



"I wasn't able to shave. Water's scarce in the West. You enjoying retirement?" She told me she was. I wanted to ask if she was happy.

Dad left us when I was in kindergarten. I learned later that he liked to run around, stayed out later than he promised, drank too much, and couldn't keep a job. We moved often, but it never seemed unusual; just something we did. I asked Mom once why she married him.

"His sense of humor, his blue eyes, and the way he could dance. Boy, could he dance. But I never missed him when he left."

"Never thought about remarrying?"

"Never."

I stayed with her two weeks that time, visiting old friends, talking to people, spending time with her watching movies, and helping out by planting bulbs and pruning trees. She still lived in the same house she bought when I was in junior high.

Even then I could tell how proud she was. "We're going to have a home, Jack," she told me. "Our first one."

When Dad was around, we never stayed anywhere long enough to get settled, and later when Mom was in college, we lived in a small attic apartment. In the summers she studied in the kitchen beside a window fan. Still, sweat beads dropped from her chin onto her books. After she received the call inviting her to become the head librarian, she phoned a Realtor and within the week had decided on the house. The neighborhood was good, she said. A quiet street. We would be around stable people who owned their own homes. Central air was installed.

"I'm never going to sweat in my own home again," she said.

This August when the police found her on the kitchen floor, dead for three days, the thermostat was set on sixty-eight.

\* \* \*

The upstairs apartment I shared with Karl was near campus and owned by Mrs. Fisher, an elderly woman who lived below. She was a widow, and the rent she received supplemented her Social Security. At first Karl and I did things together, like go to the Main Gate, a tavern near our place.

"Have I told you about the time we got a truckload of tires from the dump and tossed them over the school's flag pole?" Karl asked.

"Sounds difficult."

"It was, but we managed to ring thirty or forty of them. Then we soaked the pile with kerosene. Since we used Dirk's truck, he

threw the match. It was like the night exploded. There must have been eight of us, drunk and laughing. The fire alarm went off, lights went on. Hell, Dirk had to get home. He forgot his father was a volunteer fireman and needed the truck. Have you ever seen a tire fire?"

"Never. Why?"

"You can't put them out. And man, do they stink. They smolder until there's nothing more to burn. Even when we went to school that Monday, the flag pole was still smoldering and stinking. Had to be replaced."

"Did you get caught?"

"Not even questioned. They had a good idea who'd done it, but no one said a thing."

"And that was fun?"

"You kidding?"

"Weren't they mad about the flag pole?"

"They expect things like that. Hell, that's what high school's all about. Don't tell me you never did anything like that."

I went to get another pitcher.

\* \* \*

The application deadline for veterinary school was the end of first semester. Karl was pulling straight A's and feeling cocky about his chances. He borrowed a Polaroid and asked me to take his picture.

"Part of the application process," he explained.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"To weed out those who don't fit?"

"Maybe."

"Like minorities?"

He shrugged. "Could be."

"And the downtrodden?"

"Why not?"

"The long haired and unshaven?"

"The program's selective, Mallory."

The required photo only needed to be from the waist up. Karl wore a dress shirt, a clip-on tie, a suit coat, and cut-offs. He looked silly, like someone who couldn't make up his mind what he wanted to do. He posed against the kitchen wall, hair back and smelling of Vitalas, trying various smiles. I shot a roll of film. He laid out his options and picked the three he found best.

"What do you think?" he asked.

I looked them over. He seemed sincere in wanting to know my opinion. "I think this one's the best."

Karl looked at me and smiled. "You know, Mallory, I think for once we agree."

\* \* \*

My wife told me there are two kinds of people: those who look for differences, and those who look for similarities. Jennifer could so easily divide the world into little packages. That's what I found so interesting about her—no ambiguity. She viewed the world as various problems to be tinkered with and repaired. There was no question in what category she placed me. We had so many differences, that looking back I am surprised it took so few areas of compatibility to convince me to say before a priest and all the rest that our marriage would last forever. Even those areas where we were close were not enough to hold us for long. I don't believe she ever understood the irony. While the world's problems could be fixed by a turn of a screw, a little oil here and there, a new system devised, a policy written, even she came to believe that our marriage was beyond such help. Maybe I was too convincing.

\* \* \*

Karl played this game with Mrs. Fisher.

"She's hard of hearing and half-blind. She won't even notice. This is the third month I've done it."

He showed me his rent check written for twenty dollars less than mine. "Come on," I said. "She needs it more than you."

"What's she going to do? Kick me out? Don't be a fool. She hasn't noticed it yet, and she won't ever notice it."

"It's not right."

"But it's okay to burn down the ROTC building?"

"Take down your own check."

A week later Karl and I were watching Monday Night Football when we heard a knock on our door. I answered.

"Is Karl here?" Mrs. Fisher asked. I invited her inside.

"Karl," I said. He didn't bother to get up from the couch.

"What." His attention remained on the game.

"You made a mistake in your rent this month," Mrs. Fisher said. "You're twenty dollars short."

"No way."

"Karl, this is the third month. If you're having trouble, come talk to me."

"You're wrong. I've paid you your money every month." He never turned from the television.

"I have statements, Karl." She held up the papers; her hands shook.

"I don't care about your statements."

"Karl," I said, "just give her what you owe."

His eyes narrowed but his attention never wavered from the game. It was third and ten—a passing situation. "She's wrong."

Mrs. Fisher stood in the apartment her late husband built, holding those papers she believed would prove everything. She looked confused, not angry.

"How much does he owe?" I asked.

"Sixty dollars."

"Just a minute." I wrote a check and handed it to her. She acted unsure whether to take it. I folded her hand over the paper.

After she left and I sat down, Karl said, "I'm not paying you back." We watched a Budweiser commercial.

"I didn't expect you would."

\* \* \*

After we signed the legal documents and Jennifer moved the last of her boxes out of the apartment, she celebrated her freedom by taking a two-week cruise in the Caribbean. I celebrated mine by breaking the lease, withdrawing my half from our money market account, and buying a one-way ticket to Ireland. I landed at Shannon with my bicycle and a change of clothes.

One afternoon I ran inside a downtown Galway pub to wait out a rain storm. I stood at the bar, ordered a Guinness, and looked around the crowded room. I turned when I felt a hand on my arm. Standing beside me as if he just materialized from the ether was an old man about as tall as the bar stool. His face looked like it hadn't felt the cold blade of a razor in six days.

He tipped his tweed cap. "Where you from, lad?"

I thought he must be drunk, yet his eyes were clear and I smelled no alcohol on him. "America," I told him.

"Aye, I knew it. Back to see the old country, are you?" I nodded, and took a drink. "Now tell me, lad, do they tell the old stories in America? About the ancient heroes of the Gaels?"

"Just about leprechauns and St. Patrick every March seventeenth."

He smiled sadly and rubbed his chin. "That's about all that's left now. Parades, a few pints." He shrugged. "The tales aren't passed down any longer."

He eyed my change on the bar, and I expected him to ask for a pint. Instead he said, "Tell me now, lad, have you ever been in love?"

"It's hard to tell anymore."

"You'd know it if you were. About that there'd be no doubt. Have you never heard the tales of Finn MacCool's son and Niam?"

"Never have. Sorry."

"Like to hear one?"

He looked up and smiled letting me see what was left of his teeth. "Only if I can buy you a pint." He slapped my shoulder, and I ordered two more stouts.

"What you have to understand," he said, "is that long ago this land was different. Before St. Patrick took away our legends." He paused to cross himself. "There were druids, brehons, and shanachies."

"Druids, brehons, and shanachies?"

"The old Gaelic order, lad. Priests and judges and storytellers. Our poets. Have you not heard of them?"

"I've heard of druids. Pagans, right?"

"I can't blame you for not knowing. The lads here don't know them either." He shook his head sadly and drank from his pint.

"This tale begins one day when St. Patrick stopped Ossian, the poet and Finn MacCool's son, to ask how he'd come to live so long. You see, Ossian had been alive for over three hundred years."

"Come on. Three centuries?"

"Do you want this tale or not?"

"Go on."

"Then don't be interrupting. Mind you now, you got to believe."

"I'll try."

He took a drink and frowned at me. "Trying isn't part of believing, lad."

"Please continue."

"All right then. Ossian told St. Patrick he'd fallen in love with Niam, the daughter of the King and Queen of Tir na n-og, or for you, who speak no Irish, the Land of Youth. Aye, how Finn grieved he did, losing his son like that. But Ossian's love for Niam was so strong, even the great Finn couldn't stop him from leaving.

"For years Ossian and Niam were happy, but Ossian began to feel a longing. One day he says to Niam 'I miss my home.'

"This worried Niam, for she knew his land had changed. You see, time in the Land of Youth wasn't like in Eire. 'But Ossian, how do you know your ways are still followed?' Niam asked. 'It's been so long.'

“But Ossian persisted. ‘Look at me, Niam. I’m a young man. My home couldn’t have changed. I’m thinking of my kin, about my father, Finn. I feel a calling, Niam.’”

The old man took a drink. “Though Niam tried to change his mind you understand, like Finn, she found that Ossian couldn’t be happy until he filled the hole in his heart.”

“So he left her?”

“Aye, that he did. But she sent him off with a warning that should his feet touch the ground of Eire he’d lose his youth and be unable to return to her.”

“That didn’t convince him?”

“Lad, there’s magic in this land. Why, look at yourself. Even you’ve come. Take all the reasons you’re here and multiply them a million fold, and you may understand Ossian’s desire.”

“I see.”

“Well, Ossian packed his great white horse and rode for many days across Tir na n-og and across the fields of Eire until he knew what Niam had said was true. The land he knew was gone. He stopped a man along the road, and asked, ‘Where is Finn MacCool?’

“‘Finn MacCool you want, is it?’ the man answered. ‘Why, we have but tales of Finn, for he’s long since passed from us.’

“‘You tell stories of him, do you?’ Ossian asked.

“‘Aye, that we do. And of his son who left us for the land of Tir na n-og. All we have now are the stories.’

“Saddened by what he heard, Ossian started back for Niam when he heard cries and saw three men trapped beneath a marble slab and an old man weeping nearby. Ossian stopped, and the old man said, ‘My sons are trapped, and I’m too old to help.’

“Ossian tossed the man a rope. ‘Tie this around the stone, and my horse will free them.’ And true to his word, the great horse did. But lad, the rope was from Eire and very old now, and under the strain it broke. So spooked was Ossian’s mount that when the rope snapped, she reared so high her hoofs touched the clouds. Have you a guess what happened next?” The old man grinned at me and drank from his pint.

“Ossian fell to the ground, and grew old.”

“That he did, son. This fast,” he said, clapping his hands.

“And blind, as if dressed out and buried alive.”

“Some love story.”

“But wait, lad. There’s more. While Ossian crawled upon the ground crying out his loss of home and for his lost Niam, he heard a horse ride near and a voice he knew say, ‘Ossian, why did you leave me? Was I not enough?’

"Ossian said, 'Niam, to see my land once more. You spoke true. I've lost my home, but I didn't want to lose you too.'"

"She followed him," I said.

"From the moment he left."

"But it was too late."

The old man smiled and pushed his cap farther off his forehead. "That's what Ossian thought too. But when he believed he'd lost everything, he felt her take his hand, and grow old like he."

The man finished his Guinness and wiped a sleeve across his lips. "There you have it, lad," he said, patting my back. "An old tale. Mind you, a good tale can be cut to fit any occasion."

He excused himself, and while I waited his return, I ordered two more stouts. But he never returned. I looked around the pub and outside, but he was gone, disappeared as quickly as he'd arrived.

I recall this man and his tale when I'm alone and watching couples in various stages of companionship. In those moments I may also think of Jennifer. Unlike Ossian and Niam, few act from their passions, preferring instead to let reason dictate. But can debate, reflection, pro and con checklists bring order to the inexplicable? If I were looking for an explanation as to why Jennifer ever married me, I found it when I met her father. We even had the same first name.

\* \* \*

After winter break, Karl was accepted into the school of veterinary medicine.

"Calls for a celebration, Mallory."

"You worked hard for it."

"Damn, this must be how it feels to win the Super Bowl. What shall it be? Wine? Champagne? Micholob?"

"How about a pitcher at the Gate?"

"That's your problem. You don't think high enough. Set your sights above your reach, then strive."

"Your celebration. You call the shots."

"Shots, you say. That's an idea."

Karl left and returned with a quart of Jack Daniels and a six-pack of Heineken.

"Come on, Mallory, let's celebrate." He poured two juice glasses half-full, handed me one, and posed his own toast. "To my success." We touched glasses and downed the liquor. "Here, another."

I didn't go to class the next morning. That time was spent in bed, vowing never to drink again. Karl was happy in his hangover. He basked in it, told people about it, called home and laughed



about it. After all, he said, he'd worked for it. I only went along for the ride.

I looked at the partial quart of Jack Daniels on the kitchen table rising above the chip bag like a deity, the glass rings around it as offerings, and remembered what Karl had said.

"I'm out of the traffic jam and on the four-lane with no cops in sight. Man, I'm on my way. Tell me, Mallory, what gear are you in?"

And then he got sick.

\* \* \*

I rummage through Mom's bookshelf and find a photo album. This must be a recent effort on her part, for while I remember her taking pictures, I don't recall her ever placing them in an album.

She displayed the photos in chronological order. I open the book in the middle and see her standing beside a sand dune from our only vacation, the summer I turned fourteen and we visited Aunt Helen in Arizona. Mom looks thin in the photo, a condition she so wanted to maintain, but couldn't. She wears a navy blue dress and sun glasses. She looks younger than I do now.

"It's time you see mountains," she said, explaining why I had to leave my baseball team and my friends. "After the Rockies, you may change how you view things."

"I've seen mountains before."

"But only in books."

I believed that the Rockies were right across the Colorado state line, and was disappointed when once we left Kansas nothing changed. "They're not even in the distance."

"Be patient," she said.

I ran out of things to do, and I was tired of riding. Mom wouldn't let me play the radio. "There's nothing to do."

"Read a book."

"And get a headache?"

"Look at the scenery."

"But it's all just dirt brown and empty."

"Look to the southwest."

I did, and then I saw them rising out of the ground like ghosts, their peaks snow capped in the summer heat. "Christ," I said, then glanced at Mom who pretended she hadn't heard me. "I had no idea."

The time between when I first saw them until we were climbing the pass seemed endless. As we ascended, the temperature dropped and the smell turned from dust to pine. I hung my head

out the window to smell it and to hear the sound of the wind through the trees.

"There's one more place I want to show you before we get to Helen's house," Mom said the night we stayed at the Sleepy Springs Motel near Canon City.

"Where's that?"

"Be patient."

We crossed the line of demarcation into Arizona before noon the next day. The landscape became desert and I saw my first cactus. We drove past Navajos selling turquoise jewelry alongside the road and almost rear-ended a horse-drawn wagon where in the back sat three barefooted Navajo girls wearing light-blue dresses. By early afternoon we had arrived at what Mom wanted to show me.

She stopped in a parking lot. "We're here, Jack. Go take a look." A small crowd was gathered near the railing.

"Coming?" I asked.

"You go first. I want to rest my eyes."

I didn't stand near the family from Ohio who had just gotten out of their car and were now throwing rocks over the edge. Instead I went to a spot where I was alone. Mom came beside me.

"Would you say this canyon's grand, Jack?"

"I never could have imagined."

We stayed for two hours, longer I know than Mom wanted. But she didn't rush me. I borrowed her Instamatic and hiked part way down, shooting a roll and a half of film along the way.

I was naive then and didn't know that a photograph couldn't record what I saw. When we got those pictures back I was disappointed. The fact that I've never owned a camera can be traced to the day I brought home the photos and saw that the Rockies and the Grand Canyon were nothing more than pictures I'd already seen in a textbook.

\* \* \*

The apartment Karl and I shared didn't have a kitchen sink, so dishes had to be washed in the bathroom. To avoid that, we found ways to not cook. Karl's favorite was to eat peanuts and sardines, making a point to throw away neither the shells nor the tins.

"What's the matter, don't like fish?" He dangled one in front of me.

"I don't like the smell."

"They're good for you," he said, eating it. He put the next one near my face and laughed. "Are you sure?"

"Quiet, the news is on." He cracked open a handful of peanuts

while we heard Walter Cronkite tell us that four students at Kent State had been killed that afternoon when the Ohio National Guard opened fire.

"Bound to happen," he said, cracking another peanut. "You can only screw around so long." He tossed the peanut into his mouth. "Peanut, Mallory?"

"You're an asshole, Schmidt."

"Huh?" he said, innocent and confused.

"A fucking asshole."

He shoved me; I shoved him back. We stood, and the sardine oil spilled on the floor. "Okay, let's get it over with," he said. "I'm sick of your put downs, 'wave the flag, Schmidt' and that crap." He knocked me off balance.

My mouth was so dry my tongue clung to the upper ridges. I said, hearing my voice quiver, "Let's take this outside."

"Why, so you don't wake the old lady?"

I left the room and headed for the street with Karl close behind. Mrs. Fisher stood in the doorway to her apartment.

"I heard shouting," she said. I ignored her.

Karl stood in front of me, hands clinched. "I've been waiting for this, Mallory. A long time." Overhead, the sky was so dark the street lights were on. He pushed me, and I grabbed his arms to steady myself, then backed up. I closed my fist into a ball. Karl kept his arms at his side, taunting me.

"Come on, take a shot, Mallory." He circled slowly, sticking his chin forward still keeping his arms down. "Are you a coward? Too afraid?"

I closed my eyes and swung as hard as I could at that face. I hit nothing. Then I felt my jaw snap, and I landed on the ground. A shower of white sparks pinballed behind my eyes.

The day was Monday the fourth. The month was May. The year, 1970. In three weeks the semester was over. We never spoke to each other again.

\* \* \*

That summer, I lived with Mom and worked at a factory that manufactured grain dryers. They were made out of steel and painted green, and it was my job to grind the welds and load boxcars. The factory wasn't air conditioned, and I'd get so dirty that the water turned black when I washed my hair. On Fridays some of us would stop at a bar nearby to drink Schlitz served in frosted mugs. A beer never tasted so good, and hasn't tasted as good since.

"Did you hear the news?" Scott asked. We were at the Castle,

a gas station converted to a tavern, listening to Dylan sing "Like a Rolling Stone" on the jukebox. Scott had been my best friend since grade school. He was so jinxed that by seventh grade he had lost all his teeth and had to wear dentures. He made sucking noises when his dentures slipped.

"What news?" I asked.

"About your old roommate, Karl."

"What about him?"

"He and three others got caught breaking into a grocery store on Sunday."

"You're kidding?"

"I got the story from a buddy who lives in Westphalia. Seems Karl's softball team had just finished a game, and they wanted more to drink. Nothing was open, so they broke in. All got caught holding a case and a bag of chips. You know Dirk?"

"Karl mentioned him."

"He was with them. You didn't see the paper today?"

Later I learned Karl pleaded guilty to a lesser charge, and had his invitation to veterinary school withdrawn.

\* \* \*

My hometown has changed little in the years I've been away. The streets look wider and new franchises have been built near the town's edge, but overall, it's a time capsule of middle American life. My friends have settled into steady jobs, and most have bought ranch style homes where they raise small families.

I give Scott a call. We buy a twelve pack and he drives his pickup into the country where the dirt roads are damp from last night's rain. He still works for the railroad, having advanced since I last saw him to brakeman, an occupation where he earns good money and has good benefits. But he's often away from home, staying in hotels built near train stations. Talking with him, I realize his life is like what many view a sailor's life to be; he seems to have a girlfriend in every stop. This surprises me.

He owns an early-model truck, but the interior is immaculate, a condition I remember him keeping all his cars. Scott seems preoccupied by time. He says things like, "I hope Sara hasn't forgotten about our daughter's soccer practice at one this afternoon," and, "Damn, tomorrow is large item removal day. I must get that washer to the curb."

He taps my shoulder and points to an abandoned farm house near the factory. "There's your old buddy over there."

I see someone sitting on a foundation wall. "Whoever it is

doesn't look happy," I say.

He slows down. "That 'whoever' is Schmidt."

Karl's eating, and appears too preoccupied to look at us. "So it is," I say.

"I ran into him last week. He works at Struthers with his father. They're both welders."

"I'm surprised."

"He knocked up some high school girl from Westphalia that year you were in VISTA. Married her. They have three children now who look just like him. Poor kids."

We ride a while longer, and I open another beer. "In case you're wondering," Scott says, "he never asks about you either."

After we talk about ourselves and retell old stories, he glances at his watch and says, "Have to be getting home. I told Sara I'd be back before supper." I'm surprised he isn't embarrassed telling me this. "Jack, will you stay in touch this time? Hell, you never write. I don't like losing track of you."

"It's always nice to see you," I say, and mean it. "I'll do better."

Before he drops me off, he pauses and says, "Jack, I was sorry to hear about your mom."

I look away.

"When's the service?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. Listen, I don't expect you to come. I was away when your mom died."

He pats my shoulder. "Call before you leave town, okay? We'll have you over for dinner. Sara would love to see you again."

I hold up what's left of the twelve pack. "Let's split these."

"They're yours. Sara doesn't like any in the house." He shrugs. "You know, the kids."

He drives away, and I think maybe there is love after all.

\* \* \*

A poet told us home was a place that when you go there they have to let you in. My VISTA colleague worried about that.

"Does that mean a shelter's the only home some people have?" Tom asked. "What if the shelter's full?"

I've been thinking a lot about Tom recently. He woke up every morning coughing, and reached for a smoke. He started drinking too early in the day and stopped too late at night.

"Where's your home, Jack?" he asked. "Where can you go where they have to take you in?" Although he posed the question to me, I suspected he posed it as much to himself.

"Where do you go if you're an orphan and no one ever adopt-

ed you?" he continued.

I saw Tom only once after VISTA. He worked in San Francisco as a security guard. After a few drinks he told me he was writing a novel about our experiences, and that I was a main character. I suspected it was wishful thinking. But he had good ideas. We started a Co-op of Navajo artists and showed their work throughout the Southwest. That was Tom's suggestion, and it was our only project that worked.

I think about Tom now that I'm back home and it's August and the heat floats in waves off the concrete and my mom is dead. I think about Tom because I know that like Mom, he too is dead. Not because I read his obituary or heard it from friends. I know he's dead because he could be no other way. I hear him ask, "Jack, where do you go?"

And I whisper, "Tom, I have no answer."

\* \* \*

The suit Mom bought for my high school graduation still fits if I leave the coat unbuttoned and hold in my stomach. I know most attending her funeral: neighbors, Aunt Helen, former co-workers.

Even though the custom never felt right to me, I view the casket, figuring I owe Mom that much, not having seen her in four years. She doesn't look like I remember, and she doesn't take me in her arms and make me feel like her child again.

We ride in silence from the chapel to Field Crest Memorial, where we gather at the pit and watch the casket descend. The preacher, whom I don't know, says a few words, and as instructed, I throw in a handful of dirt and hear the stones tap the varnished box.

\* \* \*

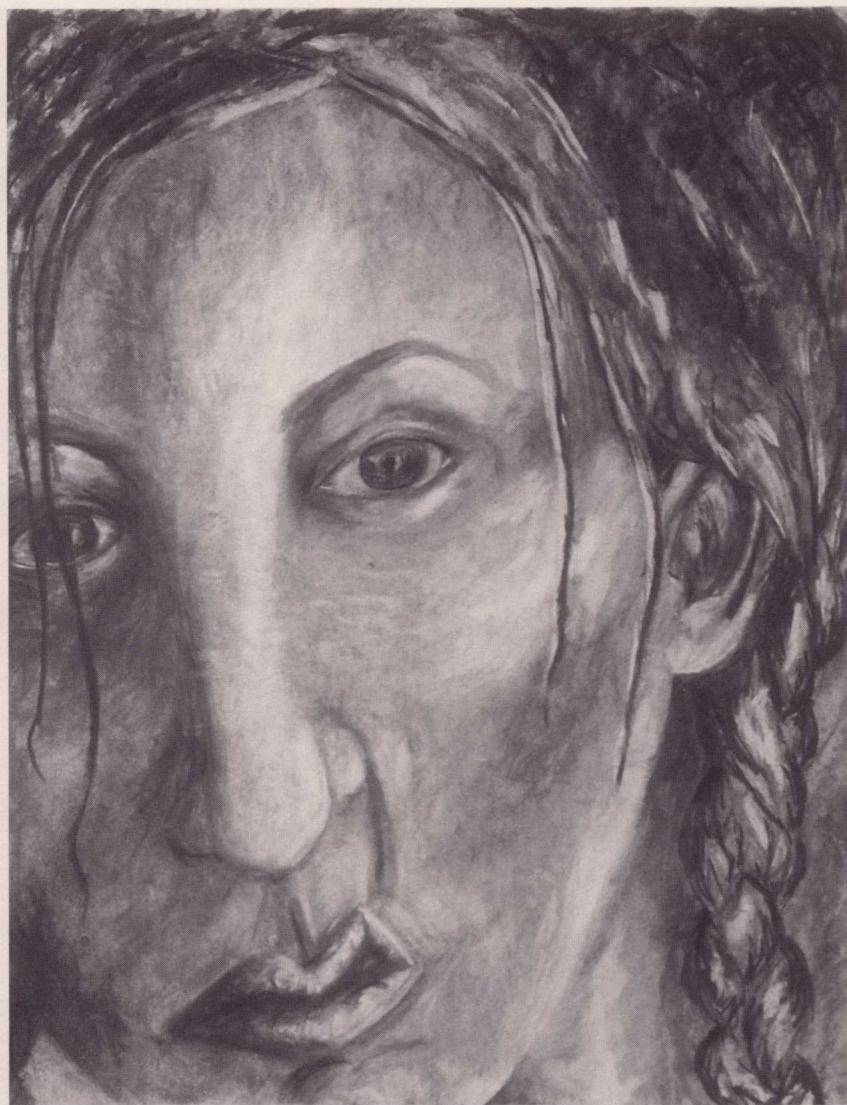
I stay long after the others leave and watch the soil fade as it dries. Like Ossian, I returned to the home of my youth, had touched the ground and grown old. But unlike Finn's son, no one takes my hand, although I wait long after the shadows retreat and the sun sets.

—James O'Gorman



**Juliana Schroeder**  
*Self Portrait*

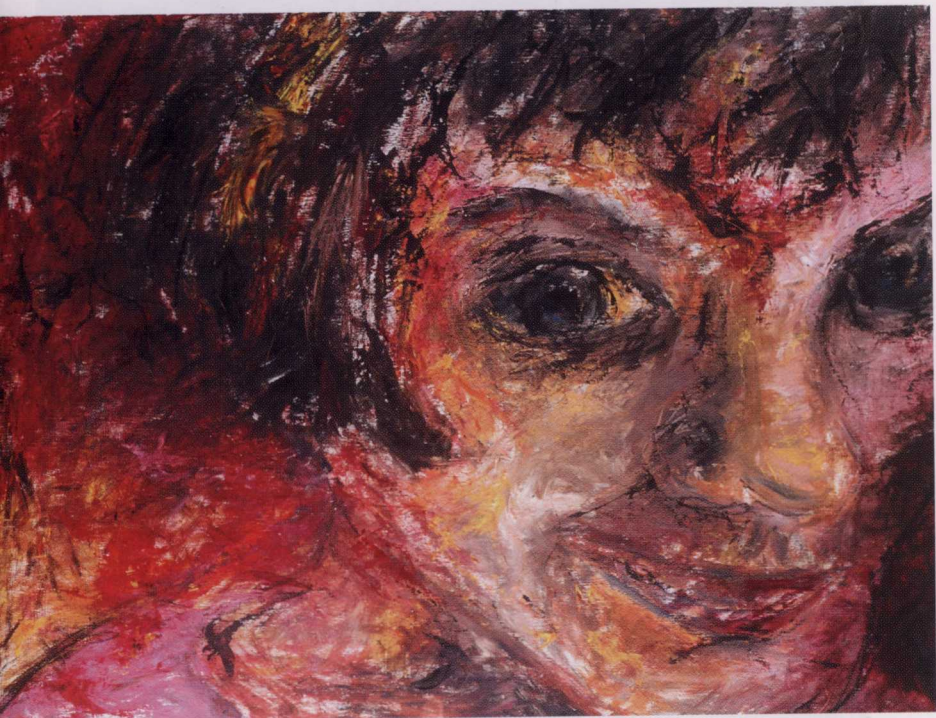
2002, charcoal on paper, 32 inches x 42 inches



Deanna Prachar  
*Self Portrait*

2002, charcoal on paper, 32 inches x 42 inches





Beth Curley  
*a. tautou*

2003, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 36 inches



Karin Kuzniar '98  
*Corset Attache*

2002, oil on plywood, 8 inches x 10.25 inches



Karin Kuzniar '98  
*Five Dressforms*

2002, oil on masonite, 12.125 inches x 19.75 inches



Gretchen Stabile  
*untitled*

2002, oil on canvas, 24 inches x 36 inches



Leslie Bell '72  
*Silence and Song*

2002, oil on canvas, 45 inches x 40 inches



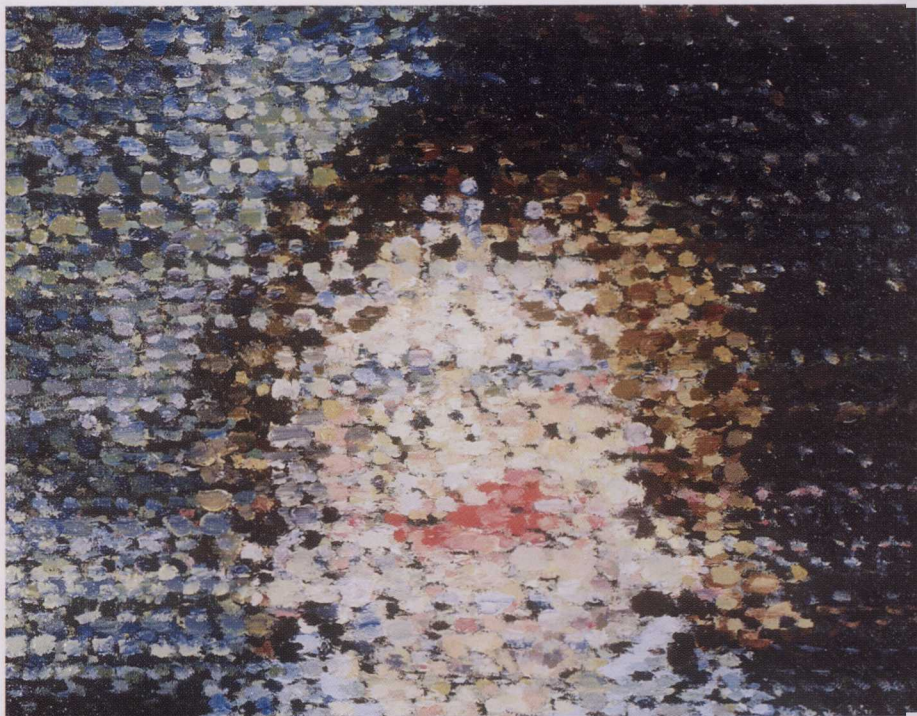
Kristin Quinn  
*Sirocco/Solano*

2002, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 60 inches



Sandy Bennett  
*Adaptation Tonic*

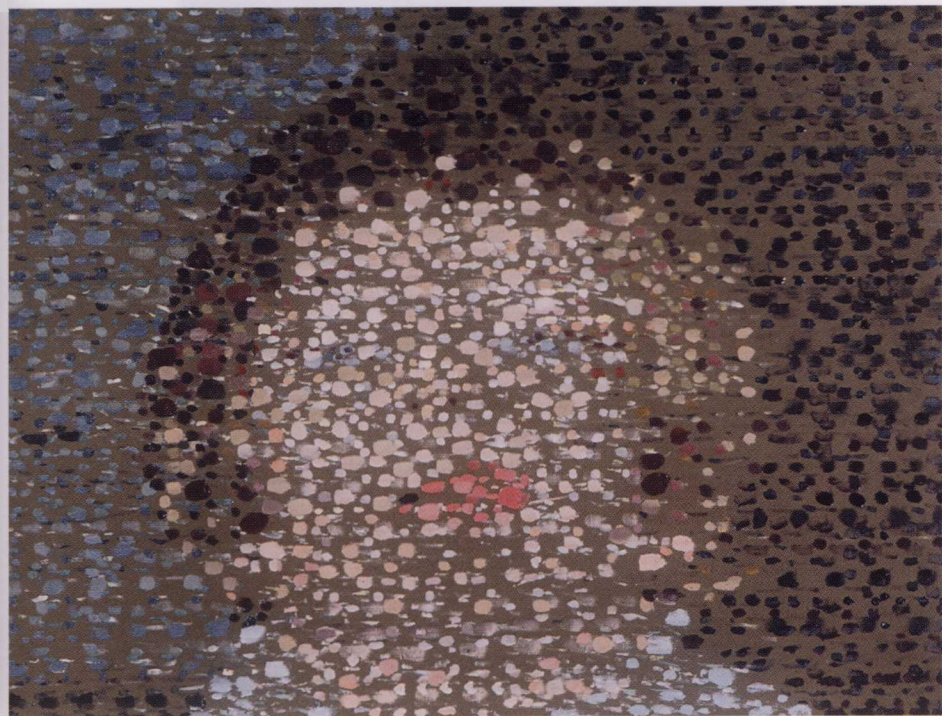
2002, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches



Peter Axelsen  
*Portrait of Self, age 3 or 4*

2003, oil on board, 15 inches x 11.5 inches





Peter Axelsen  
*Portrait of Self(2), age 3 or 4*

2003, oil on board, 26 inches x 20 inches



David McDaniel '70

*Siesta*

1998, oil on canvas, 17 inches x 36 inches



**Anna Blackburn**  
*Purple Undercurrent*

2002, oil on birch, 24 inches x 48 inches



Kunhild Blacklock '91  
*9-11, Souls Ascending*

2002, oil on wood, 33.75 inches x 24 inches



Kunhild Blacklock '91  
*Blessing of the Tree*

2003, acrylics on wood, 25.125 inches x 30.125 inches



Debra Bahns  
*untitled*

2002, oil on canvas, 20 inches x 16 inches



**Suzanne Michele Chouteau**  
*Spence Field (the good red path)* intaglio, 9 inches x 3 inches  
*Medona Creek, CO (dusk)* intaglio, 9 inches x 3 inches  
*Approaching Storm (Canada)* intaglio, 9 inches x 3 inches  
2002

## . . . who can get born again?

Mama got mad  
when I didn't wear black.  
Said, What are people gonna think? Here  
put this on—handed me a blouse  
put her foot to the floor  
and sped up 61, north to the parlor.  
Why do we cover it up?  
Cuz Kevin would raise the cup.

Does it matter what we wear (sure, I know  
I'm romantic) drive, own?  
There's something terribly wrong  
with this picture, I whispered  
to the sun, drove into Dewitt  
with sun tears on my chin  
kinda felt like I shouldn't a been cryin'  
but even with my hands  
my hair my hat  
couldn't hide it.

Why are we mourning for the dead, Kevin . . .

Posthumous publication  
"Just on time to be too late."  
It's a damn shame ya might just have to die  
for people to see  
you were alive.  
Poets, artists, workers  
share love, light  
a fire, watch it blaze—alone.  
Sacred smoke lingers  
and is gone.

. . . when it's the living . . .

Kev-head and his great laughing guts  
resting in the big bed wearin' a suit  
but that ain't the way he dressed  
day to day just an old pair of jeans  
and a John Deere shirt. That's okay  
who knows, maybe he thinks  
it's cool, but anyone who knew him



his ass-warm Buzzy's barstool  
would hear him say  
Have a party, babe.

. . . we should mourn instead. When it's the living . . .

—*Erin Moore*

## The Time Keeper

On the road to Turkey Wood  
where the gravel turns toward home  
in a field of clover stood  
a man with blade and stone.

To the casual passerby  
a man in a denim coat  
was cutting hay with a scythe  
his singing voice off note.

To the careful watcher  
the slicing blade did reap  
labor, time and clover  
with every rhythmic sweep.

On a cold wintry day  
where the gravel turns toward home  
cutting wood instead of hay  
was man the metronome.

—Richard K. Wallarab '56

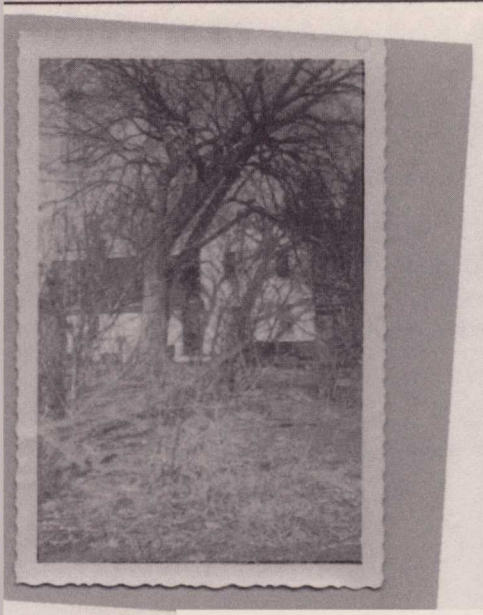
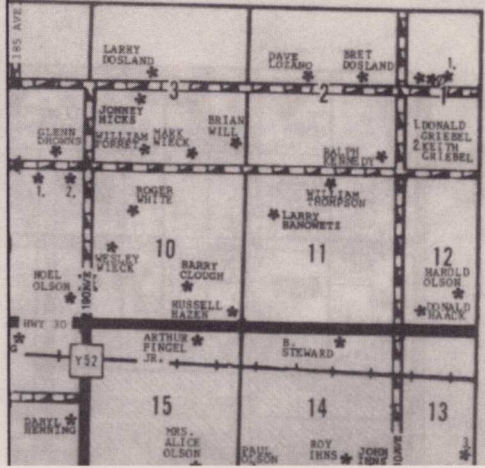
نظرائي تطوف علي ربهك ... تقبله  
تمر علي شعرك ... تلامسه بجان  
ثم تعود تهبط الي كتفيك ...  
الي كتفيك ... فتصدم بخاتم في اصبعك  
تترد مذعورة تختبي خلف اجفاني  
تأخذه عينه عليها  
وتفره ... تفره في بحيرة من دموعي  
فيلدني ظلام ... وكتفه فطواني  
تبحث عنك  
تهرب من خاتم في يدك  
وأهدى ... أهدى الي قاع الحرمان  
يتلقاني بأحضانها ... يطبعه علي  
بأذرع من شوك ...  
تفرز في كل جزء مني  
فأحتضن ... وأحتضن دون حماة

صبيحة علي عيسى

My glances float upon your face . . . and kiss it  
They pass by your hair . . . and caress it with tenderness  
They then fall down to your shoulders,  
to your hand . . . and shrink away from the ring on your finger  
They retreat, scared, behind my eyelids.  
So I close my eyes,  
and they drown . . . drown in a lake of my tears.  
Darkness fills me, and my steps falter  
They search for you, crawling  
They run from the ring on your finger.  
And I fall . . . fall into a deep gorge of denial.  
It welcomes me . . . and clamps on  
with arms of thorns  
that pierce every part of me.  
And I writhe and writhe . . . never dying

—*Sabeeha Ali Issa*  
*Translation: Ali Issa*

GRANT TWP.



## The New Treasure Hunters

The night that ruined housing wasn't the night that I put the Cutlass through the steel gate to the sounds of sober voices screaming "gate." It wasn't the night that I had to ride in the back of an El Camino for two hours covered in cow shit. It also wasn't the night that John and I stood in a living room arguing about whether the house was abandoned when the owner got up to take a leak. Nor was it the night that we had to go radios down and wait for hours in the darkness, crouched in the wet grass to see if the cops had busted half our crew. No, the night that ruined housing was the night we found the money.

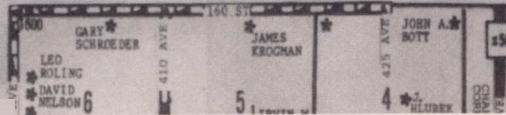
Housing, for those of you who don't know, is the semi-legal and mostly moral art of digging through raccoon shit, falling through floors, being attacked by bats, driving thousands of miles of gravel roads, and sometimes getting rich doing it. The countryside of America's Heartland is lined with abandoned houses waiting for the match, or the dozer. Inside these houses is everything from little more than a few animals and several tons of their own feces, to antiques that are worth small fortunes. Some, as I have found, also contain loads of cash, coin collections and gold jewelry. You see, the majority of these houses were last inhabited by a gen-



T-82-N

HAMPSHIRE 'N'

ELK RIVER TWP.



eration that had little belief in banks. Pianos, walls, mattresses and the occasional freezer were the preferred storage methods. Greedy inheritors, it seems, have little knowledge of these stashes. Items too worthless to be taken or sold are left to become antiques, and thereafter the houses are left to literally collapse for various reasons. Farmers then buy the fields adjoining the houses, and curse their existence since the cost of legal removal is the only thing keeping the houses standing. I know, because I've been in over one hundred of them. It was one of these houses that put an end to two summers worth of fun and profit.

I was bartending one night when I got the call that we were on if I still wanted to go. Housing pays better than bartending, and I was ready to call it a night at the bar. They were not my usual housing group, though I had taken them many times. As I yelled last call and began to restock the coolers for another night of small-town drunkenness, my partners walked in and waited for me to finish up. I kicked out the usual closing crowd and locked up to count the drawer. Tony, a bartender himself, came around and helped me to finish my nightly tasks. After the trash was in the dumpster out back and the money was secured in the safe, we went outside and I finished my beer to the usual debate of who was going to drive. Tony had his new car, Josh had his parents' minivan and I had my trusty Cutlass, though it was more than overflowing from the previous night's adventures. Josh finally agreed to taking the van. Now the second-most popular debate of the summer arose: who had flashlights. Nearly an hour later we found the supply I kept under the loads of empty beer cans and antiques that filled my car.

We piled into the van, Josh driving, I had co-pilot to navigate, and Tony was forced to ride in back. I pulled out the plat books and we laid our night's trail. Pulling out of Grand Mound and onto the highway we knew we were in for an adventure, as always. Half a pack of smokes later we were into new territory and hooked it off

See Pages 21-22 For Additional Names.

40 Acres  
40 Acres  
160 Acres

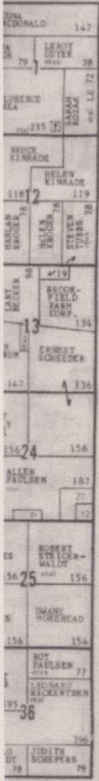
R-2-E

T-83-N



BROOKFIELD DIRECTORY

R-2-E



the highway and onto the gravels. Our first target was a house that the plat book said was ten miles north of 317<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the map, it was a safe house, few neighbors for miles. We found the location, but gazing across the cornfield, we realized that we were a few months too late for this one; it was gone. The next house was not for another fifteen miles, so I lit up another smoke and waited as Josh took his merry time to get there. That is one indisputable benefit of me driving, you get there a lot quicker, and in a hurry I had proven able to get us out of anywhere. Anyhow, we soon came upon the second victim of the night. It was the typical abandoned house, two stories tall, collapsed porch and not a pane of glass left in a window. We did a drive-by since there was a lived-in house directly across from our driveway. There was only one light on across the street so we rolled back and pulled the van behind a barn with the headlights off the entire time. We grabbed our flashlights and descended upon the house. It was a cool night and the dewy lawn had soaked through our jeans by the time we found a way through the forest of a lawn and onto the back porch. I found the door open and led the way into an empty kitchen. This house looked to be a quick one, all the cupboard doors were already open and held nothing. We split up and cased the joint in a matter of minutes. Not a thing to be found. I learned, however, that no one had found the basement and began the search. It took awhile, but I found the hatch under a pile of raccoon shit in the bathroom closet. I descended the ladder and my flashlight soon found a dozen blue Mason jars on a wooden shelf



## ND MEASUREMENTS

quare Measure

le ..... 1 Section 80 Rods Sq. .... 40 Acres  
 files .... 1 Township 208 Ft. 8 In. Sq. .... 40 Acres  
 Sq. .... 1 Township 160 Rods Sq. .... 160 Acres

## FORD DIRECTORY

R-4-E

JACKSON CO.

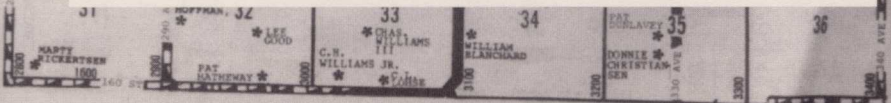


tucked into the limestone walls. I filled a crate that was in another corner, climbed the ladder and we were gone. Only about five bucks richer, we continued.

Several empty houses and two hundred miles later, we headed for home. It had been a shitty night and we had grown bored. On the way back, we decided to hit one more house. I had already been there and had filled the car on that occasion. Tony and Josh had never been to the house, so they were more than eager to go. Eventually, we pulled up the long winding lane and parked behind the house. I led the way through the two back rooms that no longer had roofs and into the kitchen. I stopped and pointed out the enamel table that was worth six hundred dollars, that I would get some night with my truck. We proceeded into the living room and began to dig through piles of junk selecting the valuable antiques that lay below. We each had half-filled boxes by the time we entered the bedroom; we dug around but found nothing. I headed upstairs with Tony while Josh decided to play a tune on the cobweb-covered piano. An angry raccoon greeted us at the top of the stairs with her litter of babies behind her. We thought it better not to fuck with her and crept our way back downstairs. The basement stairs were back off the kitchen and I led the group into the moldy stale air. Three dirt-floored rooms in the basement, but nothing to be found. We walked back upstairs, avoiding the step

BLOOMFIELD TWP.  
 DAY DEL  
 MRS LIP  
 1200  
 HILL BLANK  
 1300  
 RONALD BILL  
 BILL CORTIS  
 SANDERS  
 145  
 1500  
 1600  
 1800 AVE

DEEP CREEK TWP.  
 BRILEY LN  
 1800 AVE



See Pages 21-22 For Additional Names.

WASHINGTON TWP.





## Comes to Rural Residents

ur Area Have Purchased Advertising In The  
nize Your Advertisers & Let Your Advertisers  
n Continue To Make It Possible.

INGTON DIRECTORY

R-4-E

that I had broken through the week before. We stopped on the landing to make fun of the homemade tool organizer on the wall. It had an outline painted for each missing tool.

Back in the kitchen, we began to finish our search by digging around a little more before calling it a worthless night. I was examining the table to see if the legs were removable when Tony let out a yell. I ignored him, since someone seems to always be yelling when housing. When I realized what he was yelling, I got off the floor and went over to the old gas Servel fridge that he had been rooting through. In his hand were several yellowed envelopes. Still thinking he was joking I said, "Let's call it a night." I soon realized from the look on his face that he had found something good. That's when he began to pull the cash out of the envelopes. We'd made a pact to split the money, since Josh drove, I knew the house, and Tony had found it. I made Tony put it in his pocket because we had already been in the house too long. The second we were on the gravel and past the neighboring house the dome light went on and the count began. Twenty thousand dollars in crisp 1960's bills later, we all lit up a smoke and took our shares. We got back to the bar and went home after promising not to tell anyone where the house was until we went back together one more time to search deeper.

That was the night that ruined housing. Two weeks and several thousand miles later, I knew housing was dead. I have since found hundreds of dollars worth of antiques, but no more cash. That night could never be matched, and every night thereafter left everyone more jealous of the three of us. Many groups started housing after hearing about our find, but no one goes anymore. Little could be found to match that small fortune, except for the coin collection behind the false piano wall, but that is another story and another season of housing is coming. And if anyone is interested in antiques . . .

—Adam Green '02

## Wire Tap

There is nothing more seductive than this. Nothing. I sit here gazing. Completely intrigued, totally enraptured. I honestly think that this is my version of heaven. I am ogling the open highway, which stretches beyond my eye, beyond my imagination. I am already drinking V8 Splash out of the bottle, have my sunroof open, despite the cold, and the CD player on. And it's loud. I don't care that people are looking at me like one of those sixteen-year-old boys who blow their entire college fund on some G'd-out wannabe ghetto ride with hydraulics, neon lights and shag carpeting. I love loud music, and that was how it is going to be.

I finish singing Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill" and decide to flip on the radio just in time to hear Britney Spears attempting to sing some pathetic song that someone else wrote for her. I laugh at how I can sing better than her without studio work, contemplate the power of implants, and then flip stations. Wondering why they never play TuPac, I instead hear Enrique tell me he's going to be my hero and feel woozy. Deciding that I had made a poor call, I flip the CD player back on. I look ahead, thinking about how I want to paint the trees that grace the solitary house in the distance. I laugh at myself, thinking about how lately, even when I am alone and talking to myself, everything takes on this poetic vibe that no one is interested in, except for myself.

I quickly step on the accelerator after an elderly man passes my car and feel ridiculous. Hell, I have plenty of tickets to prove myself, but he'd never know. Then I ask myself why I care. And remember how I've come to terms with my craziness. Minutes pass and my mind wanders. To places that I've never been and chances that I knew I must take. I think about moving across the country, leaving everyone and everything I know. My mind runs ahead, considering the things that I don't know how to do, like how to get health insurance and a new license plate. I daydream about the mountains and then realize I'm singing again. And it morphs into the kind of singing that would make my voice teacher cringe. That kind of singing that originates in my feet and overtakes my whole body, causing me to belt out the lyrics to Seven Mary Three, admiring the sheer intensity and power of the song, with no regard to pitch or tone, and least of all volume. I don't care that the woman edging up to my car is looking at me like I'm a mental patient, or that she is alarmed that I am drunk and dangerous. The impulse to scare her passes and I travel on, legs crossed Indian-

style, and I think about how un-politically correct that is. Even Native-American style would be a slur, I decide, and think about how an Eskimo kiss is a poor word choice also.

I notice that a semi is speeding at an alarming rate behind me and quickly decide that if I hit the gravel, I'm a goner since I never even opened the book for drivers ed and have no idea how to do that off-road recover, which I am convinced is just a rumor in the first place. He jets into the other lane as I hold my breath and make a last-minute decision to do that tugging motion in the air for him to honk the horn. I am surprised that he does and almost veer off the road to my ultimate, and self-inflicted demise. I laugh again and assure myself that I don't ever need to get a boyfriend; I'm my own amusement. Plus, I am dancing in my seat and congratulating myself on how much better I have gotten at it.

I pass bare trees moving in unison with the shrubbery. I think about what an ideal spot it would be to grow weed; no one would notice. I realize that I'm getting passed by a slew of minivans and see a child push his face against the window and puff out his cheeks at me, like on that Volkswagen commercial. I get the urge to give him the finger, and then remember that he's a child and I am not. I can't believe that I almost did that and regain the small amount of composure I previously had and pop another piece of Trident Original Flavor into my mouth with a gloved hand. The angora fur gets into my mouth and I bitch to myself about how much better it is to drive in the summer. Everything is better in the summer, I decide.

I realize that I am not paying attention when a huge red truck is immediately to my left, and I hadn't even noticed it in my mirrors. The driver looks over and winks at me. I quickly avert my eyes and focus on my speedometer, afraid to look around. I don't know why I don't simply look ahead or to the opposite side, but somehow the speedometer seems to be the only acceptable place to look. I still see him in my peripheral vision and notice movement. Glancing over from the corner of my eye, I see him flagging me over to the side. Is he serious? I didn't fall off the back of the turnip truck. I wouldn't pull over for anyone, least of all someone who probably has children my age. I pass him quickly as he comes to a stop in the gravel. He can't be serious. But he jumps from his car and throws his hands up in disgust, witnessed from my rearview mirror.

Afraid that he might be back on the prowl, I run the risk of losing my license and charge ahead. I glance at my speedometer again and notice the dust on my dash and think about how I need to invest in Armor-All. Then I think of what an outlandish name

that is. Armor-All. Weird. I see several deer off the side of the road and pray that they don't get the impulse to prance across the highway, because I know that I don't have it in me to hit something head on. I'd be more likely to put it in the ditch over a bird than another car. They don't test me and I swerve off on my exit, determining which is the last possible second for me to slow down and not wreck my pretty car. I quickly realize that I just thought about my car before my own well-being and grow disgusted with myself for thinking like a guy. I try to push the thought aside but am bombarded with other alarming tidbits, like belching earlier and how I'd already thought of sex twice today. Scary.

I am lingering on that thought as I pass endless cornfields, and no matter how many times I see them, I am in awe. I try to guess how many corn stalks there are and then jolt myself back into reality after a sharp swerve. My phone rings and I instinctively answer, immediately regretting that I allowed the intrusion. It's my mom, wondering what time I will be home and what we should do for my dad's birthday. I didn't have the slightest idea and desperately wanted to get back to singing, with just a few precious minutes left, so I tell her that I'm going to get a tattoo on my ass as soon as I get into grad school. Works, as usual. She hangs up with a "very funny" and I laugh to the dial tone.

I speed up as I near my city, suddenly anxious to see my family and leave my endless stream of thoughts. I am barely able to stop at the red light, ending up somewhere in the middle of the intersection. A low-riding guy pulls up next to me and does that stupid head lift thing that they all think is so smooth. He looks over again and focuses on my shirt. I look down to see if anything is on it and wonder if he has a problem with my Salvation Army bargain. He rolls down his window and I wonder how he expects me to talk as we drive. Two guys this trip. Why is it that these guys would never approach me in a normal setting, but throw them in their cars and they turn the mack on? It's not as if the window sheds this rosy light upon them and they are transformed into Johnny Depp. Yet, they think so, along with thinking that screeching away as they speed off is sexy. Yeah, it's great that you almost run over small children and wreck your tire treads.

I turn to ditch Lowrider and notice a huge black hole in a street sign. I begin to think about black holes and how scary it would be to be lost in one: that inevitable death, and completely alone. I am thinking about what exactly you would die of in a black hole when I reach my home.

I am greeted with my mother yelling from the upstairs window that I will be written out of the will if I ever get a tattoo. She says

that I shouldn't give the impression that I am trash and I tell her that yelling out of a second story window to her daughter in the driveway sure makes us look like it. She tells me that I should go back to school, so I do.

—Samantha Nelson '02

## disillusionment of the senses in four parts

|                         |                       |                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| life is all             | a figment             | mental invention |
| just a dream            | of senses             | of the mind      |
| seeing                  | thoughts              | tasting          |
| colors                  | hearing               | light            |
| lighting the mind's eye | the synapses of speed | and sound        |
| as if hypnagogic        | images                | awakes           |
| visions                 | tapping               | silently         |
| phase out               | in the brain          | again            |

—Todd Tubbs

## Thirteen Ways of Reading a Wallace Stevens Poem

I

Among the many bound pages,  
The only brilliant thing  
Were the words of his poems.

II

I was once empty,  
Like a jar  
Of which he wrote no poem.

III

His poems bristled in my path of life.  
It was a small part of my mere being.

IV

A reader and poem  
Are one.  
A reader and a poem and poet  
Are one.

V

I do not know what I like more,  
The beauty of images  
Or the beauty of its expressions,  
The poem bristled  
And closed its eyes.

VI

Bantams in pine woods filled the lines  
With artistic grace.  
The meaning of the poem  
Confronts the reader.  
The tone  
Found in the meaning

Is confronted by the poem.

VII

Of why Mister Stevens,  
Are there thirteen ways of seeing blackbirds?  
Do you not see how the poem  
Sneaks around the tree  
Where those old blackbirds sit perched?

VIII

I know of his poem  
With disillusionment of ten o'clock;  
But I know, too,  
That the poem also knows  
Of what I know.

IX

When the poem forgot your beauty,  
It marked the start  
Of one of many cycles.

X

Of modern poetry,  
The plain sense of things, and  
A clear day and no memories  
As you leave the room.

XI

He returned back to Tennessee  
With a round jar.  
Once, a fear struck me,  
For I thought I lost  
The meaning of his anecdote  
Or poem.

XII

Sea surface full of clouds,  
The poem will remember.



XIII

It has been Sunday morning all day.  
Blackbirds flying  
Because they wanted to fly.  
The poem flew  
On extended wings.

—*Todd Tubbs*

## The Quiet One

Father Frank Goodwin frowned at his reflection in the mirror, then grinned at the memory of his wife, whose steaming showers had regularly complicated his shaving ritual. If he complained that he would cut his throat in the fog she created, she'd break into a song from their courtship, and he'd pick up the melody as he wiped the mirror with a towel. Once he was fully engaged, she'd switch to harmony.

For ten years now, he had shaved to recorded music, though he sometimes left the shower running, a towel at the ready. At home, he always chose Susan's favorite recordings, but on mornings like this one, when he was traveling, he had to take pot luck. The small radio he carried was now tuned to the best station he could pick up in the little town of Five Points.

He frowned again. Portable CD players were cheap as hell. Susan would have wagged a finger and kidded him mercilessly until he had capitulated and bought one. "Stupid not to," he said out loud, snapping the radio off.

But he needed a head bereft of memories when he was working. In a couple of hours, he'd be sitting around a table with people who were barely speaking to each other, and he'd need to be sharp. He handled conflict resolution for the diocese, an appointment that Susan would have seconded. Still, he thought, smiling wryly as he rinsed his razor, she'd have told him to buy the damned CD player. "There's no substitute for a steady supply of reliable music, especially when you're traveling," she'd have said.

He dressed formally, in a black suit and clerical collar, feeling like the lawyer he had once been, and left the motel in search of breakfast, choosing a locally owned place over several franchises and their gaudy neon. His Roman collar turned a few heads as he entered, but the locals had returned to their conversations or newspapers by the time he was seated. Externally, at least, he was only a minor curiosity.

His briefcase held the correspondence from the local pastor and the parish group that had lodged the complaint against him. He sipped coffee as he leafed idly through material whose details he knew by heart, trying to conjure up some enthusiasm for the meeting. Someone behind the counter turned on a radio and began searching through the static for a station.

Frank had been clerking for an appellate judge when he met

Susan at a diner near the federal courthouse. She was waitressing her way through undergraduate school, and he was attracted as much by the tunes she hummed as by her looks. The third time she waited on him, he recognized the George Harrison song and supplied the words. "He's my favorite one," she said without prelude.

"The quiet Beatle," he said.

She snorted. "He always took the hardest harmony parts."

He readily agreed, and mentioned as casually as he could that he'd played guitar in a high school band. She beamed her appreciation, and he got her phone number.

Their first few times out, he thought she'd rather be dating George Harrison. Frank already knew that his harmonies often held the songs together. He usually bridged the gap between the melody and a higher harmony, but sometimes, he supplied a voice in a lower register, beneath everything else. "Some of his harmonies are just one note, like a mantra," she told him, "but they complete the song." Frank adored her passion.

He let her go on, just to hear her talk. And though he had sung many of the parts she was enthusing over, she gave him a different perspective on them. George did a lot of the heavy lifting, and he was rarely appreciated, even by the other members of the band.

Susan graduated that spring and began teaching at a junior high school. Later that summer, Frank completed his clerkship and took the judge's advice, joining the staff in the district attorney's office. He and Susan were married in December.

When Colin was born, she quit her job to stay home with him, though they would have to struggle on Frank's meager income. He was itching for private practice by then, because he had lost his zeal for prosecution. Many of his adversaries were public defenders: poorly trained, overworked, or both. Their clients didn't have a prayer, and the senior assistants in the DA's office took all the high profile cases.

By the time he had made the move to a more lucrative job, however, Colin was in school and Susan had resumed her teaching career. To his dismay, he discovered that he didn't like the looks of the law from the other side of the aisle, either.

He might have anticipated that. Most of his classmates had abandoned their idealism by the end of the first semester of law school, if they had actually brought any with them. But he clung stubbornly to a belief in justice and tried to hold his own in arguments with his more cynical peers. He longed to pass the bar and prove them wrong.

At first, he thought he would. He'd enjoyed the clerkship,

researching case law for the junior justice he served. She liked to think out loud, to play devil's advocate, and she encouraged her clerks to challenge her. When he was involved in these lively office debates, Frank thought he was part of a process that would make civic life fairer for everyone. Little by little, the law would level the playing field.

He'd kept a list of their balanced and scrupulously written opinions, and followed their progress during his first two years in the DA's office, fuming each time a decision was reversed. Susan preached detachment as an antidote to despair, but he found it hard to let go.

Life as a criminal defense attorney was equally disquieting. The conviction that many of his clients were guilty of the charges against them was, in the main, overturned by his belief that everyone was entitled to a fair trial and a vigorous defense. If nothing else, he argued to himself, he stood between a defendant and a sentence that was harsh or pointless. But even his victories failed to please him. The law, he decided, had little room for subtlety. Increasingly, he wondered if it had any room for him.

Family was his refuge. Colin was bright, beautiful and creative, with a fierce independent streak, which Susan encouraged and Frank tolerated wistfully. The small family vacationed in a new spot each summer, and they spent hours singing together in the car. When Colin was eight and could handle melodies on his own, Frank and Susan harmonized, inventing new parts for songs that lacked a third voice. He always tried to cede George Harrison's vocals to her, but she smilingly passed them back to him.

Frank left a generous tip beneath his plate of half-eaten eggs and bacon, thinking of the approving nod Susan would have given him. Back in the car, he glanced at his watch. Half an hour before the meeting. If he arrived early, he'd either run into the parishioners on the parking lot, thus antagonizing the pastor, or be caught sitting with the pastor when the parishioners arrived, confirming their suspicion that he would inevitably side with a fellow priest.

He frowned. Better to show up at the precise time than to risk contaminating himself in the eyes of either side. He drove until he found a little park and sat at a picnic bench, presiding over a few ducks squabbling with each other on the surface of a pond.

He'd switched from criminal to civil litigation after a few years in the firm and had initially enjoyed the opportunity to bring cases to a successful conclusion before trial. Still, he often complained to Susan that he was playing a game with winners and

losers. Worse, even the losers believed fervently that someone ought to win. Then one night, as he poured out his frustrations, she began to talk back.

"I spend half of each day resolving little conflicts," she told him. "It isn't always easy, even with adolescents, but it can be done." She liked the challenge of confronting two equally obstinate antagonists and gently persuading each of them to modify his demands by appreciating the other's. "They'll both accept a decision if neither one thinks he loses, but the way I see it, they both win."

"Is there a difference?" he asked, propping himself up on one elbow.

"Depends on your perspective," she answered, pushing him onto his back and climbing on top of him.

Afterward, she placed her lips against his ear and whispered, "The world isn't a just place. It's just a place."

He made some kind of sound, and she leaned back in the semi-dark, trying to decipher his reaction. It was amusement, more or less. "Well," he said after a moment, "if the world were a just place, I probably wouldn't be lying here with you."

"Nobody gets what they deserve," she said brightly, "and it's a good thing, too." So it ended in laughter. But later on, as he listened to Susan's regular breathing, Frank knew what he wanted to do.

When he made partner, he used the leverage it gave him to carve out a small niche for the mediation of disputes, his pro bono work. No one at the firm was interested, so he worked alone, honing his skills in consultations with psychologists, sociologists, experts in rhetoric, and anthropologists. He learned to read body language and to recognize moments in the negotiations when breakthroughs might occur.

If his partners worried that his new interest would decrease the firm's income, they were soon disabused of the notion. He kept up his case load and won several large settlements when opponents refused to see the wisdom of compromise. He found it distasteful, especially as he learned to appreciate the value of mediation. But it was their choice, he reasoned, so if people insisted on justice, he let them have it.

It was at least a little ironic, he knew, that his reputation as a fierce litigator served to increase his traffic in mediation. People seemed relieved when he was on everyone's – or no one's – side. He was not above using this as a means to bring people together. And though disputants never ceded him the power to settle the argument as he saw fit, they often looked at him like he was a Deus ex

Machina in a suit and tie – and got down to the business of limiting their expectations.

To his, but not Susan's, surprise, he began to experience consolation in the impartiality he assumed at the start of each negotiation, an impartiality that was, in fact, genuine. When he entered into talks with hostile parties, he brought with him a great deal of expertise and a conviction born of experience: when people accept less than what they believe their anger, greed, grief or wounded pride demand, they change somehow.

He didn't really know how they changed until Susan found the words for him. "They think they want justice. Then you open their eyes," she said one night as they lay in bed and he talked about a difficult case.

"Really?" he asked. "And what do they see when I get them to open their eyes?"

"They see," she said, as if talking to one of her students, "that justice is an illusion. Then they have a chance to learn that if they're bitter, it's because they want to be."

"It's not that simple," he protested.

"I know that. And you can't put it in so many words. But that's what you do."

"Nobody's ever completely satisfied when we're through," he reminded her.

"Bingo," she said, snapping her fingers in the dark. "But if they're lucky, they might decide that satisfaction isn't the point." Then she said, "Satisfaction's overrated, anyway."

"You really think so?" he asked, placing a hand on her breast.

"Maybe not in the short term," she said, laughing.

Frank had already decided to leave the firm for full-time meditation when Susan became ill. It began with a dull ache in the abdomen, but when the pain increased, she sought a diagnosis. Pancreatic cancer. The oncologist called it advanced and inoperable. He gave her a month.

She lasted half a year, and as her weight and strength diminished, serenity became the most tangible part of her. But Frank grew increasingly frantic. He attended Mass every morning, praying for a miracle. Late at night, he lay beside her, making wild promises to God. "I'll do anything you ask," he begged. "Just let her live."

She required greater doses of morphine all the time, but toward the end, it didn't put her out. "I'd rather be awake for it," she told him in a whisper late one night when he asked her if she was in pain.

He was holding her just before dawn, still praying for a mira-

cle, when he felt her stir. "What is it, Hon?" he asked. Then he saw that she was struggling to reach the small CD player on the night stand. "You want some music?" he asked, the fear just beginning to register.

When he felt her nod, he got up, came quickly around to her side of the bed, and turned on the lamp, careful to shade her eyes from the glare. "Where's the fucking disc?" he blubbered, fumbling through a stack of cases, most of which ended up on the floor. Then he heard her clear her throat. "Just push play," she said distinctly. They were the clearest words she had spoken in a week.

Susan had talked about it shortly after the diagnosis, and she had been insistent. "When I die, I want my two favorite men with me."

Frank now did as he was told and heard the simple guitar chords: E minor to A. As the sound of "My Sweet Lord" filled the room, he lay back down beside Susan. Her eyes were open and her lips moving. He leaned in close. "Alleluia," she murmured along with George Harrison, "Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna."

She stopped breathing before the song ended, but he let it play through to the end, then played it again, weeping quietly, his face pressed against her hair. Then he placed the phone call and woke Colin. The two of them were sitting with her when the people from hospice arrived.

A dog's barking startled him and he looked toward the pond. The ducks had retreated a short distance from the shore and were quacking loudly at a terrier that strained against the leash held by its master, a frail woman in a print dress. She spoke sharply to the dog, and yanked savagely on the leash when it failed to obey. The wretched animal slunk back to her, casting one longing look back toward the ducks, who preened, adjusted their wings and paddled slowly away.

Frank looked at his watch. Time to go. He pulled the car onto Nathan Bedford Forrest Highway and turned left after a mile or so, driving up a steep hill toward the white frame church.

Pastors familiar with his background sometimes asked him to talk with parishioners whose feuds threatened to split the entire congregation. He had also moderated several administrative disputes in the two years since his ordination, and they usually broke down along predictable lines.

The trouble in this small parish was fairly typical. Members of the parish council complained that the pastor wouldn't share financial information with them. In response, the pastor threatened to dissolve the council for insubordination.

Sometimes, members of the parish complained about a pastor's unorthodox liturgical practices or his refusal to preach about church doctrine. Regardless, the correspondence Frank read in preparation for each case verged on the melodramatic, if not the hysterical. Invariably, the parties spoke of the welfare of souls, clubbing each other with citations from Scripture or Canon Law to make their case.

Frank sighed. These disputes were so Catholic. Leaving the car unlocked, he carried his briefcase into the church. The sanctuary was empty, and he sat in the last pew, gazing at the huge crucifix fastened to the wall behind the altar. He smiled.

Susan had been reared at the opposite end of the ecclesial spectrum. The pastor of her non-denominational church owned a paving company, and he received his call to the ministry one day while driving a gravel truck in place of an unreliable employee. He looked upon the people of his congregation like hired hands: they could quit or be fired, but they would never run the franchise. Like the majority of pastors in that rural county, he kept his day job.

His preaching, Susan said, was as unvarying as a stretch of highway through Montana, and she had memorized every road sign and mile marker by the time she was ten. During her teens, she visited some of the churches that her friends attended, but they proved to be less entertaining variations on the visions of fiery lakes and unrelenting punishments that she was already familiar with.

She fled as soon as early graduation from high school allowed, moving to the city, where she avoided worship entirely until she met Frank. When he told her that he went to church, she was surprised, since he had not once asked her if she had been saved.

They had a good laugh about her confusion during the first Mass she attended. She had no point of reference for Catholic liturgy, and was prepared to be surprised, perhaps even shocked. Afterward, she told him that she had initially mistaken the Kyrie Eleison for a chant to Krishna or Vishnu. But she felt at home right away.

Frank's religion was a guarantee of her pastor's disapproval; he regularly complained about Catholics, Lutherans and other idolaters. So the wedding took place in Frank's church. Susan's sullen relatives attended, alternately gawked at the statues and stared at their feet throughout the ceremony, and skipped the reception, at which alcohol was served.

Susan went to Mass with Frank every Sunday, and though he never pressured her, she decided to convert when she discovered



that she was pregnant. She was received into the church a month before Colin was born.

Over time, Frank discovered that Susan was unorthodox in a way that only an adult convert to Catholicism could be. She appreciated the wisdom the church had accumulated over the centuries, but she thought it had far too many doctrines. "It's like they're running back and forth all the time, trying to keep the plates spinning," she said on more than one occasion.

"The church uses too many words," she told Frank one Sunday afternoon, when Colin, then twelve, was at a friend's house. Frank was playing his guitar.

He nodded and smiled, though he said nothing. The new pastor had gone on far too long that morning.

"All I'm saying," she said a bit louder, as if he had challenged her, "is that music doesn't explain itself. It just pulls you in. I think that's what God does, too. Or wants to do. The church gets in the way sometimes."

"So you can just believe anything you want?" he asked, a little stiffly, though he was thinking, "God, that was a Catholic thing to say."

"That's a very Catholic thing to say," she told him. He blushed.

"Yeah, I guess," he said, "but I'm a Catholic sort of person."

"I love what Jesus has to say," she told him. "But I hear other voices, too."

"What voices?" he asked. "Whose voices?"

But she didn't answer because she was focused on her own thoughts. "It's like harmony," she said at last. "When it's just right, you know God exists and everything's complete. So I listen for interesting harmonies."

He heard a babble of voices in the vestibule, and he exited the pew just as the pastor entered the sanctuary from somewhere behind the altar. Frank took a few steps toward him and stopped, so that when the parishioners entered the church, he was standing roughly equidistant from the warring parties.

He smiled, pivoting so that everyone could see his face. "Good. You're all here," he said.

They shook hands and exchanged names, but before the pastor could lead the group to the conference room, Frank suggested that they all take seats in the pew. "I'd like to start us off with a prayer," he announced.

He ushered them into places on either side of the aisle, deftly blocking the way of the chairperson of the parish council, forcing

him to sit beside the pastor. Then he stood before the group. "Let us pray," he began.

Frank's prayer was brief and extemporaneous, though he had given its principal aims some thought beforehand. But he doubted that the people seated in front of him were listening too closely. As he prayed for all of them, he saw some lips moving and guessed that they were practicing their speeches.

He ended by invoking the Holy Spirit, Who had His work cut out for Him, if the correspondence he had read was any indication of the disputants' moods. When he had finished speaking, he asked the pastor to show them into the conference room. After a brief review of the ground rules, he summarized the complaints as he understood them and then gave everyone at the table a chance to speak.

They were all civil as this first Saturday morning session began, though as people talked, Frank could feel them straining to keep their emotions in check. On the surface, the dispute was about equally mistaken notions that the church was a democracy or an autocracy.

Frank scanned the faces at the table as each person spoke. Everyone in the room was sincere, and none of them understood the real problem. They all wanted to be part of one perfect thing, and for various reasons, they had chosen to place their hopes on this little parish, this tiny, roughly homogeneous collection of believers.

And when perfection didn't materialize, their anger and grief spilled over into a struggle for power, a poor substitute for perfection, as Frank knew, but less frightening than the abandonment of desire.

His face remained passive, but he was waiting for the right time to stir them up, to get them shouting at each other, saying out loud what they really thought and felt. They were about forty-five minutes into it when he saw an opening and asked the right question. Everyone began speaking at once, voices rising as they struggled to be heard.

He let it go on, interjecting comments and questions only when he thought someone was ready to bolt from the room. After about fifteen minutes, they appeared to run out of gas, until the pastor tried to get in the last word, and it all began again. Many harsh things were said. Frank knew they needed saying.

They were a long way from perfection by now, and Frank's experience told him it was a good time for them to think about that. He ended the session with a few words of encouragement and sent them off to separate lunches, aware that they weren't ready to

eat a meal together. They were to regroup in two hours. He returned to the motel but didn't stay there, aware that it was no place to be thinking about how to break people's hearts. Instead, he changed into casual clothes, stopped at a store for a couple of bananas and a bottle of orange juice, and found a park where parents were watching their children play soccer. He sat in the stands, the sun warming his face and forearms.

When Susan died, Colin was fourteen, and Frank took a generous buyout from the firm. As his work in mediation increased, he scheduled himself carefully around all of the games and recitals. Colin was a capable midfielder, but a gifted musician. When he played one of Segovia's Bach transcriptions, Frank could feel the music quietly easing his grief, transforming it into something better that he couldn't name.

Susan's words were at hand, gathered in diaries, a habit she'd formed in her teens. She showed him some of the earlier ones after they were married, laughing at the foolish concerns of adolescence, but Frank encouraged her to keep up the practice.

She wrote less frequently after Colin was in school and she was teaching again, and the last four years of her thoughts filled only one volume. A couple of weeks before she died, she made Frank promise to read them. "When you're ready," she said.

He had been frightened to open them, to see her handwriting on the pages, but he was relieved at how good it felt to hear her voice in the words. He loved best the passages that spoke of the contentment she felt after they had made love, or when she saw Colin flip his hair back with an unconscious shake of his head.

The most recent passages, written after the diagnosis, were entirely free of bitterness. She didn't want to die, and she was determined to live as long as she could, but she wrote that she had no time for regret. Sometimes, a passage ended with a verse from a song she loved. If she caught herself trying to put into words the feelings that Colin's playing evoked in her, she jokingly reproved herself.

The last entry was written about a month before she died, and it was almost indecipherable: a verse from "Amazing Grace" and random lines from "Within You and Without You" and "My Sweet Lord," her favorite songs. Finally, she wrote "One note, like a mantra," and then, "Harmony . . . Peace."

Frank jumped when his cell phone rang. He checked the caller ID, smiled, and edged away from the little grandstand as he answered. "Hey, Dad," Colin said. Susan would have been happy

for their son, who was now taking advanced guitar studies in New York. He was twenty-four.

They chatted for a while, and Frank explained where he was and what he was doing.

"God's work, huh?" Colin teased. He was a cheerful believer in the beauty of music.

"It's a living," Frank said, completing one of their standing jokes. "When will you be home next?" They hung up after a few more minutes, and Frank made several circuits of the parking lot.

Susan never abandoned her Catholicism as Colin now had, but her diaries contained evidence that she had found wisdom in many places. Quotations from Zen Masters, Hindu Yogis, Islamic Imams, and Jewish Rabbis appeared on the pages like the refrains of songs. Jesus got a fair amount of play, too.

As far as Frank could tell, by the time of her death, Susan believed that God's voice was heard most clearly in music and poetry, regardless what culture or religious tradition it sprang from.

He envied her. She had distilled her beliefs into something pure, simple and ineffable, and it somehow bridged the gap between the human and the divine for her. The peace she felt, even as she was dying, wasn't proof that she was right. It was the product of a life of patient waiting.

In the first years after her death, he spent a lot of time wondering if she believed in the resurrection. She had quoted Jesus on the subject, but had also copied passages that referred to reincarnation or the transmigration of souls. He couldn't decide where she ended up, and he became fairly certain that she hadn't, either.

He wanted to share the contentment she felt in the lack of certain knowledge, and he knew that the testimony of other religious traditions helped her achieve it. But he couldn't incorporate Buddhism or Hinduism into his religious lexicon. If he was going to find what Susan had found, it would be within Christianity, the language of his youth and culture.

He glanced at his watch. "Shit," he said to himself. He'd now have no time to return to the motel and change back into his clerics. But it was just as well. Though he'd been ordained for two years now, he still felt more like a lawyer when he wore the collar. He threw the banana peels and empty juice bottle into a trash can and walked back to his car.

When he reached the church parking lot, the members of the parish council were just climbing out of two cars and the pastor was closing the rectory door behind him. No one commented on Frank's change of clothes. He began this session by identifying the

feelings he had heard expressed that morning, hoping that the people gathered around the table would see past the immediate causes of the dispute and find a way to appreciate the common roots of their discontent.

Within half an hour, he had them talking about everything except the issues that had brought them to the table. When the conversation lagged or threatened to go off course, he told brief, self-deprecating stories that gave them all an opportunity to laugh at themselves. The dispute was never mentioned during the two and a half hours that afternoon.

They broke about thirty minutes before the regular Saturday evening Mass, at which Frank would preside. The entire group was having dinner afterward, and Frank now thought they might be ready to start the process of learning to live with one another.

The Gospel for the weekend was the passage from Matthew where Jesus tells Peter that he must forgive "seventy times seven times," and Frank began his homily by suggesting that Jesus knew it might take most people that many repetitions to forgive someone and actually mean it. He called forgiveness an antidote to bitterness, and he spoke for five minutes, about his average.

After communion, as the choir sang a hymn, he closed his eyes and thought about what he had said to the congregation. The homiletics professor at the seminary always kidded him about his economical summations.

Three years after Susan died, when Colin was a high school senior, Frank's pastor asked him if he'd ever thought about the seminary. He was surprised, because his church involvement went no deeper than Sunday Mass with Colin. "No," he said, "I haven't."

But the pastor persisted, mentioning it at every opportunity, and when Colin was accepted at a university on the west coast, Frank decided to consider it. The associate at their parish had been an accountant for ten years before deciding to become a priest, and Frank talked with him about his decision.

He knew that he would never remarry, and he hoped that the study of theology might bring him the kind of peace that Susan had found. But it was the thought of living in the house alone that tipped the scales. That fall, when Colin left for school, taking the CD player with him, Frank left, too.

At first, he didn't enjoy the seminary for reasons other than the ones he had anticipated. He slid comfortably into the academic work, which was no more challenging than law school, and he got along well with the students, most of whom were several years older than Colin.

He thought the problem was the continual bounce back and forth from the terribly serious to the downright silly. He knew right away that most of these young men couldn't wait to get out there and save some souls, if not the world. They were earnest in a way that took him back to his law school days.

Even their humor betrayed a single-minded focus on God and the church. They paraphrased Gospel verses (Many are cold, but few are frozen), referred to the offertory collection as "fleecing the sheep," and sang parts of the Mass to the theme songs from television shows.

He wasn't scandalized. The gentle blasphemy was about the only thing standing between these serious young men and early burnout. Then, toward the end of his first year, he began to understand why being with them day after day was so difficult. They were, all of them, the anti-Susan. Their beliefs in church teaching were specific and unshakable, worthy of somebody's sacrifice when push came inevitably to shove.

They would one day be released into the world of parish life, armed mostly with serious words, the last things they needed. Their faith was a beautiful and complicated melody, but it tried too hard for resolution, and it had no room for other voices. Once he figured that out, Frank found his balance, and he developed compassion for the men he studied with. They reminded him of his life before Susan.

By the time he was ordained, his faith was entirely free of specificity, something that would have shocked his professors. He understood the language of Christianity, and he used it both well and sparingly, quietly urging his congregation to understand that God's simple gifts weren't designed to satisfy their longings or to answer their questions.

He had learned to hope only for contentment, and he found it, fleetingly, all over the place: in Colin's voice, in an old woman's smile or tears, in the clang of spoons in a metal sink, and very often in Susan's diaries, which he read instead of his breviary.

Most of all, he found it in music, maybe because he always felt Susan's presence in harmonies which bridged the gaps between voices or fortified a melody with a single note that repeated itself over several measures.

He felt a nudge in his ribs and opened his eyes. The choir had finished its post-communion song, and the congregation was looking expectantly at him. He smiled and stood, then blessed them with the ancient words of Aaron: "May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you peace."

Later on, as the dinner with the pastor and the parish council was winding down, one of the people across the table from him said, "I hear you have a son."

"Oh, yes," he answered. "We talked on the phone earlier this afternoon. He's in New York, studying music."

"You're happy for him, aren't you?" she said.

He smiled at her and nodded, sharing a moment of perfect understanding with another parent.

Instead of leading them back to the conference room, Frank suggested that they wash the dishes together and then use the dinner table for the evening session. He got a few shrugs in return, but the woman who had asked about Colin began collecting plates. Soon everyone was in the kitchen, laughing and telling stories.

When they were almost through, another of the women noticed that the pastor had rubbed his forehead and left some soap suds along one eyebrow. She reached up, wiping them carefully away, and he thanked her with a small, embarrassed smile. Several of the people in the kitchen laughed.

Frank was familiar with this, the rush of relief people felt when they had said the hard words and everyone was still standing. But he saw the chairperson scowl, and he knew that the group had a lot of work yet to do.

At the very least, he thought, they'd learn to be civil to one another and to settle future disputes without assistance. As to bitterness, Frank knew that the jury was still out. He could only encourage them to open their eyes in any case.

His work with this group was far from over, but as he ushered them back to the dinner table, he found himself humming the old song that had gotten him that first date with Susan. To his surprise and delight, a man on his left picked up the melody, and Frank, prompted by many years of patient waiting, immediately—and unconsciously—switched to harmony.

—Mike Linder '71

