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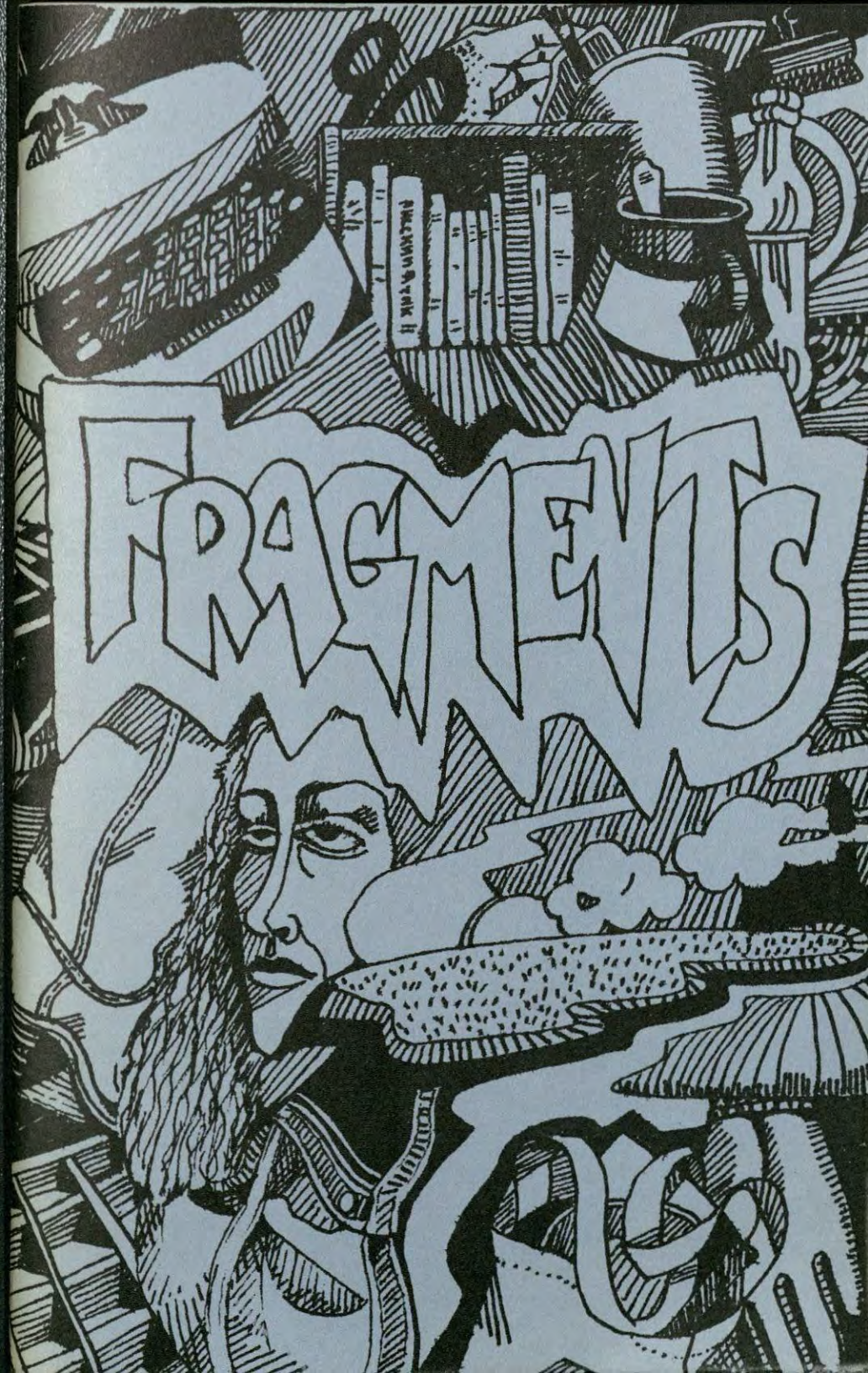
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Boogie Nights - [By Jonathan Ramin]	1
Still Life - [By Aron Abrams]	5
The Artful Dunkers - [By Greg Benoit]	10
Merely a Player - [Michael Sittenfeld]	16
Everything Washes Up Here - [By Michael Sladden]	20
Arrows - [By Doretta Wildes]	23
The Tide - [By Lois Mendez]	24
The Yo-Yo - [By Lois Mendez]	24
Self Portrait - [By James Francese]	25
A Taste of Well Water - [By John Ayers]	26
Vienna in 1910 - [By Evan Stone]	26
Rasputista - [By Evan Stone]	27
Before You Regret It - [By Patricia Doddona]	29
Garden Crown - [By John Ayers]	31
The Clinic Volunteer - [By Doretta Wildes] ..	32
Shoreline Recycling - [By Graham Gavert]	33
Interplay - [By Peter O'Connor]	33
Untitled - [By James Francese]	34
Your Smiling Eyes - [By Peter O'Connor]	34
Rescued - [By Patricia Daddona]	35
Loss - [By Patricia Daddona]	37
Ballade: The Woodpile - [By Doretta Wildes]	38
Red and Green Tropic - [By Doretta Wildes]	40

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"BOOGIE NIGHTS"

Roxbury has always intrigued me. The sight of those ravaged tenements has remained in my memory since my first tour through the ghetto, in 1970. I'll never forget that bloated dog on Ruggles Street, left to decompose in the March drizzle. Morbid curiosity and guilt compel me to return.

"Andy, pick up that shit and get out of here." LeRoy, the fry cook returns me to reality. His balding hair and beard remind me of Luis Tiant. LeRoy and I have a joking relationship. That is, I am the butt of his jokes. This does not bother me, since socially and economically society considers me superior to him. I can afford to receive his jibes, without any loss to my self-esteem. Often I wonder why I live in Belmont, while LeRoy must spend his life in Roxbury. My social conscience informs me that this is inequitable. If I could experience a night with him in Roxbury, then maybe I would feel less guilty, and certainly more knowledgeable about the situation.

Remembering that LeRoy once invited me to his apartment for an "orgy", I inquire whether the offer still stands. "There's something wrong with you, man," he remarks. 'Ah could understand if you wanted to spend a night with Angie or Jane, but why LeRoy?" "There's something wrong with you alright!" After mulling it over, he reconsiders the idea. "O.K., but remember I'm an old man, I'm just going to take a bath and go to bed."

The sign on the State Street Bank proclaims "10:04-87", as I hop into LeRoy's 1971 Pinto. Despite the age, the car is well maintained. Silence prevails as the Pinto drives down Massachusetts Avenue, past Symphony Hall. "Bonehead country" that's how Greg referred to Roxbury. To outsiders it symbolized a fearsome section of urban decay. Tonight I will discover whether this stereotype is true.

At night, Roxbury does not appear as frightening as most people portray it. The darkness has blanketed over her ugliest scars. In fact, I could mistake this portion of Mass. Avenue for Beacon Street, if it were not for a sign warning, "Posted - the sale of Heroin is prohibited on the premises." The Pinto turns right at the Boston City Hospital, and enters into an industrial strip, occupied by the Colonial and Nepco provision companies.

I used to pity Roxbury's residents, all the congestion and crime they endured. Now I am a fellow resident, a soul brother, for tonight at least.

LeRoy stops in front of Jake's Tavern, and tells me that his apartment is located two flights above.

A wave of anxiety overspreads my body. I am in a district which few whites venture into, even during the daytime. The glares from Jake's patrons indicate that I am not welcome, even as LeRoy's guest. My thoughts return to that April night, when Joe O'Rourke was stoned to death in this neighborhood. Of course that was two years ago, but

"These dudes are so wasted they can't tell whether you're a chick or a guy, let alone your color." LeRoy comments, attempting to alleviate my tension. "Welcome to the Hotel Happiness" he adds, as we pass through the doorway. Once inside, I inspect the apartment, which consists of a livingroom and a kitchen. "Sit down Andy, and take a mess off your feet. Care for a Budwiser?" "I'm alright," I snap, hoping that my hostile tone will ward off any villains who might be lurking in the apartment. Then I curse myself for acting rudely, my purpose was to form new friendships, not alienate old ones. The phone interrupts our conversation. Donald, the chef, has invited us to a party at his house. Noting the time, 11:00, I claim to be exhausted. In actuality, I am afraid to walk the streets, even with LeRoy.

Alone now, I lie on the carpet, praying to fall asleep. The floor is not conducive to sleep, and the street light illuminates my room, casting shadows on the walls. "Boogie nights, ain't no doubt, we are here to party. Come around, gotta get it started," blares Jake's jukebox. Although the noise irritates me, I know Jake's will not sympathize with my plight. Who cares if I lose a nights sleep?

What purpose does my night in Roxbury serve, if I will not relinquish a few hours of sleep to mingle with her residents? This experience reminds me of the night Mayor Lindsay spent in a factory worker's home, and then returned to the Gracie Mansion the next morning. I am performing a similar deed. Lindsay received headlines for his deed. The only way I'll make the front page is if I become a murder victim.

As I doze, the image of that rotting dog flashes across my mind. I wanted to allow the mutt some dignity, but then at least, I was wise and remained in the car. A squeal from the hallway awakens me. I jump from the floor, only to discover a mouse with his rear leg in a trap. I debate whether to rescue him, or ignore the grisly scene. A naive but humane instinct obliges me

to call the Animal Rescue League. Before I reach the phone, the rodent escapes, dragging its mangled limb behind.

"Let me in." The voice sounds familiar; it reminds me of an ex-dishwasher, probably a friend of LeRoy. Reluctantly I open the door, and a youth with the name "Billy Lee '75" imprinted on his T-shirt enters. He wears sunglasses, and several band-aids are wrapped around his elbow. Billy's speech has a halting quality. "Gotta dime for a phone call?" he asks. I toss a dime in his direction, the way a boy throws a biscuit to a dog. I have the impression that Billy wants more than a dime tonight. It was foolish to let him in. In May, Billy threatened to pummel LeRoy, and both LeRoy and I were instrumental in his dismissal. Not satisfied with a dime, he escalates the demand. "I wanna dollar, man. I know you got one, gimme a dollar." I realize that Billy will not be content until he has taken LeRoy's valuables, and perhaps my life. Slamming the door on him, pragmatism finally overcomes the social conscience. "I'm gettin' mad! I'm gettin' mad! I'm gettin' mad!" he wails from the hallway. The voice gradually vanishes, and from the window I observe Bill Lee stumble out of the apartment, and disappear into Jake's Tavern.

That's enough! I have witnessed enough trauma for one night. Why did I deceive myself into believing that a visit to Roxbury could cure the nation's racial problems? The opposite is the case. I write the following note for LeRoy: "Dear LeRoy, Angie dropped by and invited me to her place. Not bad? Andy." Then I dial a cab.

"Will you send a taxi to thirty Columbus Street? The name is Silverman.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but our hackney carriages are not dispatched to district thirteen. Have a nice day." The voice has a pseudo-British accent. I repeat again:

"Will you send a taxi to thirty Columbus Street?" A woman's voice now answers: "What Tommy means, honey, is that we don't pick up niggers.

Downstairs Jake's has closed for the night, and her patrons congregate below my window. Through the darkness I perceive Billy Lee and his friends listening to a transistor radio. "Boogie nights are always the best in town.

Hey, wanna boogie? Wanna boogie boogie nights?" The music is so loud that I can discern the lyrics from my room. I feel like ordering Billy Lee to shut the f - - - up, but I realize that he will retaliate. The mob storms upstairs, crashing through my door, hauling me to the streets. Downstairs they greet me with a barrage of taunts and rocks, as they did to Joe O'Rourke.

"Everybody must get stoned. Ah said everybody must get stoned." chants a drunken voice as it ascends the stairway. A girl's giggle accompanies this off key melody. It's Billy Lee and his gang, I'm sure! Searching for a weapon, I locate a bat, hidden under a pile of soiled linen. The inscription on the wood reads: "LeRoy Jones, The Roxbury Falcons - 1973." The noise increases, and I notice that the crowd in front of Jake's has vanished. They are headed up here! After flicking on the switch, I raise my bat and squat behind the door. Two bodies enter the hallway. I scream in vain, "Halt! Don't move! I'll kill you, I really will!" They both appear familiar. The girl with the bleached blonde hair resembles Angie. And the man with the beard reminds me of

"Damn, boy, put that thing down!" he hollers.

"LeRoy, what are you doing here?"

"Ah live here boy, that's what. Now put that down 'fore I run your ass out of here!" I comply, as a sensation of shame and relief overspreads my body.

"There's something wrong with you, boy." LeRoy repeats. "Ah swear there's something wrong with you!"

Both Angie and I nod in agreement.

STILL LIFE

On the way to the pizzeria, Noah passed by what he assumed was the site of an accident. He couldn't be too sure because there wasn't a body lying on the ground or a smashed car on a lawn or things one associates with accidents. But there was a middle-aged business man type standing next to a cop who was taking notes, looking like he might have just run over a girl or something. And there was this mother type, crying like she might have had a daughter run over.

But these were all guesses. Since he was in the car and not walking, Noah couldn't stand around and look. Noah just drove past that spot at the same speed he drove past everything else and waited for another idea or event to take the place of what he had just seen.

Noah was once in a car with his parents, driving past a poor part of a city. It was dark and all that he saw were shapes of the people who lived in those ugly places. Most of them stared at the car and Noah wanted to look back at them. But the car was going too fast, turning the whole thing into a fast-paced movie. It was a montage, showing bits and pieces of horrible things that went too fast to think about. The images kept on getting worse and worse. Then they started getting better and soon, Noah was home. Then he went to sleep.

That's what this was like. Driving right past where the accident was, just glancing and hoping that something like that wouldn't happen to him.

Noah was in the pizzeria, waiting for his pizza. The four Italians who worked there were speaking Italian to each other. Noah didn't say anything, preferring for them to notice him. They did, after a while.

"You order yet?" one of them asked.

"Yeah."

The Italian switched right back into his language and started speaking to the others again.

Noah waited for his pizza. There was a mirror behind the counter which Noah watched himself in. Mirrors were the strangest things. At home,

when Noah looked into the mirror, it was obvious that he'd stand out in any crowd. He'd smile and mug and act so confidently that no one could confuse him for an introvert. Everything was fine in that mirror. But as soon as he'd leave that mirror and look at himself in another one (like the mirror at the pizzeria), he'd see the same old introvert that everyone else saw. Just staring at himself in the mirror, something he never saw anyone else do. No one else had to. Mirrors were made for introverts.

Everything was going at that pace for a while. They would be speaking Italian, then one of them would stop, ask Noah if he ordered yet, and then they'd start talking Italian again.

Then this big, drunk, black guy who worked in the bowling alley came in. He was wearing his blue uniform which was pretty greasy.

"Where's my pissa?" he said.

The Italians laughed.

"Piece of what? Ass?"

"I want my pizza" he said again.

"Piece of what? Ass?" said a different Italian.

The big black guy didn't say anything. He leaned over the counter and looked like he was going to say something. But he only moved his mouth for a while.

The Italians went back to speaking Italian. The drunk guy leaned on the counter while Noah watched himself in the mirror. Nothing much happened until the black guy turned around.

"You got a light?" he asked Noah.

"No. Sorry. I don't have one," Noah said, not yet nervous.

The black guy got mad.

"I don't give two shits whether you want to or not. Give me a match."

Noah ignored him, which was the intelligent and cowardly thing to do. He just stared at himself in the mirror, watching the black guy yell and curse at his back. One of the pizza guys came from behind the counter and took the black guy's arm. The guy said something in Italian. The black guy couldn't relate.

"When I'm in here, you talk English" he ordered.

It looked like the Italian was going to get hit by the black guy. Noah didn't move back. No fight, though. Another Italian guy came from behind the counter and took the drunk outside.

The Italians, when they came back in, asked Noah if everything was okay. Noah shook his head to say yes. Then the Italians started speaking Italian again. Noah listened for a while, then looked outside.

The big, drunk, black guy was dancing.

"This is the first position" he said to no one, standing sideways with his ankles together. He lost his balance and wound up standing clumsily.

"This is the second position". Some little leaguers came around in their uniforms and dripping noses.

"Pirouette" he belched, turning around.

"You drunk?" one of them asked.

The black guy said something nasty to them. They left and he started dancing again.

The Italians were watching.

"That nigger's crazy," one of them said, laughing. Then he said something about him in Italian. Noah watched.

The black guy was dancing by himself. Then this man, woman, and kid, a family, walked by. The drunk watched them.

"Modern Dance," he said, taking a few steps in front of the lady. She walked past him as if he was a drawing on the wall. So did her husband.

"You dress like a fag" the black guy said. "You queer?"

The husband, another business man type, looked at him. You could tell that he was considering saying something. But deciding that it would lead to a fight which he'd lose, he decided not to. So he took the intelligent and cowardly way out and followed his wife.

The kid looked at the black guy who started dancing again.

"Fucking nigger," the kid said, knowing that the black guy wouldn't hit him. The kid had defended himself, not his father, and left.

The drunk tap danced a little longer. Then Noah watched him come into the pizzeria.

"Where's my pizza?"

"Piece of what? Ass?" one of the Italians said.

The black guy didn't say anything. He looked at Noah and didn't remember him.

"Y'know," the black guy said to the Italians. "A kid just called me a fucking nigger. Y'know, the damn kid was probably right."

One of the Italians laughed. "He was."

The black guy said "I suppose he was," while looking in the mirror. Noah didn't see him do anything specific or make any kind of expression. He just stared at himself for a while. Then he walked to the bowling alley where he worked. He was still drunk, but he acted a little more sober. Or he tried.

"You order the pizza?" one of the Italians asked Noah.

"Yeah," Noah said.

"Here you go," the Italian said and placed a white pizza box in front of him. Noah paid the guy.

While walking out, Noah saw one of the Italians cleaning the counter with a rag.

"Have a nice day," the Italian said.

"You too," said Noah. Then he left.

Outside, he didn't see the black guy.

The Italians went back to talking Italian. The drunk went back to drinking. Noah went back home.

On the way to his house, Noah passed by where the accident (if there was one) had been. The cops were gone, the crying lady and the business man were all gone and the kids were playing in the street.

After eating his pizza and watching T.V., Noah went to bed. Confused and scared as all hell.

THE ARTFUL DUNKERS

Once upon a time there was a small village called Gullyville. It was a sunny, pleasant village, and the people there were themselves sunny and pleasant. They were ordinary folk; some were farmers, some shopkeepers, cobblers, or blacksmiths, and they all lived ordinary but happy lives.

One thing was unique about the good people of Gullyville: each one, from the mayor to the shepherds, from the old men who smoked their pipes by the tavern to the young boys who fished at the pond, every villager truly adored to dunk doughnuts in hot chocolate. From the day a toddler was old enough to drink from a cup he learned how to dunk a doughnut properly. And properly it had to be. One could not just stick one's doughnut into cocoa and then bite. No, no, one must slowly slip the ring into a cup, poured in the proper steaming style, hold it there for four and a half seconds, allow it to cool for a count of two, then delicately nibble the sopped section. Once the doughnut had been bitten it could be broken if desired, though there were some who stubbornly insisted that this damaged the flavor, but the initial dunk must always be made with a complete doughnut.

The villagers had a special time in the afternoon and again in the late evening set aside for the "dunking of the doughnut." When the village clock struck two all work would stop, and the shepherds and fence-menders would stop and come in from the fields. Special long, narrow cups would be set out, and everyone would enjoy a hot cup of cocoa and some fresh doughnuts. This same ritual was repeated every night at about nine o'clock, after which the villagers would say goodnight and retire.

One day a young man came into the village and stopped at the town's tavern. It was just after two o'clock, and many of the villagers were busily sipping and dunking. As he sat and watched, the tavern-keeper placed a large oval mug of cocoa and two doughnuts in front of him. Hesitantly he picked up a pastry, carefully imitating the way his neighbors pinched theirs between finger and thumb, and dunked his first doughnut. So delighted was he with the delicacy that he soon finished his first helping and called for a second.

This young man, whose name was Bill Frantique, quickly fell in love with the people and customs of Gullyville. He took a room upstairs

in the tavern and, with great enthusiasm, began to take part in all of the villagers' activities. He soon became known throughout the town for the vigorous, excited interest he showed in their most mundane daily activities.

His first love, though, was dunking doughnuts. Twice a day, five minutes before each doughnut-dunking, he would explode into the tavern, blow across the room, and come to a neck-breaking stop at his usual spot. Rather than linger over the flavor, as most of the townspeople did, he would eat a large doughnut in two or three dunks and as many bites. After swallowing three or four of them in the time it took his neighbors to finish one, he would lean back, rub his bloated belly, and belch contentedly.

Life continued in this fashion for several weeks, until one day when Bill walked slowly into the tavern just before doughnuts were served. His friends were startled by his pace and remarked that they had never noticed that he wore a hat. He was indeed wearing a hat, a bright orange bowler set squarely on top. Some said that they had always thought the orange blur they saw as he passed was his hair, which they now saw was brown. Others had thought that the color was his head overheating from the speeds he attained.

He seemed deep in thought and was unaware of the eyes on him as he quietly sat down in his chair. Suddenly he sat upright, and the characteristic gleam was back in his eyes.

"Variety," he announced conclusively. "That's what we need: variety."

"That's what who needs?" asked an old villager, holding a doughnut submerged.

"That's what we need. I'll take two doughnuts and a glass of milk," he said to the tavern-keeper.

The keeper, taken aback by his request, poured cold milk into a dunking cup without thinking and set it down in front of him. The townspeople watched in stricken silence. Surely he wasn't going to dunk a doughnut in milk. Why, that just wasn't done. Totally unethical, to say nothing of poor taste.

With renewed enthusiasm he grabbed a thick doughnut and plunged it into the milk. Dripping crumbs and milk he pushed it into his mouth and bit off half. The spectators gawked. Swallowing the mouthful, he re-dunked and devoured the other half. His friends watched in amazement as he attacked the second doughnut, disposing of it similarly. When his customary burp signaled that he was finished, the tavern erupted into activity. He was instantly surrounded by the others, some congratulating him on his idea, some reproving him for his impudence, some just waiting to see if he could keep it down.

Things outside the daily routine seldom occurred in the village, and this unique event was the sole topic of conversation. Most of the townspeople were amused by the story, although there were a few, mostly older unmarried women, who were offended and became convinced that Bill Frantique was "just plain crazy." There was also a group of teenagers which became excited about dunking in milk and began practicing it regularly.

Many of the youths were forbidden to practice their strange idea at home, and so they joined Bill. The tavern began doing a tremendous business during the afternoons, as the townspeople crowded in to watch Bill and his friends soak doughnuts in cold milk.

After four or five days the novelty wore off and the crowd of spectators thinned out. One day, after a couple of the younger enthusiasts had also stopped joining him, he decided it was time for another change. As the regular customers settled down with their cocoa, he asked the tavern-keeper in a casual but loud voice to bring him a cup of tea. The chatter subsided, and everyone turned their eyes toward him. The tavern-keeper stopped wiping a dish and faced him with a wary look.

"You don't want that in a dunking cup, do you?" he asked.

"But of course. It's time we loosened up and experimented a little."

The villagers watched in quiet anticipation as the keeper placed the tea and doughnuts on the counter. Bill dipped a doughnut and brought it

dripping to his mouth. His audience leaned forward eagerly in their seats. He took a large bite, and they leaned still farther. His face looked thoughtful as he chewed the pastry, then his chewing stopped and he looked reproachfully at the cup of tea. Finally, with a look of determination, he swallowed the mouthful and re-dunked. The spectators reacted with a unanimous start, some of them losing their balance in the process. His loyal followers clamored to get cups of hot tea and soon followed suit. Their enthusiasm seemed to wane with the first bite, but picked up as they felt themselves the center of attention.

Once again the name of Bill Frantique was heard throughout the village, and every conversation seemed to find a place in it for him. The villagers were again amused by his experiments, though there were some who felt he was beginning to carry it too far. Some were even angry with his disrespect of tradition, and the older women were discussing the best method of containment for him. However, there was no one in the entire town who was not talking about him.

One day the mayor decided that he should do something about the disorder throughout Gullyville, it being an election year. So he contacted the newspaper and arranged to hold a public interview with Bill in the tavern. At two o'clock the next day he found a huge crowd of people extending out into the street. When he had squeezed through (he was rather a plump man and was panting when he finally got inside), he found Bill seated at the counter, surrounded by his friends, dunking in his current invention, a cup of tomato juice.

"Well," the mayor puffed, "I'm glad I could finally meet you. Is that tomato juice?"

"Yes," he sprayed.

"Hmm. I'm not sure I'd have believed it without seeing it. Tell me, Mr. Frantique, just exactly why do you insist upon finding unlikely new liquids in which to dunk? After all, dunking doughnuts in cocoa has been a well-established tradition in our fine town for many generations, one which should be preserved, both out of respect for our predecessors or ancestors as the case may be, and with an eye to the enjoyment of our children and children's children for generations to come. Do you not agree, sir?"

"No. We're in a rut, and I think we should get out of it."

"I see. But why tomato juice? I can't quite convince myself that such a combination is pleasing to one's taste."

"You've got to understand," he said, gesturing for emphasis with a soggy doughnut, "It's not the final product that's important."

"It isn't?"

"No." He stressed this point with a shake of the doughnut, spattering the mayor's suit with tomato juice. "The real art is in the dunking, not [more doughnut emphasis] in the objects dunked. Therefore, you see, it doesn't matter how it tastes. It only matters that you keep variety in the dunking, that's all."

The mayor, casually rubbing the red stains into his shirt, nodded in understanding. "I fully see your point, young man. Yes, I do. You feel that, if I may coin a phrase, variety is the spice of life. Very admirable. By your leave, I should like to join you in your exploration of new artistic horizons. May I?" He picked up a stray doughnut and immersed it in Bill's cup. The spectators gasped, and a buzz of whispers sent the startling information back to those who couldn't see. He casually bit into the doughnut, his face alight with confidence. This light quickly disappeared, however, and was replaced by a faint green glow. He looked toward the door but saw that any escape was impossible. Not wishing to insult anyone, he diplomatically swallowed the mouthful. Smiling weakly, he patted Bill on the shoulder and said hoarsely, "Carry on, my boy." He then turned and, preserving his dignity and poise, pushed his way outside.

When Bill's protégés heard his statement on the art of dunking, they became very excited. At last they had a philosophy to follow, a principle to apply to their craft, and they could now begin exploring on their own. And explore they did.

That evening when Bill blew in for his tomato juice dunking, the others followed on his tail wind and began ordering such things as apple juice, orange juice, cranberry juice, and one even tried prune juice. Their master watched with proud approval, until every one of them had sat back and belched out his satisfaction, the one who had prune juice doing so several times.

His admiration lasted for a few days but then started to wane. His young friends' intentions were good, and their enthusiasm was splendid, but he began to feel a growing uneasiness. Perhaps they had, after all, gone just a little bit, only a speck, mind you, too far. Possibly, with their healthy vigor and vitality, they had been a wee bit carried away with originality. Some of his neighbors, noticing his uneasiness, began to say that he was like a teacher who feared that his pupils would become greater than he. They were convinced that he was jealous of his students because they thought of new ideas before he did.

Meanwhile, the young artists (for that is what they called themselves) were having a grand old time. They had begun to feel too restricted dunking only doughnuts and had started using cookies, cake, brownies, and one, the young man of the prune juice, even tried bananas. This young man, in fact, began to build up a reputation of his own which grew to rival his teacher's. When he had tired of bananas and prune juice he began to explore new areas and showed great promise. However, his career was cut short when he got worms from dunking Jewish rye bread in birdbaths.

Bill's dissatisfaction grew, and so did the rumors of his jealousy. But whether he truly did resent his pupils' notoriety or just felt it had gone too far, the village never found out. For one day he disappeared from Gullyville and was never seen again. The villagers had many different theories regarding his disappearance, some thinking that he'd moved on to help other towns, others convinced that he'd just gotten moving too fast and had disintegrated. However, the turmoil he left behind gradually faded his name from the people's minds.

After a time it became practically unheard of to dunk doughnuts in cocoa. Only a few of the very old men who smoked by the tavern still did so. The good people of Gullyville eagerly supported the art of creative dunking and are doing so to this very day.

MERELY A PLAYER

The wooden stage creaked as Jake walked back and forth. He crouched and picked up a thick electrical cord. Dropping it, he heard an ominous crash echoing throughout the small, empty nightclub. He dropped the cable on the floor many times, testing the resonant sounds and beats. Rhythm, thought Jake, and words and chords and - -

A widening shaft of light flowed into the room as the door opened. Jake swiveled - - notes of fear thumping in his neck and rushing into his head - - and gazed into the brightness.

"What're you doing, kid?" asked Mr. Fredericks, owner of the nightclub.

Jake shrugged. "My group's playing here tonight. I was just looking around."

Mr. Fredericks walked forward, his form a silhouette against the doorway's light. "You're Jake, right? How much did I say I'd pay you, anyway?"

"Two hundred plus ten percent of what the house gets."

Resting his thick perspiring hand on Jake's shoulder, Mr. Fredericks drawled, "I'll see you tonight, okay?"

Jake went home.

At the afternoon's rehearsal the group played well, hitting every beat and chord change, but still lacking the verve which Jake sought.

"Otis, you're not playing hard enough. We want those people to know what we're saying. You can be subtle on the quiet numbers."

"What are you worrying about?" asked Otis, the lead guitarist. "People in a nightclub don't care about our music's cosmic significance! They talk and drink and don't pay much attention to the music."

Jake leaned against an amplifier, his guitar pointing at Otis. "Who are we playing for, anyway? We're not playing for that nightclub crowd, we're performing for us! Don't you want to be the greatest?"

"Let's be realistic, Jake," said Allen, standing up from behind his drum set. "We're just a bunch of kids out of high school. How can we call ourselves great or expect to be the best?"

Shaking his head, Jake said, "My songs aren't even hard to play. All I want is more conviction, more feeling. It's rhythm with guts that we're after, not flashy solos."

Bill, the quietest of the four, was adjusting the tuning pegs on his bass. "This is our first big gig," he said slowly. "So let's just play the best we can."

The group practiced several more songs before the rehearsal end. Jake knew something was still missing.

"Pass the whitefish," said his father, taking pieces from the plate, and adding, "How much are you getting paid tonight, Jacob?"

Poking the tender meat with his fork, Jake did not say anything.

"Jacob?"

"Huh?"

His mother cleared her throat. "Your father was asking you something, Jacob."

"Um, sorry, Mom. I was thinking about the group and the songs and stuff."

"All I wanted to know," began his father, "was how much you and the guys are getting paid."

"Two hundred dollars plus ten percent of what the club gets during the night." Jake paused. "I want this performance to be special. Rock and roll can be magic if it's approached with the right amount of fervor. A good performer can reveal anything to his audience. Desperation, love, solitude, happiness can become vivid and real through a simple song. My group can achieve whatever it wants if only it has - -"

His parents smiled and nodded. Jake felt like he was talking only to himself. "Well, that's sort of why tonight's so important."

"You want more whitefish?" asked his mother while passing the plate across the table.

Backstage Otis asked, "Are you scared?"

"No. Anxious," said Jake. "I just want to get out there and play."

Allen was tapping his drumsticks against his knee. "Yeah, I'm ready, I'm ready."

Somebody said, "Okay, guys, get out there."

Walking out there in front of all those people felt like diving into a pool's deep end. Jake plugged his cord into his amplifier and turned toward the audience and the lights and everything which seemed to be swirling around. Moving closer to a microphone, he adjusted it to fit his height and gazed into the brightness. Purple specks were rotating in front of him. Jake shook his head, noticed his hand was shaking, began to gag, and finally said, "Hello."

He heard some scattered laughs. Turning to Otis and Bill, Jake raised his guitar and screamed, "One-two-three-four!"

He faced the audience and heard himself playing the chords to Chuck Berry's "Around and Around" and his voice singing "Wotta crazy sound" and "I'll never stop rocking." Jake felt powerful and scared and kept playing his guitar harder.

"That's All Right (Mama)," Elvis's first single, and Buddy Holly's "That'll Be the Day" followed. Otis played stinging notes, Bill's bubbling bass complimented Allen's propulsive backbeat and jazzy touches, Jake rasped the words.

"That'll Be the Day" skidded to an end with the thrash of a cymbal and a stuttering guitar chord. Jake looked at the audience whooping their approval and said into the microphone, "This is sort of surreal . . ." He talked to Otis for a moment and returned to the edge of the stage. "We're going to do a song which I wrote . . . and if you like it, we'll do a few more."

Muscles straining, knuckles whitening, eyes darting, Jake played the opening chords, singing the first verse accompanied only by his guitar. Allen then slammed his snare drum, Otis and Bill eased into the song, and Jake looked right through the lights.

"EVERYTHING WASHES UP HERE"

Walter Ensel Breckenridge courteously removed all doubts concerning his whereabouts by washing up on my beach this morning. But then courtesy is what Web is all about; I tell him so, sitting on my breakwall, facing the morning tide, ebbing, last night's squall fading, waves bowing, pulling back, bowing, pulling from his khaki corpse. "Web!" I shout, "You've been damned courteous you know!" He knows, lying there in my surf, battered, taut gray face searching under his arm ("Your cigarettes Web? They're a bit wet."), stretched ahead like a swimmer's in mid-crawl. A reach past sandy hair, sandy seaweed, green bottle glass. "What are you reaching for Walter?" He waits patiently for Doc Vrooman and the Law. "I called Talbot half-hour ago Web. Said he'd be right over. Had to call Vrooman. I think you caught him at a bad time." His mouth bubbles a bit, I take this for an answer, but the wind blows it away down the beach.

Very courteous to leave his boat, *Madeleine*, lines cleated, sailing an obedient circle out there, found three days ago. "You're too good a sailor!" I protest. But his head stays hidden, bashful, I think he's suddenly ashamed.

My beach forms a small cove. Everything washes up here. Web and I buried a cow by the breakwall. She came up just after the hurricane Lou Lou, so that's what her name is, etched on the stones over her head. His idea. Lou Lou's eyes were still open when we found her.

"I wonder what she saw when she went under," Web said.

"Nothing," I said. "She didn't see a thing," and handed him a shovel.

"Depends if she jumped or fell," he said, and jammed the shovel into the sand.

I climb down from the breakwall and plod out toward him, leaning into the wind. The sand is whipping up. It stings today. "Web Web Web," I sing, clapping cold hands, "What did you see? Boy, what *did* you see?" I stand over him. His eyes are closed, caked with salt.

Very courteous not to wash up on his own beach. *Madeleine* would have taken fits. Much better this way. Very courteous not to arrive bloated

and naked and chewed. I walk out into the waves, walk around behind him. "Old coot!" I yell and splash him. Nothing but bubbles.

"How could you you son of a bitch? What right anyway?" I splash out of the surf and plod up the beach again, quickly turn around, half expecting him to be standing, asking for a light, for a drink, 'the good word'. "When did you feel it Web?" I shout. "Why didn't you say anything!" Bubbles.

He saw me on his way to the yacht club last week.

"Morning," he said.

"Morning Web. You're taking the morning off?"

"Day. I'm in need," he chuckled, wheezing. "So they tell me down't the office."

"Young lawyers. What do they know?"

"I was once one," he said proudly.

"No offense intended, old coot!"

"None taken," he said. We traded smiles.

"Madeleine all right?" I asked.

"Yeah, I was just going down to take her out."

"I mean Madeleine," I laughed.

"Oh. Yeah. Well. I think I made her cry this morning. She thinks I'm shell shocked or some such," he wheezed. "Says I forgot today was the fourteenth, so I missed some meeting or such."

"It is the fourteenth Web," I said.

"Yes, yes, it is," he said, and smiled, and put his hand up over his eyes, and walked off up the road. "The bloody Goddamned fourteenth!" he wheezed and kicked at a stone. "The bloody finest fourteenth in a month," and turned behind my hedge.

"Well Vrooman had his doubts about you!" I yell at him, "but now they're no matter, none. You've solved another mystery for him. Courtesy Web. And for Madeleine. She can sure stop her weeping now, aye? You son of a bitch," I sneer, and laugh a little, but there's a bad taste to it.

"You certainly have bowed outta cutting the grass gracefully enough." I walk back towards him. "And helping me bury anymore shit that comes up here." The tide is out now, and he's left high. If I didn't know, I'd say he crawled up after me. But the bottle glass is still by his hand.

"So you spilled your soup at dinner, and forgot your meetings, and your stories got jumbled. Did we *love* you any less? You son of a, and what's accomplished but courtesy!" I'm kneeling in front of him, and the bottle glass is cutting my knee, but to hell with it I'm so mad, "and what do you expect of me now? Stories and songs and praises. I don't have to remember you. You're right here!" but my hand touches stiff, scaling, scary, and I jump back and rake it through clean sand.

"What is courtesy Web? 'A word. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday,' yes I know that's Falstaff, I read your copy. 'But will it not live with the living? No!' " I shout and plod back toward him. The bubbles have formed a transparent smile.

I see Talbot and Vrooman stumbling down my bank toward us. Talbot stops to whistle at me, but it's blown away, and I already see the sack under his arm, unfolding in the wind for all his attempts to suppress it, so I say to Web "look sharp now Walter, we have visitors." But of course he does nothing, which makes me laugh uncontrollably.

"Damn you Web Breckenridge, damn you you son of a bitch," I laugh and scold him till tears stream down my cheeks. And when Talbot and Vrooman get down here it will be all I can do to convince them I'm laughing, not to worry, grab his leg.

ARROWS

Don't seek me with your carbon eye.
The diamond element.
The soot element.

Your light is a crown of thorns
And you are adroit
As a stickpin

Pointing and pointing,
Never making it in.
Even the compass

Has doubts, squirming
The way antennae, the way
Wands do.

The baton ogled
Through cellophane skin
On the teeming shelf

And I looked,
Wanting its implacability,
Selecting a jack,

Little tornado,
Its spines spinning a pupa-
Doll, my innocuous.

THE TIDE
GUSHES IN
ON THE TONGUE OF A LION.
IT STRIDES ACROSS THE INHABITED SAND
TO OBTAIN IT'S SUPPER.
THE EBB

S L O W L Y

IT'S PAWS DIGGING, DIGGING, DIGGING, SO DEEPLY INTO THE SAND.
IT'S ROAR DIMINISHING.
IT IS SATISFIED.

THE SAND IS EMPTY.

the yo-yo
my life
is like
a slow
yo-
yo.
always down
on the
bottom
of the
line.
now
and again
my line will be pulled
to the heights
of hilarity.
but always.
unfailingly,
down
the string will go
leaving me
at the
bottom of my line

SELF PORTRAIT

I

The smooth-swelling seas on which I float,
the water is cool, and
the slow gentle waves lap my sides
like the wet kiss of a favored pup.

The light seas which float on me,
the breeze is warm, and
the quick playful winds caress my self
like the sensual touch of my lover.

The seas which flood all seas,
the light is soft, and
the rays, delving deep, finds my soul,
make it water-silken, air-free, and
insubstantial light.

II

Look to the spirit which moves the sky,
full of life, like the pregnant storm,
swelling and full, crackling with
fierce energy.

Listen to the spirit which rocks the earth,
full of battle, like the heated mount,
spewing and spitting red phlegm with
choleric ire.

Moan for the spirit which roils the sea,
full of endless motion, like the growing spout,
swirling and spinning, gathering all into itself with
o'er mastering desire.

Feel *now* the spirit which *seethes* in my soul
restless and pacing, like a wild animal caged,
charging the bars, striving toward that final
explosion into freedom

A TASTE OF WELL WATER

The child delighted with the drawer of odds and ends
is well water, pumped by a rusty pump,
from an old abandoned well reaching to the source of dreams,
that slowly fades into the hard bright awakening hours.
But this time the pump pumps on,
telling you you've since grown up,
making you an end to what you once were,
pumping over your crying face
in the cool clear morning, so fresh and new:
you lift your hands and touch the traces of your childhood.

VIENNA IN 1910

The photograph is old and curled,
The witness to a quiet day
When sunlit windows
Smiled on the strasse.

The Viennese line their shelves
With Murano glass,
Prizes of Venetian summer.
Now, returned from holiday,
They discard old opera guides
Like broken
Crystal in the night.

Beware the son of Alois,
Wandering these very streets
He falls into flophouse beds.
Dreaming of the day when Wein
Contorts into a Scream.
No longer a postcard painter,
He can be an architect.

This place is Freud City
For the wary
Who count clouds,
Dark and swift
As the Anschluss jackboot.

RASPUTISTA

Years ago Willy was a panzer leader,
Black and white and smiling as he rose
Wax-like, from his machine.
Now he wears sun glasses,
Thin arms in guilt-free shirt sleeves,
And sits in the shade of his straw hat;
He looks like Mr. Quintessential,
The man with a tapedeck in his car.

Willy is a businessman at the office.
Sitting among the Aztecs
He locks his file drawers,
Stretches his legs onto his desk
And throws back his head,
Laughing his conquistador's laugh-
No flowing Aryan locks
But a steely crewcut
That ages like rusty wine.
He turns to the window behind him
And sees the window-washer leering in:
-How long have I been watched?-

When Barbarossa began Willy held his breath,
Then gasped and smiled as the panzers
Covered six hundred miles in one hundred days.
Willy ate bread and salt while he checked his treads,
Willy drank vodka while his friends hung partisans.
The summer wheat fields flowed into fresh craters,
Rasputista-the season of mud and rain,
And Willy cursed his sinking machine,
Washing the ground was drier.
He'd like to roll over a board.

Willy has a wife, once a comely jungfrau
Who turned on her side to face him
As the eastern sun poured through the blinds,
Washed her skin a brilliant white.

Willy squinted and remembered snowblind friends,
Their muddy treads cleansed by December drifts.
When Willy's smiling wife moved towards him
It was like the final frozen kiss.
Now, she stands silently by the toaster
As Willy hands her money,
His eyes on the television news.
He leaves the kitchen to brush his teeth.

Willy is in a hurry at the bank,
But has to wait while the teller
Talks of summer's twisted weeds
Spreading over her burnt-up lawn.
She bends to grab a fallen coin
And Willy thinks of a vacant reptile
Crawling and drinking at his trough.
He doesn't like this teller,
Imagines her covered with mud,
Glares until his eyes rest
On her deformed hand.
Willy feels remorse.

Willy speaks English to his American friends,
-My American friends,
You put a man on the moon . . .
(I was right up at the front,
Kursk you know.
I didn't see those things
Behind the lines;
I never knew
Until too late.
But what could I have done?)

Willy enjoys playing chess,
Preferring mid-game to end-game,
Infuriating opponents with trades,
Swapping pieces with smug abandon,
-It ends the muddle-
He likes to clear the board

Hitler's famous remark on the invasion of Russia: "When Barbarossa begins the world will hold its breath and say nothing."

Bread and salt is a traditional Ukrainian dish. It was served to the Germans just after the invasion, when they were seen as liberators of the Ukraine.

Kursk was the largest tank battle in history (July 4 - July 11, 1943). It was a German disaster.

BEFORE YOU REGRET IT

You took that knife
in your hands
and ripped the sky open,
didn't you?
Well you'd better sew it up
again
there's pink all over the place
flooding through the screen
making rivulets on the window panes
and a like
between the sill
and the glass

My little brother
wants to sail toy boats there
but I told him, "No,
you can't." The sky's bleeding
Don't you see?
Somebody
tore at it
with a dagger,
or with long, searing nails.
"Somebody," I said
I didn't say who
He doesn't know it was you.

you seem to me to be
 gentility
bordering on disaster
like a pleasant wavering laugh
capped with sharp hysteria
you tip your hat for me
 grey death knell
this last the only fear you have never
 enumerated
as you have ounted your other sheep . . .

you have a scar where memory
 should be
you finger it noticeably
you erase with the wet friction of your palms
everything but the sad scar
thus appear as a man with
 but one fault

I admire you as a sun-scorched archeologist:
you wear out a smile like noone else.

GARDEN CROWN

Morning sun
fills the garden crown
with dazzling light;
gray sharp monuments
to what will be,
year after year;
the common bright green hair
in patches on the rocky skull
that never grows more bald;
rare gem, the violets,
pass so soon
& different every year.

Musky garden smell
rises in my warmth,
an old familiar
of summer days in sweltered sun,
warm dressed up evenings, special nights,
cool naked mornings, lying close,
on a bed of leaves.

In the cruelest month, the old desires mix
with newly germinated memories,
a cool spring rain that stirs
dull roots of painful
long unrealized needs.
The dull plant lifts its weary head
to the warm returning sun,
to one more cycle, one more season,
one more chance to bear
new fruit in a new year.

THE CLINIC VOLUNTEER

The window saves soap, not
Out of parsimony.
“They light, aromatic
And white as angel food
Cakes”, she says, “They’re preserved
Wings.” The wrapping’s intact.
“Metabolism shrinks
My gulls, dispels their scent.”

She alphabetizes
Surnames at General
Ward Wing Z, transcribes the
Doctors’ oracles in ink,
Internecine drugs shrink
To totemism, like
Viruses in vaccines,
Attenuated. “Rings

From Vinca rosea.”
Italics, botany
Beguile her - An herb in
Latin is an herb in
Glass, is a word in a
Cathedral. Vincristine -
Cage for neoplastic
Cells and normal ones as
Well. Anrexia -
She died of it. She saw
Her face reflected in

Her plate - the mouth, nostrils,
Sockets, and could not eat.
“Vinca”, she said, “I shrink.”

SHORELINE RECYCLING

Much like flattened dough that, rippling,
Still adheres to the rolling-pin, so
The figure moved nearer,
Drifting on the waves, to the rock-formed jetty.

Greeted by the cordial cluster
(Surfaces steadily sized with spume),
The body languidly
Let them scrape snatches to use as wallpaper.

Gulls arriving in a flurry
Began to bicker over the spread.
The fleshed one, riffled through,
Cared little that the leftovers weren't preserved.

Water, mindful of each one's turn,
Intervened and filled each pore of skin.
The corpse sank and glanced at
The hostess-crab sharpening her cutting-knives.

INTERPLAY

The light inside
equal to but not more than
the light outside; but warmer.
A curious interplay
of the interval
and external
as viewed from my chair,
pensively,
by the window.
The inner objects
reflected back to me --
the outer ones entering;
Depending on your point of view.
The two composing
a complete picture making
a streetlight's flicker
a flash of rage in my eye.

1

Silence in fear, it is not right.
 Fear is a demon who burns a wicked sight.
 lovers--Estranged, people I have known well.
 Silence is but living hell.

2

To be trapped in silence -- god
 What pain!
 How to make it right again?
 Unable to speak, for
 Unspeakable fears
 Trapped in silence, how the demon learns!
 God help me -- let
 Her speak first.
 To be trapped in silence is what I fear worst.

3

I shouted and screamed, but not a word fell.
 Silence is but living hell.

YOUR SMILING EYES (A flautist's recording)

His breath grows shorter,
 more urgent.
 A succession of tones
 trails higher.
 Papier-mache geese
 Flap
 their wings and rise
 from among the reeds
 and disappear as tones become
 longer - and more airy.
 He calls to them
 through his flute.
 They answer.
 We applaud.
 It is a live recording.

RESCUED

My hands burn,
iced knuckles needle-pricked
and steaming.
I'm sweating,
I can't breathe.

It's been like this
for days, now, and I'm
wishing the others wouldn't notice.
Their fat, moist fingers
touch my numbed cheeks,
melt at the tips.
I grind their fallen fingernails
into the carpet with my toe;
they pop up around my ankles, dancing.

My face is rosy;
I'm in from the cold.
But I hear the clinks and duds
of base-ray heat and shiver.
My scarf hangs at my shoulders,
undecided.
My heart stops.

"Take off your coat . . . ," they say,
they keep saying.
If I hear "stay awhile",
I will stamp, I will scream
But I cannot move, can move only the right foot,
and bend the right knee. All of me
is fallen to sleep, dead
lead, dead head . . .

I tingle and whirr.
And they listen, and watch.

"It's almost imperceptible,"
I hear one whisper, his ear
at my chest, his eye
at my thigh.

"Do you think she can be moved?"
Someone goes for my legs.
My muscles tense and swell;
I am planted.

Two, and then three, puff and grunt,
heave and groan.
Another comes for my shoulders and head.
"Frozen through!", she bubbles,
but backs away as she breaks off
an eyelash
from my open left eye.
"Ooooo!" She's fascinated: frightened and amazed.

There are five of them, now,
all pulling at me, lifting.
They sweat all over me;
they smell.
Finally, the little one
unties my boots.
They wrench me free
and carry me like damp, stiffened plywood
to a couch, by the fire.
They're wheezing. They snuffle.
"Froze solid," one says, kneeling
into the flames,
brushing at his tousled hair,
and rubbing himself wet,
again.

Wicked witches! Liquify!
But they won't, the don't . . .
O, Dorothy,
It's me, Toto,
Dorothy . . .
I'M thawing! . . . It's me . . .

LOSS

I can't stand it.
Sitting here, she by me,
Lips pressed tightly together,
As if that would lessen the pain,
Eyes squeezed shut,
Face in a tear-drenched wash.

How can I tell her
It's nothing she's done?
Or, at least, not only, not even
Mainly, what she's done?

I have to leave the room.
But I find no words to comfort
Her in this parlor, either, old
Already with family sit-ins.
All I find here is her absence;
And that's only comfort enough for me.

BALLADE: THE WOODPILE

He built a wood house on a cliff,
The child was butting teeth.
She honed grist to a pyramid,
Buried her jacks beneath.

The child collected metal jacks
Instead of cats or bears -
Only these jacks like metal kings
A fire could not sear.

An ant inside a hilly nest
Need not strain to adapt
To sand - Dust was her room. She built
Ghost towers as he mapped

The clapboard house in blue. His rooms
Were paper cubes, the heights
Were mythical. He drew a nest
Of stairs like geese in flight

Between a ceiling and a floor.
The sky was in his chart -
His halls were hidden chutes, his walls
Were atmospheres apart.

The steeple bloomed above the jacks,
An undivided tomb:
The dust was soft as sparrow breath
And filled the lofty room

As if it were an attic. He
Had built a kite, the child
A tomb. He lived above the clouds
And she, above the Nile

Until winter usurped the cliff
And summer took a leap -
His wife nagged him to timber and
She nagged the child to sweep.

RED AND GREEN TROPIC

You live tail to mouth,
African cat,
With your twin-hulled catamaran

And your mate's catamenia.
They never stop flowing -
Whatwith her calendar of pills

And your jungle - salad
Of dollar bills.
It's the enumeration of it

That weds you -
All those figures,
Those snug, green level-heads,

And her clotty blooms
Plopping
Like prompt, suicidal hearts.

Your Phaethonic boat makes a twin -
A double-edged cicatrix
On the varicose Potomac,

And you, a flailing triskelion,
Tongue, tail and that plummy
Snarl of brain

Left me, nineteen,
Gushing Phoenician-red. You said
"This sight is obsolete." And bolted.

You are the tiger
And I am Sambo.
I watch you exhaust yourself

To a golden grin.
Her finger's in it
Like a tot in a tube -

She wags it- Stray cat-
Mouth, spitting back
Slits of herself.

It's a little love mirror
Over your bed. You roll
Over, strapping your briefcase.

