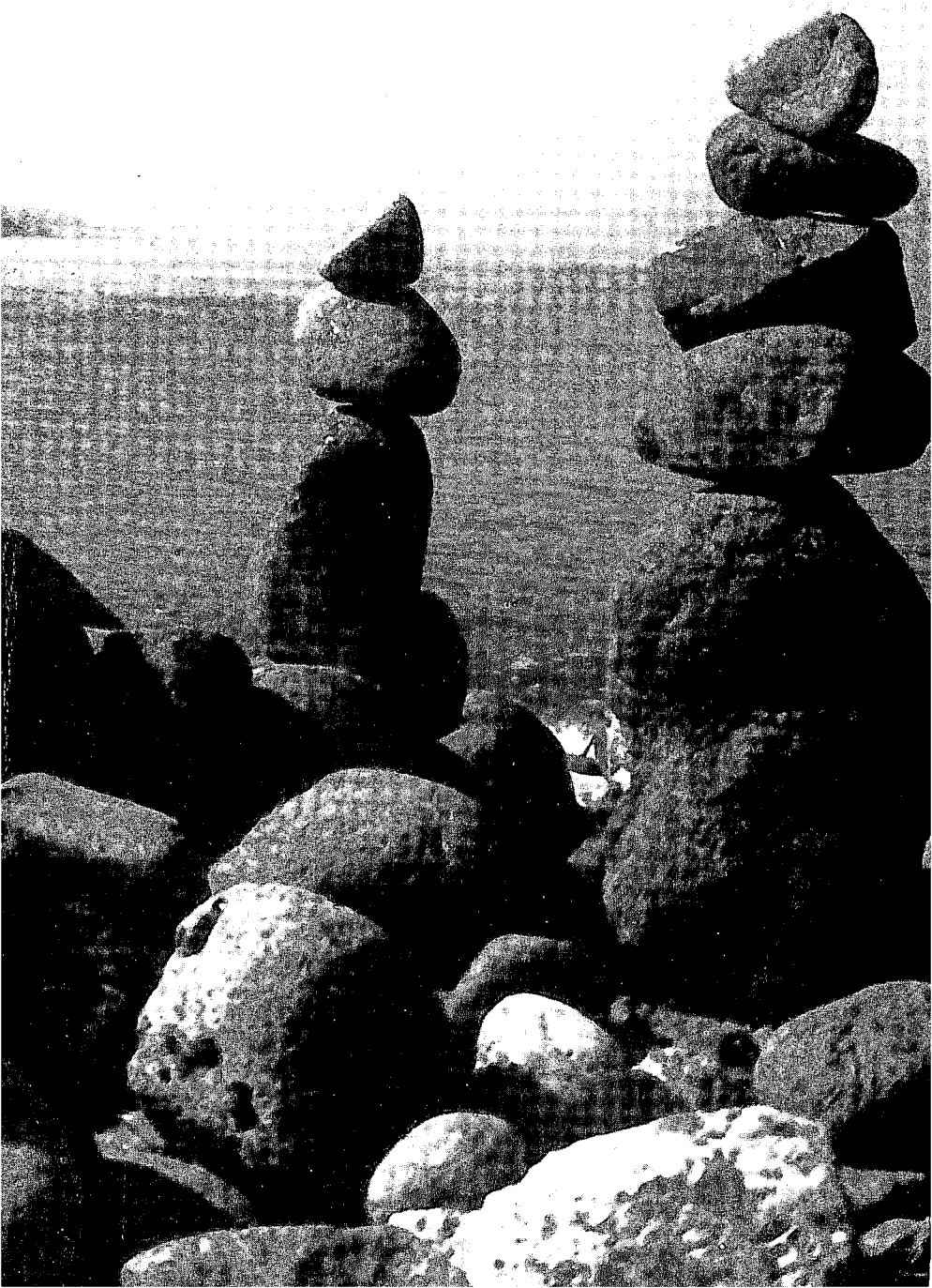


WATERSHED



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Volume 18, Number 2

Watershed

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Watershed is proud to be the recipient of the first ANNIE for contribution to literature by an organization. Congratulations to George Keithley, recipient of the first ANNIE for lifetime achievement in literature. A story by Mr. Keithley appears in this issue.

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Oroville Highway
February, 1988

then suddenly
there are geese
as if, late afternoon, the sky
has shattered
glinting and flashing
as thousands of wings
mass lakeward

and later,
at the last light,
they are here again
like smoke, high and trailing,
bound north

and I
earthbound
can only watch
as if I do not feel that longing
cannot tremble
like the compass needle
to that pull

as the icebound heart of winter
melts swiftly
in spring twilight
travelling home

Unrequited Love 89

I have a cricket in my house

he chirps when the refrigerator comes on

I think he's in love

after searching for weeks
he's sitting behind the
icebox

waiting for the
motor to turn on

I can relate

Banana Nut Bread

I crack walnuts
with my mother
after we've gathered them
from under our tree.

I hold one
in the palm of my hand,
break it with a silver tool,
dig out the meat
until my fingers are sore.

I know before I open it
if a walnut is green
or rotten,
and I throw it
into the pile of shells.

I wish I could tell you
that my mother would whistle,
or sing,

but the flavor
of baked walnuts
remains in my mouth
long after I have eaten the bread.

Slicing Circles

(for Robin)

We used to dig radishes
behind the green house
when I was six
and you were twelve
growing like dandelions.

We were pirates
high on a weedy hill
searching for round roots
with dirty hands.

Before you let in slippery men
who smoked
with Mick Jagger mouths,
kissed you wetly
in McDonald's, Burger King, AM PM.

In the kitchen
I would rinse radishes
turned so bright
under running water,
I had to close my eyes.

You were tall enough
on tiptoes
to reach vinegar
in the cupboard above the stove.

Before possession, crying babies, eviction,
three months wearing yellow
in the county jail
where they let you near the fence
to pull weeds.

You would slice circles,
let me pour vinegar,
and I don't know
but it seems I watched the red
spill into white radish meat.

There was never enough salt
on those days
when we would eat our delicacy
at the formica table.

I still love you as much as salt, and
no more.



Seward Bryan Foote

San Francisco Restaurant 1976

I could see my father's puffy
red face in the bar
from another room.
I watched him slip
gray oysters down his throat
between beers.

I sat still
while my mother stared
at the plastic covered candle
at our table,
chewing bread crusts.
I watched my father laughing.

I wanted to go home,
call out to him,
hate him.
I wanted to walk into the bar
and swallow gray oysters.

ch chink

The red liquid shows itself
on my dulled yellow,
waterproof apron.

ch chink ch chink ch chink

Head chopper chops the heads.

ch chink ch chink

Water flows fast across the
aluminum tables.

It's not so loud

with the green sponge ear plugs.

Ice filled orange crates orange crates
floating on fork lifts.

It is cold despite the rubber gloves.

One pair two pair three pair

always rubber gloves—

and cotton liners for grip.

ch chink ch chink

The head chopper chops the heads.

salmon salmon salmon salmon

Our belly splitter slits

and slides the salmon down to me.

Me. Gut puller. Mighty gut puller.

I get paid a quarter more.

I reach with clawlike grip

into the nape of the neck.

salmon salmon salmon salmon

ch chink ch chink ch chink

I reach into the nape of the neck

with swollen forefinger

and the two adjacent.

Swollen because I reach

into the nape of the neck

with forefinger and two adjacent

and pull out

bladder, heart, liver.

Bladder, heart, liver,

and sometimes pink perfect eggs.
Once in a game of truth or dare,
our hands never ceasing
to slit, slice or pull
bladder, heart, liver,
we made Lesley
eat
a pink perfect egg.
That was before Lesley
became too tired to make it to work.
Swoosh down the shoot go the
pink perfect eggs.
I look past the aluminum
past the ice filled orange crates
past the yellow workers
towards the great double doors
big enough for passing forklifts
for a hint of the time.
The land of the midnight sun is dark.
It must be about 3:00 A.M.
Break.
Strip off apron.
Strip off rubber gloves.
Strip off liners.
Take out ear plugs.
Leave on black rubber boots—
there is blood and the heads of fish
on the cement floor.
Once outside on the dock, dotted
with homesick fishermen
unloading their boats by
great artificial moons,
I smell fish.
In the splintered wood
in my hair
in the fabric of my wet flannel.
Coffee.
3:15 A.M. Break over.
ch chink ch chink ch chink
salmon salmon salmon salmon
Now I am bloodliner
and I hold the knife—

hence the quarter more.
It's all in the wrist
slice the sac of blood
then scoop it down the drain
slice the sac of blood
then scoop it down the drain
It is cold in here.
I can see my breath.
I look to the girl next to me
Leisha is her name. She is eighteen
and reminds of the characters
in *Thelma and Louise*.
The black rings under her eyes
tell her shift is almost over.
slice the sac of blood
then scoop it down the drain
Tell me a story Leisha
I must not think of this pain.
Not that I am different
than anybody else
it's just that my hand is
real swollen
especially my forefinger
and two adjacent.
Leisha tells me that this asshole
at the bonfire told Jimmy
it was time Jimmy pass Leisha around
to give the other guys a chance.
I keep dropping my knife.
ch chink ch chink
What is this I am holding in my hand?
A heart. A bladder. A liver.
To what?
salmon salmon salmon
They really are pretty
purples and reds
blues and greens
stripes and dots
and zigzagging scales.
Fair to say I forgot they were fish
until one fell off the table
and I picked it up in passing

with a naked hand.
So slick my senses
screamed FISH
and I remembered.
Are there any left in the sea?
ch chink ch chink ch chink
What just splashed on my face?
Blood or water?
Do I have blood on my face?
I thought so.
Don't stop talking Leisha.
ch chink ch chink ch chink



Seward Bryan Foote

Peter's Lament

Watch out for Wendy,
She's sneaky and mean.
She looks for lost boys like you
And lures them into her garden
With tea and persimmon cookies —
 the good cookies—with walnuts.
Next she'll read you a story
Till you're good and sleepy,
Then she grabs your little lost boy soul
And stitches your shadow back on.
And you can run and run all you want,
Even try to fly,
But you can never, never leave your shadow behind again.

Night Shift

I am a nurse who works at night
Taking care of your father
Who is dying.

I work at night taking care of your dying father
Who can't sleep:
What's the point, when so much sleep lies just ahead?

Your dying father can't sleep
And I'm his nurse
So we sit up in the night talking.

He talks of you in the dying night
When he can't sleep and I have to stay awake
Caring for him.

He tells me of the pride he feels for you,
And the joy he feels at the sight of you.
There, in the dark,
He doesn't bring up the things you retain:
The shaming words,
The angry temper you feared to face.

But in his dying night
He doesn't mention love either,
I think
Out of his own shame for the residues
He suspects he left in his love for you.

If he seems especially sad about the interminable night
And I feel strong enough to bear it,
I tell him I'm a father too,
And that I trust my children will somehow feel my love,
Whatever memories they may retain.

After helping them to their feet and holding them steady
So they don't have to urinate lying in their own dying bed,
So they don't have to urinate lying in bed like babies,
More than one have said:
"You're a good man, Mark,"
And most say: "You remind me of my son."

Circe in the Thirties

Lights low
And the stink of stale beer, cigars
Not yet washed onto the stage
She lingers in dreams
Of Aegean lotus isles.
Once, her voice
Shattered galleys on the rocks
And brought them all crawling,
Muscled, salt-sea bodies
Sugared with sand.

Now she would settle for even one
In this world gone gray.
Shimmering, even in faded garters,
She waits for the spark:

*Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss
Auf Liebe eingestellt
Denn das ist meine Welt
Und sonst gar nicht.*

Alone
her voice cracks.
Wind from the open door
Topples an empty bottle
From a table
To shatter.

Outside, the night carries trumpets
And the terrible heartbeat
Of boots.

*Die Fahne hoch!
Die Reihen dicht geschlossen.
S.A. marschieret,
Mit ruhig festem Schritt...*

In a Dim Space

scene iv

The post of the guards: in front of a well secured door.

Enter guards: PLEBE and SIR. Behind them, several stagehands are setting up for scene five. The spot-lighting in the previous scenes has been concealing small heaps of garbage and junk scattered on stage. The stage hands clear some of it for the next scene. They leave some of it because bits of garbage are continually floating down, making it futile for the stagehands to pick all of it up.

SIR: Come here. Follow me.

PLEBE: Sir, I can't follow you.

SIR: What do you mean, you can't follow me? My instructions are perfectly clear.

PLEBE: Sir, I didn't mean that I didn't understand your speech. What I meant was that I can't follow you down the corridor because I don't have a security clearance. Passport.

SIR: What do you need a security clearance, passport for? You skipped breakfast today.

PLEBE: Oh yea, that's right. Autie made me. Okay, after you, Sir.

They proceed on walking.

SIR: We stop here. This is our post.

PLEBE: We sure got a good one this time, Sir. Good view.

SIR: Peaceful.

PLEBE: Yes Sir, peaceful.

SIR: And fresh air.

PLEBE: Yes, we are lucky to have such good jobs. Sir, who are we

protecting again?

SIR: The leaders.

PLEBE: Which ones?

SIR: THE leaders. The big ones. The LEADERS' leaders. Anyhow, it doesn't matter, we've sworn allegiance to protect all of them. Why do you ask, Plebe?

PLEBE: I was just curious, Sir.

SIR: Well, it doesn't matter. It's a job. The leaders have the money. They pay us. We protect them.

PLEBE: That's what I like about being a guard, Sir.

SIR: What's that?

PLEBE: Steady pay. There will always be rich people to protect, and poor people to rob them. They don't pay great, but it sure is steady.

SIR: Yeah, this sure beats my last job.

PLEBE: What was that, Sir?

SIR: I was a hot dog hawker, at the stadium. Hot dogs here! Get your red hots here! Foot-longs. Hot dogs here!

PLEBE: I'll take one with mustard, Sir. And a root beer soda.

SIR: So, what did you do before this high security job?

PLEBE: I hawked too. Newspapers, Sir. For the *Daily Extra News Gazette Journal Star Post Enquirer Voice Pulp Propaganda Asterisk Times Chronicle Herald Press Today Edition Observer Reporter*.

SIR: Oh yes. I think I heard of them. I vaguely remember. Are they a conglomeration?

PLEBE: Yes, Sir. They started off as the *Daily*, then merged with the *Extra*, subsequently becoming the *Daily Extra*; who bought out the

News, thus renaming it the *Daily Extra News*, who then purchased the *Gazette*, henceforth renamed as the *Daily Extra News*...

SIR: Enough!

PLEBE (*timidly*): ...*Gazette*?

SIR: I get the idea, Plebe.

PLEBE: Sir?

SIR: Yes.

PLEBE: This sure beats our old jobs. Doesn't it?

SIR: Of course it does. Why do you ask?

PLEBE: Just curious, Sir. Well, you know how people always make fun of cops, Sir. They stereotype us. And put us down.

SIR: Yes, I know, Plebe. But, we've got it better than them, I assure you. We've got steady pay. We're not low-lives, like some other professionals are. For example: Playwrights. The loathsome lot of them.

PLEBE: How so Sir?

SIR: Well, your average play writer, he has to contend with critics and audiences and directors and a whole other multitude of nefarious people. Not us though, we deal with a tightly knit bureaucracy. We have a code of honor. Our jobs are guaranteed perpetually. We're lifers.

PLEBE: There's not much drama though.

SIR: Not AS MUCH drama, but some drama nonetheless. Our jobs are steady. Your typical playwright recognizes that trait in us. He's jealous, because he must constantly ride a different roller coaster everyday. So he has all the guards in his shows bumped off. We deserve more drama than that. You know, like in *Star Trek*: when you see a guard, you know he's gonna get it soon. Unless he's on the regular cast. So you know what we gotta do.

PLEBE: I sure do, Sir. We gotta keep talking, because the more lines we have, the less likely we are to die in this show.

SIR: All the world's a stage.

PLEBE: And dead men don't talk.

SIR: OH NO!

PLEBE: What's wrong Sir?

SIR: I forgot my next line, Plebe.

PLEBE: ME TOO!

SIR: You know what that means Plebe.

PLEBE: Regrettably so, Sir.

The both pull out guns and shoot each other, then fall down. The stagehands nonchalantly pick up the dead bodies and throw them in a big trash heap they have been collecting to be dragged or swept off stage. They also deposit GEREMEY'S veil into the pile, momentarily focusing their attention on it, as if it were important, only to resume their 'just doing my job' attitudes.

AUTIE: Did you hear that creep talking bad about playwrights?

STAGEHAND: I think so. I wasn't really paying attention.

AUTIE: Well it annoys me. When I'm not a stagehand, I'm a play writer. I wrote this play.

STAGEHAND (surprised): YOU wrote this play?

AUTIE (beaming and proud): Yes.

STAGEHAND (picks up a piece of paper and hands it to the author): Can I have your autograph?

AUTIE takes pen out of pocket, signs paper, and hands it to STAGEHAND. They resume work.

salvation

god wasn't there
in the front seat of the car,
with the front door open
to the wet night.

god didn't see
the devil you swallowed
before the headlights
came in

and god didn't want
any excuses
for what your twisted heart
screamed.

but he let the man with the bad back
whisper something beautiful.
and john the baptist
held you

while all the angels
were dying.

the theory

i have an illness
of extra-
ordinary proportions

and she is jealous
of my night

for she cannot compete
with the terror.

her only hope
is to find a surrogate
in the shape of a dark coat

and hang him
in the closet
near the only source of light

and let the long shadow fall
over thin blue stars.

learning

when death bangs on the door
with both hands and feet,
reasonably tired and irritable
from a day of pointless conversation,
and the only way to silence
is to cover our mouths
with each other's mouths;
then we will speak
from the middle space,
if we can,
and avoid the commotion outside,
if we can,
and follow the green river
to the open sea,
as tears from the screen
burn holes in our cheeks,
and metaphor escapes us,
for we know,
without a doubt,
that the coal black tunnel below
is the only way
out.

hit that muddy river

the clouds are gettin mean
the wind plays poker with the sun
beuford holds a twelve-gauge
like a hot fat baby in the crook of his arm
his coveralls look like prison
seersucker stripes and thirty-two pockets
billy picks a kernel from his nose
and bites it
dolores kicks the cat
warren slops the pigs
the hired help ain't worth a shit
uncle rathbone says
they eat too much and lay around
and fuck the animals
that one with the big head and no brains
killed a couple chickens for the dyin quiver
bessie got a lump on her neck
and it's turnin black
mylo wants to cut it off
with his pocket knife
damn
there's a warm one comin
gonna strip right down
and hit that muddy river
stay in there all day
if i have to

Tule Maze

"Nick-o-las! Car-riel..."

I can hear Mom's voice faintly. It reaches over the gray tips of the tallest tule reeds and places itself in front of us. Nicky looks up at me, but I shake my head at him slowly and sternly, while fixing him with an unwavering stare. We are not going back.

How can I listen to Mom when the maze calls to me? Its voice is the brushing of the reeds as they sway in the wind—thin cats that purr. I want to know what is in the heart of the tule forest. I want to know what makes the deep black holes that dot the twisting water trails. My paddle does not reach the bottom of the holes when I dip it into the yellow water. It just swings into the blackness. They look like the footprints left by some leaping devil—left by something that knows no symmetry, for the holes are randomly spaced in the twisting narrow trails of the reed labyrinth. My brother has leaned over the side of the canoe letting his ragged, shoulder-length hair float on the water. Once, his face dropped so near a hole as he peered into it, I almost held him back. Something might suddenly fly out of the hole, some snaky eel or monstrous fish. Something might try to take him away from me.

Nicholas has many times reached his hand down into the water, where his fingers hang—white and limp above a mini abyss. "What lives in here?" he asks me, his sweet face turning to mine in unalarmed questioning. Sometimes I tell him, just for the joy of seeing the power in my words as he snatches his hand back to himself. When I whisper answers that are filled with unknown monsters he will watch me reproached and intrigued as if I am the monster. He has even cried on occasion, when I pretended not to know the way out of this maze. I was only delighted for a short while at that. Tears make my mean fun something else. Why does he come in here with me, if I am so cruel?

He has been cruel, too. I have seen the legless frogs he holds captive on the beach in a fort made of bark. There his GI Joe men guard the gross dying bodies until the fort is knocked over and the dog comes to eat or roll in what is left. Today, maybe I will tell him that the ghosts of those tiny limbless frogs wait deep down in the darkness to chew off his fingers.

"What do you think made these holes, Sissy?" he asks me, his open eyes unconcerned.

I am shivering from the water that has dripped off of my paddle onto my jeans. I turn completely around and settle myself backwards on the canoe's front seat. "What do *you* think?" I retort softly, inviting him.

His green eyes close slightly as he thinks, a joined pair of dragonflies lands on the orange sleeve of his tee shirt but he does not notice. They pulsate there, their wings glimmering. "It must of been a giant." He finally states.

"A giant what?"

"A giant...worm."

"And that is why the holes are so deep." I finish for him, giving a smile of approval. "Is he still down there?" I whisper the question at him with wide eyes. "Down where we cannot see him...but where he can hear our voices and slowly edge his way up and out. Maybe this worm has invisible limbs, limbs that look like streams of water...never ending fingers that could surround our canoe, and then reach up like tentacles to suck us down into the blackness." I stop for a moment to see what his response is.

He is wide-eyed and his hand grips his paddle as though it is a sword. "I would save you," he says to me sternly. His little red-brown head wears a halo in the sunlight. Disturbed, the dragonflies move to the green fiberglass of the canoe.

I glance again into the deep silent holes in the water. Marsh grass, long since dead, lies flat in twisting curls at the dark mouths' edges. There is something so disgusting about a hero. "I would not save you," I reply.

He is silent for a moment and his face looks as though it might cave into itself, but then he calmly says, "Daddy would."

I cannot argue with that, anymore than one can argue with Mom when we come back late, in the darkness. She waits on the edge of the dock, so still and silent that we do not see her until she speaks. "I...wish...that you would not stay out so late." She says gingerly to me, as if trying to be diplomatic. But we know that there is no way to argue with such a stern and powerful wish.

Nick and I drift farther down the twisting corridor until we come to a mossy stump. Where it is above the water it has been scraped out. There are many claw marks and tears. In the recess is a skull, smooth and white with large front incisors. The log falls across several others that are completely submerged under the water. It is much deeper here, but not a black hole, for we can see the bottom. It is brown and silty, and seems even dirtier in the yellowish screen of the stagnant water. It is strange that there is no smell here; everything

should be as blanketed in decay as the bottom is, with this fine silty mud. When we come to some places in these passages the canoe gets stuck, though I do not know how, since when Nick crawls out into the water to push the canoe along he sinks up to his waist in this mud. It is not like the mud near the shore, not thick and slippery. It falls to pieces at a touch. When the corridors are very shallow the wave of the paddles in the water leaves trails of silty puffs, like smoke from a steamboat beneath the yellowed water's surface. I will not get out to push the canoe. I do not like to feel myself sink.

Once, the first time that we came into this maze, Nick and I, we were attacked by a bird. It was so strange. The bird flew out of nowhere and began to dive at our heads. I must have cried out, for Nick stood up suddenly, rocking the canoe, and waved his paddle in the air like some unwieldy wand. The bird was only a screeching, dark blob in the sky, very small, nothing like the danger of capsizing so far from the cabin in the cold water, but it terrified me. It flew and flew and dived...and there was no reason for it to do so.

At high summer, a bird in the marsh might do that when its nest is threatened. The blackbirds at my grandparents' house will attack anything that comes near the kiwi plants when there are hatchlings in their nests. Once, after my old black cat lost its eye to an angry blackbird, Dad climbed up into the arbor and pulled the nests down. The birds screamed and plunged; his shirt was torn, but when the nests were gone and the crying featherless babies dead, the blackbirds did not attack anymore. In the marsh that time, it was too late in the season for there to even be any fledglings. We could not row fast enough to get away, to get back to the cabin; the current from the lake was too strong, and we were very close to the tule maze's mouth where the current is the hardest to fight against. Finally, that current was what saved us, it pushed us deep into the marsh, near where the water-trails begin. It took us out of that strange bird's territory.

Since then we have been very careful to watch as we enter the maze, but since then we haven't even seen another bird, not even a wood duck or a loon. Sometimes, at night when I sit on the porch and tell Nick my stories, I hear the loons call. I'll pause and listen to their voices, soft and eerie, creeping out of the darkness of the lake. It is such a mysterious sound as it echoes across the water. The sound is sadder than any other noise I have ever heard, wilder too, like how a lonely, snow-covered peak might sound, if it had a voice. I have never seen any loons in the tule forest; they must live somewhere along the other shore, in one of those clumpy little hills that dot the water's edge.

"Hey, what's that?" Nick suddenly asks me, pointing with his paddle into the yellow water at the foot of the stump with the beaver skull. Nicholas has found several lures during our wanderings about the lake. They are trophies he proudly displays to Dad, running up the rickety mossy dock waving the rusty things in the air, their hooks jangling.

He points to a dark reddish thing with angles; attached to it is a thick chain dusted with silt. The metal jaws under the water are very old and have been sprung. There are dark, grizzled lines of grassy material blowing in the water's current from the rusty and jagged edges, like flags or the drooping, thin branches of willow trees on a windy day. Nick prods it with his paddle and asks me again what it is, though I know that he knows—it is just like the traps that Dad sets for the muskrats under the house. It has the same jagged teeth and thin smiling jaw—only it is much, much larger. I lean back and look up into the overcast sky.

"What is it?" He whispers in that sweet little boy's voice of his.

His eyes are so big and green when they look at me that way, in that pleading and wanting way.

"It is a cage for a bear." I tell him. "It is where the bear hides, after it dies. If we reach down into the water and pull the trap up carefully...and then pry open its teeth, we can set him free. The bear might even whisper a growl into our ears, a growl of 'thank you.' Then he will fly into the wind and find the hunter who set the trap...and wait just outside the hunter's ear until all is quiet...then reach in with terrible claws...."

Nicky has his fingers in his mouth and watches me with morbid fascination. "Daddy killed a bear once," he tells me solemnly. "He told me that he set a trap for a bear and caught it. Then he took his gun and shot'em."

"That's right," I agree. Nicky ponders my answer while sucking on his grimy fingers. A thought jumps his eyebrows high and he takes a wet finger from his mouth to point into the yellow water.

"Mom says that we shouldn't go in here anymore because there was a bear seen on the other shore."

The only really scary bears are dead ones, I tell him. But I lied; live bears are very frightening. Sometimes, when I have hiked deep into the hills with Dad and his gun, we have come across the evidence of bears—droppings or tree bark that has been deeply scarred by massive claws. The black bears that live in these mountains are supposed to be the most dangerous of all, even though they are not as big as grizzlies or those huge brown kodiaks that are sometime in

scary stories. Once Dad reached out and stopped me with the muzzle of his gun. When I felt that cold hard barrel against my tee shirt I knew to be still. In the green bushes with their half-fallen leaves the branches quivered making a rustling sound, but I could not see what was there. It could have been an elk, or a mule deer, even a rare moose—they are sometimes spotted near our lake. Later, as the firelight flickered around his dark head, Dad told me It was a bear—a black bear, hunting for the last of the wild huckleberries. "Stay as far away from the black ones as you can," he told me. "They are the worst."

It is funny how that bear, the one that I did not see, is much more real to me than the ones I have seen. Sometimes at dusk, from the trolling boat, we see dark hovering shapes at the water's edge. Dad's finger pointing into the semi-darkness silences all chatter, and all eyes follow it to reverently stare at the black lumbering thing on the shore. But those bears are far away and indistinct. I wonder why Mom did not tell me that there had been a bear seen near our side of the lake.

Nick is silent, then he carefully gets to his feet; I can smell the dead fish from last night on the jacket that is tied around his tiny waist. The sleeves faintly sparkle with dried slime and scales in the late sunlight. He straddles the sides of the canoe, and in a practiced gesture peers over the tops of the reeds, his hand blocking messy hair and sunlight from his eyes. He is looking back to see the house, the little red cabin. I have an urge to rock the canoe and send him tumbling down into the cold water with that rusty trap and flying silt, but I do not; I just watch him as he squints his eyes and searches.

"Still there?" I ask.

He drops his hand and turns his head; his reddish hair flies into his face. Reaching up again with a grubby little paw, he brushes the strands away to reveal a grin. "Yep," he says as we slowly continue down the corridor.

The cabin is closer than the other houses to the marsh. It is a happy looking cabin. At night, from the boat, the light from lanterns shines out of the two large front windows gently, like beckoning eyes that wink when Mom blocks the view with her indistinct bulk as she bustles about the kitchen. She does not approve of our journeys into the maze. I do not think she would lie to keep us out, though—telling frightening stories to her children to make them behave is not how she works.

The air out on the lake and in the marsh is more breathable than that on the shore. It is not quite so heavy with pine and dust from the

nearby road. During the summer the dust is chokingly thick. It billows up into the dry, dry air and hovers. Nick and I will take an inner tube and kick our way into the middle of the lake, letting our skinny whitish legs dangle into the deep green-blue water, like Nick's fingers do over those dark and incomprehensible holes in this marsh. We will grasp onto the black rubber—wrapping our tanning arms around its shape and kick and tell stories.

Sometimes, I will frighten us both with a chilled and soft voice in the warm air, speaking about what kind of things might hide below in the blue-green water. I tell stories of things that will suddenly rise up and pull us down, of things with many fingers and angry, snapping teeth. Mom asks, "Why are you guys so quiet?" when we come back from the lake, shivering and with sunburned backs. Sometimes, she gives me a penetrating look as if she thinks that I am being bad. If she says too much, I get angry and we yell, while Nicholas stands aside and watches us with big green eyes.

Now that it is autumn, it is far too cold to swim in the lake, so Nick and I paddle along the winding trails of the maze. During the summer, the tule forest sits waiting for us, waiting for our splashing and playing to become subdued. Then we paddle and wonder as the trails twist and turn, and the answers hover like dragonflies, just out of my reach. I do not even think of the maze until the tide of summer turns and the heat lessens. There is something about a dark mystery that requires the cold.

In these mornings, the sun does not seem to reach us till nearly noon. The mountain shades us from the dawn, and then slowly the block of sun stretches across the water, but even then it is not warm sunshine. By the time it reaches our little cabin we are so used to being cold and being out of its reach that we barely take notice and stay close to the fire.

Both Mom and I like to get up early in these frosty mornings. We sit huddled close to the fireplace and sip our cocoa together. Many times I've asked her about how she met my father.

"I knew him when we were children" she'll explain, telling of pranks and teasing and dolls whose heads mysteriously disappeared. "How I hated him; he was so horrible," she'll say, laughing at her memories, and shaking her head.

"Why did you marry him?" I'll ask her, "What happened?" Mom will smile at me softly, her dark eyes amused. "We grew up."

"And you saw something different in him?"

"No, what I saw had always been there."

How can that be?

Seeing my disbelief she will continue, "It's human," she'll tell me decisively. "Things just happen," she'll say, her smile tender. Things just happen?... like the dark holes in the tule maze? or the rusty lures and tangled fishing line crawling up the silty stems of gray reeds? There must be reasons, there must be actions and things that could explain—monsters, bears, rotting logs that snag the flashing silver hooks as they travel beneath the deep water.

"It's getting dark, Sissy," Nick tells me as he drags his paddle across the bottom creating tornadoes of silt. "Mom will be mad."

It is getting dark, I am beginning to think that there is no center to this maze—no end. The trails always seem to end up back at the lake, pointing to the smiling cabin with our worried mother standing wrapped in her jacket at the edge of the teetering dock.

"Will you tell me a story by the fire, a nice story—not about things that are gonna come and get me?" Nick has such beautiful hair, in the late afternoon it shines red-gold.

"Maybe," I tell him while trying not to smile. A light wind has come up, it pushes the scents of the prickly pine trees and smoke from cabin fires into the now whispering reeds.

"Please, Sissy?" he says and I do smile at his grubby little face. Nicky takes his paddle in both hands and pushes against a sunken log. The canoe turns around in a graceful arc and he begins to paddle in earnest, humming some strange tune to himself.

Turning to right myself in the seat, I dip my paddle into the yellow water too, and together we create clouds of silt as we pass over gaping black holes amongst the reeds. They will be there tomorrow. The maze will whistle in the light wind like thin cats that purr.



Seward Bryan Foote

Can't Say What It Is

After work
we go to Mickey's.
7th & Taft.
Done it 32 years
ever day
because
it don't change
an we know
what we'll find—
tired smell
comin off wood tables so old
they shine
an us
not knowin much
about what's goin on
in the world
but knowin what it takes
to get a laugh
or maybe a woman
who might dance
if the music's right
knowin who's lookin for work
who's needy an what for
an we let it lay
when it's time to head home
an nobody asks
what we was lookin for
or how come
we're feelin empty
when we're full of drink
or if it's goin there
or goin home
that leaves a hollow feelin
can't nothin fill.

When I spit you out it was more like pumpkin seeds,
than watermelon
that rise
in a slow arc
black streak
to land in summer dust
almost already buried.
But you,
I spit you out like choking—
salty, chalky
plump
and unexpected.

What Happens Next

Wild horses run
through light
faster than light moves
and we move with them
faster than the hours
lapping up daylight
under our feet—

we run
to each horizon
each day's slippery-rimmed canyon
deeper and more mysterious
than yesterday's
with no plateaus,
no destination—

and leave behind
all we know,
drawn forward by the need
to see what happens next—
by the need to hope
it might change
all we know.

when it's over

everyone tries to spare you something
like cooking
you shouldn't have to follow
recipes or decide what to cook
or whether to eat
ever again
friends know
even neighbors know
you need a hot meal
when it's over
so they rush in with take-out bags
paper plates and plastic forks
meatloaf and chicken soup in a jar
eat, they say—don't think so much
but you do
and in your dreams
you close the door
leave the filled refrigerator
empty rooms
too crowded with memories
and never look back
to see disappearing images
in picture frames

Contrapposto

You're the chaff that falls away
the machine mulching away the childhood
tree of my tree-house.

I stem from stems reaching out
of my mother, stand on the bones
of my ancestors, and sift through the remaining dirt
for understanding. Bad backs and thinning hair
are my family legacies. Eventually everything that is mine
to hold or remember falls away. The memories in pictures
pinned up on walls, like heroes, fade
and are forgotten.

But I don't forget you.
My palms leave prints in the dirt
where the tree-house stood.
I signature them in a cloudy memory
of this foliaged theater
of remaining trees and backyard scrub.

Later, I will lift myself up,
go to the side of our house,
look at palm prints you left
next to my baby palm
the signature "D" for daddy
and "BB" for baby boy.

Soon the rain water, two minutes worth,
fills your print
and I keep bailing it out.
How remarkably it fits so well
my hand in yours.

He reads, fixated on
the book, the words
engross him
He does not see me
trip
and fall
like a giant tree
or a crashing jet
pilot, intoxicated
Trap him into
passing eye contact
He tries to smile
but, it comes out wrong
twisted, contorted
Yet, it warms
like a
local
anesthetic

if lint was love

he is sewn into the fabric of
her life like a pocket that
is taken for granted.

he is close to her
provides a warm sanctuary
for her loose change, her fears
car keys and reflections.

his lint for her is thick and blue.
She feels this
digs deep into him
and turning him inside out,
she brushes it aside.

Temptation To Tame Taurus

a big, brashy, bully bull
branded
and confined
torpid, stupidity
cowpoke's property
a misdemeanor, bellyander creature
human being
bull being
let's eat the bull
and see
what we can see

little girls
pour their hearts out
into little notes
in red envelopes
and leave them
on the fence post.
Mr. Bull
bully, brawny, brazen bull
kicks the post,
knocks down
their marks of love
tramples them
in heaving fits
and snorts...

Little Lobelias

We come up amid the pumpkin vines,
and among the daisies.
Even between the cracks in the patio.
Although they come after us
with hoe and rake and
sometimes with a can of gasoline
when they're fed up.

We are tiny.
Some say that we are so sweet.
We don't take up too much room,
or push the mulberry tree out of the way.
But our deep color
clashes with the coral roses,
so we can't stay.
They pull us up by our roots.

We ruin the perfect symmetry
of the marigolds.
Make the vegetables uncomfortable
and often interrupt
the smooth green mantle of grass.
Yet we won't last a day
in a little blue vase on the window sill.



Silhoutte

Fernando Nicholls

The Goddesses

Raising their pocket-mirrors
to the skies,
and steadying their careful selves,
they cake
more make-up
up onto their skins of plastic.

Hiding my sidelong glance,
I twitch
my callused fingers near my cup
and let each
nervous gulp
of coffee
sing my throat.

If I move wrong
they might kill me.

And I smile
queasily,
dumbly,
as they emanate
from their thrones,
raising eyebrows
of indifference
to the ups and downs
of my shaking voice.

Mexico

An American boy leaps lightly
into foamy pools
of cool salty bubbles
splattering on the shore

I crouch in the sand next to Manuel
drowning sorrows
with cans of Tecate—no lime
only the question why—
why take our hope from us, he says
this man was good
like your Kennedy, he says
you know what I mean?
yeah, I say, glancing north

towards a peddler walking
this same strip of sand
the infant carried carelessly from her back
cries out into the haze of overcast

The American boy in the ocean
looks like a disco dancer now
frail arms
flailing from his sides
as he laughs and waves to his father
further up the beach

The Meadow

Bill Tilly puts his arm around Doris Haberkamp as they walk up Mad Woman Meadow, and his hand is resting on her hip when they pause at the black bank of Mud Creek. Doris runs her fingers through her hair. "This is my favorite season," she says. "Everything is fresh and new."

"It's the run-off," Bill remarks. "So much water. The creek is full."
"Look," she urges. "just there—"

Across the water a persistent breeze pushes tall grass splashed with wildflowers. Paintbrush, mule-ears, purple lupine, brilliant fireweed. The dark scar of the creek cuts the meadow from the mountain pass at one end to a wooded draw at the other. Along its way to that draw the water slicks the soil on either side, while the sedge grass swishes and dances in that unnerving, reckless way which she finds irresistible.

She won't mention the legend of the meadow but everyone raised in the valley knows the tale: how a mountain woman, no longer young, walked here one moonlit night. *Who will my lover be?* she asked. *Sbb-sbb*, said the creek, the grass. *Where will I find him?* she asked. *Sbb-sbb*. Looking into the water she saw only the moon. Its face deathly white. White as ice. She wept. She tore her hair. In despair she threw herself into the cold current. Winter came. In spring the snowmelt flooded the meadow as it did today. Then nothing was found of the woman in the creekbed or in the fresh grass; she'd disappeared into the mud and grass and water, leaving no trace, not even her name. She had merged with the mud and the water and that was all anyone knew of her.

Bill leads Doris away from the creek. Down beside a vernal pool edged by monkey-flowers they find a small dome of outcrop gleaming in the sun. Like the Sierras shouldering above the meadow, the rock is granite, scored and smoothed by generations of wind, snow, ice, rain.

"Look at this!" Doris urges. "How round it is!"

"Like the moon," Bill says.

Doris searches the stone for a face like the man in the moon. His winter face, she'd called it as a child. She has often been awake during the night and she's used to seeing the moon, in all its phases, in the deep sky. Studying the stone, she twists a coil of her hair as she did when she was a little girl. No need to do that to your hair, Dory,

she scolds herself. Dory. Her father's pet name for her.

"Did you see the moon last night?" asks Bill.

"Oh yes." It was shining on her pillow. But is that what woke her? No. It was her mother's cry. Suddenly awake, she'd stared at the clock beside her bed. 4:00 a.m. She heard her father's footsteps. Heard the bottle strike the kitchen table. Heard her mother sobbing. An hour later she was still awake when a glass shattered in the sink. Then, before dawn, she fell into a fitful sleep.

Bill and Doris walk across the meadow. He wants to see her again tomorrow. Saturday. A baseball game in the city? He'll drive them to San Francisco. In his pickup. "Yes, I'd like that," Doris says. "I'd truly enjoy a trip like that." She's surprised to realize that she means it. How often we do that, she considers. We hardly know our desires, our hidden feelings, until the words leap out. So much is hidden from our own sight. In each of us. Which is why it takes the tenderness of someone else, coming close to us, to draw us out. If we will but let someone approach us. Then she remembers it was her father who told her this.

They'll drive back to the valley tomorrow night, Bill explains.

"Yes," Doris says. "With the moon almost full it will be lovely."

She wants to invite him to dinner with her parents Sunday night. Is that too much? Is that rushing him, too soon? She hesitates, wondering. Is she asking too much? Doris knows she's too often stifled by fear. Of what? Nothing. Surely that's the point. Here she is, twenty-nine, and shaking like a schoolgirl because a man has asked her to see a baseball game with him. It's nothing but her foolish fear. She might as well be an infant afraid of the dark. Isn't that what wakes her, really, in the middle of the night? Wakes her and holds her down, lying in her bed with her face turned away to the window, the panes washed by the moon, the thin curtains filtering a cool and distant light. And the smell of her fear is a heavy pungent scent like a man's breath upon her face. No, she tells herself, No, no, no. She isn't asking too much. But if she hesitates she's afraid she'll be too late. Then the words are out. She's surprised to hear how simple they sound. "Will you come to dinner Sunday night? Mother will cook a roast."

"Sure," Bill says. "I'll be happy to."

So that's all there is to it. Why did she worry so? You're such a ninny, Dory. She breathes deeply, settling her nerves. Take a deep breath, her mother would say. For your nerves. And she does. Yes, it helps. But she's watching Bill, and she notices his smile has vanished and he's staring at her gravely.

"What is it?" she whispers.

"Should I wear a suit?"

Doris is so surprised and relieved she almost laughs in his face. Is that what worried him so? Then he wasn't judging her, evaluating her, when he frowned like that; the poor dear simply wanted to make a good impression. And he's still waiting for her answer.

"Yes, they'll appreciate that," she says. "They're particular."

"I expect so," he says, smiling, and she realizes that he means it as a compliment to her. And to her parents. Not many men, she thinks, would be so kind. So generous.

Doris rakes her hand through her hair, then she wishes that she hadn't. She clasps her hands at her waist. But his warm smile and friendly manner make her forget her fears and she becomes effusive: "We'll eat early," she says. Her father, she thinks, is doing better. These matters take time, her mother has assured her. Family matters always do. The point is that he's finally making an effort. He's trying. "Daddy doesn't drink that much before dinner," Doris says, amazed to hear the words emerge in her own voice.

For an instant she allows herself to believe that she only thought she said this. But she looks into Bill's eyes and she knows he heard her. Well. It's true. Her mother says the point is that he's making a genuine effort and you have to respect the man for that.

"Your father—" Bill's voice breaks off. He turns away, looking out across the meadow, the wild grasses waving in the breeze.

Doris coils her hair again and it twitches on her shoulder. It's difficult but she's determined to be truthful about this: "I mean before dark," she says. "He doesn't really drink very much before dark."

Bill nods as if he understands and she hurries on to tell him of her mother's sobbing and her father's visits in the night. Her words escape in urgent gasps. But Bill has stopped nodding as Doris describes the weight of the older man. His breath on her mouth. She pauses only to catch her breath. The stunned look in Bill's eyes is nothing new to her. She has seen it in her mirror every morning.

"I won't look for you tomorrow," she says.

"What?" he snaps. "Oh—yes."

Though Bill is near enough that she might touch his arm she doesn't reach out. She knows he's already gone; he's well across the meadow by now, and the water in its swift relentless way is rushing between them.

new poem about a coin

there's a coin in the tip
of my sock
and i have no idea
how it got there.

it feels like a dime,
which used to be enough
for a phone call
but now is not quite enough.

it's not really bothering me,
it's not chafing me
or cutting me,
it's not hurting me
it's just there
and i'm aware
that it's there.

The only thing keeping me
from unlacing my boot
and pulling off my sock
and removing it
is the fact
that the energy expelled
in removing it
exceeds the amount
of irritation it inflicts.

And so it stays,
rattling around my sock
bobbling around my toes
in and out
in and out
in between

and i find myself
thinking of you.

East 19th Street

In her bed on the floor
she would wrap herself
around me. One arm
Sioux, the other German.
We'd watch the beam
from a helicopter's search
light leap and bend across
her fence. Then she would smooth
my hands while her dog
lay troubled at our feet.
His name exactly matched
her eyes. Blue

For Leonard

I followed his
voice, the enormous
arc of his beckoning
arm, with the curiosity of
an explorer. I
let myself go like
a child falling into deep water.

At the far end
of the breeze-
way he retrieved the leather
gloves he'd left
outside the laundrymat.

For once I'd
let him be
like any man; a goal,
a secret, in the lead
with a woman
in love behind him.

Putting away
my summer
clothes I assign
a pile for thrift
stores. Others for
returning or mending or
throwing away. Finally
on the back of a chair
are two faded work shirts;
one wool and held
at the cuff with a safety
pin, the other of thin
poor quality fabric.

I live alone
but my dead family's
clothing moves on its own
from box to hanger to chair
as if one of those people
will walk in, dress, and then
leave again, to pull
birdegg beans in the truck
patch or drive late at
night, heartbroken, for
another fifth of rye.

Anthems sang
between the slow
spaces of cricket sounds,
the moist warm swoosh
of cars on the highway.

Lips curl to speak
around words of memory
locked inside a sold
house and the old
movements of dead people.

I have no pictures
of them in my room
now, yet I still
feel the weight of
their steps on the landing,

watch the nightlight
glisten on their robes in the dark.
Hear their voices up stairways,
at dusk in the kitchen
or out on the porch.

The Sand Women

Bored, the sand women
weave windy hair into high pale drifts
anchored in sea grass and driftwood,
slide into Sunday frocks,
shoe bare feet in espadrilles
and breeze into town
where they take up residence
in the brick café at the far table
under restless trees chanting their names.

They order tea and petit fours
watch
the partially obscured man
and woman
gaze away from each other
in rattles
of attempted reconciliation
sighs
of unsettled passions.

Whispering, the sand women
exhale damp salt tinged with seaweed
which floats on the tree chants
lands on the woman's arm
just as the man touches her hand
and inhales lost time.

Without a word, the sand women
finish their tea, wander
past the man and the woman
as the wind picks up
and carries them home
on the sun's evening road.

Antlers

My father slips silent
at sixteen
through old growth Sierra forests

his bullet finds the spine
the heart
of the black tail
the white tail

in other days
these were our brothers
skinned out with prayers
received with blessings.

We are forest children
silent speakers
dreamers

I lift my father's hair
with the comb
it flips from the scissors
like a jackrabbit kicking heels

the sharp stiff strands arc
from knuckle measured scissor cuts
like shimmering black water sprays.

My father is the color of
deep copper satin. At 73, the back
of his sun worn neck is as soft
as a child's, his work weary hands
are as smooth as water-washed stones.

Forest poor, he loves the earth.
He turns the soil,
softens it between his fingers,
presses new plants deep
with gloved hands.

In his garage, the antlers
of many brothers point heavenward
row upon row
lining rafters.

My father walked silent
in the forest
until the mill
muffled his hearing
hushed the rifle
stilled the wooded voices.

Now his rifle gleams behind glass
and he walks silent
toe to heel
mornings
filling the kettle
with quiet, patient, fauceted trickles
to boil.

Evenings he
gathers in
the green garden hose

bends silent, patient
over thirsty growing things
offering quiet, liquid blessings.

Written for my father's birthday
May 25, 1993

Linda Bleeding

Suddenly there's this little child
stringy blond hair
eyes puffy when she cries.

I didn't learn an apology in school
or Church or at the Y.M.C.A.
that will stop her.
I didn't own it then
so I can't claim it now
without a proper pick-up number.
And then if I'm more impressed
with the effects pedal on a guitar,
the roar of American motorcycles,
how can I apologize for what terror
only a God could create?

She was not the one anyway.

But I worked with you til the end,
and I couldn't fix you either.
Surrounded by Craftsman socket
wrenches and paint rollers,
I still don't have
enough,
for anyone I love.

I see her wrist so slender now,
the air parts to let her reach, turn off the shower.
—Come out, come out. You've washed the
salt of our earth
far enough away.

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