



## THE IDOL

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## Competition Issue

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The content of this issue is the result of the second annual writing competition sponsored by **The Idol**. We were pleased with the large number of submissions for the contest this year. Over twenty pieces of fiction and nearly 65 poems were considered. In the interests of impartiality, each item was submitted under a pseudonym. Three judges reviewed every piece, and rated them individually. Those with the highest cumulative scores were awarded prizes of \$100 or \$50. The winners were:

- 1st prize for fiction—Mark Wallace, "The Guest"
- 1st prize for poetry—Jayne Weiner, "The Gardens"
- 2nd prize for fiction—Sharon Grollman, "Going Home"
- 2nd prize for poetry—Sam Hughes, "Anima"

The winning fiction entry was published in our last issue, so in this issue we have printed another excellent piece by Mark Wallace. Together with the winning entries, we have included works submitted to the competition which were judged of outstanding quality.

We wish to thank everyone who submitted items to the competition, and encourage them to do so again next year.

## LOVE and DEATH

Mark Wallace

Mr. Kurtz had fallen victim to a fatal stroke late that summer—had squirmed around a lot before he was finally overcome, judging from the ransacked appearance of the living-room of the house—and so a new teacher, a northern teacher, greeted Jimmy and his schoolmates on the third day of September, 1847.

He eased into the schoolroom that gusty Tuesday and found twenty-four youngsters standing by their desks and tables, parrots by their perches, each one spitting out a mumbled "Good morning, Sir." Pausing a moment, not bothering to acknowledge their salutation, he then proceeded to stroll around the room, glancing quickly at the pupils and their desks, the walls, the two windows speckled with dried raindrops, and finally the blackboard in front of the room, hovering over his own desk. There he came to a halt, taking a seat on top of the desk in a sort of mild stupor.

His uncle had not warned him, although he supposed he should have suspected. The eyes that were turned upon him bespoke no traces of enthusiasm—they were

empty, vapid. Such a far cry from his own education—the tutors, the travelling around Boston, the challenges posed—and he wasn't certain quite how to deal with it. He thought back to the letter he had received a scant eight days ago, explaining Kurtz's death and the consequent need for a replacement, and the fortunate coincidence that his uncle and aunt were leaving to spend the fall and winter in Europe, thus allowing him to occupy their house and use their servants. His uncle had recommended his nephew to the local families at a meeting the day after Kurtz passed away; despite the objections to his northern upbringing, the fact that the nephew was probably qualified and available on such short notice was enough to quiet most of the grumbling. After all, it was argued, the uncle himself was of northern origin and had fit in very well with his adopted land, sliding smoothly into the slot which his neighbors had permitted him. Little did they know that, unlike his uncle, Brentwood's stone castle of beliefs was firmly sealed, and the—as he saw it—Southern muck would not

seep in. In this teaching opportunity he thought he had found the chance to crush his drawbridge over the malarial mud of the slaveholding South. In his mind he still conjured up the tutor, standing in his father's library, balding, stooped; saw him turn with a fever in his eyes that the young Brentwood had never before seen, sway deliberately at him, and recite in a deep, reverent voice from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness...." Never had Brentwood felt such a rush of inspiration as coursed through his body when that tutor had recited. And here he was, twenty-three, in the South. He looked at the kids, his materials, his white blocks of marble to sculpt. He would cut away the Southern waste from them, oh yes, cut it all away until they were shaped into pretty little Northern figurines. But he did not realize that their sculpting had already been started, that the



parents stood chisel in hand chipping consciously or unconsciously at each child every minute the child was with them.

"You can all sit down," he said. They sat. "Now, who's the oldest here?" Tommy Watkins stood up. "You look like a Billy or a Nigel, no? What's your name?"

"Tommy, Sir."

"Now Tommy, how did Mr. Kurtz conduct the class? You see," here he looked around the room at all the faces, which bounced back his gaze mechanically, "I'm going to need some help because I've never really taught school before. So everybody's going to have to give me a hand these first few weeks, okay?" No one nodded. He turned back to Tommy. "How did Mr. Kurtz teach you your lessons, old boy?"

Upon hearing this label, Tommy started forward, as though he'd been lightly pushed. "Well, Suh-suh-sir" came stuttering out.

"By the way, you don't have to call me 'Sir,' Tommy. Just call me Mr. Brentwood." The class was silent at this. They all seemed to be a little frozen. Outside the trees shook in the warm wind. The sky was cloudy. "And that goes for all of you," Brentwood added.

The younger ones looked a little frightened, he thought, as he got up off the desk. "So," he began. "This year we're going to study grammar, arithmetic, Latin, spelling, geography, and history. Now what's your name?" he said, singl-

ing out a child of eight or nine hidden behind a table.

The child stood. "Jimmy, Sir." A general gasping ensued; Brentwood could almost feel the tremors of the youngsters as they watched to see if he would respond to the "Sir."

"Jimmy, how did Mr. Kurtz have you do your lessons?"

"He wrote them on the board and made us repeat them aloud until we knew them, Sir," came a high-pitched voice from out of the young boy's mouth.

"And if you couldn't remember them, Jimmy?"

"Then he cracked our knuckles with his ruler, Sir."

Brentwood had noticed a beaten ruler hanging like a corpse from a little hook in the side of the desk. He picked it from the hook and held it up for the class to see. "Was this the ruler he used?" They all nodded, and tightened in their chairs. "Well," he said, "I hope we won't have to use this again," and with that he cracked it in halves over his knee. Turning his back to the class, he walked easily to the wastecan and slipped the two halves in with a rattle. Tommy and Jimmy were still standing. "Why are you two still standing?"

Tommy spoke up. "Suh-suh-sir, you haven't told us to sit down yet."

"Dear God," rolled Mr. Brentwood, "will I have to tell you everything? Don't you have minds of your own? Think, lads, think,

that's all you need do. Use your judgment. First of all, you don't have to stand when called on. Secondly, if you do choose to stand, you can choose when to sit down again. Thirdly, you don't have to keep addressing me as 'Sir.' I realize this will take a little getting used to, since the way we will learn might be different from the way Mr. Kurtz taught you. But I think you'll find we have more fun. Now, for tomorrow I want you all to come in here ready to tell about your families' experiences during the Revolutionary War, for that is the first subject to which we will devote our time. To do this I expect you to talk with your fathers, and then—" Jimmy's face dropped on hearing this last. "What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Muh-muh-my father's not home," Jimmy burst out.

"If your father's not home, then ask your mother or your grandfather," Brentwood said kindly. This seemed to relieve them. "Now," he said, as he scattered his eyes all over the room; "are there any other questions?"

No one looked puzzled, so Brentwood continued. "I understand from several of your fathers that traditionally the first day of school is brief. We will—follow tradition. Class dismissed."

As Jimmy picked his way down the stone-infested wheel tracks of the yellow-earthed road, he became aware of someone,

someone walking quickly behind him, someone sure-footed, whose steps dislodged few of the round rocks. He turned and saw Mr. Brentwood, his short dark hair wriggling with an occasional gust of air.

"Jimmy!" Brentwood called. "Wait!" He caught up to the boy and put his arm around him. "So your father's not home, huh?" he asked. "Is he away for long?"

Jimmy nodded, and a little sadness flashed at the word "father," but he quickly jumped from this into an idolatrous smile that splashed up on his face. "So," Brentwood continued, "we seem to be going in the same direction. You must live close to me."

Jimmy couldn't push any words through his smile, so he contented himself with pointing to a large white house that stood on the other side of a small valley. "That's very near my house," exclaimed the teacher. "You're not Jimmy Bracken, are you?"

Jimmy nodded again. Not a drop of his smile melted. "The son of Eugene Bracken, the man who works for Senator Winston?" Brentwood now realized why the boy's father wasn't at home. "Do you ever go to Washington with him?"

"No" trickled weakly out from the boy's mouth.

"Then you probably don't see him too often?"

"No."

Brentwood took his chisel in hand. "Do you want to go explor-

ing with me this afternoon? I don't know anything about the area, so you could help explain where all the paths in back of my house lead, and point out the different houses where our schoolmates live."

Jimmy agreed, but said he had to check in with Aunt Gwen first. Mr. Brentwood wanted to change from his school clothes, and so it was that fifteen minutes later the two met in front of the teacher's house. "Did Aunt Gwen say it was okay for you to come?" asked Brentwood as Jimmy approached, a stick in his hand.

"Yuh-yuh-yes, she said I had to stay out of trouble, and to be back in time for dinner."

"Well, let's take a look at these paths I told you about," said Brentwood, slipping his large warm hand into Jimmy's. Jimmy's hand was pink like a baby's and fleshy. They came to the paths quickly, three simple narrow lanes through strawy undergrowth that was flecked with sunlight. The teacher liked his curly blond hair.

"Oh these," muttered a disappointed Jimmy. "These ain't nothing."

"Aren't anything," corrected Brentwood. No wonder the boy doesn't talk when I ask him questions, he thought. "But they are paths, aren't they? So where do they lead?"

"This one goes to Aunt Gwen's house, and this one goes to Stanley's Uncle Jim's house and I don't know where this one goes."

Brentwood visually traced one of the tracks to his uncle's servants' quarters.

"Who uses these paths?" Had Jimmy been older, he might have noticed that the pocket of air that hung over the teacher's words was tinged with intention. The chisel was trying to splinter off a slice of marble.

"Oh, Aunt Gwen and Jack and Varie and Uncle Massy and all the rest of the servants."

Brentwood started off with Jimmy down one of the paths. "Why do people have servants?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Do you like servants?"

"Yeah."

"Do you know why they are servants?"

"No."

"Are you going to be a servant when you grow up?"

"No."

"Well then why are they servants and you not a servant?"

"Because I'm not, because I'm not a nigger. Only niggers are servants." Jimmy's fleshy little palm was sweating from the heat of the teacher's hand. They tramped along in silence for a while. Jimmy threw his stick at a shiver in the middle of a patch of vines. He picked up a new stick.

"Did you ever wonder why Negroes are servants?"

"Because they're niggers."

"But why does that make them servants?"



"I don't know. Don't move," gasped the boy. He crept forward slowly, and bent lower and lower, then froze in his crouch—and pounced. Something went scuttling a few feet off, paused, and then scuttled some more.

"What was it?"

"A frog." They continued walking. Jimmy picked up yet another stick.

"I bet there're a lot of frogs around here."

"Yeah, there're a whole lot. They're all over the place. Uncle Massy caught one last week that was the biggest one I ever seen."

"I ever saw," corrected Brentwood.

"Biggest one I ever saw," repeated Jimmy. "It was all yellow and it just sat there and didn't move hardly at all and it was really big."

Brentwood pulled back the string and the bow arched. He let the arrow fly: "Why was it yellow?" Like neat little dominoes he could see each question and answer falling in succession with a clatter as he drove home the point.

"I don't know. It just was."

"But it still was a frog, wasn't it?"

"Yeah."

"What about people?"

"Huh?"

Brentwood was a trifle surprised that the boy couldn't see all those dominoes. "Why should it matter if a man is brown or white? If he's a man, shouldn't he be treated like all other men? It's just like the frog.

Even if it's yellow, it's still a frog. The yellow frogs aren't servants to the green frogs. The same should be true with men, shouldn't it?"

Jimmy had thrown away his latest stick, and was now intent on Brentwood as he spoke. The boy liked the feel of the teacher's hand on his shoulder. "You know, one of the tenets—uh—one of the principles that led the Founding Fathers to start the Revolutionary War was that all men are created equal." Jimmy looked uncertain. Brentwood froze into a marble statue, trying to assume the pose of his tutor, cursing his lack of spectacles as he tried to instill the majesty of the words into the child: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." A frog hic-coughed. Jimmy didn't hear it. His senses were focussed on the teacher, the words shrouded him, he was lost in their mist. They stood, both statue-like now, for a full minute before Brentwood finally turned and took him by the hand, and they began anew their walk. "Up north where I come from, we don't have any servants. We believe what I just recited, that all men are equal, so we don't let any man own any other man. We don't allow it. It's just not right." The boy's eyes were gleaming. The words travelled physically, sliding from

Brentwood's mouth down his arm into his hand, then into the boy's hand.

Next morning the teacher caught up with Jimmy on the way to school. He noticed something about the boy's carriage, and wondered what albatross hung around that clean fresh neck, pulling it down. After a couple minutes of walking, Brentwood brought the problem to the fore. "You look a little down in the mouth, Jimmy. Is something bothering you?" Jimmy spread his lips in an effort to speak, but faltered. The blood flooded his cheeks and, flustered, he closed his mouth. Brentwood mussed the boy's hair, coaxingly. "Come on, Jimmy. Spell it out, boy."

"I-I-I—" he stammered, as the tears streamed down his face. "I didn't find out about the War."

"What?"

"About the Revolutionary War. You said we-we had to ask about the War, but-but—"

Brentwood picked the boy up and held him to his chest. "Shhh, shhhh. It's all right, it's okay. Shhhh." He stroked Jimmy's hair. After a while the boy's tears let up. "Did you ask anyone in your family?" the teacher prodded, gently.

"I asked Grampa, but he told me to keep quiet and almost hit me. Then I asked Mother but she didn't have time." Jimmy's sniffing subsided.

"What about Aunt Gwen? Did



you ask her? She must know what your family did in the Revolutionary War." Brentwood saw Jimmy stumble mentally as he hoisted him a little higher on his chest.

"Uh-uh-we got Aunt Gwen about three years ago."

It was Brentwood's turn to stumble. "You 'got' her?"

"Yeah, we got her from a trader."

"Then how come you call her 'aunt'?"

"I don't know. We just do. That's what everybody calls her."

Brentwood set Jimmy back on the ground. "Well, it doesn't really matter that you couldn't do the assignment. As long as you tried, that's the important thing. It's nothing to get upset about." Jimmy looked reassured, as Brentwood petted him. "So. What should we do in class today?"

"I don't know."

"Should we talk about having servants, and Negroes being people, and stuff?"

"Yeah, yeah, let's!"

The teacher was slightly stunned at Jimmy's enthusiasm. "And maybe I could call on you and you could talk about the frog?"

"Yeah, I can talk about the frog and it's yellow and how it's still a frog and the same for people, even niggers." Brentwood's elation raced with his blood at these words. The kid had understood. This eight-year-old kid had understood. He saw twenty-four kids

going home, marching home, convincing their parents to free their slaves. It was the start of an abolitionist movement in the South. He would travel, preaching, sprinkling the ignorant but grateful Southern masses with pure abolition water. The crowds would flock. His friends would feel a sense of honor, of privilege, at having been intimate with him. Newspaper headlines, the new messiah—his arms lurched forward, he stumbled into Jimmy. His shoe had caught on a root.

As the weeks passed, his twenty-four converts did not materialize. School went well and the kids liked him, but there were only two other boys who dove into his pool of abolitionism. These two, Chuck Gaiser and Davy Thomforde, would get together with Jimmy and him almost every day after school, to play games or explore, or just to walk and listen to his soothing voice as it gurgled over them. He realized that there was something about his voice, some Siren-like quality which enveloped the three; something about his warm touch that lured them to him. But the others, he muttered to himself, the others are lashed to the mast and cannot be drawn away by my voice and touch. Nighttimes, in the light, at his desk, he swore at the inattentive youngsters for not removing the clods of wax from their ears. Why couldn't they hear his sweet

abolitionist voice calling?

They didn't have many other friends, these three. Jimmy was rather timid and, after the third day of school, had the tag "teacher's pet" pinned to him. In the fourth week some of the boys even started calling him Jimmy Brentwood, so close had he become with the teacher. Chuck's father was a mild, quiet man, but his mother beat him; Chuck came to school with bruises and scabs that made the other boys afraid, that shook something at their foundations, and they hated him. Davy, poor red-cheeked Davy, was the youngest in a very large family where he was sort of an oddball, an ugly duckling. He had a sagging face and hardly any hair, he was pudgy and weak, and he cried a lot. His mother and the servants had enough to do without listening to him whine all day long; the other children taunted and bullied him. Sometimes they even took away his dinner, and wouldn't let him eat. These three, then, were recruited to row the ship; my voice reached them, Brentwood thought. He would see that the others cleaned their ears and came on board, too. But one thing the teacher had not reckoned on was the squall, Poseidon's revenge.

Slowly, as he fanned his abolitionist fire and tried to spread it to the kids, the parents caught the scent. It took them a while, they must have been quite a ways down-wind, but they smelled its



stink and came running, buckets in hand. During the sixth week of school, two parents had approached him and expressed in a rather easy manner their disapproval of his teachings. He had given little thought to any reaction that might come from the children's families, and as a result was slightly taken aback by this encounter. On reconsidering, though, he realized that he should have expected some sort of response from the community. However, he heard nothing more until he attended a party at Jimmy's parents' home. The kids had already been swatted by his beliefs for nine weeks, weeks in which he had used every conceivable opportunity to fill them to the brim with the idea of equality; but this would be his first shot at their parents.

It was the first dinner party to which he'd been invited. Brentwood was the only guest who hadn't come by carriage. Instead, he had walked over on one of the servants' paths behind his house. Inside, he knew, were most of the parents of his pupils. He had expected this, and was prepared to move them with his beliefs.

The first person who greeted him was Jimmy's mother, very apologetic over the fact that Mr. Bracken was not at home. He had expected to be back in time for the party, but had been detained in Washington. It was common, she explained. As she talked, the

teacher scrutinized the guests. "You know it's almost as though he thought he had no family, the way he's spent the last five-and-a-half years in the capital," she continued. At this point Jimmy came charging down the stairs and leapt at the teacher, giving off a gleeful yell of "Uncle Bill!" as he grabbed around the teacher's waist. Brentwood was equally as happy, and he recognized that the kid could be a cute little persuader. He knew that Jimmy would—if permitted—tag along behind him for the entire evening.

"I think it's wonderful the way you two have so much fun together," Mrs. Bracken threw out, in a voice a trifle too syrupy for her to have meant it. Brentwood could taste her bitterness.

"So do I," he smiled. She led them, the teacher and the boy going hand in hand, directly over to Tommy's parents and, after introducing them, returned to the door to greet more new arrivals, and to watch her little "party" develop.

"Your son is a very bright lad," began Brentwood. "It's a real pleasure teaching him."

"Well, we're delighted you think so," said Mrs. Watkins. His cannons were all loaded and ready to be fired, but he knew that they would be most effective, do the most damage, if the enemy were unprepared for the attack—so he smiled at the Watkins. They wore pleasant enough expressions

themselves, but if he could have looked behind those expressions into their camp, he would have found artillery, artillery quite similar to his own. It was camouflaged in the same manner, too, covered over and hidden by smiles. The only difference was the direction in which it was pointed.

"You know, it's really nice country down here. It's such a change from the North. It somehow seems more relaxed and more spread out."

"Yes, doesn't it though," said Mrs. Watkins. "But it's still nice up North. The one thing I love, which we don't really get, is the beautiful fall foliage."

"Yes, it is magnificent," chimed in Mr. Watkins. "And the snow is glorious. Sometimes I think we ought to move up there, simply because of the snow."

Probably likes the snow because it's white, the teacher said to himself. And then to Mr. Watkins, "yes, but it's so cold up there, and the people get so irritable by the end of the winter. Here everyone is pleasant and friendly." Back and forth, back and forth, each trying to butter up that piece of bread that is the mind of the other. Each wanted to be accepted by the other, to be taken into the other's body so that the vial of poison could be released, and the old beliefs killed off; the killer's beliefs would then possess the body and would be so deeply entrenched as to resist exorcism.



After many more pleasantries, and after the teacher had been introduced to a number of other parents of his pupils, the gong for dinner sounded, and the guests waltzed into the dining-room. Jimmy disappeared back up the stairs. There were two large tables in the room, both of which had been set lavishly. Each was covered with a white linen tablecloth, each had a beautiful centerpiece, each was majestic. The silver service glistened, as did the napkin rings and the candelabra. The luster of the wood was deep and rich, and the velvet curtains gave the room an appropriate air of luxury. Brentwood realized why the Southerners were unwilling to do away with slavery.

His bookends at the table were Mr. Watkins and Mrs. Nollie, Mrs. Watkins' sister. Across from him was the hostess. He found Watkins to be a surprisingly intelligent man, well-read, and interesting to listen to. Their discussion wandered about in a desultory fashion until it landed on Brentwood and the school. Brentwood saw his chance: here was an intelligent man, Watkins, who would see reason if it were pointed out to him; Watkins saw *his* chance: here was an intelligent man, Brentwood, who would see reason if it were pointed out to him. Watkins took the first step, so eager was he to expose the misguided teacher to the truth.

"So how do you like teaching?"

"Oh I think it's great, it really is. Some of the youngsters are so

bright that it is a real joy to teach them."

"Yes, well, Tommy certainly finds the class challenging. We've had many long talks about what he has learned. I think it's good the way you're concentrating on American history. I think this is important for a boy to have. One needs a thorough background in one's own heritage. I really think it's essential."

"I agree," said Brentwood. "And I also feel it's important that one has a moral sense of one's country. I've been trying to emphasize the moral questions in our history—the idea of taxation without representation, self-determination by the colonists—things like this. And the idea of equality, I've been trying to stress this to the kids, too."

"I approve whole-heartedly," said Watkins. Brentwood was startled. Watkins—approve of equality? It was too much to believe. "We've tried to hammer in the natural equality of all men to Tommy. I think it's the most important thing he can learn."

"I've been talking a lot about slavery in connection with equality, and—"

"Well, that's a different question," said Watkins, cutting him off. "If you think about it, you'll see how it's not the same."

"Well, I don't know," said the teacher.

"Look at it," Watkins said calmly. "We're talking about equality

between people. Slaves aren't people, really."

"It's true," said Mrs. Nollie. "The Negro is not the same as you or me. It even says this in the Bible. The Negro has to be a slave. It's part of God's punishment of Cain."

"Well," started Brentwood, but Mrs. Bracken jumped in.

"Yes, in fact, slavery is good for the Negro. It is a way of Christianizing him. He can learn from us. If he were back in Africa he'd never even hear about religion. This way at least he has the opportunity to become a Christian."

"But there's more to it than that," said Watkins. The ball of the conversation was being passed around Brentwood, and he could not catch it; he was the monkey-in-the-ring. "Every great society has existed with slavery as its basis. It is a fundamental economic necessity. Slavery has permitted our superior Christian culture to develop. If it weren't for slavery, we wouldn't be where we are today. Look at what is considered to be the greatest society, ancient Athens. Their extreme intellectual achievements were possible only because the slaves did all the physical work. It's the same with us—without slavery, we would still be poor dim-witted pagans."

Brentwood forced his way into the conversation. "Hold on," he said firmly. "All that about Athens may be true, but what about the Negro and *his* society? Doesn't he have rights which we're not gran-



ting him by keeping him enslaved? Don't you think—" But again he was cut off; they were attacking on all sides.

"We're helping him," threw in Mrs. Nollie, "we're helping him greatly. The slave is happy, which is a lot more than can be said for most white people. We give him a chance to be a Christian, and this is more than any other lower creature gets." Brentwood's anger rose and showed through on his face.

"What you must remember, Mr. Brentwood," said Mrs. Bracken, "is that the Negro is not a person like us. That's what all you Northerners forget. If you lived with the nigger you'd see this. And I can prove it to you." She picked up the dinner bell and rang it. A servant came out of the kitchen. The servant was smiling, almost beaming. "Sarah?"

"Yes Mrs. Bracken?"

"Get me a pillow."

"Yes Mrs. Bracken." Sarah was still beaming as she left. Mrs. Bracken turned back to Brentwood.

"Now Mr. Brentwood, a normal person would not put up with me and my orders. A normal person would rebel, would fight me. But Sarah doesn't rebel. In fact, she is happy. You saw her smiling, didn't you? Didn't she look happy?"

"Well yes, but—"

"Well there you have it," said Watkins. "I think we have just proven our case, and done it admirably. It'll be good knowing my

son is getting taught sensibly, and knowing that our teacher is not an abolitionist." He looked sternly at Brentwood, almost threateningly, as he said this. "Now, if we are permitted to change topics, I think it'll be interesting to see that library in Pennington. They say that..." Brentwood felt that the bookends had squeezed in on him. A sense of frustration, of failure, was festering inside him, and it grew as the evening wore on.

When it was time to leave, something strange occurred. Jimmy was downstairs again, trailing Brentwood. The teacher was almost at the door and had turned to thank his hostess, when it happened. For a second, it seemed that everyone in the room froze. They became statues. And oddly, they were identical, as if they had been chipped at by the same artist. Every one of them was a duplicate of the others, and all were statues. Jimmy was the only one who moved. Jimmy touched him and, as if this was a signal, they all started moving, chatting, laughing, the way they had been. Brentwood left, puzzled, but quickly forgot about this peculiar occurrence. He had something more important to occupy his mind.

At home, Brentwood turned his loaded cannons, the ones he hadn't fired, on himself. He asked if he could compromise his beliefs; if it actually was a compromise not to speak out against an injustice. He wondered what would happen

if he continued in his teaching, if he in fact stepped up his anti-slavery propaganda. He knew now that he could not get to the parents, but had he gotten to any of the children? Or was it hopeless?

The following day he sat on his desk in silence, his head down, until the classroom was full. He looked up—Tommy, Billy, Chuck, Glenn, the two Bobs, Jimmy. Then he asked the question.

"How many of you think that slavery is wrong, that it is bad?" He looked around. "How many of you think that the Revolution was fought for all men, including Negroes? How many of you?" He steered his eyes slowly over the class. And then he knew that the parents had done their work—three hands raised, and he had been certain of these three even before he had asked. He saw, too, several uncertain faces. Then he stood and looked at them, walked across the room and back, and sat down again. "Well we're going to keep studying it," he growled. "We're going to study slavery until you all see what it is, how inhuman and unChristian and just plain wrong it is. And if your parents don't like what we're doing, then I'm sorry."

The class didn't seem too moved by his speech, by his decision that had been ground out in the gray stark hours of the morning. They obviously were not aware of the issues at stake. School went on as



usual that day. Brentwood taught Jimmy, Chuck, and Davy a new game called "fisher" after school; later on, he ate a quiet dinner alone. As he finished his dessert, the door slammed open. Mr. Watkins stamped in, gritted his face. "I meant what I said last night." Then he stamped out. By the time Brentwood got to the door, his carriage was pulling away.

"Don't you want to discuss it?" shouted the teacher. The tandem was gone.

For the next two days he talked about nothing but slavery. Even the grammar and spelling were waived. The evening of the second day, reading in his study, a window was smashed. Smashed. That was Thursday night. Friday morning leaving for school he found a rope in the shape of a noose nailed to the door. Out of curiosity he tried to slip the noose over his head. It fit.

That day there was a ferocious give-and-take in class, Brentwood asking over and over about the servants, their habits, their similarity to "us," etc. Jimmy left right after school, as he and his mother were going to visit his other grandfather. He had a very pleasant week-end, playing with Grampa Weldon, riding one of the ponies, exploring in the attic. He got home late Sunday night and didn't have time to stop in at Uncle Bill's. The next morning Uncle Bill wasn't waiting

for him on the road to the schoolhouse. This didn't bother Jimmy, for quite often the teacher went in early to set up a science or nature experiment. It was sunny, but now the grass had faded, and Jimmy needed a coat to keep himself warm. He went into the schoolroom with Tommy and, shutting the door, looked over to see Glenn's uncle sitting erect behind the desk. A shiny new ruler smirked at the children from the hook on the side of the desk, gleaming in anticipation of the blows it was soon to lay on those white young knuckles. Glenn's uncle stood, marched halfway across the cold floor, and turned to the children. "I am taking Mr. Brentwood's place. He will no longer be teaching you."

Jimmy's mouth sprung open, the tears shot to his eyes. Where was Uncle Bill? He raised his hand. Glenn's uncle was shocked.

"Why do you have your hand up in the air, like an idiot," he said harshly. Jimmy quivered in his seat and reddened, then said "I-I-I want to know where Mr. Brentwood is."

The teacher grabbed the ruler and truculently clacked it on the desk. It made a loud smack. "Any more questions like that and I'll use this," he smiled.

Where was Uncle Bill? Jimmy thought of making a break out the door, but the ruler glittered.

"You," Glenn's uncle barked at Tommy. "Stand up and tell me

what the ablative absolute is."

Tommy snapped to his feet. "It's when—"

The uncle cut him off. "Where are your manners, boy? Before one more word slips out of that mouth I'd better hear a 'Sir' and an apology for not having said it when you first spoke."

"Yuh-yuh-yes Sir," stammered Tommy. "Sir, the ablative absolute. . . ."

Jimmy didn't hear another word that was said in class for the rest of the day. After school he ran home to Uncle Bill's. He burst through the door and ran all over the house while the cook, who had heard the commotion and had come to see what was going on, tried to explain that Brentwood had left. Jimmy finally accepted the fact that Brentwood wasn't in the house. He stood outside crying, disintegrated, mumbling "Uncle Bill" again and again. Three hours later he dragged himself home. There he was told by his mother, and later by half-a-dozen other parents, that the teacher had gone back up North. He could not forget how vividly Uncle Bill had told him Friday at recess about the noose, and the window, the window shooting its little shivers of glass all the way over to the desk. Uncle Bill wouldn't have left without saying good-bye.

Then he found him. Stumbled over him. In the underbrush. Jim didn't recognize him at first, and neither did Chuck and Dave, who

were following right behind him. They rolled him over and saw the line of blood that drooled from his mouth. His blue uniform was deep red around the chest, red like Grampa Weldon's horse. Jim's blue uniform was yet to be smeared. A bullet zipped through the bushes nearby. Jim, Chuck, and Dave dropped to the ground for safety. The thorns jabbed them mercilessly. They didn't know that the regiment they were fighting was made up of their old schoolmates. Ahead Jim saw a gray uniform flash. Then he looked again at the teacher's face, older than he remembered it. Then he threw up.



# THE GARDENS

Jayne Weiner

Slowly strolling,  
stiff white spring coat  
crunching patent on YOUR feet.  
you, She, hangs handbag  
you, He, carries camera.

Mouth moves YOU.  
slow, dumb words  
offending flowers' face.  
tall, clean YOU  
in cotton colors stare  
museum stares  
at peeping yellow greens.

she, proof of YOUR beast,  
lumbers along behind YOU.  
starched blue, pointy patent,  
she, sprouting lardy dyeballs,  
crimps up YOUR pastel lie:

YOU lay down once,  
Naked.  
Heat, sweat spilling YOU.  
Flesh tied.  
Sticky kicking skin  
Breathed.  
you bred, She,

and bloomed.  
Spring secrets in your breasts,  
milk buds for tiny sweet seed  
swam your timeless tunnels.

But you shaded the sack with monkey suits  
to shrink your garden's swellings.  
you begged moo-cows to water the weed  
which shivered your spine for growing.

she weed, almost now seed bearing,  
unblossoms birds' morning song,  
pimpled shy,  
ancient seeds' secret lost.

garden flowers, rowed and rayed,  
share the grief.

# GOING HOME

Sharon Grollman

The girls on my hall don't ask me where I'm going anymore when they see me dragging my gold initialled brown leather suitcase down the stairs. My roommate says, "Why do you go home so much?" And I smile, shrugging my shoulders, looking at the tiled floor and answer, "I don't know. I just like to, I guess," then looking up, grinning at her shaking head.

On the bus I sit next to old ladies with knitting needles and crochet hooks. I tell them, "There is a lake coming up pretty soon on the right with a blue house by the shore. Sometimes you can see the people eating.... And there's a park..." The ladies keep knitting, nodding their heads as I talk. It is very important that I tell them, to let them know how smart I am. Then when the women let their hands drop to their laps and their heads rest against the window, I count the number of minutes we have left to go until we pull into the station, wondering what my mother will be wearing, what news she will have to tell me. She cuts out articles from the town paper about old classmates and places them in a neat pile on my dresser.

The bus moves too slowly. My mother is waiting in the station with old men and negroes. I don't want them to look at her—to see her legs spread, her stomach bulging over her belt, her pointed breasts beneath her tight sweater. I think I see her face in the lighted windows that we pass.

When I do see her, it seems awkward, as though I'm seeing her for the second time—once in my mind, in the houses, and then sitting in the station. She smiles and rushes to me, taking me into her big arms, kissing my cheek, leaving her red wet lipstick on my face. "I missed my baby," she says, leading me to the car. "Does she like college? Do her teachers know how smart she is?"

I stare at her thighs spread beneath her gray miniskirt. I want to say, "Mom, your dress is too short. You shouldn't wear things like that. It makes men look."

"My English teacher said I was doing very well. She wrote that on the top of my paper. She said I was 'perceptive.'"

"And what about the boys? Does my baby like any boys? Do they like her?"

I don't answer, but ask about the news.

"Billy Sand was killed. I think he was in your year."

"How?" It is necessary to know the details—where he was, how it happened, who he was with.

"Someone told me but I can't remember."

"Remember then."

"Is my baby getting cross?" and I pull my hand away from hers. "Oh, yes. She always had such a temper. There was a little girl who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead, and when she was good, she was very, very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid." She slides her palm down the side of my face. "And is she breaking out?"

"How did he die? He sat next to me in math."

"Drunken driving. Or maybe it was pot. That's the way it happens most of the time. I'm glad my baby doesn't have her license."

We pull into the driveway and she hugs me before getting out of the car. She leans on me, her body heavy on mine. She is glad I'm home.



Ten years ago. I clumsily put on my blue tights, twisting them around so they don't gap around the ankles. I move quickly, afraid I will miss the school bus. Mom is still in bed and she would be angry if I nudged her out of sleep because I missed the bus. Before I go, I lay my head on her stomach, kneeling beside her bed. It is okay. She is still breathing.

Mom takes me shopping, gripping my arm as we walk through the stores. I pull away at first, but she clutches my arm tighter. I lower my eyes when I see old classmates. "Don't you know that girl?" Mom whispers loudly in my ear. "Wasn't she in your class? What's her name again?" I tell her I can't remember, that it was too long ago.

In the dressing room, Mom helps me pull my shirt over my head, then with my arms raised, she slips on a blue polka dotted dress. "Isn't my baby pretty?" she says, her pale fingers touching her cheeks.

"It's too tight."

She admires me in the mirror. "It fits perfectly."

She pays cash for it while I protest, telling her I really don't need it, that I have no place to wear it.

Eleven years ago. The school nurse calls the house. I can hear her dialing the numbers, the clicks so familiar. I can see Mom lying in

bed, her head tilted to one side, her mouth open so the saliva runs down her chin. I am thankful when I hear the nurse speaking. My mother is still alive.

"Hello, Mrs. Kearns. This is Miss Hanson, the school nurse. Your daughter complained of dizziness... No, she has no temperature... Yes, I'll tell her to wait at the front entrance."

When we get home, I crawl into bed next to her, close enough so I can hear her breathing. Safe.

"Dinner's ready," Mom calls. We sit at the counter. I wear my new dress. I watch her as she cuts the pieces of fat off the edges for me. "You know," she says, "Aunt Ida bought a new pair of shoes and Henry slapped her. I don't think they're very happy. Poor Ida. He won't give her nice things. Women need nice things. Men don't understand that. They expect women to give them their bodies once or twice a week and clean the house, but once a woman asks for something... And Auntie Ell is having such troubles. Her husband—a first class schmuck. I'm telling you. He marries her, gives her children," and she leans over the table, lowering her voice, "Then he leaves her because he says she's... frigid. But it's the man's fault. The woman is only the follower."

I make designs with the food.

"My baby is going to shrink away to nothing. The boys won't be able

to see her." I watch her as she laughs, teeth showing, her hands in her stomach. She pokes her food with her fingers, tearing apart the red meat while blood drips down her palm. Her mouth moves excitedly, her tongue searching for pieces of meat caught between her teeth.

Twelve years ago. Daddy tells me stories, sitting beside my canopied bed. While he reads, he plays with my face, his fingers running through my hair. One night he kisses me on the mouth and carefully, slowly, unbuttons my pajamas. His head is heavy on my stomach so it is hard to breath. I stare at the ceiling as he moves his hands on my rigid body. Before he leaves, he tells me if I ever tell anyone, he will kill me.

Mom drives me to the station. "Does my baby have to leave so soon? We were having such a wonderful time."

"I'll come home next weekend."

"You promise?"

She leans over to hug me as she parks in the station. "Call me when you get there." I wave as I run to the bus and watch her lips mouth, "I love my baby."

I sit next to a nun and she falls to sleep as soon as the bus starts to move. I watch the roads, the passing houses, thinking I see Mom's face in each lighted window.

Dear Mom,

I miss you already and I've only been back for two hours. It is a sunny day and all the boys are outside playing baseball and the girls are sitting on the grass watching, rooting. I can see them from my window.

Nancy (my roommate) isn't here but she wrote "welcome home" on the memo board, or maybe that was left from last week. I'm waiting for her now. We always go to dinner together.

Can't wait to see you next weekend. Miss you.

Love,  
Mary

Nancy, Leslie, and I walk to the cafeteria for dinner. I try to keep up with them, their pace is too fast. They ask me if I had a good weekend and I shake my head. "Yeah, and you?" They don't answer. They're talking about Bobby, the boy Leslie is dating.

"Christ, ya know, I sleep with him and everythin's swell the night before. Then when he wakes up he starts mumbling, angry about something, ya know? What the hell does he want? He says I wasn't responsive enough."

Nancy tells her it's okay, that maybe he just wasn't feeling good. She then turns to me, her eyebrows peeked at the corners, and asks, "What do you think of the situation?"

I feel them laughing as they exchange looks and tap each other

on the leg. "I don't know. Displaced aggression, maybe." My fingernails leave half moons on my palms, the kind that I left on Bruce's neck when he pushed me under the stairway and tried to kiss me, shifting his thick arms around my waist, holding me against the wall. Miss Leonard, my eighth grade math teacher, gave me permission to go to the girl's room and it was as though he knew I was coming, waiting. He let me go when I dug my nails into his neck.

In the cafeteria we sit at a long table half filled with noisy boys. Nancy knows them and waves, sitting down next to the tall blond one.

"How was your weekend?" he asks her.

"Okay. Lot of parties. Got pretty high."

I stare at my food and listen to the talk, letting it sink into my head so I can go over it later when I'm alone. I whisper their words in front of the mirror, making the faces that they would wear. Painted smiles.

"Hey, Bruce. You're girlfriend was real cute. Why didn't ya introduce her to me?" a boy asks with a plate of blueberry pie, his hip pressed against the corner of the table.

As I look up at him, he winks, then walks down the aisle. Nancy sees him and shoves her elbow into my waist. "Your new sweetie, huh?"

"Oh, yeah," I mumble.

I hear her whisper to the blond boy, "My roommate—not my friend."

English class. I walk in late while the professor is talking. I find the first empty seat. She asks a question about Hemingway's theme, looking in one direction, then the other, her mouth twisted into a smile. No one responds—all eyes on notebooks. I try to remember the answer, muttering words to myself. My body is stiff. Time is running out. When the professor gives the answer, I feel cheated.

She asks another question and I blurt out an answer too loudly so all heads turn towards me. My arms jerk with my words as I stare at the professor's dress hiking up her thighs. Her fat shows, pulled tight, rippled under her black stockings. She shakes her head, waiting for me to finish. I have to show her how smart I am.

David comes to my room every night so I can help him with his math homework. He is my best friend. He leans over my shoulder as I sit at the desk, playing with the numbers, listening to the pencil scratchings. "You understand?" I ask, still looking at the paper. He doesn't answer, but buries his head into my neck. I continue, "Do you understand? This is how you're supposed to do it." I jerk away as his mouth comes closer to mine. "David," I whisper, "stop it."

He retreats to my roommate's bed, his head resting against the



wall, his legs outstretched so that the top of his socks are showing.

"Come on, please let me kiss you."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because. . ." I smile as he hides his head in his hands.

"You're so beautiful," he whispers.

"Shut up, David." I am not afraid of him because he is weak. I am glad he is here so I can watch him. David is my best friend.

I speak very softly. "David, Mom just wrote me a letter about James. He is three years older than I am but we used to play with each other when we were little. He'd chase me in the park and if he caught me, I'd have to pull my pants down. Once he tied me to a pole in his back yard so I could belong to his club. When he got in junior high, we weren't friends anymore. Mom said his only friend was his cat. David, isn't that funny? Last week, he slit his cat's throat, then took an overdose of pills. They couldn't save the cat but he was okay after he had his stomach pumped out. I wish I could've seen his face when he found out his cat was dead. I wish I could've taken a picture of that face. I'd hang it on the wall, David, next to your high school picture."

I give him his math book and tell him to leave. He doesn't look at me as he shuffles out of the room.

I work three nights a week at a

restaurant in town. Frank says I'm his best waitress and I am pleased. I like work. When I work, I do not think.

Sometimes Frank says to me, "Take a break, honey," and I shake my head and say, "No, I'm all right," but he insists, "Do me a favor, kid. Sit down." He watches me from behind the counter as I sit in the back room playing with a deck of cards, constantly fidgeting. Frank yells, "Take it easy, will ya?" But I can't stop moving.

Frank likes me. When he walks by me, he grabs my shoulders or slaps me on the rear. When waitresses forget to pick up their tips, he snatches the coins from dirty ash trays and slips them into my breast pocket. He is very careful then, not to fumble, not to falter. I pretend not to notice his small thick hands, the dirt impacted beneath his ragged finger nails.

Most of the customers are regulars. Like Sam. He yells out my name as soon as he walks through the doors. I do not have to look at his face to know who the voice belongs to. Sometimes he asks in a whisper if he can have a little something extra, on the house. He sits like an old man huddled over his food—poking and grabbing it with his fingers—shovelling it in—his mouth open as he chews. Strands of food stick to his chin. He tells me I'm sweet, his arm wrapped around my waist, then kissing me where his arm is resting.

I tilt my head and smile. "You're crazy, Sam," I say and he squeezes me tighter. Sometimes his arm goes limp, brushing down my body.

David comes to see me once a day. He always sits in the same booth next to the juke box so he can study the names of all the tunes. When I see him, I rush with my orders. Then he calls my name and I raise my chin in recognition and my smile becomes teeth.

I bring him coffee and an english muffin, sliding in the seat across from him. Leaning over his plate, he asks me how my day is going. And I tell him about Sam and Frank—their jokes, their words of praise, speaking very quickly, afraid I will miss a detail but I do not tell him how I would like to crawl out of my skin so I would not have to feel the hands of men who think they are offering me gifts of love with their touch.

When I finish speaking he gets up from the table. "I'll see you later," he says, his little finger heavy on my wrist. With his other hand he searches in his back pocket—he always leaves me a quarter tip.

I don't know why I'm going. An action out of impulse. Maybe it was the dream I had. I was standing in the middle of a crowd. People were anxiously waiting for something. Applause, laughter, and shouts were heard. Then the shoving began. I tried to escape

but I was trapped. My mouth opened, wanting to scream, but no sounds came, only a heavy rasping. He saw me. He saved me from the people, the enemy, their screams, and thunders of applause. He carried me away. The dream made me want to love him.

The next day I call in sick at the restaurant. Sitting in the train station, waiting for the 9:37 to Albany, I watch the people—the old lady in the green dress who eats a child's hamburger, the negro who stares at me from the phone booth. The man sitting next to me reads the Enquirer, carelessly turning the pages so the corners rest on my lap. The woman with the child now greedily picks in between her teeth and swallows the bits of dislodged food. I smile at everyone, not out of friendliness, but out of fear.

It has been seven years since I've seen my father.

The thought occurs to me that I should bring him something. I rush through the half empty station searching for a gift store. On display are postcards of historical Boston and American flags that sit in a paper cup on the spotted counter top.

"I'll take the flag."

I arrive in Albany at 1:30 and take a cab to the Home in Schenectady. The Home is a euphemism for a place for old people. It's where families dump their parents when they don't want them anymore. It's where they wait for the old folks to die.

"Kearns, please," I ask at the desk.

"You a relative or friend?"

"Mary Kearns. Daughter. Which

room is he in?"

"I'll lead the way," she offers. "I didn't know Mr. Kearns had family." The nurse waits for a reply. When I don't answer, she continues, "I bet your dad will be real glad to see you. He know you're coming?"

"No."

"This is his room. Maybe I'd better tell him you're here."

"Thank you for your assistance. I'll go in by myself." I slowly walk into the room.

Mary had a little lamb

Fleece as white as snow

My father always taunted me with that rhyme when I was a child, mimicking me, repeating it until I would cry. I whisper the words until he slowly shifts his head towards me. "Dad, I'm here," I say, waving the flag in the air.









## ANIMA

Sam Hughes

Strands of seaweed  
Painted with rich, brown mud,  
    with primeval forests,  
Gently undulating with the tides  
Turned by the moon's cryptic finger—

Beckoning?

Soft and slithery  
To the touch of dry, sinewy hands  
Groping  
Grasping  
Clutching  
Pulling —

They drift in to shore,

Drying, crumbling,  
Crunching beneath tender bare feet  
On a pebbled beach

# MARNIE

by Lynn Wintriss

Self-animation they call this sensation as I watch one fleshy fingered appendage creep toward the other in an ambush attack planned to fix the opponent to the surface beneath it which gives it support and sustenance in this long wait someone calls life—personally I think it's death and birth only occurs at that revelatory moment when the future is realized to be just an instrument of destruction slowly surely advancing toward the limited consciousness of the human form and figure this out if you can—yes, I have an overwhelming all-consuming never-ending passion to unmask this hollow—is it really?—form I find before me every day as I proceed with my usual performances and form a semi-semi-circle with the flesh which surrounds my facial orifice. Ah, those red red lips lusting for a sibling scarlet to satisfy this unfounded desire for completion resolution dissolution truth at any cost even if only to liberate the ghosts robbing the vermilion shadows from this shell which should be emerged from and discarded at any time now. Someone

calls the words echoing within me reverberating until the walls shiver forcing a response found somewhere in one of the many uncharted niches of this doubtfully inhabited body. A soul reluctantly wanders through fitfully animating various extremes and causing unexpected spectacles to occur just in case anyone happens to be watching this poor pitiful female being stumbling in the oblivion which mirrors her internal state-of-being. Lost in the ozone searching for missing souls looking for one in particular which will force those creeping hands to declare a truce and forget all those long shiny sharp silver blades and their sanguine reflections when held to the lips they shine like flames dancing and singing false notes of a summer strawberry sweetness and the sticky juices oozing from the fresh slices. Anonymity while doomed to a cardinal emptiness fighting temptation and the tantalizing pleasure-pain a spear of metal through the palm would bring if only allowed the indulgence of the audience we royally of course would provide an interesting to say the least diver-

sionary display for the small fee of only a few tears or a couple of receptive ears to listen to the sobs of this endlessly echoing abyss called a person by those not in the know. On second thought you're not invited for this will be a simple ceremony private showing for the triumvirate of me, myself, and I otherwise known as the tragic trio when playing some of the more classical roles as described by Freud and Jung and whoever else happens to label themselves as psychoanalytic experts and whose word almost everyone takes lightly or with a grain of salt depending on the religion and background. My own consists of shimmering daggers knives swords thousands of them reflecting crimson waves of light and shadow as I undulate to the hypnotic rhythm and dream of abortion rape murder and self-mutilation while under the influence of mind-constricting thoughts of safety matches and slapped hands and the soon-to-be-experienced streaks of tension in the palms while the soles of these dusty feet sympathetically cringe in expectation of the forth-coming event of a lifetime. Yes it will be a



horrorshow good time if those hands ever make it around that eternal circle which Chronos is always secretly expanding never contracting and relentlessly extending the length of the normal human life expectancy while thousands commit suicide daily to shorten their own and contradict Durkheim's theories. Is that a NO or a KNOW I hear gaining force as it makes its way toward the external openings of the soul where it will hopefully escape and be lost for at least an eternity if not two or three of them for mind over matter does not seem to be a working idea for this specimen of relatively mentally-decayed post-pubescent femininity bewitched by an all-consuming whirlwind of masochism.

The usual electric hum began a little ahead of time. Marnie had arrived at the office a bit early Tuesday morning—just to make sure she got all of her work out of the way before the luncheon. She had been working with Tullman and Tullman, architectural designers, for two weeks and already moved as though her tasks were well-defined. She had found theirs an easy routine to fit into. Dave and Craig were good people to work for; she wanted to please them, and enjoyed the smiles she received in return. People who had goals, fulfilled them, and found new challenges with every new job. Purposed. Vigorous, and

she was beginning to assume the same directions.

Music was coming from the system someone had just turned on. A classical station in the area always provided an encouraging atmosphere. Maybe it was the music—somehow the external pressure she'd always known in other offices had become internalized. She was pushing herself, and humming along to one of Beethoven's sonatas this morning.

The draftsmen were finishing up the last of the blues, anticipating the lunch date. They would be celebrating a lot of things—another job finished, a new girl in the office, another contract coming up. The glass wall behind their backs let the sky of the morning merge with the blues on their drafting-tables and accentuate the blue-greens of the office. In-doors and out, it was a spring morning promising a better afternoon.

Dave rushed in and handed a letter to Marnie to be finished. Craig came in from his office and gave the draftsmen something to be corrected. Coffee was dispensed all around.

"Are we going to have this done by noon?"

"No problem—I'll have this draft off my table in an hour. One of these elevations is giving me a bit of trouble, but I think I've figured out the problem."

"I may need an extra while on this draft, but it should be done by noon with no rush. Jerry just

brought in his proofs and wants you to check them out so he can get them printed up this afternoon. Other than that, I think it's all wrapped up."

"Well, I've got these letters to finish up, and then there's the layout for the promotion. I think I can have that pretty much taken care of by noon."

"Ok, great. I've got reservations for 12:30 at the Carriage House, so keep your stomach in mind as you finish up."

The crew settled at their respective desks, coffee cups perched close at hand, and industry continued at a brisk pace until the appointed hour. Phone calls, buzzers, and bustling in and out punctuated the short few hours. Problems, questions and solutions darted around the room, confusing the hands of the grandfather clock settled in the corner. At noon, though, all began to settle things, finishing up final paragraphs, erasing the last little smudges, making piles ready for the afternoon's work. Finally, when everything was prepared for its rest, they all left for the restaurant. The three cars raced and played the length of the ride—jumping stoplights, passing one another, honking, and waving. Everyone emerged laughing and joking.

The Carriage House was a converted wood and stone barn the office had done the plans for a few years earlier. Now, a successful



homestead-type restaurant—everyone except Marnie greeted the waitresses as they walked in. She smiled, and surveyed the room carefully, her eyes resting on the perfectly arranged table settings.

They were escorted to their table in a far corner of the room. Drinks were quickly ordered all around. Marnie, though, couldn't make up her mind, so Craig finally suggested a bourbon on the rocks—she smiled him thanks, looked at the waitress, and nodded.

A quick steady banter gained momentum, the drinks arrived, and Dave proposed a toast to the office.

"To contracts, past, present, and hopefully future, and that we'll all be working on them together for a while."

"To Tullman and Tullman and associates—"

"I'll drink to them all, and to a good lunch—I feel like I deserve at least one lobster for all the sweat I've donated to the cause. How about you Marnie—how's your drink?"

"Mmhh...yes, definitely. To all of you, us. It's wet and strong. Exactly what I needed."

"You look like you need something else there. Hungry?"

"Well, I—I guess I really haven't had the time to think about that. Yes, I suppose I am hungry. There certainly are a lot of people here."

"Of course. With our office doing the design, they're guaranteed

success."

"I'll drink to that!"

The next few minutes were devoted to a general study of the menu, and a few queries as to the house specialties of the day. The general consensus seemed to favor lobster, especially because the bill would be on the office expense account. Dave looked up to see if it would be unanimous, glanced at Marnie, signalled to the waitress, then gasped and turned back to Marnie—she was sitting, staring at her hand impaled to the table, and the stain growing out from under it. Dave quickly stood up, strode over to the manager and whispered to him. He then motioned to the rest of his party and led the way out the door. Marnie was left gazing at the knife in her hand, her back to all the other diners now rushing toward the door.

A crowd formed outside, angrily protesting their interrupted dinners and questioning the manager. They were distracted only by the shrill of the ambulance and police car.

"I guess I've been asleep for nineteen or twenty years. I never really thought about it before. Usually I have a super-short attention span, both in terms of day-to-day, hour-to-hour things, and in terms of week-to-week, month-to-yearly life. If my environment isn't constantly changing and entertaining me, I withdraw to

someplace else that will interest me. Either someplace within myself, or else a totally different external situation. So I really couldn't have been sleeping all those years, because I didn't really feel bored. Sometimes an unexpected change will throw me totally off-balance for a long time though. When that happens, I usually fight to regain the old status quo—and my childishness becomes the most obvious. I want to be in control."

"Always?"

"Well, that's the problem. I want to be in control of some things, but then there are other situations where I want someone else to do the manipulating. What I know I want, I want. But if I'm not sure, or indifferent, I look for someone else to make the decision—and pay for the consequences. That's what that sleep-like period was—I just became indifferent to everything. To people around me, to the places I saw, to the different meanings of just simple day-to-day things. I really didn't care about life, but at the same time, I didn't want to make the effort to end it."

"Is that the only reason that kept you from suicide?"

"Yes. You see, one night, I 'woke up' and realized that my attitude was OK, but my reaction to the meaninglessness of life was all wrong. So I took a handful of tranquilizers and pain pills, and began a long, long wait. But nothing happened—I knew there was a



good chance that it would all end, but I didn't feel any reaction. So after a while, I told someone what I had done to see what his reaction would be. I didn't care whether I died or not, so it didn't matter if he saved me. Of course, he did—I was taken to the hospital, kept there for a while, cleaned up and out, oiled, inspected, injected and transfused, and then I was released."

"What happened after you got out of the hospital?"

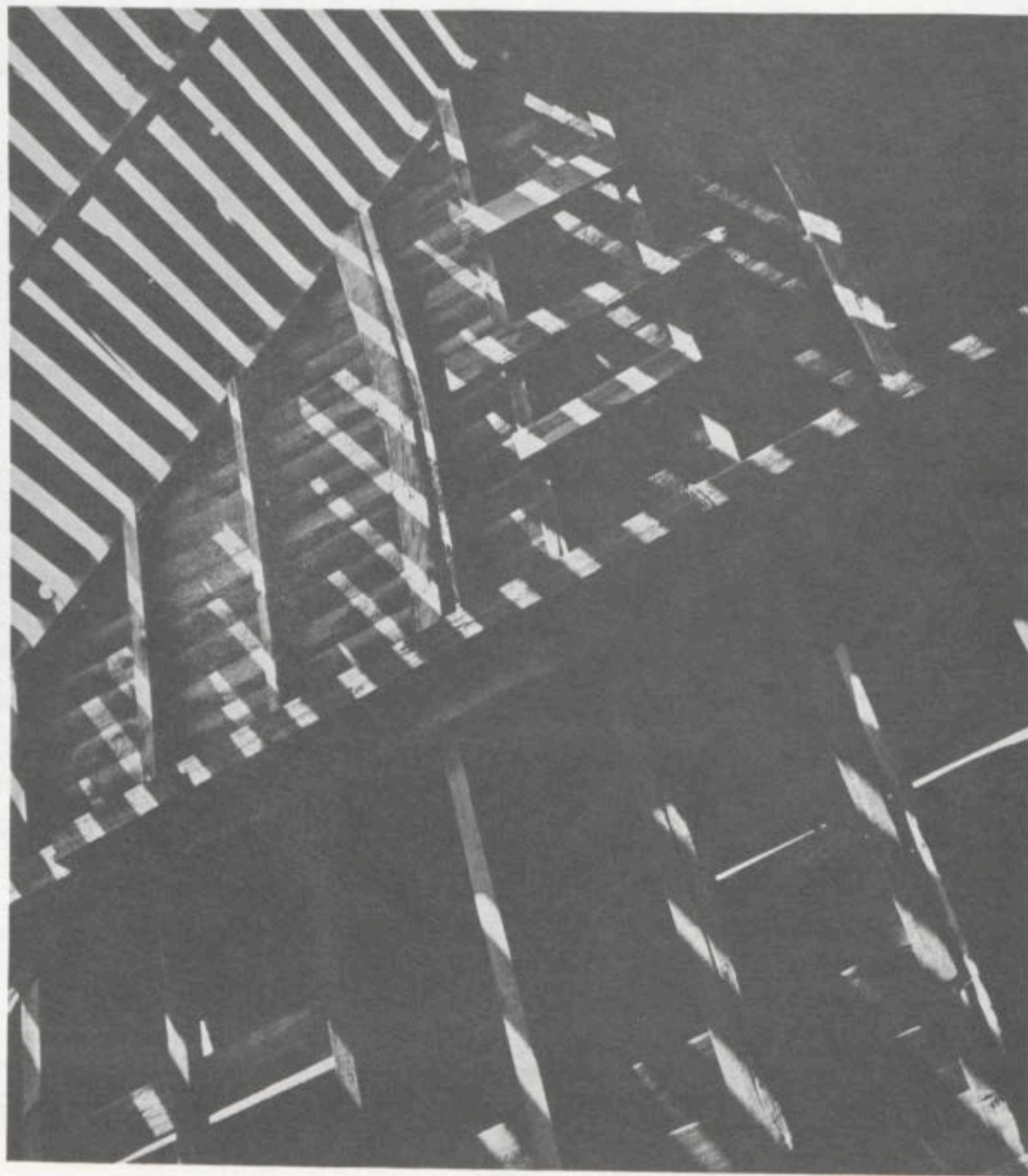
"I went home. I slept a lot—usually I went to bed around midnight, then I would get up around six the next evening—yes, about eighteen hours a night. When I was awake, I read a lot of heavy authors—Camus, Sartre, Dostoyevsky, Sylvia Plath, authors along that vein. One day I read **The Idiot** and decided I couldn't read anything more for a while, so the next day I got up at six in the morning. I found a job where I actually had to think—I was working with real people, who smiled, joked, and got half-way important things done. That was about the closest I'd ever been to the real world, and

I was surprised to find I enjoyed it."

"And then this incident occurred."

"Yes. That's it. The incident occurred, I didn't really have anything to do with it. A group of us from the office had decided to go out and celebrate for lunch. We'd made reservations and arranged for an extra hour that noon—Tuesdays were usually less busy days. Everyone was looking good, we were all waiting for that extra bit of relief a cocktail would bring—it was a sunny day. I was caught up in the whole spirit of the idea—it was contagious. When we entered the restaurant though, everything changed. It was dark, with a few orange blots of light. The carpeting was really heavy, the furniture was solid and looked hard to move. Restaurant music was wafting in from nowhere—and all this junk was supposed to be atmosphere. Well, I got claustrophobic and I began to feel like some extraordinary weight was lowering down on top of me. We all sat at a long, large table—it had a fancy white linen tablecloth, and I think there were orange

napkins. The silverware was all perfectly laid out, and I remember a harvest color reflecting off the steak knife. I think I ordered a bourbon on the rocks—it was a tough decision. In fact, I think someone else finally suggested that I order it when I couldn't think of anything I wanted. While the waitress was getting our order, I watched everyone else around us eating and I didn't feel very hungry. I **was** thirsty though—I can remember taking a sip of my drink and noticing how cool it was. Then I was staring at my hand, and the red stain slowly seeping onto the white tablecloth from under my palm. I was fascinated with the way it was growing—I thought of a time-lapse film I'd seen of poppies blossoming. It was very noisy around me—a lot of people were walking by very quickly, gaping at our table. I looked up, and found that everyone from the office had gone too. I must have sat there by myself for ten or fifteen minutes until the police and ambulance came. Then I don't remember anything else except for the red."





## A MOST PRECEPTIVE ORAL

John Pizzuto

"I need to be more virgilant,"  
she says and,  
demurs;  
poise and curls,  
with an empty topic tapered  
to her needs, namely,  
"The Plight of the Oddest  
in Modest Disguise  
Since He Lost a Pair o' Dice."

While a man in Fedora  
carries matzoh, she's  
inferentially plagued by a  
coyote done in Spain;  
and the words she spoke  
cut to the heart of the  
artichoke: "Is art a joke?"

Lackadaisically looking like me  
on the take,  
waiting for a time when  
Gullivers travel, Finnegans wake.





## THE BEGGAR OF FAITH

Mark Wallace

You cannot know what it is to feel something inside you,  
    pressing your inner muscles, I thought.  
“The trees around here are thin,” you said, looking out the  
    window.

I died last year,  
Don't you know?  
When you raided my coffin in its moist night graveyard,  
Did you expect to find me ready to stand,  
Ready as soon as you had cast back the lid?  
You must carry me squaw-like for a while.

Your chin sags;  
Your face is white, hoary, sallow, gaunt;  
The bright medley of the patched quilt blanches your cheeks,  
    your high cheek-bones, your parched skin.  
You are sixty, sometimes, when I look at you.

I drag along behind you, bleating;  
It bothers you, this dragging.  
I will stand soon, and step weakly like a lamb at birth,  
But step nonetheless, from out of this sepulcher.  
You will be my legs.  
Yes, you will.





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# SUNFISH

Jody Green

Sunfish under liquid light  
you dance a prism's fracture,  
and these colors wink and dart  
and tease  
so near the elements' bound.  
Almost, but not, you drink the air  
but safely still  
you keep beneath that death;  
living within the reach  
of probing rays  
you cling to the others' world,  
and anxious for its worm  
you wait in your reckless show.  
But I, more drawn to Neptune's love,  
am suspended in the darker depths  
where sound and song  
and the searching sun  
have lost their way.  
I envy your warm escape  
from this murky domain  
but frightened by rough waves  
which wash upon dry shores,  
I retreat and wait  
for winter's freezing dome  
to drive you down  
to this unchanging home.



# THE BLUE CHRYSLER

E. H. Richardson

Elmer had that nervous happy feeling Thursday morning when he climbed into his car. He set his thin brief case on the seat next to him and carefully folded his raincoat in half and set it on top. Last night, he had finally traded his old Plymouth and gotten a new Chrysler. It was three years old, with only 36,000 miles, but it was beautiful. He felt a little flush thinking how everybody would guess he had gotten a raise.

Selecting the elegant chrome key—it wasn't even worn—Elmer inserted it in the ignition and turned carefully. Nothing happened. He tried again. Still nothing. Elmer shot a nervous glance around him, as if he had an audience. The windows of the row-houses returned the blank stare of a harsh morning sun. Elmer was relieved that the street was deserted; he always left for work at seven in the morning.

He tried the key one more time, and then tried to convince himself he wasn't upset. In a way, his disappointment was crowded by his anxiety of being such a spectacle at work with his new car.

Elmer fingered the keys in his pocket as he walked the familiar sidewalk. The bus stop was just at

the end of his street. Six years ago, before he had the Plymouth and his promotion, he had taken the bus every day. He thought it would be nice, just like old times, but he looked over his shoulder at his new car. The old times weren't there. He'd have to make an excuse that his Plymouth had broken down. Nobody even knew that he had gotten a new car. Elmer never discussed anything like that because other people might think he wasn't decisive.

The bus approached promptly at 7:15, sending a slight wave of doubt over Elmer. He dipped his hand in his left pocket. There was plenty of change; he was always careful to have plenty of change for any emergency, and smiled to himself for his habitual foresight.

On the ride to work, Elmer thought over what he should do to take care of the car. He wanted to ask his assistant at work; Jim knew a lot about that sort of thing. Then he realized Jim had been kidding him about junking the Plymouth for years, and he'd have to tell Jim it was a new car. He couldn't ask Jim. Elmer finally decided he'd call the salesman. After all, the car was

guaranteed.

During lunch hour, Elmer left the office to use the pay phone in the lobby. He couldn't remember the number and his fingers trembled a bit as he looked it up. He was afraid the salesman would think he was silly, calling the day after he had bought the car.

"Good morning, Al Packer's."

"Hello, this is Mr. Dheil. Could I please speak with Mr. Doug Sanders, please?"

"Certainly, just one moment please."

The line was silent for an interminable length of time.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting, sir. Mr. Sanders has gone to lunch. Should I have him return your call?"

It wouldn't do for him to call the office; the others would hear the conversation. "No... no, I'll call a little later. Thank you very much."

As he sat at his desk eating his sandwich, Elmer didn't feel very hungry. He was afraid someone might have seen him using the lobby phone. He was apprehensive about using it again. Since it was Thursday night, the dealership would be open late, so he would

call from home. Maybe they might send a mechanic tonight.

Elmer was glad to be on the bus after work. It was like old times after all. He had bought his Plymouth from the same dealership, and they would be glad to help him.

"Good evening, Al Packer keeps you coming back!" A different voice answered the phone.

"Hello, this is Mr. Dheil. Is Mr. Doug Sanders there please?"

"Yes he is. Please hold the line."

Elmer didn't have to wait so long, and the voice on the other end surprised him.

"Doug Sanders, what can I do for ya?"

"Ah, hello? This is Mr. Dheil. Elmer Dheil?"

"Oh, sure. How's everything?"

"Well, pretty well, thank you. I'm awfully sorry to bother you, but I have a little problem."

"Yeah."

"Well...when I got in my car this morning...it...wouldn't start."

"Gee, I'm sorry to hear that. What's the problem?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought maybe you might be able to help me."

"There's not much I can do tonight. All the mechanics are gone for the day. Why don't you call tomorrow?"

"Well, I had hoped to drive to work...tomorrow morning."

"Then try a gas station."

"Well, I'm not sure which one to

call. And I don't know what to do about the guarantee."

"Just get a receipt and call me in the morning."

"Okay...I'm sorry to take so much of your time. Thank you very much."

"Sure thing, bye-bye."

Elmer said goodbye to a dead line. He was a little shaken, but Sanders had made him angry. He looked up the number of the Shell station not far away, and got them to send a truck around. But they were busy and couldn't be there until eight or nine o'clock.

Elmer was waiting at the door when the truck turned in at the end of his street. He went down the steps and waved. The truck pulled alongside the Chrysler.

"What seems to be the trouble, Mister?" The boy hardly looked sixteen.

"Well it wouldn't start this morning. When I turned the key, just...well, nothing happened."

"Ya got the keys?"

"Yes, here they are, this one."

Elmer caught the color of the boy's hand on the steering wheel. It looked more like tar than flesh.

He kicked the throttle hard three times like he had an itch on the sole of his foot. He flicked the key. Nothing. Flicked it again. "Battery's dead. Or somethin'. Lemme give a look unner th' hood."

The boy grabbed a set of cables from the back of the truck, and one of the copper clamps hit the fender

of the Chrysler. The boy didn't flinch.

When the portable generator was going, the boy scrambled back in the car, stamped the gas again, and flicked the key. It started.

"Yep's the battery. Went dead. Just let'er run a coupla minutes. Charge'er right up." He managed the cables this time, without hitting the fender. "Ats fifteen bucks, Mister. And ah...no checks."

"Sure...sure, just a minute. It's in the house." Elmer struggled out of his trance.

He handed the boy fifteen dollars, and gave him a dollar tip. "Thank you very much. I'm sorry to keep you out so late."

"No problem. Thanks Mister. See ya."

Elmer felt worried, and relieved. After he got in the Chrysler, he wiped the steering wheel carefully with his handkerchief. I'll go get some gas. It'll be nice to drive a bit.

The front door was left unlocked, so Elmer didn't drive for long. He was back in ten minutes. After he turned the motor off, he paused, and started it again. It was a reassuring sound.

Before going to bed, Elmer looked through the upstairs window. The blue Chrysler was elegant under the street lights. That night, he slept like a child just after Christmas.

The Friday morning sun blared through the windows of the 7:15 bus. Elmer sat on the opposite side. He didn't know how he should



feel, and he hoped no one would notice the ache in his throat. He would have to call Sanders again, but the busy morning took his mind off the car for a while.

An hour before lunch, Elmer had worked up his courage when he stepped into the lobby phone booth.

"Good morning, Al Packer's."

"Mr. Sanders, please?"

"One moment, sir."

Elmer looked at the cash receipt from the Shell station. The dealer would have to reimburse him under the guarantee.

"Doug Sanders, what can I do for ya?"

"Mr. Sanders, this is Mr. Dheil. After I spoke with you last night, I called the local service station to start my car. I have the receipt for fifteen dollars. The battery had gone dead."

"Sorry for the trouble, Mr. Dheil. Why don't you send us the receipt and I'll mail you a check. That be all right?"

"Well...the car still doesn't start. I think the battery is dead again. I thought maybe you could send a mechanic around, maybe late this afternoon to fix the car?"

"Well, Mr. Dheil, I'll see what I can do. Somebody'll be there this afternoon or tomorrow morning. THAT all right with you?"

"Yes, that would be fine. Thank you very much."

The line was dead instantly, and Elmer didn't try to say goodbye this time. The approaching weekend

eased his tension. The car will be all set by Monday.

Elmer hurried through dinner and sat in the front room, turning the pages of the evening paper. Several cars went by, but none of them stopped. They were all going too fast to be looking for his Chrysler.

The greyblue light of the late news was the only illumination in the front room, except for a bit from the light at the back door, coming through the kitchen. The Chrysler was shiny under the street light, and Elmer tried to avoid his second thoughts. His new car left only that same ache in his throat. But Sanders had said the mechanic might come by Saturday morning.

Sunday was another Indian Summer day. Elmer stayed in bed later than usual. He made wheat-cakes for breakfast, and skimmed through the Sunday paper.

It didn't work. The Chrysler would not let him forget. Elmer fell into an armchair in the front room, halfway through breakfast. The sugary after-taste of the maple syrup almost made him gag. He stared at the floor without moving. What little determination he had gathered, was lost.

The warm fall Sunday afternoon was a tepid intrusion. By lunch time, Elmer scraped his breakfast into the garbage and cleaned the dishes. He sat at the kitchen table. His eyes glassed. The back alley through the kitchen window was inactive.

The following week, Elmer grew accustomed to riding the bus again. And he grew accustomed to Jim's kidding about junking the Plymouth. It was easier to make the excuses. Sanders' derision, and the gas station people treating him like a woman, stagnated Elmer's anxieties for the car. His secretary had seen him entering the lobby phone during lunch hour on Monday. He never completed the call; it could wait until the weekend.

The weekend came and went. The blue Chrysler stood as a monument at the curb in front of his house. It greeted him every morning on his way to work, and wished him a pleasant good evening as he turned up the steps to his front door. Elmer tried to avoid its temerity.

The Chrysler gradually became absorbed in the derision of his daily life. The twenty dollar Simonize was patched with sap and dead leaves. Elmer tried to wash the car once, but its lustre was gone.

"Oh...my cousin's car. He...the Plymouth is in the shop and he lent me his wife's car, to use...but I don't want to drive it in town."

The row houses across the street returned his glance with an even stare.

"That was real nice of him." The receding back of Elmer's neighbor smiled.

Elmer took the keys from his pocket. He hesitated. Without knowing why, he unlocked the car,



sat down in the driver's seat, and sorted the keys in his hand. He flipped them, one at a time, back and forth on the ring, and went by the ignition key twice. On the same impulse, he tried to start the car. Nothing. Elmer remembered himself, and glanced around. His neighbor had turned the corner.

The door shut easily; Elmer checked to be sure it was locked and stooped to pick up the bucket of ugly water. He diverted his eyes to the house, and went in without looking back.

Elmer couldn't get his neighbor's questions out of his mind. He was sure that everyone was wondering about his car by now. Maybe I can talk to someone else at the dealership. They should be the ones to take care of my car.

Once again, Elmer used the lobby phone on Monday. He decided to talk with the service manager.

"Good morning, Al Packer's."

"Hello, this is Mr. Dheil. Is there someone I could speak to in the service department?"

"Just one moment."

Elmer had not collected his thoughts. "Service."

"Ah, hello, this is Mr. Dheil. I bought a car from you not long ago, and I've had trouble starting it..."

"What kinda trouble?"

"Well the battery always goes dead."

"Then get it towed over here and we'll put a new battery in it."

"Well, what should I do about

the guarantee?"

"When did you say you bought that car?"

"Just the middle of September."

"Well, if that's a used car, your guarantee has expired. If you want an appointment to have us fix the car, we can get to it by Wednesday."

"Well no, I... I'll have to make arrangements to get it towed. I'll call back a little later."

"Whatever you say."

Elmer mumbled thank you and replaced the receiver. Now he was going to have to pay for it, and he hadn't even mailed them the receipt from the first time. Elmer formed a "why" with his lips, but just exhaled softly and climbed the stairs to his office.

Elmer no longer drew any attention on the 7:15 bus. The questions at the office had ceased, and Elmer made excuses only to himself. But he was sure that he had betrayed his facade. He was often vaguely aware of knowing glances in his direction. He suffered when people were laughing around him, and he was afraid that his reaction showed too, and perhaps even kindled their amusement. Elmer did not need to imagine himself as the brunt of their jokes, he was sure it was true.

Elmer decided that the only way out of his troubles was to get rid of the car. Then, the general derision might disappear too. He considered selling the car, but then realized he would have to repair it

first. He thought of selling it to a gas station or a mechanic—he had seen advertisements for "Mechanic's Specials." But those kind of people intimidated him. Elmer knew they would think he was ridiculous.

The fresh snow melted and slid and settled on the Chrysler. Elmer's car was the only one on the street that was still covered with snow. It was as if the snow was making a spectacle of him. The slippery sidewalk made him angry. It took so long for him to walk the distance to his door. And the street light picked him out and put him on display. Elmer forced his attention on the footprints left on the sidewalk ahead of him. He thought of his own, clearer than the rest, trailing behind him, following him up the steps. Elmer completely avoided any recognition of his car. He could feel its needling presence along with his unheeding footprints just outside his door. Up to now, Elmer had been able to avoid, occasionally even forget the Chrysler, but it again engulfed his life with the same blunt intensity. It dared him.

Elmer slept restlessly; he could hear nothing but his thoughts and his reservations.

Elmer picked his way through the day-old slush on his way to work. He almost refused to notice. But this time he was forced to look. The front seat of his car was covered with snow, so was the dashboard.



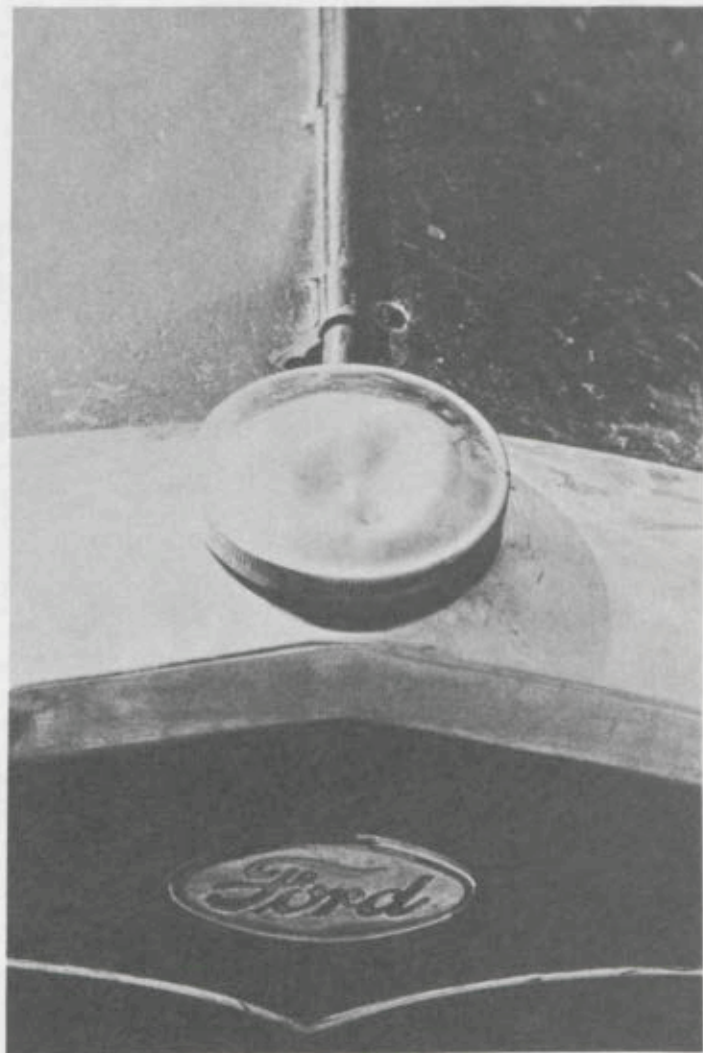
Elmer walked over to look. "Damn." He said it with the intonation he used to get a lady's attention—"Mam?" The snow on the seat was mixed with glass.

The 7:15 bus went by the end of his street. No one would notice he was not waiting at the corner. Elmer sat in the front room. He stared at his hands. At eight-thirty he called the office to say he was ill, and wouldn't be in. Elmer waited. Three hours went by. He looked at his cold hands.

The tow-truck showed up late in the afternoon. It was almost dark. The title to the blue Chrysler sedan was already transferred, to the city police. They towed away abandoned vehicles free of charge, if the title was in order.

Elmer responded with half-hearted gratitude to the little sympathy he got at the office. He supposed he had a reason to look under-the-weather.

On the way home that evening, his footsteps no longer counted the way. Elmer glanced mechanically before climbing the steps. The kid across the street had parked his "modified" Valiant where the Chrysler had been. Elmer had trouble with the key in his front door. It would have been nice to visit his family at the shore next summer, with his new car. He would have been proud.



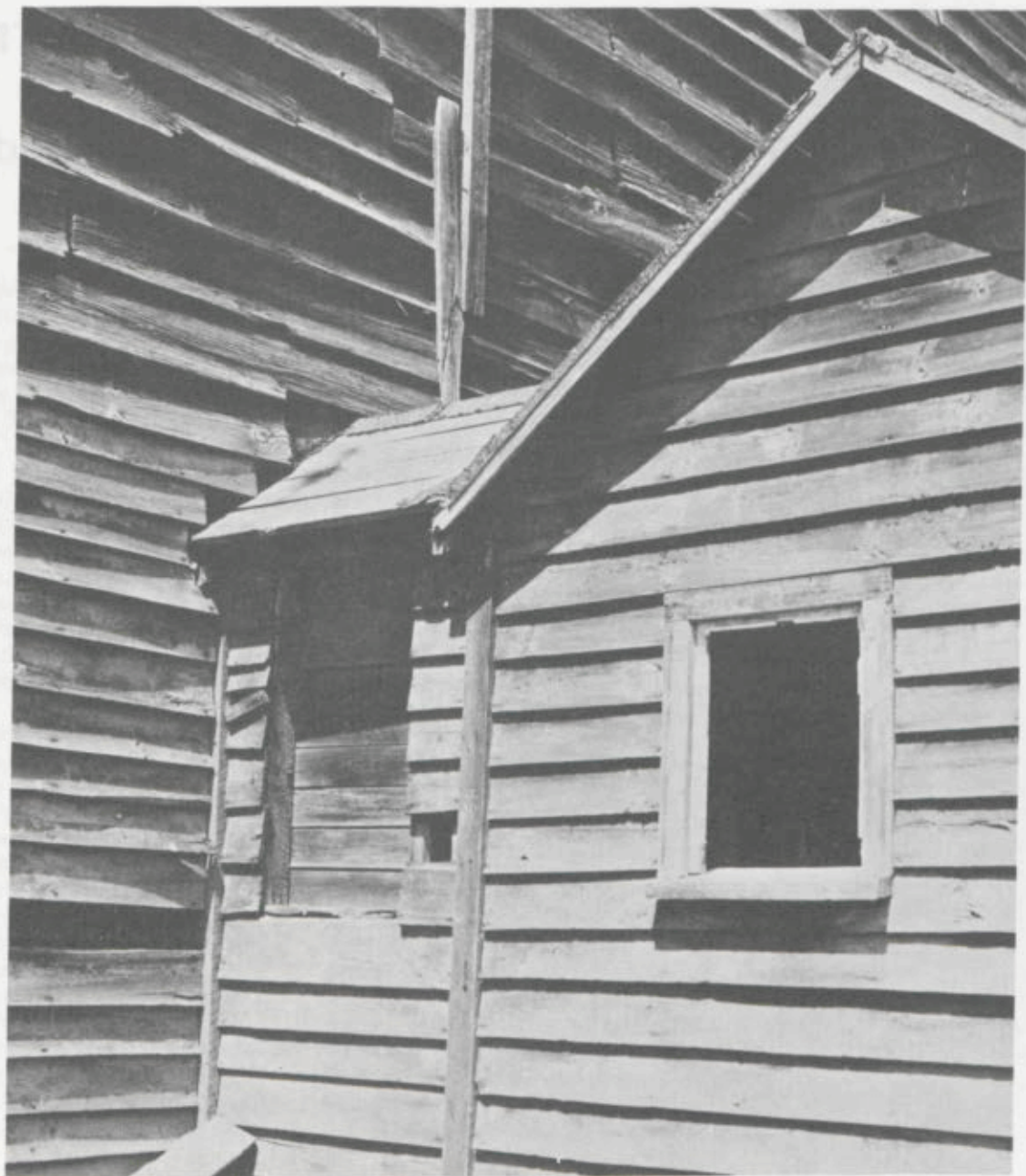
# MEMORIES OF A DANCING BEAR

Kathy Hayes

Clap hands, she said:  
Amuse me, an indulgent smile  
For fireworks, spewing sparks  
And comets; anything to entertain.  
She wanted: for me to blaze,  
Neon marquee for the coming attractions,  
Star's white-hot center.

We were incomparable!  
Acrobats never needing nets.  
Her fingers: long and useless,  
Bound fingers resting  
On the arm of a chair.  
Mine grabbed at her ledge  
Slowly crumbling: giving way.





Piedmont

The hall is dark at six AM  
the crowd, the stars—all gone to other games  
But left behind: a harmony past ears,  
resonating in a muted song  
of two well strung, wood-rich guitars.

A door: creaks through their silent symphony  
disrupts a celebratory duet

A roady comes—his steps echo into  
wooden floorboards—a life sized metronome

Conscious of the approaching tick of time  
two guitars seem to grow in confidence.

(If we can take a louder song as such.)

Perhaps they just know how the song will end.

Perhaps they wish for one last chance to sing.

Two scarred and calloused hands hold a guitar.

The roady thinks of days to come—new days.

A new act, born of the old, taking them  
to foreign songs and words and castles and lives.

while one guitar is left to sing alone



# NARCISSUS IN STONE

Phil Mueller

Edwin Wolff was glad when the old man died. In this very hall he'd died, at night when the others had gone home to their families, and the janitor swept him up the next morning. Now Wolff was alone, and he walked slowly, his measured footfalls smothered by the red pile of the carpet. Not in respect for the old senator, of course, for Edwin Wolff deferred to no one, was awed by nothing. Nothing but power. He felt it now, radiating from these walls, the oil paintings, the hoary marble statues calling his name, and so he stopped and stood between Webster and Calhoun, stood as an equal, because nobody was close enough to notice.

The old man—from him and his kind flowed the power that saturated this hall and all of the Senate. When **he** spoke people heard him. The papers and T.V. news followed him like winter pigeons waiting for crumbs. He'd been top Democrat in a Democrat's Senate. The President would call him in every Tuesday for lunch (what did they eat?) and they'd relax by the pool and speak casually, man to man, about how

they'd run the nation next week. Even the title was powerful. He tried it on for size. Majority Leader Edwin Wolff. Like a child flapping about in his father's tuxedo, it dragged on the ground; still Wolff thought it a perfect fit. But the old man was twenty-one years growing into it, and then wore it only five, and what did it get him? He was dead. He'd been a fool to wait so long. Wolff knew better, he'd be feeding crumbs to the pigeons long before he was too old to feel and enjoy it. He was not a patient man. Nor could he afford to be. That was the hitch; the flaw in a bargain basement suit. Most new senators had six years before facing the masses with their achievements; he had less than two. He figured it a raw deal and never admitted, especially not to Edwin Wolff, that had it not been for the old senator's death and the confusion of an interim appointment, the district attorney in a midwestern state capitol would never have been picked and packaged to represent the Democratic Party in the U.S. Senate.

Picked and packaged. He rolled

that around in his mind. Picked, yes, but not to represent the Democratic Party. Young, inexperienced, the "wrong" party—he'd be buried come the next election. The old man had lasted so long, but party wasn't important there. He might have been a Free-Soiler, a Whig, a Populist—it wouldn't have mattered. He was an institution; a senator forever, just as sure as the Pope was Catholic. And when he died, well, the governor **could** have appointed a Republican...he'd certainly have liked to. But for a Republican governor with a shakey majority and a Democratic state legislature—he might as well have announced an abiding hatred for babies, dogs, and the Bill of Rights. But Edwin Wolff was the next best thing. He was the perfect package. And if he hated anything, he hated being used. They were all so sure he couldn't make it. But Wolff couldn't see it any other way. Hadn't he had the highest conviction rate in the entire state? And that without plea bargaining? "A criminal is a criminal," he was fond of repeating, "and you don't send a murderer up for assault any more



than you fine a whore for loitering." It was the kind of principled toughness that his grassroots constituency—if a gubernatorial appointee can claim one—thought they loved. But it was only the tip that surfaced in public statements, the buffed, blunt extrusion of a much deeper and morbidly pervasive world view, represented better in gut comments among the small but slavish circle of reflections he called his friends. "If a man can't make it in a society, can't keep the pace, then you get your hands on his throat and you cut him off from that society." He didn't want to end his first tour of the Senate, didn't want to go home to **her**, so he lingered and shaped his large and muscular frame to match Daniel Webster, except that Wolff had no book to hold.

"Can I be of some assistance, son?" The voice came deep and gritty, yet warming, like hot oatmeal on December mornings. The statues ceased their whispers. Wolff blushed like a boy caught flexing his muscles, naked, in a mirror. He turned to see a squat and hunch-shouldered man, gray and grizzled enough to **be** his father. "You haven't lost your way, have you?" The man's gray trousers and green shirt were wrinkled as he, and Wolff wondered that the maintenance crew in the U.S. Senate shouldn't have more appropriate uniforms.

"Lost my way?!" He forced a tiny laugh. "Don't you know who I am?" (what I am?)

"I feel simply awful about it son, but I'm afraid I don't. Should I? I only work here."

"Yes, I see. But you ought, at least, to know that I am not your son." He attempted a benevolent smile, but couldn't manage more than missionary compassion for this ignorant heathen. "You might say that I work here also. I am Edwin Wolff, United States Senator from Wisconsin. Remember that name, old fellow. You will hear alot of it. Front page, feature story; it will ring through these halls. And a marble statue like these will be made of me. I will be immortalized here; but you don't know me!"

The man flushed in apology. "Oh golly me! Oh golly. I'm truly embarrassed, Senator Wolff. Thought I knew all the senators—but you're new. You've got old Den—Senator Burke's seat, God rest his soul. He was a fine gentleman, he was. Why I remember—"

"Please, you must excuse me, I really must be leaving. Perhaps we'll meet again when I'm not so busy, then you can dust off those old memories." He hurried down the hall, trailing his words over his shoulder to the strange man who remained, himself as if lost, until Wolff could not distinguish him, motionless and gray, from the figures that lined the walls.

The alarm clock crowed coldly from its bedside roost. Wolff thrust an arm out quickly to silence it. He

hadn't slept. Rising quietly from the bed, he fumbled with the clothes that lay heaped on the floor. There was nothing missing from his wallet. The lump in the bed stirred and sighed. He cursed silently, and the ratty ball of brown hair rolled over into a face. The eye shadows had run into purple blotches that looked like bruises on her cheeks. He turned away from her and hurried to pull up his trousers. She watched his back as he dressed and when he put on his socks he stumbled and hopped on one foot rather than sit down on the bed.

"Good morning," she paused, "Mr. Jones." She stretched out the name and laughed. "Did you check your wallet? Always; always, check the wallet."

"I did."

"Nothing missing, was there? Surprised?"

"Shut-up!" He buttoned down his shirt, and still would not look towards the bed. He remembered how good she'd looked in the bar; hair curling loosely over bare shoulders and the lamplights glimmering from her dress and her eyes. "Just don't say—anything."

She sat up and drew her knees beneath the sheets to her chest. "Hey," she entreated, "Big deal. It happens to the best of us. Probably just a bad night. You shouldn't take it so hard."

Wolff spun around and lunged at her. "You!" His broad hand encircled her face with fingers that



dug in till the knuckles were white and wet with her tears. "I was drunk! Drunk, that's all, you hear?" He shoved her backwards to the headboard. Moving off he turned towards the door. "Anyways, it was you, not me. You're lousy."

"**Impotent!**" She spat a chain of invectives that caromed off his back as it disappeared behind the door. Out on the street, "Mr. Jones" checked his watch and hailed a cab, and before eight o'clock he was back in his Congressional Hotel suite. The clothes he wore went into the laundry hamper, and he shaved, and stepped into the shower and scrubbed his body to remove the infected layer of skin. Another night and woman were sucked dizzily down the drain, but for one word. The word hung like shrapnel; digging, digging, into his brain. The dog lounged in the living room, stretched across the couch. When Wolff entered, he lifted his massive head and shook himself.

"Hey Sampson, here boy!" Sampson left his repose to meet his master. Wolff knelt to the dog and gently stroked his smooth golden mane. He laughed. "Now you know the couch is off-limits. What will she say when she finds blond hairs all over, huh?" Blond hairs on his own shoulders didn't matter anymore. Sampson nuzzled against his face. "Oh sure. Apologize, will you?" Sampson washed a loving tongue over

Wolff's face. "Okay, okay. You're forgiven, you mutt. Enough slobbering—I've got to look sharp today. This is it boy, Sampson old pal, we're gonna get 'em all today, huh?" Such a friendly fellow, so constant, so loyal, never growling, never biting his master. He loved that dog. He'd never kicked him; not once.

His wife's door was closed and, he guessed, locked. He watched it for awhile, as if it could open itself. **He** couldn't. As much as he wanted to try, had always wanted to try, to tear down the door, to throw it aside forever, as much as that he was paralyzed, too weak to move towards it. It measured the distance between them.

The limousine arrived at nine to carry Senator Wolff even farther away, to his inauguration and first official day of work. On the way he wondered what committee assignments he'd receive. He hadn't even known who to talk to about the committees he wanted, so he'd written the new majority leader. He'd gotten a personal phone call in return. He'd written the right man, as William Franklin Hall wore, among his several hats, that of chairman of the Steering Committee. "However," had said Hall, "it is the committee's decision of course, and depends largely upon what spots become available." But the man Wolff replaced had served on Judiciary and Foreign Relations. "Ah, that is,

of course, very true, and he served the Senate and the country well. But the committee vacancies he left can be claimed by the most senior Democrat who doesn't already serve on a major committee. I'm afraid that a line of requests long as your arm has already reached the Steering Committee, and no senator will readily relinquish such an attractive post. Have you considered other committees? Public Works, or Banking? Or Post Office, or Labor and Public Welfare. These are possibles, and they offer fine opportunities for constituent service." He'd considered them (who would ever **hear** of them?) but he knew what he wanted. "If you insist, well, cross your fingers and I'll do everything I can to help. I'll do it for the man who used to hold both our jobs. Old Burke would have wanted a straight thinker from Wisconsin to take his post on Foreign Relations. He had a real feel for diplomacy, that man. Did you know him, Senator Wolff?" Sure. Everybody who read the papers knew Majority Leader Denson Burke, chairman of Foreign Relations. But Post Office, Banking, Public Works — who the hell was the chairman of Public Works? Who the hell cared? Wolff was not long in finding out.

His Senate inauguration was so elaborate and dignified as to be worthy even of Wolf's Napoleonic visions. Majority Leader Hall greeted him as he stepped from



the limousine and escorted him to the Vice-President's Room, behind and right of the Senate chambers. The President was unable to attend, but had sent via the Vice-President a note of apology also inviting Wolff to breakfast tomorrow, Tuesday. The swearing-in ceremony had been scheduled for the "morning hour"—from noon till one-thirty or so—to allow the maximum number of senators to be present. This was the time each day when bills and resolutions were introduced for investigation. And so Edwin Wolff entered, when the Vice-President called to order those awaiting a glimpse at their newest colleague, entered to the welcoming applause of ninety-five United States senators (the senior senators from Wyoming, Delaware, and Pennsylvania were enjoying Paris as delegates from the Armed Services Committee, and the junior senator from Oregon was ill). He scanned the galleries, this particular morning full of faces he had known as a Wisconsin District Attorney; but as Senator Edwin Wolff he no longer recognized them. He checked the press section to find it packed with slouched shoulders and sleepy faces; some laden with camera and lens, others with tape-recorders, and still others armed only with pen and scratch pad. He guessed the pictures would be taken later.

Majority Leader Hall introduced the new man by way of eulogizing

the old, and concluded that his "brief but most encouraging acquaintance with this forthright and able Wisconsin prosecutor presages the steady development of Senator Edwin Wolff: a legislator to be as large in his contributions to this Senate as he is in physical stature." Several other senators, Republican as well as Democrat, followed suit, delivering short eulogies to Denson Burke and following with gilded words of welcome and encouragement to the new senator who felt himself fading, deeper and more hateful with every word, into the dead man's long shadow. It came as little surprise, then, that at the end of the ceremony Wolff found himself ushered to seat number one-hundred, on the Democratic right side of the center aisle, at the outermost periphery of the Chamber, where he might die at his desk and never be missed. Far-away, standing by his center-aisle seat in the front row, Majority Leader Hall was recognized by the Vice-President.

"Mr. President, I request the unanimous consent of of my esteemed colleagues to suspend normal procedure and recess at this point; to reconvene at two o'clock this afternoon."

Wolff leaned towards the frail and balding man at desk #99 to his immediate right. "What do we do now?"

"Do?" He shrugged and smiled. "Why you don't **do** anything. That's 'unanimous consent';

strictly routine. It's how we get things done."

The Vice-President nodded to the Majority Leader, who was back in his seat. "Are there any objections?" Wolff sat silently, but most of the others were milling about in the aisles, chatting with one another. A few had already wandered out through the doors in the back of the chamber. Others craned their necks up to chat with the press, who leaned over the gallery railing. But most of the press, **his** press, had already left to await the exit of the Vice-President, whose gavel sounded, muffled and distant, as he spoke. "Then by unanimous consent, the Senate will recess till two o'clock."

"C'mon, we'll dine upstairs." It was desk #99. "Oh, I'm Smith, Bill Smith, from Iowa. I know you already, Senator Wolff, and I can't believe we've really met. It's great! When you were NCAA wrestling champ at Indiana I used to catch some of your matches on television. I wrestled J.V. for a year at 126, kind of, I mean I never won. But you, you were really something! You know, I'm a frosh also, just came in last year. We had a week of orientation before the session began, and it still took me some time to get settled. And confusion? We had problems with floor procedure, office set-up, staff—well I don't guess I've got to explain all that to you. Coming in like this will be even tougher, but if I can help, just let me know."



"Well thanks Smith, but I'll manage. I've had offices and staffs before." The Wisconsin delegation that waited for him in the galleries was forgotten. "Still, I'll take you up on that lunch offer." This man might be of some use. "Maybe you can show me the ropes around here...and which ones to pull."

"Well, that's fine, just fine. If I can help, Ed — sav, is "Ed" alright?"

"I prefer Edwin, if you don't mind."

"Fine. Well, feel free to ask, Ed, uh, Edwin. By the way, what committees did you pull?"

"Well, I spoke to Majority Leader Hall, and we discussed Foreign Relations and Judiciary."

"Hall said there were possibilities there?"

Wolff resented the taint of incredulity. "I said we discussed those committees. I'd say that indicates possibilities, wouldn't you?"

Smith was somewhat off-balance; he dug for a reply. It never came, as the Majority Leader's voice terminated Edwin Wolff's first floor debate. "**Senator** Wolff — has a nice ring to it, hey? Would you honor me and several of our colleagues with your presence at lunch? This would be a good time to make new acquaintances. I see you've already made a fine one." He smiled broadly at the thin man opposite Wolff. "Morning Bill."

"A **fine** morning, Mr. Majority

Leader. I've just offered my services as guide to Senator Wolff, though I'm sure he'd manage fine without me." Smith grinned back at Hall, his bony cheeks lifting till they almost closed his eyes.

"Well, you're certainly in good hands, Senator Wolff. Now what about lunch?"

"I'd be honored. If the Majority Leader would only lead the way." He turned his back on Smith and stayed close to Hall, who seemed by far the more profitable dinner companion.

"Now Senator Wolff, I've seen your wife's photo in the papers. A lovely woman, very beautiful. Miss Wisconsin, wasn't she?"

"She was, six years ago." It had seemed important then.

"Is she here today? I don't believe I recognized her in the galleries."

"You wouldn't," he thought too loud.

"Beg your pardon?"

"I said she wasn't here. She felt ill this morning, so she remained at the hotel." He would have to be more careful.

"Nothing serious, I hope."

He wished it were cancer. "No. It comes and goes. Just a bug. She keeps to a liquid diet at these times." Irony was one of the few things Wolff found amusing.

"Just as well, perhaps." Hall chuckled. "Minority Leader Ballard has a weakness for beautiful women. The old man still has a little of the Dionysian in

him."

Smith had gone off to find other company, recalling his own first day in the gentleman's club, and wondering as he went what story the majority leader could have told Wolff to have him believing in such fairy-tales as Foreign Relations and Judiciary. He guessed that Wolff had a good deal more to learn about the Senate than office and staff. In any case, it was a real thrill to have a sports hero for a neighbor.

And Wolff—had he been able to clear the obsession of power from his eyes, he might have seen, even on that first day, the first glimpses of its reality.

Lunch went smoothly. Wolff was surprised to find among the group several from the other side of the aisle, including the minority leader. The latter seemed particularly jocular with his opposite number. Wolff felt himself the center of attention, and in this, at least, his perception was accurate. He was questioned, indirectly, of course, and always in casual, if not quite "down-home" overtones. Yet the undercurrents were there and he felt them like rip-tides tugging at his ankles, testing his strength here, his potential there. Where he would stand firm and where he was fence-sitting and might be coaxed to either side. It was nothing new. He'd sparred this way before, with judges and defense attorneys, and he could freeze the lines of his face to sup-



port himself on any issue, any position, on either side of the same issue if it seemed an advantage, and count on it never to betray him. So the party that treated him to shrimp and scallops on Monday learned little about the junior senator from Wisconsin. He could not be used, he thought. He could not be trusted, they thought.

At two, Majority Leader Hall walked Wolff back to the Senate chambers. He fidgeted, seemed unsure of something, and Wolff wondered what he was holding back. As if in passing, the older man half-mumbled "Oh Senator, I thought you should know before it comes up on the floor; you've been assigned to Public Works and Agriculture." So casual and matter-of-fact. It might have been the weather. It hit like hailstones.

"Agriculture?! Public Works?! What happened with Foreign Relations and Judiciary? You said you'd help."

"It was as I said. There were really no openings. I'd like to help you there, but—"

"But you're the chairman," he whined.

"Still, I have only one vote."

"Alright. Agriculture, that makes sense—we **are** a dairy state. But Public Works? I have to get my name known. That's very important, you understand. To my reelection, that is, and..." Here Wolff looked away. It was a threat, but it needn't look obvious. "...and also for a Democratic ma-

jority. My constituency is traditionally Republican, you know, and this kind of thing could insure my defeat next year. I don't understand; why bury me in Public Works?" That was enough. He was afraid to push the nervous man any further. He didn't especially need enemies, and especially **not** at the top of the ladder.

"There's a lot to be said for Public Works. And one of the senior Democrats just moved up to Foreign Relations. There was an opening. And as I pointed out, I have only one vote."

There **was** a lot to be said for Public Works, and if Edwin Wolff couldn't think of anything favorable, at least someone had. And though Hall's story sounded solid, Wolff heard a different one later that afternoon.

"That's right. You were specifically requested. Or that's what I get from Hall's personal staff." The girl seemed sure of herself. She sat tall, her large bones the frame for a network of graceful dips and curves. Like his wife had—once—but all of that was not important now. This girl **would** be part of his empire, but now she was his research assistant, a third year Georgetown law student, and she had circulated on Senate staff for two years now. Her desk was a tangle of congratulatory letters and constituent requests that arrived even before he did. He tripped over a pile of books at the side of her desk. He was more angry than

curious.

"Requested?! That just doesn't make sense, Judith. Why...**who** requested me? I don't know anybody on Public Works. A month ago I'd never heard of Public Works."

"It seems, Senator Wolff, that somebody knows you. In fact it was Senator Alfred Merridan who made the request."

"Now who the **hell** is Alfred Merridan? I don't know his name."

"He doesn't make the papers often. But you're probably the only senator who doesn't know Merridan, and know him well. He's the big man on Public Works, your chairman. Also sits on the Steering Committee."

"So? I mean, Hall is the chairman, and he promised me his vote, **and** his support. How many votes does Merridan have?"

"I don't think it was a matter of voting. Not directly anyways. Hall may have voted for you, but support... Well, that's another story."

"Judith..." Wolff did not like waiting.

"Well...it's not easy to describe. If Denson Burke was Majority Leader—of course you wouldn't be here—but if you were, and he wanted you in Judiciary or anywhere, you'd be there now. He pushed and he knew how. Senators came to him...as Majority Leader he held the Policy Committee chair...to get their pet projects moved up on the calendar, or moved back until they could put a



coalition together. And he'd do it, if he didn't have a personal stake in the matter himself. So they owed him. And of course he handled committee assignments, and transfers. He had only one vote, that's true, but he could snowball that vote and pick up others just by cashing in I.O.U.s. Or just by asking; friend to friend. Everyone helps out. There were other things." She paused to scratch for a memory. "Think back two years, one and a half. Before the last election. You may have read about it; Burke stepped down as Foreign Relations chairman, and Snowdon took over. Well Snowdon was having electoral hassles in Arkansas—that chairmanship got him over the hump. Three weeks after the election, Burke had the chair again."

"So Hall could have helped, but didn't. He lied to me. All along he fed me crap."

"I don't think that's it. No, not exactly. Burke and Hall are... or is that **were**... different personalities. You can't judge one by the other. Like apples and oranges. Hall won't push; he doesn't see his job that way. The Burkes have mostly died out. Hall carries messages to and from the President, tries to keep the party together. I really don't think he has it in him to play the same games Burke did."

"He plays, alright. He played with me like a puppet. Played me for a sucker. Well that's okay. It's the last time." He paused. "Still can't figure this Merridan."

"Yell loud and you can ask him yourself." Judith pointed over her desk out the window to the lawn below. "He's headed towards the library. They say he spends four hours there each day. Knows Public Works better than anybody."

"I'll just bet he does. He must thrive on boredom." Wolff watched the small hunched figure scuttle across the lawn below. "Even looks dead. Looks familiar."

"You know him?"

"No. He's just an old man, like every old man." But he couldn't shake the feeling. In a dream that night he stood naked, staring into a quiet morning stream and fascinated by his own empty reflection. An ugly imp, old and withered, fell upon him from behind. Coarse-haired legs and arms laced a strangle-hold around his neck and wrestled him past the shattered reflection, breaking into the shocking cold water. The more he struggled, the deeper the old man took him. He drowned. He woke up screaming. He knew.

He knew—even before the chairman entered—that Alfred Merridan could only be the old maintenance man he'd met on that first evening's loitering in the Senator's Lobby. And it occurred to him then that there was only one reason for the chairman's special request to Hall. Merridan **knew** Wolff. He was perhaps the only one who did. And now it became

obvious to Edwin Wolff that the old senator, this janitor, the creature of his dream, would drown a young senator who challenged his power. Wolff was not yet prepared for the struggle. He would lay low.

"Good afternoon esteemed colleagues. May it be a productive afternoon for all." Merridan almost danced into the room, smiling broadly. Senator William Smith entered behind him and took a seat next to Wolff, nodding his greetings. "And to our newest colleague, the esteemed junior senator from Wisconsin, I bid a humble welcome. I am confident that he will serve in the highest traditions of the Senate, to take his place between **Webster** and **Calhoun**." He actually winked at Wolff, who imagined himself tearing the statesman's glib, mocking, tongue by its sinewy roots from his silver throat. "Perhaps we might later find time for an old man to... dust off fond memories of days and friends gone by?"

Wolff did not answer. His hate grew and throbbed at each word. He gripped the sides of his chair and stiffened, cat-like, in a half-crouch.

"First order of business: Senator Wolff, do you have any preferences for subcommittees?" He'd been caught off-guard. He could not keep his anger, it ran and hid, though his hatred increased. His body relaxed and he looked uncomfortably around the committee room.



Smith leaned towards him and whispered "Take Water Resources; I'm on that one."

"Mr. Chairman, I'd like a spot on Water Resources." It was the only subcommittee he was aware of, but Merridan needn't know that. He knew too much already. "That is my only preference."

"You will be a welcome addition to the Water Resources subcommittee. You will also serve on the Highways and Roads subcommittee. Is that agreeable?"

"Very much so. Thank you, Mr. Chairman." Merridan, smiling, approached and offered his hand in welcome, but Wolff felt the fingers close about his neck and pull him, thrashing, down towards the water.

The next several weeks were spent largely in the business of settling in. Judith proved useful, as did Smith. From his seat in the Senate chambers he coached Wolff, when Wolff attended, in floor etiquette. But the lessons were few. Wolff could count on Smith being there, as he could count on his own desk. He himself became almost a stranger to the floor. He seldom understood the issues discussed. The subjects were complex and wide ranging. No one could keep up on all of them. He resented the deference he was forced to grant other senators in their fields of expertise. There were seldom more than ten senators on the floor in the afternoons, except during considerations of the most controver-

sial bills and resolutions. Still, when the quorum bells rang in the Russell and Dirksen office buildings, the chamber filled quickly with men still puffing from their scrambles from the subway. Even at these times seat number 100 was often vacant, as Wolff spent many of his days on public speaking tours in an attempt to glut his name upon his home state. These tours had the added advantage of putting physical distance between him and his wife, who invariably remained in Washington ("...the little woman isn't feeling well; nothing serious..."). His nights were spent looking for bars where he would not be recognized; in each of these he feigned a charming manner to pin some woman on her back somewhere, and pound her into submission. But though his frozen face never once betrayed him; his body always, always did.

Judith was tired of opening and answering constituent mail. She told him so. She was a hireling, and her arrogance offended him.

"You're being paid better than most secretaries."

"I'm a research assistant, not one of your damn secretaries!" She belted him with a look that nearly made him wilt. Here was something new—he'd never seen it in his wife. It would take some jockeying to get this filly into the stable. He groped for the reins.

"Alright, alright. I'm a

chauvanist slob." He grinned, sheepishly, he thought. "But I love it." She didn't, if her impatient frown was any indication. He straightened his face. A gentle tug at the reins. "Seriously though—you're right to be angry. But it seems that all the women I've known have fit the stereotype. You're different—we might be good for each other." Closer, closer.

"Professionally speaking, of course." A tug in the opposite direction. The reins slipped a little in his hands.

"Of course. And I'm certainly open to suggestions." C'mon, here's some sugar, come on in, don't you love sugar you dumb animal?

"Senator, have you actually read any of your mail? They want to know just what the **hell** you're doing up here on the hill!" Wham! She bolted. Took the sugar and kicked him in the teeth. "I tell them you're working on projects vital to their interests. I tell them that you've become the recognized expert on dairy farm subsidies and also on the problems of the Lake Michigan - Wisconsin coastline. I shovel alot of shit!" Merridan **had** suggested that he specialize in coastal water problems of the Great Lake region. Smith had urged him to heed the chairman, but Wolff knew the game. Stick him in some God-forsaken dark corner of the Senate with a bag full of Lake Erie sewage.



He'd be harmless there, all right. Well, Smith could be shoved to the outside with his Mississippi River flood control expertise, but not Edwin Wolff. Consequently, Wolff was seldom consulted in committee, and was never approached informally for advice. Merridan often solicited the opinions of Smith and the other eleven members of the committee, including the six Republicans. This was a personal slap, Wolff was convinced. Merridan doled out the limited committee staff personnel to assist members of both parties. Wolff, of course, received none, but he knew why not. The committee staff were Merridan lackeys and could be counted on to pull his strings in every subcommittee. It was obvious. Merridan was more interested even in **their** views than in Wolff's. Edwin Wolff would not be used. But here was a hireling, a woman, trying to use him, to push him. Well he could satisfy his crying constituents. And she would also satisfy.

"I'll draft a bill. Some real pork for Wisconsin. You've got all week for research; I'll want to introduce it Friday morning. Plan to stay late Thursday night. Is that alright with you, Judith?"

"It's the action I've been waiting for, Senator."

On Wednesday, Wolff got his first front page headline since the inauguration. The Milwaukee Herald, the state's largest, waved this banner over the junior

senator's handsome profile: "Wolff Negligent, Moffet Charges." In the article that followed, Wisconsin's Republican senior senator lashed out at Wolff for "gross dereliction of his representative duties." Wolff read it at breakfast and threw his coffee cup against the wall. It shattered and dripped brown on the daffodil wallpaper. She could clean it when she poured herself out of bed. He formed an amusing picture of her trying to drink the coffee straight off the wall. Wolff had failed Wisconsin, Moffet had charged, by allowing out of his Agriculture committee a bill which would cut government subsidies to dairy farmers. He hadn't even been there on "mark-up" day, when the final draft was cleared. It wasn't the first day he'd missed. The Agriculture committee meetings had become as frustrating as his floor activities, or inactivities. He'd come to indentify the subcommittee chairmen according to the crop they represented. There was Senator Cotton from Texas and the distinguished Mr. Wheat from Kansas. Smith's senior colleague from Iowa, with his long face and light golden hair hanging limp; he even **looked** like his state's favorite son—corn. And each cordially scratched the other's stalk. Several times he challenged witnesses, who seemed to offer only supportive testimony; and each challenge drew increasingly agitated reprimands. Once he dared to at-

tack a committee bill on the floor, and was cautioned via the staff gossip that "we don't air our dirty linen in public." That particular bill had been sent back to committee. The "unified front" was crucial. He was labeled a malcontent, and was pushed farther out in the periphery of the club. He was cut-off from the informal information network that revolved around golf and tennis and Thursday lucheons. When he asked the chairman what bills would be considered when, the calendar was "indefinite, and subject to agenda changes." And so when the dairy bill came up, he was meeting with representatives from the Protestant Churches of Wisconsin. Nor would his objections have mattered had he been present, because none on the committee felt obliged to help him out. But then he'd have had something in his defense. His "pork-barrel" bill had suddenly become a vital appeasement.

Judith stayed late on Thursday. She hadn't slept since Wednesday morning, but her research was finished. It remained to draft the bill.

"Okay Senator, what you've got here is a series of waste treatment plants set on the three main rivers flowing from Lake Michigan. The combined effect on the quality of water—"

"Wait, Judith. Can you give me a rundown on the economic effects of the project for Wisconsin? By the way, did I thank you for work-



ing overtime on this—well probably I didn't, but you know I appreciate it. Now, the stats?"

"Yes, well first let me show you what the project will accomplish in terms of water resource conser—"

"Enough with the water. I don't give a **damn** about the water!" He sat down; sighed; and made a conscious effort to relax his features. "What does all this mean in terms of new jobs, increased commercial revenue—that's what I want. And the rest—well, we'll get to it—but first this, okay?"

"The federal government can be expected to fund half the project, as the benefit accrued will be on a local or state basis. Wisconsin makes up the rest. Total: about six million. It means about three thousand new jobs."

"Hold it. Now if the state pays half, then state taxes go up, and maybe I go out. The whole thing goes under federal funding. And we'll double the jobs, put plants on two more rivers."

"It'll never pass."

"Never pass?! These bills never fail! I see them bounce in and out of Public Works everyday. And they're never questioned on the floor. A hairy ape could manage a Public Works bill on the floor!"

"They're never questioned on the floor because Merridan has a good reputation. They love him out there, he's their man. When Public Works reports a bill, his judgement is respected. And it goes beyond that. You must have seen it. He can get up and talk on

foreign aid or education or welfare and everybody in the Senate listens because he's respected. And most of them owe him too. They've all had pet projects that he's guided through Public Works. Now if he tries to sell some ridiculous package like this, then he loses some of that respect, and a little power with it. He'd bury that bill in a minute. You'd only look foolish." Foolish. She, a woman, a girl, scolding him, bossing, belittling like his father when he was small. He had wanted to kill him. He struck now at her. He grabbed her shoulders and kissed her; pummeled her mouth with his; more in attack than seduction. He tasted his blood. She'd bitten his lip; he backed off. She took her purse from the chair and turned towards the door, pausing there. "You can't even kiss," The door closed and he never saw her again. Bitch. Well, she'd done the research; was no longer needed. Let her go. He sat down and typed out his version of the bill.

Wolff stood by his desk in the morning hour and introduced his bill. He waived a reading of the bill and the President Pro Tempore referred it to "the gentle hands of Chairman Merridan and his Committee on Public Works." In committee that same afternoon, Alfred Merridan scanned the bill silently and his round cheeks reddened into little suns.

"Senator Wolff, I'll be damned

to hell before this **bill**, as you would like to call it, ever finds a place on my calendar." Wolff rose quickly.

"You can't do that to me! That bill has to come up, damn it! I demand a ruling from the Clerk."

"Mr. Wolff! Oh golly, Mr. Wolff." At this the chairman grinned. "Let's try and remain civil. This is a civil institution. We depend upon harmony and good will. But since you insist upon mummifying us with the rigid wrappings of parliamentary procedure, we shall have a ruling." Several senators chuckled despite themselves, and Merridan turned to the Chief Clerk, seated to the right and below the dais. "George?"

The Clerk hesitated, then in his most authoritative voice proclaimed, "The chair has the power to delay indefinitely the consideration of any bill or resolution; his judgement to be overridden only by a two-thirds majority of the entire committee." More chuckling from the group.

"Thank you George." He smiled down at Wolff. It was a benevolent smile, almost fatherly. And for this, it became all the more hateful to Wolff. "Now, son, do you wish to carry the matter further, or can we let it rest in peace?"

Wolff counted heads. Of the thirteen members, only ten were present. And each head turned away as his glance fell upon it. He looked to Smith. If Smith was not with him, assuming Merridan's



position, then the other eight votes were moot. Merridan traced Wolff's glance to the freshman from Iowa. Smith lowered his head and looked away. Wolff sunk back into his seat. The creature on his back dragged him closer to the water. He would kill it, that was decided. It only remained for him to find the appropriate weapon. The chairman pondered the brooding senator for a long time, then spoke. "Now let's get down to business. I've decided to establish a new subcommittee to handle all matters pertaining to flood control problems of our mid-western and western river valleys. Senator Smith, I'm sure the folks back home will be pleased and proud to learn that you've been appointed chairman of our newest subcommittee." Several eyebrows raised at this, and one Republican mumbled something about "empire building". "All bills coming out of your subcommittee will bear your name as either principle sponsor, or co-sponsor. To serve with you on this committee will be Senators Clark of Missouri and Wolff of Wisconsin." He focused on the sullen Wolff. "I realize, Senator Wolff, that another assignment will put quite a strain on your time and energy, so I have elected to relieve you of your position on the Water Resources subcommittee. Now, the next item on our calendar is House Resolution number six-eight-nine-six, to provide for a..." Wolff sat stunned for several moments, then rose

and slunk from the room. The chairman paused in his introductory remarks to follow him with his eyes. He felt no thrill in victory.

The junior senators from Wisconsin and Iowa walked quickly past the marble statues and oil paintings that lined the Senators' Lobby. For Wolff there seemed no where else to turn, but he could never have approached the Judas. Smith had come to him; had left the committee room and caught him in the hall. The explanations poured out like tears as the Iowan tried, almost apologetically, to calm the vanquished. For a moment, just a blinking of the eyes, Wolff felt glad to see Smith; not Senator Smith, but Bill Smith. Then the moment passed; it fluttered before him, and was gone. Senator Smith might still play a useful role, if he were directed with style.

"Smith, you saw what happened. You know damned well the Clerk fudged that rule just for the occasion. There are no rules in there; only Merridan."

"Well Edwin..."

"Call me Ed."

"Yeah. Fine; but Ed, there are informal rules. Customs, traditions."

"Smith, I want to challenge his chairmanship. It can be put to a vote, I know. It'll take a coalition." He put his hand on the small man's bony shoulder. "We can build, Smith, you and I."

"It can't be done, Ed."

"It's been done. It was done in the House."

"Yeah, in the House. There were over thirty freshmen in the House. It's different here. Look at the Republicans. You won't get the old ones to help. What happens to them if seniority is scrapped? They know that some November morning they'll wake up and find themselves with fifty-one senators, what then? Seniority privilege would look mighty good to them then."

"We don't need the old Republicans. There's a lot of young senators who won't get anywhere till those old cretins die out."

"And without the system, what then? Elections for every committee chair? Logrolling, politicking on a year 'round basis while the Senate stands still?"

"Cut the crap, Smith. I'm not talking politics. I'm talking power. It's what everybody wants. And the ones who haven't got any want it most of all. And that's the young senators."

"Maybe so, Edwin. But they won't help you. They won't help because they're content, Edwin, and I'll tell you why." A middle-aged man walked towards the pair. "Observe." The man was opposite them now and Wolff recognized his face as one he'd seen on the Senate floor. Smith smiled and greeted him as he passed. "Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman." The man returned his greeting.

"Who was he?" Wolff asked.



"I'm not sure. Barker from Arizona I think. A second term man."

"If you're not sure, why the Mr. Chairman bit?"

"That's just my point, Edwin. If you're not certain, it's pretty safe to address any senator that way. There are sixteen standing committees, maybe four times as many subcommittees, and God knows how many special and ad hoc committees. They're content, Edwin, because they all have a niche, a specialty, a piece of the pie."

"A niche?" Wolff repeated. "A niche? You mean a hole!" But even as he said the words his mind drifted to Merridan.

Merridan's niche was Public Works, Wolff was sure of it. More specifically, it was pork-barrel legislation, despite Judith's intangibles of expertise and respect. The most comprehensive vehicle for pork legislation was the annual Rivers and Harbors and Flood Control Act. It was an omnibus bill, involving the scattered pet projects of senators from every state. It came out of committee in the "morning hour" on Monday, and was scheduled to hit the floor on Thursday. It was the withered old man's arms and legs, and Wolff would hack them off.

On Tuesday Merridan rose by his desk and was recognized. He wished his esteemed colleagues a fine morning and requested their unanimous consent to bring the Rivers and Harbors and Flood Con-

trol Act, denoted S-1777, to the floor. The session was to end the following Tuesday, and it was necessary to gain authorization for next year's projects. Merridan wanted to get it through and move on to tie up last minute loose ends. The presiding officer routinely called for objections and Wolff rose to voice his. Merridan turned in surprise, but laughed softly. "Ah, I might have guessed. Our purist. We are in the young senator's debt. I'm sure we all need, on occasion, to be reminded of proper procedure."

On Wednesday the old man rose again and asked unanimous consent to open debate on S-1777 a day early. Wolff saw that he did not get it. He took his seat, this time in silence. The Senate went about its business. The Public Works committee met in the afternoon, but the junior senator from Wisconsin was conspicuous only by his absence.

On Thursday afternoon, with "morning hour" business completed, the omnibus pork bill was introduced to the body of the Senate. Copies of the bill had been entered in the Congressional Record which lay on each senator's desk. Merridan had already designated himself as floor manager of this, his most precious bill. As a matter of routine convenience he asked that the Senate waive a reading of the bill. The "Senate", or one percent of it, wanted to hear the bill read. Its

nature made the reading an especially long one. An hour into the list and descriptions, the Chief Clerk was forced by a sore throat to turn the bill over to the Legislative Clerk, who finished reading just in time for Merridan to ask for an hour's recess. This time Wolff did not object. The recess would be that much less time left for Merridan. The chairman left the chamber with a worried looking group of party leaders following close behind. Wolff left alone for his offices, where he spent the hour with his handbook on floor procedure. Small groups of senators spent the time making jokes and miming the "misfit" from Wisconsin. Some were indignant at the breach of Senate courtesy, the "ungentlemanliness". A few of the many who had been absent earlier were curious enough to return with their colleagues when the Senate reconvened. The pro-temp gavelled about twenty senators to order.

First came the amendments of the Public Works committee. Several minor cut-backs passed with little opposition. What debate there was came exclusively from the injured sponsors of those projects that were pruned. Smith small-talked to his neighbor in an attempt to ease the boredom, but Wolff was all alone in his world and as still as a statue.

The floor was open to all amendments. The senior Texan



drawled out that a levee project on the Rio Grande would benefit Mexico as well as his home state, and so should fall entirely under federal funding. There were no arguments, but Merridan rose and was recognized. "My sincere apology to the great state of Texas for this oversight. I fully support the senator in his claim. In consideration of the apparently unchallenged merits of this amendment, I dare say a voice vote will cause no problems." If the "yeas" and "nays" were close, the fate of the amendment would rest on the ears of the pro-temp, and the decision would be final. But Merridan's confidence was well-placed. A call for the "nays" went unanswered. There came a heavy silence when no amendments were forthcoming. Merridan turned and focused anxious eyes on Wolff. He nodded self-confirmation and settled in his chair when Wolff drew himself up to be recognized. It begins, he thought.

"Mr. President, I propose an amendment that would provide for the creation of a new National Resources Planning Board along the lines of its namesake, which was sabotaged by Congress in nineteen-hundred and forty-nine. This would centralize and coordinate the functions of the kaleidoscope of individual projects to be authorized in Chairman Merridan's omnibus bill. The merits of such an agency are obvious to anyone who cares to

recognize them. A dozen, a score, a hundred local projects scattered throughout these fifty states cannot equal a sound, national public works program in its overall benefits. The great streams that have..." He was strong. It was late Thursday already. They'd recess soon and he'd be ready to start again on Monday. They wouldn't work Friday, it would spoil the weekend dinner tours. Monday and Tuesday would be easy. He'd talk it to death and Merridan would crumple into bits of clay between his fingers. The creature would dissolve and he'd breathe again. "...helped to make this nation great and prosperous are inter-connected streams, the whole forming a river system. A system such as the Missouri or the Columbia is capable of enriching the economy of half a dozen or more states. But how does Congress treat these systems? Piecemeal; with fifteen projects on the Missouri from St. Louis to Helena, Montana." His thoughts raced out ahead of his words, exploding, a Forth of July rocket sending streamers in all directions. "If we are to reap the vast potential of our rivers we must institute intensive, comprehensive, long range planning. This planning belongs in the realm of executive action. Does Congress fail to recognize this? Why is it so vehemently rejected? There are two reasons, though the first is indeed no reason at all, but an excuse. It has

been argued that such a change would produce another omnipotent government agency, spreading its tentacles over the nation's lifestream. Such dramatics!" It was past time. When would they call for a recess? It was past time, didn't they know? "But there is a truth beneath the facade, an ugly head behind the mask. The system as it stands is useful to the Congressman. He can spread to his constituents the trappings of position, and they can show their appreciation at the polls. Once the distribution of projects is left to a centralized agency, the wriggling of an individual Congressman is lost in the coils of executive decision." An hour passed. Three. Four since he first stood. His stomach voiced its displeasure at missing dinner; he heard it over his own voice. For the first time he pried his eyes from Merridan and turned slowly, a lighthouse beacon scanning the chamber. Only six chairs were filled. He **would** be heard. He **had** to be.

"Mr. President. I suggest the absence of a quorum." If fifty senators did not present themselves the session would have to be adjourned; he could leave his desk, wet his throat with water, sit down, go home, rest...rest...a fresh start on Monday...

Ninety-one senators grumbled in within twenty minutes. Also, there came a new variable to the equation. Someone had called the press; their section in the galleries



began to fill. Winter pigeons waiting for crumbs. People would **know** Edwin Wolff next week. They'd know him as a fighter, a man of "principled toughness." A hero fighting city hall. He pushed on. Midnight and beyond. Cots were set up in the halls. Senators slept in shifts and fifty always dotted the chambers. Only Wolff was a constant. And Merridan, who sat unblinking, never dozing, not even a yawn. As hypnotized, or hypnotist, his gaze seemed transfixed upon Wolff's forehead. He was cold marble, Wolff thought, and the pinpoint shafts of the old man's concentration burned holes where they hit. His legs knotted in protest as four o'clock birds shook new snow from the cherry blossom branches. He read Webster's definition of "pork" for the third time at five. As the sun grew in his wife's bedroom window he began to attack particular projects in the bill. "This is just one slice of baloney, but it is, none-the-less, baloney. And while I admit there is some beef in baloney, baloney is mostly composed of pork." He lapsed. "Pork... mostly baloney... is ba—the junior senator from Maine proposes a project that benefits, primarily, pleasure craft owners." He was slipping away from himself, coming and going like a shadow cast by a revolving light. He fought to keep hold of his thoughts as they

drifted like smoke through his fingers. It was twenty hours. He felt them all. He watched still the monster with his death-grip stronger than before. "Our prices are rising. The price of meat rises every shopping day. It is the price of our **pork** that rises highest of all. Do I seem to play at Don Quixote tilting at windmills? I see your empty eyes. Your eyes are stones, you cannot see. Cannot... cannot look, Merridan, look to your hands old man!" The press box came alive. Several reporters rushed to call their editors. The winter pigeons sensed the crumbling. The winter pigeons were hyenas and Wolff was not the crumb-tosser, but a carcass to be picked at. "Your hands are black with the entrails of a nation. My wife is drunk now. I don't let her touch me. You lead them around, the ignorant. You use the people. They let you because they are fools; fools. They need you to run their trivial lives, they are animals to be trained. She was beautiful. She was; but also weak as are they all. And you are stronger than they, but I am... I am... you are wolves. **Wolves!** You sit and slaver and your eyes gleam when I stumble, wait for me to fall but I won't fall but still you wait. Do you know how many women I've had? Old man, janitor, do you know how many can you even imagine? Webster stands nearby and Calhoun behind me and will

forever. Did the wolves snarl did you lie with their wives ugly and reaking scotch and did you janitor you ride their necks as they writhed in the water? Yet they, we, will outlive all of you. How many, old man, and how long since you used a woman? I am immortal and you are impotent... impotent..."

"Mr. President, I have the necessary sixteen signitures on a petition for cloture. I request a voice vote." Merridan was standing, hunched, holding the paper he'd held for almost twenty hours. Unlimited debate was sacred. It was a tradition. He wished it weren't; that he could have ended it before it began. He did not share in Wolff's appreciation of irony.

The voice vote was taken, the "nays" did not answer, cloture was invoked, the debate ended. Another voice vote passed Senate bill #1777. The senators filed out with heads bowed. Merridan crossed the floor to the lone figure standing like death at the side of his desk. He still held the small paperback of parliamentary procedure. Merridan wrapped an arm around his waist and led him from the chamber, through the maze of camera flashes beyond, and down the Senators' Lobby. Wolff slowed; he stopped by the marble statues. He stood, with his book, between Webster and Calhoun. Merridan waited.



## PAIRS

Aubrey Carton

Tear soft kisses  
Rip apart tender flesh  
Red runner sleeks forward  
In the dark alley, holding his own.

Circles form from water drops  
And linger, moon flecked.  
Shadows repeat strict images.  
Shallow movements wait for dawnlight.

But we, we wait for nothing.  
We shared the juice dribbling fruit...  
We saved the stone.

In a "parfait" jar, silled against  
Glass panes,  
Cousining two seedlings  
The stone mirrors our quality.  
The seedlings hold their own.





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