

JANUS  
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NO. 1000

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## rites of passage

Gary Duffy

Summers are always thirsty, Ted thought as he rode on the high fender of the tractor and tried to shield himself from the engulfing dust. The creekbed down by the lower end of the cornfield always withered and showed its skeleton of rusted hunks of metal, rocks and clumps of dead brown weeds. It was a hard time on the farm as he and his father would plod through the endless fields, trying to get rid of the weeds which robbed the corn of moisture. He would steal glances at his father and watch the sweat bead on his brow. The sun would always blister the back of his neck and hands but never bother the brown skin of his father. "You got your mother's body, not mine," his father would say whenever Ted got sunburned. It would make Ted feel ashamed and he would sulk, which would in turn make his father mad. Ted considered it a good week if his father was friendly to him for two of the days.

Mr. Morris was a gaunt man in his early forties; a farmer all his life. Mrs. Morris was frail and small but beautiful as a hothouse flower. She spent most of her time sewing when the other farm wives were in the fields with their husbands. Ted was conceived, his father publicly admitted, to help with the farm work. But usually his chores were the only things that Mr. Morris would let Ted do. Though Ted was twelve, his father would not let him drive the tractor or do any heavy work. In the winter Ted would gather eggs, milk the cows, feed the hogs, and then go to school. In the summer, he spent his free time down by the creek, exploring

the dry bed for miles beneath the arch of sycamores and cottonwoods. He made believe the fluffs from the cottonwoods were snowflakes come to slake the thirst of the creek. He searched for arrowheads in the sandy and rocky bottom. Usually the only things he would uncover were the sand spiders who would scurry for cover from the sun.

There was a gravel road that went in front of his farm and then wound down the hill toward the creek. An old abandoned bridge arched over a bend in the creek there, where enough water remained in the summer to serve as a swimming hole for the area kids. Ted usually stayed away from it, even though he lived the closest of any. He would often dream of the night when he was six and some high school kids doused the oaken planks with kerosene and set it afire. His father took him down to the creek to watch the blaze. The volunteer fire department had not come until it was too late to do anything but watch the firey planks drop into the creek, making a black, chunky scum on the water. All that remained now was the frame, rusted and even twisted in some places from the intense heat. The county had decided not to rebuild the bridge because of lack of money. Some heavy machinery had bulldozed a low-water crossing up the creek but now that was eroded. The only people who ever went near the place were the kids who had rigged a rope to a large tree.

The schoolhouse was about two miles from Ted's home. It was a small white frame one with a belltower, a relic of fifty years that

would be torn down after consolidation with the school system in town in about two years. Ted had gone to all six grades in that one room. In six years he had had six desks and had moved from the front row to the back row. Mrs. Rand usually called on him to answer questions, because he was the only one of the seven sixth graders, besides Mary Jo McGuire, who ever did their homework. He would answer reluctantly, gazing out of the window most of the time. Sometimes in the winter the heat from the old black wood-burning stove and the smell of twenty kids and Mrs. Rand's perfume made him gag. Mrs. Rand always gave him a minus in attitude, even though he got good grades in his subjects.

The boys his age, Benny, Tim, Larry, and Sam, all sat together in the last row, either carving their names in their desks like they had done for six years, or poking each other and laughing. Mrs. Rand had given up on them four years ago. She would pass out books to them at the beginning of each year and collect the tattered remains at the end of the year. Whenever the kids got rowdy, Mrs. Rand would go into the cloakroom and not come out until everyone got tired of making noise. Usually that was when Benny decided that he had teased her enough. Whatever Benny said was funny to the other three boys his age. And whatever Benny told them to do to Ted, the other three did. Ted had lost three teeth in the schoolyard in six years.

Benny had been cool toward Ted lately, though, and had even talked to him during lunch in the schoolyard during the final weeks of school in early summer. Benny would brag of how much he had helped his father with the spring planting and Ted found himself lying about how much he helped his father. Their conversations were usually brief. Benny would talk loud enough so that the other three boys could hear him across the yard where they

l lounged under a large maple tree. When Benny wasn't telling of the work on the farm, he would relate how much fun the four had had at the swimming hole by the abandoned bridge.

About the middle of the summer when it had been hot and dry for so long that the corn was turning yellow around the roots, Benny walked into the yard of the Morris farm. His heavy brown boots kicked up clouds of dust about his feet as he shuffled up to the door of the house. Ted was the only one at home. His father was fixing a fence on the north end of the farm and his mother was in town buying groceries. Ted peered from the shade of the porch into the sweaty face of Benny.

"Damn, it's hot," Benny said.

"Yeah," Ted mumbled.

"Say listen," Benny said, "Me and the guys are going to camp out down by the old abandoned bridge tomorrow night and we thought you might like to come along."

"Aw, I don't know. I've got some stuff to do around here . . ."

"Bullshit. You ain't got nothin' to do. We got us some wine to drink and we'll spend the afternoon just floating in the creek. It'll be great."

"Well, I don't know," Ted said, and withdrew into the cool shadows. Benny squinted his eyes from the sun.

"You afraid to go for some reason?" Benny said.

"No. I'm not afraid of anything," Ted snapped.

"Good, then we'll come by and get you Friday afternoon. See ya' then." Benny turned and was halfway down the driveway before Ted realized what had happened.

That night at the dinner table, Ted asked his dad if he could go. Mr. Morris readily agreed. Later that night, Ted overheard him tell his mother that "maybe there's some hope for that kid after all. At least he's camping

out like the other kids. But I don't know." Ted spent most of the night lying awake in his bed and thinking about his father and about the camping trip.

Friday morning's chores went quickly and by noon Ted had packed swimming trunks, towels, underwear, and a change of clothes and a blanket in an old carpet bag that he had found in the attic. When Benny, Tim, Larry and Sam appeared at four o'clock, Ted's mother called him. He noticed that the others had small bundles tied up in blankets and thrown over their shoulders. He tried to hide the carpetbag, its flowered designs faded and smelling of must. His mother kissed him on the forehead in front of the others and he blushed.

When the gravel road turned into a dusty path, Benny suggested that they take off their shoes. The warm silky dirt felt soothing as Ted squished it between his toes. At the sight of the trees lining the bank near the bridge, they broke into a run. Ted came in last, panting and sweating heavily. Laughing and yelling, the other boys tossed their bundles under the trees and started stripping. Ted undressed slowly and hid in swimming trunks in the bag when he saw that the others were going to swim naked. They took turns swinging on the large knotted rope all afternoon, pushing each other and laughing. Ted felt exhilarated standing wet and naked by the rope, then swinging out over the dark green water, hovering forever in the air, and then splitting the cool dark water with his white body.

In the late afternoon, they lay back on the sandy bank in the warmth of the sun and drank from a bottle of wine that Benny had brought. The dark, warm liquid stung Ted's throat and warmed his belly with each swallow. They were still naked and Ted would glance at the others, noticing the darkness between their legs that signaled the dawn of manhood.

Ted sat with his legs crossed while the others lay back in the sun.

At sundown the boys got dressed. Larry produced a package of weiners from his bundle and Benny started a fire. They told stories over the fire of sex and girls and drinking and smoking. Ted laughed when the others laughed and told two stories that he had heard his father tell at the feed store once.

As it grew darker and the bridge began to cast long interlocking fingers of shadows across them, Benny piled more wood on the fire and began to tell lewd stories about peeing in the cracks of the girls' outhouse at school and seeing Mary Jo McGuire inside. The others laughed at every word that Benny told. Ted laughed too, but over a heavy lump in his throat. When Benny finished the story, he said "Let's see who can get it off first." He stood up and pulled down his pants and proudly displayed his sex. The others did the same. Ted was the last to stand up and he fumbled with his zipper.

"C'mon, stick it out!" Benny yelled.

"Yeah, let's see it," the others taunted.

Ted slowly shoved down his blue jeans, revealing white shorts with a bulge in the front.

"The son of a bitch has got a hard on already," Benny yelled, pointing at Ted. "C'mon, all the way," Benny said and busied himself with his task, grunting and yelling at the others.

Ted closed his eyes and touched himself. He shivered, then started to masturbate furiously, bringing pain with every stroke. Soon, Benny jerked violently and yelled, "I'm first." The others yelled their number as they too ejaculated. Ted jerked twice and quickly pulled up his pants.

"Hey, he didn't get nothin'," Larry said.

"I watched him and he didn't get nothin'." The three looked at Ted, then turned to Benny,

who smiled at Ted. Benny slowly pulled up his pants, followed by the others, and then said "Well, maybe he's still too young. And that ain't his fault. There's other ways of testin' whether you're a man or not."

Ted stuck his hands in his pockets and stared at the ground, drawing an arc in the sand with his right foot.

"I guess one way would be to find out if he can cross the bridge by himself," Benny said as he smiled and cocked his head to one side.

Ted's stomach tightened and twisted. He saw the flames from that night years ago. He saw the dead carcass of the bridge stretching over the dark water and clinging to the banks, its girders no thicker than a spider's web.

"Of course, if you're scared . . ."

Benny's voice trailed off.

"I'll do it," Ted told the sand beneath him.

The bridge stretched huge and ominous in the moonlight as the five dark figures clambered up the concrete abutment. Ted looked at the hollow tunnel with only a few dark lines arching over to separate it from the night. A thumbnail moon was mirrored in the water below. To get across, Ted would have to walk on the narrow and rusted I-beam that had formed a support for the floor. Tie rods formed three x's on each side and a heavy rod angled up from the bottom of each abutment to the center of the span, forming a supporting arch underneath.

Ted thought that he could make his way across by holding on to the tie rods. But the center of each x was above his head. In three places he would have to walk unaided.

The tie rod was still warm from the day's sun when Ted grabbed it. He felt the rust grit against his sweaty hand and he grabbed tighter. He looked up to the girders above,

drawing black triangles and squares on the starlit sky. Then he stared at the reflection of the moon and watched as bugs crashed onto it, distorting it with tiny ripples.

"C'mon. Get goin'." Benny's voice startled him and he jerked, grabbing the rod tighter.

He slid his left foot forward. The rust crunched and slid off, whispering as it touched the water below. Ted inched further, holding the rod tight and looking straight ahead. The rod grew higher and higher until his ribs ached when he strained to reach it. He hesitated when he could only reach it with his fingertips.

"Don't stop now. Keep goin'," Benny yelled. His voice seemed miles away as it echoed off the far bank and was lost in the blackness.

Ted bit his lower lip until he could feel warm blood oozing down his chin. Then he jerked his hands down to his side like a soldier stiff at attention. Slowly he arched his arms out like he had seen a tightrope walker do in the circus. For balance, he thought. He stood motionless with his arms out. No teasing from behind now. He began to move forward slowly, first the right foot, then the left. No sound but the crickets and the frogs. His armpits began to ache with the strain. He thought of the hawks he had seen soaring over his farm. The next tie rod was almost in sight. His heart pounded against the inside of his chest. Suddenly a fish splashed in the water below. The frogs bellowed in fear. Ted jerked. He stretched his arms trying to regain his balance. His right arm caught the I-beam as he fell. He heard himself scream. When the others saw his head hit the heavy rod beneath and his limp body splash into the water, they turned and ran.

... IN SOFT PARENTHESIS



## ON ELIOT'S "HYSTERIA"

D. E. Vargas

“. . . Rising for each newborn and then  
Sinking for each to dust again.”  
(Herman Hesse, "Immortal", *Steppenwolf*)

The flames of the seasons burn,  
And the inevitable claws of the Falcon tears  
your heart from your chest,  
And blood runs from the eyes of love,  
And fingers rip the meat from anguished faces,  
And scavengers eat away the rotting flesh,  
And maggots crawl through pores as sweat.

I decided if the undulating of the young girls hips was continued, some of the sensuousness of our love-making might be gathered in mind, and I continued with careful anticipation to The End.

But as she smiled I was aware of the sweet scent of peach juice, until her smile was only the accidental squirting of joy. I was squeezed by short grasps, clutched at each bite, lost finally in the gurgling depths of her abdomen, swallowed by the mouth of bitterness.

An elderly woman with a syphilitic nose  
was hurriedly pulling weeds from her rose bed,  
saying:

“If those weeds wish to grow in my neighbors garden,  
if those weeds wish to grow in my neighbors garden. . .”

# LOVE POEM

Y. Stebbing

My lady,

Moving in uncertain day disgraces  
With one dark hand  
The fancied glory of the  
Land and with one brief laugh  
Outshines the smiles of lesser  
Dead ladies of a more fragile art.

This woman

Breathes in reams of doom and brings  
(What seems to come of love.)  
I smell the sex in every room and  
Move with cautious step across first  
This delicate prairie; next this  
Shocking fairy forest curse of love.

But I forget!

My lady,

Reading in her book of charms sees  
With sleeping eyes the wordless wonder  
Of her ways; protects me from her harms  
With gentle talk that follows love and  
Soothes my memories of the  
Aging journeys in her body.

This woman tracks my history,  
Stalks my demon with her nightly world and

My lady looks too good in love,  
Turns my nightmare to a dream of love,  
And I am broken to the path of love,

Bent to sleep this way forever.

# RARE LESSON

D.C. Weiser

She is twenty years old and wears a gold cross to protect herself from vampires and typewriters. Her hair, a raven's nest combed straight, frames a face composed of circles. Some of the circles have roses in them. The face is, at first glance, quite transparent. One might say, expressionless: there is that temptation. Now the eyes move, this way. A subtle yet total shift in awareness takes place and, it is known (there may be a distinct feeling that the picture will never be the same). Fingertips stray to the cross just below her neck or quiver attentively at her lips, as though she whispered secrets to them. An unsophisticated revelation of teeth shows the hidden, 8-year-old child (smiles of roller-skates). Though, just now, this is a sombre portrait and dignified. It may provoke the image of a black cat skirting the narrow road you want to cross. Lots of luck. But gone again! it never stays the same. There is, nonetheless, a lesson to be learned here. Illusions are some of her favorite things. As when birds, perceived in flight, change their instinctual course and drop to visit her window-sill. She imagines she speaks to them. Occasionally, a lucid crow with a raspy voice will tell her of far-away events. Very rational birds, these crows. But ravens and doves have neither perched on her shoulder nor accepted pearls from her proffered hand. And tears that rail against a window are unknown. In the window is the reflection of a burning candle. There is sufficient light. But on the other side of the pane, from the outside, save for the occasional glint and sparkle of the tiny flame, all appears dark. The lesson is simple. It is that in rare but certain moments, holding a loved head to her breast, she does not appear but wears her heart on her face. Despite tears, despite tragedy, despite the futility of understanding. It is that, naked before the pitiful darkness of a burning bit of wax, her face becomes the seat of her love and she is beautiful. For she tilts her head, reclining slightly against a blind window. Could you freeze motion, you might want to keep this forever in a snapshot. Love in candle-light and unscathed is the rare lesson that you see.

# THE TENTS GO UP VOLUPTUOUS

D.C. Weiser

The tents go up voluptuous!

Our stakes bang to the ground  
A girl sits down, her canvass-dress blooming!  
In the cradle of a coffeecup her eyes  
place bets and, shuffling, drop a card  
Hard earth! Bitter world! Concrete bears us:  
Already the magic begins to trick us  
(My eyes can't quite make out their voices,  
Your earS can't sEE to hear . .  
Lost they wander from my ears to  
your eyes, from carnival to zoo,  
seeking the Circus--

Inexorably they grind the footwheel  
Path through a SAWdust ocean,  
The Sahara of Thrills & Charges,  
And hope for transport, in enchanted  
rapture,  
To captivating Arcadia, to an  
Enchanting, ellysian lap of luxury  
Which they never--they can never find:  
Oh their Halcyon days went up in a  
bang!  
Noisy magic tricks and lost kicks are  
Sought for comfort, for peace of mind--

Seeking the Circus and settling for the  
sideshow).

And drop a card, spinning  
Webs and rippling in my ear-wells,  
Spells that enchant and transform  
With frogSIEEp or witchcOLD SHOWerS  
! Who you are I am a little  
Mirror or a sunny thread of light you walk  
(You walk a  
grassy path with  
your 1st Prize steed.  
DzE-spk-tywho? DZzyspeekTYOO?),  
Talk to us, taking my attention from you;  
Only they are  
talking and your shadows

Recede,

recede from my touch (are gone!)  
And the clock strikes dark.

Circuses pass (unseen, unfelt) in the winning  
night  
Their shadows seem to nod  
But memory fades with dusk and shades  
Remain, unspeakable and dumb:  
Our canvass-flapping voices chill and  
melt and blow the dust to cover up the paths  
we make  
And fill the hearts of innocents with joy  
and magic fools our senses  
All perception is magic  
You are magical in my eyes--

Lies do not matter--or energy!  
Hustling crawls, kinetic bustling  
Crowds mill and fill the open  
Spaces--elbows jangling

(jailor-keys confine  
Us, consigned to this  
Destiny, that fate)--with futility

in need of hope, the candle that they  
may find the excitement we search for.  
For the meaning of the Circus is  
The Magic that it spreads  
Under that billowing Big Top of mine  
And you may enter through the doorway  
of their eyes, the entrance of the ears.  
Hearing and SEEing all thiS AneW,  
like freshly-poured coffee once again  
Or rain, you may come to understand  
The beauty of the Circus, the sadness  
of the Carnival and Zoo,  
The graphic meaning of my new-born  
words,  
like Singing buttErfliES and winged dEER  
to lead you to the doorstep of my vision.

# MARIE! YOUR CHEEKS ARE JUST

Mark Milburn

Marie! your cheeks are just  
love bumps right above your liquid grin  
So smile for me  
And Glow,  
Your'e a human love-lamp I know  
And so, your face is warm  
to touch  
and brush  
and kiss,  
Oh! kiss  
the secrets that we give in slips  
mouth to mouth,  
with tounes and tips,  
will be kept in lips  
(like a message in soft parentheses.)

# THE QUESTION

Jim Yarbrough

Laughing woman.  
Siren conjur-talker,  
Sun-tressed, fine-thighed  
Leaf-walker, love-toucher,  
Man kisser,  
Nude-shouldered Circe  
Tricked my later maybe, my  
Not now, my then when:  
Frost-fire magic, but how much  
Pain again?

## SNOW

Bob Ahsens

How is it you should come to me with snow?  
Our time had little snow, or sleet, or wind.  
Or any of the winter's parts, just spring.

I can't compare these steely skys,  
To parts of you, not thoughts or eyes,  
Nor cold and wet to smile or heart.

Rather what grows within this sphere of thought,  
Is something lost to hand or eye, or even mind,  
A quiet strength, glances caught, a silent  
closeness of the heart.

## MILES

Bob Ahsens

Linear features, measured feet, meters, miles;  
Numbers on a map, simple as a dinner flight  
Six thousand ocean miles, as I recall,  
Equals seven suspended hours.

Mountains named for Pike, Long, McKinley;  
Altitude in feet, wrinkles in stone,  
The Barriers that lie between.  
Breached by men and cement lines.

It's the sweep of hands, minutes, hours, days,  
The too long highways, tolerable airways,  
The alien places between, critical time,  
Preventing my hand from touching yours.



I WANT TO ILLUMINATE THE WORLD

# TERMINAL TOWER BUS STATION: CLEVELAND OHIO

Larry Stebbing

Waiting and hating  
the tick-tock; tick-tock  
heartbeat of the growing clock  
tower, we old men fail to notice  
the tower, we see only the clock and we

Do not notice how the clock  
sits atop a curving, curious grey-  
stone tower with little windows  
and a sign which flashes, "Terminal Tower"

We are constantly eating out of  
packages and throwing away the  
wrapping or taking pictures with our  
polaroid instamatics and throwing away everything

That doesn't have an imitation of our  
brainwashed babies and ugly wives  
on it because, probably, it is worthless  
and not of great value like that out of focus

Picture? Someday we will all be at  
Niagra or together in Southern California  
waiting for our cameras to  
tell us that our last great composition is

Ready and the Grand Tour Bus will leave w/o  
us and we will all have to  
become residents of Niagra or S. Cal.

Then we will be unhappy and keep saying,  
"This is no home at all."

## FREEDOM

Bob Ahsens

Friend, tell me why I should be,  
Rendered less than clouds upon the breeze,  
Each sailing the winds charted course,  
Everyone with more direction than I,  
Driven, as fate would have it, to amble,  
Open, searching, reaching for a cause  
My heart can grasp, unleashed from freedom's infinite prison.

# I WANT TO ILLUMINATE THE WORLD

D.C. Weiser

I want to illuminate the world  
With a fire of truth, to turn loose  
A hundred million firefly words  
That will show people that they need  
Not suffer--that they are free;  
I want to purge the hundred hunger-ridden,  
    cigarette-stained souls (that you stub out with a drink)  
Of your personality with a kiss  
Like a madpoetbeesting and  
I want to make you remember  
(To shove you back over the stairwell  
Of experience) what you forgot,  
To stare you in the face like  
A single eye of conscience (even  
As I have been watched--**accused!**--  
By the single, electric eye of  
humanity) and remember with you  
All those scenes of horror which  
You perpetrated, blindly, cotton-eared,  
In the privacy of your own home;  
I want to force your face into  
The sunless recesses of  
Your TV picture, into the world  
That you have rejected, forgotten,  
Neglected, where you will see the  
Wailing faces of hunger that  
Have driven me to madness  
All these eternal moments and which  
Haunt me even now. Those faces,  
Those lives, those pictures are the  
Scenes of your shame--they are  
What you must face between  
Programs. I want to liberate  
You from your packaged ignorance,  
Your numbed faculties,  
Your purgatory of trite perceptions  
But in trying I become, myself,  
A trite jingle, an airy puff  
Of fantasy, a smooth, smiling  
Mirrorimage of your sleepy  
Narcissism and amnesia, a colorful  
Happy fading television commercial . . .

DECEMBER 15, 1971

Jay Hodge

The weekly news came last Wednesday  
The banal, and the color pictures I was anticipating  
But where is this Dacca with its precious plasma dissipating?

The little maps show me where the destruction is  
Where the tanks, the civilians, and the causes mesh,  
And I recall hearing of George Harrison's recital and ode---BenglaDesh.

But I felt innocent before---a by-stander before;  
And pondering immunity, in the distant gallery I remain  
Fleetinglly obsessed with who's right, what's right, who's sane.

## ASSIMILATE, SUFFOCATE, TWO, THREE, FOUR

Jay Hodge

He contemplated his role, his niche, his slot, his bier that he was supposed to have confirmed by now (he surely should have advanced reservations by now) in the removed society that was his. It was his because it was. Into it he had been born---it had existed before his conception---into it he was supposed to assimilate.

He thought about, how, at first, there had been a huge cave into which all society was thrust. The numerous members of the group had strived admirably to create a cave where all could live as they wished, with each other in spite of each other. Some who aspired to serve others became stalagmites, growing upward until in contact with the ceiling of the cave, and then hardening to reinforce the roof. They provided protection to the others by affording a safe, secure ceiling, and they were useful. Others became stalagmites for many various reasons; they wanted to become business concerns and offer their services and products to everyone else---of course, in

so doing, those involved helped themselves grow. There were some stalagmites who had become such for mysterious reasons. People didn't understand how or why this happened, but it did, and these stalagmites hardened like all of the rest, and the roof was, indeed, secure. The pillars of the cave increased in their numbers, and they all increased in size. As the girth of each increased, the distance between them decreased, until there was less and less light in between the pillars. The stalagmites haggled over the amount of light necessary for the existence of the society over which they towered. But as they debated, their growth continued. The cave was fast becoming not a cave at all, but rather, a filled hole.

A filled hole. A FILLED HOLE. He wasn't up against a wall, he was up against a filled hole. A hole that he had been born into--- and one that he was not supposed to go into and exist in a speck of light.

# GETTING IT MADE

Larry Norton

It's been hot and dusty for several weeks now, the last rain was over three weeks ago, and that was barely a sprinkle. The grass is starting to turn brown. Everything seems to slow down in the heat, grasshoppers don't jump so high, birds don't fly as often, the cattle hide from the sun under shade trees, even people move slower.

Everyday it's getting hotter inside the office, sweat keeps pouring down my face, streaming in rivulets down my neck and chest. I wish the office was air conditioned instead of this fan blowing hot air around. Oh well, the day will be over in an hour and then I'll be back on the ranch where at least there's a breeze.

I'd only been out of law school two years now. I'd been taken on as a junior partner in Osborne, Owens, and Holloway, a big law firm in Oklahoma City. The was also where I'd met and wooed Sue, my wife. To everyone but me things were working out fine, just fine, as Ned used to say, all hunky dory, yea, good old Ned, I can hear him now.

"Jake, you're doing all hunky dory, you've got it made, man, a great job (he had the same position I held), and a good wife, nice tits on that girl, huh, I wish I had it so lucky."

"Yea, I guess so, Ned"

"Guess so, what do you mean, guess so, you're on easy street, man, I wish I had old man Owens by the nuts the way you do."

"Ned, you know what."

"What's that, Jake."

"You're an asshole."

"You don't need to get so nasty, man, I was only trying to cheer you up, you look like you could use a little."

"Yea, look, I'm sorry, Ned. I've just been a little depressed lately, you know what I mean."

"Yea, sure, I understand, man. Listen,

how about a round of golf after work, it'll bring back the old law school days, you know, kind of get things off your mind."

"I'd really like to Ned, but I've got to prepare statements for that Dryden case, Owens wants them by tomorrow morning, I'll probably be here till late."

"Yea, sure Jake, next week sometime, maybe,"

"You bet, Ned, next week."

This was when I'd been working in the city for a year. Things kept getting to me. It wasn't so much the job, that was easy, demanding, but interesting. It was more a sense of vacuousness. I guess what I had was a classic case of junior executive blues, a feeling of frustration, boredom, and nausea all rolled up together. My small town upbringing just wasn't agreeing with life in the city, the romantic in me was rebelling against the spiritual wasteland of urban life. This all sounds nice and simple looking back, but it was pretty damn confusing while I was there. Every day I'd work until eight or nine, then go home and get smashed, barely able to stumble upstairs and fall in bed with Sue.

Oh, yes, there were breaks in the routine. There were parties every weekend, parties at the Owens', parties at the Osborne's, parties at the Holloway's, and parties at the friends of the Owens', Osborne's, and Holloway's. Lots of 'chatty' women, and 'distinguished' men, frankly, the parties were a damned bore, but an up and coming young junior partner didn't miss a senior partner's party. At times I almost convinced myself I was having fun, for the sake of Sue, who was, more than anyone else.

One after the other I ran the whole gauntlet of escapes and diversions, golf, tennis, the athletic club, bowling, movies, literature, riding, I even considered taking on a mistress.

Nothing seemed to help, I finally talked to my old man about it.

"Dad, I can't understand what makes me feel this way, what makes you keep on going."

"Well, son, I'll tell you something I guess I should have a long time ago. After the war I came back, and, like most people my age then, and now I guess, wanted to make it rich, to be somebody, to make my mark in this world. Your grandfather took me in his business, and, I guess I could've stayed on with him and taken it over when he retired, but I didn't like it, I missed the feeling I had growing up on the farm, the same kind of feeling I've got here now. Maybe it's some kind of weakness, I don't know, but when I got the chance to open my own place here, I took it. I haven't told you this before because I didn't want to discourage you from realizing your own dreams, and, I guess, because I didn't want you to think your old man was a failure. Sure, we've had a pretty good life here, but all the big money's in the city, not small towns like Miami. I really don't know what to tell you, I guess you're kind of stuck where you are now and you'll just have to stick it out and make the best of it."

Things kept getting worse, I was drinking more and oftener, my work was even beginning to slip. It's a terrible thing to say, but my grandfather's death six months ago was a God-send.

Grandfather was a singular old fellow, exceptional, a rare and dying breed. Everything he had made was on his own and with hard work, the old Horatio Alger story. But for all his success he'd never lost touch with the common man, or what the common life was all about. He'd lived in the city over half his life, but his heart was still in the country.

The one thing that bothered him most was how he was going to get rid of all his money when he died. He knew enough about life to know that his children and grandchildren were going to scheme and connive all they could to get all they could once he was gone. So right off the bat he set up a

trust fund for his wife, and divided the rest of his money equally between his children and grandchildren. And his ranch, the ranch I'm living on now he willed to anyone in the family who would live there for ten years, I guess he figured if you stayed ten, you really liked it, and not just the money it made. The only stipulation he made about the ranch besides the ten year residency requirement was that the family who had lived on it and managed it for the last thirty years be allowed to stay. With his wisdom, grandfather knew that although we'd all been going to the ranch ever since we were old enough to ride, none of us knew the first thing about actually operating a five-thousand acre ranch, and we'd need lots of help to get started.

So, the ranch proved to be my ticket out of the city. Everyone else in the family either didn't want it, or weren't able to move and live there. I knew that Sue was hesitant to move, she had been raised in the city, and naturally would miss it, but she was willing to go along with me, she loved me that much at least. The money I inherited gave me enough to set up a small law office in Hartshorne, a small town about twenty miles from the ranch, that's where I am now, finishing up a little work and waiting for time to go home. Finally I decided that the work could wait and I headed for the ranchouse. As I walked in the door I could smell the good food cooking on the stove.

"Hi there, cute thing, what's for supper."

"Corned beef and cabbage, It'll be ready in about ten or fifteen minutes."

I went in the living room and turned on the TV to watch the evening news until supper was ready. Just as a new high temperature record was being set dinner was ready, and we both sat down to eat.

"How'd it go today, I missed you."

"Fine, to my distinguished list of clients I added Mr. Buckshire Anderson."

"I don't think I've heard of him yet."

"That's understandable, he's the town drunk, a three-quarter blood choctaw. The court appointed me to his case, some fella up in McAlister claims he saw him taking

a TV out his window."

"I suppose you'll invite him to dinner, like the others."

"Not till tomorrow, the court didn't meet today, judge was sick so bail couldn't be set, oh, that reminds me, you'd better make up the bed in the south room, he'll be staying with us for a while."

"With us."

"Yea, when the police picked him up his landlady threw him out, and he doesn't have any money to get another place to stay."

"A drunk, and a thief, really Jake, in our home."

"Now don't worry, He's got a good alibi, and you can lock the liquor up, he's really a harmless old fella. He's been around here all his life, you should be able to learn a lot from him."

"Just what I need, a course in local history taught by a drunk Indian."

"There's really nothing to worry about, everything will work out all right, he's a pretty amazing guy."

"How long is this kind of thing going to last."

"What kind of thing."

"You know what I'm talking about, in six months you've defended three drunks, drawn up four wills and had one divorce case. You're away more than you ever were in the city. For six months I've seen nothing but squint-eyed men and women, dirt, and cowshit. I don't want complete strangers coming in my home and telling me all about the 'winter back in '36' or some other damn story. I'm sick and tired and disgusted by these stupid, ignorant people and their stupid, ignorant ways, I want to go back where you don't have to drive twenty miles on dirt roads to get a loaf of bread and where you can walk five feet without being up to your ears in cowshit."

"Now just settle down a minute, Sue."

"Settle down my ass."

"Please, listen to me just a minute, I love you, I want you to be happy, that's why I thought we moved away from the city."

"That's why you moved away from the

city."

"Ok, look admittedly, things haven't gone very well so far, but they'll get better, it takes time out here, these people have been here all their lives, remember, we're still strangers. You just can't come in and buy the place with a mastercharge card, you've got to prove yourself, and that takes time. We knew it'd be hard, we've just got to stick it out for a while."

"That's what you said the first week after we moved, and the second, and the third, and you're still saying it. When are you going to see that we just don't belong here, we're just not like these people, we belong back in the city."

"Please, Sue, please believe me, it takes time, you're expecting too much too fast, you'll get used to this way of life, just give it some time."

"I want to believe you, but I can't, I can't stand it anymore, I want to go back, I want to leave."

"You know I love you, Sue. Come here."

"No, we've been through all this before, first you'll kiss me, then you'll talk, and then we'll make love, and I'll end up thinking you're right and loving you and staying until I'm an old and withered squint eyed woman listening in on all the valley's phone calls and watching TV till I'm blind, no, either we're going back, or I'll go alone."

"Well, I love you, Sue, but if that's the way you feel, go ahead."

Sue stopped and looked at me, the room was quiet, a mouse scurried around above the ceiling, she looked at me with love and hate, for a long time she stared. The earth opened and closed, the mountains and pastures were raging with fire, demons danced in the sky. She slowly rose and went into the bedroom, returning in a few minutes with her bags. Her face was drawn, she looked older. I took her bags and carried them to the car, placing them in the trunk. She started to turn, but instead opened the car door and slid underneath the wheel. The door shut solidly, not loudly as though she had slammed it, but firmly. At this point time became confused

for me, the future and the past were indistinguishable from the present. The ranchhouse old and dilapidated, yet new and freshly painted at the same time.

I suddenly noticed the car pulling away, moving silently south down the hill, then east at the crossroads to a T where she headed north, around the hill and down into the valley and up over the mountain, disappearing in the blackjacks and scruboaks. I could still see the dust hovering above the road where her car had passed, it had billowed

skyward, and was now scattering in the air over the valley.

I turned and walked to the ranchhouse, and sat on the back porch facing northwest. The sun was setting, the sky glowed all purple and orange and blue. Blue haze and smoke colored the mountains. A cool evening breeze was beginning to blow across the hill as the sun set, bathing the sky in red as it disappeared behind the mountains. I rose, stepped inside the door, and sat down to finish my supper.



# STUPIDITY

Bob Ahsens

Take what you can,  
Pick at details, expound generalities;  
Play your game, you've got it together,  
Keep it up, facades can fool everyone, even you.

Look around my friend, open your eyes,  
If you can see, your wake is marked with hurts,  
Keep on truckin', just whistle and smile,  
Life's in your pocket, despite the holes.

What can I say to you, damn your excuses,  
Duck, beat the reeper, don't get caught, lie,  
You'll get yours, even foolish men grow up,  
Graduation to the dangerous, false conviction the diploma.

# TO MY COUNTRY

Bob Ahsens

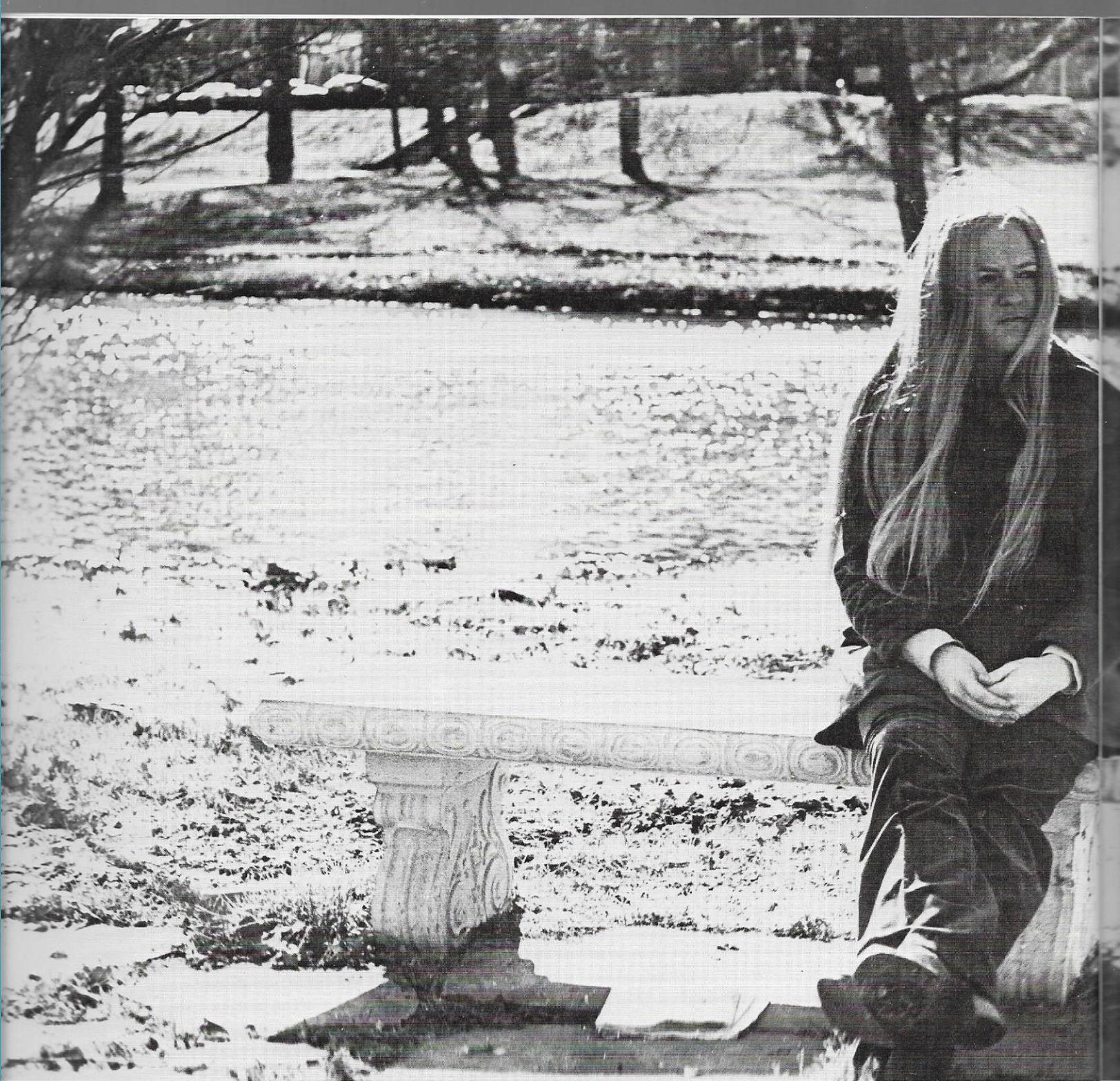
Along this stream in the forest's heart.  
My father first acquainted us.  
T'was strange to hear a man talk so,  
Of flags and courage and men who dare,  
Where I saw skys that muffed my hair,  
And rocks to carry home that night.

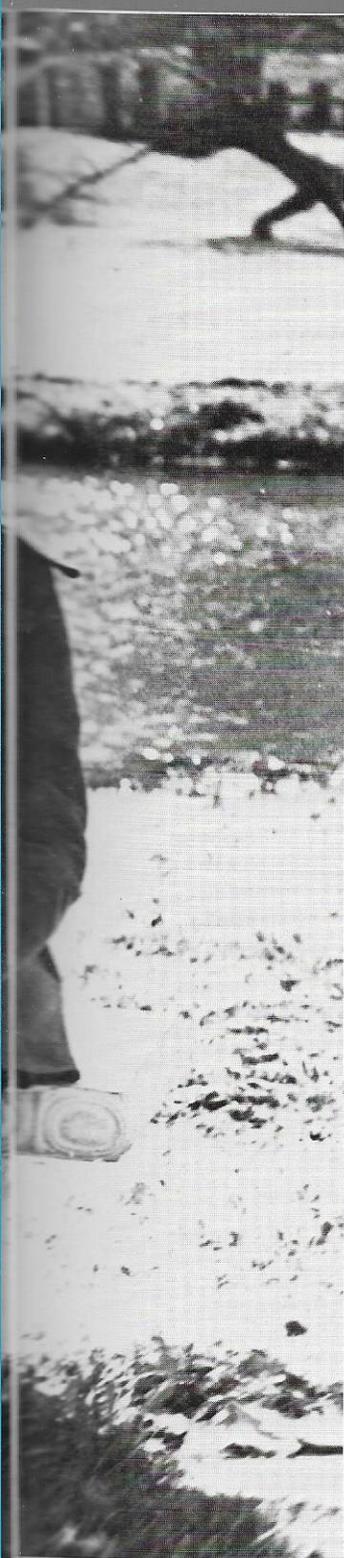
He used large words like liberty,  
Then smiled to say it just meant free,  
And that, of course, was enough for me,  
For freedom's good, and should, and would  
Always win, so I'd been taught,  
And who would argue with such a thought.

But since I've grown, learned and seen,  
How men have argued round that word,  
That men have died, and killed, for such a thing,  
They cannot see, or hear, or always feel,  
A cynic's thought has often stalked this mind,  
That can't be closed to evils done in freedom's name.

And so I've walked on foreign soil,  
To see for what it is they toil there,  
And questioned leaders about their aims,  
To find thoughts, and fears, and dreams,  
Leading me home, to my nations plains,  
To seek again that forest's heart.

So here again I've come to talk, and listen  
Now, since lately I've become a man,  
To feel the wind that muffed my hair,  
To understand the price is seldom fair,  
To stand upright, and even fight, if mine be a gun,  
For after all, I'm my father's son.





SEPT. 16 1971

Mark Milburn

I can't allow these clouds  
to forever surround me,  
when, On the first day of Autumn  
with a cold, hard shower  
Summer stops breathing for me . . . . .  
(all the flowers have been slain  
by the stainless drops of rain)  
and my warm spin with hot wine  
ends on cold rest-room tiles.  
The dirty rain came last night  
in fat tanks of clouds  
and burst black and loud  
stuff not fit for the baptism  
of cattle.

## THE RAT'S ART

Larry Stebbing

I begin to see small things that are nothing:  
The space between two fingers of the same hand;  
The lighted places arranged by shadows of a tree; and  
Breezes bodied by the limbs; or  
The light and wind that sex the clouds alive.  
I forget all I know and the ground begins to speak.

I become too conscious of the things in my pocket  
Or how my feet are placed beneath the table.

I sometimes think I ventured too far  
    like a rat  
That's suddenly in the center of a room;  
    the broom sweeps;  
The Wall; the end of space;  
And the rat traces a fine pattern  
    on the board  
In blood: the end of a rat is the first of a rat's art.

# THE DANCE WAS BETTER

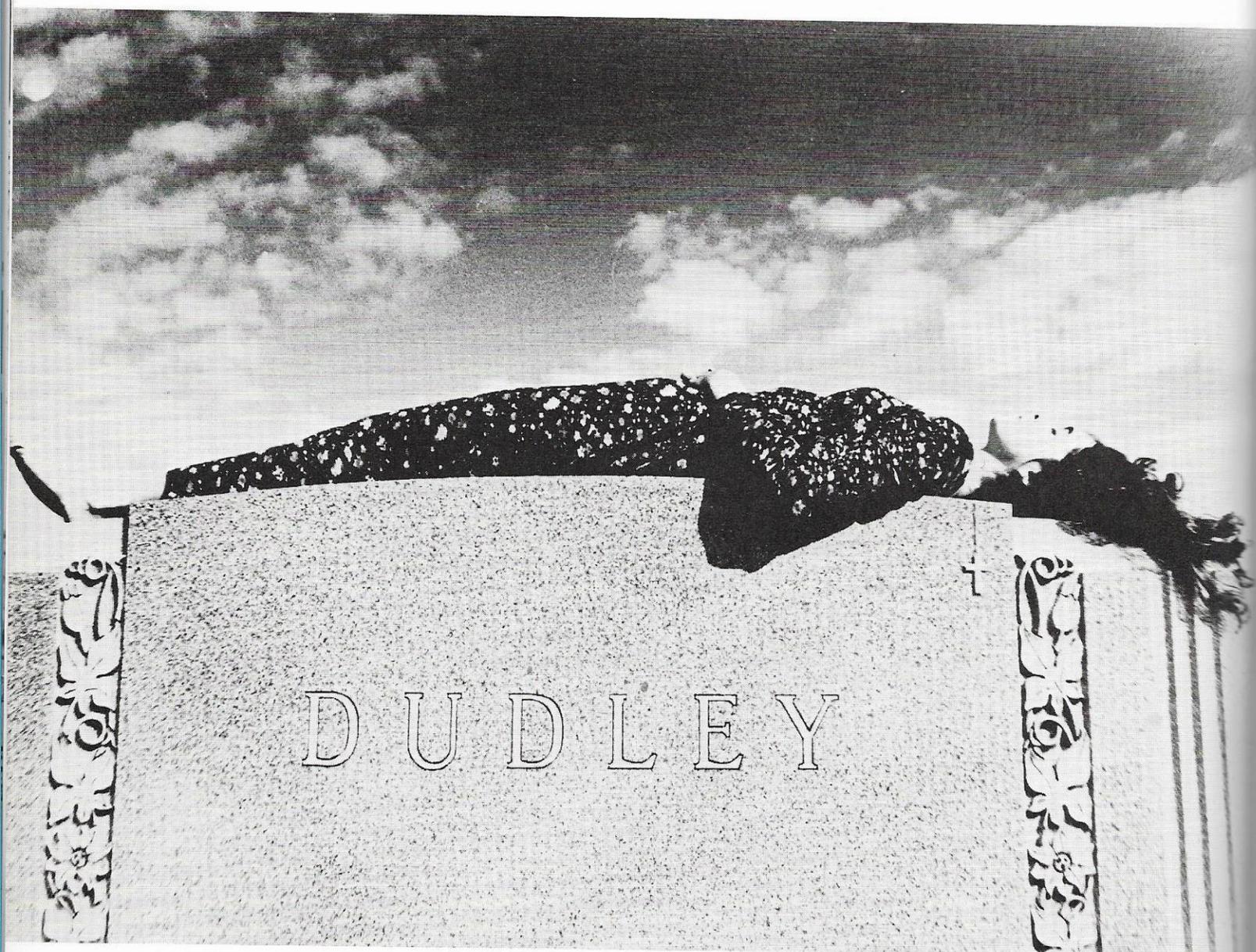
Jim Yarbrough

Blood-pumping drama  
Gives rise to chest heaving dance.  
What more?  
Buck-belly; slap-thigh. Wrestle.  
Hand a graceful geometry  
Tracing gossamer gulls,  
Or the Saga of butterflies becoming  
Honey beads.  
Race in a circle.  
Challenge the tides  
Mourning dance.  
Marriage dance.  
Mute, muscled body-drama of dance  
Always retracing some saline  
Labyrinth of sweat.

Blood-pumping drama  
Gives rise to chest heaving dance.  
And  
Breathing  
Breathing  
Breath like wind-fingers seeking/  
strangling/ soothing the manly  
larynx-lyre.  
Breathing. Dance.  
What more?  
Proud phonemes pirouette/burst  
Upon tongue/teeth in a  
Mystery of man -- words:  
Spontaneous syllabic cabala  
Surging from body-dance;  
Dramatic libido.

(What do you dance?  
You dance what you breathe.  
And how do you hear?  
With head-thinking-heart,  
With amorous ear.)

Syllabic obedience. Hear it?  
Hear it.  
Dance the fete of syllabic seasons.  
Hear it.  
Hearit.  
Heerit.  
Syllables of tongue hearth-flesh.  
Syllables lying together:  
Concatenated, ejaculated, they are  
Music of mystery -- TALK.  
Feel them dancing up  
Becoming lines  
Becoming word-song  
Becoming  
Becoming tongue dance.



DUDLEY

# IF MY HAND WERE TO HOLD THE PULSE OF TIME

D.C. Weiser

If my hand were to hold the pulse of time,  
the gaseous blow that filled the world with life,  
what would my forearm feel course through my veins,  
my cold and sleeping rivers start to teem?

If my hand were to hold the pulse of time,  
the naked kiss that filled the world with light,  
would my breast's sunrise waken to a dawn,  
my sleeping, drugged streams ripple sparkled light?

If my heart were to hear the pulse of time,  
hearken to the myriad instruments,  
not deafened, wracked and shattered by the loud  
and swelling sound, my organ and dawn die?

If my hand were to hold the pulse of time,  
time like a raging sea of woman's thighs,  
brazen whale-words in my streams and spring,  
blazing screams that sear the dark-skied clouds,  
would I not drown to drink the swirling sea?

If my hand were to hold the pulse of time,  
and hold and feel the pulsing rage of deeds  
dry my blood and shrivel my sleeping streams,  
would I hear burn the raging screams for change?  
or night erupt with my torn heart and mind?  
the sleeping stars sink in the wild, spring flood  
of streams that swirl and rage beyond their bounds?  
can one man clock the raging sea  
that I hold pulsing in my hand?