The Trinity Review, Fall 1979

Trinity College

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Deer
FOR DABNEY STUART

Strange to think of you now
as I drive downhill from the Adirondacks
the long stretch of pure forest:
"deer crossing" says the sign.

And I'm off
remembering the deer man,
feet in soft moccasins
Virginian/pot of gold
gracefully letting us know his world.
"Traveling," you wrote in my book,
"a similar road."

Of children left, missing,
of language worked to tell of this.

Your spirit seemingly
rolled words to us.
Words that caused spirits to touch.
As I listened
a moth, pale coloured,
luminous stopped on my leg.

A poem rests on me.

Several evenings this summer
I loosened the gate and waited in the shallot field.
Deer came to eat there.
I waited,
creatures waiting for creatures,
as if listening for each other.
You had seen many diamonds—nothing more than ice from a citystreet—but never the diamond cutter.
You had seen many bulls—loafish brown and bored—but never the bullfighter.

On your walls are photos of things: shells, bottles, ruins. We were as finished as that, precise and focused together. But we are ignorant of our origins.

It is the diamond cutter one wonders about.

The man in my dreams sat on a stool on a sandy Solomon floor, with instruments and lenses, like a doctor. In my dreams, he mined the stone. Went into the tunnels, found the piece, like a wound that he would heal and animate. He chiseled daintily. But I saw the bravura of a matador’s charge.

In my dream, it was the speed that made his tool a pic calculated for the aorta. Indeed, the diamond’s purples and greens are its veins. We are the wan splinters the man chiseled to the sand.

I have seen the diamond cutter.
Leap of Faith #1

The stone quay juts out into the water covered by pigeons. Sailors throw ropes up trying to make land, but the rough slabs are slippery with the roundness of time.

They brace their dinghies against the green moss sides. The wood cracks with each slap on the bulwark, passengers collide. Then, brine chasing down the floorboards, twenty or thirty leap on the arc of the waves. Hurléd upward they reach the brown stones; and walk through doves to promised land, while others beneath drown desperate.
The Man Reshingling Hamblen Farm Barn

Edith Piaf (1915-63) was a Parisian chanteuse, a ballad singer of melancholic love affairs. At age two, she was abandoned; at fifteen, she went to the streets to sing. Her first employer changed her last name to Piaf, which is the Parisian slang for "sparrow." She is said to have sung "with a suggestion of inner fire, and a hint of unquenchable tragedy of the heart."

All good things laugh, I'd heard.
And though when I'd see you, always at Hamblen Barn—
on the hottest days, in your oldest years,
peaking the ladder, sun in our eyes,
pine boards mushroom white in your hand,
leaning sometimes against the aged shingles, grey and salty—you wouldn't exactly laugh,
you had on those hours of any day, a smile.

I don't believe I ever knew your face
had to be saltskinned, with the expression of an orchestra conductor
Or your past.
Filled with visits to restaurants of
unfilled chairs. And you wondering about the people not there and what you weren't doing.
Filled with sounds from outside,
voices of your ungrateful children coming in from the evening,
deciding to whisper, finishing their laughter, you were sure,
deflated at being home. Sometimes you would accept their smiles.
Filled with views seen, but
never touched the canvas of a painting
or wetted the feathers at the bottom of a birdcage.
Or your thoughts.
Secreted too long until in one restaurant you heard
Piaf singing "je ne regrette rien," and the waitress told you her tragedy.

You remembered your falcon strength of youth.
And Hamblen Barn, hollow
for a century, shingles leaning into crooked lines and falling,
boxing with Atlantic winters and losing.

I said your face was not clear to me
but I was sure of that strength, your muscled legs,
sure you towered and would not fall, sure
that the old shingles would hold you up by your salt-tipped fingers.

One day you were not there.
The Barn was finished.
I walked past to listen for the sparrows keeping shelter inside.
I heard laughter.
Redemption

1
It has been a year
since you last saw me,
walking around the north side
of the lake; you
perched on the dock post,
in blue, like some exotic bird
not so much watching me
as the shiny yellow-green sunfish
gathering around your feet
like curious children.

2
Now you see me again
and we walk around the lake together
choosing flat skipping stones
to toss side-arm at the water;
you feel the weight of my stare,
pressing at your memory,
shaping your features.

We speak in measured spurts
of train rides
and barefoot walks in cities
on cool sidewalks;
of hawks which floated
as secretly as snakes above our heads;
of Switzerland, where
you’ve never been
Your mind wanders: you
think of empty forests
of strong trees: maples, oaks, elms
blocking out the sun;
of long boney stone fences;
of tall Russians in black sable hats.

3
Weeks later, at night
you leave a wooden chair
rocking on the porch
and run to the water,
your face turned skyward
to meet the first drops of rain.

Tree branches wave
like sea grasses in the wind,
tearing at the opaque surface
of the sky until it splits.

You feel your hair damp
against the curve of your neck,
your clothing soft and moist as
you kneel on the dock
and scoop your hands into dark
smiling, rain rolling
across your cheeks, your lips—
And for the first time in a year
you feel alive.
White Light

No sir, no sir—you can’t make me leave if I want to stay. No sir, I’m gonna stay right here. You can piss and moan all you like, but let me tell you, if I feel like stayin’, then that’s that. Nobody can move me unless I want to move first. Hell, they couldn’t even move me in Washington, D.C., down in the capital. I was one of the last of them, and here comes General MacArthur ridin’ on a big white horse—of course, this is before the second war, so he ain’t a general yet—but here he comes on this horse, wavin’ his gun around, thinkin’ he’s gonna bust up the last of us Bonus Marchers. Hah. We give him a scare, though. Hah. Me and Barney Riley, we get some boards and we walk straight on at him—him with all them militia goons stickin’ around him like glue. An’ him on a horse, like he’s too good to walk. I seen him look scared, ’cause I guess he’s figured out that a hungry man’s a dangerous man. So he sends some of his goons up on top of them tanks and turns them on us. Us, who’s been over in Europe, killin’ Germans for our country. All we want is our bonuses that was promised us, and they turn the tanks on us. Didn’t matter though, no, ’cause old MacArthur was scared when he seen that hungry men had more courage than him, and he’d eaten breakfast. Hah. Hungry men’ll take on armies and white horses and tanks. But then they threwed that teargas, with the eyes chokin’ and waterin’—that was yellow, throwin’ teargas. We’d be there ’til the end, except for the teargas and the tanks.

I got a picture of Barney Riley around here somewhere, I don’t know exactly where ... maybe under these sheets somewhere. I guess it’s here ... I guess maybe they put my things away when I got here. This is Phoenix, right? Hot as hell—is it August? I’m sure sweatin’. Anyway, Barney was big as an ox. Hah. We was quite a pair—him with giant arms and big paws, and me next to him. I’m smaller, see? I never got to be real tall. But I could be mean, too, and scrap just as good as Barney. If you get mad enough, or when it comes to bein’ knocked down or knockin’ down, well then you can scrap just as good as anybody, big or small. When it comes to a man’s pride, it don’t matter your size, you gotta defend it. So me and Barney, that’s just what we did. We kept our pride up, ’cause these were some lean years, around ’31, ’32, ’33. If somebody needed helpin’, we’d help ’em, and if somebody needed knockin’ down, we knocked ’em down. You know? You gotta stay with your beliefs, and you gotta stick by your friends. You can’t leave ’em.

One time me and Barney got into a real bad situation ... was it Barney? I thought I was with Barney. I remember the situation clear as day. No, I guess it wasn’t Barney. I must have been by myself, ’cause when those guys jumped on me I started hollerin’ for Barney, and he didn’t come. That was when I was in a tattoo parlor by the name of Joe West’s, in downtown Providence. On leave. I was havin’ this one here on my arm done. Initials. Everybody wanted to have their initials put on their arms, even us army guys. See? A.L. That’s Albert Lester ... A.L. Hmm ... I guess these wrinkles must be new. What is this tape on my arm? Who put this raggedy bandage on my arm? They’re tryin’ to get me to leave, I know it. You are, too, ain’t you? Well, I’m stayin’ ’til I’m done.

And I don’t mind them wrinkles too much at all. Hell, I got scars everywhere that look like wrinkles. From good honest fights, and from standin’ my ground. Scars give a man a mark of honor. When you walk away or quit, then you lose your honor.

By the way, where’s Mabel? She’s my wife. Pretty woman, my Mabel. If you see her, tell her to bring me somethin’ to cool me off. And Toby. Toby’s about the best hound you ever saw. I bet he’d love these
scrambled eggs. Hah. Always finishes my breakfast for me. I'll save these for him. He should be around soon. Probably out chasin' squirrels.

That sun sure is bright. This is Santa Fe, right? I was down here in Santa Fe ... we was marchin' in Washington, stickin' up for our rights, and before you know it we get thrown out. Boom. Just like that. After defendin' our country an' all. So me and Barney Riley, we decide to head west, see what the job situation is out there. We got no money, of course—that's why all the marchin'. So Barney says, "Let's just get ourselves a free ride on one of them westbound freights." Which we do. Easy as can be. But whenever the train pulls into a yard, we got to scrunch up in a corner of the car, or slip out and hang under it on one of them support beams. On account of the railroad dicks. They catch you, they'll shoot you, or throw you in jail, or both. Hah. Sometimes, on a real long stop, it takes about two hours before you can get all your bones movin', 'cause you were scrunched up so hard.

When we hit the desert, let me tell you it got to be about one hundred fifteen degrees in them boxcars. I'd kick the door open a crack with my cardboard shoe, to get a little circulation in the car. There'd be twenty-five or thirty of us in them cars, packed like fish, and it'd get to smellin' foul. I'd look out onto the desert, just watchin' cactuses go by. Amazin', the way they could survive in that sun, with no rain or nothin'. They'd just stand there with these big arms stretched out, real defiant. Nothin' could stop 'em from survivin'. They had to adjust to their situation, and they got to be strong and tough. I admired them cactuses. Never told Barney, though. He'd say I was a looney.

We got separated in Santa Fe ... I don't know just how. The country was still dry then, but if you looked around hard enough, you'd always find somebody who could direct you to a still or find you some bathtub gin. Me and Barney, about the first thing we did when we hit Santa Fe, before we even looked to see if there was jobs, was ask around for some safe gin. I always liked to take a drink—made me think clearer. Gives you courage, you know? A man's gotta have courage.

Barney says, "Give me your change, and I'll throw in mine, and if you wait here, I'll be back with some gin." And he never comes back. I guess he must have got jumped while he was lookin' around. I got a picture of him, though. It's around here somewhere.

I got a picture of my father, too. Never knew him, but I carry it with me. The only thing I remember about him was these big hands. He was real tall, too. If I could find the picture, I'd show you. If I ever do run into him, I'll know him from the picture. I guess I'll probably kill him. And I'd be justified. My grandparents always said how bad he was, what a bastard and all. They'd say I was just like him—bad, hurtin' my mother. They said it was because of me that my mother got a lung disease ... 'cause I was bad, and didn't have no manners. But she wanted me with her when she was dyin'. She knew I was her son, I'd never want to make her get sick. After, my grandparents said they didn't want nothin' to do with me, that I'd probably be the death of them, too.

Hey, you got any water in here? My mouth is dry. Hey, I said, *do you have any water?* There's gotta be some water on this boat. Do you hear me? There's water all around—will you get me some? Where's Mabel? She'll get me some. She's good to me, Mabel is. Oh, I know, she puts up with a lot. But she always sticks by me. She's a good woman—got a streak of the Lord in her. Christ, can that woman pray! I think she's prayed for just about every soul that's passed in or out of this world. I never needed that God business too much. But Mabel—y' see, I got her figured out pretty completely—she's had some terrible things happen to her ... parents dead, and her havin' all them miscarriages an' all. I guess for people like that, well, God becomes somethin' that gives you a purpose. Makes you feel like you're doin' some- thin' right. Especially in hard times—always made Mabel feel that there was someone lookin' after her besides me. I don't know—I always looked after myself. You got to be strong if you're a man in this world. Got to take care of yourself. Got to make a stand. Of course, it helps to have a little luck. Hah.

I met a woman once ... where was that? On this boat? I guess so. Maybe she's around here. She said I was a lucky person. One of them clairvoyants. Said she could tell that I'd get by, because for some reason the sun and the moon was in good position when I was born. I don't know how she knew that. But that was her profession—for five dollars she'd tell you if you was lucky or not, accordin' to the sun and moon. She gave me a lucky charm after she was done. I always kept it. It's here with me, but I don't see it. It might be under this pillow ... no, it ain't. Why don't you ask the captain of this boat where it is, if you see him.

Also, you might tell him he's got squirrels on his boat—hah. Won't he feel foolish. Hear
them? You can hear them runnin' around up there. Maybe they're on deck. Hah. He'll want to know who let the squirrels on board, he'll ask everyone. Then he'll order some of the crew to try to catch them. But you can't catch squirrels, not without a dog or a trap. Hah. Won't they look silly—all dressed up in white and chasin' squirrels on this boat.

Good for the squirrels. I like squirrels. Admire them, actually. They're real quick, and they're smart, and they can live just about anywhere. They weigh, what, about two pounds? Well, I once saw a squirrel, a small one, pick up an entire orange, a big fat ripe orange, and carry it in his mouth down the entire side of a house, across a half a mile of field, and up to the top of a tree. Can you beat that? Can you imagine a human tryin' to pick up half his weight and runnin' with it? No sir. But squirrels, well, they know what they want, and they're willin' to go out and fight for it. They're tough, they can survive, 'cause they want to bad enough. Don't need nothin' else.

What is that bright light? Are we in a tunnel? That's the whitest light I ever saw. Strange, very peculiar. I don't think I'm too fond of that tunnel. I'm stayin' here for awhile. Yessir. I want to see Mabel first.

What about this needle in my arm? Did you put this here? HEY! I said, did you put this here? This ain't Joe West's, that I know. I'm takin' this needle out. You can't get me to leave that easy. Besides, I promised Mabel I wouldn't get no more tattoos. She don't like 'em ... says they're bad for a person. Hah. That Mabel. I bet she's out workin' in the garden right now. Hah. I'm buildin' a house, y'see. Bought some land ... where was that? New York? Upstate. Small wooden house. Big yard. Big enough for a garden. Big enough for Toby to chase some fat squirrels around and give 'em a scare. Never catches 'em, though ... too quick for him. He's too old. No, wait—he's just three years old this June. Or ... no—is he a puppy? I don't know ... I don't know. I can't remember.

Hey! Hey you! Where's my teeth? How do you expect me to eat this toast without my teeth? HEY! Turn down that light!

Oh, Lord, you need strength. You gotta be a man, no matter what. You can't let no one push you around, or make you quit. When someone goes to throw you a punch, or toss you out of a bar, you gotta fight for your right to stay. You gotta be mean and let 'em know you intend to stay. A man's got a right to drink. As much as he chooses. When that banker-man comes around to throw me and Mabel out of our house, yackin' about mortgage payments on my house that I built with my own hands, well, I sat on my porch with my whiskey and my shotgun, an' I told him that if he's smart he'll stay away, 'cause I ain't plan­nin' on leavin' for awhile. No sir—he's like me. Knows what to stand up for. Knows his rights, even though he's just a dog. Maybe he's bringin' flowers for Mabel. No—no maybe I'm bringin' flowers to her, to set on her grave. No, wait ... I don't know. It don't seem clear at all.

If I had my shotgun, I'd like to shoot out that white light in the end of that hall, or whatever it is. An' shoot at them squirrels makin' noise and singin' and talkin' above my head. I know what they're tryin' to do—they're tryin' to take me with them, like they can make me leave here. But I got somethin' to stay for ... though I can't exactly remember what. I ain't finished here, that much I know. I ain't afraid, understand—it's just that I don't want to go yet, so nothin' in this world can make me.
any clever title you like

far from the vales of confession
there rests a motionless dwarf
who forever passive grows a beard
the color of dreaming violets ... 

eglantine wraps heliotropically
amidst the stillness of the rivermists,
which invade the blanketed air
heavily hung with decaying fragrance;

the ferryman passes this way
every month or so on his anyway
to some everyplace and warmth
he sings the current voluptuously

and sleep. What of Sleep?
Banished from the realm, he touches no more,
his almost whispers are things-which-were,
his caress reduced to a memory of a memory:

ice sculptures melting in the garden
seeping to indifferent moss-mouths;
monkeys in budding evergreens chatter
like thoughts in anyevery-someones mind.

far from the veils of confusion ...
here, there is no rest; forever stasis
no need to seek renewal or fresh mornings
for everyall passes gently at once

moving they are motionless, save the river
which lakelike extends in a vector of blood
sheltering no-everyone, offering nothing,
asking no-thing, and receiving allways the same
Mid-March, a Night with no Moon

In the cave a woman sits dreaming of the Hebrides. Gathering up buttons she's been sewing in her skirt, her last good eye ignites the darkness looking for the stair. She hears the dog howl down hiding from the storm beneath her bed. Pulling on the rope she lifts her right leg up, beginning to climb; a voice rings from the entrance behind. Turning her head the candle catches her face in surprise. The stairway grows brighter as the pounding increases; splinters of fire fall from her hair to drown in moss beside the steps. She falls; the buttons cascade down the stones; her son pounds at the locked door, waiting to collect mended shirts.
I.

Sappho,
sit quietly in your hot corner,
no singing now;
the day is almost over.

When the sun rose this morning I felt
like a gold-headed crocus, a flaming
yellow bird. I sang your song to Dawn,
Woman Poet, I gave you my birthday.
Let's dance, I said,
you, me, and the other women—
singing in my sleep—the crocuses
are growing in October! Happily
they grow, a ring of fires
dancing in hot woman-love.

Like ashes
tapped loose from a cigarette,
dusk falls behind a tree; the sun
still caught in lower branches.
Sappho, I must tell you:
I gave you my birthday to keep it
from belonging to her, the night woman
who brings the ashes: my mother.
II.

A dream with my eyes wide open
cares me deep inside. Listen;
this is my night:

I am older; you are older too, Mom,
in some invalid’s garb and Dad is gone.
I must decide: Will I take care of you?
I think of the man I fell in love with
at 20, whom I clung to for the love,
the touching, I never got from you.
He let me be a girl who wore perfume
and pierced her ears;
a girl who lacked your Tom-boy toughness.
Now I am asked to warm the milk
for you to drink to help you sleep at night
as you did in your breasts long before
my memory began.
Now I am asked to take the silver spoon
and hold it patiently at your lips,
fold your clothes into their separate drawers.

My belly chokes with a frightened rage.
What is this bastard fetus I have
been carrying for 21 years?
Did you plant him there
with your sperm Mother-fatherhood
or can it be mine?

Bring a flower and a wire. Cutting
into the dark, the ashes
will fall like black notes
on a scale. Then, you, will
crawl up run up wheel up
to see my breasts round and full
with new milk, golden milk.
I will feed you with a song of Sappho’s.
Poem for Kathy Ebersold

Did you move strongly through the forest thickening to August?
Past deep green branches your body cool from your swim?
Were you playing a game with the sunlight, seeking patches of its warmth, moving quickly then into the shadows on your slender yellow bike?
Did you sing, your joy moving freely in the woods?
Did you listen to summer stretching around you, the talk of tree tops moving in wind, sparkle of grass blowing in late day sun?
Maybe you wondered about supper, measuring your pace/on your way home.

At twelve had you learned yet to contain your body, to deny its childish assurance?
Did you imagine anyone watching, had you learned yet to fear the woods?
Did you look deeply into the eyes of your assailant, fight back with the same strength you used in the water and riding home?
What did you see?
A whole universe closing slowly?
Summer no longer lasts forever.

You are our child, all children violated or afraid of harm.
Your gasps and cries carry on the wind.

What do we think now of the trees that sheltered your death?
Do we walk softly, listening, listening?

* 

Kathy Ebersold was murdered this summer on her way home from swimming. Kathy was twelve years old. She was murdered by a sixteen year old boy.
The Marlboro Man is Dead

The picture tube of Rodney's Sony Trinitron was filled with an image of the billowing stars and stripes, complemented by a dramatic symphony version of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Rodney blinked and rubbed his eyes, the web of tiny red capillaries surrounding the retinas irritated and swollen from the day's bombardment of color visuals. There might have been considerably more pain, but after Carson, he had watched a Marlene Dietrich double feature which was in black and white. Late night viewing was always easier than prime time, because most of the features were older, pre-color revolution films; and there weren't all those hectic, high-strung commercials. Earlier in the evening during "Hawaii Five-O," just as Sgt. McGarrett was to be decapitated by a lunatic who thought he was a reincarnated Samauri warrior, fifteen candy-striped busboys appeared on the screen tapdancing on tabletops, belting out the chorus of "Have It Your Way." "The Late Show" and "The Late, Late Show" had fewer commercials which weren't programmed consistently into the climax of every scene. They were usually public service announcements and requests for cheques from Care and The Fresh Air Fund.

Rodney was interviewed for his Nielsen Box when he was twenty-two, and the box, which was brown, not black as he had expected, was plugged in a year later. During the three following years, he had watched well over four thousand hours of television with the knowledge that his taste was being monitored and recorded by the video statisticians of the Nielsen Corporation, and he was proud of this. He considered himself a trend-setter, a vital component of America's most influential medium.

Rodney used television the way a novelist relies on experience. He supported himself by writing scripts for an independent producer in San Francisco. His detective scripts, the "Movie Special of the Week" type, were especially pop-
ular. Because of his long hours of television viewing, Rodney had an innate sense for appealing characters and dramatic action. He had been described once in *T.V. Guide* as “a talented video artist.” The reviewer had been especially impressed with the intensity of the action Rodney created, “the thrilling suspense of violent human conflict.” Rodney, however, just knew what he liked and wrote for himself. It was usually after one of these long viewing sessions that he felt most inspired, and he would sit for hours in front of a test pattern developing a script in his mind. He fashioned his heroes from the most attractive characteristics of the various hero-types already on the air; not on purpose, of course, but television was the only way he came into an in depth contact with personalities. A character he was currently developing, Clinton Todd, had the physical stature of Jim Rockford, the down-home naivety of Marshall McCloud, Kojak’s New York brand of hard-nosed brusqueness, and Columbo’s taste for unlit cigar butts. His rapport with women, of course, was Bogart.

* * * *

**INT.**

“Jack’s Place”: a dimly lit, smoky bar and grill on the lower East Side. There are several seedy characters seated at the bar, hunched over shots of whiskey and mugs of beer, but most of the tables and booths are empty. Clinton Todd is seated at the far end of the bar speaking with the owner, Pete, a large, balding man in his late fifties. There is a prostitute with a wasp’s nest hairdo at the other end of the bar by the door talking with two young Punks who are eyeing her attention.

**CLINTON (TO PETE)**

Have you seen this man around? (Flashes picture of killer)

**PETE**

Don’t recognize ‘im.

**CLINTON**

You sure?

**PETE**

Yeah, I’m sure.

**CLINTON**

His name’s Billy. Billy Parker.

**PETE**

Yeah? My name’s Pete. Pete Laughlin. So what?

**CLINTON**

So he’s been flashing old ladies, how’s that? You think maybe a ride downtown would help your memory? Hell, we could have this place closed up in a couple of minutes. Now, c’mon! I know he’s been in here at least once this week.

**TWO-SHOT** of PUNKS eyeing CLINTON suspiciously.

**FULL-SHOT** of PETE.

**PETE**

Well, he ain’t here now, so leave me alone. I only serve ‘em. I don’t ask no questions.

**CLINTON**

Okay, friend. You just give me a call next time this dump gets stuck up. Mutual cooperation. I like that.

**PUNKS approach CLINTON**

**FIRST PUNK**

This guy harassing you, Pete?

**PETE**

He’s looking for a guy name of Billy Parker. You know him?

**SECOND PUNK**

Don’t strike no bells with me. You?

**FIRST PUNK**

Willy Parker, huh? No one ever in here by that name. You sure you got the right place, buddy?

**CLINTON**

Oh, isn’t this Studio 54?

**FIRST PUNK**

Get lost, stiff.

**CLINTON**

Lost? Yeah, sure; why not? But here. Lose this!

With graceful blows from his feet and fists, and amid flying glass and furniture, Clinton devastates the two Punks, who are left bruised and unconscious on the floor. One of the PUNKS’ fists connects with CLINTON’s jaw during the fight, and there is a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth. Pete reaches for a baseball bat under the bar, but he reconsiders when CLINTON turns and tosses a coin onto the counter.
Rodney sat back in his armchair and considered the possibility of some sleep. The day had started at 6 a.m. with "Let Us Give Thanks," and it was now 5 a.m. His stomach moaned and growled angrily at him. He had forgotten lunch because Maggie Burns had threatened suicide on "Days of Our Lives." Dinner might have been fit in between "Happy Days" and "Laverne and Shirley," but Gristede's had run out of Swanson's frozen fishsticks, and Rodney didn't trust the Howard Johnson's fish 'n' chips dinner, which was all the man on the phone said they had in stock. Howard Johnson never advertised, so how was Rodney supposed to know what he was getting? This all caused considerable problems, because César, the delivery boy from Gristede's, usually brought an "Evening Post" with Rodney's frozen dinner, and since he didn't come at all that day, Rodney had no paper and watched both "The Six o'clock News" and the recap at 11 o'clock instead of "Medical Center." He was thinking of suggesting Chad Everett for the lead in his new film, but now he would have to wait until next week to make a decision. News was always a priority for Rodney, because it showed life outside his apartment window in realistic, unbiased terms, which was important if Rodney was expected to write credible scripts. He made sure that he caught Cronkite at 7 o'clock and read the "Evening Post." Several years earlier he remembered watching the hour-long special, "Vietnam Perspective: The Air War in the North." It was a documentary produced by the United States Air Force to educate the American public in the modern equipment and aerial tactics of its Air Force. The film included some first-rate combat footage of bombing missions and inspired Rodney to write "Air War," a "Movie Special of the Week" which was aired on a Monday night at 8 p.m. opposite "Adam-12." Rodney considered this his best dramatic effort. The show received mixed reactions.

Rodney woke up at 10:30 the next night. He felt a bit like the Jello Pudding Monster from too much sleep, and his first reaction was to resume his slumber, but his stomach protested and suggested an alternative—food. Gristede's was closed, so he had the option of either having a sandwich with bread and mayonnaise, which he kept in the refrigerator to garnish an occasional Weight-Watchers halibut steak, or going uptown to "Patsie's." He decided on the latter and got dressed, picking out the appropriate clothes for a shady local bar on the West side of Manhattan. There was no hesitation in the selection of his shoes and coat. He had a sheepskin coat and a pair of range boots that he'd had made after a visit to the set of a "McCloud" episode. It wasn't particularly cold outside, but Rodney like to leave the coat unbuttoned anyway. On his way out the door he snatched his beret from a hanger in the hall closet and stuffed a pack of Mores, the long, thin, black cigarette Kojak smokes, into his shirt pocket.

There was light traffic on Columbus Avenue, and Rodney's cab made it to 97th Street with two dollars and fifty cents showing on the meter. The hack driver wouldn't accept Rodney's 'Clout Card', which surprised him, so he gave the driver a five and said, "Merry Christmas, buddy." He felt good in his sheepskin, and the boots added an inch and a half to his height. He lit a cigarette and positioned it in the corner of his mouth before entering "Patsie's."

The odor inside was of perspiration and beer soaked up in the sawdust on the floor, and although Rodney's nostrils were offended, he inhaled deeply for the experience. There were two tables to his left as he walked in, and Rodney put his coat on the back of the chair nearest the door. This way he could see the whole room. There didn't seem to be a waitress, so he approached the bar and ordered a beer, practicing his bar sense as he struck a casual pose on a stool. "Gimme a Light," he said. He'd seen George Foreman order a beer like that on a Miller Light commercial.

"We got Bud and Mich."

"Ah, okay. A Bud's fine."

Rodney paid for the beer and sat down at his table. There weren't any particularly striking characters in the bar. They all seemed very ordinary. The bartender was a tall, long haired man in his late twenties. He was dressed in jeans and a blue turtleneck sweater. Most of his patrons were about the same age, neatly dressed, and quite plain. The juke box was playing a Jim Croce ballad, the same one Rodney had heard him sing on "The Mike Douglas Show" before he was killed in a plane accident.

And it was bad, bad Leroy Brown,
The baddest man in this whole town...

He leaned back in his chair, stuck out his boots, and lit another cigarette. The beer took quick effect on his head.
Rodney was about to order a bacon and cheese omelette when a man dressed in jeans and an off-white, Colombo style raincoat came in the door. Rodney saw a stocking stretched taught over his face and knew the script immediately; he'd seen it twenty times before. The only variable was the weapon, and Rodney was satisfied when the man pulled a sawed-off shotgun from the sleeve of his raincoat. That was how Rodney would have written the scene. There was a scream from a young woman at the bar when the man yelled, "Everyone on the floor." Rodney maintained his casual position and puffed on his cigarette as if the gunman could not see him. He was concentrating on the dialogue and musing as to who the hero would be and when he would emerge. If the man took any hostages, it would be a S.W.A.T. team; otherwise, a few "black-and-whites" from the N.Y.P.D. would probably be effective.

"I said on the floor, fucker."
The man's uncensored language startled Rodney, and he was about to join the others on the floor when the man jammed the butt of the shotgun into Rodney's mouth. There was a flash of white light in his head as he tumbled off of his chair, clutching his face. He landed face down on the sawdust, choking on warm blood and broken teeth. He saw the blood dripping from his mouth coagulate with the sawdust on the floor, and he wretched, but no vomit came from his empty stomach.

"Okay, now. Anyone want to get their head blown off? Throw your wallets over here, and you, behind the bar, empty that cash register."
The thought of someone having his head blown off didn't strike Rodney as the appropriate threat. He had seen a Viet Cong executed that way once on "Eyewitness News," and it wasn't all that frightening. The man probably should have threatened to blow someone's arms or legs off. That may have had more impact.

When the man had stuffed all the cash from the register into the lining of his coat, he tossed a green dufflebag to Rodney and said, "Here. You put those wallets in there, and hurry your ass about it."

Rodney didn't move; for some reason, he couldn't. He was experiencing a sensation that he vaguely recognized, but wasn't able to place in his vocabulary of video experience. Once, when he was flying on a 727 to see his producer in San Francisco, there was a bomb threat on the plane, and Rodney's reaction was similar, but nothing was expected of him then, so it was easy to rationalize his paralysis as motion sickness and forget about it. Now he wasn't able to speak or act, although he knew he must. The man lunged at him and struck his ribcage with the heel of his Converse All-Star. "Let's go!"
The pain surged with a tidal wave flow of blood from his chest into his skull, and as his temples pounded with the frantic rhythm of his heart, Rodney realized quite suddenly what it was that soaked his pores with sweat and paralyzed his body. He had seen it played a hundred times on television. He was afraid; afraid that there would be more pain, and afraid that maybe this man in the stocking mask would end his life in a sequence of violent living color.

Rodney reacted slowly and did what the man asked him, but without dialogue. He didn't know this scene. The man grabbed up the green duffle and backed out of the bar. Rodney looked out the window as the man climbed into the back seat of a blue Camaro, and he was then more at ease with this glass barrier between him and the action. There was another man at the wheel of the Camaro, and he shifted the car into drive and sped away down Columbus Avenue.

"Hey, buddy," said the bartender. "Hey. You all right?"

Rodney attempted a confident, Rockford grin, but winced as he felt the dried blood on his lip crack.

"Gimme a shot."
"You don't want liquor, man. You're bleeding. You'd hit the roof."
"It's just a fat lip."
"Yeah, well, why don't you go clean up. I've gotta call the cops."

"It's your place, Mack."

Rodney put on his sheepskin coat and lit a More to give the other people in the bar a full-shot of his style as he walked past them to the men's room. He hoped there would be some sort of cologne in there, maybe Brut or Old Spice, so he could reappear and impress the women, who would want to baby him, with the distinct, aphrodisiac scent of masculinity. He felt the eyes on him, and he played the scene perfectly, turning slowly at the door of the lavatory to take a long pull on his cigarette.

At first the bright light of the bulb in the bathroom hurt his eyes, and he leaned on the urinal while they adjusted. When the pain subsided, he turned to the mirror above the sink. The bloody, toothless face he saw made his brain spin as the blood which remained in his head quickly drained, and his heart pounded. For a moment, the single close-up was distorted and turned double, and then the picture went black.
You read the whole book for that line about the fisherman
whose swordfish on the deck reflect the silver sky,
whose hooks and traps have breathed midnights under Bay waters
All winter he waits
for oysters to seed and build, castles with tiny windows between.
There won't be time, you think, in this spiralling white winter,
no time for the catch,
no dying fish drumbeating tails on deck, reflecting the rainbow
you know is there.
Rust on his boat worries you,
so curious about the tides, not knowing what trust is.
You've seen the boats go down, seen them last too; no matter.
You can't forget the storms of earlier chapters.
You've seen the old fisherman eating scrambled eggs
without shades at the window.
You are afraid, and for whom?
It is the waiting that scares you.
And knowing that you are one shell at the bottom, suffocating
while he drifts, a harbor for the others.
You raise the shades in your room and close the book.
The mist hugs us,
Surrounds us,
Like eiderdown as we speak
In whispers
In different tongues.

I sleep with my head cocked
Nodding and waking delirious.

The man across from me counts coins
Stamped with exotic princesses.
He clutches the money in a sweat crusted palm
And divides it with a fingerless stump.

Between the mists
The olive trees bend
Like rheumatic fingers.
The trees become mountains.
I see only the base—
The peaks overlook us.

Words roll from our mouths
Forming curled smoke thoughts
That mingle and dissipate
Settling in drops on the window
That hug us
Like the Brumaire.
Looking out the window and seeing in

I.
I have stood once again
at my window,
a thin glass and two stories.
I have seen Mom & Dad getting into
the old station wagon
and I have waved.

That dream lies uneasily
on my pillow, accepted only by the dark.
My room grows small and hot; airless.
Then, I begin to breathe.

II.
There are no animals in the pond,
no fish; there is no one here but me.
Me, the sun, and the water all in one.
We are three colors that got mixed together
and are now another, new color,
more clear than the pond; I am
depthless beyond the surface.

III.
I am marching in the wind of a child’s breath,
singing and humming, warm in a tight knit scarf.
It colors the notes as they flow out.
I am singing a red note now; it’s cherry-red
and very very sweet. I march more, I march with no
and don’t pretend.
IV.
It is warmer;
the trees are hung
with wet round bumpy oranges.
I peel them, and discover the sweet
juice pushing from the inside against
the transparent skin, and let it get
sticky all over my mouth. And now
I want to taste the sun.

V.
There is a blue air, framed in glass, dotted
with the tiny fluffy white breasts of a sky,
untouched. And I stand for a moment
at the window with my plants,
feeling the sun and looking
at the sky. And we feel young and new;
virgins in our soils. And he gets up
to see what I am looking at,
he, smiling and touching my breast.
Reachin’ for the Line

I be in the city. I be riding the street car in the city, down past a long row of big white houses sitting in the sun. They real big houses, giant windows staring out the front and all quiet around them. Big columns by the front doors, magnolia trees there too and a little black hand goes in front of my eyes.

I look up and there’s a fat lady with her kid ready to get off, waiting to push forward and off the car when the wheels stop rolling. The kid’s swinging ’round the pole, holding on with his hand and rolling from side to side and the street car bounces. He jerks quick when the brake goes on, his hand in front of my face again. Like he’s reaching for one o’those big steady houses to hold him up.

The lady real fat. She have a green coat, the color of a rug, ’round her round shoulders and it frayed in the corners. Her hat black and fuzzy and flat, look like it gonna fall over the edge of her hair except for the gaudy shining pins stuck in. Her eyes black too, so I almost see myself and my own black eyes looking back out at me. The kid staring.

What do you want kid. I don’t say it out loud, but look real hard at him and think it. He see me looking at him and he give up. I press at him and he look out the window at the magnolia.

The car stops and he runs for the door. The fat lady says William and the kid keeps running on down the street. He going away. The lady chasing him as we pass her.

Keep on goin’ kid. I laugh. He run pretty fast. I scared him good. The lady chasing him as we pass her.

Ain’t no work today. That something, yessir. But it okay I don’t need work. Don’t think I’m going to lift boxes all my life. I don’t need that shit. Hell I can get me another kind of a job, make some money so’s I can buy one o’those big fancy houses. Yeah, and when I have one and I want my windows cleaned, I’ll call Sampson to do it. Make him come over and wash em til they shiiiiiine. Sampson, you get down on your knees and clean those corners. I don’t wanta see no dirt down there. You son of a bitch. I’ll make you run like that kid.

It been four, five weeks now. Since Mis-tah Sampson big man said you’re fired you lazy nigger. Oooooooeee, I told him, ain’t you something telling me that. Well I quit, you fat son of a bitch. How you like that?

That when he called his boys to throw me outa the place. Only he didn’t know I could run and not one of em could touch me. No, I was out of there fore he even knew what was happenin’. Runnin’ past them dumb suckers toting boxes and I wouldn’t even let him think he could throw me out.

Truth is, none of his boys want to mess with me anyway. Let him go they said. He’ll just fight us and scrap. I know.

Then I got on this street car. And stayed on it all day, riding ’round and ’round from the shanty town down past the big houses and to the Square.

It something I can do. Tell you the truth, I know exactly what I’m going to do. I’ll show em all. You don’t mess with me.

Cause I been watching. Watching the conductor play this baby, and he so smooth. He got the lever and winds it up sooo careful, gets this street car moving til it gliding along the track and swaying from side to side. It enough to lull you to sleep and the whirr starts gettin’ louder til you think you’re gonna blow away. Then you feel it. Not real hard but kinda soft, a little jerk and she starts slowin’ down. The whirr starts letting down and you start to breathe again, you know you be safe and the car slowin’ down. The man takes his big black hand, it big and strong as a wrestler’s, and hugs that
handle. Starts to unwind. And the brakes whish like air blowin' through a pipe.

Then the faces peering by the pole ahead, waiting to board the car and it swaying down real careful. He stop her just right, so nice in front of those faces and they wait empty while people fall through the car and off down the steps. They ain't got the feel of the slowing down and get pulled when that last puff of air comes and she stops. Then the faces come on and I watch every one o' them.

Oooooo, I seen s'ome real winners on here. I sit and watch em all.

Yesterday there be tour-ists. Heh heh, biig man and his old lady on vacation. Oh my, she says, look at that lovely old Southern home, why it makes me feel like Scarlett O'Hara. And that darling old cupola up on top and those wonderful flowers. What do you suppose they are Harold? Are they those wonderful magnolias? I'd love to bring home a magnolia tree to plant in front of the house—do you suppose it would grow?

She flutters her eyelashes like a teenage bitch and the man shifting in his seat (he wearing this yellow and pink flowered shirt like he's in Hawaii or somewhere) and grunts somethin'. His arms folded across his chest like he can hide that pot belly of his. Too much pah-ty food in his own big home I expect. His big arms white and covered with hair. But not his head, no sirree that shining like a street light on top and he tryin' to comb a few strands over it. He starin' straight ahead through these wire glasses and gruntin' while the bitch looks all around.

I snicker.

The lady looks at me real quick like she's seein' me for the first time.

That right, lady, I think. I think real hard and look at her and her face goes red. Yeah, she really squirming now like she finally knows just whose street car she be on. She squirming 'round on the seat and looking away, puts her hand next to her mouth and leans over her fat hus­band, starts whisperin'.

I can just hear her. Harold there's a black man over across the aisle DON'T LOOK NOW he's staring this way and he looks real mean. Look at his eyes no wait don't look yet they're hard as flint.

He leans his head at her, telling her to shut up I'm sure and they both sit back quiet and staring straight ahead. Then finally she feels my eyes or thinks maybe they be gone and peers real careful at me sideways. I give her a great big smile and she knows better than to try that again, she gasps and when the man starts to
precious heads over their desks. We standing
there like we been turned down by the Queen
herself. I don’t need that shit.

Now this babe I can tell ain’t like that. Not at
all. She sit down across from me and fold her
little hands on her lap. Nice babe. I put my arm
across the seat and stare at her.

I know it ain’t long fore she feels my eyes and
sure enough she looks over at me. Don’t quite
know what to do, she don’t. She lookin’ at me
and before you know it it be over and she star­
ing out the window.

I smile. I get her yet. Come on, babe. Look on
over here. You know you want it.

But she just there lookin’ out at those big
houses and magnolia going by.

The wheels clacking and the whirring rising.
He holding her steady.

Come on babe. Look at me. I shift around,
stretch my legs across the seat and lose the buzz
from the floor. My back pressed against the
glass and the sun beating full down on it. My
fingers drumming on the back of the seat. My
hand itchin’, the left one beatin’ on my thigh.
There a hole in my pants. Gotta get Jessie to fix
it, the bitch.

Babe. She going to ignore me, ain’t she. Go
ahead, stare out that window. I see you. I ain’t
smiling.

The car slowing down, she sliding slowly.
The bitch up and moved down a couple of steps.
I stick my foot out and it catches in the hem of
her skirt. Don’t ignore me babe.

She look at me real fast, mean. Grabs her
skirt. Calls me a dumb bastard, says I look like a
lazy bum why don’t I do something ’sides sit on
street cars and look like a big man. I feel my face
get mean and sneer. Who she think she is,
crumbs off the floor? Cause there ain’t no crumbs
ahead, stare out that window . I see you. I ain’t
There a hole in my pants. Gatta get Jessie to fix
the windows and the sun beating full down on it. My
body knows it. She

That bitch be sorry then. She be sorry she
ignored me when she finds out I own one o’them
big houses outside this car. The doors yawning
lazy, like they own the world. When I get some
money.

Jessie tells me I better get a job and help pay
for the food again or else I’m out. All I can do is
laugh. She gonna throw me out? She fooling
herself. That house almost as much mine as
hers. I’m a relative and ’sides she needs me.
Who else gonna eat her cooking and keep the
night hunters from rippin’ a screen and climbing
in her window. No other sucker dumb
enough to live in that trash, for sure. The scum
that live ‘round there. They don’t know nothing
but hanging ‘round and causing trouble.

Whirring, sliding. Sun feels good now, not as
hot and the sweat stopped drippin’ down my
neck. Watching the man wind her up. His hand
and foot work together like a drummer’s, play­
ing this car. I can feel it. My body knows it. She
hugs the track close and me with it.

Like the feel I used to have for cars. Went to
work for a mechanic five or six years ago in­
stead of finishing high school. Had to come up
with some money somehow so I did that. I was
pretty good at fixing cars too, could sorta tell
what was going to be wrong with em. But that
first garage where I worked, they had a man
used to come in with a sleek little racer. That
baby would just sit in the lot after bein’ tuned or
whatever and beg to have someone real drive
her. The man was old and never let her loose,
ever let her have the road.

So one day I took it out when the boss was on
lunch, her crying for real hands to steer her and
feet with a touch to feed her power. A bit of bad
luck came along though and this old lady thinks
I’m going to stop at this stop sign I couldn’t stop
at. Couldn’t you see cause she was just starting
to let it out and the engine racing higher and
higher. She screaming and happy, this is the
first time she been run all out and this old lady
gets in my way with her car. Except her car’s a
big Ford, four-door and eight cylinders and the
little racer don’t stand a chance against it. And
she screaming along just before the crash. Only
let loose once.

I ditch the car and run, never go back to the
mechanic and run from the town instead. Be­
cause there ain’t nothing holding me there. The
gov’ment’s taking the house, the bastards, and
it don’t much matter where I go anyway. I’m
good with my hands, you see. So good.

What’s this? Two dumb bastards from the fac­
tory getting on. They walk down the aisle. One
of em sees me and elbows the other. They
laughing. Smart asses. The man puts her in gear again and we start gliding and whirring and they walk toward me. The big ugly one stops at my feet and says do you mind if I sit here?

Yes I do mind but there ain't no more room so I have to move my feet and let him sit. I been here so long the seat starting to shape itself around me. My heel marks in the cushion, and he sits and covers em with his fat body.

Hey Bobby, one of em says. You say Mr. Sampson gonna give you a pro-mo-tion?
He looking at me to make sure I heard.
Yeah, says Bobby, Mr. Sampson gonna give me a promotion cause someone's gotta control all the dumb box-loaders on the dock. Those bastards don't know if they're tying their shoes.

They both laugh.
I move around in my seat, looking out the window. She purring underneath me and the houses going by. She moving real fine and he holding her steady. The clacking steady. Wonder if Jessie going to fix me anything decent for supper tonight. Then maybe I'll go to the Quarter for a little jazz. Get someone to buy me a drink, look for a cute little number.

Yeah Bobby, the ugly one says. Those dumb box-loaders get a little out of hand sometimes. Think they're pretty tough. I hear one of em told Mr. Sampson to his face that he was a dumb son of a bitch who had no right to be ordering people. That he didn't know how to run the place and that he, the loader, could run it a thousand times better. Do you believe that? A thousand times better. Then he was stupid enough to make the moves on one of the chicks out back, when she was trying to find some papers. What a dumb shit he was.

The whirring, swaying, she's really rolling now and the conductor with his hand controlling the way. Except he's not lettin' her go, maybe 'cause of the traffic on the streets crossing the track. She moaning to be let go. The whirring trying to get louder but it can't, his hands holding her back.

Trying to get a piece of ass on the job, huh? Bobby says. Couldn't even do that, dumb bastard.

My hand itching again, beating on my thigh. Gotta find me a job where I can use my hands. Maybe be a drummer for one o'them jazz bands. I be good. But no, I be better than that, working those crazy night hours. I don't need to take the shit of working nights. Maybe I get a street car. I remember though this my street car. She purring for me. Why don't he let her go. I look up front.

An elbow. In my side.

Hey man, the ugly one says, didn't you used to work down at the factory?
I look at him real quick. Yeah, I say. I might have worked there a while ago.
He laughs. Aren't you the sucker that got himself fired a month or two ago?
The other one, Bobby, laughs too.
I move over toward the window. The seat smooth to the touch. The floor humming and singing and my hand still itching. Magnolia passing by.

No, I say. As a matter of fact I quit for a better job. Hirer pay and more responsibility.
They both look at me. I make myself smile.
Ooooocceee, Bobby says, more responsibility and higher pay? Tell me where I can get one o'them jobs!
I smile again. There ain't many of em around, I say. I wouldn't count on gettin' one too much.
They both stop smiling and laughing. You liar, the ugly one says. They glare with hard
eyes at me. She whirring and fighting. They pressing on me. I up against the window.

I ain't no liar, I say. I got the next shift on this street car, starting in 'bout five minutes.

They don't make a sound, just keep looking at me and thinking sure, sure buddy. They sit there with their arms folded across and pretty soon the ugly one lifts up his arm real slow and flips his shirt cuff back. Well well, he says, looks to be about time for you to start your shift.

I look at him, trying to glare but he stares right back and me caught off guard. I'm thinking if I don't get back to the shack soon Jessie's going to eat without me and maybe be mad enough to throw me out. I'm thinking maybe I should get off this car and run back home. 'Ccept it's mighty far. And he's not playing her right, she's crying to be let go. His hand a little too smooth now. She ready to go all out.

I stand up. I got the feel of the swaying, don't even tremble. Know how she goes. Got her figured out.

Excuse me, I say to the ugly one, it's time for me to go relieve the driver.

I climb over him and the breeze is gone, sweat dripping down my neck again. Could use a cold beer but need money for that. The aisle humming and the eyes all 'round looking up at me. I put a big smile on my face, and walk up to the front of the car. Feel two certain sets of eyes burning into my neck, Bobby and Ugly sitting there with their arms crossed.

The driver sitting there calm. I walk up to him and stand there. She slowing down and gonna stop, wheels clacking less and less. His hand on the handle sure and tight.

Excuse me, I say.

The driver looks up at me and the car slow now, real slow. He mumbles something.

I want to drive now, I say quiet so the boys don't hear.

Say that again, the man says.

I say I want to drive now. Let me take her.

You crazy boy, he says. You crazy now go sit down or get off.

He lets go the handle and it sways there, naked. He opens the door.

I know they're back there. She's purring too, waiting. So quiet. He watching me, too. She waiting and they all watching.

I feel my hand itching, opening and closing. I feel it. She's singing and I don't know what to do, where to go so I grab the handle and try to wind it up. Try to push the driver out of his seat and get in myself.

Get out of here boy, he yells, someone get this bastard away from me.

He hits me with his arm, swinging out real hard. My hand singing and singing, my feet got the buzz and the next thing I know the handle gone from my hand and I sitting on the sidewalk. People stop walking and look. Two guys on the street car laughing.

I swear I don't know what to do next. Lying there on the ground and the whirring starts up again. She moving away and I can tell he's gonna give her everything she wants, the wheels clacking and the whirring getting louder and she moving down the track. She hugs it and I see her slipping away. Laughing and the whirring going faster and faster.

And still I don't know just what to do because it almost supper time and Jessie waiting for me probably. My hand throbbing cause I was holding that handle so tight I got burned when the man pushed me. I think about crossing the tracks and waiting for a street car going the other way. She whirring and whirring and it filling my head til I can hardly see.
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