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# UNTITLED

When bearded giant
swings ax to Tree
and thunder shakes forest
my sister and I
run mile away
huddle by rock

Trunk cracks
giant howls
slips and gnarls foot
as Tree slowly falls
crushes ribs, deafens
hurtles stones and snow to sky

We embrace
branches plummet
piercing once each forehead
stabbing both in one eye
breath frozen
we listen for birds.

Ricardo M. Amezquita

# PROLOGUE

He was liberal, he was lazy, and he loved whiskey — Scotch whiskey. He had an amazing capacity for drinking it, the only visible change being, that the more he drank, the wider his grin became. There was a strange look came into his eyes when he drank. A gleam, as if he had discovered a great secret or huge joke, and the joke was life itself. He loved parties and was the life and soul of one. When one of his children asked him if he weren't afraid of dying, he told her that life is just like a party: you get ready to go, you arrive and have a good time, but as the night wears on, you become tired, and finally you're ready to go home and sleep. It was all as simple as that for him.

He had a great talent for keeping people laughing, and they tended to dismiss many of his sins while they were busy laughing. He could tell a good story, and while other men brought home Lugers after World War II, he brought home stories. He'd been in the navy and during some leave in New York he'd experienced a few moments of deja vu, but by the time he returned, the story had been altered somewhat. "I knew New York like the back of my hand," he told his audience, "and I never did believe in any of that after-life stuff, but I am seriously considerin' the possibility of reincarnation."

He missed his ship once because he was drunk. He told people that he had been about to board the ship when his brother had dragged him from the gangplank. His brother begged him not to leave because he had dreamt the night before that the ship would be hit and all hands lost. The story was, of course, conceived after the ship had been hit by a torpedo just a few days out to sea. He was creative enough to make use of even the most tragic situation.

He'd been to South Africa and told people that it was the finest climate in the world. "The broads wear bikinis in the daytime and fur coats at night," he said in such a manner which left the listener convinced that it was unquestionably the finest climate in the world. The fact that he'd contracted malaria in the finest climate in the world, and suffered from bouts of it for years afterwards seemed totally irrelevant to him.

He drifted out of jobs with the same amount of ease he'd drifted into them. He was a man who never talked of goals or plans. He never plotted any direction in his life. He didn't want to know where he was going, that would have stolen the excitement of it all.

He disliked getting up in the mornings. He wouldn't speak to anyone. He'd just drink his tea and smoke a cigarette. May, his wife, would have his suit pressed, his shoes polished, and his white shirt washed and ironed. She worked hard to prepare him for the world that she catered to; for the world that he was indifferent to.

It wasn't unusual for him to disappear for a few weeks. May always worked,

and so the bills got paid, and the kids were fed. She'd never hear from him during these jaunts, but sometimes she'd receive a letter from the woman he was staying with, begging May to set him free. There would be a flood of tears, followed by a flood of anger, but she always took him back. Not because he begged forgiveness or swore to change his ways. In fact, when he did return, it would be through the back door, and then he would go straight to bed and sleep for about two days, during which time, May would press his suit, polish his shoes, and wash and iron his white shirts. And even though all of the children knew where he'd been and what he'd been doing, she'd lecture them on showing respect for their father and threaten to send them all to a home if they weren't nice to him.

For almost thirty years, she tried to change him. She fought, she begged, she cried, she threatened. Like a sculptor, chipping away to the form which lies within the stone, she believed that someday the perfect form would emerge and worship her for the dutiful and dedicated wife she had been.

The form did not emerge. He died. He died unknown. Unknown to his wife, unknown to his children. His wife knew what she had wanted him to be; his children knew what he should have been, but nobody knew who he really had been. They wept as though their hearts were being torn from them. They wept for their own mortality because he had seemed indestructible. They wept because all chance was gone to ever know the man. He had committed himself to no person or thing. He had never belonged, had never fitted into the pattern of anything. He had been there, unattached, unbounded, inaccessible.

And when his widow stopped weeping, she began to remember, and bitterness seeped through her like a cancer. The cancer was to keep her alive for many years. She had too much anger to stop living. She lived the rest of her days hating him, cursing him, and fighting the image that haunted her. The image of a grin, of gleaming eyes that knew something that no one else ever knew.

She was a handsome woman. Brilliant auburn hair against creamy skin. The type of complexion that the tourists rave about, but the British regard as slight compensation for rained out soccer games, ruined picnics and arthritic bones. She had a trim figure and Betty Grable legs. Long slim ankles, the calves strong and firm, defined by subtle shadows beneath the swell of the muscles. But beauty must be bold and confident, and she was not. So her loveliness merely irritated people in the way that they are irritated by a rosebud which fails to open.

Her father had been a mild-mannered Welshman, but what he lacked in aggression, her mother made up for. A huge, diabetic woman who spent her time assigning chores to her nine children. At the age of thirteen, May left school, went to work in Barker & Dobson's factory, and handed her unopened pay envelope to her mother every Friday night.

From someone or somewhere, she acquired the belief that hard work is rewarded, and at some point she reasoned that if she worked harder, then surely the rewards would be greater. She set out to work harder, longer, and more efficiently than anyone else. She wanted to be right up front when those rewards were being handed out.

She was a torrent of energy which washed, scrubbed or polished anything in its path. She never tired. Her posture was never loose. She always stood or sat erect; chest out, stomach in. Life was a very serious matter to her. The entire episode was a test — a test of stamina.

If she had any idea what the final reward was to be, she never said. It could not have been some eternal paradise because she was an atheist. During the war, a bomb had fallen on a church in London killing all of the congregation. The brothel next door to the church was completely unscathed. That was when she decided that there was no God, and she never did change her mind.

The only time she relaxed was when she worked in the kitchen. She liked to sing, and so, along with the aroma of roast-beef, drifted the lyrics of "Who's Sorry Now" or "Apple Blossom Time". When they held parties, she did not sing. Instead, she poured drinks, made sandwiches, and wished that everybody would go home because they were creasing the cushions and dropping ash on the carpet and breaking down the order which she had so carefully built up.

Every employer she had took it for granted that she would always arrive early, and that she would never call in sick. When the rent-man came on Mondays, and the Jew-man came on Thursdays, she always, somehow, had their money ready for them in a neat little stack on the sideboard. The family always had clean clothes, darned socks, and hot dinners. And although she never bothered to tell the children themselves, she made a point of letting every outsider know that her children were perfect children and destined for great things.

She put great store in honesty, dependability and loyality, or any other noteworthy trait which was absent in her husband. But she was consistently inconsistent. She told her children to be kind and considerate toward people, yet she seldom had a flattering or sympathetic word for anyone. She taught her children to respect people of position and wealth, and yet she often declared that the communists should take over and hang all of the rich bitches and the toffee-nosed snobs. She taught her daughters how they could become good wives, yet she told them frequently that all men were no good.

She was impatient with those around her because they just couldn't understand that one had to work hard to survive, and one had to survive so that one could work hard. Her blind faith in this implausible conviction never waned. Later, when the rewards failed to arrive, she wasn't really surprised. She had never expected to enjoy life. She only expected to get through it, to somehow endure it, and if life were measured merely as a body taking in air, or as a mass of energy creating some inane form of order, then she succeeded.

# SUMMER

field heat blurs horizon. the sun irised
above the blue deep haze of these bluffs.
fish wander the stream channel silent.
dust from a county road browns a blue pickup.
the long afternoon lengthens the corn row
chaff sifts through the barn loft floor
a rusting windmill labors into the night.

Ron Deverman

# OBJECTS AT REST

Alice sat beside the aquarium watching the African frogs push food into their mouths with their funny clawed feet. She had just smoked a joint and liked to watch the frogs when she was high. She was smiling into the glass wall when she heard the roar from Bob's Harley in front of the house.

"Hi, Shorty," he said as he walked in the door. He always called her this because she was very small. She was only 4'11" and weighed 85 pounds. Alice just stared at Bob without saying anything. She didn't like to be teased about her size.

Bob took off his black leather motorcycle jacket and his leather hat. On the back of the jacket was stenciled the name Screaming Eagles. This was the motorcycle club Bob belonged to. Florence, the small town they lived in, had two motorcycle clubs: the Screaming Eagles and the Gypsy Bandits. Members of both clubs liked to think of themselves as real mean and tough motorcycle outlaws. Actually, the meanest they ever got was yelling obscenities and breaking glasses in their local hangout, the Rod and Gun Tavern, and urinating in the stew they made at their big biker parties.

Bob flapped his arms up in the air like a huge bird ready to swoop down upon Alice. He was an average sized guy with curly brown hair and big farm boy ears. He talked in a hoarse voice. "Well, so what's happening?" Without really waiting for an answer, he shrugged his shoulders and began making be-bopping motions around the room. He picked up the newest issue of Easy Rider, tossed it down, gave the rubber bat hanging from the ceiling a spin, lit up a cigarette, grabbed a beer from the kitchen, switched on the television, and plopped down into his chair.

"What's for supper?" he said in an effort to get Alice to speak.

"God, Bob, I just got home from work a half hour ago." She sighed, "I don't know. I'll have to go to the store and get something."

"You been smoking that weeeeeeed again, haven't you?" He let out a mocking, hissy laugh through his teeth. "Hey, pick me up some more beer, will you?"

Alice sighed again as she grabbed her coat. Why did he have to come home now and start bitching at her? She felt he had intruded on her privacy, her own special world. The spell was broken.

Bob and Alice has been living together for three years. Now Alice was wearing an engagement ring. Did she really want to marry Bob? She wasn't sure. Part of her did and part of her didn't. Outwardly, it appeared she was going to marry him. Sure, marry Bob, have babies, live in their little house in Florence. What else was there? It sounded so easy, so natural. Was there even a question involved? It all seemed to be out of her hands.

When Alice returned from the store she noticed Ted's Harley parked next to Bob's. Damn. Not again. She couldn't stand Ted. He was an insincere asshole as far as she was concerned. He had been over every night since Bob had been laid off from his job with the railroad. Alice heard Ted's voice before she opened the door.

"Hey, let's try the cat, man."

"Ha, ha, ha, oh shit!" Bob could hardly contain himself as Alice walked in the door. Ted was sitting on the couch aiming The Annihilator BB Machine Gun at Alice's cat.

"What are you guys doing!" Alice screamed as she dropped the grocery sacks into a chair and rushed towards the cat. As she did this she almost slipped and fell. Looking down at the floor she saw what looked like hundreds of tiny BB's covering the carpet. Ted reaimed the gun at the rubber bat hanging from the ceiling and another twenty-five BB's showered down on Alice.

"Goddamnit, Ted!" she screamed as she held the cat close to shelter it from the storm. She was so enraged she couldn't say anything else. Ted sat with a smug look on his face.

Bob recovered himself from his fit of laughter. "Oh, hell," he said, "it didn't hurt nothing. We'll clean them up."

"Poor, poor Hugo," Alice said as she put the cat outside. She picked up the sacks and headed for the kitchen. "You damn well better clean it up!" she said to Bob in a threatening voice.

When she got into the kitchen she thought she might cry. Instead, she started fixing spaghetti for supper.

Where the hell did you get that thing?" she heard Bob ask Ted.

"I swapped with Rick Jones. Gave him my old switchblade."

"Hey, that thing's alright. Can't miss with it. Alice, bring us a couple of beers, will you?" Bob yelled.

"Come and get them yourself!" she yelled back.

"Ah hell. We better clean these BB's up," Bob muttered as he got up from his chair.

Alice was peeling onions over the trash can when he crept up behind her back and grabbed her.

"Bob!" she pleaded, "Just leave me alone."

"Agh!" he shouted, backing away and throwing his arms up in the air. "Don't shoot! I repent!" Bob's excited expression suddenly changed to a puzzled look. "Hey, what's that smell?"

"I don't know." Alice muttered. "Onions."

Bob approached the stove and noticed a stream of black smoke rising from behind the pan of boiling water. He moved the pan to find it had burnt a nice black spot into the panel of light yellow formica behind the stove. He had just finished installing the new counter top the day before. He had got it from a

friend real cheap. "Well, would you look at that," he said in an astonished voice.

Alice turned around and saw the big black spot. "Oh, no!" She suddenly felt very humbled and smiled slightly. "Oh Bob!" She drew out his name, as if pleading to be forgiven.

"Hey, Ted, come and see what Alice did!" Bob yelled.

"Holy shit! How the hell did you do that?" Ted said as he rushed into the kitchen, almost tripping because the kitchen floor was a half foot higher than the rest of the house.

Bob stood scratching his head. "I thought that was kind of funny, having that formica back there. Thought about putting a sheet of stainless steel back there to cover that up. Guess I'll have to now, huh."

They all stood and stared at the black spot. It seemed like they stood there for a long time to Alice. Then Bob said, "Hey, Torch, when will supper be ready?"

Bob and Ted hurried through supper so they could finish in time for an old Frankenstein movie on television. Alice silently brooded over the sink of dirty dishes. Since he'd been laid off, Bob hadn't lifted a finger to help her around the house. She worked all day and came home to her fate of dirty dishes. He just sat around and got drunk. He messed up the house with motorcycle parts and tools during the day and never put anything away. He only cooked once, when she was sick. He made her a hamburger. She had to beg him to make the hamburger. She didn't think he really cared about her at all.

When she first went out with him it had been different. He drove a little metallic silver Triumph sports car. That's what she liked about him at first. She loved buzzing around twisting country roads with him. Or better, driving it herself. No one else in Florence had a car like that.

He used to get high with her. Now he didn't like to do that anymore and he called her an old hippie. That really made her mad. He only did things when everybody else was doing them. Everybody but her. It didn't matter what she did. Now he just got drunk alot. He'd get real drunk and then say vulgar things to see if he could make her mad. He really liked to make her mad! What kind of way was that to treat somebody he was supposed to care about? He didn't even like to listen to music anymore. He just watched television all the time. From the time he got up in the morning until the time he went to bed at night. She hated the television. She wished it would blow up. But then he would just go out and get another one. Right away. He couldn't be without it for a minute.

Once they drove around getting high half the night in the Triumph. They took a sandy dirt road down to the river and sat on the bank. He took off his jacket so she could sit on it. Then they lay down and looked at the sky, trying to point out all the constellations. They saw the spotlight of a barge moving across the darkness. When the barge approached they yelled at the men who were standing on the back of it. The men yelled back and asked them if they

were getting high. They told the men they were and the men said they were too. They all yelled noises of approval at each other and then the men floated slowly and silently down the river and the only thing they could hear were the waves from the barge slapping up against the bank. They rolled up their jeans and walked along, letting the waves wash up over their feet. When they drove back up the sandy road, he held her hand and told her he hoped they would always be together just like that.

Now he'd sold the Triumph to buy his Harley. They had an old station wagon to drive. It was a big car, big and ugly and clunky. Alice hated it. She felt so tiny inside of it, like an insect. It didn't glide around corners like the Triumph and it was hell trying to park the thing. But Bob was happy, he had his Harley. He didn't care that she had to drive that horrible station wagon.

Alice finished the dishes and went into the living room to smoke a joint.

"Well, what are you up to, Torch?" Bob asked as she came in. He grinned at his new name for her.

Alice squinted her eyes a little and gave him a semi-disgusted look. He knew she wasn't really mad. She sat down on the coach.

"Just lay off it, Bob."

"Okay, Torch. Hey, Ted, you think we could get Alice to pose nude for Easy Rider?" Bob laughed. "We could chain her to my motorcycle!"

"I don't know. Don't think they'd print pictures of children," Ted answered, alluding to Alice's smallness.

Alice looked at them both disapprovingly. She leaned back and lit up the joint. On the television Dr. Frankenstein was screaming, "Igor, you idiot, you must have brought me the wrong brain!"

"Hey, Bob," Ted said, "you going to that motorcycle rally in Springfield this weekend?"

"Nah, I don't think so. I'm having trouble with my brakes. I don't want them giving out on me that far from home. You going?

"Hell, I don't know yet."

Bob got up and went into the bedroom. Alice heard him pulling his box out from under the bed. The box contained his porno magazines. She made him keep them there because she found it embarrassing to have huge stacks of nothing but porno magazines in the living room. "Oh, Bob, do you have to bring those out now?" she pleaded.

Bob ignored her and came back into the room paging through a magazine. "Here, Ted. How old would you say this chick is?"

Jay eyed the magazine for quite some time. "Oh, I don't know. Nineteen maybe."

Bob smiled. "Nope."

"Well then, how old is she?"

"She's thirty-three!" Bob announced triumphantly.

"You're kidding me!"

Alice dropped the remainder of the joint into the ashtray. She picked up her cat and sat down beside the aquarium. She wished Ted would leave. She want to get to bed early. It had been a long day at work. She worked at the Golden Thimble, a sewing and yarn shop on the square, as a salesgirl. Everyone that came in knew her and she knew most of them. They would always ask her opinion on things. Why? She didn't know. They would say, "Do you think this pattern would look nice in pink polka-dot?" or "Do you think this white taffeta will look nice on Angie? It's for her graduation dress." If she said yes, they'd buy it. If she said no, they'd agree and try something else. Alice smiled at the thought of advising everyone the wrong way and having all the ladies in town looking hideous.

"Hey, Alice, how about making a beer run?" Bob suggested.

"Bob! God, let me sit down for awhile!"

"Ah, come on."

"Go get it yourself. I'm tired."

Bob sighed. "Well, let's go, Ted. Might as well take the bikes, huh."

"Might as well," Ted said as they walked out the door. On the television, Dr. Frankenstein threw the huge switch. Enormous sparks of high voltage electricity flew through the air. The monster jumped convulsively to life.

Bob and Ted walked into the Rod and Gun and sat down at the bar to have a beer. There were quite a few other Screaming Eagles there that night.

"Hey, man, what's wrong with your old lady?" Ted asked.

"Hell, I don't know. She's just been kind of uppitty lately." Bob tried to sound unconcerned. He couldn't figure it out really. She sure wasn't being very nice to him. She acted like she didn't want him around. Maybe she was mad about the cat. But Ted was just kidding around. He wasn't really going to shoot the cat. God, why did she have to take everything so fucking serious? And he'd spent four days installing that new formica counter. She hadn't so much as said she liked it. When he asked her, she just shrugged her shoulders. At least a thank-you would have been helpful. She only bitched about his tools lying around when he was doing the work. That was all. Jesus, what was the problem anyway. "Think I'll give Alice a call," he said to Ted. "Maybe she'll want to come up for awhile."

"Damn woman," Bob said when he came back. She had sounded as though being out somewhere with him would be a disgrace. He ordered another beer. "Hell with it," he muttered.

"Hey buddy, what's happening?" Bob felt a hand on his shoulder and turned around to see Claw standing there. His real name was Kenny Clawford, but everybody call him Claw. He was a big guy, slightly overweight, with long greasy black hair that went halfway down his back. He had a long beard and carried a large knife on his belt. He always looked like he'd just been in a fight. Claw was a big man among the Screaming Eagles.

"Oh, not a whole lot," Bob said. He was happy to see Claw. "What you been up to?"

"I've been working on my bike all day. Getting ready for the rally tomorrow. You're coming aren't you?"

"I don't think so. Alice would get ragged off if I did."

"That's too bad. You know, that woman's really got you tamed down lately!" Claw laughed as he sat down at the bar, poking Bob with his elbow.

Bob ordered another round of beers and a boilermaker for himself. The hell she had him tamed.

"You know, I'm about ready to beat the shit out of Bradford over there," Claw said under his breath.

"Yeah?" Bob said. "What'd he do now?"

"The son-of-a-bitch nearly ran me off the road on the way over here. That's all. Goddamn four-wheelers don't know what it's like being on a bike! Then he fucking turned around and laughed at me as he passed by. That's all!"

"That fucker is asking for it," Bob said as he swallowed the whiskey. "Hey, Ted, lets go get your Annihilator machine gun! That'd give him something to think about!"

Bob ordered shots for everyone this time. He wasn't going to let some piss-ant kid bother him just like he wasn't going to let some woman who thought her shit didn't stink bother him. He tried to make her happy but she didn't know how to be. It wasn't his fault that she had a crummy childhood. And her father was a turd. She had to forget about that now and stop feeling sorry for herself. But she wouldn't. She thought the world owed her some kind of a favor and she was going to sit and wait for it. Sit around brooding all day and be miserable. Well, let her! He was sick of trying when she didn't try. He swallowed the whiskey and walked outside. The air smelled a little fishy. River's low, he thought. He stood beside his bike admiring it. For a second he thought he might race down to the house and lift Alice off the couch kicking and screaming. He would set her down on the bike and race back up to the bar with her. Boy, would she be pissed. He walked back into the bar.

Ted and Claw and Tom Brown were talking about Stacey Dixon, who was sitting down at the end of the bar talking to Bradford.

"Bitch," Claw said.

"Yeah," Tom agreed.

"Look at how she's coming on to him. Fucking double-crossing bitch!"

"Yeah," uttered Tom.

Hey, where you been, man," Ted asked as Bob sat down at the bar.

"No where. No Where."

After a couple hours and a number of shots of whiskey, Bob approached Bradford.

"You better think twice the next time you try to run down one of us." Bob

stared him straight in the face when Bradford turned around.

"What was that you just said?"

"You heard me," Bob said in his most threatening voice. "You just leave us alone, asshole!"

Bradford gave Bob a push which sent him sailing to the floor. Bob picked himself up and raised his fist at Bradford as he screamed, "You son-of-a-bitch, you're asking for it now!" He was getting ready to swing when two people grabbed his arms from the back and led him towards the door.

"Goddamn fucking son-of-a-bitch," Bob muttered as he made his way to the Harley. After he got it started he sat for a few minutes just listening to the roar of the engine. He twisted the grip several times to make sure everyone in the bar could hear it. It gave him an immense feeling of satisfaction.

He did fine for seven blocks, then he ran into a fence. He went right through the fence. The bike turned on its side in an old woman's front yard. At least it looked like an old woman standing over him in a bath robe and pink fuzzy slippers. He could see the slippers very well from where he was laying on the ground. He knew it was a policeman helping him up. He could tell by the buttons on the man's coat.

"Are you alright?" the policeman asked.

Bob tried shaking his head yes but he realized he was shaking his head no instead. He managed to say, "uh-huh."

The policeman started to let go of his arm, and Bob almost fell down again.

"Good gracious! You about scared me half to death!" the old woman screamed in a high pitched voice. "Just look at my fence. And my cat is so frightened he won't come out from under the porch! Just what do you propose to do about it, young man?"

"Wha..." mumbled Bob. He was having a hard time focusing on anything. He heard the policeman saying something to the woman, he thought. He looked down at his bike and about fell down again. The policeman wasn't holding on to him anymore. Have to stand up, he told himself.

The policeman was standing in front of him. "Are you sure you're alright, Bob?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." He realized that it was Giz. Giz the Wiz. Bob started to laugh and then stopped himself. That's what was written on his campaign card when he was running for Florence sheriff. "Vote for Giz, He's a Wiz.' Giz was beginning to come into focus.

"You'll have to do something about Mrs. Howard's fence, you know."

"Uh-huh," Bob mumbled.

"You'd better get right home, Bob. Do yo think you can make it?"

"Yeah. I only live on the next block."

The officer informed him that he did not live on the next block, but that he did live more than 10 blocks away, on the other side of town.

"Oh," Bob said. He really had thought he was close to home. Oh shit, he

thought.

"Get on that bike and see if it starts. I don't want to see you out again tonight," Giz ordered. He helped Bob lift up the Harley.

The engine started with a roar. Bob felt in control again. He turned the grip and drove right through Mrs. Howard's back yard, leaving a big track through the middle of a bed of irises.

Alice waited until 1:00 for Bob to come home. She was high when he called her. She didn't want to go sit in the bar and watch them all get drunk and obnoxious. He didn't sound like he wanted her to come up anyway. He just figured if he asked her then she wouldn't be mad when he stayed out all night. Well, it wasn't going to work. She sat up watching her cat and looking at old Ladies' Home Journal magazines. At 1:00 she fell asleep on the couch. She didn't even hear him pull in at 2:00.

Bob dropped the six-pack on the floor with a bang. He had stopped at a different bar after the wreck. "Oh, shit!" he yelled, almost falling backwards. He suddenly realized Alice was lying on the couch. Was she awake? He couldn't tell. The she sat up.

"Well, what are you doing up?" he asked.

"I was sleeping until you came crashing in."

Bob picked up the six-pack and carried it into the kitchen. He opened one of the beers, forgetting he had dropped it, and it squirted in his face. "Damnit anyway," he muttered. He took the beer back into the room where Alice sat staring at him.

"Hi, Alice. Wha's the matter?"

"What's the matter? You're stinking drunk!"

"I guess so," he chuckled. "Hey, let me tell you what just happened to me. I ran into this lady's fence and..." Alice went into the bedroom before he could elaborate.

He grabbed his electric guitar from the corner and turned on the amplifier. He had once played in a band, when he was in high school. He played lead guitar and sang. They used to set up their equipment in the Florence park, he and a friend of his and the friend's sister, who played drums. All the neighborhood kids came around to listen. They used to play "Gloria." Could he still remember how to play it? He began strumming the guitar and screaming, "Gloria, G-L-O-R-I-A, Gloria!" He did remember. He then tried playing "Purple Haze": "Purple haze down in my brain... Lately things just don't seem the same..."

Alice came hurrying into the room. "Are you crazy!" she screamed, "It's 2:00 in the morning!" Alice raised her arms high, then let them fall in a frustrated gesture.

Bob thought he hadn't seen Alice so responsive for a long time. He kept on

playing and singing, "Let me stand next to your fire..."

"Goddamnit, Bob, go to hell!" Alice yelled as she started to cry.

He stopped playing and looked at her. She stopped crying and stared back angrily. "I'm trying to sleep. You don't give a damn, do you! You stay out all night then come home to harrass me some more. Why don't you just leave me alone!" She started crying again.

"Leave you alone! That's just what you fucking want, isn't it? Okay! You can have what you want. You don't give a damn if I'm around anyway, so the hell with it!"

What do you mean! Why the hell do you think I sat up waiting for you, like a fool, tonight, while you were out on the town?"

"To get down on my shit, that's all! That's all you ever do!" he yelled.

"Oh, yeah! What do you think you do to me? Tonight you criticized me from the time you got home until the time you left!"

Bob pounded his fist down on the armchair. "Why do you have to take everything so goddamn fucking serious!" he yelled.

"You stay out all night and then come home to play your guitar so you can keep me awake and you don't want me to take it seriously!"

"What do you want me to do! Sit here with you all night so you can give me dirty looks while you sit up there on your pedestal and feel superior! Fuck that shit!"

"I have a right to feel superior!" Alice screamed. "I work all day supporting you while you sit on your ass and get stinking drunk!"

A strange look came over Bob's face. A look that scared Alice. He walked over to where Alice was standing. He pulled his arm back and swung off to the side, putting a fist sized hole in the aquarium. Water rushed onto the floor.

Alice screamed as she ran onto the porch to get a bucket. She hurried back into the kitchen and filled the bucket with water, then hurried back into the living room. There were Carp and goldfish and African frogs all over the floor, and more coming. Alice began collecting the flopping refugees, one by one. She cried as she deposited them into the bucket. When she had them all she hurried out the front door with the bucket. She collected her cat outside. Bob had disappeared into the bathroom and stood looking at his hand, baffled by the fact that he hadn't cut himself.

When she was a half block away, she heard Bob yelling her name. "Give me back my fish!" he demanded as he caught up with her.

"Take your goddamn fish." She turned and handed him the bucket. "Here's something else, too!" Alice removed her engagement ring and handed it to him.

"The hell with it then!" Bob yelled as he took the ring and dropped it into the bucket of fish. Alice turned and walked away. Bob carried the bucket of fish back to the house.

She walked three blocks to her mother's house. The door was unlocked so she walked in and locked it. She lay down on the couch and was almost asleep when she heard the phone ring in the kitchen and her mother getting up to answer it.

"No, she's not here. I haven't see her...No...No! She's not here and I have no idea where she is! Goodnight, Bob!" Click. "Alice!" she yelled.

"Yeah, I'm in here," she answered. Her mother walked into the room.

"Boy, he sure has alot of nerve, calling up here in the middle of the night and talking to me that way. You two have another fight?" her mother inquired, hovering over Alice in her bathrobe.

"Something like that."

"I don't think he believed me when I told him you weren't here. He just better not come over here looking. Have you got the door locked?"

"Uh-huh," Alice mumbled, half asleep.

"Well, I'm going back to bed. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Alice suddenly awoke to a loud bang. The noise continued. "Oh, god," she whispered.

"Alice, open the door! Goddamnit, I know you're in there. Open the door!"

Alice decided to stay quiet, thinking he might go away, but he kept pounding the door. Finally, she thought she might make him stop. She went to the window and pulled up the shade. She could speak to him through the screen. "Bob, will you cut it out!"

He heard her and walked over to the window. "Alice, get the hell out here!" he yelled.

"Be quiet. You'll wake everyone."

"I don't give a damn if I wake the whole town! Come on out here! I want to talk to you!"

"I don't want to talk to you. Just go away, will you. There's nothing to say."

"I'm not leaving until you come with me."

"Well, I'm not coming."

"Look, Alice, I'm sorry, I was just drunk, and, well, you know, I didn't mean it."

"You're alway 'just drunk,' Bob."

"I really didn't mean to upset you, I just didn't... Oh, come on, Alice.

She shook her head hopelessly. "It will just happen again if I come back. It's no use, Bob. Go home." Alice thought she might cry again, and tried desperately not to.

"Look, Alice, it really bothers me you have to work and I can't right now. Don't you think I want to work?" Bob was speaking quietly now. "Listen, as soon as they call me back to the railroad you can stop working. Maybe we could even move somewhere where you could go to school like you've been saying you want to."

They stared at each other for a long time. Everything was very still. Alice noticed there were tears running down her face. He put his hand on the screen where her face was. She wished the screen was gone so he could touch her face.

"Alice, I can't sleep without you there," he said in almost a whisper. "Look, I want to marry you. Come on, let's go home."

Alice looked down at the floor for a moment. When she looked back up his hand was still on the screen. He hadn't moved at all. "Okay," she said.

# THE DEPOT

headed for Mel's grocery on a saturday morning
i take a back-street shortcut over piles of rail
ties, uprooted tracks, pass the depot with its
flecked paint, broken glass, weeds dusting sills
and pipe railing, bullet holes notching the depot sign.
there i see a man standing by the door, his
jacket torn at the elbows, his nose crooked, neck scar
prominent as a birthmark, whose worn look
carries all those who once labored here. boot laces
broken and retied. a man who only knows my
first name as son, who notices me climbing the
platform steps, moving toward voices coming somewhere
inside. who leans forward, liquor on his breath,
left thumb missing, saying to me from the corner
of his eyes, "they're bruisin' a woman in there".
who then shrugs off my disorder like so many
dead flies. track wind coos beneath the planks, the
platform darkened with train soot, the gleaming letters
of the C & A nudging me into the thicket of morning.

Ron Deverman

# ECONOMICS OF THE 1930s

the year that the wheat field burned I was three
I stood in the yard
obedient
terrified
I watched Dad circle the fire, then again
he drove the tractor like a crazy man
the hungry fire had to be contained
ever wider
the plow cut a furrow
Mom and sister raced
from water trough to field
they flung bucketful after bucketful on this enemy
their figures shimmered
in the waves of heat
my head filled to explode
from the awful roar
the crackle
the black smoke above the orange horror

finally
the fire was out
some of the crop was saved
the hog barn next to the field did not ignite
the pigs were safe

we did not starve that winter

I still have nightmares
calling the shadows from the heat
afraid that they would not come

# A HOUSE DIVIDED

By dusk Wednesday, Barney had almost finished sawing his house in half. It wasn't really his house any more, according to the judge. Half belonged to him, half to Maureen, his ex-wife as of last Monday.

The hearing had begun promptly at nine in the courthouse of glass and stone. Barney wore his only suit. Actually, it wasn't a suit at all, but slacks and a sport coat. Still, his stocky body filled out the coat, and the pants were neatly pressed from the last trip to the cleaners. The jacket only bulged a little over his belly.

Barney met his attorney, a plump young woman going through a divorce of her own, in the cafeteria of the courthouse at 8:30 for coffee. They went over the testimony to be given, what Maureen might say about his drinking, the other woman, and the quarrels. And then they would ask her if the marriage was irretrievably broken. Like an old car, Barney thought. Time for the junkyard.

"Mr. McGee," the lawyer's voice insisted. "Are you all right?"

Barney jumped, then loosened his blue tie a bit. "Yes, yes, just daydreaming, remembering, you know." He harrumphed to clear his throat. Tears burned under his eyelids, but he wasn't going to let them get the best of him. Not today.

When Maureen walked in with her lawyer, a tweedy young man in loafers and hornrimmed glasses, Barney hardly recognized her. Mareen's body was the same, skinny as ever, but now topped by garish red hair. She'd gone and done it, after all those years of him pleading with her not to. She'd dyed her hair red. Maureen faked a smile as she walked past his table.

After the hearing, the judge went in the back room with the two lawyers. Maureen got up and left, and Barney sat alone, waiting. She wanted half the house, said it was her due after all those years with a man like him. He'd of given her half to stay, but he'd be damned if he'd give her part of his house if she left.

When the lawyer came out of the door to the right of the judge's bench, she wore a long face. "Mr. McGee." She looked at the gold watch on her left wrist. "Let me buy you some lunch."

In the restaurant, they ordered beer and talked about marriage. The lawyer wanted a divorce and her husband didn't so she could see both sides.

"I mean, I understand how you feel about your wife leaving, and all." She nodded, looked down at the drifting suds in her beer. "But think of her happiness."

"Her happiness? What about mine?" Barney leaned forward. "We put in 17 years together. Since we were kids we been going together."

"That's what I'm saying, Barney. May I call you Barney? I'm Susan." She shook back her straight blond hair. "Maybe it's time you both experienced another relationship." The lawyer circled her empty beer mug slowly on the

wet, shining table.

"I cheated on her once," Barney admitted. "But only a couple of times, with the one woman. It was always Maureen I wanted." He paused. "Isn't her hair godawful?"

The lawyer ignored his last comment. Stereo rock bounced through the dark bar, measured the length of Barney's heartbeats.

Barney had to ask. "So what did the judge say about my house?"

"The judge ruled fairly." Susan laid a comforting hand on Barney's arm. "Maureen agreed you should have custody of the kids. And you each get half of the house."

"What? We're going to live in the same house now? Her and that wimp Roger in one half, me and the kids in the other?"

"No." Susan brushed a hand back over her blond hair. Her tan forehead shone under the ceiling lights. "You have to sell the house and each of you gets half the profit."

Barney spread calloused hands on the table and leaned toward Susan, his eyes narrow. "I put my life into that house, built it with my own hands."

"I know, but it's the law."

When Barney picked his kids up from the video parlor, no one said anything about the luggage piled in the back seat of the Chevy. Danny, thirteen and just coming into manhood, already stretched taller than his Dad. Eight year old Karen was formed on her mother's fine bone structure, had the same delicate brown hair. Karen and Maureen both looked good in pink, which gave their hair red highlights.

The headlights of the Chevy spun into the night as they raced west across the plains, up one side and down the other of the long, slow hills of Nebraska. After the first hour, Karen slept, her head soft against Barney's shoulder.

Finally, Danny spoke. "We're going to Moosha's."

"I think it's the right thing, at least for now. Your Mom and I are both pretty broken up."

"You think you're upset? Ask us kids how we feel."

Barney looked over at his son's square face, the determined mouth outlined by the dim dashboard lights. "Must be rough."

"We manage."

Moosha's kitchen light gleamed down the lane as the car turned off the highway. The old trees crouched protectively above the white house. Barney parked on the far side of the garage, right next to the back door. Moosha pushed open the screen, wiping her hands on her apron.

"I been waiting up for you, Barney. Good thing you bring these kids home to me. We get along famous, we three." Beneath her apron Moosha wore jeans and a flannel shirt. Her short grey hair swept back from her face, and grey eyes peered out through sparkling, rimless glasses. "I make cowboy cake for us. Come in for a cup of coffee. You must be ready for bed."

In the warm, bright kitchen, Moosha's soft presence stilled the pain. Aft the kids were in bed upstairs under the slanted roof, mother and son sat at t table, white china plates crossed by silver forks in front of them, only a fe brown crumbs left of the cowboy cake.

"Time you be getting to sleep," Moosha said.

"No, I'm going to drive home tonight, Ma. I got things to do tomorrow."

Tuesday morning, Barney called his boss. "Kirk?" Barney asked. Son people called him Kirk the jerk. "I got to have a few days off, after the divor and all."

"You're not drinking, are you?" Kirk sounded skeptical.

"No, no. Just personal affairs I got to settle up."

Then Barney went down to Western Auto and bought a chainsaw. With h last ten bucks, he got five gallons of gas and a six-pack of beer. By ten he w out at the house, and it was already getting hot. Good, Barney thought, as l climbed out of the car. He picked up the chainsaw in his right hand, the can gas in his left. All the neighbor ladies would be imprisoned in their houses b heat, and the air conditioners would blank out the sound of his saw.

Just in case, he started at the back of the house, walked around the whi clapboard ranch, admired the petunias, all purple and white along the fenc He wanted to saw through the willow tree he and Maureen had plante together, but he couldn't bear to kill something so beautiful, so innocent. So h used his tape measure to find the middle of the house, just to the right of th back door, then used his key to get in and turn off the electricity at the switc box. He'd saw right through the wires. Hell, he didn't care any more.

Barney had sawed most of the way to the peak of the roof by noon. Th shingles burned when he touched them, so he went down to start on the insid Midafternoon, the saw ran out of gas. Barney pulled off his sweaty T-shirt an threw it in the corner. A puff of dust mushroomed when the shirt hit the floo Barney shook his head, and popped open the last can of warm beer. He filled th saw, then went back to work on the inner wall between dining room and livin room, leaving the bedrooms and bath in one half, living room, kitchen, an garage in the other, with the dining room sliced neatly in two. He debate halving the dining room table, but remembered at the last minute that Moosh had given it to them.

The late afternoon sun was already gone from the living room when th rapping on the front door started. Barney wasn't surprised.

"Barney McGee?" A man's voice, not that wimp Roger with his whiney voic and wispy moustache.

Barney opened the door. The policeman almost filled the doorway, blue blond, muscular.

"Barney McGee?"

"Yes, sir," Barney nodded, polite. He itched where sawdust stuck to th sweat. "What can I do for you?"

"This your house?"

"Half of it, yes." The powersaw dangled from Barney's dirty right hand.

"Been doing some work on the house?" The policeman took out his pad and pencil, flipped the pad open, held the pencil ready.

"Oh, hell," Barney groaned as a red Dodge pickup drove up in front of the house, Maureen sitting high and mighty inside next to Roger.

The policeman looked over his shoulder. "Must be the person who called in the complaint."

The truck stopped short, and before Roger even turned the engine off, Maureen was out the door and striding toward the house, cool and tan in a white blouse and skirt, her sandals clean and new.

"Barney McGee," her voice shrilled. "What are you doing to my house?"

Barney knew she couldn't see anything, that only the back and inside of the house were cut. "Just some repairs, Maureen, so we can sell the house and each get our half."

"You didn't tell me about any need for repairs. Brenda called and said you sawed over here all day."

"You got to cut the wood, lady, before you can build." He couldn't help sounding mean. This was all her fault. That wimp Roger crept up the walk to stand behind the policeman.

The cop tapped his pencil eraser on his notebook. "Mister, this property is half your wife's, and I need to see whether you've damaged anything."

Barney backed out of the door. Inside, the cop noticed the wall right away, the rough-sawed split rising neatly from floor, through television, picture on the wall, ceiling. "Jesus Christ, mister, what have you been doing in here?"

Maureen stuck her sculptured head in and screamed. "Barney McGee, are you crazy?" Her red curls flopped from side to side.

Ugly, Barney thought. Her hair looks downright ugly. "I sawed it," he said aloud. "In half. You can have whichever you want." Suddenly bitter, he waved the powersaw toward the right. "Now in here you got your three bedrooms, a good-sized bathroom. With sunlamp and whirlpool." He swept his left arm out. "Over there you got most of the living room, part of the dining room, all the kitchen and garage. Oh, and the electric dryer and storage area in the basement."

When Maureen sobbed, Barney was caught off-guard, his humor somehow lessened. For the first time, he felt guilty about the sawing.

"This was my home," Maureen sniffled, wiping tears away with a raggedy kleenex. "I lived and worked here, too. You had no right."

Roger the wimp stayed outside, and the policeman just stood there in the living room, his arms hanging down, pencil and notebook at rest.

Barney wanted to say something. "Listen, Maureen, don't cry. Look, you can have whichever half you want. We'll get a housemover to come in and set your half on a lot somewhere."

Maureen snorted, face buried in her hands. "Half a house." Her shoulders shook.

Barney would of sworn she was laughing, if he didn't know better. He reached out to pat her shoulder. "So which half you want?"

# ON A STATUE OF DEATH AND PSYCHE
## (WE HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR NAMES)

Woman fell
Rain broke her knees

Not Man but Death
Waits on our doorstep
another said

Sparrows fly from his black wings

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Kathleen King** is a PhD. candidate at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Her novel *Cricket Sings* was published by Ohio University Press in 1983. Her work has appeared in *Cottonwood Review, Tornado Slide, The Village Magazine, Spoon River Quarterly,* and previous issues of *The Alchemist Review.*

**Lynne Weller** was born in England and has lived in West Germany. She has lived in the United States for the past 10 years.

**Becky Bradway** is a short story writer and a novelist. She has been published in three past *Alchemist Reviews* as well as editing the issue in 1981. She will receive an M.A. in literature from SSU and plans on entering a writing program in the fall.

**Tim Osburn** is author of several novels and numerous poems, short stories and articles. He has also organized many writing workshops and readings and was managing editor of the *Sangamon Poets* chapbook series.

**Gary Smith** lives in Chicago. He has had stories published in two previous issues of *The Alchemist Review* and in issues of *Off the Rocks* and *The Coe Review.* He is working on a collection of short stories *(Hot Syrup and Other Stories)* and a novel *(Disciple from the Borinage).*

**Kristal Brazaitis** was born in Brown County, Illinois. She has spent most of her life living in and around small towns in the Illinois River Valley. She is currently exiled to Springfield, Ill., where she lives with her husband and two dogs of questionable value.

**Rosie Richmond** has written two novels, *Duffy Jo* and *Fifth Position.* The latter is currently with an agent in New York. She has two novels in progress, *Leak* and *State Gummint.* A teacher and consultant, she has published in *The Alchemist Review, Illinois Times, TwoWay Mirrors,* and *XX Chromosome Chronicle.*

**Ken Ishibashi** is a high school dropout, an ex-Marine and decorated Vietnam veteran. He has published work in *The Runner, International Surfing Magazine,* the literary publications of four colleges, *Saturday Review,* and *Mensa.*

**Ricardo Amezquita** has worked as an instructor at Northern Illinois University, as a legal intern for Illinois Migrant Legal Assistance Project, and as teacher for the Illinois Migrant Council in Rochelle, Ill. His latest publication was in *Revista Chicano-Riquena.*

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**Harris H. Hatcher** received his B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from Washington University in St. Louis. He lives now with his wife and daughter in Springfield, Ill., where he works as an insurance broker and as a part-time instructor at Lincolnland Community College.

**Betty Aderman Kopatz,** after a career as teacher, wife, mother, and grandmother, is now pursuing a career as a student in SSU's Literature Program.

**Bill Crook** is a well-known Springfield artist whose work has appeared in several past *Alchemist Reviews.* He holds degrees from the University of Illinois and SSU and has exhibited at the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Old Capitol Art Fair. He won the Bruce A. Magidsohn Memorial Scholarship in 1979-1980.

**Mary Johnston** lived most of the 1950s in Paris on the Ile Saint Louis, a subject she shares with Eugene Atget. She had a one-woman show of her photographs there in 1980.

**Katherine Lawson** is a freelance editor and writer and a graduate of the SSU Literature Program. She is a member of *Brainchild.*

**Jessica Weber** is a member of *Brainchild,* has studied with John Knoepfle and Jackie Jackson at SSU and at the University of Alabama's writing program. A story of hers will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Another Chicago Magazine.*

**Ron Deverman** is the Literature Chairman of *Springboard,* chairperson for *Illinois Writers, Inc.,* an artist-in-residence for the Springfield school district, and co-coordinator of Two-Way Mirrors for five years. He holds a degree in Environmental Engineering from the University of Illinois and an M.A. from SSU. He has farmed for the last four years but is now working as an editor and technical writing consultant for the Illinois Department of Transportation.

**Beth Beasley** is a graduate student in Communications at SSU after receiving her B.A. in Art Education at Illinois State University, where she won best drawing prize in the 1982 juried student show. Her work appeared on the cover of last year's *Alchemist Review.*

**Michael Miner** works for *The Chicago Reader* in its production department. Co-founder of *Two-Way Mirrors,* his work has appeared in past *Alchemist Reviews, Mississippi Valley Review, Loon,* and *Dial-A-Poem Chicago.* He was winner of an Illinois Arts Council award in 1981.

**Oliver Wiest** is a journalist and photographer working for the *Journal-Courier* in Jacksonville, Ill., where he lives with his wife and five children.

**Jane Morrel** grew up in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma. She received her B.A. in 1950 and M.A. in 1954 from University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. She received the *Preview* award for poetry in 1950 from University of Arkansas and the John Gould Fletcher award from that university in 1954 for a collection of poems. She has been a teacher on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and was named the Springfield poet-in-residence by Springboard in 1976.

**Lynette Seator** is a professor of Spanish at Illinois College, Jacksonville, Illinois. She has published many articles on Spanish literature as well as poems in such magazines as *Letras Feminas, Revista Chicano Riquena, Spoon River Quarterly, Praxis, Mississippi Valley Review, Kalliope, and Womanspirit.* She has work forthcoming in *Lodestar* and *Open Places.*