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**LOCK HAVEN STATE COLLEGE**

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# SONG FOR A DEAD SEASON

Rain in staccato rhythm  
Screens the streets  
Caressing the withered cobblestones  
And glinting from the cracked  
And boarded shop windows.  
The softly chanted wind-poems  
From each half-lit street lamp  
Echo in quilted harmony  
As the nimble shadows dance  
Their sad arabesque.

Summer, five years lost,  
Gathered in the harbor.  
The hymns  
Of the long dying peasant women  
Chimed through the village  
As they sat, couched in the sand,  
Mending tomorrow's nets.

Crouched in supplication, the night gypsies,  
Flowers like bleeding chalices,  
Wept and hung at her feet.  
Both savior and demon that year,  
Her green and taffeta kisses  
Stalked the high and rising forest.  
Knee-deep in the sand and water village,  
The lamb-like heather mornings,  
She fathomed the street urchins  
And wept for the twilight ferries  
Half-masted in the ritual season.

By night she crept, wounded,  
Talons wet with yesterday's blood,  
To the now black pristine houses;  
Up the cast and rusted stairs  
Clouding and sucking her relic breath.

Always, in that twilight time

Of half-world streets,  
She wanders that lost year;  
A now-stray white-robed marionette  
Five years drowned beneath the harbor.  
And within the borders of her walk,  
Stage set and curtain drawn,  
The village returns:  
The glass children laughing  
Repick her phantom flowers,  
And old men crying grey and wrinkled  
Recast their troping nets to the waters.

And always, in the breath of a windless ember,  
She fades kneeling into the muted harbor,  
Veiled beyond the childless village.  
The wounds reopen to the dying summer  
And forgotten streets  
In their season of memory  
Dry and lie lost  
In a web of harbor sand.

—MIKE COBURN



## SATURDAY MORNING

by  
Gene Winter

We always stopped in Moley's saloon evry Saturday mornin. We was always raisin hell in the woods all Friday night. Nettin trout outa Brand's crik or shooting deer. An gittin drunk. We always got the hell outa the woods by daylight cause the wardins was always tryin to pin somethin on us.

Moley's was almost to town but not quite. We always went there Saturday mornins. I dint think Moley was ever real anxious to see us though. Speshly if Nerm's head was smokin. He was always wantin ta kick somebody's ass when his head was smokin. But we dint cause no trouble fer a long time. That was when Nerm almost killed a guy fer makin funa him fer lettin Orey Kunz suck his cock. Nerm stomped the poor bastard nearda death in Moley's parkin lot and chuckedim in the backa my pickup and tookim up ta Wolf Den and throwedim down on a pile of rocks. I guess he got alright cause he's gone. Hell Nerm's got Orey suckin his cock alla time.

We always drank beer at Moley's cause he dint wanna give us no whiskey. That was okay cause we was jus comin offa one an whiskey would put us right back on our ass with a whole day to go. Anyhow we hadda go by Nerm's an git some money offa his ol lady cause she got paid Friday night and she wouldn't givem none if he was drunk. He'd beat her ass but he wouldn't git no money if he was drunk. So we dint mind drinkin beer.

We pulled up an ol Moley was jus crossin from the trailer to the saloon so we went right on in withim. Boy it really stunk in there in the mornin jus opnin up. Moley he givus a beer fer nothin cause he dint have no money in his register yet. He always did that when we got there early enough. Man that place smelled like groundhog guts. An Moley ast if we seen Hardnose Butler comin in cause its check day an Nerm says he don't wanna see that old bastard with his mouth goin when he's drunk alla time.

That goddam Polak square dance caller was gittin up from behind the piana. He always mooched drinks all goddam night an when the dance was over an evrybody left he crawled behind the piana an slept. Moley dint never trust the sunama bitch but he stayed up all one night watchin ta see if he stole any whiskey but the goddam dummy slep all night. Moley jus left him go after that cause he dint wanna see im drive down White Pine mountin drunk as he gits cause sure as hell he'd git hisself killed and Moley wouldn't have no more square dance caller.

He came an set upta the bar with his face all puckered up like a fish's ass an rubbin his head like he was jus lookin fer it. Jesus me an Nerm laughed. Nerm said he was uglier than a burnt snake. But the Polak jus sat holdin his head like he dint hear. Then Nerm said he was so ugly a horney toad'd throwim back. Nerm an me was laughin our ass off but the Polak jus set so Nerm tol summa them Polak jokes. He tola buncha them an we was really laughin an even Moley was laughin his ass off. When Nerm said that one bout the Polak stole the garbage truck cause he thought it was a camper the Polak reached in the cooler an grabbed a quarta beer an went outside ta the shithouse. We was really laughin an ol Nerm says he ain't so fuckin dumb it don't stink so bad out there an Moley stopped laughin.

I got me one hell of a headache an I tol Nerm we oughta walk over ta Bill Snell's and drink up summa that grape wine a his, but Nerm said he don't wanna git drunk before he gits some money offa Penny an I said if we got us summa Bill's wine we don't need no money. But ol Nerm says what we'd do is stop an git his shotgun an drive over Limestone Ridge an look fer some turkeys. Course I knowed he wanteda git some money an stop at Coley Nettles an screw Reba. Penny won't do no screwin on Saturdays cause the kids is around all day, she was always lookin out fer them kids. She's after Nerm ta build a room on so's they'd have some privacy but Nerm says he's a miner not a goddam carpenter an if them kids wanna room in the mine he'll fixem up. I could git ol Reba too but Nerm always gits her so well fucked it's like stickin your dick in a bucketa mud.

We had some more beers an ol Nerm starts ta blowin his mouth organ. He can really play that sunama bitchin mouth organ. His daddy showed him how. When ol Nerm plays somethin I know I always sing the words. I don't play no instrument cause I can't workim right but I really like singin. When we git ta goin over



ta Nauvoo with Fryer Keebler an his two brothers they always ast me ta sing the lead when we do harmnizin. Them boys is real musicians an good singers too. They even usta play upta Merle Cooney's saloon in Bowenville an they really had crowds ta hearim. But they was always fightin with people so Merle throwdem ta hell out an got summa them long haired goddam hippies with lectrified guitars. I hear he still makes lotsa business though. I was singin Salty Dog an we seen ol Dickie Butters truck pull up out front so Nerm stopped playin.

Dickie bought a pitcher an we set over by the big winda. Nerm was laughin an rememberin Dickie when he pissed onol Coley Nettles lectric fence an hollared like a goddam stuck pig. Me an Nerm was laughin so my gut hurt an Nerm shit his pants. When Dickies cock dint hurt so much anymore he started laughin at Nerm fer shittin hissself an Nerm punchedim in the mouth. Dickie pulled out that ol fish knife a his but we knowed he dint mean nothin by it cause he never does. Ol Dickies bout the nicest ol boy around. Real friendly an happy. He's always buyin guys beers an he makes damn good money too drivin that ten ton fer Amos Hakes. Dickies got real short fuzzy hair like a nigger an kinda dark skin like one. I guess me an my dad's the only ones know Dickies half nigger. Folks I know aint never mentioned it an my dad says its cause they don't think it's possible er cause they never thought bout it. My dad knowed the nigger woman ol Jack Butters was fuckin when she hadim. My dad wouldn't never let me go round Dickie when I was a little kid but then he seen how nicea kid Dickie was an tol me all bout it an said never to say nothin cause it aint Dickies fault his mother was a nigger.

Dickie wants me an Nerm ta ride over ta Limestone Ridge withim an ol Nerm says hell yeah but we gotta git some money an Dickie says shit he's got twenny bucks an that's enough fer all three of us ta fuck Reba an still buy a bottle of whiskey an a twelve pack. So that's what we did. Dickie run over a fawn with his truck on the way over an Coley's ol lady womped us up a batcha sanwiches outa the front shoulders an back with green peppers on an lotsa chow-chow an mustard. They was really good. We dint take our whiskey in with us cause we knowed he was gonna make some money else why'd we be there? Nerm tol Dickie ta slip Coley the ten an he sent his ol lady over ta Wide Water fer grub an stuff so she'd be gone cause she don't go fer Reba gittin fucked. Speshly if it's fer money an not fer

marryin an speshly if it's ter a buncha drunks like we was gittin.

We kept drinkin while Nerm took Reba ta the barn. Then we was drinkin while Dickie took Reba ta the barn. Then I took Reba ta the barn an I knowed bout what she was gonna be like. I dint know what I was gonna do but I knowed I wasn't gonna kisser an I wasn't gonna eat er so I aster fer a blow job. She tried it but said she dint like it so I settled fer another hand job. One a these days I'm goin over there alone.

Man was we drunk on the way back over the ridge. Dickie went into the mountain coupla times an busted up his fender an jammed his door so bad that when we stopped ta piss we hadda all git out Dickie's side. Nerm was playing the mouth organ an I was singin an Dickie was drinkin outa the bottle he stole from Coley when he went out ta the barn ta fetch Reba in fore his ol lady come back. When we come across Lick Run I seen ol Hardnose Butler walkin down the track toward Moley's. I said fer Dickie ta pickim up but Nerm said fuckim he likes the railroad so much letim walk on it. Ol Hardnose is sposta been a track foreman up in York state on the Central line. Least ats what he says an he sure gits one a them railroad checks in the nail evry month cause Moley let me see one once an Moley gits all his mail there. We was talkin bout Hardnose on in ta Moley's bout how he tells stories bout the war an how he won medals an stuff. Nerm says thatsa buncha shit an anyway he don't mention no damn war less he's drunkern hell. You'll probly hear some today cause the way he's walkin if he wasn't followin them tracks he wouldn't find Moley's. We was in Moley's when we seen Hardnose come up the bank.

Hardnose he come in the back cause he don't want nobody seein im takin that check outa the envelope but evrybody clear ta Dolan Hill can hear Moley countin the money fer Hardnose when he cashes it. We really git ta laughin when that happens. I'll say one thing fer ol Hardnose though, when he gits his check he always sets the bar up to a drink. Course that's the last time he buys till check time next month. We was all back upta the bar now.

Nerm started right off funin with Hardnose like he does ta evryone else. He always tells Hardnose he wasn't no track man but a damn hobo an Hardnose gits pissed off like a sumana bitch that he wasn't no damn hobo he was a section foreman.

Nerm says what was you doin if you wasn't hoboin when I



seen you crawlin offa that tie pile down across the power line. He was all frost on one side| a his body that he wasn't layin on an the other |side was nice an toasty. Drunkern a goddam loon.

Nerm was really laughin. Hardnose says he wasn't doin no hoboin I was just out lookin fer my dog an I got tuckered out an laid on that tie pile an I wasn't drunk noways.

The Polak he come in from outside an Hardnose boughtim a beer. Ol Nerm ast the Polak if he knowed the president of the Central was buyin im a beer an the Polak wasn't no bettern he was when he went ta the shithouse in the mornin so he dint say nothin.

Track foreman. I was track foreman. You know goddam well I was a track foreman. Ol Hardnose couldn't take mucha Nerm cause he was always ridin his ass.

So what. It don't take nothin ta be no goddam track foreman. Nerm says ol Early there coulda been a track foreman if he wanted ta an he said I dint do nothin but cut logs since I got throwed outa school. An that's truth cause I never did anythin but cuttin an skiddin in my whole life. Hardnose says ya gotta be tough an smart ta be a track foreman cause ya gotta handle the toughest goddam men there is. You gotta be smart an tough.

Nerm says well we already know you ain't smart an I don't guess you're so goddam tough either.

Tough enough ta put many a your kind in their place.

I spose like you put them Germans in their place.

I did my part. Hardnose was lickin his lips like he was gittin ready fer some story tellin.

I hear you got lotsa medals fer fightin them Germans.

That I did. I got me the Silver Star, the Bronze Star an the Purple Heart.

You probly got a purple hard an that's about all.

That's all you know.

Nerm an Dickie was grinnin ta beat hell an ol Dickie says tell us how you got that Silver Star Hardnose. He shook his head like he wasn't gonna an we all jus sat still.

I was in Italy with the third armor. We was tearin through Italy Like lightnin. Travellin light, movin fast, an hittin hard. We was goin through this hilly section where they growed lotsa grapes fer that Eyetalian wine an we sent the armor around cause we heard there was anti-tank stuff there. So us doggies was goin through there on foot. We come up on

this little valley an when we walked down in it the whole place come alive with machine guns. We hit the dirt real hard an we was pinned down. Pinned down bad.

Did ya talkim ta death Hardnose.

Watch your mouth. I looked things over between bursts an figgered out only one placement was blockin us gittin outa there. I crawled over ta the cap an I says cap I think I can git us outa here. The cap says Jesus Christ Butler do somethin. So I makes me way across that valley floor by crawlin an sneakin like an Indian. Fellas tol me after they don't see how any man coulda made it. I crawls me way upta this pill box all made outa concrete an sees this little door on the back. I know me some German from my ma when she was a kid over there an I astem ta open the door an this one guy opens the door an I shot the cocksucker right between the eyes. I grabbedim an hauled im out so's the rest wouldn't know what happened. Then I hollars down an says how many you fellas down there an this one guy hollars up eight. So I pulls the pin on my gernade, chucks it in the door an says there, divide that up between ya ya lousy bastards an slammed the door. Well it sounded like an elephant fartin in a fifty gallon drum when that gernade went off an all them Germans was killed. I signaled the cap an evrybody was able ta crawl outa the place without a scratch.

Hardnose you're so fulla shit when you die they're gonna hafta flush you steada buryin you.

God strike me dead it that ain't a true story jus the way it happened.

Hardnose you better watch that god stuff or he's gonna shut your yap fer good fer lyin like that.

Goddam you Nerm you ain't nothin but a big mouth makin funa people an all. You don't never believe nothin. How do you know I ain't tellin the truth. You wern't there. You ain't never done no fightin in war. War really shows who the men are an I was there an I showed what I was made of.

Why Hardnose I could stuff you in the cracka my ass an trot fer a mile. You ain't nothin but a poor ol fuckin drunk.

Hardnose was so mad I thought he was gonna esplode. Dickie was laughin till I thought he was gonna piss hisself.



Nerm says all you do is lay around that goddam rat's nest you call your house an stay drunk till check time rolls around again. Hardnose was really yellin that Nerm dint have no room ta talk cause he had his wife an little kiddies jammed into a one room trap an he's by hisself.

Least I got my ol lady in that trap an she dint run off with no goddam coal cracker like yer ol lady did.

Dora left cause all those years a railroadin I did was hard on her bein alone an all.

She left cause you couldn't take care a her an she up an off with some one could give her some diddlin.

Poor ol Hardnose bout exploded.

Goddam your filthy mouth that ain't true. God strike me dead Dora left cause she was tired a me railroadin an bein alone an all.

An all is right. An all means she wasn't gittin no screwin ta home. But I bet she's gittin plenty now.

Nerm an ol Dickie was really laughin an Dickie says is it true you couldn't keep your ol lady fucked Hardnose. Well Ol Hardnose looked around at Dickie an says don't You mention my wife you goddam fuckin nigger. Dickie he kept right on laughin till he seen my face an seen how mad it made Nerm. Ol Hardnose was up in the air screamin that Dickie was nothin but a goddam nigger. Finally Dickie jumped away an pulls out his fish knife an Hardnose lets out a beller like a knocked up cow an says don't don't an starin at that goddam fish knife a Dickies like it was pow-wowin im. Hell evrybody knowed Dickie wouldn't stick nobody with that knife. Evrybody cept Hardnose an he out the door like a grouse goin up. Dickie stands there like a kid caught playin with his dick an sayin he wasn't gonna hurtim.

If it was me Ida stuck the bastard, how bout you Early.

I wouldn't hurt ol Hardnose an I was wonderin why he said that bout Dickie. Me er my dad never said nothin ta no one.

Hey, did you gents hear about Rawlings Butler?

You mean ol Hardnose?

Yeah.

No, we was over ta Bill Snell's drinkin wine an jus

left. Why?

Well, he was walkin the track down by the bend at Lick Run and a train came around the bend and ran smack over him. The engineer said they came around the bend and there he was. He blew the whistle and blew it but Rawlings never made a move to get off the track.

See there Early. That bastard was lyin bout them Germans an bout Dora.

Ol Hardnose.

Sunama bitch.



## TWILIGHTS: N. Y. CITY

So we are given those sleeps  
contagious to life, alibi  
-- those somnambulistic wanderings  
bled from our dreams

and we eat them,  
rolling in late dragon dawns  
of refusal/denial,  
still hungry for booty  
and the scents of moaning animals,  
of wasted dance

that once took, wrenned  
from the hearth of eyes ---  
when our skulls, sparked

to heir glamour, ail  
the scream fretful and misplaced  
in desire scarved  
in the wan muscles  
in the endless days  
taunting their prey.

I cannot bleed

and want gypsy-like

the false rose hissing  
between two caged breasts  
of a mad-calved whore, lustrous.

II.

There is never word - - -  
what word trundled  
from the lime-piled walls  
sick in kited flowers,

the pillows soughed,  
thin veined and hair  
from the lights of sleep.

The radio hangs on chatter  
like a tropical bird,  
worldless, and shadows  
smoke the walls  
stringing banners that marrow  
the arch-yapped faith  
gated and awful in lie

. . .furniture is few and jagged  
shorn vestments that curdle the skin,  
the benched body aching

and hot sleep and dreams  
of blind children quickly  
"talk" she says  
her breasts like two white stones.

—STEVEN ROTH



## ASSASSIN

It wants the grip  
the leanness to lay  
for hours on cornices  
the body. . .

—STEVEN ROTH

## A BRIDGE OF YEARS

by  
William D. Francis

Pierre Bouton, climbing the mountain path for over an hour now, was warm -- beginning to perspire. He followed the path to the top of a grassy knob where in the grey light of early evening he gazed into the valley, down across the wooden bridge to the small stone cottage five hundred yards below him. Smoke rose from its chimney, and the faint light of kerosene lamps lit the curtained windows. Pierre descended into the valley, until the sound of his feet on the wooden bridge mingled with the sounds of the wilderness. He stopped to listen, but the wildlife was alerted and he only heard the rushing of the stream below. As he stepped from the bridge, Suzanne emerged from the cottage.

"Am I glad you're here! I've been lonely all week -- ever since I moved in -- you can't imagine how surprised I was to see you at the market yesterday. After fifteen years."

"I'm not late, am I?"

"Oh no, you're early. But that's all right, I've chilled some wine. We can have a drink before dinner, and . . ."

"I'd like that. It's quite a walk from my house to yours."

Together they entered the cottage and Pierre surveyed the room. Rough hewn timber framed the ceiling; he was standing on hardwood floors. In front of the fireplace was an overstuffed green couch, and behind the couch was a cherry dining table. To his left were stairs that presumably led to the bedroom.

"Nice. You furnish it?"

"Oh no, the old man who owned the cottage before sold me his furniture, and I just left it as it was and besides I just couldn't bear the thought of having to redecorate."

"There was a time when you would have spent months on that sort of thing."

"I know, but after fifteen years of changing the drapes and recovering the furniture and painting the walls just to escape



boredom -- Jean wouldn't let me go to work and we couldn't have children -- I don't care if I ever change another drape."

"Then you and Jean are no longer together?"

"That's right."

"Oh."

"Yes. Well. Oh, open this bottle for me, while I get some glasses. This will be my official freedom drink. The meat is almost done, but we should have something to drink, don't you think?"

Pierre opened the bottle deftly and handed her the wine. As he watched her pour, he was reminded of their short time together fifteen years ago. Now she had stray strands of grey in her hair, giving it a dull chestnut color. Her face lost its polished tautness, now peachsoft cheeks remained. Eyes, once quick to flash in argument, now harbored a soft green glow.

Glasses filled, Suzanne carried them to the couch.

"Come over here and sit down. Would you mind if I explained to you about Jean?"

"It's none of my business really. Not unless you want to."

"Oh God, stop being so stiff! I'm more comfortable with you after a fight and fifteen years than I was after living with Jean that length of time. He wouldn't let me do anything I wanted and to make matters worse, he would stay late at the office. Five months after our marriage, I hardly ever saw him. When I left a month ago, I had to leave a note for him to contact me in Dijon about a divorce."

"Remember that stream outside of Dijon?"

"Yes . . ." Won't ever forget. It was me who found it in the rain. Him reading "The White Deer" to me while we were safely dry inside the car. Then silence and not having or wanting or needing to talk. The rain stopping and him wanting to go wading in the stream. Yes, I remember. Leaving Jean and returning there at dusk a month ago. "But now, Pierre, other people have found it. The grass is trampled down, and bottles and cans anywhere. It's not quiet anymore."

"People seem to ruin everything they touch."

Suzanne nodded, sipped her wine while Pierre sat in silent contemplation. Minutes passed without a word.

Much later, Suzanne was in the kitchen removing the meat from the stove onto a platter that she asked Pierre to carry to the table.

"It's beef braised in savory sauce. I hope you like it."

"Smells good."

She followed him in short quick trips bringing chestnuts cooked in dry white wine, mushrooms, creamed corn, and another bottle of bordeaux.

"There's more wine in the kitchen if we need it."

"You think we will?"

"I hope so."

At last they were seated. The meal proceeded quietly as Pierre spoke in a low wine-loosened voice about his paintings; Suzanne nodded, smiling softly in the candle glow, asking questions about her neighbors.

"I'm your closest neighbor -- three miles away."

"That far?"

"It's not so far. Besides, from your end it's all downhill."

As their meal ended, Pierre offered to help clear the table. With only slight protest, Suzanne yielded.

"Put those dishes over in that corner -- beside the sink. I'll wash them tomorrow."

Pierre poured more wine, stood, walked to the bookshelf beside the fireplace and gazed over the titles. *Isadora. Chekov Short Stories. Women In Love.* Wonder if she kept . . . *Kama Sutra.* After all these years.

"'The White Deer' is on the bottom shelf. Take it out and read it. Better yet, I will. You go to the kitchen and bring that bottle in here."

The bottle was in the corner of the kitchen, near the sink. Cramped, big enough for two, the area reminded him of Collette's kitchen. There we had our tight . . . We did not go to that party together; she had been to Paris "to visit friends," she said. If she returned in time she'd meet me there. It seems so stupid now, fifteen years later. . . .

"Pierre, why do you touch me all the time?"

"I love you."

"Pierre, are you insecure?"

"No, I'm quite confident. . ."

"Pierre. . ."

"As a matter of fact, extremely confident of myself. . ."

"Pierre. . ."

"And I don't like you constantly scrutinizing and analyzing my personality. . ."



"Oh, really!"

". . . in front of other people. It's a bitchy thing to do!"

"Pierre!"

Suzanne's voice brought him trembling from the past.

"Are you all right? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm all right."

"No, tell me. Something's the matter. What were you thinking about?"

"If you must know, I was thinking about that fight you and I had the last time I saw you."

"Oh, God. Here, drink this."

He took the glass of red bordeaux and drank. The liquid traveled down his throat with a promise of pleasure and calmness.

"A candlelit dinner, good wine, a nice cottage out in the middle of a peaceful forest, and *you* think about a fight! Men!"

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, that's all right, you can't help it -- you're a man."

"I said I was sorry."

"All right, I'll stop. I'm being a bitch again. Sit down and read to me."

"Once upon a time there was a king who had three sons. . ."

Holding the book with his left hand, Pierre gestured with his right, molded his face to make the proper expressions, pitched his voice for the different characters. Both Pierre and Suzanne were so enthralled with the story that they didn't hear the rhythmic patter of the rain on the window. When the story was over, it was Suzanne who first realized what was happening.

"Listen."

She ran to open the door. With glee she flung it open.

"Oh, how beautiful!"

For a few seconds, Pierre was silent. Then:

"You planned this."

"Yes."

She closed the door.

## LOVELY LADY OF THE HIGHLANDS

You sit there sulking in your wicker chair,  
velvet jeans  
lickerish dreams,  
Weaving a ballad of Guenivere  
Combing your amber hair.  
Peacock strutting toward the door-  
Where's his book of ocean lore  
Lovely lady of the highlands?

Eyes like rubies in the dusk  
sealskin hat  
Persian cat,  
Motorcycleflaking rust  
Tumbleweed clumps of dust.  
Clench your vibrant tangerine  
Glinting orange in candle beam,  
Lovely lady of the highlands.

Stolen nuggets in new guise,  
cowrey shell  
hand-dug well,  
Suede and supple leather ties  
Softly clinging fireside sighs  
Silence the beckoning alarm,  
Rest your head in the crook of my arm-  
Lovely lady of the highlands.

—HAROLD WOLFE



## TO THE KIDS OVER ROCKY'S

what dirty ragged kids are these,  
roaming the streets;  
tired, hungry;  
falling down and picking themselves up,  
only to fall again -  
there is no kinship between these wretched beings,  
children, unasked  
brought into this existence  
they live? only to hate it -  
they shock the fine,  
the proper,,  
the pillars of society  
with their "french",  
"french hell" , they say,  
with their curses -  
why don't you look back  
you fine proper pillars?  
there is a small dirty hand  
outstretched, begging -  
and the morning light cuts through the chill,  
it reflects off of a small, lonely tear,  
in that palm, outstretched, begging. . . .

— ANONYMOUS

## TWENTY-FIFTY-ONE

by  
Geoffrey A. Jones

People jumping off of ten-story buildings has always depressed me. So naturally I was depressed as I stood there looking down at the form, the blob, oozing over the sidewalk. The crowd pressed close around me. I felt as though I were in a hot, tight little box. The people kept pressing against me, trapping me.

"Who is it?" asked a shrill voice from the back of the crowd.

"I don't know," replied the man in front of me, "but he must have been a good diver. That was a beautiful swan dive,"

I became nauseous. I pushed my way through the crowd and, freeing myself, turned and stood looking at the people. They pressed around the form, the children in the back sitting on their fathers' shoulders to get a better view. I could hear the voice of the man who had been standing in front of me. He was explaining something about the "beauty" of the dive, but my dazed mind couldn't grasp what he was saying.

I took a couple of steps backwards and tripped over something on the sidewalk. I hit my head hard on the concrete, and lay there for a moment, stunned.

"Look, another one!" yelled a voice that came running over to me. In a moment, a small crowd had gathered around me.

"Did anyone see him jump who is it?" asked the shrill voice that had been in the back of the other crowd.

"I don't know," someone answered to both questions. "It couldn't have been a good jump though, no blood."

By this time I had recovered some of my senses, at least enough of them to raise my self up and look around at my growing audience.



"Look, he's getting up."

"He's a fake. He couldn't have jumped."

"Damn publicity hound," growled the man next to me and kicked me in the groin.

I lay alone on the sidewalk, writhing in pain, my nausea greatly increased. I must have passed out, for the next thing I knew, it was several hours later and dusk was settling on the city. I looked around, still not fully conscious. The street was empty except for mangled bodies lying here and there at the bases of buildings.

Just then a funny-looking man with a bright green hat and a moustache that reached all the way to the ground came around the corner. He carried a queer red box under his arm, with a crank on one side and telescoping legs, folded into the bottom of it. By his side, there ran a small monkey with no clothes on. When the man reached me, he unfolded the telescoping legs and set the box down.

"A tune?" he asked and without waiting for an answer, he started to crank the crank. The barrel of the gattling gun fired a volley into the building across the street, killing the girl dressing in front of the window. Just then I felt the monkey trying to take my wallet out of my pocket, I made a move to stop him, but the old man, giving a toothless grin, kicked me in the groin and I lapsed back into unconsciousness.

I awoke, I think. It was sometime later, in some sort of apartment. Sunlight glared through a broken window. There seemed to be a fog in the room, starting in my head. Some of the fog lifted enough for me to see a face. It was a girl. She was pretty.

"Just take it easy," she was saying, "You're in bad shape, but everything's all right now."

I just barely caught these last words. Sleepy. I dozed off into a painful sleep. When I woke again it was late afternoon, or morning or night. But the sun was out, so it couldn't have been night. She was there, the girl, at the stove, cooking. I watched her, she must have felt it, for she came with soup for me to eat. I ate it, but it made me sick, and I vomited on the floor. She took my hand and looked into my eyes. I fell in love with her. She seemed to sense this, and I think she loved me.

"It can't work," she said. "I have to 'go' today, it's my

turn."

"No, you can't!" I cried and tried to get up. I tried too hard, got dizzy and fell back to the bed.

"I leave now," she said, and dropped my hand and walked to the door.

She left, and I half crawled, half fell out of bed. I tried to stand, but could only get half-way up, the pain in my groin. I followed her. Up the steps to the roof. I got there just as she went off. I hobbled to the edge and looked over. A crowd had already gathered.

"Who is it?" asked a shrill voice.

"I don't know," replied someone, "but that was a beautiful swan dive."

I became sick again. I tried to step over the side, but I couldn't. It wasn't my turn. I had to wait.

## II

I think I'm dying (or at least I think I wish so). There's this pain deep inside my chest. I cough most of the time. I cough myself sick much of the time. My body is in a wonderful state of decay. I figure I'm decaying at the rate of five years for each week for the last six weeks. That makes me fifty-one. Happy birthday, me.

I think about the dreams so many people had for me and I had for myself. Those that I didn't ruin, I just ignored. To most people, my life would seem a failure. But it's not. I've succeeded in wrecking a lot of dreams. But now the dreams are gone and I've got to live on reality. A tough thing to do for a person who has lived on dreams. You know, being a nice guy in this world is like walking up to some faggot sadist, without using your hands for protection, or even wearing a jock, and saying Hi! I know you won't kick me in the balls.

These are some of the thoughts that go through your head when you contemplate your own death at the young-old age of twenty-fifty-one. You wallow in deep pools of glorious self-pity, the only luxury afforded both rich and poor alike. These were my thoughts as I lay in bed one night, and they cheered me considerably. However, you can imagine my bitter disappointment when I awoke the next morning.

I went to the refrigerator and opened my first can of break-



fast lighting up my first dessert. I coughed a few times and fell on the floor. The pain was reassuring. I finished off the first can and put it with the rest of the Iron City cans in the garbage can. I opened my second course and finished ~~it~~ in three big drinks.

By this time I had rallied enough to realize I was still alive and put on my clothes. I walked up the street to the bar and went in. It was 1:30. There was a new bartender.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-fifty-one," I said.

"Wise-ass college punk," he replied passionately and threw a ketchup (not catsup) bottle at me. It hit me in the head and knocked me down. Two rednecks, using only their feet, kicked me out into the street. I picked up my disheveled body and made my way back to my apartment.

I went to the refrigerator and got another can of Iron City. You know, they say this beer has iron filings in it. That's good. I need all the iron I can get. I want to be a man of iron some day (iron being the closest substitute I could find for steel).

I finished the can, threw it away and walked outside. The suns were shining brightly. There was a peace march coming up the street and I decided to watch it. It was a typical march. All the people were dressed in grey flannel suits and patent leather shoes walking in neat orderly rows and carrying signs saying STOP THE WAR, DON'T KILL THE BABIES, and GET OUT OF UTAH NOW.

Following the parade were the usual radicals with their shaved head, adorned with olive branches, wearing togas, mortaring houses along the street and screaming kill for peace.

I looked up at my window and realized that I had forgotten to put a sign in it. I ran back upstairs (a slow run back upstairs), and rummaged through my closet looking for an appropriate sign so that my apartment wouldn't get destroyed. The best thing I could do was a sign that said SOUL BROTHER, which I hung in the window and was promptly shot by a black panther who lived across the street.

I looked at the hole the bullet made in my arm and the blood coming out of it. I ran to the kitchen and grabbed an empty Iron City can. I caught the blood in the can as it gushed from my wound. The bleeding stopped and the can was full. I sold the can for a good price to a wino werewolf who happened to be

passing by my kitchen door.

Just then, three nude girls came running into my apartment chasing a large dog apparently named George. It was the first dog I'd seen in months. They caught him in the living room and started raping him, all three at once. I watched them for a while, feeling sorry for George. I went back to the kitchen and opened another can of Iron City. About half an hour later the three girls left, smiling. I went in and got George's carcass and threw it out back for the garbage man to pick up in the morning.

Poor George! I cut my wrist in sympathy for him and put on a black lace arm band. My conscience eased, I opened another can of Iron City.

I finished the beer and walked outside. It was 3:30. One sun was down, the other was setting and one moon was up. A police car pulled up along side of me in the street. One of the officers rolled down the window and cooed Sonofabitchwise-asscollegepunk. "How old are you?" he asked, hoping to get me on a curfew violation. "Twenty-fifty-one." He pulled out his shotgun and shot me mumbling something about commie pig.

It was a good shot, and thinking I was going to die, I thanked him heartily. However, a group of boy scouts carrying an old lady with BE PREPARED branded on her forehead happened to come by. They quickly gathered around me, bandaged up my entire body, and then each one kissed me on the cheek. They picked up the ole lady with BE PREPARED branded on her forehead, and left, taking my clothes and wallet with them.

Just then I heard a knock on the front door. I wondered who it could be at this hour of the morning (it was already 4:30 and both suns had set). I opened the door and immediately recognized The Examiner. I bade him come in, which he had already done before I even bade.

"Any complaints about our glorious society?" he asked.

"There is one small thing," I said.

"What's that?" he asked, picking up one of my chairs and smashing it across my teeth.

"You're right," I replied, "it was nothing."

I thanked him for his concern, he left and I shut the door behind him. I went back to the kitchen and opened another can of Iron City. I sat down in a chair and looked at myself in the mirror. I cried. It was so great to live in a society that cared



so much about each individual that it sent examiners around each week to find any flaws the society might have. I felt so ashamed of myself for wishing I were dead. I prayed to The President, asking his forgiveness and thanking him that I was still alive. Then I passed out into a drunken, slobbering sleep.

### III

I fell out the door into the sunlight, singing "happy birthday" to myself, spilling my beer. I was twenty-three. I picked myself up and scratched my stomach, my balls and my left armpit with my right hand. Two boys walked by on the sidewalk.

"Wise-ass college punks," I yelled, and threw a handful of dirt and ants at them. They ran up the street and were shot by a little man in a funny green hat. He grinned at me. I grinned back.

I went back inside and opened another can of beer, toasted myself and sat down at the table. I looked at the telegram I got yesterday from the office of one of the assistants to The President:

60611347

Tomorrow.

I was filled with pride. It was even my birthday.

A mental picture flashed across my mind. A face. A pretty face of a girl, looking at me. I didn't recognize the face. This confused me. I don't like to be confused. Picking up the beer can, I smashed it in the corner and stumbled out to the couch.

Must've been one of those demonstrators we beat up yesterday, I thought. This calmed my mind.

Feeling pretty content with myself, I got up and put on some clothes. I went outside and, since it was a nice day, decided to walk. Up the street to the bar, first.

"Hey, Fred, give me a beer!" I looked around the bar with envy, at the seventeen autographed pictures of The President, in seventeen different poses. Fred sure was lucky. I wish I owned a bar. The smell of home-made soup was heavy in the bar, laying thick on the floor and piled on the chairs.

Another mental picture overtook me. Two soft young hands pushing a bowl of soup at me. The room started to spin around dizzily. I couldn't stand, lost my balance and fell on the floor, into the thick layer of soup-smell. The smell made me sick. I

got up and stumbled through the door, falling on the sidewalk, dazed. A man walking by kicked me in the face and brought me back to consciousness. I got up, thanked him and half walked, half stumbled downtown.

By this time I reached the downtown district, my head had cleared somewhat. Must've been hunger, I thought, and dismissed the incident. I looked around at all the empty ten-story buildings lining the street, their empty, dark windows looking at me, too. Nobody lived here anymore. I looked up ahead and could see The President's House only a few blocks ahead.

Just then a body from somewhere above, hit the pavement not three feet from me. Why that bastard, I thought, he tried to hit me. I looked closer at the body and recognized a face that belonged to Charlie. "Hi Charlie, you prick," I said, and kicked him, but he didn't feel it. I turned and walked in the direction I had been going. A crowd gathered around Charlie.

Mental picture: a broken window. I staggered and shook my head, forcing the picture out of my mind. Damn, I thought, today of all days.

I continued walking up the street. There was The President's House, looking beautiful and stately. I walked into the building with the numbers 70631 beside the door. I went upstairs, to the roof. I looked across the street at The President's House, filled with awe and inspiration. I stepped to the edge of the roof and dove, spreading my arms wide and arching my back. I had always been a good diver.

Just then a scene captured my mind. The girl, the soup, the broken window, the pain. It was the girl, *the* girl. The memory jolted me and I lost my balance in midair. I tumbled out of control. I tried to correct myself but couldn't. Then, blackness.

"Who is it," asked a shrill voice from the back of the crowd.

"I don't know," replied a man in the front, "Wasn't much of a diver though, was he?"



## THE SEASONS OF MY LIFE

The summer of my life vanished  
Swiftly --- like a deer, running through a lea,  
And with this same agile, unfaltering pace  
My innocence fell from me,  
The autumn of my life came to stay  
And briefly remained ----- until ---  
The winter snatched my autumn away  
At the beckoned call of God's will  
The mellow void of autumn  
Filled with bitterness only a winter could claim  
Sat surrounding my mind and heart  
Until my springtime came.  
Now, as I sit among the ruins  
From what a year in life can do,  
I tremble with foreboding  
But mostly --- I pray for you.

---JANIS BURENGA

## GAME FISHING

by  
D. Michael Stouffer

The small, fiberglas row-boat softly rocked with the smoothly flowing motion of the river. There was a gentle strain captivity from the lead anchor which kept the boat from gaining total freedom with the river. The water was a deep green, uncommon for early summer; for it usually sustained the shimmering clarity of the ice-melted spring thaw. The heavily forested mountains engulfed the river on both sides -- rising powerfully like two giant hands cupping a pool of water in the crevices of their masculine, but intimate, palms. Each tree reached towards the heavens and finally merged with the dark, billowing clouds that were crowding out the deep blue sky of the day. Across the river, a seventeen-year locust dropped from an overhanging tree and into the water. Instantly, there was a small splash and it was greedily devoured by a bass; as if it would be seventeen more years before another meal.

It was now six o'clock and the heat of the afternoon gave way to the gradual, water-cooled evening. It was a perfect time for bass fishing. Sleepily arousing from their afternoon inactivity, they now searched methodically in the murky water for their evening meal before retiring into the long hours of the night.

Susan sat across from me in the boat. It was the first time she had been fishing. She was toying with the fiberglas rod that I had given her -- unsure of exactly what she was to do with it. After she gave me a questioning glance, I took the rod from her and demonstrated -- with an ability that had taken years of experience -- the separate steps that were necessary and would consummate in a perfect cast.

After the explanation, I let her practice casting a few times with a lead weight. Her lack of experience and coordination gradually reduced to that of a bearable novice, and I grew im-



patient to engage in the expertise of the sport. Since there was a fairly strong current, her feeble casts could possibly be effective -- for the bait would be taken far enough downstream to be outside the shadow of the boat.

I took the rod from her and placed it across the seats of the boat. After I took the weight off, I reached into the tackle box for a hook. Untangling them from a prickly clump in one of the small compartments, I tied one to the nylon cord -- making sure that the knot was tight enough to hold anything in that river. Turning around, I picked up the minnow bucket and placed it between my legs. Susan sat across from me, intently watching, as I tried to grasp one of the slippery spears without crushing it. They darted in and out of my hand, conscious that their necessary purpose ended in a fatal experience. Finally, after what seemed to be days of aggravation, I managed to catch one by the rear fin. Pulling it out of the pail, I reached for the hook with my left hand, clutching the minnow with my thumb and index finger behind the gills. Anticipating what was to come, Susan turned half-way in her seat, looking down into the river. I glanced at the minnow, and turning the hook downward, carefully curled it through until it exited from underneath the jaw.

"There," I said. "That should hold it."

Susan looked at me, then at the line which I was holding. The minnow flipped about painfully desperately striving for oxygen, but unable -- for the hook had clamped its mouth shut. Using my little finger, I separated the lips of the mouth and placed the minnow into the water for a couple of seconds. The river had presented a moment of freedom until the startling realization that the hook still remained.

"Here," I said, handing her the rod, "just be careful not cast too hard -- you'll throw the minnow off the hook."

She took the rod eagerly, for as long as she did not have to participate in the uncomfortable procedures of fishing, the sport became a new and exciting experience to her. I watched as she gently swung the rod around and dropped the bait about ten feet from the boat.

"Let the line out about twenty feet, slowly," I said, motioning with my hands.

I watched as she pulled the line from the reel slowly enough to keep it taut with the current.

"Now just sit back and keep the minnow in contact with

your rod. Don't let the line get too slack."

I repeated the process of baiting up, only using a stronger line on my reel. Casting over her line and into the middle of the river, I leaned back against the bow of the boat and looked over at Susan. She was sitting there, not saying a word. Her eyes remained fixed to a spot downstream where she figured the minnow to be. Her hair was long, brown, and straight. Her face was thin with high cheekbones and deep brown eyes that gave her the appearance of an Indian princess. She had a slender body with long, fashionable legs that were still pale for the lack of the August sun. We sat in silence until the sudden splash of a bass jumping out of the water startled me out of an obscure tranquility. I looked and saw that Susan's rod was bent to almost a ninety degree angle. She struggled frantically, trying to pull the fish into the boat in one motion.

"Don't fight it," I yelled. "Keep the line taut, and reel him in slowly."

"But he won't come in," she said, looking over at me for some kind of assistance.

"Well, let him have some line. But make sure you keep that hook in him firm."

She did as I had told her and the bass took the extra line and headed down to the bottom of the river.

"Now," I said, "reel him in about five or ten feet. Then give him a couple more feet of line to play around with."

After repeating the process a couple of times, Susan had brought the bass close enough that I could get the net around him and bring him into the boat. He was large, about fourteen inches. I held him up to her, and she had a big smile on her face.

"Please throw him back," she said.

"Are you kidding?" I asked. "Nobody throws a fish this size back."

"Please -- throw him back. I don't want him to die."

Realizing any further argument would be useless, I shrugged my shoulders and said "Okay. It's your fish." Grasping him behind the gills, I started to take the hook out but noticed that instead of hooking the bass in the jaw, the fish had swallowed the bait and the hook was imbedded in his stomach.

"What's the matter?" she asked, aware that I was having some problems.



"He's swallowed the hook. I don't think I can get it out."

"Will he die?" she asked, with a loss-of-innocence look that I had seen once before.

"Of course he'll die. What did you expect?"

I tried to twist the hook around so that I could get it out, but the fish's mouth wasn't big enough and I couldn't get a good grip on the now slippery metal barb. The pulling and turning only cut deeper into the flesh, and blood began flowing from his mouth. His eyes seemed to curse me as I tried again with scarlet fingers to retrieve the fatal obstruction. But again, all I could produce was more blood, which was now dripping on my pants. Growing impatient, I took my hand out of his mouth and washed it off in the river. Then wrapping the line around my hand a couple of times, I gave it a strong yank. The hook came out, along with most of the bass's digestive tract. I dropped the fish into the water and watched as it floated downstream, its gills throbbing for the last time. I bent over the boat and began cleaning the mess off the hook, when I noticed that the boat had begun to move also. Looking up, I saw Susan holding the anchor, crying.

## LIGHTHOUSE

Through the yellow panel  
of my mosaic window  
I still glimpse the lighthouse  
the wind-worn tower  
its pyre-beam  
glaring, fading  
through the churning harbor mist  
reflecting  
on the endless ocean billows  
which throug and swell  
like the pulsations  
of my heart.  
I await the longboat's return,  
its lantern  
red upon my chest.

—HAROLD WOLFE



## GUITAR PLAYER

Stretching five  
Calloused and smoke-stained fingers  
To a ritual dance;  
Arthritic upon a rosewood rack,  
He bids the twelve steel ladies  
To elegize his tortured canticle,  
Whisper and weep his world  
Of dusty wineglasses  
And spectral cafes,  
Faded yellow pages  
And forgotten windows  
Staring forever back  
Into a misplaced room  
Of silhouetted faces,  
Sainted harmony,  
And never to be sung lyrics  
Now lost  
In an ever-waning maze.

—MIKE COBURN

## WITH ONE HAND WAVING...

by  
Jim Wilkinson

"I hope you're satisfied, George. Here we are stranded in this wretched, God-forsaken land, miles from the remotest signs of civilization. I hope you're happy now."

"I think we're out of gas, Constance."

"George, I don't know why you insisted upon leaving the turnpike in the first place. We'd have been in New York by now had you listened to me. I don't know what you can be thinking about sometimes. What kind of ridiculous notions come into your head at these times?"

George Emerson sat slumped in the driver's seat of the yellow Lincoln, knuckles white from his tight grip on the steering wheel. He looked straight ahead, purposely avoiding the penetrating stare of the sensuous, elegantly dressed woman he called his wife. Even so, he could not escape the blinding glint from the afternoon sunlight striking her diamond bracelet. The aggravating reflection was trained on his right eye. She was doing it purposely to annoy him -- he knew it. But even that was better than challenging Constance's insidious stare. Anything was better than that. How quickly those luscious, seductive green eyes had become a vicious tool of power and domination as soon as they were married.

"George, are you listening to me? I'm beginning to think father is right about you. . .that I should never have married you . . .that you're forever pre-occupied with those selfish, adolescent dreams of yours, and inconsiderate of my happiness. I was terribly naive to have. . ."

George sighed heavily, gazing past the tinted windshield -- the sound of Constance's voice resonating in air-conditioned space -- no words registering. His stare, focused on nothing in particular, embraced an indefinite expanse of green foliated mountains, rounded by eons of exposure. The long descending



road, carved out of the mountainside like an asphalt zipper in the bowels of the valley. God -- to live in the woods -- just like these-- a place where he could write and where Constance could do. . .Christ, whatever she did.

The dream of a country home had been laid away, temporarily he thought, when he met Constance during his final year of graduate school. She was too beautiful (and too rich) to resist. Only she was not about to leave New York and her father, with the security and everything. Oh well, she would come around in time -- and besides, the old man did give him a job with his publishing company -- sort of a dowry. But that was all for Constance's sake, not his -- that was obvious. Hell, she couldn't have a bum for a husband. Being a proofreader wasn't George's idea of success -- he was a writer for christ sake. But it was only temporary, and certainly he'd advance. As one of the family he would have a sure market for his work. . .

George had been a proofreader for three years now and the old bastard had personally rejected everything he had submitted. What the hell did he know about literature -- good literature, not the trash he published. He never did want Constance to get married -- to grow up -- to find herself. The old man had told George he was a loser -- that he didn't have the talent to be a writer and that he'd better start being more level-headed or he'd get rid of him -- "And we both know who Constance will stay with, don't we George?"

"Well George, what are you going to do? Sit here and rot, which is what you've been doing ever since I've known you?"

"I think I'd better get some gas," he said, opening the door.

Constance was speaking again, but he cut her off by quickly stepping to the highway, slamming the door -- trapping the sound inside. George hurried away from the car, not bothering with gas can in the trunk.

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"Hey, John, gimme another slug o' that rot gut!"

John lifted the gallon bottle of Muscatel from the floor of the truck and handed it to the driver, Captain Slut.

"I don't know Cap, this stuff 'ill score yur pistons. . .jesus christ, watch the road, man."

Cap dropped the bottle smashing it on the floor, and spun the wheel just in time to miss the guardrails and to send the '50 Ford paneltruck into a four-wheel powerslide through the vicious downhill curve.

"Holy shit," wailed John, already forgetting about the road, "ya busted the wine, ya slut."

"Don't git excited, w'll be at Luther's in 'bout hafa hoopla . . .hey, there's somebody walkin in the road, wanna pick 'im up?" Cap, not waiting for a reply, spiked the brakes, once again sending the panel into a drift.

George heard the sound of screeching brakes and jumped the guardrails, positive he would be struck down by whatever was making that horrifying noise behind him. When the mountains finally ceased to echo that terrible scream, George peered meekly over a post to see two headlights and a radiator staring back at him from a distance of ten feet. It was a goddamned truck! -- a white truck with little black feet painted all over it -- and "La Foot" inscribed in Old English letters across the hood.

As George stood stunned in the road, two men jumped from the cab, one from each side, and came toward him. George surveyed the passenger first. He really had no choice but to do so, as the lanky man literally bounded from the truck, and in three long strides was standing over him allowing George to see nothing past the blue cowboy shirt with pearly buttons and pocket snaps. He glared at George in crazed astonishment, threw his arms in the air, and sauntered back to the road; hand-tooled, cleated boots clicking on the pavement.

"Yer god awful damned lucky some crazy bastard wasn't comin down the road jus now." George looked back to the truck from where the driver was now shouting at him. The driver! Jesus Christ -- he was a midget -- a bald-headed, two hundred pound midget with a huge handlebar mustache!

"Ya tryin ta git yer ass killed?" added the cowboy. "Well, never mind, ya wanna ride?"

George was reluctant to climb through the back doors of the panel, but finally did so, recalling how little traffic had been on the road. In the two hours he had been walking, he had seen only a couple of semis and a gang of about fifteen motorcyclists who threw him the finger as they roared past.

Twenty minutes later "Captain Slut" (as the cowboy had introduced him to George) pulled into "Luther's Bar & Grill"



-- Beer, Wine & Liquor -- Dancing Every Sat. Nite. George hadn't said much, sitting on the cot in the back of the panel. The cowboy, John, had provided most of the dialogue, telling wild, outrageous tales about his pipeline experience. Cap reacted exuberantly to nearly every line -- his drunken snickering laugh coming more through his small pointed, pixy-like nose than from under the mustache. They were very exciting stories George thought, about real live, vibrant people -- not like those nutless bastards in the office. Nutless bastards was a phrase John used repeatedly -- and with such power. George immediately applied it to his father-in-law.

After each outburst of laughter, which George too was now sharing with his new friends, Cap would turn to him and exclaim, "He's a real runaway, ain't he?" then face front again, back to the road, laughing hysterically, bouncing in the seat with exuberance.

Cap adroitly slid the panel into a narrow lane between a big, heavily-laden logging truck and an old black Buick with "Bertha" painted carelessly across the trunk. George noticed a group of motorcycles parked along the side of the building -- probably the ones he had seen earlier, he thought. Before the engine had sounded its final chug, John had exited through the back doors, ran over the top of Bertha, leaped from the hood and landed in the open doorway of Luther's. His momentum sent him sprawling lengthwise on the pooltable, scattering balls in every direction.

A large, heavily-muscled man with nearly shoulder-length hair walked to the table holding a cue stick. He wore only a leather vest to cover his bulging torso, making visible two tattoos, one spanning each enormous bicep. The right arm displayed a U.S.M.C. insignia -- the left, a flowery heart with "mom" inscribed in the middle. He reached down and grabbed the limp body by the belt and, with one hand, stood him upright. This made the tattoo look as if it were being viewed through a zoom lens. He faced the others around the table and drawled slowly, "Hey everybody, John's here. Rack 'em up Toad."

"Hey Swamper, what's the hole through Bertha's trunk?" questioned Cap coming through the door with George inconspicuously following him.

"Ah, the son-of-a-bitch. I tried. . .I tried", his speech being interrupted by a steadily rising gush of laughter from deep inside his cavernous frame. "I tried to start the whore, but like nothin man, nothin. So I put a .44 magnum slug through the ass-end. And ya know what? The pissar still won't start. Hey, who's the dude with ya?"

"Oh, hey man, this here's my buddy." said John, coming from the bar with three beers and a fresh bottle of wine. "What'd ya say yer name was? Oh ya, George, that's it. He wants t'dbe a pipeliner."

"I don know," grinned Swamper, "he looks kinda sweet to me. . .but what the hell. W'll see what he's made of. . .if he can stay with us and then decide. Startin now. Come on dude, drink up." At that, Swamper threw down a full beer in three jerking throbs of his adam's apple, smashing the can against his forehead and letting out a thunderous "midnight huskers forever".

"Huskers forever," came the shrieking reply from John standing in the corner with a small, bearded man holding his crotch. "Hey Swamp, Petemoss got his keys stuck on 'iz schwantz. Come 'ere an look at this, George."

George made his way to the group of men, who by this time, had gathered around Petemoss. He looked over Cap's bald head to the point of attention. No doubt about it -- Pete was having problems--a cluster of keys on a chain dangling from the pierced head -- an intricate design of tattoos covering the whole thing.

Petemoss looked up, grimacing, "I'm momentarily hung-up here," giving the chain a quick jerk, freeing the keys and a piece of pinched skin. "I need to tighten up after that," he moaned, pulling a can of lighter fluid from his shirt. He threw back his head, squirting the fluid into his mouth. Pete shook violently as he lit a match in front of his face, then exhaling, he ignited the air for a foot in front of him chasing the effect with a shot of whiskey

This was all too much for George who turned quickly away only to feel Swamper's big right paw on his neck.

"What's the matter, dude, ain't ya never seen one?"

"Well, not quite like that," came George's muttered reply. This prompted a playful cuff on the back and more booming laughter.

"Yeah, it sure is somethin else. Here boy, drink up. Puts lead in yer pencil. . .da ya wanna be a pipeliner er not?"



## SUICIDE NOTE

Phyllis turns the day around,  
Dancing the cripple from me.

Phyllis' song gloves the ground,  
Like seashells beached.

Phyllis pulls the bedsheet down,  
Gathering me up as a memory.

Stay with me tonite .  
I asked you,  
Please, I'm possessed by dragons,  
That slim in my thoughts;

Hold my hand,  
Bend my fingers into your strength,  
Shorten the pain,  
That eats like wild-fire;

If only you'd stayed the nite,  
and laughed at my chills,  
when someone coughed in the grey streets. . .

Phyllis falls to ghosts,  
That dance transparent  
In bloody dreams;  
Phyllis lies boneless at 2 A.M.

—JOE LEVANDOSKI



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