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Spring 1983

### The Gallery. Vol. 2, No 2

Connecticut College


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# The Gallery

spring 1983

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# THE GALLERY

## Connecticut College Literary Journal

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This issue of the Gallery is dedicated to Mr. William Meredith, with deepest  
thanks for his constant support, guidance, and friendship.

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## The Poem from Rock Harbor

Take care.  
The new moon's no modern oracle  
but whatever we choose.

Brushing away  
sand with our knowledge -  
able hands, tiny lights flash  
then go out:  
the romance of fireflies,

the children of reticence.  
We'll mean too much whatever we say - -  
words heavy as wet sand,  
their impossible brilliance  
flashing, then going  
on. No shining's more  
lasting than words.  
For our sake,

take care.

## Travelling Among the Ruins

1.

The white surface  
of the photograph's underside  
reads: Vicenza April 1981;  
and you (where the image  
reveals itself) lean  
back firm against a wall, stone  
intricate, historical  
and distant.

I have been wondering  
where I moved in that moment  
when the shutter closed,  
and the answer comes,  
here . . . Here,  
when the sky ignites  
with the morning, already afternoon  
settles comfortably overseas.

This image is an emigre,  
a delicate renegade tourist  
unveiling European treasures —  
allowing loved ones  
a small though terrible  
knowledge: life  
goes on.

Each of us  
travels among ruined continents  
we have not chosen.

2.

Germans embrace a desire for travel:  
I have recorded that fragment, that one  
line from our last conversation  
as a key, some reason,  
a resolute explanation.

—At the airport, I waited  
for the evening flight to depart.  
When it began to rain, I boarded  
the subway home again.

And this, too: what's the antonym  
for homesickness? You knew that word  
well, but in your own language,  
not mine.

—One evening,  
you held me as I turned  
over and again in my hands  
a volume of criticism  
I could not translate.

## Praying

*For Anne Sexton*

Perhaps there's more to  
this sky than I usually conceive,  
holding back on, like clouds do,  
visions of heaven. I have rarely believed.  
(It's the same old story: praying  
in the hour of greatest need.) Perhaps the sky  
never mirrored an ocean, rowing  
there always such a large improbability.  
My dark mother and I could tell  
by incontinent heart, of accidents  
despite faith, pretending ourselves  
Icelandic sea widows, but repent:  
the sky's always been our ocean, our doubt  
less bottomless farther out.



## Eating Peaches

(for Della Cowall)

Our knives cut  
through fur like  
men who skin Arctic seals  
for a living. We're kinder —  
know how cutting  
feels.

Then swallowed  
clean,  
taste reminds that  
memory recalls  
the loss of  
memory. *When we  
remember, we remember*  
all

those things we'd  
forgotten.

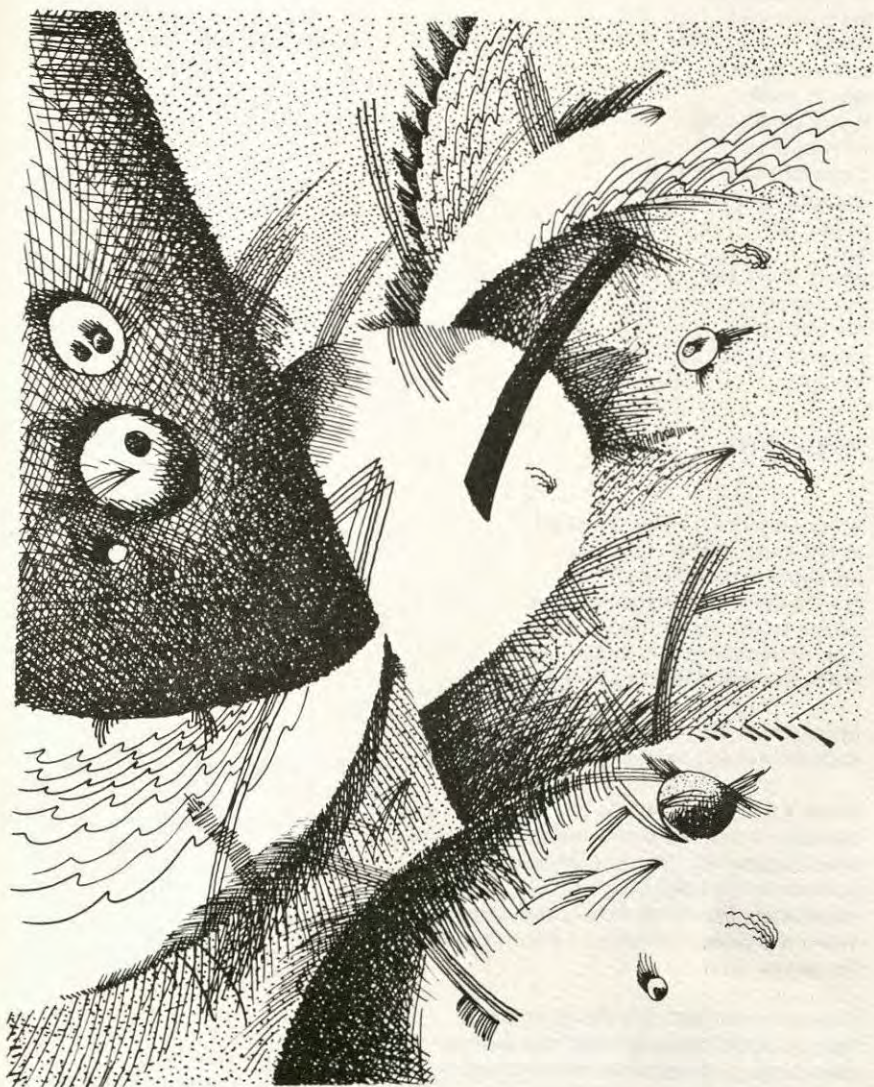
David Craig Austin

## A.M.

A strange bed, constant cough, jet lag  
call me from fitful sleep.  
I crawl over you into the darkness  
to pad barefoot, bare breasted,  
around the apartment.

Snails slide up the glass  
the sun slips over  
snow-peaked mountains,  
defining the valley,  
into the kitchen  
where I stand  
holding back the curtain.

Valerie Hendrix



Kent Matricardi



## Depreciation

or I am even less  
each time we  
speak  
so I will leave  
slowly walk  
my head released  
or held in rise  
I cannot know yet  
you cannot touch me  
or will not  
now  
please don't rest  
your hand on  
My shoulder  
or reach after  
my back

## My Daughter

When she stands straight she is  
as tall as her father. She has  
his light-spattered eyes, they  
are the color of the stained pine  
picnic-table I made five summers  
ago. When those two laugh I see  
that table catch like dry kindling.

My eyes are washed blue. She always  
said she would like my eyes.

When she was a child her father would have  
her put on my blond wig and tease her until  
she disappeared. She put the wig on last  
summer and finally laughed. She looked  
misplaced. Her black brows and olive skin  
make the thing look gray. I haven't worn one  
for years.

I wasn't surprised that she came home  
for Christmas because I had nightmares  
about her. She appeared with hollow eyes . . .  
I was afraid for her. I was afraid her  
father wouldn't understand.

We had champagne and shrimp. She brought in  
a live pine and we decorated it with ornaments  
I hadn't touched in twenty years. Her father  
took a photo of her on the dock in  
her nightgown with a glass of champagne  
to her lips. It was midnight I think  
and foggy.

Jody DeMatteo

## Splitting Atoms

We are either solid or liquid  
during these days  
when temperatures can change  
hour by hour.

The warmth, your special gift - -  
the one I longed for.  
Overboiling and steaming,  
I would flow to you anywhere

the cold was not. Always my favorite,  
your heartfelt energy  
that kept me moving  
closer to you and nearer to the center of me.

It has been winter here now for months  
with you, and I am frozen  
to the marrow. I will not be  
cracked by your deceiving

gestures anymore. I am looking  
for a new beacon once this coldness  
melts from my frame.  
Hesitating, I start again and again.

### Knitted (for Sal)

Two needles fit in his small hands -  
Black tufts of hair at the knuckles,  
neatly trimmed nails on fingers  
that push plastic gently back and forth.

He unrolled the intertwined wool  
showing me marked moods.  
Tight rows signaled worry and tension,  
sleepiness filled the gaps of looseness.

And he told me  
perfection was patterned  
when everything was all right.

I called my friend  
hoping looseness would flow through the wire.  
*Needles are puncturing me, he said*  
*and I'm sleepy with worry.*  
*I'm interwoven here, and drowned by tension.*  
*Please don't bother me, I'm knitting.*

Thomas B. Curtis



## "Where Is The Joy in The Killing Of Kinsmen?"

"Excuse me," I said, getting up from the dinner table. My eyes were slicing my mother into prism shapes. Except for a small circle of clarity, I seemed to be looking out through a kaleidoscope. This effect made me dizzy and nauseous.

"Don't you feel well, dear?" my mother asked. Her face divided into three displaced sections. I had to squint to make it stop. "You've hardly touched your bluefish."

The walls are very thin in my house. I didn't want her to hear so I went outside in the bushes to throw up.

I don't particularly like bluefish. I only eat it as a courtesy to my mother, who really does care about me. Normally I'd choke it down with no complaints, physical or otherwise, but today the taste didn't mix well with the psilocybin I'd eaten that afternoon. And, in the course of a summer day spent on the beach, I'd gotten too much sun in my eyes, causing that strange prism effect.

In the cool twilight of the backyard, I stood between rows of drying sheets and towels on the clothesline and listened to the flatulent but clear tones of my cousin Arjuna's tuba emerging from the attic window. Arjuna had come to visit before making his way back to his parents' house in New Mexico. He'd spent the last four years in India teaching the tuba at the University of Delhi and engaging in activities he only hinted at in his letters. Sometimes he'd send snapshots of himself bathing in the brown waters of the Ganges or standing barefoot in the snow on a high mountaintop, his long hair streaming down his shoulders in kinky waves of brown. We hadn't heard much from him, but it was easy to surmise that he'd taken a turn towards the mystical.

Admittedly I have always been a little skeptical about the cliched young american pilgrimage to the east, packaged tour of enlightenment made safe and easy for the white liberal. I'd only known Arjuna as a pre-teen. He'd been my quiet older brother of a cousin when I played with him on the beach years ago. His parents used to pack him on a plane and my mother and I would drive to Newark to meet him in his sandals and floppy straw hat at the airport. As we got older, we saw less of each other. He spent his summers elsewhere, developing the hippie consciousness that bounced him to the exotic East.

My skepticism was tested this morning, however, when I went up to the beach to look for him and found him seated in a lotus, his white trousers and long hair covered with sand beneath the net of an active volleyball game.

"Arjuna," I called, raising my voice over the din of the game. I knew the people who were bouncing the ball back and forth over his head. I'd grown up with them and knew this was exactly the kind of thing they would do. After spending their whole lives on the New Jersey shore, they weren't apt to accept the imposition of a strange element into their midst. When I returned from my first year at N.Y.U., they'd sniffed me up and down like a new dog in the neighborhood. After four years of school, they no longer recognized the smell.



My cousin Arjuna, sitting in his devotional pose, his lips forming a thin smile of rapture, was becoming the target for spikes and serves. I trod through the soft sand to the game and stood for a minute watching.

"Hey, come on," I said after a while, "Hold up a second." The ball continued to ricochet off of fists and palms with a punctuated rubbery sound. Today my voice didn't seem to be having much effect on anyone. I shuffled under the net to where Arjuna was sitting.

"Don't touch him, Carl, he might explode." It was Jerome, a guy I used to hang out with in high school. His comment stirred up a general laugh of approval from the others.

"Fuck off," I said, and reached over to touch Arjuna's shoulder. When I shook him slightly, his eyes opened slowly and he drew in a noisy breath. He stared at me blankly as if from the depths of a chinese painting. His hand reached up to stroke his beard which stretched a few inches below his chin. He seemed to be taking in his surroundings. His head turned from side to side, and he arched his bushy eyebrows.

"Hmm," he said and stood up. I followed him back to the house and went in to have some bacon and eggs. My mother was in the kitchen busying herself with a cake recipe.

"Mom," I said, "how long is Arjuna going to stay?"

"Jamie said he needed a day or two to rest up from his jet lag." She used the name Arjuna had abandoned in Delhi.

"Jet lag? Is that all?"

My mother stepped quickly into the dinning room. Her little slippers feet made slapping noises on the linoleum. She wiped her hands vigorously on her apron and with a toss of her head, made sure her graying hair was still firmly tucked into the kerchief she always wore.

"Now you just listen to me," she whispered, "that boy's been through a lot in the last couple of years." She paused and we both stopped to watch Arjuna pass through the kitchen and up the stairs. "He's been living on rice and tea and who knows what else. He's put years on your aunt's life. You be nice to him while he's here. He's your cousin, remember."

My old friend Jerome's words echoed in my head. He's my cousin, yes, but he might explode.

Sarcasm is a trait that has gotten me into no small amount of trouble in my life. It's also kept me sane. I don't know whether it's just me, but I find so much of the world to be ridiculous, puffed up, and painted like an old washed-out fashion model. A bad attitude, I'll admit. My friends at school used to call me a fair weather asshole. They could count on me for rain on a sunny day. I don't know why they stuck by me. I was mercilessly cynical. But i remember in the Bible there was a big difference between Doubting Thomas and Judas. I think Judas ended up gnashed in eternal mastication. Lucifer's juicy fruit. I don't know what happened to Old Thomas. He may have been a little near-sighted, but a sense of doubt seems much wiser to me than no sense at all.



I'm not sure where Arjuna's senses were when he arrived in Delhi. It appears that he lost them along with his luggage on the flight over. His first telegram read "Send Shirts. Mine lost in Iron Curtain." A few days later another was received. "No need for them here." His mother, a lady in her fifties whom I only know through family rumour, complained for quite some time to mine about this turn of affairs. Her arm was sore from ironing. "What did he need to go to India for?" she said, "George and I raised him a good Christian." George was my father's brother, a Methodist minister in Santa Fe. My mother never speaks about him.

Arjuna arrived around nine the night before. He was supposed to have called us so we could meet him at the bus stop, but he walked to the house instead. Even after the photographs, I was a bit surprised at his appearance. He was skinny and tall with an ample amount of hair around his mouth and on his head. I wasn't ready for the cloud of wierdness that surrounded him as neatly and naturally as his homespun cotton shirt. It may have been the lighting, but there seemed to be a strange luminosity emanating from his eyes.

He smiled warmly when my mother screeched out his old name and kissed him noisily on the cheek. "Ah yes, Aunt Melissa. How are you?" he said. He turned to me with a slight upward twist at the corners of his mouth. "Carl, of course."

"Of course." I answered. Why yes of course it was me. I didn't have my yoga togs on and a year's worth of beard cascading down my chin. No, I had the same choppy haircut, the same long nose and long face. No recognition problems here. In fact, I was wearing my favorite blue t-shirt that hangs like a sackcloth over my skinny torso. Holy in a double sense, it's been a constant in my life for a number of years. He must have remembered seeing me in it. But, oh, I reminded myself, we are seeing what is beneath the flesh now, not that which lies upon it.

"Carl, my cousin, how are you?"

"Me? I'm O.K. except for a slight case of desperation."

At this, my mother pinched me on the tricep. "Carl's just graduated," she explained. My mother balks at what she calls my negative streak. Nothing's ever good enough for me. Nothing's ever right.

"Hmmm," Arjuna said, "We'll have to see about this." He looked very tired from his long trip. He'd come by way of London standby and had spent the last forty-eight hours sitting on his suitcase waiting for a transatlantic flight. Two days in an airport is a long time for anyone, especially someone who doesn't drink. I assumed Arjuna abstained.

He excused himself to my mother and me and asked to be shown to his room. I grabbed his duffle bag and a strange blue leather pouch which he told me to be very careful with because it contained his *bhakti*. "My devotions," he explained.

My mother did motherly things to the bed, making sure it looked comfortable and neat. She pointed out the bathroom and the fresh towels and added "But I'm sure you remember where everything is. Nothing changes around here." He thanked her, and she and I went downstairs.



"Mom," I said when we were out of listening range, "think Arjuna's going to sleep in that bed tonight?"

"Why of course. He'll sleep like a log."

"That's what I was wondering. He's probably used to sleeping on the floor."

"You shush up and stop being so nasty to him. Desperation! Good Lord."

Later in the evening, after I'd had a sufficient amount of house brand scotch to make me careful as I walked. I cracked the door to Arjuna's room and saw him fetally curled on the small throw rug. A beam of moonlight broken into a grid by the window screen covered his upper body. It occurred to me then that the screen could keep out mosquitos but not light. I wondered if Arjuna missed the hum of insects in his ears.

I lay back on my own bed and let the events of the evening perform their floppy dance inside my head. I'd spent the night in one of my more unpleasant pastimes these days, finding out exactly how little my old friends and I have in common. What we talk about primarily now is old times, the parties we threw, our pranks at school, and how our old girlfriends were married or pregnant. But all it took was one pick-up truck commercial on the bar T.V. to silence our conversation and irreperably redirect it. Jerome was now a mechanic in his father's garage. He explained the specs of the vehicle which soon led into a thorough discussion of transmissions, suspensions, and engine blocks. I remember once revelling in these things myself, but now I don't own a car, I have a bicycle. I don't like four-wheel drive, I like hiking.

For lack of words, I filled my mouth with scotch and my ears with the static drone of the late night movie.

Sleep used to come easily for me. Now it seems when I close my eyes, the lights come on and the memory shop opens for sinister transactions. A little man in a leather apron grinds my thoughts into sparky sharpness. This image burns cleaner and cleaner until I realize that the sharpened metal is a blade, and that blade slowly cuts the connections between me and myself.

Things are perhaps a bit confusing for me these days.

I've been having bad dreams about driving since I was a little boy. Usually I am in a Cadillac or something large like that, driving down a curvy backwoods road at an alarming speed. Pine trees rush out at me, expand in size and just move away in time. I'm at the wheel, but I'm never in control. When the accident comes, and it always does, there is a voice that I can barely discern above the tinkling of windshield glass. You're still alive, it says.

I was having this dream when my mother shook me awake.

"Carl, it's about time you got up. Get dressed and go see what happened to your cousin. He's been gone since six-thirty. He walks so softly he almost got down those stairs without me hearing him." My mother sleeps very lightly, almost as if in compensation for the heaviness of her presence during waking hours. Her active ears created some problems when I was in high school. It



still concerned her to hear me steal in way past midnight. She claims she hasn't been able to sleep well since we moved down here from New York. That was a year after my father died. I was very young.

This morning her voice was like a cloth of electric shock descending on my aching head.

"He must be wandering the beach. I'd say it's been a while since he's seen a clean body of water. To think of that nasty brown Ganges."

"Mom," I said, wincing at the sound of my own voice, "The Atlantic's polluted."

"Nonsense."

"And the Ganges is spiritually clean. That's what's important to the Hindus."

"Nonsense." Our discussion wasn't going to get any better. The case was closed.

After retrieving Arjuna from the volleyball game, I settled down in my favorite rocker to read my Thomas Hardy. Hardy was the focus of the English Novel course I'd taken this past semester and I'd managed to get through *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* but was unable to complete *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in time to take the exam. Somehow I skirted around it on the essay question. It was such a good book I didn't want to spoil it by reading a dubious masterplot summary. I was at the part when Henchard starts his descent into drunkenness and ruin. The whims of fate. How they can batter a man about.

But Arjuna's insistent tuba managed to bumble its way into the brooding English landscape. Scales on a tuba are an almost indescribable thing. A hierarchy of moans, belches, and farts. I put my book down and trotted upstairs to witness the sources of these sounds, and found my mother hovering in the space between the hallway and the open door of Arjuna's room, a toothy smile cracking the surface of her tanned face. My mother has a little upturned nose, and her smile makes the nostrils flair like a small dog's. The sight of it made me suppress an untimely laugh. She put her finger to her lips and flicked her eyes to indicate my seated cousin dwarfed by brass. "Isn't it wonderful?" she whispered.

I have a face that consists of a knitted brow and a raised right half of my upper lip I employ at times like these to suggest incredulity. My mother must have seen this face being gathered together because she quickly pushed by me and stepped down the staircase. At the lowest step, she turned and mouthed "stay with him."

Was there a reason for not leaving my cousin alone? If so, was there danger involved? These thoughts occupied me for an arpeggio, and then silence forced a moment of eye contact with Arjuna.

"Hello Carl. Does my practicing bother you?"

"No, not at all. I love music."

"The tuba, I'm afraid, at times seems somewhat distant from what we normally conceive of as music." His tone of voice was appropriate for a large lecture hall.

"Hmm." I nodded with the interest of a captive audience.

"But you see, it only represents one end of the spectrum, or rather, one facet in the crystal. I conceive of music as a many faceted crystal." He held up his hands and moved them in a slow rotating fashion as if he held something between them. "As you turn the crystal, the distinctions between musical forms become less apparent."

"I understand. Think the Sex Pistols have their own facet?"

"The . . .?"

"Oh I'm sure they must."

"The Sex Pistols. Are they a group?"

"They were until the crystal shattered."

"You must play me one of their records sometime."

"Sure, I'd love to."

Arjuna stretched out his hand and gestured to the floor. "Sit." I squatted down and leaned my back against the dresser. My stomach objected to the sudden shift in gravity. Cold flashes of hangover tingled at the top of my scalp, and I wondered why I treated myself so badly.

"Tell me about yourself Carl. It's been a long time since we've played on the beach together." He reached over to the night table, fumbled in the drawer, and, to my amazement pulled out a pack of Marlboros and lit one. "Excuse me," he said, breathing out a gust of un-mystical smoke. He offered me one, but I declined. I tried to learn how to smoke, but it was just one of my many failures in the trials of adolescence.

"What did you do in school?" he asked.

"What did I major in, or what did I do?"

"Both."

"I majored in English, and I did a lot of drugs and drinking."

He chuckled and let out a wispy stream of smoke.

"I lived with a bunch of compulsives in a disgusting little apartment in Tribeca. Hung out in Blarney Stones and missed all the good T.V. shows because I washed dishes at night.

Arjuna held his cigarette in front of his eyes and stared at the burning tip. He was slightly crosseyed. "The cigarettes are terrible here." I waited for him to continue, but he waved me on. "I'm listening. Please go on." At that moment he poked the orange tip of his cigarette out on his bare arm,



extinguishing it in a black smudge of ashes and skin. My conversational inclinations were gone.

"Maya," he said. "Illusion. Pain, cigarette smoke. It all makes up the fragility of this world." The lecture was resuming.

"Nicotine consciousness?" I ventured.

He smiled and pulled at his beard. Sweat collected at the furry borders of its bushy expanse. "Very good," he said and lifted the crushed cigarette up to his eyes again. "Nicotine makes the blood thinner. It makes the heart pound faster and the nerves tense up. Every cigarette you smoke makes it harder for you to stop."

"Addiction!" I added.

"Attachment. That's what it is. Things like cigarettes, money, golf. They keep you attached."

"I guess so."

"And we're all attached."

"Must be."

Arjuna folded his hands and stared at me. His eyebrows formed an 'M' shape across his forehead, almost joining at the bridge of his nose. He blinked occasionally. "Well?" he said.

"What?"

"Nothing yet?"

"What do you mean?"

"Hmm."

There seemed to be a communication filter that separated Arjuna from me and made his line of conversation very difficult to follow. I chalked it up to the tropical sun, asceticism, whatever, and stood up with the intention of going down to the beach for a swim. I made a motion to leave, but Arjuna quickly blocked my way. "Don't go, Carl. We should spend the day together. It'd be better."

Then what, I thought. How could a day of Jabberwocky compare with the listless activity of beach sitting or the acrobatic exercise of dodging employment opportunities. I sat down and watched my cousin dig through his duffle bag.

"I brought you this." He handed me a piece of purple dyed cloth delicately embroidered with a dancing girl with shiny almond eyes. "That's Kali. Goddess of the dance."

I took the soft fabric in my hands and examined the supple movement of Kali's form. Her body twisted and undulated to a tabla's rolling beat. She was very beautiful. I stared until she actually appeared to be moving.

"Carl." Arjuna's voice stirred me from the purple world. "Carl, I think you and I should get out of this house."

"What's the matter?" I asked, feeling my curiosity slip into a vague sensation of fear.

"When things start taking effect, it's better to be out in the open and not in places where unpleasant encounters might occur."

"I'm having a little trouble understanding." The fear was growing slightly more acute, like the pressure of a knife point on my skin.

"Carl, we're going on a small journey today."

"Where?"

"Well that depends on what happens." My forehead seemed to be bleeding, but when I reached up to touch it, it was only sweat. The meaning of my cousin's words began to dawn on me.

"A trip? Is that what you're saying?"

"An appropriate term, though misunderstood by most."

An incredible surge of memory hit me somewhere below the stomach and I almost fell down. I knew this feeling. I didn't want it at all. "Oh, Christ! No!"

"It's funny that you mention Him. There's been some speculation . . ."

"How the hell did you do it?"

"A little powder in your eggs."

"What nerve! You fucking asshole. You could've asked."

"Carl, calm down. You'll make it hard on yourself."

He was right, of course, but my anger was taking on a tangible form. It was like a shell of red light enclosing my body. I turned my back so that I wouldn't see him, and stared out the window. Outside on the blacktop, a nuclear family was making its way up to the beach. Father had no sandals on, and his legs jumped spastically each time his tender white soles struck a sharp rock. His wife had on a bright orange print bikini, and between the two pieces of floral cloth protruded the fleshy evidence of another child on the way. The visible little one wore oversized sunglasses and dragged an innertube behind him on a string. The black rubber voiced a steady gregorian moan. In Mexico, they used to do that to Catholic priests.

The last time I had eaten mushrooms had been in New York on a drizzly Tuesday in October. Two friends and I followed up on random directional whims, covering Manhattan with the ashes of our hallucinations. One particular occurrence still sticks out in my mind when I think about that day. The memory starts as a smell, the odor of piss and cheap whiskey, and gradually solidifies into a form, a passed-out drunk in the paint-peeled entranceway of a building. The psilocybin confusion of the sacred and profane sank us below



any level of understanding or compassion. We laughed hysterically. I try to think it was the drug's fault.

When I turned away from the window, Arjuna was gone.

"Arjuna." I said loudly. His name felt strange on my lips.

"I'm in here," he said. I traced his voice back to my room where I found him changing out of his indian clothes into an old pair of cut offs, a t-shirt, and a Yankee's hat. I laughed at the tumble of hair coming out from beneath the cap. My hippie cousin had metamorphized into a redneck. He was perfect. Since rednecks find long hair acceptable now and relegate short hair to homosexuals and punks, he had little trouble slipping into the part. My hair was finally growing back. Can't be punky in South Jersey. No fucking way.

"Are you still angry with me Carl?" he asked, adjusting the cap so it tilted over his eyes.

The red glow returned, flared for a second, and then dissipated.

"No, just surprised. That's all."

In a few minutes we were walking up my street towards the ocean. I live on an island some eighteen miles long and only a quarter of a mile wide at its fattest point. On one side is the Atlantic. On the other is a large bay separating the island from the mainland.

Arjuna had informed me that he'd taken some mushrooms also, which made me feel a little better. The circumstances of my ingesting them was becoming a distant memory. It didn't seem to matter. What was important at the moment was that no one noticed me, spoke to me, or requested that I respond in any way. There was a laugh growing like a mutant seed in my insides that if released, might forever confirm the suspicions of my neighbors. Melissa's boy is insane. Little children will be notified and stones collected in small piles. Carl has gone over the edge. He's possessed. It's Satan. Satan. The red guy in the sunday school coloring books. Hot sauce. Szechuan food. Massage parlors on Eighth Avenue. Teenage girls saying no, it's a sin. Drunks flying home in a drunken Buick.

Out on the ocean, an oil tanker rose and fell with the groundswell against the blue wall of the horizon. Arjuna and I stood by the water's edge letting its waves send tongues of salty foam around our ankles. With my back turned, I was a giant, a Gulliver standing on the shores of Lilliput staring off towards his distant England, not knowing that the deep sleep that would soon occur would end up as bondage to the little people.

Arjuna tapped my shoulder and pointed to my mother knitting in her beach chair twenty yards away. "I think it'd be better if we walked."

Within a half an hour we'd walked until the houses that marked my street were smaller than an outstretched thumbnail. The day grew noticeably hotter, and I stripped off my shirt, exposing my newly tanned skin to the sun. The slight ocean breeze tingled and smelled like electricity as if a wire had been cut and was spraying the air with its ions. It was low tide and my feet encountered broken shells and crab carcasses, shark's egg pouches, seaweed, and bits of



jetty rock flaked off and shifted around by the winter storms. The crowds on the beach increased, covering the sand like a white mass of chicken breasts slow-frying on the teflon surfaces of bright colored towels. The smell of coconut oil wafted by in fleshy tropical gasps. So many bodies around. The palms of my hands felt moist and my leg hairs prickled. Seagulls were falling out of the sky and just barely missing the earth, croaking out horrible raspy lunges of sound, their red eyes malignant and tumorous. They swooped and landed and plodded like wind-up toys by the waterline. Hitchcock land. It was getting awfully hot.

Arjuna had removed his hat and tucked it into his back pocket. His hair clung to the beads of perspiration on his neck. His eyes were half open and dreamy beneath his long butterfly lashes. His arms hung at his sides and did not swing as he walked. Who was this person?

Arjuna caught my eye and seemed to realize I'd been staring at him. His lids revealed the full globular aspect of his pupils. His lips showed bright red through his beard.

"I don't think I like this." I said.

"Do you feel nauseous?" I was hearing his voice for the first time again.

"No, not nauseous. I don't know what." The fear stabbed sharply in my abdomen. Yes I did feel a little nauseous.

"Come on, Carl." He took my hand and patted it gently. "Let's get off the beach. There's a few too many people out here."

We changed directions and moved across the soft sand to the street. At the top of the dune we could see the bay. It was too hazy to make out the mainland on the other side.

"Looks like we've lost New Jersey." I said. The fear was momentarily dispelled. I wondered what became of that laugh I'd suppressed. We kept to the edge of the street where the blacktop wasn't so hot. It was around lunch-time by the placement of the sun, and the street was empty except for an occasional old couple sitting on patio furniture in the shade of an umbrella or mimosa tree. Their tranquillity was the resignation of old age, memories distilled of all impurities and sour tastes. It had a contagious soothing effect.

We walked down Ocean Avenue, a gravelly pot-holed secondary avenue that stretched longitudinally across the Island. The pastel colors of the summer rental duplexes and Cape Cods along the road made them seem like a long line of after-dinner mints. A fake, plastic look. The Island has a bleak aspect in the afternoon that I've always dislike, an empty, bare feeling to it that smacks of desertion failure. A bare strip of sand and marsh stuck between a salty devouring ocean and a brackish, polluted bay, it's like a clichéd statement of impermanence fit for a Saturday matinee nature film, complete with the off-speed soundtrack that makes the accompanying symphony slip while steps at a time. On the bay side of the island there are little places, little coves where children spear small fish on hooks in order to pull in larger fish, where reeds snap at the touch of a finger, and metal oxidizes in the blinking of an eye. You can sit in one of these coves, your toes separated by muddy effluvium and listen to the sounds of vacationing voices drifting over the houses and streets in a quavering drone. I have a predilection for these coves. Like a caged animal, I've got to pace the length and breadth of my containment.



"He was after my ass. A sex guru. The kind that hangs a tantric sign on the door and carries on like Krishna with the milkmaids inside. But he wasn't as bad as my second teacher."

What was he after?"

"My wallet. My connections. Every one of my friends in the States. He wanted a corner on the mind-body-spirit market. Quite the business in the West."

"You did study with someone, though. I saw you this morning on the beach. That wasn't all bullshit was it?"

Arjuna smiled and stroked his beard. "Yes, I met an old man, finally, a sincere old man. But he wasn't a guru."

"But you studied with him?"

"No. I didn't study at all. We did a lot of travelling together. He was a deaf mute, but he laughed all the time. You could see it in the wrinkles on his face. We went down to the Ganges together."

Arjuna and I turned the corner and walked towards the bay. With the wind at our back pushing us up the narrow street. It seemed that every window in every house sported an american flag, every yard a pink flamingo or a little black jockey with his face now painted white. Up ahead was the intersection of Bay Boulevard, the main avenue. Cars flashed by in steely apparitions of reflected light. We crossed the road, dodging ice cream trucks and station wagons filled with staring faces and went along with the windy force behind us that now seemed stronger as if helped along by the lubrication of pink houses with green shutters and well-raked gravel yards.

I began to feel uneasy at the sensation of being propelled. We were approaching the bay at an alarming rate. I felt like a bullet in the barrel of a gun spinning and picking up speed. What would happen when I reached the bulkhead limits of the street? Turning around was an obvious impossibility. I was afraid of the edge of the bay but also afraid to try and stop.

"Arjuna," I said, "this could be it."

He looked at me with his eyebrows arched. "It could be. Fill me in."

"We're going to reach the end of the street soon."

"True."

"And then . . ."

"And then?"

In a moment I was able to reach my foot out and steady myself against the tary bulkhead. The water lapping against the wooden pilings had a rainbow oily tint. I could see a bilious reflection of my face in the dark green and the flesh convoluting in ripples of movement. It could have been any face.

"What happens?" Arjuna said softly. He was tracing the paths of the seagulls swooping out to their nests on the little marsh islands in the bay.

"I guess we go back."

Arjuna and I split up when we returned to the house. He went upstairs to listen to my stereo. I grabbed a towel and walked up the blacktop to the beach with the intention of jumping in the ocean for a swim. I wanted water all around me. The sun was finally starting to sweep down towards the bay, brining a cooling stillness to the air. Late afternoon is a melting time.

I was feeling bad, jangled and burnt. My feet were like leathery pads that didn't feel the broken glass I'd been walking on or the tacks that continually flew from my mouth. Uphill. Up this street. I'd walked it so many goddamn times without ever really wondering what it was all about. I knew everyone behind every door and every bedroom window. I knew every dog's bark, every seagull's squawck, every vicious rumour and every bad joke. Why then, I asked myself, did I feel so out of place.

My legs ached as I made my way over the dune to the water's edge. I forgot how much walking I'd done. Mushrooms do that. They adjust the controls so that certain sensations are acutely focused while others blur out altogether. When I jumped into the ocean, the muscles of my calves cramped immediately. The water was cold, but I dove under and stayed beneath the surface until I could no longer hold my breath. When I came out, my mother was standing at the water's edge.

"Carl, where've you been all day?"

"Arjuna and I took a long walk."

"Oh. Did you and he get along?"

"Sort of."

I spread my towel out next to her beach chair and lay face down, avoiding the rays of the setting sun.

"He's a very strange guy."

"Your cousin's had a hard childhood. That father of his is a real tyrant."

"Uncle George, huh?" I never met the man. One of my father's family.

Under her breath, my mother said, "Yes."

I don't know what he did to make my mother so unfavorably inclined towards him. To me he was just another fibrous shape that looked like my father and now, like Arjuna as well. I'm told I resemble my father. I don't know. When I was a little kid, so young that the memories are now only fragments of yellowed photographs, my father used to help me build sandcastles without the use of bucket or shovel. I'd cry if either of those two items were introduced into our endeavors. With our bare hands, his mostly, we'd build enormous Mayan cities complete with tunnels and yucca plants made from beach grass. And when the cities were constructed and blessed, my father



would snooze beneath his sunglasses, and I would start the process of populating the empty streets with figures made of popsickle sticks.

My father was a lawyer with an interest in archeology. The only other things I remember about him were his boozy breath and his eyes. His eyes were slate grey and penetrating. Sometimes when I stare in the mirror, I see those eyes looking back out at me.

Taking a shower was an interesting feeling. Just to be naked and in the dark of the showerhouse with warm clean water hitting my skin. Each droplet brought new attention to the tiny spot of flesh it touched. Showers in the summer tend to be short though. Within a few moments, the hot water runs out because all the neighbor's children have decided to play with the garden hose next door. I dried off and went up to my room to change. I found a bottle of scotch in my underwear drawer and poured myself a double shot. The smooth liquid tasted wonderful but left a raw sensation of burning in my stomach. Arjuna was lying on my bed with my headphones on and his eyes closed. I checked the cover of the record he was listening to. It was one of my classical albums, A Mozart Evening with the Philharmonia Orchestra. I used to listen to it quite often when I was little. There were a number of minuets and German dances I liked that always put me in a flower-sniffing mood.

The side ended and the needle lifted up and returned to its resting arm. Arjuna opened his eyes. "Hello Carl. How're you feeling?"

"Coming down is always a chore."

"Hmm. You have to relax through it."

I flipped the record and unplugged the headphones so that the sound came out through the speakers.

"There's something I don't understand, Arjuna."

"Yes?"

"Why did you do it? You took a pretty big risk. What if I freaked out?"

"I had a feeling you could handle it."

"Yeah, but why?"

"You need shaking Carl?"

My cousin was no longer dressed up as a Hindu saint, but was wearing shorts and a t-shirt. He was a chameleon.

"What is it with you?" I said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm tired," he answered, "and I'm going back to New Mexico. It's been a long four years."

After eating dinner with my mother and covering up the results of it in the backyard, I put some drops in my eyes to calm them down. I wanted to finish *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I was nearing the end. Newson was returning

from the sea to claim his daughter from the now broken Henchard. As soon as I could see single objects, I poured out another scotch and planted myself in my rocking chair. The embroidery on the seatcover was done by my great grandmother. It is fading and ripping in places now, but the structure of the chair is still intact. I don't think it will ever get reupholstered. You can't do that to heirlooms.

Andrew Roffman

### The Appearance of Optimism

i.  
The watch repairman contends  
with many forces of evil.  
The swimming pool, the rock,  
and all the twisters of nature,  
Conspire to rust, smash and sway,  
The pure and perfect works of time.

Still the watch repairman goes  
with confidence to the front  
Of his store each time to confront  
yet again the powers of darkness.

Armed to the teeth, he knows he can win.

ii.  
You said,  
"I may be an optimist, but . . ."

I thank you  
For your nourishing faith.

I think that in these times,  
Optimism is called for.

Anthony Iannotti





Anne Gallagher

## Becoming Myself

Female friendships that work are relationships  
in which women help each other belong to themselves

Louise Bernikow  
*Among Women*

Trying to see past  
The sheet of water covering my windshield  
Wondering why  
Why the need to voyage so long a distance -  
The hours of empty driving on Interstate 80 -  
To confront years of Pain  
Love Confusion.  
Struggling to dispel the notion of obsession -  
Recalling Kate Millett  
And her beloved Sita and then pushing the thought aside,  
Knowing that can't be me.

I slowly enter the driveway  
At the crest of the hill.  
Clouds quickly shift overhead and  
The dewy grass smells wonderful.  
The trees and the flowers stir in the breeze  
To welcome me.  
My heart racing, I nonchalantly greet the cat  
And glance furtively at the screen door.  
I knock, and enter without waiting. I  
don't want my first glimpse of her to be through a door.  
We stand at two ends of the kitchen - so country -  
expecting smells of freshly brewed coffee and bacon frying on a skillet.  
She stands there, still in her blue nightshirt  
and I, not giving myself time to deliberate,  
reach out for an embrace.

She shows me her home -  
A creaky, lived-in house: back porch overlooking the hills,  
Dusty books lining walls and walls of shelves.  
Only select modern prints  
Tell me I'm in this century.  
I enter her room as I would a museum.  
Studying everything, not touching - as if I were entering  
her personality . . . and I feel that I am.  
Sitting on her floor we enter into easy  
conversation. Talking of the place  
Where she and I began. Something in common -  
Making the transition of being together.



Sitting later in the kitchen  
Surrounded by windows  
That let in clouds  
And country air.  
Eating grapes and sipping Fresca,  
We discuss our families  
Our friends - then art  
and our futures.  
I am struck by how much she has grown . . . and by  
New and slightly foreign stirrings of awe  
and respect.

I look at her  
Sitting back on the porch  
Against a backdrop of bushes and trees  
and hills in the distance.  
I remember how I longed for her, how much  
I ached for my hands to be touching her slender body,  
and how her violently powerful hugs were never enough  
to fulfill the pulls I felt inside.  
I realize that when I touch her now  
I am touching to fulfill a bond,  
To express what I, forever an expert at words,  
Cannot articulate. No longer  
touching in anticipation - hoping the touch  
is a beginning. I clasp her hand in quiet assurance  
That what we have is complete . . .  
As complete as the moment.

Eight hours later it's unbearable to leave.  
I sit on the floor looking up at her  
On the piano bench. Her lungs and her fingers  
Creating the art that moves me beyond no other -  
Knowing the creation is for me. Her voice  
Enters my ears and courses through my body,  
Sensing that if she stopped now, I wouldn't be able  
To hold her closely enough.  
When she finishes I can only look at her,  
And silently we walk out to my car.  
We hug fiercely, murmuring I love you's, realizing  
The meaninglessness of mere words.

The drive home is dark  
And lonely.  
I stop at a Scenic Overlook, feeling like a tourist.  
Past hills and small towns I see a cluster  
Of orange clouds  
At a place that I'm sure must be the end of the world.  
The mist rises over the mountain below me.  
I glance back at the clouds and see a glowing,  
Fiery ball emerging from beneath them and I weep . . . My eyes  
Not moving until the sky has darkened and  
The long, wet highway beckons me back.

## DREAM

All night I wander  
holding this small pot.  
I cannot see the moon

in the liquid that  
I slosh, or the birch  
or the stars or my face.

All night I wonder  
who this woman is,  
and why she cups these blackening hands  
tighter round the clay.

The ink: it spills  
I take a drink  
My hands are black  
I cross the street, and back  
and forth.

The inkpot drops but doesn't break.  
The ink is never gone.

Like hangers breeding in closets  
or the phoenix still rising from ashes,  
blackness repeats itself.

Again it spills. I drink and blacken and cross.

### love song

*(for p.)*

when eggs fry  
i peppershake  
you stoke the stove  
in the room below  
when sparks fly out  
i know your eyes  
are blue, though  
you close them  
and i fry  
eggs



## The Letter

Your handwriting is big and round.  
It can not fit between the designated lines.  
It rolls fast off the page  
and onto the slick linoleum.  
Gathering momentum,  
it crushes a closed door  
and rumbles past,  
downstairs, outside,  
as if it had something  
important  
to say.

## The Wish

He talks about literature and art.  
She pulls at a thread in her shirt.  
Tired of that distraction, she bends  
to pluck a delicate weed from the ground.  
"It's not dandelion season," he says,  
as she blows half away,  
its tiny white plumes spreading  
with her breath like rumours.

Daisy Smith

## Etchings

*for Caroline*

Your prints imprint on us a hidden landscape  
Far different from the smooth soft beauty of your face.  
The land forms in patches of ancient sand and dust,  
straw huts contain the tools of a dead race.  
Their loosely etched figures, their footprints,  
their cave-jottings and scrawls . . . Only these remain.  
On this plain of history, your marks are unrecognizable —  
miniscule, scratchy; black and awkwardly formed.  
Unlike the elegant upward tapering of letters in your signature,  
these signs and symbols of pre-history dance over the roofs  
and people and frame a home few modern women have imagined.

This surface is not pretty or calm: it pulses with mysterious  
curlicues of unrecovered meaning . . . . But in the radiant  
beauty of your face we'll never see a hint of such scrawled lines.  
The lines of ages are not meant for your face, and yet they  
have been etched into your soul. Believing again in loveliness  
as a reflection of the eternal, I look at you  
and begin to think I see the brand of old, old knowledge,  
the primitive graffiti of past worlds, floating in your eyes.





## Two Women

### i. a woman

a perfect face  
in shadow against a friend's  
a profiled kiss

### ii. the stranger

face to face, watching  
pairs of eyes widen slowly  
shyly letting the other's lighted features in

### iii. proximity

passing  
in daylight:  
shy distance  
modest proximity  
and a desire to close in

### iv. the gap

disdain,  
worse: indifference,  
denies

### v. the bridging

to enclose her,  
learn to behold beauty  
without blushing  
envelop, magnetize, and know her  
one must move nearer

### vi. later

a welcome back:  
she entered the room  
a one-sided exchange,  
from question to answer to  
silence. Before she finished speaking,  
the other put out the light  
and led her into the impersonal hallway.

### vii. dinner time

in spheres of familiarity  
the women sit. Each to her own.  
Disappointed, distracted, wondering.  
Bursting with talk, while traces  
of consciousness reach back to

an imagining of what that other unknown  
sister sees. Wishing for a glance  
of admiration or recognition.

viii. the difference

One feels distance and desire  
more keenly than the other.  
This is inevitably the case.

ix. vital signs

a moment of unselfconscious talk  
between them  
a deep look, full of listening  
traded smiles information, tea

x. disenchantment

there is the azure of eyes  
matching an old blue sweater  
and then there is already  
the hint of a double chin  
and the face of loveliness aging  
That disdain also remains.

xi. if only

"what you will possess will possess you"

embraces in friendship and love  
might be offered more freely if,  
in her mind, the other conceived of the slavery  
of adoration. Without the will to speak,  
a look of longing intimates, but dares not tell.

Could but one of them approach  
the other in the indifferent present.

How dare we make goddesses of ourselves.

There is no approaching a goddess.

xii. two women

in circles the women come and go  
talking. Not to each other, though.



## Burning the winter goat

Rise, there is a plowland to clear. Raise  
and raise a heap of stone bramble and stunted oak  
by island seas and this synclinal hollow. Thoroughly  
gore these good roots and thaw the clouds of February.

A goat froze last night fur to frost - - horns too  
heavy to gnash another fencepost. Yesterday a goose,  
of Canadian wildness, was shot - - suicidal supper  
of buckshot and buckwheat seeds.

Carcasses to drag through mornings of mud. Raise them  
on singing shovels. You have snared the grudging  
wind and your fire bite the sky! Hurl these animals, called  
the plowman, onto your slash and burn pyre. Do not tarry!

Quickly a rain's begun. It is really raining - - you  
can see it. Look, a stone rose where the thicket was  
a stone that was not there before, big enough for three men  
to sit on steaming in the downpour.

Nathaniel Cohen

## Moon-bathing

We shuffle among trees whose leaves,  
multi-colored by day, are now dark gatherings  
that whisper about the season past.  
We do not pass quietly. Each step  
announces us with breaking tree-fingers,  
as tangible to our ears as to our feet.

The path opens, and we stand  
in a composition of shades  
between white moon, black water.

One by one we open ourselves  
to autumn air, then to water  
already almost too cold.  
The sting recedes, water  
becomes satin gliding over me  
as I move voice-wards.  
We disappear, reemerge, float  
like bubbles in an inkwell  
till shore draws us in.

Standing, whitewashed and slowly drying,  
our clothes waiting in small rumpled heaps,  
we ignore what our all-pupil eyes report,  
pretending the darkness shrouds more  
than the pale light reveals.

Bart Hoskins

## Crossing Deserts

I've always wanted to write  
about lizards. I write  
lizards lizards lizards  
in the margins of a million pages  
that have nothing to do  
with lizards. Snakes too.

You once expressed  
an interest  
in the deserts. You know  
their time will come, as I do.  
And you know neither deserts nor those that live  
there argue with silence.

Most creatures know silence  
better than we do.  
Forgive the tapping of my typewriter.  
I promise  
to try  
to let the silence be.

## The Barn

As though blind, you led me  
through cathedrals in Europe  
noting architecture, history, God.

We hardly noticed sun  
between stone skies, the leaves'  
mosaic after eons  
of stained colors. We heard

echoes of our silence in the cold  
caverns arching always above  
our heads, closing in.

In the country once we stopped  
at an ageless barn, alone  
in acres of tanned stubble.  
We stood

back to back in hay and  
stared at stripes of light  
between lumber.



## Washing Rock

A million years ago this cliff rose  
to meet her. Now she works daily  
at its brow, on her knees, in rhythm  
with the tide washing below,  
arms arching again and again  
in embrace.

Sponges are children of the sea,  
suds that seep from them like  
foam squeezed to mane waves.  
And her eyes are the deep, the blue  
and green drops of whatever  
water's made us.

For years she's loved the rock  
with her helpless hands, stroked it  
like a child, knowing no reason  
beyond or behind love, coaxing shine  
from dry white land-bones  
between soil and sand.

The story goes that long ago  
a girl fell from these silent stones  
to others, laid herself out to rock  
and let salt crystals grow in her.

But it is this woman washing rock,  
knowing nothing of the child,  
I saw scrubbing in the sun,  
loving rock for rock for rock.

## Still Crossing Deserts

These deserts offer no mirage.  
The air is stacked like fired bricks.

Sand deceives, inconstant terrain.  
Landscape wrinkles, whorls like the fingerprints of all time,  
spools spinning a pattern  
one can only understand  
from the tops of mountains  
that don't rise from desert.

This is all fossil, all bone.  
My eyesight is yellow and brittle.

Sand runs through my fisted anger, my palmed love.  
It slips from any touch,  
not even as kind  
as water, that lends my hand  
sparkle and the finest layer of itself.  
Sand holds its own.

What fury, what love  
ground all this stone soft?

We've already discovered the distance  
from desert to sea.  
I'm walking for water,  
bones splintered with thirst.  
If I reach it, I will build  
a castle of sand for you.

JoAnn Elizabeth Coppola



"Woman"

Susan Levin

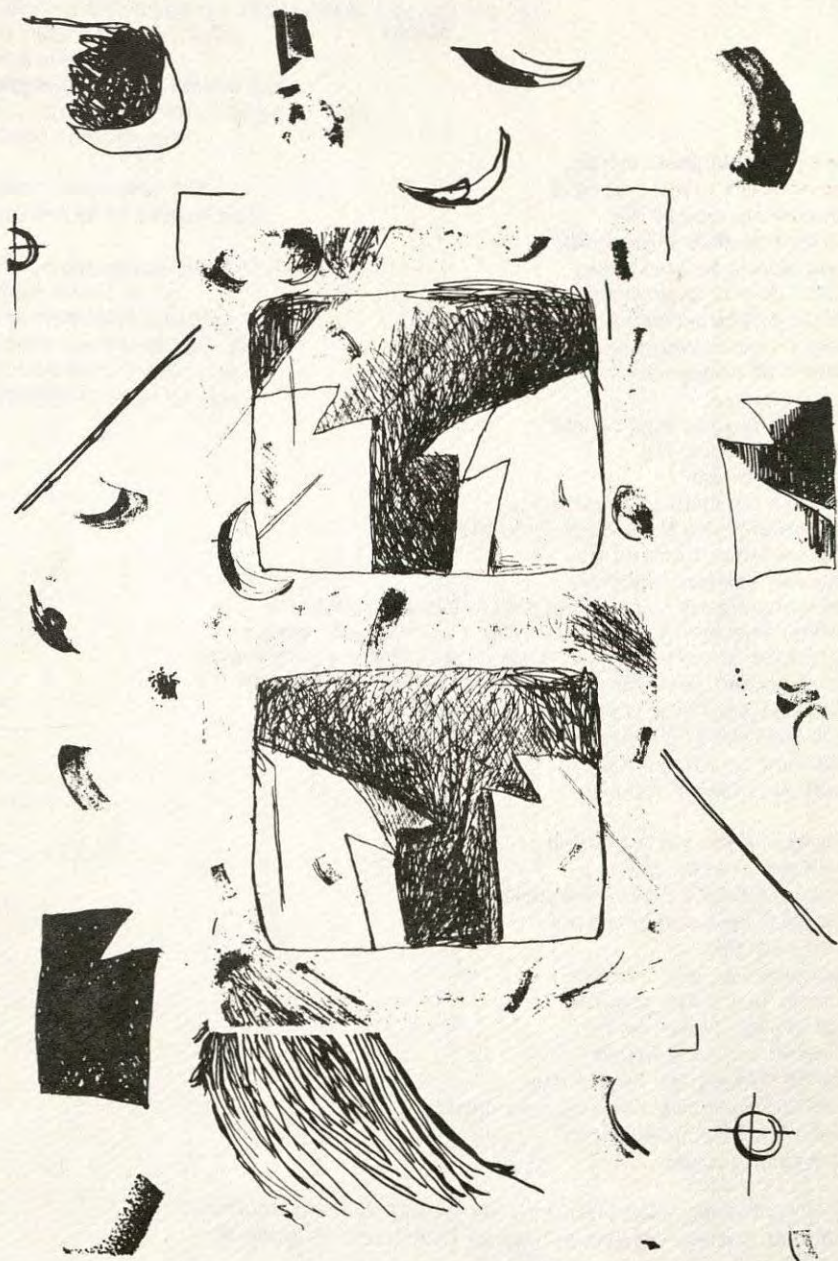


We have told ghost stories,  
 spent hours in philosophical  
 discussion, related the  
 petty tragedies of our lives,  
 and often you have asked  
*What do you want from me?*  
*What do you see in me?*  
 and I have answered in kind,  
 words of eloquence and erudition.

Even in love we try to speak,  
 but there words fail,  
 crumble to ash  
 across your chest and scatter  
 downward with the sweep of my black hair.  
 No craftsman can capture  
 the cadence and ambiguity  
 of that language (*We are like people living in a country  
 whose language they know so little that, with all manner  
 of beautiful and profound things to say, they are condemned  
 to the banalities of the conversation manual. Their brain  
 is seething with ideas and they can only tell you that  
 the umbrella of the gardener's aunt is in the house . . .*)  
 We must be content here  
 with breathless discourse.

Again at dawn we rise verbal  
 to watch the sun crawl  
 from the frozen river - - we speak of  
 its silent, unaided ascension  
 as if only this - -  
 our presence, our narration - -  
 makes such things possible.  
 On the way home, we run  
 through the gulls settled  
 on the damp grass; they skitter  
 and bump into a squawking grey cloud  
 and we look at one another  
 and cannot speak.

(Note: The italicized section in the second stanza is quoted  
 from W. Somerset Maugham's novel *The Moon and Sixpence*)



"one good turn begets another"

Shana Rae Kaplow



The light hit the railing the same old way. The familiar slant of the parallel shadows went, as usual, unnoticed. Had he really thought for a moment, he would have stopped to pay tribute to them - this, his last (and sad he thought in a remote way. In a way which took him back to his preconceptions of sweet Mediterranean gusts. When she was more golden to him) day in Spain. No more dusks with wine, sitting on the balcony watching dried leaves roll-skit and hop curbs. Or the peculiar orange of the Spanish clouds, orotund, delivering faces of grammar school teachers. He touched the railing where she had. The stupid metal would easily outlive his hurt. It would always be there, that army gray rail, bracing the Clumsy from unseemly splats. Where she touched it. How many last touches are there in history? Or the funny position of hers, on the very cane of that chair, that would never again formulate itself, the legs long since uncoiled, the laughter had pattered gone across the pink fake marble forever. Even the hinge (finding his Pub-stolen mug in the cabinet) would rest uncrepitating in its own metallic good-bye. "Good-bye, hinge," he said, thinking of dumber things yet: would anyone ever find the mastodon snot he'd smeared and tedded under the sink. If they ever did it would be ingloriously dehydrated, just a flake.

If night, the last look from the balcony would have been better. Night covered the petty dust of Tarragona, it enriched the taffy folds of shadow in the lit swimming pool (tucked in the corner of the L-shape made by the Apartamentos Astoria). A glistening blue jewel whose only real purpose was to slosh to whims of besotted oafs and to play with light. Bend it, wrinkle it, but always give it back. Once a briefcase abruptly severed open with many skidding documents on the pooldeck. Some of the more noble sheets took wing over the pool and stopped conveniently against the chainlink. The others, well, they rolled, thought about it, and were apterous too, but were somehow lacking in their makeup and so soggly died, slowly spinning in the filtration current.

He tried not to think about shutting his door for, you got it, the last time. But he did, just as he had no rights to his own mind. It never listened to him at least. The elevator sneered, there, poignant blue inside with the smudged vanity mirror. He entered, pushed, and watched the dark brown door sink up, staring remorsefully from the spare pane of the elevator door.

Mr. Quiver Lip (if you knew him you'd call him this too), owner of the building and permanent lobby fixture, took the key giggling. His lip quivered extra hard to say so long. "Later on, vibration face."

And was gone.

He had one pair of perfectly fitting Levi's. Two spare Fruit-of-the-Looms. Seven hundred American dollars worth of pesetas. A portable cassette player (headphoneless). And no ticket.

The second class cars were bumpered with sweaty Spanish magpies. The train had been stuck in the station just long enough for gaunt men to come sniffing and flouting (each in their own mousey way) pushing clogged August travel along. An old Senora with a walking brace shuffled to the pay toilet. Abdul (or so his travelling name was to be) had waited and been cut in front of long enough. He twisted his shoulders in between his pushy competitors. Face looming before the ticket booth. And wrapped his fingers around the bars. The cool surface soothed his slimy wrist.

"Un billete para Algeciras."

"No hay. Completo." The wizened man said, sorting.

"Completo?"

"Si."

From the venetian-blind gloom of the ticket office, a high-waisted man approached blurting. He snapped at the pole of a person, then glowered at Abdul. "Completo! Entiende?"

"Mellow-out fatso."

There it was. The clunky olive snake. The thronging tube. In school-bus yellow ALGECIRAS emblazoned a hooked-on placard. From there, a ten buck ferry ride to Tangier. Abdul looked at *that* overbusy conductor, at *this* one, and then walked in a first class air up the gutta-percha steps. Travelled eyes looked at him. A girl of his age, perhaps, but older by the weakness of her smile. She held a green carpet valise between her knees. What little comfort the edgy cover of the trash can gave her, she took.

Standing, then, in the space between cars, Abdul grabbed the nearest metal surface as the train gave a bolt. Jolt. The slug eased over rusty rails. Arms of all cotton colors swayed out of the windows. As the train pinched south, TARRAGONA, the battered wooden sign, slipped by.

Abdul was prepared to stand to Morocco.

As each station screeched into view, then chugged out, Abdul made a sedulous mental note, so that when the tobacco-blackened teeth demanded where he had gotten on, he could say the most recent stop. In Europe, one sleazed.

*Transparent Things*, a book brought because of its thinness, was wedged readably between the fallow flashing window and Abdul's chest. The pages turned, the stations passed. It grew dark. The gritty mud of the train's floor didn't matter anymore.

When Abdul opened his eyes, the skinny legs of the girl had been replaced by the stout ankles of an American, he thought. Telephone poles blinked past. Their cables lowered and rose. Indigo mountains. Cracked fields. Two soaring hawks, Abdul considered, could see into Moroccan skies.

"Speak English," Abdul said, noting the Fowles volume being read by the manifest American. Love handles. Top siders. A certain attitude about sitting on a trash can.

"Yes, I think so." The American said.

"Do you know when we get to Algeciras?"

"Next stop."

"American?"



"No."

The further one deviated from the common tourist path, the more he mantled himself with indigenous garb, the less likely Americans were to admit they were American. Abdul would have rather been stabbed than admit he was American. He felt it gave him a conceptual disadvantage to be one.

"You?" The California accent with tortoise-shell glasses said.

"Me what?"

"American?"

"No."

They looked at each other. Abdul smiled first. Like two beaten politicians they revered each other's mnemonic scars.

The conductor mumbled as he threaded through the people-jammed passageway. With poise, with palpitations, Abdul slipped into the bathroom. He feigned a bowel movement. He picked his nose. He studied the sprouting bed of zits on his upper lip. The biggest, greenest-headed, was spurt - the other sycophants were spared. He stepped out of the bathroom. Sat back in the grit.

The convex station roof was mistily above the train. A free ride, if uncomfortable, and Tangier - he was told - was right out there. Ensconced in the fog over the sea.

After changing two hundred dollars worth of pesetas into dirhams, Abdul sat in a plastic lobby seat. He wrote a flatulent postcard to his friend. Haggled with a stooped merchant over the price of a Coke. Then coolly asserted himself in line.

The sea was creamy aqua. Gulls balanced themselves above the poop, slicing off in turns to flick wing tips on the glimmering surface of the water - and then lifted back into position. Abdul walked into the cabin. A blackjack table was happy with players. A curious line of people waited in the aft, fanning with outsized passports. At the head of the line was a rodent-faced officiator. Abdul disregarded any reason for standing in this boring line, even if his deeper acumen told him it was an inevitable hassle.

People and rucksacks were sloppily drooping throughout the ship. Babies cried. Berbers babbled. Turbans nodded. Waiters continually tried to cleave through the rout, saying, "An cha, ah cha."

The universe quaked, or so thought two ants tussling on the sticky checkered table Abdul was sitting at. The ship collided a second time. Cables and jibes were thrown between the orlop and pier.

The sacred earth of Morocco. African dogs snapped at the air. The horizon was different. From behind the turdy plexiglass even, it was as wily as Abdul had expected.

People can quickly be subsumed in either of two categories. The people who like to squirm together to exit a plane, a boat, as quickly as they can,

and the people who can wait until the fire-panicky organism has departed. Abdul listened to "Cracker Jack Palace" on his radio. A few other people in his category lifted languid behinds out of their chairs. The rodent-face officiator that had headed the line stood with splayed feet snapping looks at passports. The bald eagle made from hole-punches on Abdul's passport irritated this man. He frowned, searching through the askew stamps from northern countries. He groaned. "Na." Abdul reached for his passport. "Na." There was something infinitely wrong. The passport was jabbed at him. "Na. Na. Na." The man threw his arms up cursing in Arabic. He shoved Abdul in the stomach.

"Huh?"

The acne scarred face stared with hate. Black pupilless eyes sternly said no. Absolutely not. Abdul tried to dodge this potent barrier and walk off the ship. His shoulder was clenched. "What the hell's going on?"

Standing in uniform a man motioned seductively. He patted his fist against his palm. "No estamp," he said. "You have no estamp."

"No stamp?" Abdul watched a bernussed businessman flash his stamp, stumble down the ramp, and then wobble into the mob.

So, Abdul thought, I'll get a stamp. "Excuse me?" The swart man batted his eyes to listen. "Where do I get a stamp?"

"No. Before."

"I didn't get one before. How do I get one now?"

"No."

A disbelieving snicker came from Abdul. He nodded slowly, took a breath, and sprinted all of three steps before being snagged by Arabic hands. They tugged him back. The shabby ocean vessel had become a prison.

"Great."

The guards stiffened into an adamantine formation.

For a bitter twenty minutes Abdul pleaded. It was the biggest piece of fate he had ever felt. Africa was indifferent to his luck. People boarded to go back to Spain.

The glittering of the city grew smaller out of his turdy window. The lights became a hump. Abdul turned, not wanting to see Tangier completely snuffed-out by the darkling offing. Although he knew he'd see Morocco, knew that in the middle of something very serious in the future he'd laugh about his frustrated tears, he could not remember ever being more angry.

Humility found a side deck. There was an occasional march through, but no one stayed long because it was too cold.. It wasn't a deck held completely vulnerable to the winds, but the exterior wall was more screen than wood.

Mick Jagger sang passionately to Abdul. A paper plate had glumpy mustard streaks on it. But beneath the yellow smeared plate, stuck cozenly and cleanly, was an untouched one. Abdul frisbeed the mustardy plate over



the tables. It crashed into the screen Abdul began to draw the women he'd lived with all summer on the clean plate. He couldn't draw - -, maybe he was good at creating eyes in a naive way, but when concerned with striking up a likeness, ha, no way. There was her hair, but hair was easy. Before attempting to sketch her eyes he looked out to the water. The lights from the ship illuminated wave edges for a long way out. As the waves changed, as waves do, they, especially those on the periphery of the reflection, lost their glitter and commingled with the sooty whole. When one cried it looked like fire.

Before now he was too hot, too hurried, to think about her. All the jabs and smells - - the positive progression towards his heady goal - - had carried him as if by careless fingers to his present plastic chair to Spain. He was aware only now that half of himself was snailing her way to Paris. She wasn't going to kiss his eyelids anymore. He thought of gallic loins being coddled by her lips. It became impossible to draw. Maybe it was an end to the lucky half of his life. Maybe being made a captive on a ferryboat was something indicative of his ill-starred time left to go.

Beneath the faceless hair he wrote:

*She cried into my love.*

His cheek flattened on the table. His lips parted, releasing a lucent trickle of slaver upon the Arabic graffiti. It was Spain again. A guard nudged Abdul. Then escorted him through cloggy customs, saying "Abi, mas Abi." In a corner of the ferry station he found a bench with uncomfortable ruts. It finished his sleep. A matutinal shaft of light woke him. He bought another ticket after learning the procedure for getting his passport stamped. The ride back to Tangier was spent eviscerating pistachio nuts from their shells. Morocco. Beneath his strawy sheet Nari's mind was cluttered. He would drift off, the pouting hunger of his brothers would go away. But then lank fingers would release their rootless grip and Nari would fall. And even in this cartwheeling plunge he would think of his mother's pointless bread selling. The sick eyes of his youngest brother.

He awoke, controlling the spinning room.

Nari was seventeen years old. He knew, besides two tongues of Arabic, French, Spanish, and English, the dog-eat ropes of Tangier. Willy-nilly, the wide range of his imagination's flow that became but a trickle of purpose: to provide.

A year ago times were better. Americans and the tittering French came in herds, their fat wallets bought the sweet chocolate and jefe faster than the farmers could supply it.

Nari had not bamboozled a tourist in weeks. The fallow caves in his brother's face could not understand why foreigners swung wide of the rat-scrampering city. Or else didn't go to Morocco at all.

In a hole, a square hole in the cement floor, were five kilos of precocious gold marijuana. It was Nari's. Like an alchemist beset by his gilded touch on things, he swam in his treasure wanting food.

Every time he feathered off the cliff of sleep, he became sodden with bad



thoughts, plummeted, and awoke with the room gliding and jerking. The sun came up pale orange over the adobe lines of the city.

An insomnia sunrise.

\*

How many bugs are there in Africa? No. Forget about the spiders and hulking creepers. How many 'no see'ems' are there? Abdul, our American lay on his face with underwear on his head. He had tubesocks on his hands and arms. But no matter how hard he tried, there were always innumerable holes in his makeshift screen. The itchy-gnashing pests found ways to enter. God was interrogated several times as to why he created such monsters. If the blood-sucking storm was not enough, it was decidedly cold sleeping on the bench.

His seven hundred dollars had been reduced to two hundred. And since he needed nearly that to get to London where his plane back to America left from, sleeping amid the dung heaps was his only alternative.

He hugged his ears with his socked palms. When he got a chance he was going to devise an atom bomb that killed only, but all, insects. It was going to make him famous.

Thinking about his filched five hundred dollars, nuzzling, nuzzling, against the chill and bugs, Abdul contemplated the satin-waves of a waterbed with his girlfriend open armed in it. Oh, he meant, his old girlfriend.

It was simple how he lost the money. He would have lost all of it had he not had the gumption to stuff his trainfare into his secret flap. After getting off the boat, Abdul had walked to a campgrounds. The front gate was guarded by a pair of green-slacked duffers who didn't even stop picking at their anuses when Abdul walked in without paying. Everything was cheese, until, from nowhere, a paper-picking vassal of the camp was wrestling with Abdul's elbow.

"Okay. I'm coming for christsake."

Abdul thought the vole on the boat was ugly, but the elephantine Hitler, the apparent owner of the campgrounds, poking him with Arabic invectives, was perhaps the ugliest man in the world. If they had a contest, Abdul nodded to himself, he'd bet his last seven hundred dollars on this man. Mr. Hideous of the century.

In feeble Spanish - - through an interpreter - - Abdul explained that he earnestly believed campers who had no car could camp for free. And now, that he knew this wasn't so, he would gladly pay.

The man laughed. He grumbled a mixture of French and Arabic. Large green ovals under his arms. Tartareous breath. A violent antipathy for Abdul. His goitrous neck rippled as he began to yell. By magic, Abdul's wallet was within his grasp. He took all the visible money. Chortled. And then clenched Abdul's arm out the gates.

"You are a fat foolish man. You know that? A real creep." Abdul smiled and kept his tone happy. He was sure that words his escort was saying were not complimentary either. "Hey, tell me, is your mother as ugly as you are? When was the last time you showered?"



Abdul sat up. Pulled the underwear off his head. Where he was had not been clear the night before. After being swindled by the campgrounds official he had found the beach easy enough, but was told by gloomy faced berets to move on. "You no sleep here," they said. And so he went, without that comfortable margin of money he had known only a short eternity before. He found a remote lane. It was a human-span wide at most. And was walled with towering rushes. There was a space, like the seedy part in some unfathomable giant's hair, that timid Abdul crawled into. Besides cans and small raggy beasts, there was sludge darkness and his own immured fear threading through. A meadow, if dungy and many with crawlers, opened up. The stars. Abdul laid back to sleep. Later the bugs, the Fruit-of-the-Loom shields, and the cold.

Sleep was only realized when he was woken by the mad charges of yellow dogs. Their lonely cries would open Abdul's eyes, who peered at the sound through a swiveled-over leghole. Their lonely cries became irate. Abdul sat up to fend. But each time, the beagle chimeras veered left and right, afraid of the underwear bum. He's slip off, anon to be re-startled. The wild snapping came out of the pitch at him - peeling off missing like the dangerous flirting of fighter planes.

The orange morning sky discerned the tumbledown shack that leant against the opposite wall of rushes. It didn't really lean against them, but Abdul was affected by his night and so was sure of it. He removed his elastic sheaths. And walked to the beach.

A gentle hand of warm air lifted the insects from their voluptuous prey. Abdul hadn't scratched for an hour. The beach made a huge sweep to the right, the left sands had been taken over by the city, stick by crude brick. Abdul squinted watching the ruffles in the water run along the surface like a herd of feathery creatures skittering together. Nari stood behind. He walked to one side to scrutinize Abdul's profile. Usually Nari could smell a nationality. After three sniffs he could pin someone down to a capital city. Two psychic categories flashed as Nari tapped his hook nose. Either this guy was from New York or from Beirut. Nari's yellow pants billowed in the wind. He walked heavily, as is easiest on powdery beaches. With one hand he held the corner of his towel. Marilyn Monroe's face rippled and snapped. Nari deftly smoothed his terry-cloth flat.

Abdul raised an American eyebrow. The beach was small universe, could not this prunella-haired man find a spot to himself? Then, it would be nice to exact a Moroccan doobie from him.

"Hola, shalom." Nari smiled with his cozenly white teeth.

"Hi ya."

"English?" Nari had thought better of his prior guesses. This man had most likely seen the dross of Madrid.

"Yup."

"No. You are *not* English-speaking."

"Yes. Really, I am." Abdul flexed his flawless American accent.

"American?"

"Yes."

"New York?"

"Yup."

"I knew it." Nari was concerned with the burrs in Abdul's hair. His clothes had the rigid-slime quality that simply said, sorry, not many bucks here. But he would see. "You came here this morning?"

"Yeah, well, kinda last night." A young boy struggled with his metal strap case, selling. "Are you Moroccan?"

"I am Arabic."

"Wow. I mean you really speak English well."

"English is the easy language."

"Really?"

"I know English like the front of my hand."

"You mean back."

"No. I mean front. I stroke things with the front of my hand. I touch."

"I see."

"Hey, tell me, friend. You would like to come smoke with me?" Nari's round black eyes were more than sincere, there was something inexorably intelligent in his smooth brown fingers gestering at the rakish city behind them.

"Well look, I'm totally broke. I mean last night I even slept outside. So don't try to sell me anything. I'd love to get high though."

"You speak from your *corozon*, my friend, you are honest." Nari stretched his torso by tugging at his wrist over his head.

"Let me just take a dip for a sec, then I'll be ready."

"Sure, my friend, swim." He brandished his arms at the immense glitter. "You are here from New York."

How fast the sea had dried up. There was a space of ten minutes when Abdul's skin was dry, but then a quick-brewing sweat exuded. The shorter, Arabic man, spoke in naive terms about his mother's bakery, both of them feeling the grade of the endless path up. Burdensome carts sinuously wheeled down. Dogs strayed. Explosions of argument went off in the jambs of roofless markets. Sad little girls stared. An obnoxious taxi honked, parting the ghostly pace against the white sides of the buildings.

"Steep hill." Abdul wished he was still dolphin-frisking in the waves. The clean clench. Flashes of light. Smoothly soaring along the bottom.

Nari led gesticulating. His handsome smile was like a cartoonist's hyperbole:



too broad. They entered a beaded doorway. The bead's shadows wimpled slightly. Abdul, feeling pretty stupid for having said his name was "Abdul," sat uneasy in the musty dimness of the den. Nari offered tea.

"Um (God, I hate tea. Why do these people all drink tea?) sure. I'll have a small glass."

"We heat it as our great great great grandfathers did. Exactly."

"Oh."

"Yes. The stone there. See it?"

"Um hmm."

"Well. It is our source of energy. We heat it on hot coals then place it in the oven. It boils tea all day."

Abdul (Let's face it, his real name was something American-common. Let's say Christopher. No, Rubin.) was taken by Nari's prowess with his English tongue: phrases, words, that an average Arabic boy shouldn't be able to play with. The complexity of the Arabic language (the meaningless scrawls) - a mirror of English from Nari's side, surely, tingled as his lips touched the long thin pipe poked smoothly towards him. "I'm not too coherent."

"Have more. More." A violent hospitality.

"I have to get outside. I have to go to the toilet."

"Yes. Come." Nari cradled his elbow into the hot brightness. Bony women squatted. Their brown faces slowly pivoted on Rubin. Looked from some well of tiredness. Lazy flies crawled aimlessly on the leg of the child.

The toilet was a hole. Nothing more. The ramshackle door had gaps through which the oldest frumps in the village could see his swinging things. Rubin huffed and slapped himself a bit. He was gravely disappointed that there was not a sink. He questioned the practice of smoking one's brains out. Was it necessary? In a moment.

Rubin arched his back. Sore in two places from rocks. He prepared to squint. He wondered would it be so terrible to ditch Nari. Turn on one knee, make a few strides to that slit of an alley there, and think of wetter things. Another dip in the blue.

Two steps, maybe three, and a clench from Nari was timidly forcing Rubin back up the hill, back to the golden-gray gloom, back to smoking his way into Rubin's wallet. "Smoke, my friend, it is very good."

While never a swashbuckler, sometimes Rubin liked to allude to his physique (very adequate when a foe was smaller). But Nari was ardent, stocky and sure, and had manacles in his eyes. He glozed Rubin back in. It wasn't that there was anywhere to go, but soon, it began to dawn on him, money, his depleted wad, would be wriggling naked - - vulnerable to the crafty palms of Nari. He leant back on the short-legged bench, feeling the bulge in his right pocket. The hub to all of Nari's hospitality, Rubin thought, it figures.



An elderly man smiled toothlessly into the den. Sat across from Rubin and Nari. They matched eyes and said various hellos. The rucky man smoked Nari's pipe like an old pro. Been smoking since he was six. The seven year old (Rubin's brother was seven) sitting in the corner, made shy by such an exotic customer, pushed a piece of straw with one brown toe. He watched the old man draw in on his cheeks. Tight smoke rings widened and lost form in the fummy chaos. The boy, in seventy years, could (and would, Rubin lamented) sit in the self-same spot and blow equally monotonous rings. Their lives were the two opposite ends to the same enigma.

"Here. Smoke more." Nari poked. There was something wily and mean.

"I'm fine." Rubin cleared his throat. "Look. I'm gonna take off now. All right?"

"My friend. My friend." Nari shook his head laughing, looking between his knees. "You must buy my goods my friend. I have shown you a good time."

"I'm sorry. I told you before, I have no money to spend. None."

"I saw your wallet. Do not lie."

Nari's ubiquitous smile had been punctured. This made Rubin smile. Like the queer way he laughed in sad parts of movies. He looked at the orange glowing brick. The lean tea maker fiddled quietly on his counter. The wind sucked in the beads, then coughed them out. Rubin felt the impalpable bulk backing each of their arguments. Money. The world would be Eden peaceful if it were never invented. But Rubin, just an ephemeral traveler with the velvety wealth of America waiting, a Pan American ticket away, could not simply pour out his wrinkled bills to anyone. He tried to find the words to best explain that he simply had only enough to go to London. But then he thought, Nari never went to London, why should he?

Nari inveigled his pipe. Rubin became dependent on his guardian angel. She would come through. Guardian angels are either scattered in their feminine guidance, or solid. Rubin's guardian angel was a still blue force, something tangible. As solid as the cracky cement slabs set at imperfect angles giving the den an insane edge -- a distorted sense of the universe.

Rubin centered his thought on the glowing brick. She had spoken of the villains loose here. The amoral slobs clutching at scraps like spidercrabs. "Come with me to Paris. Come on. Morocco's full of slimy creeps. Come on, Rubin." Things couldn't be sutured that easily. Come with me, sure, be my lover, my best friend. Nothing has changed. He thought of her most perfect mouth. Her loving coax. Yet monuments of perfidy now stood blocking his faith in her. They were nothing, the others, he could say. Mere playthings. But she could not. She was guilty. Her guilt had bred in his system all summer, a mossy vague beginning, that with time and pensive reflections had become rocky jointed and gnawing. Something to drown and forget. But she hugged him the same. She loved him the same. Her eyes still looked too beautiful to possess. He thought of the back of his knee holding the front of hers. A troop of bronze Frenchmen lifted her with tender fingertips and alighted her on swaying flanks. She laughed into their eyes.

"Here. Abdul. More."



"Look. I'm broke. I'm wasted. Now just let me leave."

"Abdul."

"My real name is Rubin, okay. 319 Stratford Road. Brooklyn."

"My friend. Why do you lie to me? Am I a crook? I have turned you on. You must repay me."

"I'm busted. You hear. I need my stinking money. I have no spare money."

"No. You must give. You see, I am very poor. My brothers starve."

"Oh give me a break."

"Rubin. Look at my eyes."

They were black reflectors. The squat stools. The zombie rocking of the old man. And the sickly green color of the walls all curved to fit precisely in. As eyes, they were careworn. Young like an old man's eyes are young, but troubled indefinitely by something. Squinting in all his humble truth, Nari's eyes were honest.

There were things magic to a third world boy. A house with air conditioning. A radar range. A smooth-blowing cruise in a convertible. He opened his wallet. "I can't man. I need to go to London."

"You can, my friend." Nari smiled with confidence.

Rubin feared very little. Once, for the purely idiotic hell of it, he traversed Central Park at two in the morning. Just to feel danger, discover the dimension of fright. Not a knife or a gun, nothing but the summer innocence of the trees growing affected his senses. He haunted subways uncaring. He would go whenever, alone. No one bothered him. He was immune to crime.

The dimness of the den was violated momentarily. A muscular stripling, muddy brown, sat down next to the old man. He reached for the pipe with a kind palm. Nari spoke with him in quick-flashing Arabic phrases. Laughed. Then, out of primordial courtesy, the boy left.

How Nari got Rubin's cash is not clear. It wasn't with words, nor with silent soliciting. It was the wooshing throbbing perchance, or maybe pure foolishness. Some things mattered more to others than to himself. Two hundred dollars to Rubin, tsch, a minute paroxysm in his stomach at most. But to Nari (at least Rubin thought scrutinizing the deep gray arc beneath his eye) it was like magic to a believer. Something dipped in heaven juice to savor slowly.

"Here." Rubin kept ten dollars to get to Spain.

Nari bowed. Thumbed the bills. Not as much as it could have been, but he could already relish his mother's smile. "And now? How will you get back?"

"I'll get by. I'll sleaze here. Slip through there. Who knows."

Nari smiled, thinking that Rubin had layers of cash. Like all Americans. Rubin was just acting. Not quite convincingly.

They shook hands. Knobby black fingers firmed inside fleshy sorrel ones. Rubin sighed, a summer's toil contained within a plastic bag. Golden powder to enter space. Nari was frugal in meting out his produce, but it was plentiful to Rubin. "Thanks," he dipped his nose into the bag. The smell made him grin, "ah."

A small black dot slid minutely through the sea's glitter. From the look of the fat women beside him, Rubin knew it was the ferry. Gulls preened, huddled together along the pier. Terns soughed for minnows. The wind made spasmodic imprints upon the offing. A gust's course could be traced by the running disturbances roughing the surface.

If he had learned to depend on luck it wasn't out of fruitless hopes. Rubin always got what he wanted. He would get home on nothing. There was always hitchiking and bathroom caches on trains. Or gainly rich women with Porches who asked only small sensual prices.

And his girlfirend loved him. She balanced him through all his awkward mistakes. If he even hinted at stumbling from his tightrope of luck his guardian angel would spread her silky being to cushion.

He couldn't lose. That wasn't in the plan.

The dot had grown into a crusty vessel with busy black heads teaming. Gulls escorted it into port. They laughed and called men bad names. A fishless craft was a personal wrong done to them.

All the fat tourists hurried aboard. Jeans and backpacks. Robes and silkily accoutered women padded evenly up the gangway. Rubin watched a young girl selling bread. Her left front tooth was missing. He wanted to hug her. It was something he needed to do. But instead he patted the top of her head. She smiled, somehow knowing a secret of his.

He thinks of this smile, her rosy-coffee cheeks, whenever he remembers Morocco. Something pure there, something that makes him pop laughs at affluent cocktail parties given by his father. Or over a sparkling glass with his girlfriend.

Nari's face was washed, in features, from his memory. Spreading the leather walls of his wallet made him "sisssss" softly. Tangier became formed out of the rich aqua sea. Tonight, Rubin picked the flakey remains of his zit, Nari and his family will make a toast to me.

A gull cut sharp to follow the ship. Its yellow eye winked.





