



BAYOU REVIEW

FALL 1988

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Bayou Review awards three \$50 prizes for winning submissions in the categories of essay, poetry and short fiction. All submissions are considered for the contest. Notification is made prior to publication.

The winners for the Fall 1988 contest are:

Essay: *Starry, Starry Night* by Billy Shaw

Poetry: *Last Chance* by Marty Armstrong Manegold

Short Fiction: *Jody* by Kim Rubit

Front Cover

"Autumn." Reversed black & white photograph of William Charles Williams' ink and color pencil

Cover photography

Scott Greene

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STARRY, STARRY NIGHT

Billy Shaw

They have surrounded our tiny planet for centuries upon centuries. Lovers through the ages have held hands by their light. Dreamers have reached for them, full of hopes and desires. Children of all ages have sung songs to them, written poems to them, made wishes upon them. They guided the ships of Columbus to a new land and led three wise men to the cradle of a very special Child. They were as eloquently portrayed by Vincent Van Gogh one hundred years ago as they are today by the MacDonald Observatory. They are at once fiery balls of burning gases billions of miles away and twinkling dots of soft-white light just out of reach. They are nature's history lesson, a panoramic videotape. We see them as they were, not as they are. Somehow, that just doesn't seem to matter to me.

My fascination with stars began as one of those song-singing, wish-making children. That quickest of all stars, the one that always wins the race to the horizon, must have grown weary of my frequent requests for new bikes, bigger allowances, and the admiring glances of the pony-tailed girl in my reading class. Soon after, a host of followers would fill the night sky, and the darkness would not seem so scary. I was too busy to be afraid. There were people and animals and birds and things up there, just waiting for me to turn my star map the right way so they could magically reveal themselves to me. There was mighty Orion, the Great Hunter looking back at a charging Taurus; Pegasus and Cygnus flying across the heavens; the Big Dipper pouring out the Milky Way. A myriad of celestial wonders, each with its own special story, each in its own special place; there for me to enjoy at my soul's content.

I have no idea where those days have flown, when shooting stars were shooting stars and the moon followed me wherever I went. My awestruck innocence has been replaced by an occasionally weary worldliness, and the gaiety of my youth seems, at times, to be a flickering memory. Yet I can walk out my back door after sunset, look up, and recapture a little of that wide-eyed wonder I used to feel. Orion is still Orion, the North Star still sits in the north; not that much has changed. I even believe that, now

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that I'm a little older, I have a greater sense of amazement at how our universe works. The magnificent expanse, the incredible order, the wondrous beauty that surrounds us all, speaks volumes for its Creator.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.

-Psalms 19:1

Tonight I'm sitting back with my traditional glass of post-dinner iced tea while my eyes scan the beautiful evening sky. The moon is high, and Jupiter is hiding unobtrusively among the distant, blinking lights. I look for Saturn, her rings endlessly bending in a cosmic embrace, but she is nowhere to be found. My attention turns back to the stars while the glorious choruses of Beethoven's Ninth ring from my speakers. I close my eyes. As the tape ends and the music dies, my mind drifts back to an old song by Don McLean, its opening verses toying with my memory. "Starry, starry night," indeed. I think about the wishes I made as a child. I was pretty lucky; I got the bike and eventually the raise in allowance. Of course, it wasn't as much as I had asked for, but you can't have everything. I sip some tea and think about the pony-tailed girl. I wonder whatever became of her? That was one wish that never came true. I guess the stars weren't listening somehow.

Perhaps they'll listen now.

LAST CHANCE

Marty Armstrong Manegold

Almost a generation has passed since
I sat in a classroom
head aching, forehead furrowed
trying to learn.

Fear of failure and the excitement
of discovery couple in this new
venture of mine. They euphemistically
categorize me a "re-entry" student.

Sitting in the lunchroom I watch and
listen as students chatter their
day away.

With heads bent together
whispering or thrown apart in laughter,
they discuss, smoke, drink and eat.
This is their first chance.

It is a more serious business for me,
not something I can put down, like
knitting, to take up again someday.

Both failure and success
squint at me from a distance,
beckoning. This is my last chance.

DEGAS VIEW
Richard Davidson

sometimes at night
in the crazy 1/2 light
i see your face in the rain
your nose pressed against the pane
but i know you're not really there
god, i hope you're not really there

JODY
Kim Rubit

Jody's frail body lies drenched in sweat. His eyes, wild with fervor, dominate the other features of his face. He complains about the smell of his own stench.

I stand watching, feeling sick and weak. Jody needs me and I want to help him, but I somehow feel I can't. I want to reach through the tiny window of his hospital room door and dry his boyish tears. I want to be his hero again, like I was when we were kids. I want to tell him that I've killed all the boogiemens in his closet and under his bed, and that he can sleep now without the threat of horrid nightmares invading his dreams. I want to assure him that his big brother is here to take care of him and make everything all right. But instead, I just stand here feeling afraid and helpless.

The thought of my failing Jody again makes me cold and achy inside. It has been ten years since I last saw him. He sent me a telegram one day saying he would be in the city for the night, playing at a club in town. He wanted me to come hear him play.

* * * * *

I was running late that evening and the band was already on stage when I arrived. I was excited about seeing my little brother again and happy that he had found something in his life that made him feel complete. But I didn't see Jody when I walked in so I assumed he was still back stage. The band finished their set and a man I had never seen before came to my table and said hello.

"Hello," I answered.

"You don't recognize me?"

I felt a little uneasy. There was something familiar about him but I was sure I had never seen him before. "No, You must have me confused with someone else."

"Hey, big brother. It's me, Jody," he said in a soft, childlike whine.

"My God," I whispered to myself.

I stood there for a moment in disbelief. I realized it had been a while since we had seen each other, but I hadn't expected such a change. He looked old, tired and worn out. His skin was rough with a pale, yellowish color to it. His thin, shriveled body slouched itself against the table. He spoke in a low voice, slurring the ends of his words, which made his sentences seem to run together. I couldn't understand much of what he was saying. I sat staring at the table to avoid having to look into his eyes. And as he reached for a chair, I saw the needle marks on his arms. Before, I had only guessed as much, but now I was sure. Jody was using drugs, and he had been for some time. On one arm the scars were old with scabs. And on the other, the marks looked as if they could have been made just hours ago. I was hurt, angry and disappointed.

Jody looked like a ghost whose presence haunted me. I had left our small, bleak, lifeless neighborhood to make a new life for myself elsewhere. I had failed to see the little brother I was also leaving behind.

Realizing this, my feelings turn to guilt. I had lost my little brother and it was my own fault. My guilt became too much to bear.

Jody's band was due up again. He asked me to wait for him so that we could catch up on old times. I said I would. But instead, I cowardly slipped out while he was still on stage, leaving my little brother behind to fight his problems alone. I didn't see or hear from Jody again until today.

* * * * *

As I stand, now seeing my little brother living in this hell I had left him to survive in, the guilt I had felt that night, ten years ago, returns. But this time it brings with it the strength and courage I have needed to stop running away from Jody and the part of myself that I see in him.

I know he can't hear me, so I whisper to myself instead, "Big brother's here now, Jody, to make everything all right again."

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

Van Dahl

She: She could of taken the pill,
And if she really wanted to
She coulda got him off his ass
And kicked it 'cross the street.
This mornin' I was a standin'
Right there.
(She points out the window.)
Ah shit, I grew them tomatoes
That Ed keeps talkin' about.

He: What?

She: I told you already she'd run a red light
Down somewheres in Alabama.
(Quiet—quiet beats, the air on the bus and
nothing else.)

Then without notice or warning—
In the familiar sense—
Breaks squeak and silver-like cadmium
Rings down.
What a dead tin sound.

A lady gets on with children.
A set of twins and a thumbsucker.
A neat, cordial politeness adorns them,
So I lose my seat to the boys and their everything.

Sorry to think that they may be among
School dropout statistics.

Ran out of envelope to write on
And so I slough off an old me
At the same time
Moment begat momentlessness.

SOLITUDE
Cynthia Rhoder

Why must I live a life of solitude,
A life with no beginning, no purpose—
just an end.

Why must I live a life of solitude,
A life with meaning—
but no understanding.

Why must I live a life of solitude,
A life with no direction—
just crossroads.

Why must I live a life of solitude,
A life with no time—
only the passing of the day.

Why must I live a life of solitude,
A life I must live with no solution
to my solitude.



Photograph by Marc R. Gladin

MY DAD, MY TEACHER

Joseph R. Valdez

My dad was a man of about 220 pounds, some of which belonged to his beer-belly. Actually, he was a well-built man, stood just shy of six-foot tall, and he had broad shoulders, muscular arms and strong hands. Dad always kept himself well-groomed with short hair and usually sported a moustache, most of which was gray. Most people we knew considered him a good-looking man.

He would never let any situation get the better of him. I recall a fishing trip we went on with his brother. We set out for a spot we had never tried before, but where we had heard the fishing was great. We didn't know the area at all. After a few minutes of what seemed to be a pleasant boat ride, we ran into some trouble. We hit a sand bar. The motor took the full brunt of the impact and now had only one gear—reverse. As luck would have it, we were close enough to an island so we could get there safely in reverse.

Once there on this small island, a mess with empty cans, soda bottles, wine bottles and pieces of wood scattered about, dad weighed his options. The first option was to flag down a passing boat and ask for assistance. The second option was to try to fix the motor ourselves, since the first option didn't seem to have much hope, especially being out there on a Wednesday afternoon. Boat traffic was almost nil, so the second option took over as the game plan.

Dad never kept many tools in his boat, so my uncle and he showed their resourcefulness. With only a bottle opener, a knife, a pair of pliers and one bottle top, they managed to fix the motor. It worked long enough for us to make the five-mile trek back to the dock safely.

I was amazed by the fact that my dad didn't panic; at least, if he did, he didn't show it. He handled this situation as if he knew in advance that he would come out on top. I, of course, knew that we would be stranded just like on Gilligan's Island.

Life always seemed to pose challenges for my dad. He generally met them head-on, and almost always came out on top. Then he met the biggest challenge of his life, his bout with cancer.

He was diagnosed with cancer late, too late for a fair fight. It gained so much territory in his body that subsequent operations would prove to be futile. After undergoing a series of chemotherapy and radiation treatments my dad still amazed me. I never once heard him say, why me. I never saw him give in to this killer. What I saw was a man fighting to retain his happiness, his sense of humor, and his compassion.

This man had been a picture of health only a few months earlier. The picture now turned to a man who weighed 150 pounds, had lost all his hair, and who grew weaker with each passing day.

I remember our last Christmas together. All of us gathered at his sister's house, where we always had our traditional family gatherings. All of our relatives were there, but none of them could believe the shape he was in, especially his physique. They couldn't accept the fact that my dad, at age 42, was losing his battle with cancer.

He never showed anyone at the party his pain. Instead, he stood around visiting with everyone as if nothing were wrong. He tired easily then, and he was probably only able to stand around for about thirty minutes at a time.

I saw him sneak off into a vacant bedroom when he tired. He stayed in there for quite some time. I got worried and decided to check on him. I stopped at the doorway and heard him crying. His pain was so intense and overwhelming that he needed a place to recharge his strength. I just stood there feeling helpless.

Once he felt strong enough, he rejoined the party and acted as if nothing were wrong. He never showed anyone his intense pain. He showed only his impeccable smile and brilliant sense of humor.

I couldn't quite comprehend his actions at the time. It wasn't until after my dad's passing, in March of the next year, that I began to understand his actions at the party and at home.

The message I felt my dad seemed to be saying was never let anything or anyone bring your spirit down. Never bring anyone else down, if you feel down. Most importantly, strive to be happy, especially when the world seems to be crumbling around you. Life is too short to be unhappy.

I hope never to forget the things my dad taught me.

A BOY AND HIS BALL

Jeraine Root

From the chaise longue by the pool I watched the young boy bouncing his greenish yellow tennis ball against the side of the apartment building. Totally oblivious to my steadied observation, he continued his one-way game of catch, chanting "Mom! Mom! Mom!" Each time the ball struck the hard brick his voice grew a decibel louder until, finally, he was throwing the ball with such force it sailed past his reach. He chased after his round friend, scooped it up and, winding up like a big league pitcher, hurled with all his might releasing a frenzied, "MMMMMOOOOOOMMMMM!!!"

Out the door stumbled a disheveled woman, perhaps in her mid-30s. Miller Lite can in one hand, a nearly gone cigarette in the other, she shrieked, "What!?!?! What do you want?"

Startled, the boy shot back, "I lost my ball."

The corners of her mouth pulled her face into a scowl as she said, "You interrupted me for *that*?" The contempt dripped from her final word, leaving a stench in the air as she closed the door behind her.

The boy slowly walked toward the sea of grass where his wild pitch had landed. As he waded through it, parting the knee-high blades of green with both hands, I heard a barely audible muttering, "Mom."

BLACK CAT
Beverly DeLoach

Black cat arrives.

Deftly he stalks, black velvet paws raising
individually to allow the gold of the moon
to light his black satin toes and the cool evening breeze
to douse the soot.

Honorably seeking tired bones and exhausted minds,
rifled spirits and hearts played out.

He seeks not the young; they belong to fierce panthers
who must tear them away with carnivorous vice.

Juxtaposed, they wait for him.

Even his piercing emerald eyes cannot warm thrones
of cold grey steel upon which they sit and wait.

And wait.

Robbed already are they
of chestnut crowns with golden lights,
of hazel jewels and ivory smiles.

Gently they submit to him.

He eases all pain, he calms all fear.

The ride upon his sleek and muscular body
is smooth and swift, gliding endlessly into the night,
stars nodding approval of a life worthy of
the black cat's knock upon its door.

FACTS

Robert Dickerson

She was old, forever old and squat,
My grandmother, even in my youth;
Head hoary as the horizon line at mid-afternoon,
The ridged brow angling to wasted eyes of water;
Cheeks that bespoke the remnant trickle of Cherokee
Blood.

I see her parasoled against the blaze,
Trodding fissured roads of red clay,
A parcel burgeoning with the privileged's discards
(Worn shoes, hemless dresses, wheelless toy trucks)
Under her burnished arm—
Cowed steps compelling her to the
Musky house, and we small six.
Last January, I watched the mortician's apprentice
Stand, jump on her sealed coffin to seat it snugly
In the thick East Texas clay.

SUMMERTIME IN GEORGIA

Robert Cobb

This being my sixth week in basic training, I had already been involved in a myriad of dangerous activities which transformed my eighteen-hour days into an eternity. Today threatened to be longer than usual as I road-marched under the hot Georgia sun to the hand-grenade-throwing range for the first time.

Of course the pressure had begun much earlier when I was awakened as usual at 4:30 a.m., the time of the morning when the drill sergeants announce their presence with loud noises and bright lights. It really doesn't matter how fast I move to pull my sweat pants and sweat shirt on, as long as I'm moving faster than the person next to me. A few minutes later and I'm outside of the barracks standing wearily at attention, awaiting the drill sergeant's barks which will begin my early morning physical training. After thirty minutes of calisthenics and a two-mile to five-mile run, I'm then granted a quick shower, and an even quicker breakfast.

Soon thereafter the sun peeks over the tall Fort Benning pine trees, and smiles down upon me and a row of highly shined infantrymen. Poorly polished combat boots which fail to reflect the morning's brilliance entitle the owner to additional exercise. This is unnecessary, however, as trickles of sweat are already rolling down everyone's face in response to the heat and humidity.

All during the following hour I prepare for the road-march by drawing a weapon from the arms room, receiving my rations and drinking several quarts of water. I strap a cumbersome helmet on top of my shaved head and entangle myself with web gear. If I appear too awkward, it only invites further harassment from the ever vigilant drill sergeants.

Sadly enough, only after several rocky miles down the dusty tank trail, when my uniform becomes sopping wet with sweat, do I gain comfort.

Once at the range, preliminary training qualifies me in hand-grenade marksmanship. Stance and positions of arms and fingers are all stressed upon me by the devoted range instructor. Afterwards I'm herded with the rest of the platoon into concrete

bunkers adjacent to the sandbagged pits, which is where I'll throw the grenades from.

It becomes my turn, and as the flak jacket I'm wearing seems to increase my feelings of incapacitation, I quickly assume my position into one of the sand-bagged pits. Sweat burns my eyes, obscuring the target, and the 2 1/2 pound green baseball in my hands feels more like a bowling ball. I take a deep breath, tugging at the cotter pin freeing it from the fuse, and throw the grenade hard, pushing it away from my body. I watch for a moment as it sails toward the target in slow motion like a balloon. My body seems possessed by this same motion as I try to seek refuge behind a row of sandbags.

The explosion ends as quickly as it started, feeling more like a concussive sound wave rather than bright flashes and colorful sparks. Contrary to television and comic books, is the fact that fragmentation grenades neither whistle nor smoke while in flight. Several moments after the explosion a light rain of debris informs me that the ordeal has ended.

I scurry back towards the concrete bunker, realizing I would now have to stay in that dark hole for almost an hour, while the remaining soldiers in first platoon take their turns throwing grenades. As every soldier knows, an hour in a place such as this proves to be very valuable, for it means a peaceful hour of undisturbed sleep.

This day, although not yet half over, would probably be a very miserable and depressing experience to most people. I believe it should be mandatory, as it holds a particular knowledge not found in any major university's curriculum.

SEEING YOURSELF IN SPOONS

Tomas Vallejos

On an empty stomach
Too early in your long day
It's easy to be distorted
When you see through stainless spoons.

They are the commoners' craft,
Familiar as Rogers
Or foreign to you as Oneida.
Avoid them at any cost.
It is always too high.

Look up close from the underside
And it shows you
A long-faced hound dog,
Drooped eyes looking for attention,
Oversized snout designed for nothing
But lapping in a beggar's bowl.

Look from afar
And it shows your outstretched arms
Too thin to hold anything
That might be offered.

Turn it over,
As a normal person would,
And you are upside down,
Your hands much too big
For the crumbs beyond their reach.

If you dare look closer
Your eyes begin to pour down
Like cream of wheat
Onto a floor
You wish were your empty stomach.

No.

If you are really hungry

Put the spoon down.

If you must reflect at breakfast

See yourself in a greasy toaster.

It's warm and big enough to make you

As full or slender as you choose.

And when it pops up

It offers plenty of bread

And a promise of butter

To melt on your waiting tongue.

VOICES

(a sonnet for a friend with throat cancer)

Josh Crane

I lost my voice once, over-yelling, wild,
at some silly football game one fall day.
"Lost" it, like something misplaced, gone astray
like a dog or like a paper misfiled.
And I missed it amid the frustration
of trying to communicate with friends.
I croaked, not wanting to wait while it mends.
Then, at last: quiet in resignation.

In the forced silences from my own sound,
I became aware of each wasted word,
paltry phrase, and spendthrift sentence I heard,
so far from love and truth. And, thus I found

so fond of the cacophony of men
are we, we rarely hear the voices within.

INSANITY
A Rugby Team

KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL.

Saturday morning wake-up call.

The infinite chant heard by every rugby player.

We live to kill or be killed.

To us there is no difference.

All we know is to stop the attack by the opposing mortals.

Alas the only way we know is to kill.

We are like an unmovable rock with its own will,

But without brains.

Why do we want to kill or be killed?

We do it for the joy of not knowing

When that fine line between mortality and immortality is
crossed.

What a feeling!

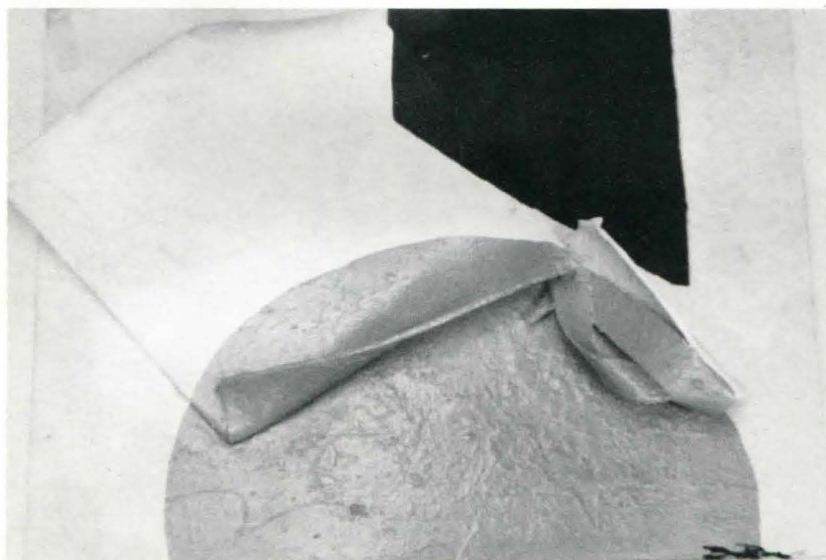
AN INNER-CITY NURSE'S CRYSTAL BALL
Anthony Shephard

Here she comes into this world
A world that will be cruel to her
If only she knew what I know
She wouldn't breathe this life*
She's leaving me now with a soft smile
But she'll be back in ten or twelve years
And lay where her mother now lies



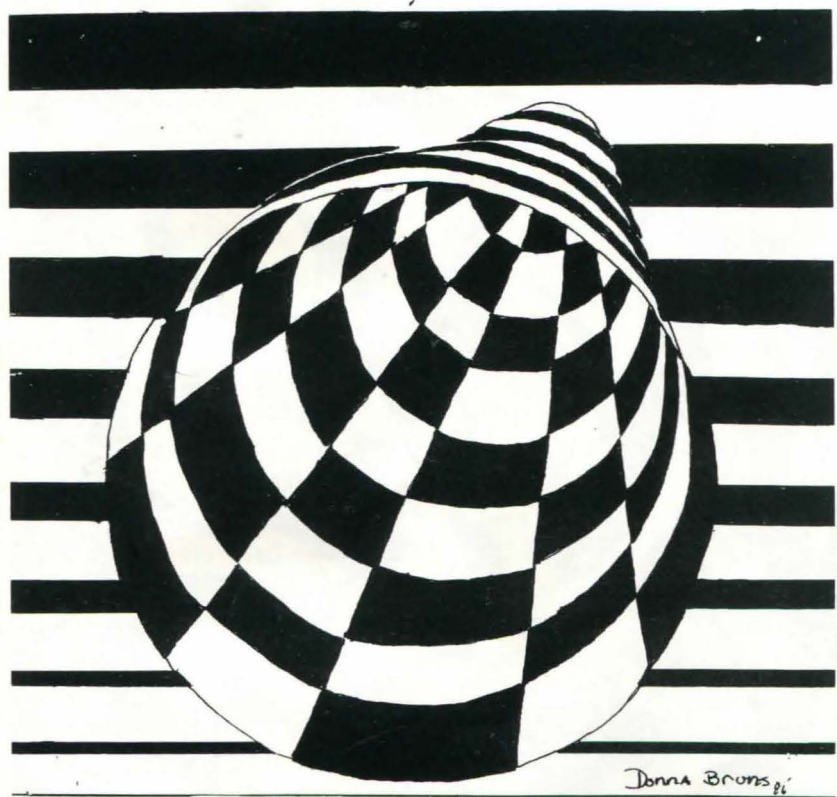
Untitled (graphite)
Donna Bruns

Photograph by Scott Greene



Untitled
Donna Bruns

Photograph by Scott Greene



Big Mind (ink on paper)
Donna Bruns



Spirits Return (ink on paper)
Donna Bruns

FORT/DA
Ray Wright

It's hot. Me and Shorty are sittin' on a park bench. You know the kind. It's made of nothin' but slats, and you have to sit way back to have a back rest. There's no way to git comfortable sittin' on it, especially somebody like Shorty because he's so short, and his feet don't touch the ground too good. Me, I'm taller, and I can touch the ground all right, but the slats are still uncomfortable, and we both are fidgeting. Bored stiff. Shorty and me go back a long way, all the way back to grade school, back before me and Sherry.

"Wanta go to a movie?" asks Shorty, and I know he ain't got no money, and I know he knows I do. And I know he knows I planned to go see "Friday 13th," part 3 or 4 or some such damned number. There's so many of them, who can keep up with them? I was gonna take Sherry. But not anymore. So I tell Shorty no. And I don't want to go. Not now.

So we're sittin' there, and I notice this kid. Can't be over two or three years old. He's sittin' on his butt, there in the grass, throwin' this stupid yellow rubber duck away and screamin': "Gone! Gone!" Then he crawls over and picks it up and grins in that straggly-toothed way kids do, slobberin' all over his chin, and says: "Mine! Mine!" He puts the duck in his mouth and bounces up and down on his ass, busting the air out of his pampers, grinnin' and chewin' on that duck. Then he throws it away again and yells, "Gone! Gone!" and goes through the same silly routine. It don't take much to amuse a kid, I think, and I say to Shorty, "Look at that stupid kid."

And he says, "Why?"

And I say, "Watch him. He keeps throwin' that duck away and then goin' to get it, and he acts like gittin' it back is the greatest thing in the world."

So I watch the kid awhile. His mother—I guess it's his mother—ignores him. She's readin' some dumb magazine. I watch the kid, but I ain't really interested. I don't feel all that good. I'm just kinda depressed, and sort of mad too. You know how it is. How you can't put your finger on nothin', but things just don't seem right.

Shorty says: "Got a cigarette?"

And I reach in my pocket, but all I have are some of those slender, brown ones like Sherry smokes, and I know Shorty don't like them, but I offer him one, and he kinda looks at it, then at me, and says: "That all you got?"

I say, "Yes," and put them away. I don't really care if Shorty doesn't want one. I know one of the reasons he don't like them is because he don't like Sherry. Never has liked her since I first started datin' her. And Sherry don't like him. But I don't say nothin'. I just put the cigarettes away. I don't want to tick him off. Shorty gits mad real easy—Mom says it's because he's so short—but he gits real red in the face, and he starts stammerin' bad, so I don't say nothin'. I really wish Shorty would just bug off. I mean, he's my friend, and we do stuff together, but sometimes a guy would just like to be alone.

The kid is still throwin' that stupid duck. He notices me lookin' at him, and he gits still for a minute; then he acts like he's gonna throw that duck at me, but I sorta frown and cross my legs. I ain't in no mood for that kid and his duck.

I hate to miss the movie. I don't see why Sherry got mad and left. I mean, she's a swell girl, and we had great times together. But she didn't like Shorty always hangin' around, and then yesterday she got all upset, started chewin' on her fingernails the way she does and said: "Maybe you would like for me to be the one to leave." And, well, hell, Shorty was standin' right there watchin' the whole thing, and what was I supposed to say? I looked at Shorty, and he looked back at me, and I said: "Sure. Go ahead. Leave. See if I care." And she did. I looked up and she was gone. Gone just like that.

Later, Shorty said, "Do you miss her?"

"Hell, no," I said. "I'm glad she's gone. She's just a split-tailed broad."

And Shorty said, "You don't know if she's split-tailed or not." And I could have killed the little bastard. I mean, he's o.k., but there's times he really bugs me, especially lately.

So, I'm sittin' there, watchin' the kid, jumpin' up and down, bustin' the air out of his pampers and yellin', "Mine! Mine!" and slobberin' all over his self, and I think, who cares. It's so damned hot, and I'm leanin' forward on my elbows, tryin' to git comfortable on the stupid bench, and Shorty is sittin' beside me, swingin'

his feet, scuffin' his toes in the dirt under the bench, raisin' a cloud of dust. He's buggin' me, and I start to tell him; then I hear Shorty say, "Hi," sort of like you might say it to somebody when you wasn't really sure you was glad to see them or not. And I look up, and there is Sherry. I say, "Hi," sort of like Shorty did, I guess, and she says, "Hi," and keeps standin' there.

She's got on those short shorts of hers that she seems always to find a way to roll just a little bit shorter. Today she's rolled them even higher it seems, showin' a streak of white between her shorts and the dark tan of her legs. Her face is peelin' under her eyes from the trip we made to the beach a week ago; her hair is all wind blown, and she's smokin' one of her slender brown cigarettes. She looks great. She keeps standin' there, and then she says: "I'm sorry." I sort of squirm on those hard slats. I look at Shorty, and he looks at me, and I say: "Aw, that's all right." I mean, what could I say? Then I say: "It was probably mostly my fault." And Sherry smiles. She's all right.

Then she says: "You wanta go to a movie? My ole man gave me five dollars for washing his car last night." That's how Sherry is.

"Me too?" Shorty says.

Sherry looks at me real steady for a minute; she takes her cigarette out of her mouth kinda slow, looks at it, then at him. "Buzz off, Prick," she says.

Shorty slides off of those slats real quick like. He's real red in the face, and he's tryin' to say somethin', but I can't understand him very good. Sherry ignores him. She holds out her hand to me. It's all brown, and I notice how all her fingernails have been chewed to the quick, but it feels sort of soft and nice if you know what I mean. I start to get up, and I feel somethin' hit my leg. I look down, and it's that kid's rubber duck. I reach down and pick it up and carry it over to the kid. He watches me real close, not blinkin', not bouncin', the way kids do when they seem to be really thinkin', waitin' to see what you'll do. I give the duck to him, and I say: "Here. Take good care of your duck, kid."

GRACE AND LORRAINE

Anthony Shephard

The tears of this August day flow for Grace
Many friends visit her this time of year
Poor Lorraine, she's dead too
But her grave site is lifeless and forgotten
Grace gets fresh flowers everyday
Lorraine gets growing crab grass every summer

Through the tears, they say that they come every summer
Even children who didn't know her, cried for Grace
The two who visited Lorraine must've wondered everyday
Why was she not remembered this year
Why was she the one forgotten
After all, she's famous too

Those who knew Grace knew Lorraine too
But who wants to mourn over a dingy grave every summer
Besides, some think that Lorraine's should be forgotten
A king's regicide couldn't seize attention from Grace
She's the only king her admirers recognize year after year
While Lorraine's existence is being forgotten everyday

Those who visited Grace wore black everyday
The two who visited Lorraine wore black too
Some say at least she got two visitors this year
See, she wasn't shut out this summer
But she is not lady Grace
That's one dead lady that won't be forgotten

Lorraine shouldn't be forgotten
She should be remembered everyday
For her passion, nonconformity and grace
When paying respect to Grace visit Lorraine too
Put one of your flowers on her grave next summer
Make her feel that she is appreciated next year

Share some of your tears for Lorraine next year
Show her she has not been forgotten
Take the trip across the track next summer
Where her grave deteriorates everyday
Tell her she's a monument too
Tell her she's just as special as Grace

Those tears should not only be for Grace next year
Lorraine too, does not want to be forgotten
Every day her soul cries, especially during the summer

There are rumors that the Lorraine Hotel where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated will be turned into a monument. At present, the structure is deteriorating into nothingness. Graceland, where Elvis Presley lived and died, is visited by thousands of people each year.

TWO STEPS FORWARD NO STEPS BACK

Joseph F. Wrede

The dead and wounded continued to be counted and their neighbors interviewed. The message being broadcast through the medium is graphic, loud and clear. We are losing the war against drugs. Our Commander and Chief is on the air. He has a sad smile on his boyish face and nervously picks the lint from his cardigan. He speaks to the camera telling us the time has come to eradicate the problem at its source. If we are to be successful, if we are to get drugs out of the schools, off the streets and out of the lives of our children, we must fight.

Panama. Nicaragua. El Salvador. 1990. The President's words, the people's fears and the judge's gavel foreclose on Philly's life.

"Hey yellow belly, you best cover your butt boy, cuz that there streak is blindin' me. News travels fast in the tank, and we don't like your kind in here. Ain't that right Jake," said Earl.

Jake remained quiet. He never spoke. The only thing he moved without physical coercion was a hand that traveled elliptically, taking a cigarette to and from his lips. His eyes were sunk deep in their sockets and showed grey like flint. His gaze never wavered from the tiny window in the massive cinder block wall. Philly's head moved unconsciously as his eyes followed the dusty ray of light filtering into the window to Jake's face. He wondered what moves a man like Jake to respond.

"Yore a fool; you messed your chance to bag a few sand monkeys in the name of your country." This time Earl didn't bother confirming his beliefs with the silent Jake.

"Listen pal, those people are just like me and you; some are conscious and some are scum. It's their right to decide their own destiny and determine their own fate. Do you think this war is all about drugs? This is a fire fueled by fear and lies and we are a country that learned nothing about Vietnam. Who are we to lead by an iron fist? Who are we to turn Central America into our own iron curtain? If it's only about drugs, then why didn't we spend the money, time and energy on rehabilitation programs, drug hotlines and education. Instead of a multi-billion dollar ad campaign that features celebrities telling us to 'just say no.' They have been candy-coating the issue for years and now, suddenly,

the problem is such that it can only be solved by taking control of Central America? They're just exchanging one inadequate solution for another. Earl, isn't it time the free world take two steps forward for brotherhood and say no to war as a solution?"

"Yore red; yore nothing but a Jordan commie coward," Earl sputtered angrily.

Philly threw his arms in the air and turned away in frustration. He began walking towards the window, when suddenly a sharp pain in his lower back sent Philly reeling to the cold cement floor.

Earl's voice echoed in his head, "You ain't takin' no steps t'all boy."

He was dazed and vaguely aware of a second blow as he looked up toward the light. In slow motion he saw the cigarette fall from Jake's hand as his mouth opened to release a terrible cry. Jake's voice had the rage of a wounded beast. Philly's eyes moved to Earl who still held the bloody piece of metal. He looked worn but his face still held a few traces of ecstasy from the attack. Jake bent close to Philly, sheltering him from Earl's hatred. His grey eyes were no longer cold.

Perspiration clung to his brow as Jake whispered urgently, "I was there kid. I was in Nam. Every day of my life I wake feeling like I'm already dead and wishing I'd had the wisdom not to go."

Philly's wound continued to flow. He could taste blood on his lips.

"Where the hell's the justice in this, kid?"

Philly's eyes traveled to the window. He thought if there are a thousand points of light out there, whose law decrees that I am only allotted one, and even as I lie here this one ray grows dim.

FREEDOM

Patrick Okwusogu

Freedom is never what it seems to be.
It is just a mere pathetic fallacy
Conceived by the idiotic norms and rules of a doomed cul -
ture.

Life is a transition between the two sides of darkness.
The uncertainty of tomorrow is hung around our necks
Like the albatross around the neck of the ancient mariner.

Life is but a dream,
While death is the awakening of the conscious mind.

CONVERGENCE
Joseph R. Williams

You old man,
Asking me of my eye rung black,
 "Don't you know," I ask
 like my bladder is 'burstalating.'
You, man, part of the street—
You, old, encrusted in
Seemingly benign sterility of life—
With your nose large and bent,
Eyes slit lost without red glint,
Eyes lost of care in circumscription
You blend part of the street.

Mocking street lights
Buses passing you by and by
 You, man, share things with my father.
 A difference of something,
 Something not quite right.
Like trash and February wind caught downtown
'chunneling' through your hair.

Don't I curse you properly,
Ignore you seemingly,
And stare at you through
 AND THROUGH?

You share—
You are a man known to the world
In my Father

Is it me
IS IT ME?

But you don't know either.

Not hatred on a scope,
A tainted fence, or rusty pole
Blown out-weathered hard and dry
Like cracking-peeling atoms and other
besieged mindless elements
Off life

{And no one would know 'morrow if I die—if he die}
I play well the unactor acting up
Still, if you die—?

Ghosts man and you are mentioned
Making me sick even without your pipe;
You, old man, hang on and choke in a doorway
Like the stench of a resource out of place
I look back and see you washed in Acheron water,
Wiping spittle soaked sleeves 'cross mouth.

And I know if you'd emotion,
you'd reach out and slap me.
Instead you broke my arm and took my change,
And I wend, trying to remember my home.

There's a hotel down the road.
Only a few dollars will get you
a bunk with a meal.
It's the best they can offer.

You take it gracing the path, watching
ladies in the theater alley.
A door opens, and rumbling voices drown in
over the jukebox drone and clanking glasses .

You draw one over with a smile and a nod,
she passes (gives you a smoke) pretending allegiance.

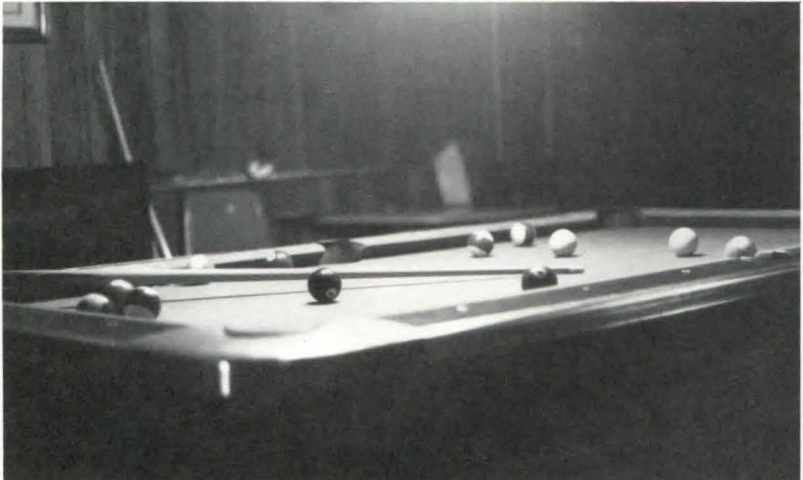
"Now don't get me wrong," you said pissing on a
parkbench,

"I want to pass peacefully, you don't understand
or know what I want. I'm silent as the
majority can be, and I want to watch you in
those movies; soft, naked, black and white."

She looks the opposite way with a make-believe style, and
cringes to think she heard you; yet thinks about you in
bed at night, wonders what you cover warm with,
and always shrugs you off in the same thought.
She yawns, adjusts the quilt, and snuggles
In her own sterile world.

My presence is my blindness.
Yours is the contents of my suit coat.
 You don't even know what's in there,
 And I don't know my own existence.

She's tucked away quietly in a tall-tall building.
No bars on the glass, just me and a bottle ingesting each other
Watching people below pass.
 A few elevators for only the few...
 More and more stairs for exercising your innocence...
By the time you reach the top, I figure you'll be
too tired to kill, and your hateful motives, I give
you a lesson for life and a sentence with forgiveness buried
somewhere in it.



MY FAULT

Elizabeth L. Harris

No male pride or chauvinism, more
a lack of it, when he spilled his
gism all over the sidewalk for the
citizens to see-
therefore on me.

Twenty-three years of the last twenty-five
I drive late to search the alleys, the
gutters where males like him
hide from their shame-
the female's to blame.

I see a leaning black post hold a leaning
black man, and know that it's mine and
run to catch him before he
falls to the ground-
he sees my frown.

He looks up into a face of pity and disgust
and turns his head to the dust, flings the
arms away, the ones which so tenderly
cradle his head-
and wishes he were dead.

He companions those who agree to his drinking
himself into an erection, in solemn toast, in
his dejection he downs the quart and swallows his
fear, and knows it does not satisfy his wife-
and brings no life.

What more to do than hang onto
A Catholic vow, which only now
when thought about, says, "You
made it, now lie in your bed."
I wish I were dead.

I abstain from drink from my convictions, from
sex because of his affliction, but being only a
woman and a descendent of that first vixen of
long ago who caused the Fall-
It's my fault after all.

A NEW FATHER

Mario E. Rodriguez

The young man stood at the double-glass doorway. His eyes fixed on the gold-embossed lettering, RADMAN, SOTO and TOLETTI. The paper in his hand confirmed the suite number within the 65-story tower. The receptionist at the front desk gave the young man a "can I help you" look.

He stood motionless, feeling bewildered and not sure if he wanted to meet the man mentioned in his father's letters. He felt the door slide away from his sweaty hand.

"May I help you, sir?" the girl asked.

"Uh, yes ma'am. I have an appointment with Frank Radman."

"Well, you must be Andy."

"Yes ma'am."

Andy Radman stepped into the ornate lobby. His body surged with an eerie feeling that seemed to reach its peak and started when he learned from his dying mother that his father, Charles Radman, was alive and not dead as he was led to believe for 18 years.

He sat in the snugness of a rich leather couch. The prestigious, ornate decor in the lobby absorbed some of Andy's restless activity. He wondered how his father, a two-time loser, was viewed by his brother, Frank Radman. "They're probably both crooks," he thought. He didn't know what to think.

"Well, hello, young man," a high-pitched voice shot out. "I'm Frank Radman." The attorney's long arm reached out to meet the grip of the strong, golden-aged Andy. "You're the spitting image of your father." Andy smirked at the comment. He wasn't sure if it was good or bad. "Well come into my office, Andy. We've got some talking to do. May I get you something to drink?"

Andy's presence with the only living soul that knew of his father's existence pummeled him with a sudden grasp of fear, like a child on the verge of screaming as he's being led into the doctor's office. He lowered himself into a stiff oak chair. Compared to the luxury of the lobby, Frank Radman's office seemed out of place. The desk was cluttered with stacks of white

paper. Stuffed manilla folders were piled on the floor next to the lawyer's oak desk.

Directly behind Frank Radman, a plain white wall was adorned with a dozen or more frames. There were a variety of scholastic degrees, mayoral proclamations and letters from the White House. Andy noticed the signature of President Johnson on one and that of President Reagan on two others. A credenza was filled with yachting cups, model schooners and clippers. And in the corner between the exhibition of wall frames and trophies, a glass-encased cabinet illuminated what appeared to be a military shrine. In it were shiny military medals attached to colorful ribbons, pictures of green-clad soldiers embraced in a token of everlasting friendship.

Andy got up and walked over the makeshift memorial. "At first she told me Charles had died in Vietnam," he said as he bent over to get a closer look at the taller man next to Frank in the picture. He immediately recognized the likeness of him in his father.

"Do you mind if I get a closer look?" Andy asked.

"Let me unlock it, Andy. This stuff has a lot of sentimental value."

Frank carefully removed from the picture a V-shaped blue ribbon that was attached to a golden star medal and he laid it aside in the cabinet and handed Andy the picture.

"This is your father at 18. We were stationed in Pleiku—both of us. I flew choppers while he pounded the jungles looking for 'Charlie,' the enemy. I flew back to camp every day while he stayed in that hot, soaky jungle."

Andy listened as Frank ritually removed several pieces of war artifact, except one, the one that was draped over the picture. He moved one piece at a time. Each piece or picture had its own story.

Frank placed his hand on Andy's shoulder. "You know, I don't keep all these things because I'm some type of proud victorious warrior. For that matter, there was no victory, not even when we came home."

Andy studied every line on Frank's rough-looking face. He listened to every word.

"I keep these because they remind me of my friends, your

father, the sacrifices we made and still experience for going to that god forsaken place.

Andy took a step back from the case, as if suddenly aware that his restless activity demanded that questions be asked and answered.

"Why isn't my—why isn't Charles as proud as you are?" Andy questioned. "He's a two-time loser sent to San Quentin. Couldn't he see his own son at least once?"

"Andy, your father didn't know you were alive," Frank said with a sigh. "No one did except Betty. She sent a letter saying you were stillborn. She moved away. No one knew where she had gone to."

"Yeah, sure," he replied.

"Don't you see Andy? She didn't want to remember her past. Look what she told you about your father. Killed in action, huh? Think about it."

"Why did he go to prison?" Andy demanded.

"Your father is a good man. He did his time. He's had time to heal."

"Why did he go to prison?"

"He killed a man...in self-defense," Frank answered, gesturing with his index finger as if making a point to a jury.

Andy's eyes shifted to Frank's raised finger, then back to Frank's stern face. "Is that what war is all about? Go away and kill. Come home and kill."

"Look at the bottom of your shoe, Andy. Go ahead—any shoe. Tell me what you see."

Andy leaned forward shaking his head. "I see leather."

"What else?" Frank asked.

"I see scratches, dirt. . . What is this, some sort of game?" he said.

"Andy, I'm not trying to promote the war like it's some kind of shiny product. But what you see on the bottom of your shoes is exactly what happened to a lot of veterans. They trudged through the jungles taking on the pain and punishment of war to protect an ideal. The ideal may have been misapplied, but they went where they were told to go just like your shoes go where you direct them. And when they came home, society and the guy who wore the shoes put them through some more

punishment. The shoes came back tired, fatigued, needing...and pardon the way I'm saying it...needing new souls."

Andy knew better. "What about World War II veterans and Korean veterans? They saw as much, if not more, than the Vietnam veteran."

Frank responded, "That's true; but World War II vets had an average age of 26. Vietnam vets were barely 19. World War II vets came home victorious as units. They had time to comfort and provide emotional support to one another on the long trips home in the ships. Some journeys back home took two to four months. They had time to heal, and they didn't know when they were coming home. Some units stayed in the war two and three years. Vietnam vets knew before going to Nam when they would return one year later. You would think that's good, but each man went over as an individual and returned as an individual, alone with a head full of bewilderment. He left best friends behind. There was guilt. In the jungle one day, back home the next.

Andy grew weary at the prospect of listening to the justification of his father's brother. "Look, I don't mean to sound rude, but I came here to meet my uncle and know a little more about Charles and be on my way. I didn't come for this speech."

"You do want to meet your father," Frank added.

"Of course—if what you say is true."

"Before you try to get to know your dad, please let me tell you a little more. Maybe it will help." Frank grabbed Andy by the arm and coaxed him over to a chair; he sat next to him.

"You see, your father suffered from some of the worst form of PTSD. Do you know what that is?"

"I think so," Andy answered.

Frank continued, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It kills a man slowly. Not physically at first, but mentally and slow. The world gets choked off. No jobs, you can't sleep, you can't keep friends. Your body feels numb; you feel rage. You kill yourself, you get killed, or worse your rage reaches a point of no return and you kill someone else. That damn war still hurts. Andy, your father has done his time. Twenty years later after leaving Nam his mind and body are not choked off. He's a good man. Just like he was before he went."

The enigma of character traits in troubled Vietnam vets

seemed unimportant. Andy abruptly walked over to the shrine. He tried to imagine a fatherly warmth on the expressionless face as he stared at Charles in the picture. That was more important—not hang-ups. He turned around and looked at Frank who was still seated.

He said, "Do you think things would have been different if the war hadn't messed him up?"

"It's hard to say. One thing about your father, though, he has greater character than I or a lot of other men. When you really need him, and if he knows you do, I'll guarantee, he'll be there. He was a great soldier. I think he is still a great man."

Andy stared again at his father in the picture. The green combat fatigues created an image in Andy's mind. Charles' expressionless face was now alive with pride, like an approving parent watching his son do something good.

"I'd like to meet him," he said.

Frank got up. "Andy, there's one more thing I'd like for you to see." Frank carefully removed the golden medal from the display case. He placed it in Andy's palm. "Here. Take a good look at it. It's the nation's highest award for..."

Andy cut in and whispered. "It's the Congressional Medal of Honor," and stared in Frank's eyes. Frank said, "Read what it says on the back."

"For valor above and beyond the call of duty. Charles L. Radman." Andy quickly stared upward as he felt his way through the revelation. "You won the medal of honor," Andy said, again staring at the picture.

"He didn't win it; he earned it," Frank added. "His actions saved the lives of over thirty men. President Johnson himself presented it to him. Funny thing, Andy, is that he hasn't touched one penny of the monthly allotment from that medal. When Betty disappeared, he figured she ran off at her young, foolish age with some man. He always felt she was hiding something."

Frank looked at his watch. "Now Andy, I have a client waiting, so you go down the hallway and to your left. There's a conference room. There's someone there who wants to meet you.

"Andy clutched the medal tightly as he held back a tear. He looked at Frank and softly said, "It's dad."

Frank nodded.

ARCTIC

Luck Smith Jr.

Cold. The pain made nothing matter, but she was freezing in her indifference. Looked in the rearview mirror and saw nothing, not even the miles she had covered. Rested her head on the steering wheel, but found closing her eyes regenerated those fractions of pain she was holding back. Stared up to witness the white lines on the road pulling under her again (how far now?)—moving, the car moving on its own. The sea behind the eyes blackened more with the dropping temperatures, oblivious to the winter landscape bordering the lonely road she took.

Somewhere up ahead . . .

Drinking coffee, eating a cupcake, those dark, evacuated eyes stared out of the wide windows, obstructed by sale advertisements, as she stood in one of those bright, beckoning, overpriced, all night mini-marts. Staring at the winter of highways that connected city to city to city to somewhere . . . and watched her waiting car impatient for the miles. The store attendant of some unknown nationality, forever defiant behind the product-strewn counter, eyed her suspiciously, but other than a distant acknowledgement, she gave him no second thought. The coffee, although hot, did not warm her. She stood there for what seemed hours, and no one entered the store in that stretched time.

Somewhere far behind . . .

She discovered herself suddenly in a situation of not believing the words he spoke. Words that told her rather bluntly that it was over, that they were no more. Not believing such a thing. No. What was she to do with all this love she had inside for him? Shut down the factory and do what with the merchandise? That was really funny to her. So she put in the sea. The love. Put in the cold place, the numbing place. Now she was freezing in those temperatures. Irretrievable.

Somewhere up ahead, lost . . .

There were pictures in her purse which she brought out. She put the pictures in her lap, spread out. She had parked. Looked the pictures over, remembering. And remembering, reliving, experiencing an odd nostalgia, everything abruptly halts—air, motion, time. And floods a liquid black. Discovers after waking

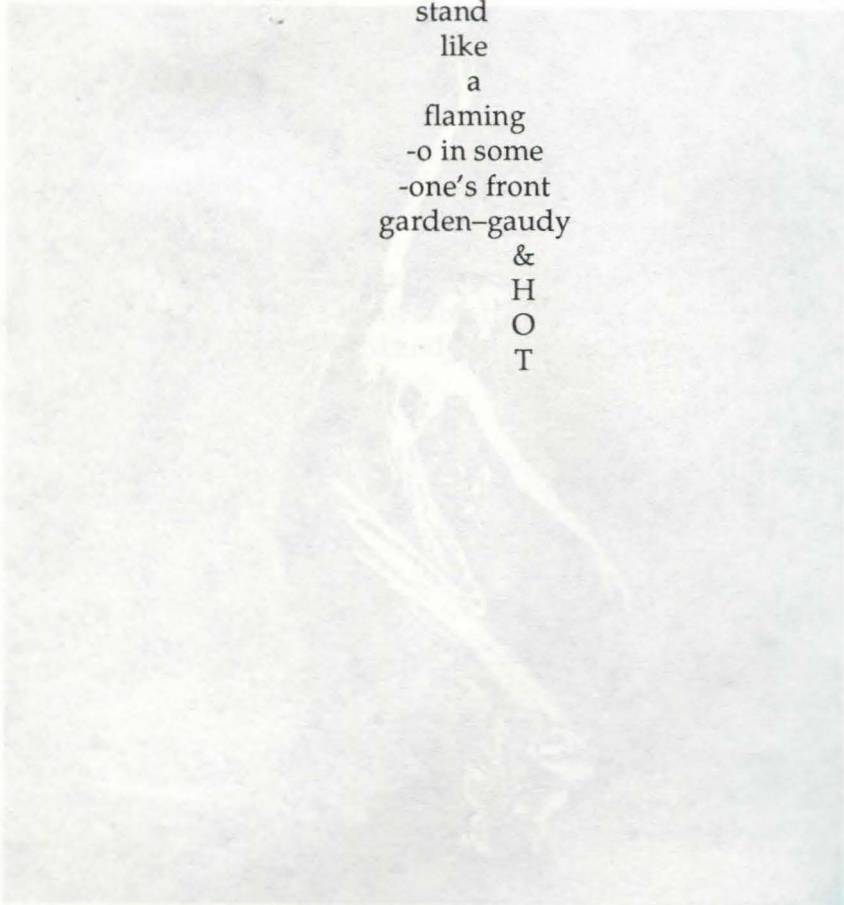
that she is moving again. The car moving on its own.

Somewhere near the end . . .

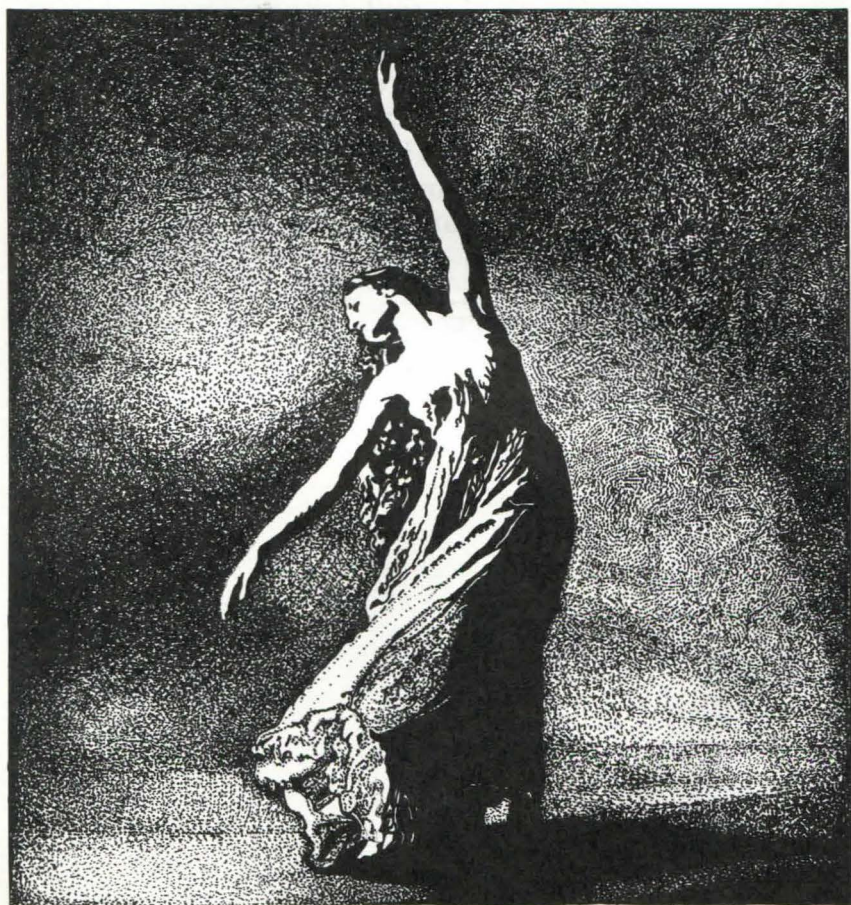
The ice sea is freed. The pain fills the interior of the car. The windows are opaque with it. She sits idle and silent, hands at her side, eyes wide and blind, overflowed. But drowning, the car still moves, still journeys on the endless mile. Heading south. To warmer climates. Too late.

—for Jackie

CONCRETE/PLASTIC
Richard Davidson



you
stand
like
a
flaming
-o in some
-one's front
garden-gaudy
&
H
O
T



The Little Russian (ink on paper)
William Charles Williams

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