

Spring 1969

Convivio, volume 7, number 1, Spring (1969)

Moorhead State College

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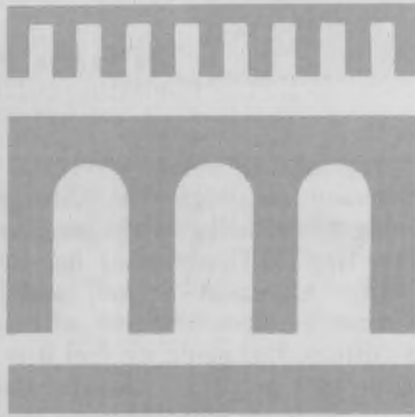
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MOORHEAD STATE COLLEGE
SPRING 1969



CONVIVIO

Spring 1969
Volume VII, Number I

FICTION, POETRY and ART
by STUDENTS, FACULTY and ALUMNI
Moorhead State College
Moorhead, Minnesota

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April 14, 1969

Since Larry Peterson has resigned as editor of *Convivio*, further action concerning the printing of the magazine rests with the editorial board. The English Department has decided that two sketches, Larry's "An American Scene" and Tom McConn's "Cold Crucifix,"* must be censored; this, of course, strips us of our prerogative as editors. But since we feel it is one of the best issues of the magazine ever produced on this campus, we wish to print the remainder of the work with this note attached.

As a state college, subject to the pressures of the legislature and the community, we understand that public opinion must be considered somewhat; unfortunately, this can result in the public having a genuinely onerous influence if it decides to exert that pressure. This year the controversy that ultimately stopped publication began with the whim of a single printer. We are asked to create cautiously, with one eye out for public disapproval, and a literary magazine such as *Convivio* cannot exist under such conditions; therefore, it is an impractical idea.

From our position, this expurgated issue will be the last *Convivio*. We want nothing further to do with the magazine.

Michael Moos
Richard Callender,
Convivio Editorial Board

*Published in *THE FAT GIRAFFE*; Vol. I, No. 1, May 19, 1969

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Self Portrait

PRELUDE

We thought we'd left the hour
far behind us. Driven
before our notions like leaves

in the rush of fall,
we drank our cup of fire
to clam our Ancient fear.

(for the night
is always with you)

I must have been mad
when a child

(mad as a raving infant)

- I've slept under some
strange moons - -
Huddled beneath
my ragged blanket of darkness,
my bones picked clean by the
Night's black birds,
I toss in the fever of this
passing fit of breath.

Still

tempted by the pain perhaps,
I shall grow old, comfortably or not,
(collecting incidental junk)
and learn by name those faces
that ride out of the northern
darkness with the snow. I'll probe
with worms beneath
the undersides
of rocks

and taste again
the honey found in old,
fallen wood
and taste again the blackberry's
honey (the blackberries grow where
the lost children lay);

deliver midnight from the night
and sing again the midnight angel

and sing again the midnight carol of dawn
and return
and return
and return

I THINK I REMEMBER, AS A CHILD

In my twenty-first year,
drunk on the wind,
a storm in one hand
and in the other
a speck of dust rising on a
late afternoon tide
of sunlight,

I think I remember,
as a child, the first morning,
when the sun rose to overwhelm
the last morning star, and the sky
shuddered with light.

I have been a child's doll,
left alone on the grass
for its first first warm rain.

WHEN I WAS EIGHTEEN

When I was eighteen,
scuffing my toes and
searching for pebbles to amuse me,
I thought death thoughts. All about
me the painted laughter skirled
and echoed and I
dwelt intensely upon obscure
memories of how
we had gathered to celebrate

the fire
 with furs about our
bodies and knelt
chanting on cold cavern floors
to pray
 that the ice
would not eventually engulf us

THE VISIT

A wonderful Sunday feeling
climbed the early sky
and I strained,
neck and toe, to lay
my eyelids folded back
against the sun.

I waited impatiently through
the onion and potato smells
of dinner and, looking from my window,
saw you as you came walking
with your soft ways,
through clouds of breath,
over the mounded snow
and pressed my nose
against the window to see
the marks you left behind you.

And I crouched in my favorite
corner, pretending I didn't
see you standing there
as you unwound your melting clothes.

CATAPLEXY

The doom whistle sounds
for my inflamed brain
and the trees stand corroded
and silent, their fires
stilled.

The festering darkness
perspires and steams
and the sewer pots
smoke desperately to heaven.

I have eyes that once swallowed
a thousand flaming trees
(eyes that could melt
with a change of the wind)
and I shall die
thirsting for summer's heady wines,

while the children,
haughty in the knowledge of
their endless childhood,
suck their nectar
carelessly.

James Fawbush

THE RIVER

When I was a younger child than now my old brown boots led me to the old brown river that went rambling up north to do its business there. I was just sitting there in the afternoon sun listening to the water and thinking about almost nothing when along floated a big dead catfish with a strange smile on its face. When it reached the spot where I was slapping at bugs it kind of stopped and gave me the once over. It gave me a really bad feeling in the stomach, so I tossed a rock and knocked him on the head. He joined up with the river again and faded out of sight.

I had something to think about then so I decided to stick around for a while when all of a sudden I heard voices. I looked around and saw two kids laughing and dancing towards me out of the trees.

The short guy was one of those who has dirt on their face because they're always checking out what they can find in a hole or something.

But the other, probably his sister, looked a lot like the deer that Cousin Lee shot in the head and covered up where the bullet went in with a sack because he got sick when he saw blood.

As she went flying by with big handfuls of yellow hair trailing out behind I yelled, "Hey, don'tcha think all the people should have a river by their home?"

"What?" she asked as all that hair crashed down around her shoulders.

"I say it would be really, really nice if all the people had a they could come to be with."

"Ya, I come here all the time," she said with a smile, "and if you look up that way you can't see all the factories that dump stuff in the water. River don't seem to mind though, It jus' keeps movin'."

They sat down beside me in the dirt and she was like the snow before people mess around in it.

"This your little brother?"

"Ya, he doesn't say much though."

"Wanna go fishin'?" he asked, like he was the first guy to ever find out about it.

"All right," I said and he streaked off to get the tackle like he just heard that the biggest fish in the world was down the river a few miles and swimming that way.

"Strange little dude," I said with a laugh because I knew every dude was a little strange inside.

"Ya, he's my brother, y'know," she said and her eyes were happy.

Everything was quiet then when we were alone until the kid came back with some thread and a safety pin.

"We need a pole," he said and he gave me a really empty look. So I glanced around in the big trees that had been standing in one spot for many years and spied a sapling oak. Then I sauntered over and ripped it out by the roots. That was probably against the law but I was sure the young tree didn't mind being a fishing pole instead of growing to be like its sturdy neighbors, because a big wind will blow anything over.

"Got any bait?" I asked after I rigged up this really spiffy looking rod. I got another one of those blank faces from him so I just opened up the pin and tossed the line in the water as the sun was finishing up its duty in those parts for another day.

After a bit of fishing a high voice cut through the woods like somebody was laying the last judgment on us.

"Oh, it's Mother, must be time to eat," she said in that voice that sounded like a warm morning, but I knew she would rather stay and fish for a while, so she sent her brother away and we were alone together again.

"Well, if we had some bait we might have some luck," I said as I stared at the lifeless pole.

"Oh, I didn't really wanna catch nothin' anyway. Well, you know, it's jus' kinda fun talkin' and everything."

When she finished talking a breeze came up and I thought

about the rain.

“There’s somethin’ really good about this place, y’know, with the water and the sky and the trees and everything, ya get what I mean?”

She passed the pole over to me because it was my turn and and looked at me with a really strange smile on her face for a while and I got a funny feeling in my stomach that felt good.

“Ya, I think I know what ya mean, I think,” she said, “well, I got to go now, you know how mothers are. I might see ya again sometime, okey?”

“All right,” I said and with that she skipped back into the trees and faded out of sight.

I figured I had to be getting home too, so I pulled out my harmonica and trekked off down the river. After a few minutes of marching along, I tripped over a rock and fell down. The ground was cold and everything was dark. I didn’t know what to do next because I was all alone so I sat on the stump of a very grey tree and cried into my hands.

Rebecca Parsons

CHILDREN POEMS

Children of sorrow
Your playtime won't come
War men are playing
With lives and the world.

*

From behind her wind-whipped hair
A child of tomorrow sees.
The shrouded view
Blinds her mind from the world.

*

Day woke up late
The laughter of children hadn't come to wake it
War had come instead
And the children now sleep forever.



Untitled Figure No. 1

Rich Callender

THE VISITATION

Eddie's Bar was a strange one to Thomas Jeffries. It was only a half mile from his flat, but he'd never been there before. Strange bars were nothing new to him, however; he'd never frequent one stop for more than a few weeks before moving on in search of a different one. And each new bar was inevitably unsatisfactory.

When two a.m. came, Eddie was quick to evict his last two guests- Jeffries and a rangy old man known around Eddie's as "the Prophet". His name was Matthew Welke, but everyone that knew him as one of Eddie's most regular customers was sure of his violently spiritual capacities, which was why his real name had practically been forgotten. Jeffries and the old man had not spoken to each other all night. Each was a loner; each preferred solitary drinking. When Eddie flushed them at closing, the Prophet spied Jeffries as if for the first time and begun preaching as they walked out the door.

"You and I," said the Prophet, "we have both fallen to iniquity. But the sins upon my head are far heavier than yours, my friend, because I am a man of God. I have seen the Way. The path has been cleared and He calls to me. Jesus is calling and I will not go to Him! Redemption is there, my son, but it's a heavy price and I am frail. Yet He waits for me! He waits for me!"

Tom Jeffries was too drunk and too tired to answer. Besides it seemed a one-way conversation, the Prophet needing only someone to address; he said only "Goodnight" and walked away.

The Prophet continued, now directing himself to Jeffries, then to the stars.

"It's heavy, heavy, heavy," he cried, "the path is there, but your feet . . . your body . . . is so heavy."

A cab door slammed and he missed the Prophet's next sentence as his attention switched to an old lady getting out of the cab, crouching into her purse to find the fare; but before he was out of earshot, the Prophet's voice boomed his climax through the trees.

“ . . . and because you cannot see, you remain ignorant of the weight—you don't know that the blessed were damned!”

Jeffries caught the revelation, but at the time it was only one of a thousand messages that floated loosely through his mind. He tried to block them all from thought and concentrated on the remaining distance to his bed.

He'd never been married; almost engaged once, but doubted he'd ever be ready for it. Quiet by nature, he kept a lot inside, not wanting to bother anyone with his troubles; if he told people his problems, they'd only tell him theirs, and then things would get involved, and he hated messy things. His current life he saw as wrong, as useless, but he saw no better alternatives in the business world; everything seemed like different wrappings for the same package. So he continued with odd jobs and occasional janitorial work, resigned to mindless, uninvolved jobs as the closest thing to freedom. He would stop drifting when he found the place and job that made him the least unhappy.

His walks home early in the morning were almost always uneventful. Poorly dressed, usually half drunk and in need of a shave, he never appeared as likely prey for a mugger. Night air was noticeably fresher than that from the day, which was riddled with pollution spewed from forests of industrial chimneys; nighttime was also cooler and easier going. A scattering of stars above the tall, dirty buildings helped clear his head, or at least stave off sleep until his room could be reached.

A small, faded sign announced his sleeping quarters: “Deano's Apts. Rooms by day/wk./mo. Low rates”, The narrow wooden staircase covered with thin, brown rubber matting was steeper than usual, but his legs were not to be stopped from reaching room 312. The padlock slipped in his hands, evasively sliding about on the metal hinge; the original locks were too easily opened with skeleton keys, so Deano had installed hinges and padlocks a few years before. When finally his key had conquered the lock, Jeffries took it off, flipped back the hinge, and entered his room. It cost him twelve dollars a week and had three pieces of furniture; the toilet was down the hall. After placing the lock on the ancient dresser, the bottom drawer of which served as a wastebasket, he tossed his shirt and pants on the straightbacked chair and collapsed on the bed. He dropped off to sleep immediately.

An hour passed and his deep rest became fitful, beset by phantasmic angels that soared about his room filling his ears with

sounds indistinguishable among singing, moaning, and screaming. He accepted their presence and the forms intensified, taking on dark, spectral off-shades of green and yellow; he saw himself joining the angels as they raced like trapped flies about his room, but could not talk to them. Jeffries felt his body caught in the whorl; he wanted to scream, He felt possessed by hellish sensations, but recognized the forms as angels and remained still.

A primitive drum sounded amid the furious chorus. Jeffries searched for its master as he spun. Quickly the pounding changed to a voice pattern. The force increased; he reeled, succumbing to everything; the drums cried "Hell exists." Fierce, echoing pulsations. "Hell exists." Deep, throbbing. "Hell exists." The vortex held him. He got no closer to the drummer. The pounding quieted. He saw the Prophet walking slowly through the midst of the angels and the drums. The noise calmed.

Sweating heavily, Jeffries woke up. He had never dreamt any thing as bizarre that seemed at once so real. He began to doubt whether he'd been sleeping. It was light in the room, with the soft brightness of the first hours of the sun, and he leapt to his mirror. He'd been badly frightened, more than any time before; he felt around his cheeks, eyes, and chin to assure himself that nothing had been altered by shock. After this he thought of the blur in his mind that remained of his dream.

At first he tried to tell himself that he had heard more than "Hell exists". Thinking of the angels, he reaffirmed his perception that they were angels, not devils. And the drummer. He'd said only "Hell exists". Or did he say anything? Perhaps it was only his hands, beating out patterns that sounded like voices; perhaps the drummer had said nothing. Did it matter? He had heard the words. He remembered the Prophet, walking determinedly through everything. He realized that nothing more needed to be said. Hell existed, and it was told to him by the midst of angels. All of the Biblical messages were true, then. Jeffries knew that he'd received a holy visitation. He hadn't seen Jesus, he never say that he had (if indeed he would ever tell anyone of his visit), but he had been visited, the presence of hell had been assured. And he had seen a man who knew the way; but the Prophet was too weak. He would be strong. Nothing more was needed to be said.

The following two months saw Jeffries acquire a full time job as a janitor in a large office building, move from Deano's to a slightly more expensive but cleaner, more respectable boarding

house (rent included two good meals a day), and join the First Baptist Church on 53rd Street. Life became punctual, regular, and the comfort of a schedule put him at ease for a while. Reverend Anderson, the minister of his church, told Jeffries that in a few months — after he'd become more familiar with the church — he'd be proud to have him serve as a Sunday School teacher. The truly reformed, those whose salvation requires real work and character, make the most inspiring teachers.

The building manager where he worked and his landlady were equally impressed. He had not once in two months been late for work, had always given admirable performance, and hadn't stolen as much as a can of kitchen cleanser. He was unfailingly honest, almost to the point where the manager suspected him of something. At the rooming house, Mrs. Toffelson, the widowed owner, had adopted Jeffries as a second son. She brought cookies and often invited him down to play gin rummy. There was not a complaint to be made about Thomas Jeffries; he knew it, and knew that it must always be so.

By only a few certain movements could anyone have noticed the discontent that had not sufficiently been displaced by the new order in Jeffries life. The building manager could never have seen it, for it was contained as he worked. Reverend Anderson couldn't have noticed anything: prayer and song hid the doubt in his eyes. But the Sunday afternoon card games with Mrs. Toffelson occupied neither his hands nor his mind fully enough, and the old lady would catch him moping out the window.

Depression came when he realized that more than his Sundays were being wasted.

"Good Morning, Tom."

"Good morning, Mrs. Toffelson."

"Did you see Ramos pitch yesterday? He blanked the Cards on two hits."

"No, I missed it."

"My, that boy can throw! You really missed a ball game. I was glued to the television. You mark, that boy'll take thirty games this year. Best damn kid I've ever seen."

"I've got to get to work now."

"You run along then — have a good day! I'm baking ginger

cookies this afternoon – I'll bring you up some when you get home."

"Thanks. Goodbye now."

"Goodbye, Tom."

Yet there was no other way. Recollections of his vision returned stronger and stronger to keep him stable. He tried to beat his discontent by working harder. He became so punctual he would arrive within two minutes of the same time each day. His brooms and cleaners were placed so systematically in his supply closet that he could easily have found anything in the dark. The floors he cleaned were closer friends than Mrs. Toffelson; he talked to them. He began to feel heavy, and often was cross with himself. He thought he needed a woman, that the time had come to marry.

This led him to a scattered dating of several of the single women at his church, all of whom thought he was one of the most gallantly reserved men they'd ever met. Once, late at night in the apartment of a woman five years younger than he, Jeffries embarrassed the girl by refusing to stay overnight. He mumbled a explanation, apologized, then blurted out that it wouldn't be right and walked home immediately.

In his room that night he hated himself. He hated the woman for asking and he hated himself for refusing. He hated himself for not giving her a good explanation. He realized that he hated his vision; for a second he wished he'd died in the middle of it, just after he heard the drummer begin to play. Getting up from his bed, he could not calm himself. Hurriedly dialing the woman's number, he began to sweat.

"Hello."

"Kathy, this is Tom—ah, I'd like to apologize for the way I acted."

"You've nothing to be sorry about. I made the mistake of being pushy, that's all. I didn't mean to scare you."

"Well, you didn't scare me. It's just that I'd left my safes at home and I wasn't ready for you. I got confused. I don't want to get you into trouble or anything."

"You needn't have gone home for that. I would've told you if we had to be careful."

"I'm sorry. I feel like an ass."

"It's all right, Tom."

"Am I still welcome then?"

"Yes."

"I'll be over soon. Goodbye."

"Bye."

The route back to Kathy's was a distance of about two miles, and it plagued Jeffries with too much time to think. He hated his fall from grace. All his effort would be obliterated in the span of a few hours with a woman. No amount of remorse would loose him from the agony of the sin he hurried towards. He didn't love Kathy. It was sex and there was no basis for sex. As he walked his mind flashed images of his dream, stronger than ever. Angels had held him. Drums had warned him. The way was clear cut; he would either return to damnation or he wouldn't.

By the time he was halfway to Kathy's apartment, he knew that he could not sleep with her. The idea of beating her for tempting him falshed amongst his other thoughts. He was already in shame, although he'd not since the dream committed any fleshly sin. But he felt as if he'd already fallen. He knew he had. Kathy was a messenger of the devil and he hated her. Still, he feared that he would lose control and beat her to death. Jeffries wondered if he had the right to kill her if she was a demon. He decided that he did. Only three blocks kept him from his mission when he saw the Prophet, who was drunk, and burst out as Jeffries approached.

"The Way is heavy, heavy, my friend. I have seen the Way but lack strength. Help me, friend, help me."

"You drunken bastard," he sneered, and stopped. He smashed the old man in the mouth, toppling him. "You goddam bastard!" he shouted, "you're no more prophet than I am. You're just a goddam wino. A filthy, stinkin' wino!" He kicked the old man in the stomach.

The Prophet only groaned. He could not answer. Bleeding badly from the mouth and having swallowed two teeth, he could only wince, spit blood, and wait for the sidewalk to pass into oblivion.

Jeffries puffed, rubbed his bleeding knuckles and started run-

ning to Kathy's. There were tears in his eyes and he sobbed angrily as he ran. Reaching the steps to Kathy's apartment building he began to sprint up the six flights of stairs to the third floor. He tripped constantly but never stopped, racing up, using his hands both to protect his head as he fell, and as legs to pull him closer to the third floor. He crashed into her door and burst inside. She sat on her couch, wearing a simple cotten bathrobe.

"Tom!"

"You whore!" he screamed, and leapt for her throat.

His weight brought them both sharply into the arm of the couch. It knocked the wind from Kathy. Straddling her, he gained a stranglehold and wrenched her throat. She resisted with a few convulsive jerks, still breathless from the fall. Her eyes became aimless, glassy; she was soon limp. His deathlock still on her neck, Jeffries continued to strangle her for some few seconds, dazedly rocking slower and slower, up and down, until he saw that she was dead.

Getting up, he was still sobbing. He swallowed, became quiet, and walked into the kitchenette; he found a long slicing knife and pulled it deeply across and into his throat.

QUIETLY, AT THE BEGINNING

I feel like smiling
And apologizing to all the people
I met on days I didn't smile.

She is warm
She is gentle
She is very, very good.

She may only be helping me
And not loving me
Maybe she does not draw such lines
But she
Is woman.

PRELUDE TO SPRING

I have lived
I have been alive
I was born twenty years ago

There is nothing to do
But watch the snow. The great
Slate-grey hills seem permanent,
Seen at night:
This time the snow would stay.

But vengeful spring
Pushes us out, a forced freedom.
Mud covers promised green.
On a tree, the black-brown
Of a bud cracks, and yields
At last to the green edge.
But the air is not safe.
This warmth is shallow. Everyone knows
That the day's brief sun recedes again
To the last winter nights.
Keep your coat on. The air
Is full of influenza.

I would make again
The mandatory promises
Of a new season. The snow breaks
Heavy with dirt, melts,
And flows into puddles.
So must all that I let die.
The turbulent brown puddles
Flush frozen gutters to fill the sewers.
Another time, other chances will come.



Gone To Scene No. 1

AN END FOR BENNY

Benny and I used to sit there
waiting for something in the wind,
imagining our flower-trellised stoop
and sky somewhere between the rooftops
some special kind of Eden.

But even the flowers died that spring,
starved in their concrete coffins
by the rain that never fell past
the third story windows,
while down the street an old man
kicked his dog on still nights
and the camel who lived in our cellar
cried himself to sleep on Bach.

Linda McDonnell

BEHIND THE QUIET EYE

Behind the quiet eye,
rape of the quiet mind:
one wind-tossed sparrow
searching the leaden air.
Tormented wings
send rhythmic prayers
to ricochet off sullen clouds.
No trees;
there are no trees in miles.

THE IMAGE BEARER

The Image Bearer of the house of Elders
came out of the land of Eye;
his eyes glowed dark with madness
his mind was a silent cry.

The hounds of Yarleth pursued him,
ravened deep in the stillness of Eye;
while in darkness the singing towers
wove image-nets out of his lies.

The image Bearer of the house of Elders
returned into the Eye - -
now I walk alone among screaming spiders
that Vandaar has loosed from the sky.

IF NOT BY THIS AUTUMN

If not by this autumn,
then a little later,
my house on the cliff
will fall before the rising sea.
The sun is in the silent afternoon
as I walk the beach now;
waiting for the earth to begin to tremble,
waiting for the autumn.
When the black sun of night
spins in the pale noon,
when the airplanes fall from the skies,
and our cities sink into the sea,
I will go to the forests
to eat raw meat again,
and unlearn these words.
Then, under pale skies,
you will ride out of the north plains
with blood and cockle-burs
matted in your hair,
humming a song of destruction.

ARCHAIC POTTERY MASK

The archaic pottery mask you made
still grins up at me from my desk-top
deeper, and far older
than the earth itself.
The friends I have now
are afraid to touch it,
and wonder why I keep it.
Perhaps it is to remember
the things we've done to each other,
are older, and more terrible than this.

TOM'S SONG

Slithering amoeba mind
of a hooded smiling devil.
Quickening alien eyes
reach out to gently bind,
caressing, bind and tie.
Cradle me deep,
cradle me soft;
hum an eldritch lullaby.
Sprinkle blood upon the floor;
draw night-shade patterns
round our door;
coil drowning fingers
about my neck - -
then dive into your death.

THE DOVE

Night came and he crouched before a small fire. The flames flicked and spurted before him, lifting and dropping the lines of his face and playing at will with the bulk and the breadth of his shadow. An owl hooped not far away and the sound recalled to his mind the morningdovesounds of when he was a boy and lived with his grandparents on a small dusty farm in Iowa and specifically of the moment that day when a dove cried from a fencerow and he looked up, startled, as though waking from sleep, to find that the sky was blue and that fields were green and that he was alive.

To his surprise he had shivered then and somehow known that it had ended, that he was no longer a child, that he could never again return; and he bowed his head and wanted to pray but all he could say was "Father."

Morning pushed against his upturned face and he moaned softly in his sleep. He twisted away from a probing mosquito, then opened his eyes. Moving only his eyes, he surveyed the surrounding bush. He no longer awoke as he had in earlier days, blinking and mumbling and moving about while still half asleep. Those days were gone. Now he awoke as a cat awakes: carefully.

Satisfied that he was alone he lay back in the sunshine and thought about his earlier days, about his wife and the Sunday mornings in bed, how the lines of her face would soften and she would smile that strange melancholy smile, a smile of love and unforgotten sorrow, so that when she smiled that way he would feel a faint stirring inside, as though he were being pulled backward through the years, through the diminishing rings of time, back toward the days of the lazy sun and the drowsy nodding fields in the wind; back to the oatmeal mornings and peanut-butter noons; back; and he would hold her to him and the side of her head would rest upon his shoulder, like a flower nodding in the sun.

He rose and stretched. The dew-drenched grass sparkled beneath his feet. Round about him bushes and branches of trees glittered in the morning sun, looking, he thought, as though made of glass and hammered silver.

He yawned. On mornings like these he could almost forget what had happened.

He looked carefully about for a sign of the one who was following him, then yawned again. It seemed unreal. A morning like this, the world shimmering in sunshine and he, he, groping, crashing, stealing through the vast Canadian woods, running from one who would kill him, from one who only three days ago had gotten close enough to him to get off a shot, a rifle shot that screamed above his head through the bushes and trees, slashing off bits of bark and leaves that drizzled downward even as he hurled himself to the ground and clawed his way into the thick brush, there to lie quivering, strengthless, as he heard the heavy footsteps crash past not three yards away. But then the crashing had diminished to a light dry crackle and he had swallowed hard against the thickness in his throat and brushed the whining swarm of mosquitoes from his face, wondering when the next time would come, when the bullet would come lower through the trees and in an instant blot away forever the sunshine and the forest and the and the singing in the forest and the memories of joy and sadness of her.

He cleared his throat and spat into the grass. It would have been easy to kill him then, he thought. At that range it would have been almost impossible to miss. The old twelve-gauge pump was no match for the other man's rifle; if they ever met facing at a distance, he wouldn't stand a chance. But there, lying in the brush, he had been given a sure opportunity —an opportunity that might never again present itself, and he had chosen to let it go by unused.

He rolled up his sleeping bag and fluffed the bent grass where the bag had been. Then he scattered the black remains of the fire, checked the shells in the gun and after a final look around started out again, the sun on his left, for winter was not far away and he knew his only chance was to the south through the States somehow and then to Mexico or maybe even farther south, where the sun would keep him warm and alive and maybe then he could start all over again; maybe; and he thought about the sun and how dependent all men were upon the sun and yet how little and how

seldom people thought about the sun or for that matter even thought.

And when he had finished thinking about the sun, he thought again about his wife.

He had gone, leaving her to stay behind, a slight black silhouette against the yellow light of the back door; and even now he could see her there and hear her crying, crying for him and for herself and perhaps for the child, though of course he could never be sure that the child was important to her.

But he knew it was the only way, for now he had a chance to begin again elsewhere; and when he was settled again he would send for her and then they would be together, as they had always been together, and then he would try to explain about the child: how the child, Jimmy, reminded him so of himself as a child; how the brown curly hair and the wide brown eyes and even the tremulous lower lip might have been his, so exact was the resemblance.

And he would explain, whether she understood or not, how a child, any child, but especially Jimmy, ought not to grow into a man unless the man would be different and better and stronger than the child's father; how every father of every child in every town of every country of the world was at root a failure, a husk and an emptiness; how in the world as it was today a man could no longer be a man, but only a pawn or a jackal; how because a man could not be a man, a boy could not become a man, but only a replica and a hollow imitation of his father.

This he would say: how much better it was if a child remained a child, if his ears never heard the faraway sound of the dove, if his world remained inviolate and whole, a world of heroes and giants and power and beauty, where good warred against bad and the lines of battle were clearly drawn and enforced; better, he would say, that the world remained a mystery containing the promise of both night and day, of sunshine and darkness, than that it becomes a world of eternal twilight, a world of everlasting grey.

And if she asked he would tell her of that night, that Spring night when the earth was warm and moist and a soft wind pushed against the budding trees; how he had been walking home from work when he heard the morningdove, and how in an instant the years rolled back and he was once again on the dust farm in Iowa, looking out like a new-born child upon the fields and the sky and feeling the solid earth beneath his feet and knowing, or thinking he knew, what it was to be alive.

But he had been wrong; he had mistaken the dawn for the evening. And that night, when he realized fully his mistake, he'd thought of Jimmy, brown-eyed Jimmy, the son of his friend, his godson in fact (though these days such things were more ceremonial than real); thought of Jimmy, thought of him so intensely and with such naked horror that finally his mind seemed to crack, to split into jagged halves; and later that very night, as a light rain beat upon the roofs and the sidewalks and the lawns of the town, he had walked boldly through the front door of Russ' house and called for Jimmy, and when Jimmy came from the playroom, a bright yellow truck clutched in his hand, he had raised the shotgun evenly to his shoulder and looked down the barrel at Jimmy laughing, laughing in great shrilling peals, because it was so funny to see Uncle John pretending to shoot him; and then he squeezed the trigger once and without looking back walked quickly out the door and down the street to an alley which he followed home, the clatter of Jimmy's truck as it fell to the floor echoing forever in his brain.

Two days later the sun hung high above in an unblemished sky and he knew the time was running out.

He was crossing a small clearing, heaving his way through the muskeg and swatting every few seconds at the host of deerflies that pinched at his face and the back of his neck, when he saw the track in the mud.

The footprint was half-filled with water, and might have been two or three days old. But when he bent closer to it, he saw that the sides of the imprint had not eroded and a broken stalk of grass which had once been crushed into the imprint was now hanging over the print, having begun to lift itself once more erect; and even as he watched, the level of the water in the track rose slightly; a fraction of an inch, no more; but enough to tell him that the track was not old at all and that the time was running out.

He straightened and looked around. Nothing appeared out of place, yet he felt a knotting in his stomach. He crouched down in the grass and looked again. A faint breeze washed over the clearing, bending the supple grass and bringing to his ear the delicate warbling of an unseen bird. The morning sun pressed down upon him, warming the back of his neck. He waited a little while longer, then rose and started toward the protective cover of the trees.

He was within a few yards of the edge of the clearing when he heard a crashing through the brush ahead and to his right.

Silently he dropped to his knees, holding the gun out before him and low. Abruptly the crashing ceased; and he wondered whether it might be a deer.

But a moment later there came the unmistakable sound of a human cough, and a moment after that the crashing sound resumed; and as he listened, trembling, in the tall marsh grass, the sound grew loud and louder, coming, so far as he could judge, straight toward him.

He laid the gun carefully on the ground before him, then wriggled quietly out of his pack. For one wild instant he wanted to stand up and scream, but he regained control and set about moving the pack around before him. When, after what seemed like half an hour, the pack was before him, he picked up the shotgun and rested the barrel atop the pack. Then he eased himself out to full length behind the pack, his elbows dug into the moist earth beneath him, and with the thumb of his right hand eased the safety catch to off. And then, his finger firm upon the trigger, he waited.

The crashing diminished as the other man neared the edge of the trees, where the brush was thinner. When at length the man stepped into the clearing, the noise faded into nothing and in its place there was only the light whispering clash of the marsh grass in the breeze.

Slowly, slowly he raised his head from the stock of the shotgun. A clump of grass before him fanned suddenly at the touch of the wind, then sprang back together. But in that instant he saw the beard and haggard eyes and recognized the face behind the beard and saw the madness and the need in the lines about the eyes, the same need that had once shown in his own eyes, before he killed Jimmy; the need of a man to cleanse himself, to redeem himself from the gnawing sense of insignificance and empty hollow mockery that lurks within his guts; and he lowered his head back to the stock of the gun and sighed.

Already he knew, as he had known many times before, that there was but one way, one path, one narrow door through which the answer lay, and he sighed again and eased the safety shut and for a moment, tried to pray.

But the words wouldn't come, and instead he put his hand upon the soft moist earth and thought about his wife. And then, when he was ready, he rose quickly to his knees and from there to his feet, and looked once more at the green and at the blue and then a hot white light exploded in his eyes and he felt the top of his head erupt into a thousand broken fragments and for one final moment he stood straight and tall.



Landscape

Daniel Albers

GRAND BEACH

O tread the cortex of the ancient brain.
Other feet furrowed edges smooth.
Abysmal smooth, twilight smooth
at my feet furrowed, old and grey.

a trail winding

a person with a leg broke

a print temple

a step from the Shadow's Dance

a hole clumsy

a secret, a heavy gift

a shell pebble

a goddess by the grain, Smooth.

O come to trace the edges,
caress an ebbing smooth, a twilight, glean.
Your grains the stations of my soul,
Tempted waters you, my soul's ablution be.

David Rudesill

RETURNING IN THE NIGHT

A wind
Bends low the weeping trees
Covering broken pathways
In the temple courtyard.
Grinning monkeys clean their fangs
Upon the love bed of the king;
I have come
Seeking family
After many years of winter
Have passed inside of me.

THE GYPSY GARDENER

Gypsy gardener
His straight hoe
Works the dark earth
Into a moist furrow
Where he pauses
Seeds in slender hands
Thrust into the earth.

Among the trees
A wagon without wheels
Is whitewashed by the gypsy wife.
The silent fiddle on the wall needs tuning.

FOREST NIGHT

for Catherine

The clouds
White she-wolves
Race across the forest night
Saliva specks of stars
Upon their breasts;
Silently they come
Devouring the moon.

TUESDAY

When rainy day wind
Runs through the clouds
With low calls of loneliness
I must rise and walk
Into the damp fields
The darkened woods
Where mice and small birds
Huddle beneath leaves
To wait for the sun.

STANLEY

Stanley Wilner

Come out upon your porch

Stand silently rake in hand

Behind the screen

Waiting, frowning in your final years,

For the children playing in your leaves

To pass on down the road.

Keith Heller

NATURAL LOVE

Stumbling beautifully over ants' eggs;
Mouth bleeding, eyes like planted bubbles;
Hair in motion, hands at rest,
Paralyzed, she wanders.

Sky-colors counting more than seven,
And new trees beneath her feet
Retch, moaning.

Heavier than time, the earth hovers;
Horns sketch a halo against a sky
Pock-marked with stars: spinning erect,
A seed-crazy bull tosses back
His crystal skull and flares pink.

She watches from behind a cotton fence;
The late bull snorts and chokes,
Tracing a delta of cream down his bursting chest.

She limps across a patch of glass
And lies down, wet, in a pool
Of sweet urine.

Heavy, the bull's tongue and lips
Snatch teeth from her sucking mouth.
He blots out the moon in her eyes
With his cracked humpback.
Breathless, exploding, the reek of stale wheat

And the castrated planets scream forever.

LOST IN LESBOS PARK

(To S. and D.)

Two shy women
alone in a forest,
half-light,
touching each other with frantic hands,
brown hair draped over hurt eyes.

Dry mouths kiss
with broken whispers,
fluffs of warm fur nibble cool, bare feet
in the dust and silence of June.

Black moment. . .
the green girls lean back and listen
to the river running beside their hidden blood.
Beneath their bodies,
the grass is rippling in yellow wine.

The distant highway mumbles in a dream.
Overhead, the leaves are wet with sunlight
and the boughs shiver in velvet.

Somewhere birds crouch in caves of oak,
drowsy,
sightless, recalling former songs
paraded bravely before fellow actors
on a blue-white stage of lost music.

Now the women hear only insects,
close to their mating fingers
and their brazen, loving wrists.
Breathing life into their manless souls,
they sigh and fall through sleep.

Below and to the left,
a madman rages,
leaping and foaming with sick laughter.

John Gidmark

A CONCEITED RING SONG for JILL

Re-minding you
Thought by thought a Summerized psyche
Brings the circle dearer;
How over nots in the moon-shaped whether,
The malleable days in a golden year-rounded season,
We metamorphosized and bound a jewel
To ring bell-fingered Time.

Re-moving you
Heart from heart Fallen in physion
Draws my vision's mettle;
How we measured and told the wire,
Gravely scratching the etch, wan, crescented,
Of our seasoned color's leaving
A waning moon to remain.

Re-membering you
Limb by limb as I Wintered the physion
Recalls the fashioning phases;
How the silver thickened and bent
Turned on its end, soon to become a circle
And the moon-shape shone anew
And the man was again in the moon.

Re-pairing us
One to one Springing in psyche
Fixes our single moment;
How the moon becomes the jewel
And the ringing seasons, pleasing to be holders of love,
Together gather the jewel
Circling and re-minding you.

THE FRANTIC FINCH

Had you been here you might have heard
what I did. (You were not around.)

I heard the finches chipping in the cage,
and seeds of millet popping on the floor
as one despairing frantic bird
who could not sing attacked he feed.
I heard the hard percussive seed
Rebound, and echoing I fouND
MY HORRID SCRAWL CALLIGRAPHY, MY RAGe
the hollow pods of word (upon the door.)

Had you been here you might have heard . . .
(I think there would have been no sound.)

FALLACY

Phallic Time,
the vectored villain,
(Life or Death
on either side,
enigmati-
cally swollen)
makes the anxious
mortal bride.
Louder clocks
than tickled Helen
bid the toiling
harem ride;
the fickle vow;
When Time has fallen
life may last
because you sighed.



Watching The Bomb

Michael Moos

TOWARD BUDDHA

Conceived in love,
born out of
nothingness,
the inner goldness
of the sightless larva
inches its way
around the green,
illusional earth - -
green,
yet golden
in its sense of oneness
with the one
within all.

Pursuing the path,
that golden way
of tranquil direction,
the larva lies
sleeping
in its self-spun cocoon
developing,
waiting
for a new life form.

Conscious of that
shaded calm,
reborn,
traveling its
circular flight,
a golden moth emerges
in sun-fields
revealed,
moving in extended flotations
toward the eternal,
sun center fire.

Fluttering
its mind memory eternal,
the golden moth,
purified,
released,
never to be
reborn,
is consumed in the constancy
of the supreme
quietude.

UNCHILD

That
which has never
been a child
living,
dreaming
in any world
dies
at the vacuum edge
of the living
storm.

FROM DAVEY MEMORIAL PARK

— for Mary

i.

Friction to steel
tonques fo rubber
lapping
on concrete
agonized movement
tracks and ties
pounding
train scream stopped
a long pause
billboards
for worship
the smell
of the Fairmont Creamery.

a girl
bicycles past.

ii.

Weathered tables and benches
green
placed at random
with silver painted barrels
out against the grass
brown in blotches
elm, ash, birch, jack pine, red pine.
A grey man in the sun
dreaming.

iii.

Three blue-black crows
waddle and peck in wet grass
for seeds
move on
and caw
at the oncoming autumn brilliance.
The turbulent, brown river.

iv.

Moving to the deep of Davey park,
moving to the edge of a terraced hill . . .
the long, thin shadows
of trees,
the long, thin arms of Davey
waiting to take me away.
A redwood bandstand
with places to sit,
places to love - -
at the top,
a steel-gray star.

v.

Children swing,
laugh,
run down
to the Red River of the North.
Lost
in red, pig-faced crowds,
a mother, searching for her son - -
her child.

vi.

Into my mind
on cool shafts
on biting, September air . . .
a golden butterfly
to keep me warm,
to keep me sane,
a woman to love a man,
a golden butterfly to love
a child.

John Clark

TWO TRAMPS IN SUMMER FIELDS GREEN

Texture-bark-hidden,
fat gray squirrels
scamper, bound, and rejoice
as two tramps
in summer fields green
soar
in new, magical flight
beyond the earth and sun,
past the ethereal, blue void
to the face of God.

Two princes
in baggy-brown-
white-whisker-faced-wonderment
sing out their bawdy tales
of muscatel-love.

A blue jay
screams loud their names
and flies on.



Patriotic Nude No. 1½

Jerome Clark

SATURDAY

He slept only fitfully that night and not until early morning had he sunk into deep slumber. At first, when the ringing began, he thought that his alarm had gone off, and numbly reached for the clock. It clattered to the floor.

"The phone," he said, and pushed his legs uncertainly over the edge of the bed.

"Hello?" he said, rubbing his eyes with his free hand.

"Keith? This is Ellen."

Suddenly he felt uneasy. He tried to remember. There was something, last night:

"Oh, Keith, I'm sorry to call so early, but I'm frightened. Last night was beautiful, but — — but what if something happens? What will you do if I — — if I'm pregnant?"

He felt as if air were passing through his ears into his head. He closed his eyes, framing a reply. "It isn't very likely, Ellen. The odds — —"

"Oh damn the odds," she snapped. Her voice slid into a kind of coo. "It can happen. It does happen. Do you love me?"

His tongue ran over the back of his front teeth. "Yes," he said.

"Oh, I'm so happy to hear that." She giggled. "I love you, too, very much. I never would have done it if I didn't love you. Can I see you this afternoon?"

"Sure, of course," he said.

"I'm glad. Oh, I love you so much, darling. No matter what happens, I do."

He couldn't think of anything to say. He had already committed himself, more or less, in two ways, and he felt trapped.

"Goodbye, Ellen." Thinking only vaguely, he drew a medicine bottle from the cabinet, fished for two of the little orange pills and washed them down. Lighting a cigarette, he puffed long and hard.

"Who the hell was that?" His roommate looked up from under the covers of his bed on the other side of the room.

"Ellen."

"God, what did she want at this time of the morning?" 8:30, Christ, on a Saturday!" Jay snorted and rolled over, drawing the pillow over his head.

Keith knew that it would do him no good to try to go back to sleep. He occupied himself with making toast and coffee and glancing over the morning newspaper, but he could not suppress the memories, by now distasteful, of the night before. Sipping the coffee, he remembered Ellen lying on the bed as he rolled on top of her, kissing her breasts. He wanted to puke. "Shit," he said aloud.

Jay laughed. Keith, startled and annoyed, turned to see him in his pajamas pouring orange juice. Apparently he, too, had given up on sleep. Keith had always suspected that there was something other than good humor in his roommate's laughter. Actually he didn't like the son of a bitch.

"What are you PROtesting today?" Keith sneered.

Jay laughed again, more nastily than usual. "The war, man, the goddamn war!"

Keith made a farting sound between his lips.

"The trouble with you, Keith," Jay said after he downed his orange juice, "is that you don't care."

"No, not at all, really," he replied, savoring the deep contempt he felt. "The difference is that I don't expect the processes of history to stop simply because I'm afraid to get shot at."

Jay reddened. "You've got it all worked out, haven't you? Everything's got a goddamn label and it's put in a neat, safely locked compartment in your brain. I could tell you why we're really against this thing, but it wouldn't do any good, would it? Because you know, don't you? You KNOW. You've got it all figured. What would happen if one day you suddenly realized it isn't always that way --- that things work independently of your con-

ceptions of them?"

Keith feigned shock. "What brings this on all of a sudden? All I said was — —"

"I see it all the time .

"I see it all the time. God, it gets sickening. Why don't you just once admit there's things you don't know? I really pity you. Some day it's all going to fall apart on you and your nice little framework is going to collapse. And your mind will blow."

"Aw chee," Keith said, lapsing into sarcasm, pressing the advantage. For an instant he wondered if his roommate would hit him, but instead Jay returned sullenly to his breakfast.

Afterwards he lay down on the bed and idly looked out the window, watching a dog sniff the base of a tree. The brief exhilaration had passed, and now he was depressed. The thought of the act, now, in the morning — — ah God. He remembered that he got a funny taste in his mouth when he kissed Ellen. Dimly he wondered what it was she ate, or whether she had bile in her mouth. He sighed. Closing his eyes, he rolled over on his stomach and clutched at the sheets, trying to steady himself. Then he fell on the floor.

For some reason, at that point he thought of Sally.

Groaning as he got up, he took his coat out of the closet and stepped outside.

Whenever Sally Smiled, her eyes disappeared at the top of her cheeks. "Do you realize," she said, her grave voice contradicting her face, "that it is not even ten yet? She was standing in her bathrobe.

"Oh dear me, I'm sorry," he sputtered, playing her inevitable, silly game. "I didn't know. I'll come back later. "

She laughed, like swaying, tinkling crystal, and retrieved his retreating elbow. "Oh, come ON" she said.

He did not know why he had come. Whenever uneasy or uncertain, he went to her, never sure of what he wanted but finding curious relief in her flippancy.

"Do you want a . . ." she cleared her throat. ". . . drink?"

"Oh, yes. Shall we get plastered?"

"Boy, you bet we will. Pardon me while I get the grapefruit juice. And don't be such a boor - - sit down." She vanished into the kitchen, returning a minute later with two juice glasses.

"You got me out of bed, do you know that?"

"You can't imagine how sorry I am," Keith said.

"Well, don't ever let it happen again."

"Oh, no, never. You're too kind."

"Yes. My only fault." She laughed, but it sounded forced. Her tone rather unnerved him. He leaned forward in his chair, uncomfortable.

"What did you do last night?" he asked.

"Went out with this jock. Boy, was he stuck on himself. I couldn't stand it. What did you do? I suppose you were out with Ellen.

"Yeah," he said, swallowing.

"Oh, you poor dear." She sounded genuinely say

"Oh, you poor dear." She sounded genuinely sad. "That girl is so cruel to you. I don't think she ever got over Bruce Stein, even after they stopped seeing each other and she met you. I know this sounds horribly presumptuous, but I can't see why you even bother with her. There are other girls, you know.

Something in the way she spoke disturbed him. She was being presumptuous, almost aggressive, but he couldn't see what she was getting at.

He noted with surprise that he had a cigarette in his mouth. He closed one eye and peered at the smoke coming out of his nose.

"I love her, I think," he said.

Sally shook her head and put her hand on his arm.

He couldn't look at her. He could hear his heart pounding. His skin tingled where her hand rested.

He stood up, catching his breath. He strolled across the room and turned to her.

"Sally, what's the matter?" he asked, and didn't wait for her answer. "Something seems wrong today. I don't know. I don't

understand, but ever since I woke up, I've been kind of uneasy."

She eyed him curiously. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it's funny like something's out of kilter, not quite right.. You Know?"

She didn't, of course. Momentarily irritated, he snarled "Damn it!" He hit the wall behind him with the back of his hand.

"I'm sorry," he said. I probably sound stupid. Nothing has happened --" Sally would never understand last night." Just a feeling, I guess. Okay --" He grinned. He didn't want to, but it seemed appropriate. "Okay, I'm an idiot."

"So what else?" Sally beamed.

He wished she wouldn't be flippant for once, but he made a noise that might pass as a chuckle.

"I'm sorry I said anything. I feel very foolish. You'll have to forgive me."

They lit cigarettes in silence. Keith leaned back into his chair and gazed at Sally's face. She looked away. God, had she blushed?

He started asking her about school, quickly and irrelevantly. He felt as if something had been let loose, slinking in the pale curtain shadows, waiting to breathe on them.

He abruptly changed the subject. The minutes skidded by. His throat throbbed. He was hot and frightened. Sometimes he lost track of what he was saying, and he listened to words forming themselves on his lips and spewing out.

Then it was quiet again. He fell back, breathing deeply. Sally had stood up and was moving toward him in a haze.

"Keith, are you sick? You look terrible! Let me get you some aspirin."

He wanted to throw up. He curled over the arm of the chair and retched. A thin mucus oozed out of his mouth. He shook his head, clearing his vision. He grabbed his handkerchief and wiped up the mess on the floor.

"Here you go," Sally said a minute later.

Keith took the glass and the pills wishing they were his tranquilizers. "Thanks."

"Maybe that's your problem. You're coming down with the flu or something."

Oh Sally! He groaned inwardly. "Could be," he said.

She ran her hand over his forehead. "You're hot, but it doesn't seem like a fever." She looked puzzled. "This isn't some kind of exotic hangover, is it?"

He smiled, acutely aware of her hand on his shoulder. "No, I didn't drink last night." It was a little funny.

"What did you do last night?"

Keith froze and moved cautiously. "Why do you want to know?" He hoped he sounded pleasant.

Her hand dropped and she withdrew from him. She shrugged and grinned. "Oh, you know me. Nosey."

Sure, Keith thought. He chuckled. "Not that it matters, really. All we did was go to the movie."

There was silence.

"It was a very good movie," he added.

"No doubt," she said.

He watched her hands. They were delicate and soft. Sally was very pretty.

"You're very pretty," he said.

Her eyes blinked open. "Oh, do you think so?"

He paused. "Yes I think so.

The silences were becoming increasingly painful.

"So you want to marry her?"

"Her? Um, I don't know."

"I hope you don't. I don't think she would be good for you."

"Uh huh." He closed his mouth, realizing that it had been hanging open. His hands were moist.

"Sometimes I wonder," he said. "Maybe . . ." The sentence trickled out. His tongue collapsed on his jaw, refusing to cooperate with him any further.

"Maybe what?"

"Maybe — —" the words suddenly rushed out — "I don't love her that much after all!"

Oh, Christ.

Sally looked down, her eyes tracing the floor. Keith saw that she was going to cry. Perhaps it wasn't too late to run.

She began to sob softly. At first he simply stared at her, appalled. Then awkwardly he rose and sat at her side, drawing his arm around her and muttering comforting words. She turned her face to him and nervously he kissed her. She stopped crying.

"Sally . . ." he began. She pressed herself tightly to him. Her body shook. He kissed her again.

He moved away from her and freed his arms. "Sally, I don't think . . ."

"Keith, please," she murmured. She took his hand and held it tightly between her hands. She rubbed it against her hot cheek and then brought it to her breast. Keith could feel her heart beating hard against his fingertips.

"Keith, Keith, Keith," she whispered and curled her arms about his neck. She laid her head on his chest.

Untangling himself, he fled out the door.

He gasped, inhaling the fresh, unpolluted air. He swayed. The ground was moving under him and his feet seemed to have difficulty meeting the ground. Shakily he started on a cigarette. His legs were numb.

God, Sally of all people!

In the apartment he struggled to compose himself, refusing to answer Jay's questions. He took enough tranquilizers to feel groggy, and lay down, losing his thoughts in the fog.

When he awoke, it was early afternoon. Still tired, he dragged himself off the sofa. Again he felt the desire to be sick. He wished he could vomit until there was nothing left inside his stomach, and then maybe he could begin everything over again. His body hung limply together with strands of tobacco smoke and tranquilizing pills, and now his bones seemed to jiggle and pulsate. How long had he been dead?

He called Ellen. When he mentioned the afternoon date, she spoke elusively, as if regretting the impulse that had caused her to suggest it. Anger rose in his stomach.

"Okay," he said, trying not to sound sullen, "if you don't want to, there are plenty of other things I could do."

"It's not that I don't want to --"

He hung up.

She was a bitch. She had always treated him as a lousy convenience, a fool who kept her occupied on off-days, screwed her when she wanted it, who could be discarded when her temporary spasms of affection had subsided. She acted, in fact, as though she were in love with someone else, but Keith knew she wasn't, in credibly selfish, that was all.

He let the phone ring several times before he picked it up.

"Please, Keith," she said, "don't act that way. I'm sorry, really I am. I want you to come over."

No I don't want to, he thought but didn't say. He watched his feet, knowing that he should tell her to go to hell.

"Yes," he said, and he hated himself.

She put on an album of hard, loud rock and moved subtly to it, more interested in the music than in him.

"How do you feel today?" He had to speak over Mick Jagger's orgasm.

"Oh I feel fine," she replied, tossing her head. "Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, embarrassed. "You know, I was just, uh, wondering."

"Uh huh," she said, her eyes on him not focussed.

The coffee he was drinking tasted salty in his dry mouth. In the silence he started on a cigarette.

"Do you regret what happened last night?"

She wrinkled her brow and measured the question for a moment. "No, I don't think so," with the precision of a legal judgment. She flicked off the record player.

"Let's do something," she said.

They walked in the spring air through the campus. She said little, but when she slipped her hand in his, Keith suddenly felt better, more comfortable, than he had all day. They stopped in

the college cafe and ate a light lunch. Uptown, they went through an art museum, lingering until almost closing time when everybody else had gone, and he kissed her.

Late in the afternoon at her doorstep, he said, "If you're pregnant, are you going to marry me?"

"Of course," she said.

He was cheerful even to Jay, who wondered how much his roommate had had to drink, "God, you looked like shit a few hours ago."

Keith laughed. "Hell, it started pretty bad, but it's picking up. I'm going to see her again tonight."

"Her? Who?" Jay asked.

"Why, her, Ellen, naturally," Keith replied, annoyed.

"Well, don't bite me. I thought it might have been that other broad, what's her name, something real common. She was here looking for you."

Keith began to be sick again. "Sally Johnson, you mean."

"Yeah, that's it. Nice kid."

Keith poured himself a drink.

They went to a movie, and afterwards they drove back to her apartment. Now she was distant. She said little and moved away when he tried to hold her.

By the time they got inside the door, Keith was furious. He jammed a cigarette in his mouth to keep from snapping at her. Then he mixed drinks in the kitchen and carried them back to the living room.

"Cheers, et cetera," he said curtly. They drank.

She stood by the window looking thoughtfully out into the darkness, saying nothing. He watched her reflection in the window, and waited.

"Do you really want to marry me?" she asked at last.

"More than anything else I can think of."

Refilling his glass, he noticed that she had scarcely touched hers. The drink burned his throat, and he coughed in the quiet. He was not certain why his eyes were wet and blurred.

She let him kiss her but did not respond. He dropped his arms, disgusted and depressed.

"There's not much point to this." His voice sounded listless to his ears "You act as though you'd rather not have me here. If you don't, I'll leave. I don't habitually stay where I'm not wanted."

"Don't talk that way, Keith. I'm sorry. I'm just not myself, that's all."

He breathed deeply, not knowing how much he should say. "Ellen, I'm tired of this. I just can't take much more. You say you love me, that you'll marry me, but too often it's like my presence turns your stomach. I'm sick of the whole thing and I want you to make up your mind what you're going to do."

"I know I've treated you badly. I feel rotten about it. I think a lot of you — you know that." She ran her hand through her hair in exasperation. "Oh, life's too damned complicated."

"Why?" He didn't see her point.

"Because — no, you wouldn't understand."

"Thanks." He finished his drink.

"You're awfully touchy tonight," she said testily.

"It's been a lousy day. You haven't helped any."

"Oh come on," she said. "Let's not fight."

He snorted. "Not much else to do, is there?"

"What do you want to do?" she asked, affecting innocence.

"For Christ's sake."

He was exhausted, though. All day his gut muscles had been tight, and now they were about to fall apart. He wanted to curl up and lie down.

He poured himself another drink and downed it quickly. Now he was better. The wooziness had left him as rapidly as it had come. He was able to smile.

"You're right. We shouldn't argue. You're a good kid and I'm a nasty old man." He didn't mean it, but he was too weary to continue being disagreeable.

They chatted for a few minutes, and the tension lifted. But when he sat next to her and put his arm around her, she rose to her feet. He choked off a sarcastic comment, determined now to remain pleasant. She was in one of her moods. All he could do was to find some way of leaving with a modicum of dignity.

A song lyric went through his head
If I can see you never
I'll sleep forever.

He thought of disappearing into the folds of a soft mattress, to be touched only by dream fingers.

"What do you think of Bruce?" she asked abruptly.

"Bruce? Oh, Stein." He tried to cover his surprise. "Don't know him too well. No particular opinion. Why?"

"Well, you know I was going with him for quite a while —"

"Yes. So what?"

"He came to see me this afternoon, after you dropped me off."

She sat down at the opposite end of the couch. "That's— that's something I think we'd better talk about. I should have told you before we went out tonight, but I just couldn't . . ."

"What's there to talk about?" Now he sensed a fear, a deep dread in him as he recalled something Sally had said. Trying to act casual, he lit a cigarette. "He's got a lot of nerve, hasn't he? I mean, coming over to see you after all this time."

"It hasn't been all that long," she shot back.

"What do you mean?"

She spoke more carefully now. "I've seen him a few times since then."

"I didn't know that." It was an accusation. "While we were—"

"Yes. There's some things I've never explained to you about, I mean, Bruce and me."

"Obviously." You bitch, he thought. He was fiercely anxious to see where all this was leading, but at the same time he was numbed, filled with apprehension. He started on another glass, realizing that soon he would be drunk.

Evidently Ellen had expected him to say more. She was quiet for a moment.

"Like, that I've been seeing him for the last couple of months."

He would not get angry. He sipped his drink and puffed on his smoke. "So that's why you've acted so bitchy." Well, that would hurt.

She stammered, but she made no denial. "I've been hard on you, that's true. Maybe there's no excuse for what I've done. But you've been pretty hard to take yourself at times, you know."

"Blame me, then," he said, measuring the sneer.

"God. There's something I've got to tell you, and it's difficult enough without all this sarcasm. Please, Keith."

Instead of speaking, he drank. He would let her interpret his silence.

"Keith, I think a great deal of you," she began.

"Sure. I'll bet you told Bruce that."

"But . . ."

His head was beginning to swim. The drink no longer steadied him. Now he was in the first stages of drunkenness.

" . . . I can't marry you."

The floor spun a little. He dropped his cigarette and grappled for it. He couldn't find it. Let the sunbitch burn.

"I love Bruce. I always have, even after I thought is was over between us —"

He should light another one, but he'd feel guilty while the first smoldered somewhere by his feet. It would burn a hole in the carpet. Where the hell was it?

"—and, Keith, I'm pregnant, with his child, and he came this afternoon to ask me to marry him. Next week. . ."

Oh, well, who gave a goddam? She didn't even own the place. The landlord could bitch. It was his problem. Keith reached for another cigarette, Jesus Christ, the pack was empty.

He made his way to the door walking rehearsed steps. Before he went out, he started slobbering. "You goddamn, miserable, lousy slut . . ."

Dimly, sometime in the course of hours in the smoky, crowded bar, he grasped the final humiliation. He couldn't even pride himself on having seduced her; even that had been denied him. She'd used him, when she'd thought Bruce would not marry her and their child would be born illegitimate. Unless, of course, she let that good ol' stupid bastard Keith . . .

Much later he stumbled out of the door, craving air, but it only made him dizzier. He forgot his car and lurched down the sidewalk, muttering between swallows of colored vodka. He stumbled several times. Once he passed out briefly on someone's boulevard.

Finally he saw a light, and knew that this was his destination. He crashed against the door, then steadied himself with one hand and knocked with the other.

He was giddy, and he giggled at the stars. Now he was sick, really this time. He vomited on the steps.

Sally's form was shadowy and he couldn't understand what she was saying. He tried to make sense out of her words as she helped him inside. Everything went black. He fell on his face.

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION (To R. S.)

We stood on the corner and watched the crowd shuffling down the street, quiet, sullen, brooding. A few were armed and they peered around them, afraid, but the others, the majority of them, were just listless, and there was nothing any of them had to say.

I felt immensely tired. I wanted to go home. I turned and spoke to her. "I'm tired," I said. "Let's go home."

We started walking. There were throngs of people on the sidewalk and they were waiting for whatever there was to wait for. We passed through them and they stepped aside resentfully.

Finally the streets and the sidewalks were clear. I reached for her hand and clasped it. Her palms were sweaty. She was afraid. God.

There was a car ahead of us, stopped on the road. The driver got out and forced up the hood, and smoke billowed up into the sky. He cursed and kicked the tire. "You can't trust . . ." he started to say, then he saw us and shrugged. I nodded at him and kept on going. I couldn't help him.

The town was small and it was a Minnesota autumn, Winter would come soon. In the meantime I needed her, needed her all the more desperately because I knew that I was losing her. The winter would be very long.

The power had gone out earlier in the day. I had no idea when it would start again. Maybe never. Who knew, now. Even last night and piled it beside the fireplace. I had collected wood been just for show. It had kept us warm when we didn't really need to be warm, it had given us light when we could see, it had crackled when we did not fear the silence.

I wanted to talk, but the words caught inside and I coughed. She faced me and smiled once again and she stroked my cheek until it warmed and then flamed. Suddenly I grabbed her and held her to me when I heard, far away, the sound of gunfire.

"I'm a child, a little boy, and I'm scared." The words ran out of my mouth uncontrollably. I was shaking. "God, let us be this

way forever, here, holding each other. Oh please, sweet Jesus . . .” Now I was sobbing, my hands leaving her and covering my face and hiding my eyes, and I turned from her.

She whispered my name. She said, “I love you. I love you very much.”

She came to me, her arms outstretched, and we kissed, and then she lay naked in front of me, and we made love slowly, then urgently but softly.

And long afterward, her hair spilled across my chest and her arms around my neck, I spoke. “I have to go. I’ll be gone two weeks, maybe three. Will you wait?”

She rose, supporting herself on one arm, and gazed down on me. “I miss you already,” she said.

And it was dark early and I could hear the wind. I dressed warmly in my brown winter coat. She gave me her green scarf and I wrapped it around my neck. “We could be happy,” I said to her and we kissed one last time.

I stepped outside and looked out on the town. A building was on fire and there was a scream and a shot and then a muffled explosion like a hand grenade.

She stood at the door as I left, and walking away I could see the flame of the burning building reflecting dimly on her face. The wind rose and there were more shots and another explosion.

“I love you!” I called out to her, but my voice was lost in the howling of the wind and the rattling of machine guns and the crying of children. Soon the sky would be aflame, and her thoughts were of someone else.

Sealskin No. 1



