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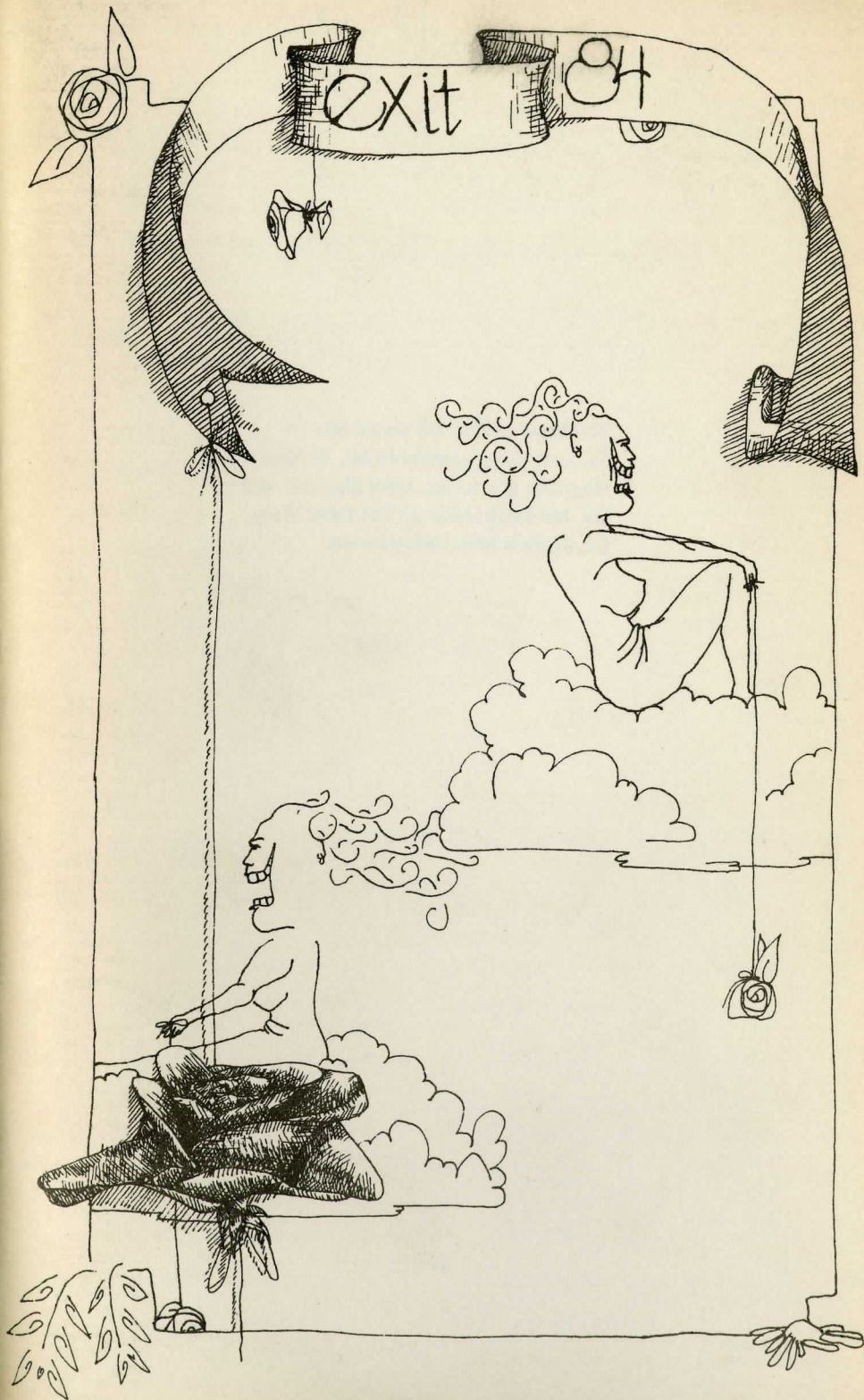
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The Staff of *Exit 84* would like to
dedicate the magazine to Mr. William
Meredith and to Mr. Mike Shinault and
Ms. Jan Fitzpatrick of The Print Shop
for all their help and patience.

Exit 84

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Laura de Baun	A Picasso in Motion	1
Lawrence Strauss	Fathers	2
Meg Propst	Sea	8
Laura de Baun	On Shipboard Try	8
E.D. Etherington Jr.	Contest	9
Graham Gavert	Red-Winged Blackbird	10
Jennifer Johnston	The World-Is Flat	10
Charlene DiCalogero	Incense Blossom	11
Lise Kritzer	ZZZZ	11
Graham Gavert	Untitled	11
Marty Noss	The Photograph	12
Tom Deedy	Bobby Benstock at the Circus	17
David Rosenberg	Losing To A Chicken	22
Charlene DiCalogero	Untitled	29
Jennifer Johnston	Waiting Alone	30
Stephen Thompson	Unsure Window	31
Michael Sittenfeld	Of Course You Can Go	32
K. Frankian	The Geri	37
Emily Sims	Speech	38
Danielle Williams	The Goodbyes	46
E.D. Etherington Jr.	A River Story	47
Meg Propst	Scene from a Marriage	51

A Picasso in Motion

Viewed through thick-ribbed glass
sometimes smoky or on sadder days icy glazed,
figures jerk, descend the stairs
like people met before.
The vision is incomplete
with smeary mouth, uneven eyes
and nose misplaced. Each face skewed,
fuzzy in a cubist mimic.

The segments remain connected loosely,
unresolved, by knotted string.
Such vagaries cannot be handled
with any finality.
The masseuse, who with great fingers
pinches off tight lumps
felt below the skin
and worries them, and fondles mostly
palms without end to cause them disappear, fails.

Laura de Baun

Fathers

I am sitting around my father's house with three of his college roommates. They are all in their mid-forties. They are all divorced and slightly overweight. My father is the only one of them who still has a full head of hair. We are waiting for the last roommate, Mr. McCabe, to arrive. Nobody knows what has happened to him. All day everybody has been making jokes about him.

They arrived last night. I didn't want to be here, but my father insisted that I come. Basically, since last night all we've been doing is watching ball games on television and drinking. Beer for myself and whiskey for the men. They've all been really nice to me, telling me all about their children, what they're doing, how much they miss them, how they wish they could see more of them. I have been chatting with all of them.

I am getting married next month, which is why I didn't want to sit around the house for a couple of days with four or five middle-aged men. They'd tell me all about their twenty-six year old girlfriends, I thought. They'd talk about how far they could jog. Or they'd all get smashed and start bitching about their ex-wives. But it hasn't been that way. I find that I am fascinated with these men, what has happened to them over the years, what is on their minds, especially since I am more or less the same age as they were when they became friends.

My father hasn't seen his old friends much recently. They all live in different parts of the country now; they are all in different worlds. My father has been planning this reunion for a long time. I am glad that he is having a good time.

Last night we watched a football game on television. As the night wore on, we all loosened up. Everybody was kidding everybody else. We stayed up until three in the morning drinking. Around eleven o'clock last night my fiancée called me up. She wanted to know how I was. I was drunk, and I think she got mad at me. She knew I had my doubts beforehand about coming. She even told me that she didn't want me to be here. But there I was last night, drunk, boozing it up

with my father's old pals, talking to Sarah on the phone, unable to say much to her. She said that she hoped I was having a good time, and then she hung up. I suppose that I'd better call her sometime today, possibly invite her over. But I don't think that would be too good an idea. I think she'd get intimidated by all the men here.

My father and I cooked bacon and eggs for the roommates this morning. Surprisingly, everybody was up by nine-thirty. Two of the roommates, Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. West, drove into town this morning to look around. The other one, Mr. Neary, stayed around to talk to me. My father had some work to do, so he went upstairs for a few hours to his study. Mr. Neary lives in California. He is an architect there. He told me about my father when he was in college. I just sat there, taking everything in. Then he started talking to me about my engagement. Marriage is a tricky business, he said. And then he told me how he got married much too young. I'm not sure if he realized that I am only twenty-three.

We started drinking again after lunch. We went into the den, and I built a fire. It is cold in Connecticut during this part of the year, especially in this old country house my father has fixed up. He is a professor at the college near here. When he was married to my mother, we all lived in a cozy modern house on campus. After the divorce he and I rebuilt this old carriage house.

Although I will be leaving this place quite soon, I think that I will always consider it my home. I can't see calling some other place home. Right now Sarah and I plan to live in an apartment in New Haven while she gets her PH.D.. I am not especially looking forward to living there, but it won't be forever. That is what I keep telling myself.

Mr. McLaughlin, a tall skinny lawyer who lives in Philadelphia, has started talking to me. I tell him of my plans to teach. He seems impressed. I keep staring at his face as we talk. I wonder if he started to go bald while he was still in college. He seems to be a lot older than the other men in the room, perhaps because he has had some tough breaks during his life. My father told me about him the other night. Apparently his ex-wife ran off with his best friend. He also has a mentally retarded son. I

am sad as we talk. He seems like a kind man, and I wonder if he thinks about his son a lot. He pulls out pictures from his wallet of his two daughters. They are both plain-looking girls, not particularly attractive. But I tell him that they are pretty. Then he says that he'd like me to meet them sometime, even though they live in California with their mother. He has been drinking heavily, and I am getting a little worried about him. I find it hard to believe that he, a man who has suffered so much and grown old very quickly, and my father, a youthful man whose life has gone rather smoothly, were once roommates. I cannot believe that Mr. McLaughlin was a kid once, a college kid, who used to, as rumor has it, stay up all night playing poker so he could watch the sunrise.

We are still waiting for Mr. McCabe to arrive. He is the only roommate who hasn't made it here yet. My father thinks that he will be here any minute. His plane was probably fogged in, he says.

The telephone rings. It is my mother, my father's ex-wife. She wants me home today. She and my step-father want to take me out to dinner. I tell her that I am having a good time, that I don't want to come home today, that I will be home tomorrow as we had originally planned. She starts to get upset, but I am firm with her, the way my father never was. He gave into all her whims. I tell her how interesting it is to see my father's old friends. Then she starts telling me how she remembers them all when they were young, before they went to seed, she says. I try to explain to her that they haven't all gone down the drain, but she interrupts, screaming that she'll kill herself if I turn out to be like "those men." The doorbell rings and I tell her that I have to go. Before I hang up I say that I will be back tomorrow, not today, in time for dinner. She is not pleased with me, she says. Then I say goodbye.

Ted McCabe, the other roommate, an alcoholic, six feet three, two hundred and thirty pounds, red-nosed, has arrived. Suddenly everyone is excited; instantly all the roommates, the poker players, the drinkers, the friends, are together again. Mr. Neary goes up to Uncle Ted and gives him a big hug. Before doing anything else Uncle Ted asks for a drink, even though he is obviously very drunk. I make him a martini, remembering that he has always liked a strong drink. When I hand it to him, he slaps me on the back, saying how good it is to be here. He asks me about my father's girlfriends. Everyone breaks up.

He wants to know if I've been taking care of my old dad, and I tell him that I have. We all sit down again. There is a football game on, and we watch it.

Somehow Uncle Ted is different than the others. He isn't divorced. But there is more to it than that. I think that he is quite happy, even though he drinks much too much. He starts telling everybody about his seventeen year old daughter. She's beautiful, he says, and she's got brains too. She has tons of young men after her. Everyone listens to him as he rambles on and on and on.

After dinner we play poker for a while. Mr. McLaughlin is in rare form, winning every hand. After about an hour or so, though, everybody gets bored. So we quit. We go into the den again, and I rebuild the fire. The roommates start talking about old times. They tell me about the women they knew in college. When they ask me about my college experiences, I tell them about my friends who lived with girls. Uncle Ted says that I am lucky. When we went to school, he says, there wasn't much social life. That's why we all got married so young. These days things are more realistic, he thinks. The roommates ask me about my marriage. I tell them that I've been living with Sarah for over a year, and that I think that I am ready. They all wish me well, hoping that I do better than they did.

Sarah calls me later on. She apologizes for the way she acted the night before. I tell her that I am having a good time, and she sounds happy for me. She tells me that she saw some of her old friends today and that she is spending the night at her parents' house. Then there is an awkward moment of silence. She asks me if I am drunk. I tell her that I'm not, even though I am. She wants me to come over later. She misses me, she says. I say that I'll see what I can do. I'll call her back later, I tell her.

For a moment I am alone with my father in the den. Everyone else has gone out to the kitchen to refill their drinks. I tell him that I like his friends. He is glad that I like them, and then he says that he is happy that I am here. He mentions that everyone is impressed with me. I'm not sure why, I tell him. He tells me that I'm being foolish, that I have a good future ahead of me, that I

have nothing to be scared of. I don't reply, then everyone returns from the kitchen.

Uncle Ted starts asking me about my plans. I tell him that I plan to teach high school english for a while. Beyond that, I say, I have no definite plans. He says that I'm going to be like my father someday. Ted is very drunk. He wants to know if I will marry his daughter. She'd make a wonderful wife, he says. I just smile, unable to think of anything to say.

I decide to go out for a drive. I need to take a break. It is bitter cold tonight, and it takes the car a few minutes to warm up. Then I have to scrape the ice off the windows. I shouldn't be driving in my condition, but I need to get away for a little while. The roads are icy, so I drive very slowly. I debate whether or not to go see Sarah. Nobody else is out tonight. They are all inside, cozy and warm, like my father's roommates. The countryside looks beautiful tonight in the snow. The snow is so deep that you can't even see the stone walls that are next to the road. As I drive by Sarah's parents' house, I see that the only light on is the one in her bedroom. I drive up the driveway quietly. When I get out of the car, I hear a dog barking somewhere. I feel like a burglar. I decide that I'd better go right in instead of ringing the doorbell. I go up to her bedroom, knock on her door and walk in. She is reading in bed. She looks like a little girl, cuddled up in her bed. She is surprised to see me.

Then she gets out of bed and I kiss her on the lips.

"You're freezing," she says.

"I know. It's below zero out there."

Suddenly I am happy that I am getting married to her next month, happy that she will be my wife.

"Keep it down," she says, "my parents won't like it too much if they know you're here."

"Oh, yeah . . . I'm sorry. I won't stay long."

"Don't go. Just don't make too much noise," she says.

I kiss her, and I take off my coat.

"Let's get in bed before we freeze," she says.

"O.K.," I reply.

She wants to know all about my father's roommates. I tell her all about Uncle Ted. She asks me if I've been drinking a lot, and I say that I haven't had any choice. She is happy that I surprised her like this. I ask her how long I can stay. She says that she knows that it's really stupid, but I should leave before her parents get up. So we set the alarm for seven. Then we make love.

I wake up around six thirty. I look at myself in the mirror and wince. I need a shave. I kiss Sarah goodbye, telling her that I'll see her later on. I creep out of the house and get in the car.

The sun is rising as I drive home. I wonder if Mr. McLaughlin has stayed up to watch. I don't think my father will be worried about me. He probably knows where I went. Except for Mr. McLaughlin, who is probably watching the sun come up and thinking about his son, the roommates are probably asleep. They will be leaving today. I will miss them.

When I get home Uncle Ted is sleeping in one of the living room chairs. There is a martini glass on the table next to him as well as an ashtray full of butts. I feel sorry for this man, but I still love him. He has so much personality. I wish that he could stick around for my wedding. I sit down in front of the fire for a few minutes. Only a couple of coals remain from the night before. I stare at the coals, wondering what I'll be doing when I'm Uncle Ted's age. Where will I be? Will I have children. Will I be divorced like the roommates? I decide not to worry about these matters right now. Then I go upstairs and go to bed and dream happy dreams.

Lawrence Strauss

Sea

Gently, she curves around my ear
capturing me with her powerful music.
I close my eyes, and still
she whips her trilogy at me.
A Satchmo, she plays her horn - -
crescendo, pianissimo,
never the same, never resting.
Her rhythm pounds me
to constant attention,
my ear craves every note she produces.
She plays on.

Meg Propst

On shipboard try

to grasp the tormented sail
beaten by the wind and fierce in its attempt to escape.
The sailor must bear the throb and quiver
almost real to the sob in the throat.
This is taming what he best knows how.

Sailor stuffs the sail into its bag
and as it bubbles, elusive,
the master torturer punches faster
and sweatingly conquers it,
wanton and weather-driven.

Laura de Baun

Contest

I could see plainly how it would go before he did. He was too close. Its hard to tell what the tree is doing when you're working the blade deep in the cut with the spraying wood chips and the heat from the motor and the noise and the gasoline smell. That close he couldn't tell when the tree started to sit back on the saw away from the wedge. Damned tricky. A gust of wind could have been enough to start it falling wrong. Could have been anything. The saw weighed fifteen pounds and the tree pinched it so tight in the groove that it held fast like a knife sunk in a piece of wood, quivering. The motor stalled because the gas couldn't flow into the carburetor from that angle, and the sudden quiet with the tree sitting back on the saw gave you a nervous feeling. The only sound was him cursing and breathing hard as he yanked and pulled at the saw trying to get it out of the groove. That was a bad place to be - at the base of that monster with all that weight and hardly a handful of wood keeping it up. The tops of the trees bowed and there was a pretty strong wind and I knew it would be enough but he was still yanking and pulling and never noticed the wind. There was a sudden crack and the trunk snapped off the stump, spitting out the saw, and before he could look up the heaviest part of the trunk had pinned him. Most of his ribs were crushed, but somehow he managed until the blood rushed up and choked off his breath.

E. D. Etherington Jr.

Red-Winged Blackbird

Among the marsh reeds I recall
I heard a strange, throbbing call,
And peering through the pencil-field
I searched, yet he was well-concealed.

I tried to match his warbling throat,
He hastily primped up his coat
And flamed before me with such might
And vanished in his burnt sunlight!

Graham Gavert

The World Is Flat

When I was Little
I was always thankful
That our house stood
Directly in front of the sun.
I felt sorry for my neighbors,
They were a little off-center.

Jennifer Johnston

Incense Blossom

golden stem blackened with age
leans patiently perhaps in the
copper and bell-singing
vase
the curls and vibrating waves
soar gently out from her head
and has no idea what it smells
like.

Charlene DiCalogero

ZZZZ

not to sleep?
surely you must
realize you must

draw close
your bright eyes
escape life

blend into
a blanket
and dream.

Lise Kritzer

To be a worm is the life to lead!
To skinny-dip through the dampish weed!
To gorge an apple - - bother the peel!
To have no foes - - except my heel!

Graham Gavert

THE PHOTOGRAPH

The town newspapers were delivered every morning by a little boy on his bicycle. The papers were to be on everyone's doorstep by six o'clock, so the boy had to be at the newspaper office promptly at five-thirty, to roll up each of the papers he was to deliver. This morning was no exception, even though it was raining. The rain didn't seem to bother the boy much. It only meant that he had to take a few extra minutes when he rolled up the newspapers, to slip them into plastic coverings to keep them dry. One by one, he rolled them up and put them in the bags. Today it took him a little longer than usual because his hands were cold.

The boy didn't know what the headlines were of the paper he was delivering. In fact he never read the paper. He only occasionally looked at the photographs, like the action shots on the sports page. Today there were pictures of the golf tournament in the next town over, that had been rained out, and they had no action in them, so he was forced to look at the pictures on the society page like the one of the newlyweds on the back page. It wasn't the usual wedding picture. The bride was not in a long white gown with a bouquet in her hands. The picture showed only the couple's faces, and the little boy thought the bride looked like his sister.

The boy put his rolled newspapers into a canvas bag and went outside to his bike. The bag almost outweighed the boy, and it was quite a feat for him to balance himself and the bag on his bike, but he managed, as he did every morning. He got himself started and pedaled down the road in the light of the quiet dawn.

A little after six he got to his favorite neighborhood. It was his favorite for many reasons, but chiefly he liked it because it was the neighborhood where he lived and because the road was twisty and curvy and fun to ride his bike on. Besides, the people who lived in the neighborhood were nice, and whenever he came to collect money for the paper, they often gave him something extra: cookies or candy, or a few extra cents so he could buy what he wanted.

He rounded the corner and pedaled faster to make it to Old Man Baker's house at the top of the hill. He made it easily and reached

into his canvas bag, took out a paper, drew back his arm and tossed the paper into the air towards the house, all the time balancing on his bike. The boy disappeared around the next corner before the paper landed with a plop in a puddle in the front yard.

Old Man Baker, who was an early riser, always listened for the paper's arrival. Occasionally, the paper would already be there when he got up and looked out the window, but usually it arrived about when the old man was making his coffee. For the past few days, however, he had not heard the familiar plop in the front yard and had been surprised to see the paper lying there in the yard when he finished breakfast and went outside for his morning walk. He attributed his poor hearing to the loud pattering on the roof of the rain of the last few days, but nevertheless, he was reassured when he heard the paper land in the puddle. He put on his galoshes and went outside to pick it up.

One thing that the old man liked about living in a small town was that you could read the entire town newspaper in the time it takes you to eat breakfast. You could read all the important things anyway. The paper didn't cover much of what went on in the outside world, because the people in the small town weren't very interested in things that happened outside the county line.

He sat down at the kitchen table with his coffee and breakfast and opened the paper. The young man, posing with his bride at the bottom of the society page, looked familiar to him. He looked like a young Jim Delaney, the old man's fishing pal who had retired in the town with his wife about five years ago. The print underneath the picture revealed that he was the son of the same Mr. and Mrs. James Delaney and that he had married a British girl on July 20. The old man had never met the son Andrew, but had often heard Jim talk about him when they went fishing. Jim also told the old man about his wife and his brother Gregory, who was a freelance photographer. He even told the old man that he envied his brother because as a photographer, he had traveled all over the world, and had not been stuck working for the same company for nearly forty years as Jim had been in New York. And Jim confessed his disappointment when Andrew had decided to become a photographer after his uncle, and not a businessman after his father.

The old man noticed that the photograph in the newspaper had been taken by Gregory Delaney. It was a slick and professional photo, taken in a soft, natural background. The bride was attractive; her head rested on his shoulder. They made a good couple.

The old man read over the rest of the town news and then got up to take his morning walk to the beach. He walked out on the porch to see if it was still raining - - he could no longer hear the persistent pattering on the roof. He could only see a sparse sprinkling of raindrops in the puddles and knew that the rain had subsided. He decided it was dry enough to take a walk down to the beach.

He got on his rain slicker and his galoshes and started walking through the little boy's favorite neighborhood. He decided that it would probably end up being a clear day. The clouds were starting to break up, and patches of blue sky could be seen here and there. He liked to take walks this early in the morning, just after the sun had come up. The road, the ocean, the world, was quiet and personal, and belonged only to him, because he was the only one walking out to see it.

If the old man saw anyone on his walk, it was usually Mrs. Jenkins, but he did not consider her an intruder on his world. She, he supposed, was also an early riser, and he usually saw her out on the porch of her house in her bathrobe with a cup of coffee in her hand. He didn't think she saw him as he walked past her house every morning. He was approaching her house now, and he caught a glimpse of her in her front yard, as she was picking up her morning newspaper.

Mrs. Jenkins was getting awfully tired of all the rain they had been getting and was glad that the newspaper had stayed relatively dry in its plastic covering. She looked up in time to see the old man go walking by towards the beach. She had seen him walk by at that hour before. She didn't think he had seen her standing there; his eyes were probably failing him in his old age. She wondered why he was out so early if he didn't have to be. She would give anything to go back to bed. But no, she thought as she unrolled the newspaper and went inside, she must get breakfast for her husband and her daughter so that her husband could go off to work at the garage, and her daughter could go off to school for early morning cheerleader practice. It had been the same old thing for what seemed like twenty years.

Mrs. Jenkins entered the kitchen and put the newspaper on the table for her husband to read when he came in. At the cabinet she got out the box of Cream of Wheat and brought it to the stove. Mr. Jenkins came in and sat down at the kitchen table and his wife brought him some coffee. Standing over him, she saw the picture in the paper of the newlyweds. The beautiful woman rested her head on her husband's shoulder. Her face was finely featured and delicate and she looked out at Mrs. Jenkins with intelligent eyes. She had long dark hair held back by a flower, fresh and youthful. Her husband was strong, and masculine with a square jaw and a rigid mouth, his eyes sensitive and deep. Mrs. Jenkins pointed out the photo to her husband and reminded him of the time when they were newslyweds. He acknowledged with a grunt. He was reading the front page. She read to him the print underneath the photo and was impressed to find out that the bride was a literary agent, and sighed romantically at the part that said the couple would reside in London. Someday, Mrs. Jenkins thought to herself, her own daughter would be married. She hoped it would be to someone strong and handsome, rich and intelligent whom she would be proud to call her son. They would live in Paris or Rome and she would go to visit them, even if Mr. Jenkins had to stay to keep his gas station open. (Sometimes Mrs. Jenkins thought Mr. Jenkins was married to his gas station.) She and her daughter and son-in-law would go to all the high-society parties and do all the fashionable things in the city. Then when they got tired of that they would travel to some small, chic resort. The water on the stove was boiling, the bubbling noises rudely interrupting her daydream.

Her daughter Laura entered the kitchen, in too much of a rush to eat any of the breakfast her mother had just made for her. She asked if she could take her mother's car to school today, but her mother answered no, that she must ride into town with her father on his way to work. Mr. Jenkins was ready to leave too, having just barely touched his breakfast. Mrs. Jenkins scolded them as they got ready to leave, and sat down to her, by now, cold Cream of Wheat. Mr. Jenkins kissed her on the forehead; Laura yelled good-bye from the front door and they were in the car and off to school and work.

They drove down the twisty road, and in no time were at Laura's school. She got out of the car and bumped into a young

man in his twenties who told her he was a stranger in town and asked her where he could get some breakfast. She told him there was a diner around the corner. As he walked there he cursed himself for not bringing a raincoat. He had been in such a hurry to get out of the city that morning that he had forgotten it. But no one would have been expecting him to be thinking straight under those circumstances anyhow. He tried not to think about it as it started to rain again.

The diner was right where the girl had told him it was. He sat down at a table and ordered pancakes. He always hated eating alone and looked around for something to read to pass the time. He stood up and went to the counter and left fifteen cents for a paper next to the cash register. He brought a paper back with him to the table and decided to see if it could tell him anything interesting about the new place he was in. He thought that would take his mind off of the fight he had with his girl friend the night before.

Ordinarily, if he had seen the picture of the newlyweds at the bottom of the page, he wouldn't have thought much about it. But it reminded him of the picture of Mary that he had in his wallet. He took it out. He had forgotten about it; he didn't want to have anything left of her on him or around him. He wanted to be totally free from her after last night. He tore the picture into little pieces and put them in the ashtray on the table. He felt free and looked at the picture in the paper, with bitterness. Margaret was the bride's name. She looked like a snobby bitch, but definitely very sexy. He looked like a conceited, selfish little boy, with a grown-up look on his face. He probably married this girl to get ahead in the world. Or maybe she was using him. They were fooling themselves in their momentary bliss, believing each others jaded promises.

He ate his pancakes in record time. The paper said there was a sailing regatta in the bay at ten o'clock that he wanted to see. He paid for his breakfast and went outside, protecting his head from the rain with the newspaper.

Marty Noss

BOBBY BENSTOCK AT THE CIRCUS

Bobby Benstock

Bobby Benstock the restless sojourner
Plays whippoorwill fiddle in the streets,
Donations are welcome, tap your feet.
Generous people toss Bobby quarters.

Alas reflects Bobby
My talents they rob,
Pitching bright pennies.
The circus offers jobs.

My bottle is empty,
My pockets are threadbare,
I'll soon pile plenty
But I surely don't care.

That labor is treason.
It hampers the soul.
There is no reason
To impose that control.

Spontaneous music structures my mind,
My solitary love, innate, divine.
As soon as I earn my bottle's fee
My tender street song will resonate free.

Tom Deedy

The Sweeper

Two more hours
I'm off this job,
Cigar smoke sour,
Arms that throb.

Dustmop brain
Conjures the threat,
Doubtful refrain,
Broken net.

Broom that drags
and echoes loud,
A popcorn bag,
Frenzied crowds.

One more hour
I'll have a drink,
Remember songs
Clear, succinct

To avoid
The dustmop brain,
It's foppish recoil
Dull, mundane.

Tom Deedy

The Acrobat

The tightrope quivers taut
Measured steps light
Prance the pristine wire.

Bobby Benstock's breast
Flutters control.
Clandestine notions

Distract his motion
And he descends
To the street below.

Among bar men wise
Sympathy reigns.
He needs sober gulps

To ascend ladders,
Embrace the gaze
Of eyes upon him.

Targets in arcades
Fall as the shot
Hits after screeching

The abrasive air.
Mounting the wire
With graceful despair

Bobby Benstock smiles
Tranquil, composed
With gentle first step

He touches the wire
And traverses
The song in his heart.

He grasps the near pole
And in hugging
Restores what he lost.

Tom Deedy

The Lion Tamer

Roaring lions jump for cracking whips
Bobby wields the snake,
The stools totter and manes whisper like
Gold girls in meadows.

One drugged, ancient monarch growls and leaps,
Bobby grabs a chair,
To quell the desperate explosion.
His back presses bars

As the bullet from outside pierces
The lion's sinew.
The tranquilizer drops the beast cold
Without lucid death.

Bobby leaves the cage and throws his whip
Near the panting tongue.
With rage his eyes sprint towards the shotgun,
His stolid heart melts

From matter to liquid in a sigh.
The dressing room dust
Settles as he gently shuts the door
With calm, doleful hands.

Tom Deedy

After The Show

Bobby Benstock the meager street fiddler
Butresses a grimy brick wall.
He ponders why anxious robots crawl
On concrete sidewalks like silent peddlars.

He hovers machines
Looking long
At their routines,
Rhythms without song.

He ponders the void,
Searching deep
Into his heart
With distant repose

He knows that he knows
Airy souls
Do not click-clack.
He knows that he needs

To find a way to lose himself in the crowd.
He closes his eyelids
With hidden, melancholy visions,
Plucks the tucked siren and whispers a tune.

Tom Deedy

Losing To A Chicken

Tuesdays, man. Rough days, Tuesdays. I always have a hard time on Tuesdays. I was born on a Tuesday. Probably will die on a Tuesday. Last Tuesday I went to New York City. Went with my friend Cleon. That's not his real name, but we call him that after the baseball player, Cleon Jones. Same thing happened to him as happened to Cleon Jones, kind of. You know how Cleon Jones got arrested in Florida for sleeping with some chick in the back of his van and they was both naked, well that sort of thing happened to my friend Cleon. He was with his girl friend in the back of his dad's T-Bird, except he was parked in a really dumb place. Right in front of the girl's house. Anyway her parents came home and saw the car in front of the house, but they didn't see old Cleon and their daughter in the house. So the old man stuck his nose up against that rectangular opera window and got a bit of a surprise, you might say. To say the least, he was kind of pissed-off. He caught them right in the middle of their no-pants dance. Whoa, did he let Cleon have it. The girl's old man called up Cleon's dad and they had a major discussion. Anyway Cleon isn't allowed to see the girl anymore, and she isn't allowed to see Cleon no more. The girl isn't even allowed to see me cause I hang around with Cleon. And that's too bad, because she's a nice girl. Not just pretty and an easy lay, she's a real nice kid. Also Cleon isn't allowed to drive his old man's car anymore. That's how come I went to New York in the first place, because Cleon couldn't drive himself. There was a big concert in Central Park: Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes, Graham Parker, and Bozz Scaggs; that he just had to see. His cousin was playing sax with Southside, so he had free back-stage passes, but no way to get there. My parents were out of town, so I just kind of took my old man's car. He would have let me take it if he was around.

The concert was at eight o'clock. It takes four hours to get there from here, so we figured, what the hell, we'll make a day out of it. I picked Cleon up about seven that morning and we took off. Well, four hours is a long time to be cooped up in a car, and from 11 (which is when we would have gotten there) until 8 is a long time to be in New York with nothing to do, so we figured we'd stop someplace cool on the way to just kind of look around. All you do to get there, basically, is cruise up the Jersey Turnpike and there sure isn't much interesting there. For the first couple of hours, we fooled around with the cruise

control, and talked to the truckers on the C.B. Then we figured it was about time to look for a place to stop. I saw a sign "Atlantic City 24 miles." Then it hit me, Atlantic City would be a cool place to stop. My dad used to spend every summer there when he was a kid, and now its supposed to have gambling and stuff.

That's where we stopped, Atlantic City. The boardwalk isn't so great. It's really kind of ugly. My old man always says that Atlantic City went down the tube cause Black gangs cruise up and down the boardwalk wailing on people and ripping off their wallets. I didn't see any Black gangs, but I did see a Black wino. He came up to Cleon and asked him for a quarter. Cleon said, "Hang on a second." He checked for a quarter, but didn't have one. He only had a bunch of dimes and a bunch of nickels. So Cleon offered him 25 cents that way, but the bum didn't want it. He said, "I want a quarter. A quarter!" Then the old dude started screaming, "You don't got a quarter? You got a quarter! Give me a quarter. Give me a quarter." We walked on. Cleon was scared. To tell you the truth, so was I, kind of.

We crossed over to the beach side of the boardwalk and kept on walking. I looked over my shoulder and that old bum was following us from the other side of the boardwalk, looking at us, shaking his fist and screaming, "A quarter. A quarter. Give me a quarter!" I don't know what his problem was. After all, we offered him the money. So what if it was two dimes and a nickel instead of a quarter. Obviously the wino was high on something, probably heroin. That makes people age fast and this guy looked pretty old. Anyway, Cleon was getting real bummed out, so we ducked into one of these pinball places.

The pinball parlor had weird machines in it. Actually some of them were pretty cool and some were pretty weird. My favorite are those T.V. games, and they had a ton of those, all different kinds. They had tennis, car races with shifters, tanks that explode and shooting galleries with rifles and the T.V. screen as the target. I was playing one of those when Cleon called me over. He had found the weirdest pinball machine of all time. There was a fucking live chicken in it! No kidding. It had an electronic tic tac toe on the front and a big, pecking chicken in the glassed-in part. The sign said, "Play Tic Tac Toe Against The World's Smartest Chicken 25 cents."

I was game; it looked like an ordinary chicken to me. I got change for a buck, and put a quarter in. A sign flashed on, "Chicken Goes First." The chicken walks over to the side of his compartment closest to the tic tac toe screen and pushes a button with his beak. A mess of grain came down for the chicken, and the upper left hand square lights up on the screen. I push the button for the square just below the one that the chicken got. The chicken walks over and pushes the same button as before. This time the upper right-hand corner lights up. So I got to take the square in between the chicken's two squares to block him. This time when the chicken presses the button the lower righthand corner lights. I countered with the very middle box. The chicken takes the middle righthand box. It's tic tac toe, three in a row, I lose to a chicken. Actually I lost to a machine. Every time the chicken pushed that button with his beak he activated the machine. So losing to a machine isn't nearly so bad as losing to a chicken. Anyway, when I played the chicken the next time it was a cats-game. Cleon never lost to him, but he couldn't beat the chicken either. Ties every time, but anybody with half a brain who goes first can win or tie every time. There wasn't anything special about that chicken. The whole thing made Cleon pretty mad. Cleon really gets pissed about those morale issues. I bet he'll be a lawyer or a politician or something like that. Anyway he complained about the chicken to the guy who handed out the change. Cleon said he wanted his money back because the whole thing was a big lie. The guy said, "So what's a lie?" Cleon said the chicken wasn't the smartest chicken in the world. The guy said, "Prove it. Show me a chicken that's smarter." Cleon said, "You prove it and show me a chicken that's dumber." Cleon also told the guy that the game was fixed and that the chicken wasn't playing tic tac toe, he was only pushing a button to get grain. And any chicken in his right mind would do that. And that if the guy didn't give us a buck-fifty (because we played the game six times between the two of us) he was going to call the A.S.P.C.A., because it was cruel to seal the chicken up in a glass booth. So the guy says, "So what's worse keeping the chicken in a cage and feeding a lot of grain or eating it. Anyway, why did you kids play the game six times if you didn't like it? You know if you had told me the game upset you after the first game I may have given you your money back, but it's too late." The guy made sense, but Cleon wasn't going to give up that easy. He said, "We wanted to make sure you were a crook before we made any false accusations." Cleon had the guy worried then, he

started screaming at Cleon, "Get out of here, kid, before I call the cops." Cleon was sure of himself, so he told the guy to go ahead and call the cops, because he wanted to show a cop the chicken machine. Then the guy said, "I'm only doing this to get you out of my hair." He gave Cleon a buck-fifty and told us to get lost. That was it for me, I had had enough of Atlantic City. Too many screaming weirdoes. Cleon kind of wanted to stay, but I talked him into going.

We went back to the car, hopped in, and decided to cruise around Atlantic City for a couple of minutes before hitting the road. They were doing a lot of construction there, new hotels and stuff, I guess. We went by this place where they were building a huge hotel, but the road was totally wiped out by mud from the tractors and junk. Too bad, though, because I didn't even see the Road Closed sign. The wheels were spinning and everything; it was just like being stuck in snow. Cleon went out and tried to push, but when it comes to feats of strength he is basically a wimp. Even he admits it, but at least he gave it a good try. It didn't do any good. Soon some of those big construction dudes came over and gave us a hand. Now those guys know how to push. We were out of there in a flash, and we thanked them and all. The car was a total mess though, so was Cleon. You know, just covered with mud. Cleon thought that my old man might get pissed-off if he came home and found the car so messed up. We decided to get the thing washed, but we also decided we wanted to get to New York already. So we figured we'd get the car washed when we got to New York.

That's what we did, kind of. We got to the suburbs of New York at about noon. Noon is lunch time, so we stopped at one of those suburb towns to get some lunch. Actually where we stopped was in New Jersey but it was sort of close to New York, so I kind of figured it was a suburb. Anyway they had plenty of McDonald's type places and gas stations and stuff like that right by the exit. I like McDonald's the best, but Cleon likes Burger King better. He says you get more meat on a Whopper than you do on a Big Mac. And you know after eating that lunch I think he might be right. That Whopper really was good, but all in all the lunch was nothing to go crazy over. Anyway there was one of those Gas N' Glow places right next to Burger King, so I figured it was a good chance to kill two birds with one stone, you know get the car washed and gassed up at the same time. To tell the

truth, I had never taken the car to one of these automatic car wash places, so I kind of didn't know what was coming off. We got the car filled with gas, that went pretty smooth. The guy asked me if I wanted a wash. I said yeah. Then he asked me if I wanted a wax job. I figured what the hell; I went for the works. The guy drew something with chalk on the windshield and told us to follow the other cars. We drove down the line a little bit until we came up to this other guy. This guy was kind of grungy looking, with a floppy hat and glasses. He rapped on my window (which I opened) and said that he'd be taking the car through the wash part. Cleon and I got out and the guy told us where to wait. Me and Cleon walked over there. I was kind of bummed because I wanted to take the car through the car wash myself. It looked like it would be pretty cool to go through. Cleon was sort of bummed too. We just stood around and talked about all those ass-holes we met in Atlantic City. Before I knew it, my car was coming out of the garage-like-building all clean and shiny and everything, except the grungy guy never stopped. He just took off in my dad's car.

To say the least, I was real pissed off. Before I could get my act together Cleon was already over talking to the gas guy. The gas guy said that the grungy guy didn't even work there. Boy did I feel like a dumb shit. You were supposed to drive the car though the garage thing by yourself. The gas guy said he was real sorry and everything, but all he really could do was call the cops. So about a half hour later the cops showed up. It took them long enough. The cop asked us what type of car it was and what color and that kind of stuff. Then he told us he was going to take us to the police station to see some other kind of cop. On the way down there I remembered -- I had taken the car without asking my dad. Boy, fuck, was I in trouble. I told Cleon and he said, "You be quiet and I'll do the talking. Don't worry, there's nothing you could do about it. Anyway if we're lucky your old man will never know." Cleon's a good dude.

So when we got to the police station and had to deal with this other cop, I shut up and let Cleon do the talking. Cleon told him what the grungy guy with the hat looked like. Then the cop kind of smiled and started describing the grungy guy even better than Cleon had. Then he said, "I think we can locate your car for you. The guy who stole it is named Willston. Willston isn't quite all there in his head. He lives out at Willow Farms State Hospital. What he does is escape

from the hospital by hitch-hiking out, and then steals a car and drives it back to the hospital. Willston is crazy." Shit, first I lost at tic tac toe to a chicken and then I get ripped off by a loony.

Anyway a couple hours later they had the car back at police headquarters. The cop said all I had to do was show him the owner's card and sign a release and the car was mine again. That's when I re-remembered, I didn't have the owner's card, my dad had it. Cleon did some slick talking and explained what happened to the cop without making us look like crooks. The cop understood, but he said he couldn't let us have the car without seeing the owner's card. Cleon figured something out smart. My next door neighbors have a key to our house and they could tell the cops what was on the card over the phone or something like that. The cop said ordinarily he couldn't do that, but for us it would be cool. He was a good cop. All we had to do was call the Talbots and ask them to call us back at the cop station with the info.

We would of been out there in a second except both Mr. and Mrs. Talbot have jobs. Neither of them gets home until about after five. So we had to hang around the police station until the Talbots got home from work. So at about five thirty, I asked the cop if I could have my one phone call. He said that stuff only went for people who get arrested. So I had to get more change. It costs a buck seventy to call home for three minutes. Well, I got through, but I didn't get the Talbots, I got their phone gizmo: "Hi! Jack Talbot here. Nini and I went out for dinner and a show. We should be back at about 10:00. Leave a message, we'll call you back." So after the beep, I left a message and asked Mr. Talbot to call me at the police station. Cleon and me had another bunch of hours to kill. We went out to dinner at McDonald's which is right around the corner from the police station. I don't know the Big Mac is pretty good, maybe not as good as the Whopper, but the other stuff at McDonald's is better. We tried just about everything between the two of us. With all that time to kill and nothing to do, we ate a shit-load. McDonald's fries are the best, no doubt. Better than anywhere. Nobody talks about their apple pies, but they're good too.

Anyway after dinner we went back to the cop station and played cards for a while. We didn't play for money. I wouldn't do it. Cleon cheats. Well, he doesn't do it on purpose. It's one of those

brain diseases with a long name, but nobody bothered to tell him he had it. Well, before we knew it, Mr. Talbot called. I let Cleon explain everything to him. Then I told him exactly where my dad leaves the owner's card. About fifteen minutes later he called back and we put the cop on. Soon everything was cleared up, and the last thing I remember the cop saying to me was something about carrying my owner's permit with me all the time. What do you want, it isn't even my car. Anyway we just headed straight for home and didn't get there until early Wednesday morning. The next day I thanked the Talbots for everything and that kind of thing. Then I explained to them how my dad kind of didn't know about me taking the car and how I'd appreciate it if he didn't say anything to my old man. Mr. Talbot said he understood and then he told me about some dumb things he did when he was a kid. Well, my parents came home and they haven't said anything yet. He'll probably nab me next Tuesday, because Tuesdays suck. Last Tuesday we went to New York and didn't even get there.

David Rosenberg

this is
 my second guess
just not having seen you in some time
if anyone's being kind
 to anyone else guess I'll ask
why, I felt like your valet
 flunky-ing around and reminding
you to set up in your shirt straight
 so you get uncomfortable enough
 to see me
you know I know what you have to do
 because one of us has been there before, obviously
but I want a bigger cut in your life
 than you give me at the end of the evening
 as a matter of tradition
your nonchalant offerings
 have not the begging behind them
 that my reciprocating and silence do.
I understand you don't like pleading
we'll pretend I only reproached you
 for a practical joke you played that
was too well thought-out
and I'll say I'm sorry for
 it started out well
with me under your wing
 but not in your side.

Charlene DiCalogero

Waiting Alone

Still with her dream
still, with her dream
she holds her stomach warm
like a monkey, cross armed
and silent, in some zoo corner.
Her dream is her warmth.
A dream turned flesh inside.

An empty house
no one there
just herself
in her girlhood rocking chair
rocking softly.

She rests near the window
where an old sun lingers
over her body beyond it
into the mirror and
up to paper birds
twirling in a mobile.

Fall dark-
colored leaves
hang ripe from a tree
outside the window.

They are still,
wind hushed,
the outside doesn't move.
A dead second grows through the empty room.
Her movement brushes it aside
as she opens the window.

New air, cool, slides under her blouse
raising the hair along her back and arms.
The noise of leaves hears a smile from the girl
reaching for the nearest branch
feeling the glossy finish of another season.

Jennifer Johnston

Unsure Window

I wait for an answer from
Your unsure window,
But silence only drips,
Painting the nights longer
And lonelier.

Why do you stand a distant
Silhouette,
Combing your mind with
Slow songs?

I thought I saw you on
The warm bank of the Nile,
A quiescent semi-evening
Behind your smile.

I guess I did not see it,
Because your window
Is so high,
A half opened window with
Dreams slowing out.

Morning at the window,
Finds you pacing, pondering
Why, I have moved my eyes
From your unsure window pain.

Stephen Thompson

Of Course You Can Go

Leon Hirsch posed his question calmly and succinctly, but his parents were dazzled by his sudden initiative.

"Of course you can go," said Mr. Hirsch.

"I'll probably go to England and France and Spain and Italy . . ." Leon's voice dropped to a whisper. "This will cost a lot of money."

"You've never asked for much before. I'm sure we can afford it," said Mr. Hirsch.

Leon only asked for books. At first he devoured mysteries, biographies, and histories. Leon now restricted himself to novels. His sentences were often elaborate literary comparisons and parallels, punctuated with "Joycean" or "Faulkneresque."

The vicarious pleasures which Leon felt in his reading of Samuel Beckett or Ernest Hemingway sparked his interest in traveling to Europe. He wanted to end the time he spent sitting in his room reading about others' continental experiences.

Even though Leon's simple, direct request to go to Europe came as a surprise to his parents, he thought of the idea as a natural extension of his absorption in literature. His parents were delighted that Leon was finally trying to do something other than poring over dense pages of words.

"Leon, you're graduating from high school in a couple of months. You're a man, now," said Mrs. Hirsch.

"Um . . ." said Leon.

"When you're traveling around this summer, don't think about us. Your mother and father. Do what you want to. Don't hold yourself back. Take chances. Don't be foolish. But take chances."

"Okay, mom."

The pavement baked and sizzled under the brilliant sky. Leon squinted as he looked out the window. Excitement and apprehension swirled around in his mind, each gaining the upper hand alternately. He had graduated a week earlier. Spring had turned into summer, and the horizon appeared rougher than it had before. Traveling no longer seemed simple. He dreaded crossing an ocean and walking in a foreign land. He also wanted to go more than he had ever dreamed.

"You packed everything?" asked Mr. Hirsch.

Leon lifted his bulging backpack. "I think so."

"You have your traveler's checks?"

"Yep. Dad, I better leave. They're calling my flight . . ."

Leon's voice trailed off. "So long. I'll write to you - -"

"Don't write if it's too much trouble," said Mrs. Hirsch.

"I'll write." Leon walked down the ramp. He waved to his parents. He boarded his flight and sat next to a paunchy gray man who held a briefcase on his lap.

"You ever been to London, kid?" asked the man.

"No," said Leon. The man opened his briefcase, leafed through thick documents, and did not say another word.

The cold nocturnal raindrops did little to improve Leon's opinion of London. As he noodled his way through the crowded streets, his backpack became heavier with the weight of dampness. The British population seemed unfriendly as they jostled Leon in the subway.

The youth hostel was filled with French, Dutch, Norweigan, Italian, Spanish, and Malasian students, all gibbering in their native tongues. Leon piled his belongings on his thin, bare cot and watched the others.

"Are you an American?" asked a Swedish boy.

Leon nodded. "How could you tell?"

"Your jeans gave it away. You look nervous."

"I just got here."

"The youth hostel?"

"No. Europe." Leon shrugged. "London is my first stop."

The Swede smiled. "Do you plan to go to Brussels?"

"I'll probably stop there on my way to Strasbourg."

"You want to go tomorrow? I'm leaving for Brussels in the morning."

The train glided through the early morning mist of southern England. Leon could see barely any of the countryside through the smudged glass. He could, however, see his face in the window's reflection when the train passed through a tunnel. He looked intently at his features, trying to read the lines of his visage like the print of a book. Leon could not comprehend his expression.

"You want some of this bread?" asked his Swedish friend.

"No, thank you," said Leon, shifting his gaze from the cloudy landscape to his companion. Leon opened his tattered copy of *Gravity's Rainbow* and began to read.

On the deck of the ferry going to Belgium he met a Dutch student who spoke English. "What is Amsterdam like?" asked Leon.

"It is an expensive city. I think it is a beautiful place to walk around. Go to the Van Gogh Museum, by all means," said the Dutch student. "The women are beautiful."

"Which women?"

"The women of Amsterdam."

"Oh." Leon thought about the brown parched bark of the drooping tree in front of his home. The leaves loped to the ground as the cardinals

pounced on the curved branches. "Amsterdam sounds nice," said Leon. He returned to his seat below the deck.

Walking on the gritty backstreets of Brussels, Leon asked his Swedish companion, "How long are you staying here?"

"Three or four days, probably."

Leon stopped and looked into a bakery. There were rows of iced delicacies and long breads. He turned to the cobblestoned street and viewed a pair of scraggly cats peering into an over-turned trash can. Their backs were arched as they hissed at each other. One pawed a soup can while the other gnawed a piece of fish.

"I'm going to Strasbourg tomorrow," said Leon.

The Swedish youth shook his head. "Let's get to the youth hostel before it's dark." They walked on.

At the hostel, a blond German student spoke to Leon in rasping, guttural tones. "How did you get here?"

"I took the train and ferry from London," said Leon.

"I always hitchhike. I cannot afford the train," said the German. "Hitching is cheap and quick. I hope it does not rain tomorrow. I want to go to Copenhagen." He lit a cigarette and puffed vigorously.

"What part of Germany are you from?" asked Leon.

"Hamburg." The smoke drifted around the room.

Leon read more of *Gravity's Rainbow* on the train to Strasbourg. The novel confused him and was unpleasant to read at times. His deep concentration was snapped by a sweet voice.

"Hello," said a young woman sitting across from him. "That is a very difficult book. I have an American friend who gave it up after only a week."

Leon looked at her brown hair and her hazel eyes. She wore a light blue blouse and dark pants. Her legs were crossed. A small bag rested by her side. "Yes, it is very hard," said Leon cautiously. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going home. I live in Luxemburg." She asked him many questions. Leon spoke about his experiences in Europe. She was attentive and polite, motioning occasionally to indicate her sympathy. "Would you like to see Luxemburg? I can show you around the city. I have lived there all my life."

Leon thought about the drooping tree in front of his home. Leaves covered the lawn. Birds looped around the lawn. "No. I'm sorry. I must go to Strasbourg."

The girl touched his hand. "Are you sure you do not want to see the city? You will still have time to get to Strasbourg by the evening"

"No. I'm sorry." Leon turned to the window and trembled. The train stopped in Luxemburg moments later. He heard the girl say something as she left.

Leon looked at his reflection. Against the background of the dark train station he studied the lines of his face.

The train moved slowly. Leon looked at the girl's seat. It was empty.

Michael Sittenfeld

The Geri

The highway passes through a small town. I've memorized the road and its traffic lights. I know when I can stop to take in the view. One sight on the way never changes: an old man sits on his front porch, bent over a book, reading. It's always the same man, the same sleepy posture, the same pages. As I wait for the traffic light to turn green I watch this scene, like a picture, occur and recur with delicate simplicity. It delights me each time I ride past this way.

An oak tree stood close to the house. One could see it had been there a long time, towering about the roof -- shading the sun from his garden. And bypassers knew the house, never attempting to know the old man, never meeting his eyes. They kept their distance from the things unknown to them. Sometimes we fear the unknown.

But children did not think to fear running shortcuts to his rhubarb garden - -
Not even the shortest paths through pricker - bushes they were not afraid of the handfuls they sneaked, Mothers never caught muffled giggles then. At night, daring pennies to peek through porch windows...they saw Superstition by a string: The melon-wedge dangling its light into a dance of little people.

The light turned green,
It had to, they're all gone now
Patches of garden grow weeds
to admire none.

These headlights rush the boarded sight
and forget what loneliness is meant to be.
Eyes of a second year
strain to see
It near and fade,
leaving impressions of tree;
Branches hovering over the frayed
edges, telling secrets.

Speech

She stood at the bottom of the stairs and called to him to come eat his dinner.

"Margaret, Margaret," he said, shuffling to the top of the stairs, "don't you remember? I'm going out tonight."

"Of course I remember," she said. "I got your suit out today, didn't I? and isn't your clean underwear on your dresser? and aren't your studs here in my apron pocket?"

He smiled down at her.

"You're wonderful."

"Come on down and eat." She turned away, but when he didn't come, she turned back and looked up at his blank face. "Those dinners don't start till late," she said. "You'll have to make your speech first, and you'll be cranky if you don't eat."

He came down the stairs. He descended slowly, leaning on the bannister, but his steps were graceful. She waited at the bottom, watching him move. He reached to touch her shoulder just as she turned to go to the kitchen. He followed her through the dining room. She stopped when she reached the kitchen door.

"You just sit down. I'll bring it to you."

He walked back to his place at the end of the long wooden table. Her place was set on the side of the table adjacent to his.

"I'm not really hungry, darling," he called as he sat down. Margaret came in with two steaming bowls and set one down at each place.

"You just think you're not," she said. "Just eat some of this soup and you'll feel better." He picked up his spoon without looking at her. "Got your napkin?" He put his spoon back down

and picked up his napkin. Yellow paper. Margaret liked yellow. He couldn't remember when she'd stopped using the linen napkins. Maybe he'd buy her some for Christmas, and she'd know he wanted her to use them again. Probably not, though. Probably she'd just put them away in the cupboard to use for company. And when did they ever have company? He tucked his napkin into the collar of his shirt and sat eating his soup. Margaret was still standing by the table. He looked up at her.

"Why don't you sit down and - - -"

"You'd better not do that tonight, William," she said. He looked at her. "You can't tuck your napkin into your neck at a decent place, you know. You'll have to learn one of these days not to spill soup on your necktie."

"I won't do it tonight, darling, I promise."

"Promise not to spill soup on your necktie?"

He was looking back at his soup now and had missed her smile.

"Yes."

"Well, let's pretend we're at a formal dinner now," she said. She leaned over his shoulder and tugged at the napkin, pulled it out and smoothed it over his lap. He sat still with his spoon in his hand.

"There," she said. "Now don't spill. I'll be right back." She went back to the kitchen.

"Thank you, sweetheart."

"What train are you catching?" she called from the kitchen.

"Seven thirty-eight." He finished his soup and put his spoon down. He sat with his elbows on the table, chin in hand, brow furrowed, numbling the names of the old baseball players he would talk about that evening. Everybody likes to hear about baseball. High school kids,

sewing circles . . . tonight a group of doctors would listen, some of them, like Bert's son, not old enough to remember his voice over the aid, announcing the nostalgia when it was new. Dr. Bertram Jones, Jr. Think of that. Like father, like son, as they say. Nice of Bert to get in touch.

She banged the coffee down on the table and it sloshed into the saucer.

"Seven thirty-eight! Why didn't you tell me? It's nearly seven now and I have to get you dressed. Drink that down quick and come on."

"Is it Sanka?"

"No, it's coffee."

"But - -"

"It's all right to drink coffee at night if you're going to be up. You need to be alert. Drink it, now, and come on. You got a shower and shaved before dinner, didn't you?"

"Honey, I didn't know you were fixing me dinner."

"You didn't shower and shave?" He sat sipping his coffee, staring straight ahead. She leaned down and sniffed him. "Well, you can shave, at least." She sat down, put her napkin in her lap and tasted her soup. She put her spoon down and sighed.

"It's all right, honey," he said. "We have time." He put his half-finished coffee down and stood up. The yellow paper napkin glided to the floor.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'll go up and shave and you finish your soup."

"It's cold. I don't like you to waste coffee."

"You drink it, honey. It's not cold." He moved her soup

bowl away and picked up his coffee cup and put it before her with an extra wave of the arm.

"Wah-la."

"She winced. "Go on up."

"Where are my studs? Do you have my studs?" He was sitting on the foot of the bed. He'd finished putting on his shoes and socks, but she was still combing his hair.

"I have them. Stop it, now, calm down."

"They're emerald; they belonged to my father's brother."

"They belonged to your mother's father. And I know they're emerald."

When he was dressed, she stood behind him as he looked in the mirror. He smiled and, in the mirror, met her eyes; they were just above his shoulder.

"You look fine," she said.

"Almost as handsome as the day we were married, huh?"

"You didn't have a tuxedo the day we were married. Come get your coat on or you'll be late." She walked out of the room ahead of him.

"You're prettier than that day, yourself, Margaret," he said to her back.

"Thank you," she said, without turning around. He could tell she had put on her photograph smile to say it.

"Prettier than a picture," he said.

He walked out of the station downtown. Snow was falling in fat flakes. They whispered against his old Burberry. They fell, splat, on

the shiny sidewalk and vanished from the edges to the centers. He stopped for a moment to look up at them falling like cotton from the gray-streaked black above. He opened his mouth for an instant to catch one, stopped himself and began walking, shoulders hunched, head down. He felt the stack of three by five cards in his pocket. There were twenty-five of them. He never used them for his speeches, but he always had them. He stopped again, looking at his feet. He'd thought for a moment that he was only wearing one overshoe. But no, they were both there, the laces of his wing-tips tucked neatly inside. He looked around. He had stopped before a display window of one of the better furniture stores. It was a dining-room, set for dinner. Yellow silk roses in the centerpiece. The napkins were yellow linen. The sign was elegantly modest: "For your shopping pleasure, Open nine to nine, December 18-24," it said.

He checked his wristwatch. He'd be late. He wanted to buy them for Margaret, but it was too late. He resumed walking. The telephone had rung just as he'd been about to leave, just as he was putting on his overshoes. She'd gone to answer it, and he'd almost forgotten his other overshoe. He'd forgotten his muffler, though. There was no wind, but the cold seeped in around his neck. He turned a corner and saw a young couple coming towards him. He glanced up at them. The man was tall and gloomy-faced; his arm protectively surrounded her slim fur-sheathed shoulders. Her head turned from him, her eyes wandered, bored-looking. She caught William's glance and he didn't look away. They passed him. What was it? Her gold shoes? Pretty ankles? Had she noticed - - but no, he had both overshoes. What about her rabbit coat, whose lining was surely satin? No. Her eyes. Lazy eyes. They had taken him in as part of the surroundings, a building, a street lamp, a window display. Lazy, languid eyes. Detached. He owned her with his arm, her arm around his rib cage connected her to him. But she was detached. Yellow napkins for Margaret. Flowers, too, perhaps. Real ones, though.

He reached the hotel and took the elevator to the fourteenth floor. The Great Hall was warm and shining with chandelier light. He took his file cards from his coat pocket and put them in the pocket of his trousers. He checked his hat and coat and overshoes, and put the ticket with the cards. The room was full of doctors young and old; most of them had their wives with them. Margaret hated baseball. He smiled at all of them. Bert's son pushed through a group.

"Hi, Bill." He met William's eyes and smiled broadly; it was his father's smile. His handshake was strong. "Come on over and say hello to Dad. You're sitting at our table." They found Bert drinking with two younger doctors. He stood up, drink in hand, and patted William on the back. His eyes had a lot of laugh-lines. His voice was a little loud as he introduced Doctors Alan Stein and David Price.

"Pleased to meet you - - may I call you Bill?" asked Dr. Alan Stein.

"Of course, please do."

"Our fathers both remember your voice over the air."

"Thank you; it's great to be remembered."

"Have a cigar, Mr. Campbell," said Dr. David Price. "My wife just had a baby boy."

"Congratulations. Best Christmas present the two of you will ever get. And you call me Bill, too." Not supposed to smoke. Margaret. Bad heart. Don't drink, either. He sat down next to Bert and accepted a light from him.

"Scotch and soda for Mr. Campbell," Bert said to a waiter. He turned to William. "Hey, Bill, remember when Margaret had Tommy?" He turned to share the story with the others. "Last game of the season. As soon as Bill heard, he left the air, and arrived at the hospital to greet his son, ten minutes old." They laughed and drank.

He was introduced as Bill Campbell, the best-remembered voice of the city's home team. Applause. He walked to the podium, fingering the file cards in his pocket. His face was warm, his heart was beating quickly. It would slow down when he reached the podium and put his hand up to stifle the applause. In a way that was the best moment of a speech. He stood at the podium. The second before he raised his hand, he knew. He put up his hand. His heart was beating harder. Hands and voices quieted; the room was all alcohol fumes and

eyes. Back in 1954 back in 1954 back in 1954 but his voice wouldn't come out. Bert would understand.

It was Christmas Eve day. This place they'd put him in was nice; he had a single room with a window. He woke up and looked at the snowy city through the window. He pushed the button that would bring a nurse. He knew when she'd come in, but didn't look at her. Just a white form by the bed.

"Yes, Mr. Campbell?"

"Tomorrow's Christmas," he said.

"Yes, it is."

"My wife. May I make a phone call?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"You can do it for me. My wife. Get someone- - - some florist - - - get her a dozen yellow roses."

"Of course, Mr. Campbell. Doctor will be in soon." She plumped his pillows and left. He didn't think about Margaret paying the bill. He didn't think they wouldn't send them.

Tears slid silently from under his closed eyelids. She was sitting on the side of the bed. With her forefinger she rubbed his tears across his cheeks.

"Merry Christmas," he whispered. His voice caught; she rubbed his face harder. The flowers . . . the flowers "

"What?"

"Did they send them?"

She took her hand away and looked at him for a long moment. She turned to look out the window.

"Yes" She bit her lower lip.

He opened his eyes and looked at her.

"What color were they?"

She turned from the window to look at him.

"Yellow. They were yellow."

He closed his eyes again.

Emily Sims

The Goodbyes

- I. Sweet songs we sing lies to love sweeter
we break promises to be stronger
in each other's eyes
relying on fantasies to fulfill the hopes of love
Singing songs in our daydreams
my feelings, they seldom come
a drop in the pond
expending to the point of ecstasy . . . only in my dreams
during the sane hours
I create dialogues in my mind with you
full of strength
daring to pour the words over you
and you rise above them
full of understanding
full of love
- II. laying beneath the jasmin tree
feeling the wind carressing me in the darkness
it is gentler than you
and when daylight come
it will stay with me
I know
when I take the plane from this paradise to go to you
it will be with me
- to keep the scent of these jasmine branches in my hands
I must lock it in my memory
to keep your love
I will soon have to box it and label it experience
but the wind I let it run free
I will leave it
before it leaves me

Danielle Williams

A River Story

It was spring and the river was high because of melted snow filling the streams that drained into the river from the mountains. He had last seen the river in the summer, and he liked it better in the spring. In the summer, streams that bring fresh water from the mountains dry up, and gasoline and oil from boats drift on top of the water and gather in pockets of marsh and smell in the sun. Tin cans and beer bottles and things from boats gather along the shores among the rocks. In spring the river is new, and the water is cold and deep. It looks inviting on the surface.

He was sitting by the river on a tuft of dried grass that died in the fall. He was in the shade of a tall maple tree that the river was killing because its currents were knifing into the river-bank and eroding the soil around its roots, especially now that the river was high. Winter was over, and there were just starting to be new sounds in the woods. Old sounds of branches snapping under the weight of snow, and the cracks and moans of ice shifting on the river, were gone. Small animals made quick, nervous movements in the grass, and birds squawked from bare branches. Life was beginning to stir. There would be leaves soon.

The river was about three miles long, and narrow, except where it bled into a larger river that flowed into the sound, and where, in the opposite direction, it widened and dissolved into little channels that turned into marsh. There was a large fresh water stream that flowed into the river where the marshes were. In that spot of the river the water was brackish. The stream was one hundred feet wide and its water was clear even in the summer. It got shallow in July and August, but in the spring it was deep and flowing swiftly. There were deep woods on either side of the river, where one didn't see many people.

He felt the sun on his shoulders. He watched the uneasy stirring in the water as the tide, just coming out of its slack period where it is neither rising or falling, began to drag the water out to sea.

The canoe was lying face down so that it could not fill with snow and ice during the winter. It was difficult to turn over, because in the dead season its sides had settled into the ground during sporadic thaws, and the ground had since hardened. The ground was not frozen though, so he eventually rolled the canoe over onto its back. The canoe looked oddly large out of the water. The fiber glass lining, a pale green color, looked bright in the sun.

He walked over to a thick cedar tree where he had hidden the paddles in the fall. He lifted the heavy branches and groped for the paddles. It was dark in the tree. The damp, mulchy earth felt cool on his hand. There was a sudden rustling and a deer bounded out of the far side of the cedar, and trotted up the hill away from the river. It was a small deer but it made a lot of noise coming out of the tree and it frightened him. He had once flushed a deer in the same area with his dog. That deer had been a buck with well formed antlers, and it leaped towards him out of the thick trees. It dug its front hoofs into the ground and turned just before it reached him, and then galloped away along the edge of the river. He remembered how his dog, a black labrador, chased the buck, and he got worried because he had heard stories that deer grow so frightened by dogs chasing them that they run so hard they die, and he remembered how relieved he felt when his dog trotted back to him, panting, looking proud.

He wiped the dirt off the paddles and walked back to the canoe, wishing he still had his dog. He placed the paddles in the canoe, and pushed it slowly over the grassy bank and into the river. In the summer you have to drag the canoe over rocks and mud before you reach the water. The river was different in the spring. He eased himself onto the seat and felt the canoe quiver beneath him and felt uncomfortable thinking that there was only a half inch of fiberglass between him and the water, and all that is below the surface that you can not see. The feeling passed when he dipped the paddle into the water and set the canoe in motion, moving quietly over submerged rocks near the shore.

He paddled up river, so that he could drift back with the tide. The canoe glided through the water, making lazy ripples that widened behind him and rubbed against the shore. As he brought the paddle from one side of the canoe to the other, river water dripped on his legs and felt cold. When the paddle rubbed against the side of the canoe

he could see birds fly from trees on the shore. Sounds travel far over water. The sun was getting low and its reflection on the water hurt his eyes. He stayed close to the shore where he could be under the shadows of the big trees.

He paddled up river to where reeds lined the shore and the river broke off into little arteries and became marsh. He found the mouth of the fresh water stream, marked by massive rocks that stood in the spot where the stream met the river. The stream was high and running fast. He knew its currents would follow the tide, so he got as close to the mouth as he could, and drifted. The motion of the canoe in the currents was almost imperceptible, and it swung around aimlessly like a floating log. He set the paddles down and stretched out in the body of the canoe under the seats, using his jacket as a pillow. From inside the canoe he could hear water slapping when there was a breeze. It was a pleasant sound. He enjoyed the river.

It got cloudy after a while and the wind was chilled, but he didn't feel the wind in the canoe or mind the clouds. He let his mind wander.

His head bobbed slightly with the motion of the boat. He thought about how close his head was to the water. The river was a pillow, rocking him gently. He felt almost a part of the river, but that was a mistake because you could never be a part of it, or understand it. The river exposed itself in glimmers. What you can see, hear and touch, are only fragments of all that is there. Underneath, where the water is black, and currents move swiftly near the bottom amidst caverns of mud and big, slime covered rocks, all is blind except the river. The river is neither good or kind. It is impartial. It can touch you on an early spring afternoon, but you could never touch it. It touched a lady one summer. Nobody knew who she was. People fishing in the distance on the bridge over the river saw her standing in the mud by the edge of the water at a spot where the river is narrow and very deep. The tide was rushing in, making funnels of spinning water by the pillars of the bridge. The fishing is never good when the tide is running fast, but fishermen were there anyway, perhaps trying their luck while waiting for the water to calm down. The lady was holding a heavy rock, and staring into the water. The wind blew in her hair and dress. Her ankles were muddy. She began walking, mechanically, into the river, holding the rock. Fishermen on the bridge yelled at her. She gazed into the water, as if

hypnotized by the swirling currents. The water was up to her thighs when she stepped off the underwater ledge and disappeared. The river had swallowed her. Aside from that, nothing had changed. The tide continued to race in. A couple of fishermen swam into the spot where she went under, but the current pushed them up river.

The police dragged the river, and watched the river's mouth carefully, to see if the tide would carry her out to sea. A week passed and she wasn't found and the police stopped searching. Perhaps she was still in the river, tied to the rock, suspended over the mud. But she couldn't still be attached to the rock. The rope would have rotted, setting her free to drift. She wouldn't float to the surface, not if the rock kept her under long enough. She would hover over the muddy bottom like a waterlogged piece of wood. The tide would not be enough to carry her out to sea. The river was long and windy. If the tide pulled her towards the sea, it would drag her back over a course of hours. Maybe a paddle would find her, as you stroked the cold, black water.

He sat up in the canoe. It was almost dark. He looked at the shore. He was parallel to the grassy bank where he had slid the canoe into the water. Tenderly, he dipped the paddle into the water, and with one stroke pushed the canoe to the shore. He got out quickly, rocking the canoe. The water was ink black in the twilight, and calm. The river was through, and he was tired.

E. D. Etherington Jr.

Scene from a Marriage

Teacups rattle on the shelf.
You have sent me in to make coffee,
but the quivering linoleum
only unsteadies me.

You hear the crash,
the unmistakeable tinkling of broken china.
You rush in to see me
strewn across the floor
in hundreds of tiny pieces,
damage beyond repair.
The floorboards still quake.

All you can say is:
oh my god the cups have all broken
what about the coffee
our guests are waiting

Meg Propst

