CALLIOPE

Volume III, No. 2

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DEDICATION

We humbly dedicate this issue of CALLIOPE to DR. WILLIAM R. BROWN.
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Kitty Stamen had never known a moment like this before. It was absolutely celestial. What are you to do if you are getting your husband’s breakfast and suddenly, without reason, are overwhelmed with a feeling of absolute ecstasy; a little heavenly comet suddenly takes up quarters in your heart, sending divinely warmed blood spilling through your body! The egg yolks, so round and yellow, smooth as satin, seemed to dance in their little white seas. Even the bacon crinkled as though smiling at her. It was a gliding waltz step she did to the refrigerator to get the oranges. Their firm skins peeled off easily under her quick sure fingers, but it was all she could do to keep from throwing them up in the air and catching them. She felt her face glow warmly as Paul walked in on her unexpectedly.

"Good morning, Kitten," he said, and kissed her on the forehead automatically as he had for the past ten years.

"Good morning, Daddy!"

Now what had made her call him "Daddy?" She had never called him anything but Paul. Quickly Kitty went to the stove and began dishing up his breakfast. She sighed with relief when he made no comment, and she could hear the rustle of the morning paper behind her. She fussed with the eggs, placing each one just so on his plate, ruffling them with the crisp bacon.

"Mummie," Morrie called from the bedroom.

Kitty flew to his side. He was sitting up in bed rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands. His little faded blue pajamas were unbuttoned halfway down; his dark, curly hair was tousled. She sat down on the bed beside him and enfolded him in her arms. He cuddled against her bosom. Oh, God! Tears danced in her eyes, and she bent down and through pursed lips made a bubbling sound on his warm exquisite little neck. This overwhelming warmth of feeling was like a miracle to her. She stood up and whirled him around. And in the bathroom another miracle took place: Morrie never let out a whimper as she washed him.

It was so cozy at the kitchen table. Kitty ate each bite as if each morsel was a new discovery. She didn’t even mind Paul’s being buried behind the morning paper. What made her so sensitive this morning? The odor of Paul’s aftershave lotion added to her exquisite feeling of—which she didn’t know? She hardly noticed that Morrie was spilling some of his...
oatmeal around the edge of his plate.

"Morrie!" Paul cried. "Look what you're doing!"

"Oh! Let him go, Paul," she said, patting Morrie's warm little hand. "It won't take a second to clean it up."

Paul looked at her, his eyes widened perceptibly.

"But you always---"

Kitty was too full of happiness--yes, that's what it was, happiness--it just had to be--to let anything mar it. She smiled at him, murmured: "I know, I know..." Paul shrugged his shoulders and went back behind his paper.

At the door for her usual goodbye kiss, Kitty's feelings burst through her self-imposed defenses. Instead of the usual little peck she gave Paul, for some unexplainable reason, she seized him in her arms and gave him an eager, warm comet-born kiss. He was completely awkward when she released him. She took his arm and gently turned him around and pushed him out the door.

"You better hurry, Daddy, or you'll be late!"

Kitty leaned against the closed door, holding her breath. She was afraid to breathe for fear the little fireball lodged in her breast would be fanned into an all consuming and unbearable flame. She whirled in ballet fashion to the couch and fell on it warm and dizzy. It was almost too much for her--this heavenly enchantment! A movement in the tree outside the window caught her eye. The tree's long slender branches were prickly with new little green and white buds. Two squirrels were scampering playfully among the branches. Their movements were so quick, so sure, that Kitty forgot to be fearful when one missed a branch and went tumbling down through the tree to the ground. His playmate met him half way down as he was coming back up and scolded him, only to be chased back up to the topmost part of the tree. A curious cold wave swept her momentarily as the neighbors' black and brown spotted dog ran around the base of the tree barking noisily at the squirrels.

"The little beast!" she thought; but the squirrels paid no attention
to him, and she fled to the kitchen at Morrie's call.

She wiped Morrie's mouth with his bib and lifted him out of his high-chair, held him close to her for a moment, and then set him down on the floor as her joy threatened to suffocate her. She loved him very much--this precious little bundle, who looked so much like a little blue Teddy Bear. And as the blue bear ran out of the kitchen, the little heavenly body within her heart throbbed. Heavenly--simply heavenly!

Her hands flew through the dishes with a new found energy and her mind probed to find the answer. What had she to be so happy about? Absolutely nothing. Nothing at all. They didn't have any money. They were in debt--even her engagement ring was in the pawn shop. Paul was on WPA and in a couple of months, he'd be laid off because of some silly rule about not being able to work continuously longer than 18 months. They never went out--there wasn't enough money for hardly anything but rent and food--necessities only.

It had been hard on her, once the banker's daughter and the wife of an up and coming mining engineer, to come down to being just another relief client. The bank failure had started it all, leaving her father a broken man, afraid to face the world without his financial confidence. Then the mine closed. Paul was laid off and their house was lost. Kitty had never been the same since. She had drawn into a shell, and like an angry turtle, only emerged to take out her bitterness on Paul and Morrie. But Paul had lived up to her father's predictions. He was steady, kind, gentle, and it was his reliable, calculating engineer mind that held them together.

Kitty became quite dizzy while throwing crumbs to the birds. It was such a heady feeling that she was absolutely intoxicated. The morning was beautiful to her mood. Were early spring mornings always like this? Cool, crisp breezes chattered as they played it through the bushes and tree tops; forecasting the possibility of a late snow. But this was Easter time, she thought. Easter time...He is Risen...new clothes...new life. Could it be Spring?

That Morrie didn't share her bloom of heaven, was obvious when she began dressing him. He was now being his usual aggravating self, and was having difficulty in standing still as Kitty tried to get him into his suit.

"Morrie Stamen! Will you, please, stand still!" she cried, as he wiggled and twisted around to get a better view of a picture of a Bunny
BEYOND THE BLOOM OF SPRING

Rabbit on the front of a magazine.

Kitty picked up the magazine, put it up on the mantel by her vase, out of temptation's way. She ran her hand tenderly over the vase. It was so tall, so white and slender; a treasure house of memories. It had stood for many years by her bed at home. It had been the depository of her many youthful secrets. For months before she let her parents know she and Paul were engaged, she had hid her ring in it. Once while in college, it had held a boy's frat pin.

"Are we going to see the Easter Bunny?" Morrie asked for the fifteenth time that morning.

"Yes, yes, only for heaven's sake, stand still." She cuddled him to her when she finished dressing him. "Now, young man, sit on that chair, and don't you get off until I get dressed."

In the bedroom Kitty couldn't make up her mind what dress to wear. Her pink one was her best; but if it became any colder, she might wish she had worn her last year's wool dress. She wished Paul could find another job before his lay-off came. Perhaps, she found herself hoping, the mines will be reopening with the threat of war coming closer. If they didn't open, maybe he could go to Milwaukee or Detroit and get a National Defense job. I'm in a regular little tizzy, she thought. The future and hope were a new line of thought to Kitty; and the future now flooded her body amorously.

As Kitty turned to straighten out her dress in front of the mirror—it gave her back a beaming young woman in her early thirties, her face flushed, her dark eyes flashing vivaciously. She put her hands up under the back of her hair and fluffed it out, pulled one side down over the front of her face, and pushed down the shoulder of her dress, baring a soft white shoulder. She put on her best come-hither look and then burst into laughter. Honestly, Kitty Stamen, I think you're drunk. Are you sure you didn't put something in that coffee this morning? Oh, you're absurd! Most delightfully absurd! She spun around till her skirt flowed out revealing her slip, stopped suddenly and hugged herself. Oh, what a heavenly sensation!

A loud crash broke into her reverie, her comet sputtered, and she ran into the living room. Morrie was standing on the arm of the chair, the magazine in his hand, looking anxiously at bits of white fragments on the floor—the shattered remains of her lovely vase.
"I didn't mean to, Mummie," he bawled. "I was just trying to get the magazine to see the Easter Bunny!"

Kitty stood absolutely frozen, her hot comet became a paltry, pitiful snowball watering down her arteries. Her beautiful vase! It was the only thing she had salvaged from the clutches of the depression; there had been many opportunities to sell but she had clung to it tenaciously. Paul had been appalled at her suggestion they pawn her engagement ring instead of selling her antique vase.

"You mean to tell me you'd rather pawn your engagement ring rather than part with that little monstrosity," he had said.

It was too much to expect of a man to understand how she felt about it, and she didn't try to explain.

"That's what I said."

He looked at her for a long time. Finally he said, "Our ring doesn't mean as much to you as the vase? Is that what you're trying to say."

"I'm not trying to say anything of the kind." If they sold the vase, she knew it was gone for good, but if they pawned her ring he'd find some way to redeem it. It irritated her to think he had always called her vase a "little monstrosity" but wasn't beyond selling it when he found out it was valuable. She wasn't going to let him. He stormed out of the house. But when he returned an hour later, he was contrite.

"Kitten, darling."

"Yes."

"Are you really serious?"

She took off her engagement ring and laid it carefully on the table. "I thought we decided that. Take the ring but leave my vase alone."

She had then run off and locked herself in the bedroom. She hated to part with her ring, but she couldn't bring herself to sell her vase. And now to see it shattered...utterly broken into tiny bits, brought a lump as large as the vase to her throat.
"Please, Mummie, I didn't---" Morrie wailed.

"Oh, shut up!" she screamed at him.

Morrie ran from the room shrieking at the top of his voice. Kitty ignored his outburst. Tears flooded her face, and sobbing she knelt down and lovingly began gathering up each tiny piece of her lovely vase. She placed the pieces in a small package of tissue paper. Her empty jewel case became its coffin. Glancing into the mirror, she saw the ravages her tears had left. She looked older. No hot comet stirred in her breast. She felt now her normal deluded and hopeless self. No hope. No future. What was the use? As she wiped her eyes, the sobbing of Morrie rushed into her consciousness. He was stretched across the bed, his face buried in his arms, deep sobs shaking his tiny body.

She impulsively started to scold him, but he rolled over on his back, looked up at her with little blurry brown eyes, and her returned bitterness diminished.

"Hush, now, honey. Mother's sorry," Kitty soothed gently. "I didn't mean to scare you, it's just that I---" She snuggled him to her breast, patted him gently on the back until his sobbing subsided.

She finally set him on the floor with a gentle smack on the buttocks, and said:

"Put on your shoes, like a good boy, while mother gets ready and I'll take you to see the Easter Bunny."

Before the mirror, repairing her face, Kitty realized that her wool dress was the only sensible one to wear. She quickly slipped it over her head and while buttoning it up, Paul's picture smiling at her from the dressing table sent a warm ripple surging through her body. I do love you, darling, she thought, even though I'm as cold as an icicle. When they were first married it had almost worried her sick. Dr. Hunt had told her there was nothing organically wrong with her, and had half way promised she'd warm up after her first child was born. Paul had been wonderful about it; he had said, "Don't worry about it, Kitten, Take it easy, honey, just relax." But she hadn't warmed up after Morrie was born, and she couldn't seem to relax. The minute Paul touched her she coiled up like a watch spring; her insides became granite, heavy and marbled with fear. She merely couldn't help it, and felt miserable about it... sometimes felt she was only half a woman. Poor Paul.
Huge colored cardboard images of the Easter Bunny lined the walls of the Five & Ten Store. Long strings of multicolored eggs danced on strings from the ceiling. Little purple and yellow baskets filled with fluffy green, sparkling imitation grass and candy eggs decorated the top of the cash registers; and at every counter they stopped Morrie had to point them out to Kitty eagerly.

"Is the Easter Bunny here, Mummie? When are we going to see him?" Questioned little Morrie, his eyes beaming as they darted constantly trying to take in everything at once.

"Mother'll take you to see him in a minute. He's at the other end of the store." Kitty stopped to look at some costume jewelry. It only reminded her of her missing engagement ring. Oh, where was her hot little comet of the morning? She moved on, before the lump in her throat choked her.

"Let's hurry, Mummie, the Easter Bunny might go before I see him."

"Shush, dear, he won't leave."

"Mummie, my feet hurt."

"Oh, Morrie, hush!"

"But they do, Mummie."

"Morrie, please, I said, hush!" Kitty really hadn't heard what he said. Her eyes were captives of two tall, slender white candles that shut out all her other senses. They were perfectly matched, the purest white, unblemished as new fallen snow, standing so rigidly straight as though reaching toward heaven. Kitty felt pierced to the heart. She had to have them! Before she realized what was happening the saleslady was wrapping them up for her. She took them in her hand and pressed the package to her bosom passionately. A distant wailing sound began penetrating the inner reaches of her mind, finally exploding into Morrie's voice.

Left to his own resources, Morrie had quickly discovered a red fire truck and was sitting behind the wheel wailing like a siren.

Kitty jerked him bodily out of the truck.
"How many times have I told you not to touch things in stores?"

"I forgot."

"Well, you better remember it," Kitty snapped.

"I only wanted to play in---"

"Never mind what you wanted to do, don't touch anything else."

Morrie started to cry. She jerked him along with her.

"Now hush up that crying!"

His tears disappeared as quickly as they had started at the sight of a huge mechanical Easter Bunny nibbling on a carrot. Below it was a wired section of a counter filled with live white pink-eyed rabbits, their little noses twitching as they hopped around.

"Oh, look, Mummie---look at the Easter Bunny, and all his little bunnies!" Morrie screamed joyously.

"Don't get so excited," Kitty cautioned.

Morrie danced around the counter as if he were on hot coals. His little brown eyes bulged, and he cooed and wooed them through the wire mesh.

"Look at that one, Mummie," he giggled---"he winked at me. He likes me, Mummie, Can I take him home? Can I, Mummie, can I?"

"We haven't any place to keep him, you know that."

"I want him, I want him, Mummie, Can't I, Mummie? Please, Mummie, say I can have him!" Morrie whined, his little voice choking with tears. "Please, Mummie!"

Kitty knelt down beside him, put her arm around him affectionately, and explained: "Honey, we can't take him with us. He'd only die. You wouldn't want him to die, would you?"

The little rabbit had his nose close to the wire; Morris reached out a finger tentatively and withdrew it quickly as the rabbit nibbled at it.
The rabbit hopped over to a fruit jar lid full of water and started to drink.

"Why do they make their noses go like that, Mummie?" Morrie asked between sobs.

"I don't know."

"Mummie, I'm thirsty, too. I want a drink, too."

"Well you'll just have to wait until we get home. There's no place here to get a drink."

"But I can't, Mummie."

"Yes you can---"

"May I help you, Madame?" a clerk interrupted.

"No, thank you, I was merely showing my little boy the rabbits."

"Mummie."

"What is it now?"

"My feet hurt."

"Never mind, we'll be going home soon." Oh, Lord, if it wasn't one thing it was another. She would never have time to---

Kitty felt a soft tapping on her shoulder. She turned to meet the smiling face of an elderly woman, her grey hair peeking out from under a flowery bonnet.

"I hope you won't be offended by my telling you, young lady, but your little boy has his shoes on wrong."

Kitty's face burned as she glanced down at Morrie's feet. Sure enough, he had his shoes on the wrong feet!

"Thank you," she stammered.

"You're quite welcome."
"Can't you ever do anything right, Morrie Stamen!" she whispered fiercely, her breath coming in short and gasping gulps. Always. Every time—without failure—something had to come up to mortify her. Paul always said it was her imagination. If he were only here—she could prove her point. Her hands were moist as she grabbed Morrie by the hand and hurried him to the nearest restroom. She felt as though every eye in the store was on her progress. She just knew it! And it wasn't imagination, either! She could picture that old gossip going all over the store pointing her out as the woman whose little boy had his shoes on wrong. Pointing her out; saying, "That one! The one over there with last winter's dress and coat!"

Now her day was normal! She knew there wasn't any use in trying to get any sympathy by telling Paul... no use at all in telling him about it. He'd only laugh and say: "Oh, Kitten, you have the most fertile imagination of any one I know. She was probably just being kind. I'll bet she wouldn't know you again if she saw you. Don't be silly!" Yes, she'd heard that tale before. It was all right for him to feel that way. Nothing ever happened like that when he was with them. But he always laughed at her mishaps with Morrie. The time Morrie had dumped over a display of cans in the grocery, he thought it quite funny. "You're over-sensitive, Kitten, that's all. Don't take things so seriously. He's a little boy yet. Use your sense of humor for God's sake!"

"I didn't know, Mummie," Morrie cried.

"Oh, all right, but the next time you pull off a stunt like this I'll tan you good—right on the spot."

"Can I have a drink, now?" He had spotted a drinking fountain in the rest room.

Kitty started to correct him, but stopped with a sigh, and murmured: "All right."

She finished lacing his shoes, and he ran to the fountain. She looked at herself in the mirror; touched up her lipstick and smoothed out her powder.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "Morrieeee!"

Morrie had half his face in the stream of water and was twitching his nose like a rabbit as he drank big mouthfuls of water. He looked up at her.
with a big innocent smile on his face.

"See. I can drink like the bunny did."

Her lungs felt bulged with live steam ready to explode. She let her breath out slowly. Oh, where is that sense of humor? Paul Stamen, you should live so long to take Morrie to town by yourself! She fought down the explosive feeling; forced herself to smile at him.

"Yes, so I see. But we're not rabbits are we. We are people, and people don't drink like that," Kitty said, as she wiped his face with her handkerchief.

On their way out of the store they passed by gray hair with the flowery bonnet, and although Kitty's face warmed at the second meeting, gray hair gave no sign of recognition. Perhaps Paul was right. Perhaps my imagination is too active. She looked straight at me and didn't even smile. Kitty shrugged her shoulders and walked out feeling much better.

III

The earlier clean odor of snow had become a reality with a much brisker wind blowing. The snowflakes were melting as fast as they hit the pavement, but in the grass around the courthouse they were laying a mantle of white. Thin sheets of ice were beginning to form on small pools of water at the curb. Winter was having his last fling before reluctantly giving in to Spring. The cool air lifted Kitty's spirits and she buttoned her coat up tight around her neck.

"Mummie, I have to go to the toilet," Morrie announced as they were crossing the courthouse square.

"Why in the world didn't you think of it when we were in the store rest room?"

"I didn't have to go then."

"Well, you'll have to wait until we get home, now."

"But I can't, Mummie." He began to dance around, "I got to go real bad. Honest, I have."

Dear God! she murmured to herself, isn't there any end to it! Aloud she asked: "What do you have to do? Number one? Or two?"
"Number one."

"See that little sign over there." Kitty pointed to a sign reading MEN over the door at the side of the courthouse.

"That one where the man is coming out?" Morrie twisted around nervously.

"Yes." Her face flamed as she thought the man in question glanced at them. "You go over there and mother will wait for you here. Now hurry!"

Morrie ran to the door quickly. Kitty turned around with her hot face to the cooling wind. She watched two squirrels, their little sure quick movements bursting with energy, chasing and twisting through the branches of a tree. Her little comet re-inhabited her heart, sent a shower of heavenly sparks tingling through her body. She seemed almost suffocated with its sudden surge again claiming residence within her. Her hands felt so warm she was afraid she'd melt her lovely candles. Am I being hysterical? Surely there must be a reason for this ecstasy...this heavenly bliss. She must tell Paul of these sudden hot flashes. He always came up with a scientific reason for everything. That's what she'd do. Tonight when they were snuggled so secure in their warm bed she'd ask him...he'd know...tonight... Her heart began to thump violently, pumping a million little comets through her body, until every bone and nerve ached ardently. Her bed had never felt secure and warm before. Oh, I feel absolutely wicked---positively wanton! Her mind raced through last night's events. She couldn't think what had made her relax last night. Suddenly she felt no longer a half woman, but a whole, loving, desirous woman. For the first time in her life Kitty had known satisfaction and warmth with her husband.

Her little comet no longer puzzled her, and she felt like running in the snowy grass, or perhaps climbing the tree and chasing with the squirrels. Almost as if predestined, a hole in the cloud let the sunshine fall upon her, and Spring stirred deeply in her breast; her eyes visualized the trees arrayed in their green splendor, their branches filled with the sweet twittering of Spring's visitors from the south. Her heart fluttered deliciously within her breast, its wings beating with mothlike tenderness against her rib cage. Her eyes were moist with happiness.

Through blurred vision she saw Morrie running towards her. As her eyes cleared, she could see the front of his new pants were wet and beginning to freeze in the cold air.
BEYOND THE BLOOM OF SPRING

Kitty was in no mood to scold him. His little tense, chubby figure running toward her only added fuel to the consuming bliss raging within her.

"Don't whip me, Mummie. Please, don't. I didn't mean to," he bawled. "They were all full, an' I couldn't wait. I couldn't, honest, Mummie. I tried."

"It's all right, son, I understand."

And for once Kitty really felt she did understand. She took his hand, threw her head back to feel the full force of the clean sweeping gusts of wind and snow. And if anyone commented or noticed Morrie's pants on the way home, Kitty never knew it, nor did she imagine any such thing.

###

WISDOM/ Pete Cooper

Spring simply is.
   suddenly in myself,
   whispering slowly outward,
   tick'ling lamb-like greening sighs

Memory said it would come.
   reason, sense, faith, and all
   the great vain tools toward wisdom
   promised it would come,
   but Winter was:
   one snowy moment loomed now
   like the glacier, and all time
   was a fit of shivering.

Now is the whisper forever.
   no promise, but eternal
   buds and mud;
   for wisdom is the weather's:
   as for me,
       Spring simply is.
YARMO AND THE CATFISH/ Douglas Hodgman

The mist that early from the smokestacks rose was falling then, dank on the walls, melted and meandered molten through the sidewalk cracks, hiding somewhere the forms but not the calls of children playing in the dumpyard trash. Beneath the street where river sliced river, was the place I couldn't go, the shack. I know where now he lives, where lives Yarmo. I couldn't go.

The Florida flat banks; the rounded mounds of mudpie simmering in the southern sun was where we used to stretch, naked as sweltering puppies, digging into the sweet muck like sun through our skins and yelping dreams that wandered aimless as the streams. The loudest of us all was brown Yarmo, The smallest, swiftest, toughest of us all was Yarmo; running, his legs were quicker than a spitfish, slipping under the pulpy water, fearless for leeches; he was leech himself, a leech of sun and mud and water. Under the steam beaming heat, with the smoke of green leaves wrapped in rough paper lying tart and sour on our tongues, we talked often of the shining cities that waited anxious beyond the shallow blue dusk of the high horizon; and after dusk we tore sweating through the sticky-sour smelling shadows, playing at city cops and gangsters; and Yarmo was the gangster, the uncatchable devil of a tooth flashing, dark dashing gangster, O the terror and the splendor! But most we whispered of the Catfish, the bulging, monstrous, green gilled porpoise of a fish that hid its sullen, whiskery anger under the rotted dock where the stream ran deep.

Once I had touched the Catfish, caught daring from the fear tight mouths of the others, I had
YARMO AND THE CATFISH

clutched the last great gulp of air within me,
and pawing froglike through the silt
hung greenness, I squirmed far under the cool,
dark dock shadow to beneath the bank
an abscess where I saw Him.
Moment of sick beating; water in my ears,
heart in my chest. Vomit bright flesh,
I will never forget it, that shock of light. And
the quick memory of mothers to shrieking
children: Ole Catfish gonna eat you if
you dont watch out. But I touched Him.
Forcing my hand out, I touched, and
feeling the sudden quiver, turned about
and fled in frantic haste to the air,
and the day, and the sun.

The ring of days revolved then to a year,
went on for two, and to the long drawn
memory of Yarmo, weary of heat-prickle
flies, tossing with a choked heart of
coconut out to the stream, a challenge: he
would catch the Catfish. We following, ploshing
behind his eagerness through the marsh to the island
forgot to jeer our fear, and when he dripped
oil-like beneath the dock to merge his
shadow with the longer overhead, I held my
breath as his. Through the slimsy boards we
watched, waited, knew the moment by
the sense of silence his hands were poised to
clutch. O burst, the ripping threshing
tortured turn of froth, the spume of water
flailed by twisting air hose under pressure,
the surge of thrust from thrust to
thrust to - break water! a mouth
above the spray. Running down the bank,
we chased the stream, could see now his
fingers in the gills. His nails, I knew,
I had fought him once, were hooked in and
under, digging down for life. His legs,
like brown oil, oozed about the Fish,
trickled together and held, held fast.
Twirled, the fish twirled, and bucked and
bucked and spun about itself, and lept
and dove and flipped and
YARMO AND THE CATFISH

Yarmo, Yarmo held fast. Down the stream we ran, plunging through the muck, following the gasp of mouth, the snap of eye, the smash of tail and water thrash. Around through the muck and slimy swamp we ran plunging, struggling down and up and wallowing on, and we ran hard running mud pumping we ran and ran. At last, so soon and very later, the Fish with one last smart smack lifted itself to a convulsive lurch, shivered high against the air and shrank back to quiet belly turned shudders near a shallow stretch of sand. Whopping into the water we picked up Yarmo and the fish, and with laugh storms rippling high hoisted them back to camp where we gutted the fish and cooked it, and ate all the murky flesh and got sick, and laughed when we puked it up.

O thoughts there are that never can be shared, feelings born to bleed alone, I thought standing on the cement rise; for down the street I could not go.

Yarmo was from then on something wrong, a catch gone from his eyes, he slipped away to older boys, the quick demand of rabbit thump beneath a skirt, and after this, the drink from bottles colored of a wasted sun, the drink that in him drank. So Yarmo went north, I knew for him it was the only thing to do, and now when his leech of hunger drink desire demands they say, he loads the boats that there in the bay come to dock, a choked coconut of a small brown man.

The mist that early from the smokestacks rose was lifting then again above the walls, scurrying high above the ceilings of cement and green glass halls, wet like the memory of mothers' bawls: It goes to show, I told you so. Drifting away was the mist, the childrens' calls, the memory of simmering mud and sticky nights. I could not stay, I could not go. But as I turned away I wondered if sometimes, when above the docks the dun sun wallows through the mist to gold old oil and rust moving under the water, he recalls, relives again the thing he wrestled with.
It was a good day for fishing.

Everything was peaceful and quiet here. The air was clear and crisp and there was the smell of pine trees and the odor of pipe tobacco. A brook ran close by, clear and fresh and brilliant in the noon-day sun. The brook made a sound like music, a gentle, endless, rushing symphony. Trout leaped from the gem-like waters, twisting and flipping in majestic defiance.

"Frank!"

The crisp air faded, the smell of pine trees vanished, the symphony of the brook became silent, the leaping trout disintegrated.

"Frank!"

Everything was gone. He looked about at the dingy living room with the dirty papered walls. The coils of spring penetrated the threadbare cloth of the couch, and pressed against his body uncomfortably.

"Frank, are you deaf?"

"Yes, yes, I hear you," Frank said wearily.

"Come out here, this instant."

Frank put the evening paper down on the couch, stood up and stretched, and tunked his cold pipe in the glass ash tray as he slumped out to the kitchen.

His wife turned on him, the spoon she held in her hand dripping juice on the cracked, linoleum floor. "You want supper?" she asked. Her eyes were like cold blue buttons. "Go out and chop some wood for the stove."

"All right," Frank said.

"All right," she repeated bitterly. "Is that all you got to say? Ain't you ever got anything to say? I'm tired of being treated like a robot. You just sit around and read your damned paper and you never talk. It ain't human, I tell you."
Some things a man just can't get used to, Frank thought absently. He had been married to her for twenty-five years and that razor tongue of hers still annoyed him.

"I want you to stay home this weekend for a change" she said. "You've been out with Bill Schippers every week-end for the past ten years. This time you're gonna stay home for a change."

"We're going fishing, Liz", Frank half turned and glanced at her. "The hell you are," she said decisively. "It's about time it entered your thick skull that you married me and not Bill Schippers. I've got to have someone around here before I blow my stack."

Frank hesitated in the doorway between the kitchen and woodshed. His wife returned his gaze with angry, cold eyes. Without a word he went into the woodshed and grabbed the long, wooden handle of a heavy, double-bladed axe.

He stepped out into the small back yard, into the brisk late autumn afternoon. In the center of a fenced-in backyard was a pile of logs. Frank selected a good-sized log from the pile and swung the axe over his shoulder.

Listlessly, he chopped until the fatigue come up into his arms like an intravenous injection of lead. Frank leaned on the axe handle and rubbed his arm across his wet forehead. He stared out at the late afternoon sky that showed in thin slivers of deepening blue between the dead, black trees and the unpainted houses.

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"Frank!"

The crisp air faded, the smell of pine trees vanished, the symphony of the brook became silent, the leaping trout disintegrated.
Everything was gone. "Yes," Frank said, the irritation slipping out in his voice. "What is it?"

"You chopping down a forest or something?"

"I'll be right there," he said. He sighed wearily, took a firm grip on the axe and began methodically to chop. In the glinting rays of a dying sun, the blade of the axe flashed. Up. Down. Up. Down. Chips of wood flew before the powerful bite of the axe blade.

"Frank!"

Her screeching cry plucked at his nerves. A sudden glow of savage power pumped into his arm and back muscles and his face took on a look of grim concentration. He redoubled his efforts. It did not take long to finish the job, and as Frank walked from the back yard into the woodshed, the axe clenched tightly in his hands, his wife opened the kitchen door and stood there facing him.

"I don't see how you can be so slow and still move," she lamented. "Shake the lead if you want your supper sometime tonight. Me, I don't give a damn."

"I'll get the wood," Frank said, and turned to go back into the yard.

"Oh, my god," she said derisively, "you can't carry wood in here with that axe in your hand."

Frank looked at the axe in his tightly clenched fists.

"If you'd keep your pea-sized brain on what you're doing and not be dreaming and reading your damned paper all the time you might have amounted to something. Instead, look at you. You'll be working in that paper mill for the rest of your life, and it's your own damned fault."

Frank felt something tighten inside of him, like the last turn of a key winding an old grandfather clock before the mainspring thwangs and crashes through the glass panel in front of the pendulum. A sudden prickle ran up his spine and the hairs on the back of his neck bristled. "Liz," he said, his voice quavering. "I've decided that I'm gonna go fishing with Bill Schippers this week-end. And there ain't you nor anybody gonna stop me."
"Oh, and are you now?" She put her hands on her hips and her button eyes glittered with fire.

"Yes," Frank said, and his voice sounded loud and unnatural in his ears. He noticed helplessly that the axe was vibrating from the trembling in his hands and arms. "All of our marriage I've been listening to you prattle and bitch and I'm fed up with it. Do you hear," he screamed. "I'm fed up."

"Don't you talk to me like that, you gutless bastard. Don't you dare talk to me like---" Her face paled, and a look of amazement congealed there as the blade of the axe split the top of her head open.

Frank stepped over the spurting stream of red and the still, upright handle of the axe. He walked dazedly into the kitchen. He sniffed the cold stew that set in a pot on the dead stove. Gingerly, he tasted it. "Needs to be warmed up," he said to himself absently. He moved ponderously into the living room and sat down on the couch.

Everything was peaceful and quiet. The air was clear and crisp and there was the smell of pine trees and the odor of pipe tobacco. A brook ran close by, clear and fresh and brilliant in the noon-day sun. The brook made a sound like music, a gentle, endless, rushing symphony. Trout leaped from the gem-like waters, twisting and flipping in majestic defiance.

It was a fine day for fishing.

###

**SALESMAN'S BLUES**

housewife (happy old tigersnarl)
with your teeth and eyes wrapped in hair
and love in your bedroom only
why ruin this morning with dripdrop
sighs mourning
someone else's rainbow?

John Murphy

-24-
The carhandlers hammered the last freight car into lock below deck at seven o'clock. Ten minutes later, the ship grated from the pilings into open lake. Evening colored clouds, bloody and ochre, glimmered from the water, and the lake was indolent and easy underneath the engine beat.

At 7:25, Purser Meade Harris was impatient in the pilothouse. Captain Bernard Stason was shaving himself with an electric raxor. Matters of carlists and passengers lining up to buy tickets could evidently wait.

True to a daily habit of 40 years, Harris nursed his peeves at stubborn whims of lake captains. They were an odd lot and of them, Bernard Stason was oddest. Harris sighed, scratched his bald head, and finally slid into Stason's anchored chair. Dick Webb, twenty-nine and tall, smirked above Coast Guard weather maps. Harris shrugged and noticed a worn spot in the neck's nape of the helmsman's pull-over. Down in front, the hull cut into a watery sunset, but Harris contemplated the worn spot, and in his mind said, "Tsk-tsk."

He did remember seeing sunsets, 40 years ago—or maybe 39. They had, in fact, fascinated him. And later they had become common everyday, like tight ferry-schedules and endless car-lists. A crumbling, an aging, a shrinking. Tomorrow there would be no more everyday; only one more trip across to his 40-year everyday. The buzzing razor bothered his head and he saw a worn spot in a helmsman's pull-over, because it clashed with everyday.

The infernal razor stopped. Webb rattled his maps and Stason swung his paunch around, hanging heavy over his belt. He looks like a frog, thought Harris, and he growls like one.

"Well, Meade, let's look at what we got."

Harris shoved the papers into Stason's hand and tilted his cap back on his baldness.

"Fifty-four cars," he said.

Stason lit a cigar, leafed through the papers, and belched a cigar cough.

"Okay. Any passengers?"
"Half-dozen, maybe."

"This your last trip?"

"Next to last. I'll come back with you. Then I'm done."

"Jesus, I envy you, no more juggling on this sea-hammock. Wish I could retire."

Guess every man wishes it at 50, Harris thought. But not oddwards of 60, they don't. After all, when a man shrinks so far, he's just right for his job, and that one and no other. Stason would reach his prime in a few years. He'd know.

"How's the ticker?" Harris asked from habit.

The captain opened and closed his fist several times over his lumpy chest and smirked.

"A twinge now and then on the steps is all," he said, and belched a blue cough.

"Well, take them easy."

Harris went out and down the iron grate steps to the deck, trying to think of nothing. At the bottom step he conceded his failure. Ought to be some little bookkeeping place would take him...maybe in Chi, even.

"Age please?" Ha! No more juggling on this sea-hammock had been a dim, future thing for quite a while; until now, really. One more trip, then done. Telling it had made it a sudden matter of fact. I'll die in six months. Should jump and save the waiting.

Hurrying to his window in the lounge, he remembered he had meant to speak to the Captain about that helmsman's worn pull-over...

Behind the wooden bars of his window in the lounge, he straightened ticket pads and punch, and watched the first passenger in line, a hairy hulk, wheeze as he dug out his wallet. Years ago, Meade Harris had discovered a rare distraction for himself in faces of passengers—-not the passengers themselves. He looked them over with chilly, blue eyes set in keen crinkles of a credit firm. There were never enough faces in one trip to make the hobby monotonous.
This fellow's trousers are snug on him, he speculated, if I judge from the crucified look on his face.

"Two dollars."

The man grimaced a grin and laid down a 20-dollar bill. Harris handed him his change with the ten on top.

"Now I've got to have your name for our passenger list," he said.

"Todd M. Fitz. I'm a salesman."

"Thank you, sir."

"Round-trip tickets for the three-four-five of us," announced the next in line, a tall, curly-haired family man. The three-four-five were scrambling around his better half, a patient-faced woman. One of the youngsters squalled and the man smiled.

"First time the kids have been on a boat. Wife and I thought it would be an experience for them. Hope they won't get seasick, is all."

"May I have your names please."

"Moore," the man beamed. "Henry, Alda, Kate, Henry, and James."

Harris printed the names, nodded, and looked at a woman with long, blonde hair.

"One way, please." Her face was not beautiful, but it had potentialities. If it had not been so peaked and the eyes not so large... well, she has seen more life than I have, Harris thought. As much in half as much time.

She fumbled her change and coins rolled. The Moore children squealed and pounced. She twitched a quick smile at them as they gave back her money.

"Name, Ma'am?"

"Carston. Mrs. Carston."

Harris paused. He should have an initial. Let it go this time.
"Captain?" Her voice twitched, too.

"I'm the Purser, Ma'am."

"Oh, yes---can you tell me, sir, what time we arrive at the other side?"

Harris tilted his cap.

"Oh, twelve thirty, one o'clock. Four, five hours. Do you get seasick?"

"No," said Mrs. Carston, and went.

Harris wrinkled his nose and straightened his pads.

Medium-sized waves built from the Northwest tossed whitecaps here and there, and lifted and lowered in a smooth, sideway motion. Because of this, Todd Fitz staggered to keep his huge balance upright on deck, while Henry Moore, pall-faced, retched over the washbowl in the men's head. Purser Meade Harris yawned and went to sip coffee in the galleyhouse. The darkened pilothouse where he usually sipped his coffee would have suited his mood better, but this was tonight and Bernard Stason was not as uncommunicative as Sam Wills, the young Negro dishwasher.

Four scrubbed walls give a compact feeling of security, Harris thought, and this is compact. Or maybe the bright, unshaded bulbs glaring on the walls and out at the night and noise made it compact. Contemplating a thing like that made it seem like 40 years ago. But this is tonight and that is like me. I have been compact for a good many years. I have one more trip on which to be good and compact.

His watch said 9:15. He pushed himself up and stooped out the cubby-hole galley door onto deck. It seemed an effort. He stood and let his mind bob and bloat. Dying dusk had blackened the rolling water and blurred the shore behind; there would have been no shore at all if tiny lights did not prick through the distance. Let the Lower Lights Be Burning was what drifted into and out of his mind. Behind the faint shore-lights an arc of yellow mist said that the moon was coming.

Harris swore and tramped forward. Moons are not for old men.

The wind had a cutting edge to it in front of the hoist gears. Harris yanked down his cap and leaned over for a look at the black water splitting
into a constant, curling V of foam under the hull. Webb and the helmsman were suffering up there, he knew, in the foul fog of Stason's cigars. Stason would be starting his jokes about now and Webb would be muttering dirty words.

Harris heard someone snoring. He walked to the slatted port of the lounge and peered in. Todd Fitz, his mouth hanging and supported by first and second chins, lay sprawled over two lounge chairs. Henry and Alda Moore were sitting close together on the opposite side. A blanket covered their legs. The three children were sleeping in a heap on a lounge chair. Harris grunted and moved aft.

People must have sand in their heads to ride ferries, when there were planes, cars, and railroads. But Henry Moores kept on paying 20 dollars at one snap to let their kids feel lake wind on their faces for a few hours. Jesus, I am an old man. An old and bitter man.

He approached the port stern rail. Something was on it. He stopped at the door of the aft wheelhouse. Mrs. Carston, it was, and she was sitting on the rail. Her legs were dangling, and the wind whipped her dress against them with a wet cloth sound. Hair blew in ravelled strings against her face.

Harris stayed in the shadow of the wheelhouse. A huge bubble knotted his intestines. No two ways about it. She was going to jump!

He turned and loped toward the steps to the bridge. On the top step he banged his shin and limped the rest of the way into the pilothouse. Inside, he choked on smoke-thick air.

"Easy does it, Meade," spoke Dick Webb from somewhere in the darkness.

"Say, there's trouble aft! A woman on the rail getting set to jump! One of the passengers!"

Webb pulled the light switch and Stason broke into a violent coughing spasm. Harris blinked.

"You take it, Dick," croaked Stason, wiping his mouth. "I can't go down with my heart..."

Webb moved for the door.
"Maybe she's gone over," Harris panted. "We better get down there!"

"There's heads going to roll if she has!" bellowed Stason. "I got a 21-year safety record on this sea-hammock!"

Outside, Webb swore at his Captain. Harris limped behind him down the iron grate steps and thought himself a coward, maybe. They came up beside the aft wheelhouse.

She seemed paralyzed, hinged, almost, onto the rail. A sudden, heavy roll of the ship could end that quick.

"Who is she?" whispered Webb.

"Mrs. Carston." Webb sauntered toward the rail. "Mrs. Carston," he called softly. God, the man is cool, Harris thought.

She hung on the rail, automatically balancing her body against the thrust and pitch of the ship. She is hinged on that rail, Harris muttered. She was swaying and tattered and drenched, and her eyes were straight ahead. Webb moved closer.

"What's the trouble, ma'am?"

"Don't come nearer, please," she said without moving her eyes. "I'm going to jump."

It sounded quite final, final enough to halt Webb. A wave crashed and pieces of it redrenched the woman. Harris felt drops of it on his face.

"You thought this through now, ma'am?" Webb's face looked gray on this side of the moonlight.

No answer. Only the automatic, gyroscopic sway on the rail. There was a noise behind them. Harris turned. Henry and Alda Moore stood huddled under their blanket.

"What's going on?" asked Moore, white-eyed.

"You keep away," spoke Harris softly. Why was it people always gathered like fascinated vultures anticipating the moment?

Webb motioned. "Stay steady, Meade. I'm going for a rope.
ONE WAY TICKET

Scared to get too close."

Harris nodded. Webb retreated and Henry and Alda Moore remained, blanket-wrapped, watching.

Another wave hurled its topside on deck and showered chills and nausea on Harris. He gulped air. His mind wanted to quit then, but the whole damned lake was a mess of churned ink and if she dropped he would unhook No. 4 preserver and toss it, then signal reverse engines from the aft wheelhouse. Ninety nine to one they couldn't get her, though, if she were bound upon breathing water after she hit. Harris gnawed his lip and watched her mechanical rocking. Two and a half hours ago through the ticket window, her face had seen a lot of life. Maybe not, though; maybe she and I are equal, she in quality, I in quantity; or something. Guess maybe we're kind of alike in that way.

As if roused by telepathy, she looked at him, then shifted on the rail and drew rigid. Harris felt sweat moving on his neck and behind his ears. He choked on nausea. Webb, damn him, was lost, gone hours. Now maybe I got to save this woman if she's going to get saved.

The woman shivered violently and lost her steadiness. Harris felt his heart, intent on ramming out, coming up with the rest of him. But she hung on and he swallowed his vitals.

Well, only one way. He edged up and gripped the rail. Forty years, guess it'll be worth it. Her sobs were convulsions. She clasped one hand to her face, and Harris was ready. Somebody's hand yanked his shoulder. Todd Fitz.

"Easy, fellow," Fitz said. "I'm a salesman. I know how to talk. I'll handle this."

Dandy! He shoved Fitz back into the hands of Sam Wills. The woman was shuddering back and forth. Make her fall back, make sure of it! Harris leaned over the rail and brought his fist in hard. It caught her squarely on the face. She toppled backward and landed limp in Dick Webb's arms.

Harris bent double on the rail and closed his eyes. Every muscle declared an independent hysteria, undulating and trembling against each other. It was a cataclysmic convergence of twain. It had happened tonight, now, but not necessarily tonight. Why tonight? He heard soft voices and
ONE WAY TICKET

soft whimpers and he heard the fat salesman sputtering, and all the sounds were unbearable because they went to and fro and crashed against each other, and whitecaps slapped and lifted and slapped and dropped, up and down, for 40 years.

He opened his eyes and saw Dick Webb. He straightened and took half his weight off the rail and put it on Webb. His breath came and went and came in jerks, and when it came he choked on it.

"Say, Dick, you tell the Captain I ain't coming back with him."

"How do you feel? You don't look good."

"Yeah, I am done, Dick, now. Not good for my job now, after this kind of stuff..."

"Sure. You okay?"

That did seem a preposterous thing for him to say, and Harris felt laughter twist his stomach into a bigger and bigger knot, so big it couldn't come up, but it had to, it had to get out. The independent, splashing waves swirled into one ageless, unshrunk breaker, and as it came and he knew it was coming, Harris grinned weakly. The bubble burst, and the liquid spasm was delicious.

###

SNOW

For a fleeting fragment of time,

It clings to the vine-covered walls...

Traces gems for the lone beholder.

Its detail minute, it reigns there

Until the sun's rays touch and melt it...

The wonder falls... KAREN GERNANT
Uncle Phillie doesn't have poor table manners, he has no table manners. He also likes prunes. As a result Phillie doesn't eat in restaurants any more. Momma doesn't speak to Phillie any more and I was warned to keep quiet if I knew what was good for me.

Uncle Phillie is my mother's younger brother. Their father died soon after he was born and not long afterward his two sisters married. Phillie grew up relatively unhindered by societal considerations. His mother was too old to actively supervise him and my mother and aunt had children of their own to worry about. Phillie in short was a happy savage. In time he married a quiet mousy little woman who was a good cook and an efficient housekeeper. Phillie had a full stomach and clean sheets. Phillie was happy.

One Saturday when I was about nine years old, my mother dragged me along on a shopping expedition. I hated accompanying my mother on these journeys. She was gifted with unbelievable endurance and a complete disregard for the densest crowds. She rarely went shopping because she needed anything, she went because she felt the urge to pick up a bargain. It was as unexplainable as the suicidal migrations of the lemming.

She would head for the largest store, find the most crowded aisle and then grasping my wrist with one hand and clutching her massive handbag to her breast with the other, would sail into the throng and fight her way to the bargains. Her technique in the use of elbows was nothing short of spectacular.

Once at the counter, I would be deposited in front of my mother's comforting bulk to examine my bruises while she engaged in her favorite indoor sport, bargain hunting. Sometimes I think the only thing she enjoyed more than shopping was coming back the following Saturday to return the merchandise for one reason or another and argue with the Complaint Department clerk. This procedure was a constant source of amazement to me but I suppose it was socially more acceptable than hashish.

Her reason for taking me along was, "So you shouldn't get hurt playing in the streets." To this day I'm able to plunge into a traffic filled street but a store full of woman shoppers brings out an unreasoning fear in me.

On the way home from this particularly exhausting experience, (we had successfully invaded Macy's and Gimbel's in one afternoon) we met Phillie, looking rather unhappy and decidedly unkempt. The explanation
was simple. His wife was visiting her relatives and Phillie was a poor laundress and a worse cook. My mother immediately took him in tow and we all went into a restaurant.

I was entranced by Phillie's eating habits. He spread butter with his spoon and picked up his steak in his hands to rip at it like a ravenous beast. The soup course was even better, Phillie couldn't get at the few remaining spoonsful of liquid so picking the bowl up, he drank from it as if it were a cup. My mother kept telling me to eat but my eyes kept straying to Uncle Phillie.

We then ordered desert. My mother had pineapple, I discovered chocolate pudding on the menu and Phillie brought shame upon all our heads by ordering a plate of prunes.

Phillie obviously enjoyed the prunes. He rolled each one around in his mouth, squeezing out all its delicious juices and then after swallowing the meat, he tucked the pit in his cheek. This worked fine at first but soon I noticed a look of dismay creep across his features. His cheek, by this time, was distended by half a dozen pits and they were making him uncomfortable. With his rather round head and his swollen cheek he looked something like a chipmunk mouthing a nut. He couldn't put the pits back in the saucer as he intended to drink the remaining juice. Then his face brightened.

He released them all into his hand and beckoned to the waitress nearby. She came over to our table and Phillie held out his hand palm up. (The one without the pits.) The waitress, probably expecting a tip for her services, did likewise, and Phillie deposited the pits in her cupped hand. The waitress stared unbelievingly at her acquisition, then slapped Phillie across the mouth. Pits went flying everywhere. The waitress walked away sobbing bitterly, my mother seemed to be in a state of shock, and Phillie picked up his napkin and wiped the stains off his face. I just sat there and then subsided into helpless, near hysterical laughter. The manager meanwhile had made his way to our table and was requesting that we leave immediately.

We did so, my mother managing to retain some dignity as we passed before the gaze of the other patrons and paused to pay our check. It was one of the few times I have seen my mother get flustered and I wasn't helping matters any by giggling. Phillie stood unconcernedly by picking his teeth.
UNCLE PHILLIE AND THE PLATE OF PRUNES

Outside, my mother told a bewildered Uncle Phillie exactly what she thought of him and warned me to keep my mouth shut if I knew what was good for me. It was a useless admonition. I was probably the biggest blabber-mouth in our entire clan.

And all Uncle Phillie had to say on the subject was, "Business must be pretty good in that joint, if a waitress can get away with slapping a cash customer."

###

JUST WORDS

Nothing
Just words
Words words words
Shaping thought
To fit words
Blank meaningless
Creating a void
Of words that
Define
Mean
Limit
Any creation
All nothing
Just words

Lola DeLong

-35-
Robert Frost Goes Somewhere He Has Never Travelled

Your silent eyes remind me of a wood
I've seen some distance off, but never could
Find time to enter: for your memory, dear,
Reminds me "Git fer home 'f ya know what's good!"

Your fragile power I respect and fear;
You, even more than snow, or leaves, or deer,
Or all the sweaty joy of chopping wood
Or mending wall, strike my poetic ear.

But just this once I've come to think I could
Slip out and pay a visit to that wood.
Enticed by bird-calls, quick I'll disappear;
But I'll be back, and after this be good.

Ogden Nash Chats with the Stone Cutters

What, besides not enough money, do you get for being a stone cutter?
Sooner or later (or sometime in between) it all wears away just as
if you had hacked away at cakes of scented soap or oleomargering
or even better, butter.
Time and tide, wind and weather, and all that rot, will wear away the
fullback-shouldered letters you carved in the marble;
And even those proud presidential faces will eventually lose their
hard noses, and ultimately look pretty har'ble.
Also the poet, and even me too in spite of my being so clever,
Can't immortalize anything forever
(Even when I use exacting rhythms
To avoid abuse in critithithims).
Everything including death and taxes is going to the dogs slow or fast,
And maybe even the catchall canines themselves won't last.
Yet some of those carved characters who are stone-cold whether they
have any clothes on or not have been standing around or sitting
on their horses for quite a while, such as this British "Henge"
fellow, or Greece's statues, or Rome's,
And although they're rather painful to memorize for the dear Dr. So-
And-So, there are some pretty darned old pomes!

Pete Cooper

-36-
SMILESMITH/ Gayann Slye

Sir...uh, Sir...

Yes, yes little girl, what is it?

Well sir, uh, well it's about this smile that I bought from you yesterday.

Yes, what about it?

You see, sir, I don't like to complain, but it just doesn't work right anymore.

Well, we don't often have complaints; that is the sweetest smile on the market you know. What seems to be the trouble?

That's why I came back to you. You see, it worked fine that morning, and I was so pleased with it that I wore it out in front of my door... and... and there HE was... the little boy, I mean... and HE must have been very rich because, do you know what?

No, what?

HIS smile was gold with rainbows all around it, oh, it was just beautiful!

I know the one... a special order... go on!

Then...

Yes, yes...?

Then HE gave it to me... HIS own, just came up and handed it to me. I couldn't believe it, it was like a dream!

Ah, I see. And then...?

I did an unforgivingly bold thing... I offered HIM mine! Imagine, my poor little one... to HIM! Of course HE refused it... what would HE have done with a feeble little one like mine?

(hollow laugh)

Tch! Poor bruised butterfly.

I held it close to me, and it felt so warm... but I was just being silly.
SMILESMITH

You see, I didn't know THE GAME.

THE GAME?

Oh, yes, you know, it was all just pretend... why... soon, a little tinkly silver smile came past and then it was her turn to be IT.

Ah!

So, though it's just coincidence, I'm sure, this smile you made me hasn't worked right since. It's really no earthly good to me at all!

Exactly how does it act?

Oh, It's very strange. The corners turn down and the color has faded. Worst of all, it's become so heavy it won't stay in place properly but keeps slipping off!

Now, now... I'm sure I can repair it and...

No, I've made up my mind that I don't want a soft pink one any more, they're too unpredictable and easily damaged... no... I want you to make me a different one!

But... dear child, what kind?

Well... a... a strong serviceable one. Make it of something hard and durable which can't be scratched or dented... that will also keep the corners correctly turned up at all times.

But... but...

Now be sure you make it tight, and you can hammer it into place. That'll keep it from ever slipping off no matter what happens. Oh! ... and you can give it a bright shiny surface so that each one can see whatever he chooses to, in it. Hmmm... I guess that about covers it. Oh, yes... you can have my old one back, for someone else to use until she learns the rules. I...I guess I'd better be going now... You can make it for me, can't you?

Why... yes... uh... certainly, certainly! (harrumph)

Oh, thank you sir, and... goodbye!
(sigh) Goodbye!

One more velvet one to gather dust on the shelf.
The beautiful discarded for the practical! Too
bad the trade-in value on dreams, toward reality,
is so low this year.

Well... that's THE GAME!

Guess I'd better get back to work.

###

GRANDMA AND GRANDPA: REAL PEOPLE/ Karen Gernant

They were real:

He, with his "Jiminy cricket" when told
of our escapades; with his shiny,
bald head--still demanding
haircuts; with his cane and
slow, sure walk; with his
quiet understanding.

She, with her every-ready cookies
and candy; with silvery hair
touched with brown; with her
tender care of plants and
flowers... and kids; with her
sweet, friendly smiles, her easy laughs.

Oh, they were real; they were good...
and when they left,
my fourteen years cried: Why?

No answer came... not then,

but time has told me--
told me that they led full lives;
that they had done their jobs, and,
having done them well,
deserved a peace and rest.

Time has told me.

They were real.

-39-
PRESENTLY

Moving hordes, wandering
And through the streets they trod,
Dragging behind saturnine glass eyes
The weight of heavy worthless
Breaths - and here it lies
Deep behind the flaccid bone,
Forever - never to egress,
That nothing resides.

Nor shall we ever -
Although we weep and wail
And lament to all things near
And to all things confer
Our hollow words -
Nor shall we ever
Pass through the pressing earth,
Black earth and waiting worms,
O wretched berth,
In your cave we shall,
When once there, remain.

But it is not ours to withstand
This noxious, sucking, vacuousness.
We know no better thing,
We only know despair
And that our entrails presently
Turn to mold and then to dust.

James Keats
"What's his name?" I asked the assembled gang.

"Dinklehoff!" replied Sniffer (so named because of his continually running nose).

"Dinklehoff! Boy with a name like that, will he get lumped. What's his old man do?"

"He bought out Fink's corset place in the market."

At this point, Russian spoke up, "Hey, I like that. I'd work for nothing. Hell, I'd pay him."

"What would you know about it, Russian? You're too young anyhow."

"I keep telling you, Lippy, I ain't Russian, I'm Polish."

"Oh yeah, that stuff you babble with your old lady sounds like Russian."

"How would you know? Your English ain't the greatest and besides I'm only a year younger than you, but I'm in the same grade as you in school, and about women, I wouldn't be too proud of being Cock-Eyed Jenny's boyfriend if I was you."

This was a long speech for Russian and the boys were laughing at me. I had to change the subject in a hurry or I was through. They wouldn't take orders from anybody they could laugh at.

"O.K., Sniffer, go collect the kid, Dinklehoff. The rest of you guys go find some garbage; we're gonna play 'Twenty years and let it fly'."

Chuck, the fattest boy in the bunch, and Ben Blue, who was always blowing his nose, nodded their heads in approval. Even from Russian came, "Good idea, Lippy, we ain't had an initiation in months."

I felt great, I was still boss.

The boys with the garbage came back first.

"Hey, couldn't you get anything besides tin cans?"

"Naw," Ben Blue complained. "The first chance in a week to have
TWENTY YEARS AND LET IT FLY

some fun and the lousy Department of Sanitation has to do their duty for a change."

"I got a cat," announced Russian.

"A live one?"

"Nah, it's deader n' hell. You think I wanna get all scratched up? It smells pretty bad too," he added, holding it up by the tail for our inspection.

"OK, let's get over to old lady Rubin's stoop and hide this stuff. Here comes Sniffer with the kid."

We had everything set by the time Sniffer came up and we could see that Dinklehoff didn't look too happy about the whole deal.

"What's all this stuff about an initiation?"

"We always have an initiation when a new kid moves around," I replied.

At this he looked even more uneasy. "What do I have to do?"

"Not a thing. We're just gonna have a trial. You'll be the judge. Sniffer will be the prosecutor, and Ben Blue is the defendant. The rest of us is the jury."

"Then what happens?"

"Ya see, we holds a trial and when we find the defendant guilty, I'll ask you for the sentence and you say: 'Twenty years and let it fly'."

Dinklehoff seemed puzzled, but eager to be accepted. He agreed to this and sat down on the stoop we were using.

"Prosecutor," I snapped.

Sniffer stepped forward. "I charge the defendant Ben Blue with stealing fruit from Garfinkle's and breaking the bakery window with his BB gun."

"Defendant, what have you got to say?" I asked.
"Nothing," Ben Blue responded.

"Jury, what's the verdict?"

"Guilty," they screamed.

"Judge, please pronounce sentence."

Dinklehoff got up and spoke his piece: "Twenty years and let it fly!"

We picked up the stuff we had hidden and started heaving it at him.

There was a loud crash. We stopped, frightened, (but not too fright-
ened to admire our handiwork). One of the cans had broken a window in the
house behind Dinklehoff. The cat was draped around his neck like a fur
collar, but the laughter died quickly when we saw that one of the cans had
torn open his forehead above the left eyebrow. We stood there, entranced
by the steady flow of blood down his cheek. He stared back at us out of
one eye, the cat still slung around his neck. Then the door behind him
opened and Mrs. Rubin came out. Dinklehoff and Mrs. Rubin looked at
each other. He started crying, she started screaming, and I started run-
ning.

I became separated from the gang and it was many hours before I
went home that evening. Apparently my parents hadn't heard of the bloody
eye and when I went right into bed without any supper, my mother tried to
take my temperature to see if I was sick.

I avoided the gang for the next couple of days until I finally decided
that nothing was going to happen. Then I walked around the corner and
right smack into Dinklehoff. He was a sight. He had so many stitches it
seemed as if he had two left eyebrows, one directly above the other. No
use running, might just as well find out what he was planning on doing.

"Hi, Dink. How're ya doing?"

"Oh, pretty good."

He started talking - wildly, eagerly. It dawned on me, "This kid is
sick in the head." All he wanted from me was to know when we were going
to initiate someone else. It seems he had, not one, but two dead cats
stashed away for the occasion.
MY POET

My Poet is a hush old man
who is not dead.
My Poet is a child who calls
his father Pain,
his mother Beauty,
who calls his Brothers to come home again.

Stone, bone, and mist below
My poet grows on,
and sings the sun around each cradle,
shouts out the hope from graves.

My Poet knows
as earth knows,
And spits his spite on irons
and on air.
And dies tomorrow, writhing song.

A ROMAN ENTERS IN

Beneath the rich, full robes
Flash-tied to tired old shoulders,
Hung his huge white hands.
Taunt, white, and positive hands
With only a drop of doubt in each broad palm
Nor was the firm face sure,
For all the bold power that weighed
On those great shoulders.
Yielding no awe to the guardian,
He asked, "Is there a Nazarene
Come before me called Jesus?"
And to the answer,
"It is as I thought."
And the face and the white hands
Received the knowledge finally,
And Pilate entered in.

Pete Cooper
Descending upon a narrow, worn, badly lit staircase, an old man with a desiccated, wrinkled face circled with long white hair and topped with a once fashionable derby, groped his way from step to step. His lean, but firm hand acted as a guide along a wooden banister and with the other hand holding his handsome walking stick, he, although badly favoring his left leg...it still held fragments from some forgotten war, hobbled to the street level. Once outside he stood on the wide sidewalk and for several minutes watched the Paris traffic upon the Rue Rivole, and then reaching into the pockets of his suit--his suit which like his hat belonged to an era wholly different than the one in which it was worn--he produced gloves and with aristocratic deportment slid them upon his hands. He then slowly turned to gaze into the window of a fashionable jewelry store for which he had been the bookkeeper for forty years.

As he looked into the neat display window of the store with eyes sparkling and expressing more than words of voice could ever, these same eyes became melancholy and the corners of his fragile mouth quivered; but only slightly.

Andre, a young salesman in the store, came out into the street. "It's closing time you know," and he started to put the shutters on the show windows.

Monsieur Dupee smiled back at him.

"Goodnight Monsieur Dupee," Andre said.

"Thank you Andre," Monsieur Dupee said in acknowledgment, and then he began his walk home.

It was a long walk, but Monsieur Dupee enjoyed it; it was one of the few things, and one of the simplest, which he found felicity in doing. He had no enjoyment with the crowded busses or the blatant Metro, only on his walks did he actually feel himself congruent with his city. The city he loved, as he felt many people must, but even more than that he thought he knew why he loved it--something most people can't explain. He felt he had become a part of the surrounding stone, that he too had gained immortality through his love and that Paris had--but just a little--assimilated something of his being.

It was dark now as he crossed the Seine on the Pont Neuf Bridge. Once on the left bank, he turned right on the Quai Conti and walked several
blocks along the river, then turning left, to enter a small street, he paused for a few minutes standing in front of a small plaque on the side of a building. It was the same thing he did every evening, but he felt he must since most people were too busy to be troubled. Beneath the plaque, but connected, was a small bowl which held some newly cut flowers.

Ah, Francoise is still true to her husband, he mused. It was 1944, during the uprising, when he was killed here. As he meditated he lifted his walking stick and searching, poked it into some of the bullet holes that still stood, like individual monuments on the side of the house. Next he read the plaque, slowly and to himself. He knew it by heart he had read it so often, besides it was like all of the others throughout the city. His eyes slowly passed over such words as revolution, liberty, country and freedom. He wished they had some meaning, but he could find none. Anyway, he thought, death had come to this man because of the cause for which he had fought. Dupee wished he had a cause for which he too could fight and die. But he had none and probably never would. He placed his walking stick on the ground and turned to go up the street.

Fifteen minutes later he was at a small cobblestone square; it was here that he lived. But, before going to his quarters, he stopped at a small candle store that occupied part of a basement.

"Good evening Monsieur Dupee," said a little middle age man behind the shop counter. "Do you wish the usual this week?"

"No, I shall need but one candle--a small one please. I plan a trip."

Slowly he climbed the one flight of stairs to a landing holding four doors. Here he produced a latchkey from his small vest pocket and opened one of the doors. Inside, he closed and locked the world outside, then walking to an old table standing in the middle of his diminutive room, he placed, in a cheap bronze holder, the candle and lit it with a match. He could have used electricity for light, but he never did; he much preferred the antiquity of a candle.

He then walked to the foot of his bed where he bent down, but not without effort, and examined several bottles of wine. Finding the one he wanted, he rose and with the smile of a connoisseur he poured its contents into a wine flask. Finished with this, he obtained a small dark bottle and with the adroitness of a master alchemist, he also poured its liquid filling into the wine flask. Then he threw the empty bottles into the garbage. Next he stirred the mixture. Presently he sat in his old chair, poured a glass of
END OF A DAY

wine and relaxed while drinking.

Quite early the next morning, a maid arrived to clean Monsieur Dupee's room. She tried the door; he usually left it unlocked for her, but it would not move. Perhaps he was yet asleep. She knocked, but still no answer. Angrily, she went down the stairs to find the owner of the building and his keys.

The owner was an old man and objected to any extra work. He laboriously climbed the stairs and unlocked the door. Inside, Monsieur Dupee sat in his chair, an empty wine glass in one hand; his unblinking eyes were fixed on the now opened door, but he looked not at the landlord, rather through him. A wind blew in from the street. It ruffled the landlord's hair, passed around him and filled the room. Then Monsieur Dupee's jaw dropped, as though he were ready for speech, but instead it looked more like a smile of derision. The landlord left the room to call an undertaker.

OPPORTUNITY

I am passing swiftly by,
On the deathless wings of fate;
Catch me mortal, catch me now,
Before it is too late.

I am passing swiftly by,
I will help to make you great.
Use me mortal, make me yours,
And glory's in your wake.

I am passing swiftly by,
I, the thing for which you wait.
Catch me mortal, hold me fast,
Or else I will escape.

Barbara Fiedorek

-47-
"What makes you think I'd do It?"

"Well, any guy who would murder his wife would...."

"It was called an accident... remember?"

"And Goldstein's death. That was an accident too?"

"Of course. Poor George stood entirely too close to the edge of the canyon. But he always was a little neurotic. Used to visit his psychiatrist every Thursday. You know, I bet George thought he was a California Condor."

He smiled unappreciatively and said, "She'll be easy."

"$25,000 is what I call easy. Got her picture?"

He pulled a snapshot from his wallet. "This is a picture of Selma before she became ill."

"Ill?"

"Yes, she has infantile paralysis. Paralyzed from the waist down. Been that way for 12 years now."

"Not bad looking, is she?"

"Not bad."

Selma was a brunette. Nice figure. Chesty. Angelic face. Bright, saucer eyes--blue probably. "How old is she?"

"33."

"Why'd you marry her?"

"Usual reasons."

"Someone else now?"

"Yes."
"And she won't give you a divorce?"

"No."

"Well, it'll take me a week, give or take a few days, to complete the job. Any objections?"

"No."

"Good. Your address?"

"147 North Haven Road."

"Oh, about the money. Six months after your wife's er--passing, you will pay me the 25 grand at the rate of $500 per month."

"Playing it safe, eh?"

"Always do. And, incidentally, on Wednesday night of this week you will meet me at the corner of Wallington and Fairview."

"What time?"

"11:45 p.m."

"I'll be there," he said, rising slowly. He advanced to the door, opened it, turned, and said, "Doesn't make sense, does it?"

"What?"

"Love and hate and fear. Where one ends the other begins."

"Most people," I said, "love and hate because they fear."

"And the sadist?"

"The sadist enjoys witnessing the suffering of others because he has an excessive hatred of civilization."

He stared at me, bowed low, and said, "Perhaps you're right. Goodnight."
THE SADIST

On Tuesday morning I made a routine check-up on the life histories of my client and his wife. Then, on Tuesday afternoon, I visited Selma. A corpulent colored maid answered my knock.

"Yes?"

"Census taker, ma'am."

"I'm sorry, but...."

"Who is it, Mary?"

"The census taker, ma'am."

"Well, have him come in."

As I entered she wheeled toward me and said, "Won't you sit down please?"

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you ma'am, but....."

"Oh, that's all right," she said, smiling warmly. "I was just going to have my afternoon tea. Won't you join me?"

"Why thank you, ma'am."

"Now what would you like to know?"

"Well, first, how many are there in the immediate family?"

"Just my husband and I."

"No children, then?"

"No--my paralysis....."

"Yes, of course, I'm terribly sorry. I should have realized...."

"Oh, that's all right."

"It must get awfully lonesome sometimes."

"Yes..... sometimes."
THE SADIST

Mary came in carrying two cups of tea. She placed them before us, took three steps backward, and asked, "Will that be all ma'm?"

"Yes, Mary, that's all." Then she gazed at me and inquired, "Tell me, just how does one become a census taker?"

"Well, it's more or less of a political appointment. You do someone a favor. And, at a propitious moment, they return the favor."

"Oh, I see."

I sipped the tea, smiled, and said, "Ummm--this is good. Allow me to compliment you on your choice of servants."

"Why, thank you. Now is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

Then, taking advantage of the situation, I said, "Yes. I--well, I know this may sound odd, but I was wondering if you'd mind if I dropped in every now and then to visit with you?"

"Why on earth should you want to?"

"Well," I said, morosely, "I lost my wife two years ago, and, well, you remind me so much of her. She was a very beautiful woman too."

Her ego being sufficiently inflated, she replied, "My husband sometimes--" she offered an embittered expression to tell me that she thought her husband was a despicable beast--"well, I suppose it would be all right--" then emphatically--"in the afternoons."

"Thank you," I said humbly, "you have no idea of just how much I appreciate this."

"You know," she said, "this may sound silly, but I don't even know your name."

"Or I yours. Mine's Frank, Frank Ziegler."

"And mine's Selma Thurston."

"It's a pleasure Ma'm," I said, pressing her hand, "but now I must go. Is it all right if I come Thursday afternoon at two?"
"Oh, yes, that will be fine."

"Until then, goodbye Selma."

"Goodbye."

I opened and closed the door and stood listening as Selma said, "Isn't he nice, Mary?"

"He certainly is ma'm. A perfect gentleman."

On a black Wednesday evening, I donned a short, grey beard, darkened the lines on my face, padded my suit to lend a stooped appearance, and, picking up my cane and wrinkled old hat, departed for my rendezvous with Mr. Thurston.

"But who are you?" he queried, after I tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'm a friend of Mr. Ziegler's. He's going to meet us at Pat's."

"Pat's?"

"Yes, it's a tavern down near the Erie terminal."

We started to walk toward Pat's when out of the darkness a casual voice said, "Hello, Vern," in that indifferent sort of a way everyday friends greet each other.

"Oh, hello Jim," Thurston replied calmly.

"Nice night, isn't it?" he said, staring at me.

"Yes, very nice."

And then his friend was gone and we were alone once again. We reached the tracks. They were lonely and endless, and I could see the dim outline of a tunnel a little way off. It was then I put the gun in his back and marched him toward the tunnel. Naturally, he was stricken with incredulity, at first, but in awhile he knew I wasn't fooling and it was then he asked in an awed tone, "But why?"

"$100,000," I replied, using my natural voice.
"Ziegler!" he gasped.

"Did a little investigating yesterday. Seems you'll receive a hundred grand upon the death of your wife. I had a nice little conversation with Selma yesterday. In time, guess who's going to be her next husband?"

"You'll never get away with it. Jim--J-Jim saw you."

"Jim saw an old man. Turn around."

And as he did so, I brought the gun smashing down upon his head. He toppled just inside the tunnel, not too far from the tracks. It was really a very simple matter to drag his body across the rails.

As I departed I heard the moaning whine of the Midnight Special. And I thought about Mrs. Thurston and how she would eventually become Mrs. Frank Ziegler. And then I thought about the $100,000 and the inevitability of my future wife's er--accident. After all, no matter how careful you are, accidents will happen. Do you suppose it has something to do with the law of averages?

###

FOR G. / John Murphy

Breath and mystery and the child in you
Beneath this fit of moonlight and babbling starshine
Left unsaid all quiet and innocence
To mock the world and my vulture heart.

Let all the words I have sung for you
Enter silently into your private night,
To dissolve among tokens of love and praise
Others have paid you with their eyes.

And being free and quaintly mad,
You command the universe to sing and giggle,
Turning my song into a penance,
To be drowned within its curving mirth.

Until everything is laughter and be silly,
An idiot's game for the rule I broke;
Love is the derelection in farewell,
Farewell is the moment I cannot know.