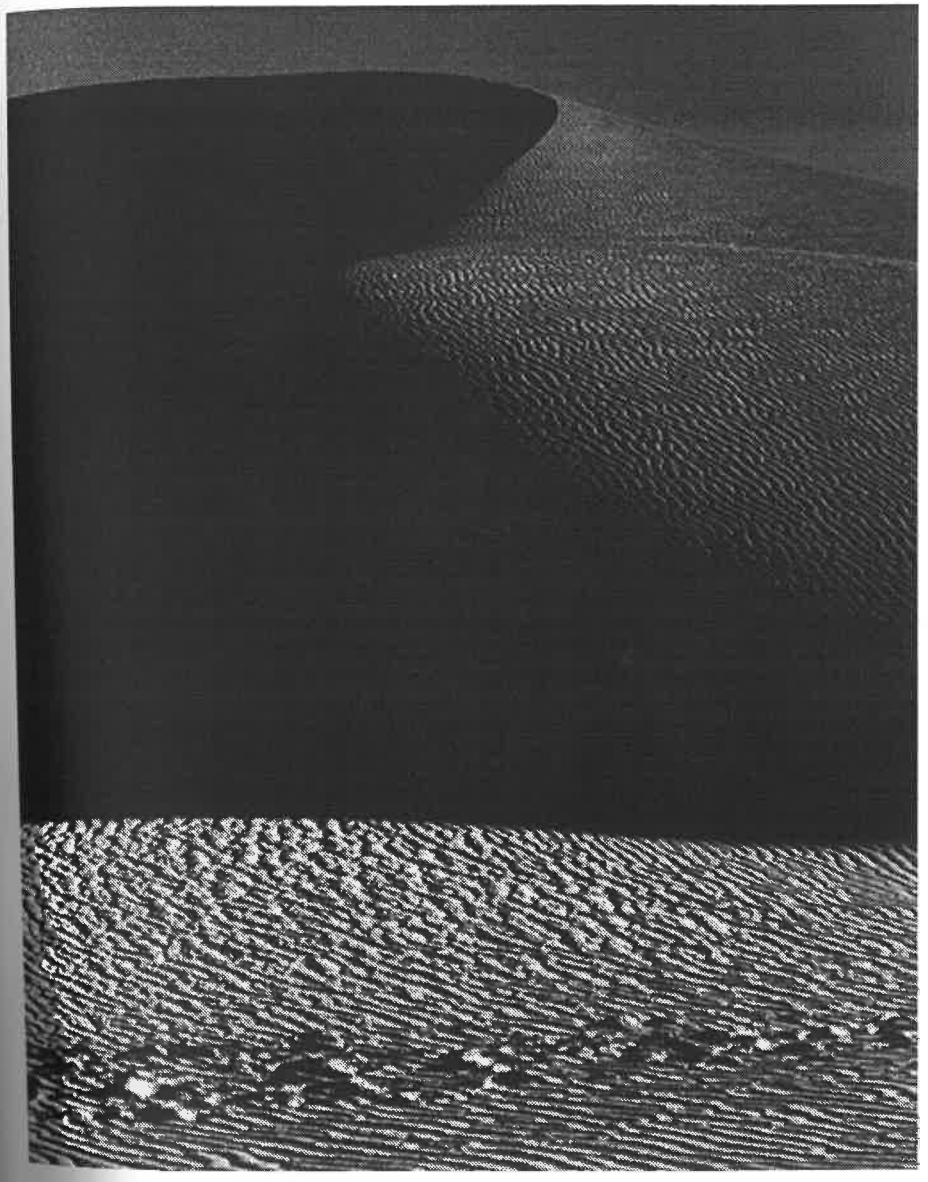
There's a German word, *konsumterror*, which refers to the frame of mind that you have in a supermarket when you're looking at fifty-five different brands of salad dressing. There's a terror that you feel because you don't know which one to relate to. So, at the end of the day, you've spent more time deciding which salad dressing would be the right one rather than about the fate of your soul. So, it's no wonder you think you're going mad and you're angry at everything because you are focused on the wrong things.

I: Yeah, even though your life is very comfortable, it lacks something.

BL: I would say it just looks comfortable. It's like a television commercial. You know that film, "Thelma and Louise?" There's a scene in there where the police come to Thelma's house and her husband is watching television. He is sitting there in his underwear, watching a football game or something and he stands up when these people come to the door and they tell him that his wife and another woman have killed somebody and are robbing gas stations. The actor does this... I'm sure in the moment, it's why actors are actors... he did not know who he was. He became a character of a situation comedy on television and did an overstated double take to

the information, trying to affect the way that he though was proper to behave in the light of this information. And, here's the genius. Doing it, he stepped backward and barefoot into a pizza that was sitting on the floor. We laugh at that, but what the actor is showing you is that one of the reasons Thelma, or Louise, I forget which, is on the road is because the man she is living with is working out his relationships with other people according to what he sees on a television program.

You can hear this all the time in restaurants. You overhear conversations that are product oriented and they often play out the kind of exchanges that take place on television. There's not the beautiful exegesis of a fragile idea that contains the food and the place and the air. That just doesn't occur.



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