The Trinity Review, Spring 1977

Trinity College

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An Hour of March 31

Having discussed
Leroi Jones
cat feet
the story of Joseph
a mutual friend
the color of my skin and your shirts
I collapse into spin art
spun-out red
over and under dribbled blue

Cheryl Berkowitz
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### Spring 1977

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A BRIEF NOTE ON THE MOVEMENT
FROM BOURGEOIS ART TO REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE

by Alan Golanski

Bourgeois art is reactionary in its affirmational character — it is subversive in its negating transcendence (Herbert Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt). The beauty and truth it finds in the given order tie it to that order. Affirming social relations by concealing them, culture teaches and strengthens a conceptualization of reality in which two worlds flourish: the material world of human activity and society, and the spiritual realm of the soul. Considered superior to the factual world of life and struggle, the spiritual world offers individuals a chance for "inner freedom" and mystic revolution. Revolt in the streets when the beautiful world is ours for the taking?! No reason for that! Abandon "a condition which requires illusions" when illusions about our condition liberate us?! Why think of it?! The Establishment is affirmed.

But there is also an element of negation in bourgeois art. "High-brow" culture separates itself from the material reality, to be sure, and the liberation attainable in the ethereal realm is illusory, to be sure, but in the illusion another reality does appear. This other reality negates and transcends the given one. "And transcends it, not toward a realm of mere fiction and fantasy, but toward a universe of concrete possibilities" (Marcuse, p. 88). It is precisely this "otherness" of artistic reality which supersedes society and provides, in bourgeois culture, a revolutionary element. It is a statement of things which ought to be, but cannot be realized within capitalist structures.

In his book False Promises, Stanley Aronowitz describes the problem which the need for art raises for the power structure. In order to perpetuate its ideological domination, the ruling class needs creative people. Culture is assigned the task of legitimizing bourgeois power. But artists are inspired when they see the society as a whole, in its totality — and this implies their distance from the center of society, from the very power legitimized by their work. Marginality and the broadened perception allowed by marginality stimulate the critical intellect of artists. The system's need for stability "calls for the degradation of the artist and the intellectual into a mere functionary;" its need for creativity and innovation "demands that he or she retain a degree of independence and a capacity for critical thinking" (Aronowitz, p. 119). From this angle, we see the affirmative function and roots of a subversive potential in bourgeois art. Embedded somewhere in even the most blatantly bourgeois and reactionary art may be negating, anti-bourgeois qualities.

One task of the revolutionary artist must be to transform artistic material "as it exists..."
under capitalism,” not by destroying what is valuable or ideal in it, but by ending its beautification and justification of the established order — i.e., by ending its affirmative nature. How? A few suggestions: Revolutionary art can replace concentration on the soul as the source of “inner freedom” with concentration on real-life struggle as the source of real freedom. It can replace attention to individual truths with attention to collective problems and reality. Revolutionary art can reveal unrealized potentialities instead of searching for eternal, nonhistorical essences.

It is at this point that the artist may claim that some sort of a totalitarian intrusion by the political revolution is going on. The philosophy of “art-for-art’s-sake” denies that art should serve any social purpose. This ideology maintains that the only function of art is to exist, and that art reflects nothing more outstanding than the feeling of the individual artist. And since each individual has the right to feel whatever s/he feels we cannot criticize the artist’s message, regardless of its political implications. At best, we can criticize his or her use of form — the way the message is expressed. But art which poses as autonomous and pretends to relate to nothing outside of itself actually serves the interests of the ruling class. Art which is for its own sake divorces its audience from social reality and works to keep the established order alive. Like anything else produced in the society, art has a definite relation to the rest of society; the artist is not above history, but is firmly cemented to the historical moment in which s/he creates.

In bringing a critical intellect to the cultural realm, we are recognizing the class nature of society and the rooting of social (and artistic) consciousness in social being. Revolutionary culture will be a part of the revolution which can bring into existence a classless society. It is then that human history will begin and a truly human culture will flourish for the first time. Art will be an “end in itself” and artistic creation will be free, human activity when it is “not one of the specialities among the many, preserved for the fortunate few, but an essential dimension of human life in general” (Istvan Meszaros, Marx’s Theory of Alienation, p. 211.). Before the revolution, it is not the revolutionary movement, but the reality of capitalist society which causes art to be a means to certain ends external to the creative process. For the ruling class, those ends are maintenance of the power structure and perpetuation of a system of exploitation and degradation; for the revolutionary movement, they are freedom for the people from that system and the liberation of human potential.
Fantasy On A Spanish Theme

In the autumn days' first pride,
not to be outdone be the air's
quickening anticipation,
or the sky's deep blazes
beating earlier on night,
the trees puff like many ruffling birds—
and I am not content to be alone.

That is when I draw her to me
from the recondite, barely remembered regions,
to captivate my thoughts;
The Spanish woman wrinkled and in black,
bringing me Spain out of her pockets
piece by piece as even I do not remember it,
divulging secrets so minute
that I fear a breath will make their richness fade
like the last color ember
in the grounded leaf.

When autumn sets in hard on the milkweed's molt,
when finally rust and brown drift
across the fields and moors,
then my lady turns to stroke my hair
and in Castillian sing me half-heard lullabies.
The minor cadences of her whisper
trace the flight of gypsies
along their syncopated song of pain,
and together we flee beyond the cloud-voiced threads
of the fantasy cocoon she wraps —
to a beyond that is only deeper inside
the wrappings of my invention.

But then when the snow's crystalline blues
pile weightless on my silken coma,
my Spanish mistress departs
like a fickle memory on a brightly harnessed mule —
and I have no choice but to be alone.

Leslie Brayton
A la Diane Wakoski

The children are alone and I am waiting for a lover who will not come despite my new earrings. The question which bothers me is whether to put on make-up and dry out my skin, endure its pulling for the sake of applesmoothness. What I want most is to make nothing happen, walk mute to the bowlegged beginnings. Then there were no enraged Lilliputs and all gargoyles were gauzy. A while and an ample rose budded on the doorstep, two pearly eyes opened and twittered. A Robin Red breast hopped in each, it was Xmas in the future. Yes, the today then was firmer than now.

Helen Lawson
Surreal

What is this you hold
in your hand, a dagger?
So unAmerican, no, it is
your heart, nurtured on
the Revolution, fathered prim
by Pilgrims. You cannot kill

me, I am
a woodcut by Dürer, do not
doubt it, When next Christmas
you mistletoe your students,
I shall be a willow at the
frozen pond, weeping.

Helen Lawson
To kill, perchance to dream a goat
neck neatly slashed open
resting listlessly in a platter of
its own congealing blood —
  this unleashes a thrill of ecstasy!
With His death dies our sins,
With her blood our suffering is cleansed,
  and we can start over again,
(a) fresh —
... or can we?

A war-scourged mercenary paces
the Manichean battleground of reciprocal forces
which goads him towards a personal
annihilation
  of notions of himself which
  intertwined with himself
  can never cease;
And that too can be temporarily
tucked away through ritual massacre.
  The ghost of that memory
  is never far from the pillar upon
  which it was sactionimously murdered.
It hovers ever
to reMIND us of the triple-edged dagger
at the root of this mindFUL malaise
  which deigned initially to penetrate the goat.

Shaking his head in feigned disbelief
the voyeur of numerous battles enters into
a psychodramatic Reign of bloodless Terror.
  Marat, amidst his personal Dachau
  invokes the Demonic Goat from its Pentagram.
  Emerging from flames of passionless sorcery
  — it thrusts that self-same dagger groinwards...
  — (or do I betray mySELF?)

The naive supplicant to the ritual remarks:
"The purpose of culture is to confuse us"
remaining unaware that he next will mount
the steps to a guillotine of endless perdition.
  And though his head may fall a thousand thousand
  times to the rhythm of that 'liberating' blade,
  he'll find that: here, there is no peace.

A demon placed his hand on our mercenary's shoulder
and counselled: "pleasure derives its delectibility
through Pain." and you shudder the shudder of an
'adjusted Amerikan' while he laughs a laugh of discomfort —
and I laugh all the heartier at his painfilled-laugh.
To purge, perchance to pain oneself
through words;
standing naked on an altar of
blood-smeared marble —
it unleashes a thrill of ecstasy
and adrenaline
which surges and swells
till yet another womb bursts,
and guiltily you kill off another victim.
guiltlessly you kill off another victim.

I do not know if I am hangman or victim
for I play both parts too well,
And you, who cling to social dictums
Go straight-away to private Hells.

—Compliments to René Girard
THE WEEKEND

i lost you once again this weekend.
with each caress, your mute body
drew back tight
pulling away from my touch.
hello, can you hear my hands?
you swam away in a vacuum.

though you lay sleep-happy, reeking dreams,
with each sticky breath another injection
stabbed my skin
with silver acuity.
inoculated with isolation, i fought you
writhing like a drugged monkey.

then later, much later
choking on a cup of insularity
i wanted to peel you awake like an orange
and squeeze to the pulp.
but you, in a dionysian sleep
were endlessly deaf to me and the watch
clocking no more hours till sunday.

i killed you once again this weekend
with each caress, razor edged hands
cut neat lines
across your smooth back.
i watched as you bled sterily;
careful not to mess the sheets.

i lost you this weekend as every other.
with each one a disjointed interval
of three suns.
i meet you each time as a foreigner.
and you always hide yourself
from what is unfamiliar.

Mona Daleo

Lynn Gray
I've always hated winter. As a child, sleds and skates never made it bearable; as a teenager, a large fake fur coat, the envy of my friends, failed to make me look forward to going outside. The cold is insidious; it creeps into the cracks of bone and cartilage, and for all of winter it seems impossible to get warm again.

The eleven o'clock weather forecast threatens snow, and I think of how it will be blown in through the tiny space below the casement window and pile a tiny drift on the sill. I will have to scrape my car clean before I go to the office in the morning. It will be so cold I'll barely be able to get up. My apartment has the only thermostat in the building, but I have to keep it turned low. The superintendent will let himself in with a pass key when I'm out and turn down the heat if I keep it comfortably warm. The landlord sends us memos about the rising cost of fuel, so I resign myself to waiting for spring and the thaws, and to using extra blankets.

I wake early to the forecasted snow. I wrap my afghan tightly around me like a cocoon and pull it up over my face. It was a gift a long time ago from my grandmother. She had made it for me just before she had her stroke; I mean right before. My mother had told me that she had just finished tying off the last knot and then said she was tired and fell to the floor. They put a pillow under her head and wrapped the blanket she had just finished around her until the ambulance came. It was December; I was in school.

After the stroke, she was placed in a home with slick, slippery tile floors and pastel green walls. My mother made me visit every Sunday afternoon, guiding me by the elbow past nurses' stations and tiny alcove waiting rooms dotted with concerned middle aged people. My grandmother was propped up, almost too precariously, her cheeks and lips rouged hurriedly by some thoughtful nurse. Her cold, plastic eyes were frightening; I knew there was nothing behind them but space. She would make sounds like some hurt animal left by its herd to die in the woods.

My mother went out to speak to the nurses, leaving me with my helpless grandmother who was not understanding anything I said. She began to make louder, wilder sounds at me, clawing at my hand with her good hand. As her grip got tighter, I screamed, at the coarseness in her face, out of fear that this was a nightmare. A nurse came running with my mother. The white uniform detached the hand from my wrist, but the arm kept thrashing around, trying to catch it again. I stood, shaking, waiting to leave. Twenty minutes later and she was lying sedated, curled up like a fetus, eyes barely moving and fingers flexing irregularly.

I throw off the afghan; I've only been half awake, dreaming about her. It happens sometimes when I've wrapped myself all up in her
I stretch with a big yawn and pull the curtains apart so I can see the snow. The roof tops look like a drawing out of a children's book; the road looks impassable. I can call in to the office and say that the superintendent hasn't shoveled and I can't get out. Or maybe that it is so cold my car won't start.

I dress, make up the bed, and start a pot of coffee. I begin to give the apartment a vigorous cleaning — all to shake myself awake. I wait for the mailman and make a grocery list, thinking if I leave soon, the mail will be here when I get back.

I pull on boots and tuck in my pants before zipping them. I button the heavy coat as I leave the building. The snow in the driveway is like a powder; it sweeps off into the wind as I brush the windshield, and then returns to confront me full force in the face. The car won't start; I suppose it serves me right. I start down the driveway, my feet sending clouds of snow into the air. The grocery store is nearby, just across a shortcut through a corner of the cemetery. As I kick past the cracked graves, the snow starts to seep into my boots, leaving a cold dampness to my feet.

Inside the store, I shiver while I collect soup ingredients. I live on soup almost exclusively in the winter. It keeps me warm and cooking it seems to heat the whole kitchen. My grandmother made the best soups I've ever had, and she taught me how to make them when I was old enough to reach a stove. They occasionally walked off alone from the group, and when seeming to realize that the group was gone, they would stand almost perfectly still on the sidewalk, bent forward, arms slightly extended. It made me want to offer them money, to somehow help them out of their helpless state.

I will ignore her, I think, because there is nothing I can do to help her. When I come closer, I can see that her hands, holding the shawl tightly around her head, are bare. She covers them slightly by wrapping them in the black cloth; the skin on her hands and face is coarse, cracked, and looks as if the color is seeping out. A hand darts from the shawl to the mouth, pushing in something that looks like green cake. I notice a wedding ring, thick and shiny; she is married, or was, has children and probably grandchildren. For a moment, she holds out a remaining piece of cake to me, but I am uncertain if it is an invitation. I realize I've stopped, stared. I smile and so does she, the cracks in her cheeks widening. My feet feel frozen solid in my boots, so I start to push past her.

Me. Cold. The voice is unnatural, too tiny for such a massive shape. It seems to me she should bellow.

I want to leave, but she repeats her words. Me, too, I say in a weak voice, terrible weather. To back up my words, I hurry into the building.

Unpacking the grocery bag, I find I've forgotten barley. And it's started to snow again. I think of facing the cold again, and finally decide that twenty minutes of cold are preferable to imperfect soup. I pull on the boots again, taking away my foot when it hits the wet at the bottom; a second pair of socks and I don't feel the dampness. Tying my scarf in the lobby, I see that the mailman still hasn't come. I push out the door and an eddy of wind sweeps flakes like needles into my face. When I can see clearly, I notice that the Portuguese woman still stands in the same place. The snow clings to her shoulders like old lace. Her head turns slowly and she sees me. I'm sure she is going to reach her hand in my direction in a moment. Her mouth is working and I can almost hear her words.

It's really too cold, I think to myself, and I go back inside and upstairs. The buzzer sounds. For a moment I think that she is in the lobby of the building, that she knows where I live and is coming after me. No, not true, either; it buzzes rapidly a second and third time, the mailman's signal. I get my mail and look it over on the way up the steps. I've gotten a letter from my mother, giving a lonely widow's description of the Maine coast in winter. She misses my father, wishes I would visit soon. There is to be a memorial service for my grandmother soon, would I be able to make it? I sit down to write back, trying to match the just so balance of sadness and peace my mother has in her letter. I think of telling her about the Portuguese woman, but I wonder if she would understand. In motherly wise tones she would write back to somehow help them out of their helpless state.

I will ignore her, I think, because there is nothing I can do to help her. When I come closer, I can see that her hands, holding the shawl tightly around her head, are bare. She
I'm making soup today. I finally do not tell her about the woman on the sidewalk. I seal the envelope, suddenly tired. I feel a temptation to go to the window and see if she is still there, snow accumulating on her body until she can no longer be seen. I peel vegetables and put together a large kettle of soup to simmer, and close my eyes on a throbbing low, I try to sleep. With the afghan pulled up to my eyes, I almost feel as if I am sleeping in a snowdrift. Everything I see is through a lacy network of white. I sleep and dream of the woman on the sidewalk. Tomorrow morning they will find her frozen to death, solid like a bulky, ugly statue. The police will come asking questions: Didn't you see her? Didn't you do anything? Why not? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid to get involved? I wake up frightened for her, and I go to the window. No, she is not there. I feel like I've fooled a very clever adversary; now I can go back to the store and get barley. The car still won't start in the cold, but the sidewalks have been shoveled and swept and it's stopped snowing. I will walk to the store on the sidewalk this time to keep my feet drier.

On the way back, holding my grocery bag to my chest, I stop as I turn the corner, seeing that she is back. I feel sure she's waiting for me. I come closer, determined to smile and then pass on. Her mouth is moving, her face, cracked and discolored, her teeth, brown and crooked. The fingers on her exposed hand are raw, slightly into my way, though not enough to block me. I can't seem to move. Me. There is something dreamlike and familiar in that hand and tentatively push at her elbow. She turns and watching behind us. I see a cemetery. We step inside the building and she examines the hand with the rosary. I know where she must wait. Her hand reaches out from inside the cloth and presses something into my chest. It is soft and warm. She smiles, putting her hand on my neck and pulling me to her chest. It is soft and warm.

When the cab comes, I walk her downstairs and pay the driver. I leave him a big tip on the door of their house. I tell him that it is very important to make sure she gets safely inside her ballered fingers.

I wait on the sidewalk until even the tail lights are swallowed by the afternoon darkness and snow. The metal cross and wooden beads are cold in my clenched hand. I begin to feel my sweater getting damp and heavy, and my boots are leaking. I walk back to the building, anticipating its warmth, rubbing my red hands, and feeling the age and smoothness of the beads with my fingertips.
Of a Dying Uncle

My uncle lies alone in white sheets
In an old man's home in London
Where, he told me, old men come only to die.
And my uncle is obliging them this week.
At this time last year I saw him
And he showed me his own room,
The almost hospital room, made his only with pictures
Of me and my mother and her sisters.
He pushed me his letter from King Edward to admire
And a picture of himself in the ribbons and medals of a colonel, smiling.
When we left his room he opened every next closed door
With a key that he had taken from the matron in anticipation
Of me, and the little we might have to say.
He showed me proudly then, the wealth of his home,
A tree, gnarled and five hundred years my senior
A cloister where monks in their reverence once prayed, lowly,
A ballroom, for God knows what, he said,
We don't dance.
He showed me the chapel as it rained London greyness outside.
Inside, his swollen hands rubbed the varnished mahogany pews.
He could not meet the small stairs, but made me climb
To see the organ bellows and imagine how loud they were
And wonderful to those that could hear their Sunday praising.
Slowly, slowly, aided by the pine, brown walking stick that
Once I gave him that summer on the Elba Island
He showed me, I saw, his little, cloistered world.
And in the living distances between us now
I am crying and crying for my uncle.
Sheet white, I think, and proud and alone
At the end.

Janie Papps
There are times when the window is clear,
When the pane is faithful to the scene.
The moment is transient, deferring to
Lists that obscure the vision and
Deceive the viewer. The image is distorted
In the fog that fronts for reality.
Outside, the guests are arriving for dinner.

Sometimes, I long to grasp the intangible;
The abstractions of the intellect, like the
Dinner talk of the invited friends.
Just the touch would confirm existence.
It is this touch, anticipating the touch,
of skin to skin, that substantiates the
Relation between man and woman.

And often in my sleep I hear the sounds
Of dead men whispering at my door.
They are the dinner guests departing late.
Dreams, the seducers of thoughts, sidle up
To the window, teasing, displaying trinkets,
While the spirit strains at its root like
A catboat anchored at high tide.
Oh woman, I got the blues,  
the personal property blues,  
that say a woman on the street  
is everybody's swiss cheese to fuck —  
you got them blues too?  
Cause rape is America's middle name,  
and just as real  
when it's a twitch of lips,  
a long look once over easy,  
saying: "I'm hot to trot  
let's race to my place."  
And just as real when it's the scalping  
on your grocery bill  
your 'ain't got no heating' bill  
your lighting bill —  
cause who wants to sit in the dark  
and sing the blues —  
or the blacks white and greens  
while the world is coming apart at its screams?  
screams that are so damn silent  
that it scares you to death.  
And why do you think that our 'place'  
is in the home?  
So only we can hear the baby's screams  
the pipes and the washing machines  
the television's drone  
the dishes smashing on the floor  
the screech of cats  
in the back alley after rats  
of unwilling bodies doing a duty called love,  
and sometimes that's rape too  
but the screaming keeps on going in our heads  
cause the courts just say  
a wife should take her lumps  
and keep those blues to herself.  
Oh women, we've got the blues,  
the "Got no legal identity" blues  
and no one but ourselves  
is going to take those blues away.

Leslie Brayton
CHAMELEON

I tried to catch a chameleon once
On a brown and breaking edge of mountain
Spattered with gasping, humid plants that were
Just green. And
Dust. Barely alive.
Rocks in centuried stillness
Turned upwards (with me) into boulders
Until the blinding summit
Where my mischief of running and chasing
In blistering, dripping heat
Hit and then hurt
And in white, Greek, frenzied sunlight
I tried to catch a chameleon.

Janie Papps
to a Friend Gone Home  
(for Margie)

The snow has put moth kisses 
on your eyes, your cheekbones; 
brushing quietly the windows 
and circles of light, these last two nights. 
You will be gone 
when I read this poem. 
You will have climbed down 
off the shoulders of New England 
and gone south. 
When spring first touches our elms 
think that you saw it first. 
When you are deep into summer 
our pompous old crickets will just 
start cracking their knuckles 
and nodding in the heat. 
Connecticut’s bony sides will sprout 
tumbling, turning the rocks 
to squash and pumpkins. 
Old bones. Cranky they are. 
And when the leaves have fallen 
and we are wintering again, 
the sun, and Orion, will slip 
low in the sky, 
but still warm Birmingham. 
And still warm 
where you are.
The Driver

As the dusty sunset turns to dark rain,
We snort and herd, branded into our seats,
Our driver, the lone blue cowboy
Of Connecticut (and Points North)
Saddles in.
We are
"Advised not to smoke stand
Forward of the white line while
Coach is in motion or talk
To the driver."
The ember of his cigarette hangs
Like the badge on his coat.
It wanders among the headlights
Riding through the wet windshield night.
Some of us huddle like cattle
Against the rain-wet windows;
Some twist their necks, to sleep.
This sleep is the sound
Of freeway water, rushing:
We are dry, we are dry,
And our driver
Sits in his leathered company,
Roaming
Miles away.

Bill Epes
Pushed up against the glass, Sister Amalia's face looked funny, Biddy thought. Like the blowfish in the encyclopedia. She was yelling something, her eyes very wide and her face very red, but Biddy really couldn't make it out through the double doors. He was scared at first, because she looked a little like Flaherty's dog who always had to be chained up and when he jumped at you was all pink gums and yellowish teeth, but that passed quickly, and after a while she wasn't even funny anymore. She yelled again, shaking the handles on the doors, and Biddy examined her teeth.

Actually, Biddy wasn't his real name; it was Eustace Lee, named for some uncle his father always remembered as sharp, as in, "Old Eustace was sharp, boy." He didn't really like the name Biddy and he didn't at all like the way strangers would screw up their faces and repeat it when he told them, but then, he always felt it fit him well for some reason, and, well, Eustace Lee was no bargain either. He never knew where the name came from (his mother always claimed it came from his being a little "biddy" baby, but he didn't think even she believed that). It was his from as far back as he could remember. Even Sister Amalia called him Biddy, except when she got mad.

Although later the doctor would keep saying how well planned it was, Biddy really hadn't decided on it until right before recess, after Sister Amalia had come in for Question Time. He'd interrupted Janie Hilgenberg, who was asking a stupid question about when the new bathrooms would be finished anyway, and asked the same question again for the third day in a row about the old drunk and Father Hogan and the whole class had swallowed together and it had become very quiet. Sister Amalia had gotten very red (although not as red as she was later, against the glass) and he always felt it fit him well for some reason, and, well, Eustace Lee was no bargain either. He never knew where the name came from (his mother always claimed it came from his being a little "biddy" baby, but he didn't think even she believed that). It was his from as far back as he could remember. Even Sister Amalia called him Biddy, except when she got mad.

— Now, Biddy, just why did you lock everybody out?
— Answer the doctor, Biddy.
— Please, Mr. Halverson, I’ll question the boy ... Biddy?
— I didn’t want to get hit.
— Who was going to hit you?
— Sister Amalia.
— Why was Sister Amalia going to hit you?
— You must have done something, Biddy.

Tell the man.
— Mr. Halverson, would you ... please take your wife and leave us now? You’re really not helping at all.
— Look — you said we could stay the first time.
— I’m sorry, but I’ll begin the sessions right now. On your way out, tell the receptionist to hold all calls for the next half hour. Thank you, Mr. Halverson ... Okay, now, Biddy, why was she going to hit you?
— Because I asked her about the old drunk again.
— What?
— I asked her about this old drunk, see, and why Father Hogan couldn’t go to McDonald’s and everything and I guess it was a stupid question.
— I don’t understand.
— It’s okay. Nobody does.
— She was going to hit you for asking a question?
— Well, I asked it before. I was sorta getting to be a pain.
— So then the recess bell rang, right? What did you do then?
— Well, everyone went out except the two old secretaries in the office and Mrs. Fitzsimmons —
— Mrs. Fitzsimmons?
— The fifth grade teacher, so I told the secretaries that Sister wanted them and Mrs. Fitzsimmons that Greg — that’s her kid — got hurt on the monkey bars and when they left I locked the doors.
— But ... let me get this ... how did you lock the doors?
— I had time enough. Sister Amalia left her keys on the desk and I went around and locked the doors.
— It was that easy? All the doors?
— There’s only three, not counting the main ones.
— Incredible. And the other sisters didn’t have keys?
— Only to the main doors, I guess. I remember being real early one morning and Sister Justine saying we had to go around to the front because her keys didn’t open the other doors.
— So what about the main doors then?
— I got Charlie’s mop — he’s the janitor — and I slid it through the things on the doors. It held real good.

Sister Amalia hadn’t figured out what was going on, nobody had, until they noticed the mop through the glass and Biddy sitting on the stairs. After he’d gone up the second floor he could
watch the nuns rushing back and forth from
door to door even as he heard the far off rattle
as they tried each one. After a while, his par-
ents came and went right to the main doors,
but he didn’t go down. A little while after that
Charlie came and started fooling with the
office door, so Biddy went down and stuffed a
doorstop under it and then slid the big heavy
office desks over in front of the door, one by
one, until they just about reached the oppo-
site wall.
He walked up and down the hall for a while,
listening to Charlie swearing at the office
daor, Sister Amalia giving orders at the side
daor, and his parents calling him at the main
daors. He felt, suddenly, that all this was his.
He wandered into the fourth grade room
and played with one of the erasers, drew a few
spaceships on the board, and finally settled in
one of the chairs, enjoying the empty class-
room.
Benny Olexovitch was tapping at the win-
dow and asking if he could come in too, and
Biddy saw the unlocked window and hurried
over, trying to look like nothing was wrong,
and locked it. Then he ran from the room to
check the other windows. Across the hall a
seventh grader was trying to crawl in with a
boost from Sister Veronica and Biddy ran
over and tried to pry him loose but he
wouldn’t let go so Biddy bit his hand and he
yelled and fell back on Sister Veronica and
Biddy shut the window. And there were more
noises, in the fifth grade room and the first
grade room, and Biddy go rid of one quick but
the other one didn’t care how hard Biddy bit so
he ran over to the chalkboard and clapped his
face with them until his face and his hair were
all yellowy white and he choked and gagged,
and he let go too.

— Do you like Sister Amalia?
— No.
— Do you hate Sister Amalia?
— No.
— Did she hit you a lot?
— No. Not more than other kids. She hit other
kids more.
— Did you ever hate her for hitting the other
kids?
— No. They did dumb things.
— Is that why she hit you? For doing dumb
things?
— I guess so.

Biddy hadn’t even thought of the boy’s bath-
room window, but flat against the wall next to
it watching Sister Justine trying to wriggle
through, he was thinking of it now. He took a
stack of tiles from the corner from under the
new toilet seats and, just out of reach, slid the
sill down tight on her, wedged the tiles in, and
left her hanging there yelling his name.

— What do you think of me asking all these
questions?
— It’s okay. I like to ask a lot of questions too.
— Uh — the other sister — just how did you
trap her in the window like that?
— I don’t know how she got up that high.
Someone must’ve given her a boost. I got a
stack of tiles from the corner and stuck them in the top, you know, like this, so she
couldn’t move either way.
— Why do you think they sent her instead of
the janitor?
— Charlie’s kind of old for things like that.
— But why her do you think?
— They probably figured she was the skinni-
est.
— You don’t think it was because they knew
you liked her the best?
— No.
— Do you know how long she hung there?
— No. I heard her yelling for a while. I guess
they got her when they got me.
— Didn’t you worry about her hanging there?
— No. She couldn’t move.
— Why didn’t you push her back out instead
of trapping her?
— I didn’t think she’d let go.
— Did you try?
— No.
— Why didn’t you bite her hand, too?
— I didn’t want to. I couldn’t
— Ah. Why not?
— Her fingers are like .. cold. Like worms.
I couldn’t.

For a while, Biddy just sat on the steps of
the second floor landing, watching every-
body swarming around below. The teachers
were still trying to keep most of the kids to-
gether and quiet on the playground, but some
mothers had come, some kids had gone home
for lunch already, some were chasing each
other, and Benny Olexovitch was fighting
behind the hedges with somebody Biddy
couldn’t make out.

The feeling came over him that he
owned all the little figures below and they were trying
to entertain him. It was a nice feeling.
He wondered if he’d stay all night.
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owned all the little figures below and they were trying
to entertain him. It was a nice feeling.
He wondered if he’d stay all night. Then the
nuns all ran down the street and a big black
car pulled up — Father Hogan’s car — and
Biddy knew he wouldn’t.

— You never thought that all they’d have to
do was get a hold of Father Hogan?
— No. I forgot about him. I didn’t think about
him.
— You didn’t think all along that he’d come
and let them in?
— No. That’s a dumb question.
— Why?
Because. It's dumb.

Why is it dumb?

Because!

If I knew they'd get back in, why would I lock them out?

What did you think when he drove up?

I don't know.

What did you do?

I ran down and tried to jam up the last doors.

And you couldn't.

There was nothing around, and I heard them coming.

So what did you do?

I ran. I ran up to the top. I ran into a room but it was stupid to try and hide and I knew it so I came back out to the stairs.

Who was the first person you saw?

Sister Amalia.

Biddy crouched over the top of the stairs, rolling back and forth on the balls of his feet. Sister Amalia came up slowly, one hand gripping the rail. Biddy saw what he should do — what he should've done and wanted to do long ago — sail down the stairs he walked down so much. And he was out, arms outstretched, and Sister Amalia's open mouth was rushing up at him and there was a shock, first soft, then hard as they tumbled down the stairs, the loud ka-thumping mixing weirdly with Sister Amalia's shrieks. Then they were still, at the bottom, and Sister Amalia's leg was over his chest and everyone was running around and shouting.

— Do you remember thinking anything lying there?
— No.
— Do you remember it hurting?
— No. There was a lot of crying and screaming.
— That's because they saw the blood from your head.
— I guess they thought I was dead.

Biddy couldn't even remember being in a hospital before, so he didn't know whether this one was a good one or a bad one. When he told his mother that, she cried, and his father looked at him like he wished he would go away. He didn't really know what to make of that. They asked him what had happened over and over, which he thought was strange, since Sister Veronica had seen what happened along with Mary Alice McAfee and Billy Keating. They asked if he like the food. They asked if he was warm enough. They asked if he wanted anything to play with and when he really couldn't think of anything to say, his mother cried again.

— Do you remember thinking anything lying there?
— No.

— Do they understand lots of things?
— No.

— Tell me about this old drunk.
— He was just an old drunk.

— Why do you feel that way?
— No, I mean to you, to you.
— Oh. Are they ever a pain to you?
— No.
— Never?
— No.

— Do you think of the drunk?
— Nothing. What are you supposed to think of a drunk?

Biddy didn't like McDonald's any more than his father did. His father hated to eat there but also hated to spend a lot of time eating, and Biddy's mother was refusing to cook again so they were there and there weren't many people at all, except some old men in the corner. His father had made the same face Biddy remembered him making when the McMakin's dog had had its paw run over, and had told him to stop staring around and finish his shake. Biddy's eyes wouldn't leave one of the old men, though. He wasn't like other old men Biddy had seen, like the others. Some were slumped over, their wrong-sized eyelids shut; some were talking quietly, either to themselves or each other, but what caught Biddy's attention about this one was his eyes. They were wide open, bright, and when they moved Biddy thought of the dragonflies at the wilderness trail and how they buzzed around. He talked very fast and very loud, on and off, and there were little drops of sweat over his cheek. What he said didn't make much sense to Biddy and he guessed it didn't make much sense to the other old men because they kept ignoring him. It made Biddy very sad, and he didn't finish even half his shake — and it was strawberry — and his father had looked at him in that same way.

— Do you mind your parents not being here when we talk?
— No.
— Why not?
— They were sorta a pain, I guess.
— Why do you feel that way?
— No, I mean to you, to you.
— Oh. Are they ever a pain to you?
— No.
— Never?
— No.

— Do they understand lots of things?
— No.
— Do they understand most things?
— No.
— Does that bother you?
— No.
— Do you think they try and understand?
— I don’t know.

Biddy had tried to explain about the old man’s eyes to his father in the car on the way back from McDonald’s, but his father had told him he should’ve spent more time eating and less looking at old drunks. He was just not eating enough, his father had said. All skin and bones. Biddy had thought about his father’s words. He didn’t know there were so many different kinds of drunks.

— Does your father talk with you a lot?
— Uh-huh. More than my mother.
— What do you talk about?
— Things. He asks me if I eat enough.
— Why?
— He’s worried, I guess.
— What do you tell him?
— I eat enough.

Sister Justine wasn’t very interested in the old man’s eyes, either. Biddy was sure that somebody should know; that somebody should help. He went Sister Justine. Maybe it was crazy, he asked, but couldn’t Father Hogan be a sort of missionary? Didn’t priests always want to be missionaries? Why did they have to go so far away all the time?

At the conference with his mother and Sister Justine, Biddy had tried to explain, all they had to do was go down to McDonald’s and see the old man’s eyes, but Sister Justine kept asking the wrong questions and his mother cried.

— Why don’t you talk about things with your mother?
— I didn’t say I didn’t.
— Do you talk about things with your mother?
— No.
— Uh-huh. Why not?
— I don’t know. Are we almost finished for today?
— Almost. Do you tell your mother things that happen during the day?
— I don’t know.
— Do you tell her what you like and what you don’t like?
— No.
— Why not?
— Because. I don’t know. She knows, I guess. We don’t fight.

Biddy didn’t like Fruit Loops. He didn’t like the way they got so sweet after a few mouthfuls or how they turned the milk a cruddy pink. There was a time when Biddy would eat things he didn’t like, but he really didn’t see any reason to anymore. And he didn’t like Fruit Loops. So they’d sit together, patiently, Biddy and the Fruit Loops, waiting for his mother to give in and throw the dish into the sink, spilling milk and soggy Fruit Loops across the counter, and say again, “And your father yells at me because you’re not eating.”

Biddy would feel bad when she did, but after all, Fruit Loops were Fruit Loops.

— Do you have any pets? A turtle, or something?
— No.
— Did you ever have one?
— I had a canary once.
— Did your parents give it to you?
— I got it in Woolworth’s.
— What did you call him?
— Eustace.
— Eustace . . . Why do you think you named him that?
— I don’t know.
— What happened to him?
— My mother gave him away.
— Why?
— I didn’t take care of him.
— Were you mad at your mother for that?
— She didn’t like him anyway. He never sang.

Biddy had had no idea that they’d been waiting three days for him to ask about Sister Amalia. They were mad. His mother had said, “Biddy, don’t you ever care?” in such a way that Biddy was really scared that some part of him that he needed for that was missing. The doctor had said he was sure that it’d just slipped his mind, and his mother had felt better, but his father stared at him the way he stared out the window at night when Biddy’s mother was out late.

He wondered if he should ask how Sister Amalia was.

— Let’s talk about Sister Amalia.
— Okay.
— You don’t mind, do you?
— No.
— Did you think about her once you were in the hospital?
— No.
— When did you find out she was hurt?
— When they told me.
— How did you feel?
— I don’t know.
— Did you feel bad for her?
— I guess so.
— Was she your least favorite teacher?
— I guess.
— Why?
— She hit people.
— Is that the only reason?
— She yelled a lot, too.
Biddy never got as upset as some of the other boys did after he'd been slapped. Benny Olexovitch always used to get slapped, and the same with Jimmy Bridges, who used to roll his little red dice in his desk even as Sister Amalia was coming up the aisle, hand out. Their mothers would come in a lot and get mad at Sister Amalia sometimes and Benny and Jimmy sometimes, but neither seemed to do much good. Biddy never thought it would.

- What did you think of the tests Thursday?
  - They were alright.
- Are you worried how you did on them?
  - No.
- Did you have any favorite ones?
  - No.
- Were there any you didn't like?
  - No.
- ... Do you worry about your head?
  - Huh?
- About it being hurt.
  - No.
- Do the bandages bother you? Are they too tight sometimes?
  - Sometimes at night they make a noise on the pillow.

Biddy hadn't minded the bandages from the start. Everyone thought he did and kept asking about it, but he told them it was alright. For a while he wished they were over his mouth, too; he thought it would look good, nothing showing but his eyes. He wouldn't have to talk either. Still, it seemed to make Biddy's mother cry a lot easier. She cried a lot before.

- Why do you think your mother cries a lot?
  - I don't know.
- Why do you think she cries?
  - She's not happy.
- Why do you think that is?
  - I don't know.

Biddy never minded when his parents fought, because then nobody talked. There was no yelling or anything. Sometimes after supper his mother would go into the T.V. room and turn the T.V. up loud and cry, but he didn't really like T.V. that much anyway so he would just go upstairs. But the suppers were quiet and when they'd tell him to stop playing with his food and eat they wouldn't keep repeating it but only say it once and Biddy could hardly hear it. Sometimes his mother would cry during supper if it was a bad fight, but not very often and she always stopped. He wasn't too hungry but he tried to eat everything because then they wouldn't argue about why he wasn't eating. Mostly he liked breakfast, because he ate breakfast alone.

- Do you think sometimes that your mother cries because of you?
  - Sometimes.
- Does that bother you?
  - I don't like her to cry.
- Do you think if you were a better person she'd cry less?
- Umm-hmm. What does your mother think of Sister Amalia?
  - I don't know. She cried only once with her.
- How many times did they talk together?
  - Whenever Sister wanted to see her. Whenever I did something.
- Was that a lot?
  - I don't know. Not as much as other kids.

Biddy's mother kept asking if he were excited about going home and he didn't want her to cry so he said he was and she seemed happy. His father told him that he should 'go easy' but Biddy really didn't know what he meant. His mother had said, "Everything will be alright, Biddy," right before she left and he knew she was going to cry again. She started in the hall after they left and he wished that the fall had made him deaf instead of breaking his head.

- Are you looking forward to going back to school tomorrow?
  - I guess.
- Are you worried about it?
  - I don't know.
- Are you worried you'll get in trouble again?
  - No.
- Why not?
  - I won't get in trouble.
- Why not?
  - I won't.

This is our last session, Biddy. What do you think? Did we learn anything?
  - Mmm.
- Do you feel better?
  - Mmm.
- Do you?
  - Better.
- Well, if you start to have trouble again, you can come back, and we'll have some more talks, okay?
  - Mmm.

No one spoke to Biddy all day except Benny, who wanted the rest of his Yodel. He played kickball out front as usual, but everybody got quiet when he came up and nobody yelled when he tripled and it tied the score. No one really looked at him until it was Question Time and Sister Amalia came in with her neck brace and asked if there were any questions. There were none.
You sat in your house, afternoons,
after your husband died,
in the slanted light,
amid velvet chairs and lace;
pictures of a raging sea
he had painted many times
in different lights;
pictures of Scotland and kilted golfers
that he had longed for.
It was that hunger for home
that had come out on his canvases
in different lights.
You too longed for Scotland.
and surely wept for him
as I punched the piano keys
and you listened, correcting me
over and over. I had
no feel for the keys.
You’ve died now too,
the horrible cold feeling in each foot
spreading up like a forerunner
announcing finally, through the doctor’s voice,
“not enough circulation,
they’ll have to go, the legs.”
One then the other they went.
You died, anyway.
And in heaven there must be a God
who’ll give you back your legs at the gate
so you can come in dancing.
I still have no feel for the keys
but you left me the longing;
the longing for some Scotland.
You left me those pictures of raging,
different lighted seas.
George Griswold, Jr.

FATHER

The pink sink on its skinny chrome legs still stands in the bathroom like a shining flamingo. Its memory is flying now and I follow it, until I feel you nudging me gently out of sleep and so, I am home again and a child once more happy to follow you into the bathroom and wash for school, to listen as you transform this chore into a peaceful fluttering of soft pink feathers.

Forgive me for lying awake at night waiting for the flamingo to fly away. I wake up in the bathroom. Standing over this white sink, wishing it were pink, I'm waiting for someone to blow those feathers back at me.

Jane Kelleher
You know you are
sitting in that chair so
dazed looking.
Crazy.
You stare out from the page
a cloudy face and
loudly moaning eyes.
You know I see
your charitable standard.
Still gaze, as if haunted by
the death of selfishness.
The way it makes you strain.
People peer in from inside out
while you sit
searching for fulfillment in a half-way smile.
Please understand—
here is the chair upon which you sit.
Its upright back will
invisibly hold you so,
through all confusion.

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