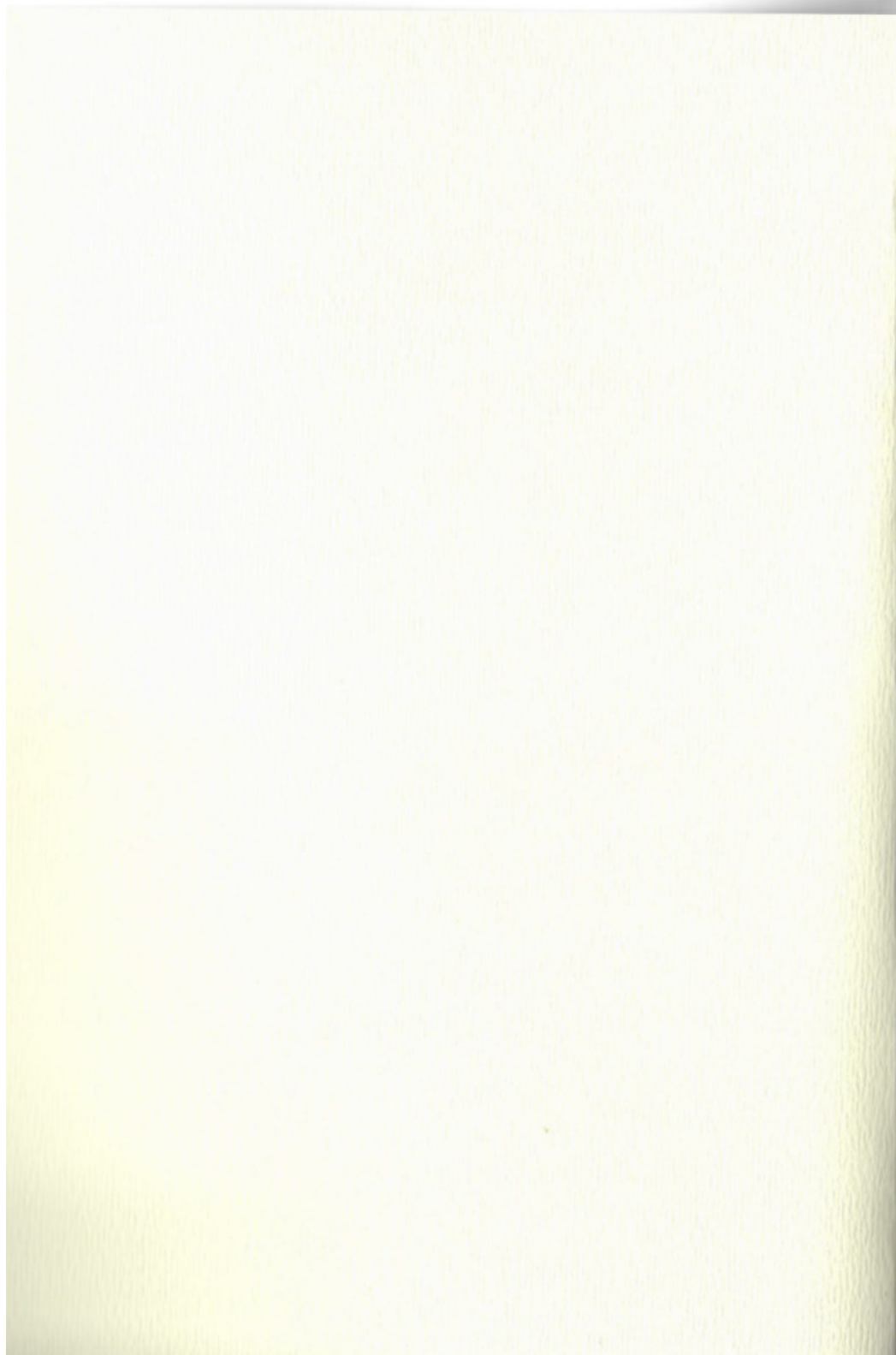


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The
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Review

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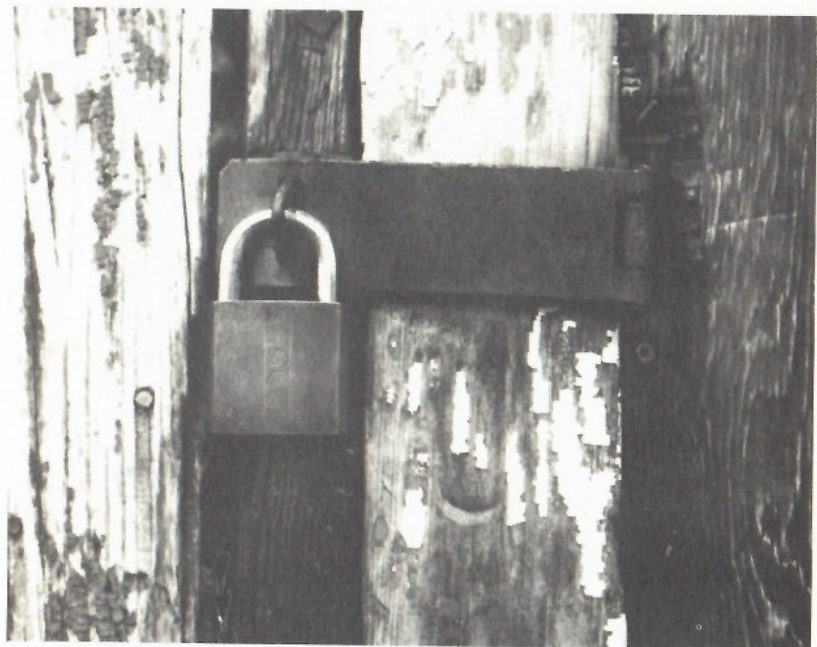
JAMES BERIKER

A Fine Romance

He held the key between the sweaty palps of finger and thumb. She plaited her hair nervously. The telephone pealed like sirens descending a deep well. Her tea tasted of ash and propriety. The lock jammed when the key entered upside down. The telephone dissolved in a vacuum of silence.

She held a cut glass decanter full of cheap port wine. He left work without his briefcase and hailed a cab. Her hairstyle required two technicians to apply three tints during eight hours of construction. Cursed with a delicate stomach he became terminally nauseous.

DENIS DE KLERCK



ANDREW PORTER

Smile If You Think I'm Sinister

The bus bolted unexpectedly, nosed up to a parked florist's van with flashing back-lights and then careened into the left lane. Sinisi thought suddenly of his fiancée – which was a pain in the ass because he was supposed to be thinking about work. The Tyler account: If he hooked it he'd be in, really in; they could pull their own blue sheets after that. Lunching with Devereaux and the Fat Men, burly numb hands extended, grappling for his own. A fine piece of work. Well done. But not yet; he had to be patient. A few more days would have it in the bag. They had warned him about Pavlovian Politics: nothing scared off a big fish faster than moist lips. To drive the point home someone had even left a bib on the desk of the guy beside him; but the guy, some new Longhair, had deserved it. Idiot: He'd sent six months spiralling down the pisspipe because he couldn't wait another weekend, chasing a prospective client with telegrams like parent-seeking orphans from New York apartment to Cape Cod cottage to Long Island estate. It might be okay to bite the hand that feeds you – afterwards. But to drool on it before....

Sinisi sat back in his seat. The ride was unusually uncomfortable today; it might be a new driver, but Sinisi hadn't noticed when he got on. He was occupying a single window seat to the left of the aisle, the horizontal sunlight of early morning falling upon him, draping loosely over his shoulder like a shawl. Even and translucent orange, it alternately stained and wiped clean the window pane beside him, disappearing with every pass of impinging buildings. Through gaps down side streets Sinisi caught scattered glimpses of a low-ascendent sun burning neon red between buildings which closed together like shutters. It was keeping pace with him, with the bus. The bus was moving; he could relax. It was a long ride to the office building where he worked: Lowell Tower. Whoever he was; still, a nice name. For a twenty storey slab. Actually, nineteen; take one out for good luck. Sinisi found these morning rides an opportune time to prepare for the day's events, to consider things, to reflect if necessary, but always to prepare himself. For anything. In this business nothing was guaranteed (except maybe the brown toilet paper in the men's down the hall). 'White teeth and fresh breath' might do it. Alone they might pull down a signature. And a weak handshake might drop a couple million bucks.

The bus pulled up to the right curb; the stalled engine groaned, the exhaust snorting dumbly. With a bridled unease the bus held shivering but inert. Sinisi heard the front doors pull apart, fold up like preying mantis limbs. There was a distinctive tiny sibillance, a sound not quite like any other. His eyes lifted to where people were getting on; no one was leaving. Regulars. No one new: A business type, well dressed and with briefcase (Sinisi had none); not doing the job right; the kid with the punk-cut; missed it by a few years, sorry. And that slow old lady with the ridiculous feathered cap. She seemed even slower than usual today searching through her coin sack. Sinisi shifted restlessly on his seat; he found he always did so when the bus stopped to take on passengers; but

being aware of the distraction made no difference. As if he were unconsciously abiding by the conservation of momentum, the bus's arrested locomotion set his own kinetics into activity. He rose on one buttock and then the other, extended a leg, retracted it, twisted his head around and saw through the window a fruit vendor's across the street.

A young woman was sorting through rows of bright colored fruit. Something about it disturbed him vaguely. The shadow-play about her hands looked wrong. The bus grunted and pushed forward into the passing traffic, lurching uncomfortably.

Yes, the ride was especially lousy today, Sinisi noted. Which said a lot for the driver. Anyone who worked this early did so because he couldn't handle day traffic in the business core. Must be someone new. Sinisi looked to the front but he could see only the driver's partition, a canvas sheet hanging behind his seat concealing him entirely. Sinisi glanced at the rear-view but the angle was off. Next time he'd sit closer to the front. He never sat himself by rote. Each place had its advantage. One good thing about single side seats: you couldn't slide into anyone. So the ride wasn't a total bust.

It was Thursday; if he got word about the Tyler account tomorrow the weekend was off. He'd start right in on the finalities, have it all gift-wrapped and on Devereaux's desk before the end of next week. His fiancée would be disappointed. The stay with her parents had been on for months; but she'd understand. Sulkingly. Then I'll really be 'sinister,' he thought, half-amused. As a gag, she had bought him a novelty sign, yellow with black writing which read SMILE IF YOU THINK I'M SINISTER. It was meant to go on his desk or hang above it on the wall at work. A kind of play on his name, and especially nice since juniors weren't allowed name plates. He thought it was cute and didn't want to hurt her feelings so he took it with him one morning and deposited it in the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, right beside her framed and autographed picture, the happy face eraser and the house plant, which, incidentally had never looked better.

Sinisi clambered over these thoughts, returning to the problems at hand. Tyler was only one among many. Even after weeks of hard work his itinerary was replete. For the next several full minutes as the bus drove onwards from emptied space into empty space Sinisi thought without diversion. There was a lunch at Marco's: a very distantly possible feminine aids manufacturer. A meeting at 2:00 with a likely drugstore's representative. There was a copyright problem Devereaux wanted him to handle personally. Several retainers needed reviewing; one account - which was it? - required fast reworking. Devereaux had said something about another. Now, which was it? Names flitted across his mind like birds delivered up from a telephone wire. There were necessities, essential, touchstone necessities. And then there were contingencies.

Sinisi looked up quickly. He had lost track of stops. A little panicky, he grabbed his coat, stood up and crossed shuffling to the front door. There he looked through the large windshield at the street ahead. His stop wasn't for some time. He caught his breath but the sudden movement and the driver's

perceptible weaving left him a little dizzy. The bus skirted a stalled delivery truck, jamming into the next lane. Trying to retain his balance, his toes clenched into midget fists within his galoshed shoes, Sinisi felt momentarily like a surfer edging off the curl of a wave. The ceiling dipped sharply. His feet tapdancing drunkenly across the floor mat, he gripped a vertical support pole but fell nonetheless sideways into a fortunately unoccupied seat.

Idiot, he thought. He adjusted his posture, straightened his tie unnecessarily; he moved quickly to recover, to appear unaffected, unfazzled. And now, without any show of histrionics, he glanced over at the driver, curious to see what this specific idiot looked like, hungry to provide an object for his momentary flare of anger. A middle-aged man sat at the steering wheel, confronting the oncoming traffic and studying the tailed. He wore glasses; Sinisi could see from the side a plastic arm and a cross-section of thick glass. Facing him he'd have tiny animal eyes. He needed a bit of a shave, was overweight but insignificantly, a swollen fold of shirt hanging over his belt like a fat-lip. Over all he looked pleasant enough. Sinisi felt a quick pinprick of guilt. No wonder the ride was so poor. The driver held the steering wheel with his right hand clasping the middle of the projecting circular bar; by the base of the wheel shaft a pinkish stump peeked out of a ruffled jacket sleeve.

Still, he was incompetent. There must be something else he could do for a living. Sinisi remembered Devereaux sacking an office boy for jamming the dixie cups the wrong way up the drop-tube by the water cooler (a mistake which had given rise around the office to a series of graphic comparisons). It takes guts to do something like that, to sack someone just like that. The poor kid had started eye-watering even before Devereaux said a word. Sinisi recalled eyes big and brown like a stuffed animal's, but with a pathos and a plea that were far from amusing. It made no difference to Devereaux. And that was why it was Devereaux who lunched with the Fat Men.

The bus stopped to take on another passenger, a young man dressed in jeans and greb-boots, his unkempt hair like tumbleweed beneath a hard hat. Sinisi watched him with a remote, instinctive distaste. He had a forearm shoved into the left hip pocket of his jeans in order, Sinisi assumed, to locate his fare; but the other hand quickly extracted a wallet from the breast pocket. In one continuous motion, with fingers scrambling like crab-legs, the young man deftly unfolded it, unzipped the change pouch, reached in with two fingers and retrieved a token. He dropped this into the fare box and walked to the back of the bus. The bus didn't move right away; having changed in the interval, the light in the near intersection continued red. An old lady walked across the pedestrian path in front of the windshield. A purse strap dangled loosely, hanging from a folded elbow, the small bag below it swinging in counter-motion to the slow tread of hidden legs. Sinisi sensed the movement in the corner of his vision before the light changed and the bus vaulted uncertainly into the intersection.

He was finding it difficult now to concentrate on the day's agenda; he had to keep fighting down the irritating tendency to glance about, to allow himself to

be distracted by triviality, by incidental scenes and details passing like a peepshow in the window facing him. Adumbrated in the still light, people walking along the sidewalk slid backwards as the bus gained speed. Sinisi lost his concentration entirely. It didn't really matter; his stop was coming up. He could afford the time to catch a breath or two before the day began in earnest. He stared out the window resignedly, his flickering vision now delineating the head and shoulders of a young woman. He saw a face suddenly solidify. God, he must have been really out of it not to have noticed her before. Sitting in the seat directly across from him, her clasped knees not four feet from his own and naked below a highcut skirt – a real extravagance in this weather – an attractive brunette jiggled rhythmically with the jouncing of the bus.

Sinisi scanned her features, her eyes happily averted – they might have been green, were probably only hazel. Hard to tell. Nose perhaps a little too upturned for his taste, but then that was very 'in.' The cheekbones, however, were unquestionably fine; they were sculptured by the chiaroscuro of sunlight that, washing down from the window pane, left faint recesses in both cheeks. In the same warm light her lips glowed as if with phosphorescent orange lipstick (probably also very 'in'); parted slightly, straying, they held more fully rounded folds and curls than a rose bloom. Maybe some of those tired old allusions weren't claptrap after all, Sinisi mused. But it was an idle notion. Such lips would hold cigarette butts with perfect teasing nibbles, lip-sync scores of catchy one-liners, promote, endorse, seduce – that was it, wasn't it? The exact couplet: trick you into buying something you didn't want and then solace you for it. Such lips would smile consumingly above brightly colored soup cans, pizza slices, cosmetics, razors.... His scrutiny continued: good jaw-line; neck, lean; bust, not so lean. He lowered his gaze unashamedly towards her naked legs and saw something that made him baulk. At first he thought she had nylon stockings pulled over her hand and wondered crazily if she had misdressed herself.

But he saw.

By her side, her left side, at the end of an arm that having fallen there showed no inclination, besides a slight sympathetic jostling, to be anywhere else. Skin stretched shiningly taut over a hub of bone and flesh.

He looked upwards, found her eyes. She had caught him watching her. She smiled.

And now his glance flew down the length of the bus to the passengers in the far seats, to the thickly clad figures he had hardly noticed before. His line of sight swooped in and out, pecking at the scraps of shadow, the folds of shirts and coat, the caches beneath bag and purse, in their laps, at their sides. And it had to get out. It darted through the window, darted back and forth along the sidewalk, through the growing crowds of milling, passing people, in and out of the light and dark of morning.

Sitting in the bus a block away from his stop, his face blanched, Sinisi breathed. Once. Twice.

Automatically he dropped his gaze; automatically although it had taken a

long moment. Reluctantly, but by an impulse which made it inevitable, he looked to his lap. His folded coat was upon his left arm concealing it; an edge of material and beside it a thin swath of shadow fell half-way between elbow and wrist. His other arm was raised, hand gripping the pole that fell from the ceiling to the seat beside him. He let go tentatively. The driver called out the name of his street, the indistinct sounds crashing backwards down the aisle and his hand dropped to his lap.

Where it found the cloth, warmed in an oblong of flat sunlight. He gripped the coat edge. Slowly then, very slowly, and with infinite patience, he pulled it back.

A. N. BOND

Ode on a Classic Citroën

Chère Deux Cheveaux,
Quelle belle auto!
Vous savez que je vous adore.
2CV, mon amie,
Je vous ennui
Mais, tomber en panne? Pas ici! Pas encore!

Chère D Speciale,
Il fait glacial,
Mais prenez courage s'il vous plaît!
DS, ma vieille branche,
Je préfère être franche:
Vous n'êtes pas à bon marché – comprenez?

Ma chère SM,
Comment je vous aime!
Restez tranquille aujourd'hui,
Parce-que, sans donner la peine,
De la famille Citroën,
Vous êtes vraiment le cadet de mes soucis.

SHIONA MACKENZIE



CYNTHIA FRASER



ANDREW PORTER

Rowing: Inside a Superlative

The Boat:

Sixty-three feet of solid timber, hewn from the forests of British Columbia by rough-necked men used to back-breaking, unsubsidized work; shipped raw to tiny towns in the remoteness of northern Ontario, shaped by master-craftsmen known throughout the neighbourhood for their woodworking skill and their lack of other employment; through two world wars this rugged boat has been the workhorse of the rowing club. Nestled amidst sleek latter-day shells of fiberglass and plastic, it seems to novice rowers like ourselves to be hopelessly antiquated, ponderously heavy, and of doubtful seaworthiness. We soon learn, however, why this boat hasn't been reduced to matchsticks. 'When yer out there in the middle o'the race, laddies, and a typhoon blows up out o'the north', growls our coach (a fine old Scotsman by the name of Raputnik), 'where will ya be in one o'these polly-Ethel-een contraptions? Nay, my buckoes, you'll wish ye was in the old solid and trusty Workboat, safe from wind and water!' The old sea-dog is right, of course. Forget that it weights as much as three new boats combined, forget the chiropractic bills, forget the danger to sea-going shipping! One must prepare for the worst when rowing, and this starts with the boat.

The Men:

Sinews flexing, their sun-bronzed skin drawn tight over lean, six-foot-plus frames of tempered steel and elastic muscle, carrying their boat down to the water with easy power, one of the rival crews walks by us. Muscle is considerably heavier than fat, and since weight is so critical a factor in rowing, we already have the clear advantage. Picked from the skinniest of the candidates at the beginning of the season, we have been conscientiously loading up with carbohydrates since then, saving our energy for the races. Our coxswain is in training too: he is the brains of the boat, planning race strategy and barking his orders at random from the stern. Already he has devised several ingenious excuses for not winning the upcoming races, so that he will never be caught flatfooted – we are proud of our coxie.

We must be considered, in the formidable vocabulary of sportscasting, the Cinderella team of rowing this season. We have all the necessary ingredients: we're big-hearted, yet modest; we're scandalously underrated; we're straight-c students; we give 110 per cent in every race; and we come to the regattas ready to row. This last is very important – you will never succeed in rowing if you came to play, say, tennis or hockey. In addition, at least five of our oarsmen had – because of broken limbs, partial paralysis, and at least one severe case of hangnails – been told before the season (by their doctors, no less) that they would never walk again, let alone row with a crew of our calibre. But their dogged determination has paid off. It is a true testament to the strength of the

human will that, though unfortunately they still can't walk, they do make it to practice whenever they possibly can.

We are men, admittedly not ordinary men, yet men nonetheless. There must be, therefore, a motive for what we do. What, then, motivates a rower? What makes him give up so much of his time to endless carbohydrate-loading, careful grooming, and all the other essentials of this rigorous discipline? Is it the glory of winning, the pumping thrill of leaving the other boats behind at the finish-line?

No.

Is it the hordes of adoring, wanton females that surround the rower in all public (and some very private) places?

No.

Is it, then, the inevitable and lucrative endorsements for everything from Vuarnet sunglasses (cutting the glare from those trophies) to Ben-Gay (after a hard day of keeping off those hordes) – indeed, endorsements enough to make Wayne Gretzky weep into his cereal?

No.

Why, then, do we row? Simple: for the team jackets! Woven in royal blue, emblazoned with crisp white Varsity lettering, these garments are emblematic of athletic prowess. They are what allow us to turn a haughty back and say with dripping disdain, 'Debating Club? Hell, no! I'm a rower!'

The Practices:

We are on the dock at 5.30 a.m. every morning without fail, clad in sweat suits, Topsiders, and (of course) our rowing jackets. We are all there, every morning, for because of the nature of the sport, you cannot practise when you are one man short. A boat designed for eight oarsmen can only be rowed by eight, not by seven, or for that matter, six. Five is way off. So we must all be there, every day, ready for practice. The only valid excuses are illness, sleeping in late, or forgetting that there was a practice scheduled for that particular morning. Since we only practise seven days a week, some confusion is inevitable. These are admittedly harsh standards, yet they must be this way so as to instill in us a sense of unending, merciless discipline.

Each practice is planned differently: on some days we'll row east along the waterfront, then row west back to the docks; on other days we'll go west first, and then east. These are the kinds of intricacies that make the art of rowing such an intensely cerebral one. Perhaps it is this mental strain on rowers that causes them to feel intellectually numb after practice (and in some cases throughout the entire day).

Instead of blindly following a repetitive and tiring series of workouts as the other teams are doing, we have been cagey this year, eating like horses instead and storing all our accumulated calories for the big race. The other crews will doubtlessly be overtrained. We alone, will be fresh and untroubled by things as petty as technique – to the born athlete, such things come naturally or not at

all. Our coach voices it best when he questions whether it is morally right to try to improve our skills beyond what Nature has given us. Ater all, it saves us time, and so allows us more time to eat.

DAVID O'BRIEN



PETER RIDDIHOUGH



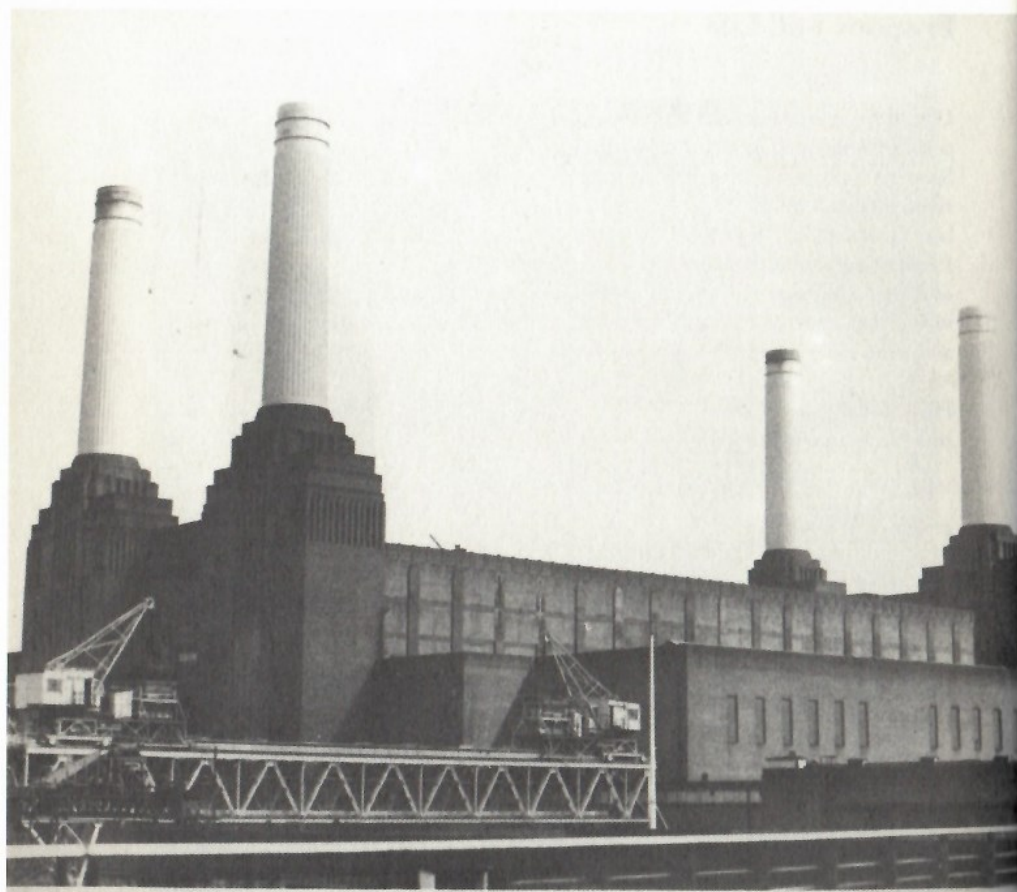
PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Precious Still Life

Day breaks over her shoulder
and lies smashed like some tiny bird.
Seeing it fall
she turns and lets her hair
bite at what's left
Looks you across the eye
as if peeling it open
while she grins
and draws the breath through her nose

How silver blood looks
in a black and white photograph.

DORIAN V. THIEL



PHILIP LEE-SHANOCK

Five Witnesses

Trees keep on blocking out the view, but I'm not going to stop. I shouldn't even be watching. It's like a shadow play, two shapes silently coming closer and closer, crashing against each other, breaking apart, crashing together again; two bodies locked tight for a few seconds before a thin gap of light separates them, then together once more. I shouldn't even be watching this. The scene is blocked out for a moment and when I have a clear view again, one of them is down on his knees, teetering, crumpling forward, and I'm not going to stop. He's there on the path, all crumpled up, beside the statue, in the park I have crossed almost every day, but not usually this late at night because I remember what happened to Sue's cousin. Just a shadow crumpled on the ground in a pool of light. Tree, crumpled shadow, tree, tree and I can still taste his mouth, feel the pressure of his arms encircling me. I wonder if he's all right; I should do something, call for help, go over to him, call the police, an ambulance. He's all right, somebody will see him, that's for sure, he'll be O.K. I can still taste his mouth. I shouldn't be crossing the park so late at night.

□

Skinny little guy in gray balanced as delicately as a gyroscope, twirling, revolving around the punk in black leather. The wiry one skips in close, delivers two quick punches before the other one moves forward, seizing him around the neck and slamming a thick-knuckled fist into his stomach.

They break, move apart, then are back again in their fighter's embrace, arms locked together, each trying to disentangle himself from the other's grip. If I were to close my eyes, I would think they were dancing by the sounds, such gentle sounds: the faint swish of clothing, the intimate, muffled exchange, the gravel shifting beneath their dancer's feet.

The thin one is so agile, his movements so effortless, so composed. But he's so skinny, I feel almost sorry for him against the punk, heavy-set, metal glinting darkly on his leather jacket, light caught in the links of the chain thrown over his shoulder.

They push away from one another and there is a dead moment, a lull, as they stand an arm's length apart, silent, motionless, and it is like watching a film frame by frame, acutely aware of every detail, the poise of their bodies, the angles of their arms and legs, their faces, painted in chiaroscuro, a cheek sunk in shadow, light pooled around an open mouth, and then I see the flash of the blade bridging the gap between them, a low, slow, swift underhand arc and it enters so easily, hot knife through butter, and oh, Jesus, I never thought death could come so quickly.

□

And puts a knife right into him. He's smiling through the whole thing and he puts a knife into him wham just like that. Because that's the kind he is, waiting around half the night for him, smoking and coughing, wouldn't even give me a cigarette when I asked, the skinny bastard, that's the kind he is. Just like that.

□

shouldn't have shouldn't have shouldn't have come this way his mouth never stops moving I can see a chipped tooth why does he move his mouth like that like that that that here we go mouth moving from side to side lips sucked in all tight there it is again that chipped tooth big triangular chip broken off at the side all yellow there and there How does it feel to treat me like you do isn't that the way the words go you bastard click of the switchblade to treat me like you do there there there there how does it feel there there like you do

□

The knife comes out as easily as it went in. He touches the place. He tries to hold himself together. His fingers cover the cut. He is bleeding. There is blood everywhere. He falls to his knees, still holding himself, whimpering. He can't stay upright and he sways back and forth. He falls against my legs. I step back. His face hits the gravel. Someone must have seen all this.

KENNETH OPPEL



CYNTHIA FRASER



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Because You Love Her

Because you love her you are here. This place has no significance beyond this moment; you might have been anywhere else. And that's the point entirely. Being here, with her, with this girl.

Oh sure, there've been others, with other eyes, other smiles. But remembering them it doesn't seem to matter. She is special. Certainly, nice to look at, to be with. And everyone who meets her knows she's sweet, even you. Deep down you know it.

But it's more. There are the uncanny things she does, the magic things. She can kill flies in mid-air just by slowly brushing her hands together, palms flat, meeting angularly like unsounding cymbals. You've seen this. You've watched her during long summer afternoons, watching flies drop down like lint balls about her in the wavy heat of her balcony. You've known her to hold your gaze over conversations for impossibly long times. Without ever blinking, without ever turning away distracted. And in the nights of quiet dark, quiet warmth, never a word spoken and she understands.

Someone else might think these things little, just tricks, nothing more. But that's not right. And she's not like any other. With her it was different. You had no choice, you never did. So even now, after all this time, nothing had changed. In a quiet or loud moment, in a crowded or empty place, standing beside her, but for the thick beating in your chest or the slithering deep in your stomach, you could forget yourself entirely. You tell your friends and they poke each other and smile. And you smile again for all of that. She's spell-binding. Simply. And you love her, of course. Of course.

Funny. You no longer know those people, the guys you used to hang out with. Where did they go? Was it one by one? It doesn't matter. Not now. And yet you remember them; you remember a friend saying 'Watch it, you're rebounding.' He seemed concerned. And another, idiot-grinning: 'It's T.O.D. - Testosterone Over Dose.' But they don't know her.

'She's using you.'

'You better cool it a bit.'

'She's taking you for a ride.'

But how is it that she can always light a match in the wind?

You think all these things while standing by yourself. She has left you here for a moment, by a display labelled Dog Toys. You take up a red rubber ball, feel it in your hand, squeeze it. Replace it. You pick up a dog-chew, a long plastic swirl wrapped at both ends to look like a bone. It does look vaguely like a bone, you decide.

No, you never had a choice. And today ...

You had other things to do today, important things. But she had asked you here instead, worked her spell of transportation. You are here instead. You replace the dog-chew.

You look back over your shoulder. A spell of slow disassociation. She is

talking animatedly with a young sales clerk. You know him. What had she called him? You remember well enough, too well. You try to pretend you can't recall, but the comment has stuck in your mind like a razor in a candy apple. So you appraise the clerk critically. He is handsome, you must admit; but not 'extraordinarily handsome.' No, certainly not extraordinarily.

As she talks with him she smiles often; her hands fly about her face like birds on leashes. You love the way they do that whenever she's excited. But now it bothers you. He too is smiling.

Birds. She has come to get birds, two small finches she wants for the apartment. Two small birds that won't make noise but will keep her company. She asked you to come along; you are here, but you know nothing about birds. You used to have fish. She had come here once, maybe last summer, had come with you to buy fish food. Had seen the birds, had seen the sales clerk. She never liked your fish. When they died you didn't get any more.

Remembering these things, you walk down the aisle on one wall of the store. There you see glass cases lined up just above the floor containing small animals. Rabbits, Gerbils, Chinchillas, White Mice: these words are written on the glass panes. Within, small animals are scurrying or not, moving or not, nibbling, running in wheels, bracing themselves up against the glass; they look out or they don't. At the end of the row of glass windows is one with the words BABY FERRETS written on it. And beneath this SPECIAL, \$169.00. You look at the price a second time. You look within. Three sable-furred elongated bodies are lying intertwined. You see small slitted eyes, tiny mouths. Just babies. They stir slightly in sleep.

You stand up straight, look back casually over your shoulder, over the shelf of cages and past the leash rack to where she is still standing with the sales clerk. You see only their heads and shoulders above the cages. He is showing her something he has in his hands. Bird feed maybe. Or a book on finches.

Look down.

A young sales girl is sitting on her haunches pulling bags of shavings from behind an aquarium. Something about her pose is vaguely exciting. You could flirt with this girl, return some jealousy. You consider this even while believing it beneath you. You think of something - anything - to say to her, and the baby ferrets below are stirring behind the glass.

You ask her 'Do they bite?'

She smiles up at you. You feel bad; her face is not attractive. And as she leaves, she is too fat anyway.

'Might give you a love-nip. Nothing more,' she says; her back is to you.

You are on your knees before the glass case in which the baby ferrets are stirring. There is no lock holding closed the two sheets of glass. A space on one side has been left for air; you put your fingers in it, pull the glass along on its runners. Far enough, you put your hand in, feel already the warmth. A funny bitter-stale odour touches your nostrils. And the ferrets are stirring.

One below your hand raises its head, eyes still closed, nose wrinkled above a raised lip. You meet it with your fingers, stroke it lightly. The fur is not as

soft as you expected, not as a cat's fur but short and matted, like a bathroom carpet. The ferret raises its mouth and nips your finger. Love-nip. You pull away gently and stroke its neck. The others are groping upwards, awakening, moving towards your moving hand. One places its small mouth with its small, small, needle teeth on the patch of flesh at the base of your thumb. You let it bite, lovingly. Loving.

But too hard. You pull your hand away. And it comes with it. The small mouth and the small teeth remain closed on your hand, the skin stretching away like bubble gum as you pull up. And it hurts.

Another has its teeth suddenly in a dangling finger. You flick it away but it remains. And now the third has you by the side of the palm. And the pain, the pain is surprising, such tiny, pointed teeth. Their mouths, lips flush with your skin. The teeth, you know, are inside.

They can't be doing this, this really hurts, you think. You see them, watch them on your hand, feel oddly detached. But the pain is real. You move your hand, shake it; they won't come off. You don't want to hurt them but – and someone might see – maybe you should call for assistance. You can't get them off. You try pulling your hand out but can't get it through the opening in the glass. You look around. There is no one near, no feet, no legs, no face; in aisle, in aisle, over shoulder. Breathing hard, fast, fast. The pain is like a dizziness now. Shit, shit. A lightness, now. You feel you might black out, might actually black out, and you can't believe you can stand it. Even this much. Where is she? Jesus, shit, shit. Why won't she come and see this and help?

Shake hard now, harder. No. Pull then, pull your hand through the glass, pull as hard as it takes, hurt them if you have to, just get it out.

It's out.

Suddenly below you, open at the end of your arm, strange. You close the glass quickly so they don't get out. You see them behind it; their eyes had never been open and they're stirring but settling now, going back to sleep. Sucking. Their lips are slowly sucking.

You see on your hand the tiny red holes and now the beads of red liquid. Watch now the tiny paths they leave as they roll down your skin.

A. N. BOND

Paupers on Parade

'The sun, in clownish yellow, but not a clown'
– Wallace Stevens, 'Esthetique du Mal'

Blue roses bloom in a jar
By the window, wires and paper
Mimic the sun like crystals in winter,
If the wind does not come.
Blues play in the kitchen
On a crystal radio set,
An aural parachutist drops
Through a crystal cabinet ...
Blue ribbons buried at the bottom
Of a box lie beneath
Scissors and needles, patches and thread.
The pages in my pocket are held
By each other, blue notes
From afar fingered anear,
Messages sent and received,
But the sky in my pocket
Is falling, is falling, the sky is falling
Into pieces of fluff –
Run away runaway:
Sew a bit of blue ribbon
To the lapel of a dusty
Deliquescent pedestrian
Walking chink-a-chink-chink,
Seeking pieces of change, vagrant
Illuminations, brief, unyielding,
Restless, paupers on parade.

ANN KAEGI

French 12 A

Instructions pour jeudi et pour vendredi

Pour jeudi:

- lire la trilogie sartrienne, *Les Chemins de la liberté*, et préparer un précis de cette oeuvre

- puis répondre aux questions suivantes:

- 1) Quel est le dernier mot à la page 24 de *La Mort dans l'âme*?
- 2) Combien d'homosexuels y a-t-il dans cette trilogie?
- 3) Quand viendront les corbeaux?

Si vous vous trouvez incapable de compléter ce travail:

- 1) Composer une danse sur le thème, 'les lampes de poche dans l'âge atomique,' en utilisant des motifs camerounais.
- 2) Faire un reportage vidéo sur les moustiques nigériens.

Pour vendredi:

- faire une composition sur l'un des thèmes suivants:

- 1) Une solution du problème de la prostitution en Thaïlande.
 - 2) Un projet pour élever la valeur du dollar canadien en utilisant des moyens métapsychiques.
- fournir tous les chiffres pertinents
- ne pas dépasser une demi-page de longueur

HEATHER TAKAHASHI

The Insubordination of Insubordination

I give you the insubordination of insubordination
In which insubordination refuses to subordinate
Itself to the order of its letters:

INSUBORDINATION
I, INDIAN ROBOT SUN
I, ONION-DUST BRAIN
I, NUTSO BARON IN ID
I SIN TOO, RABID NUN
I TRAIT ONION BUNS
I TAN INDOORS, BUNI
SOB DIN RUINATION
DIO SIN BURNATION
O NO IT'S RAID NN
IN BUS ORDINATION
SUN RAIN INTO BODI
BIND NOT AS OR IN U, I
INSUBORDINATION.

Now that you have appreciated the beauty
of insubordination, I hope you will make it
The principle of your life.

MIKE GIGLIO

Love and Sculpture

Katherine sometimes feels ashamed when she puts another Dylan tape in. She feels as if she is betraying her newly free, happy, liberated self; as if her new self is succumbing to the perverse allure of the idea of Katherine, 'true like ice like fire', who has chained herself to the bed despite the hot blood gushing from her wounds. This is an idea, she thinks, that is best left repressed. The Dylan-triggered shame is only brief, however. It's easy to justify continuing to listen to Dylan. Dylan's good for his own sake. Lots of people like him, and besides, Andrew doesn't even own the album that Katherine likes best. And he's not even familiar with the song that contains the 'true like ice like fire' lyric. He also thinks that 'Lay Lady Lay' is beautiful. Katherine thinks it's a stupid song. And misogynistic. Stupid and misogynistic. She wishes she felt free enough to dismiss Andrew with these words. Analyse him, categorize him, deny, defy, and then crucify him.

Katherine's shame, her sense of betrayal and subjugation is much sharper on the relatively rare occasions when she is forced by that bloody masochist of her former self to play Leonard Cohen. It's funny, too, because his songs are so gentle, with such healing intentions. Katherine wonders who Cohen was intending to heal. The chorus of 'So Long, Marianne' is beautiful and lilting, with accompaniment of sweet-voiced wood-nymphs and a rich acoustic guitar. A marked contrast, Katherine thinks, to the cold silence of the telephone not ringing, accompanied by badly suppressed groaning sobs and a pounding head. These were the distinctly unlyrical strains of Andrew's departure.

And yet in all other ways – perhaps in the above way as well – the Cohen entity: the songs, poems, and novels, is roped in with Katherine's memory of Andrew. She knows she never would have listened to or read Leonard Cohen had it not been for the fact that for a time Cohen was God and Andrew His loyal warrior angel. During this period, Katherine had adopted the convenient role of all-enduring, unquestioning, self-sacrificing mortal, at the bottom of the divine hierarchy, the inevitable sinner.

The first time Katherine heard a Cohen song was in Andrew's car, the stars of the city flashing past benignly, Katherine travelling blind in a state of sublime ecstasy.

'Just listen to the words, Katherine, they'll change your life.'

'Mmm ... wonderful.'

She bought the album the next day, but she still can't remember anything about that first song, not even the title. She hadn't bothered to ask.

Another time, the whole scene, superficially, was right out of Cohen's semi-autobiographical first novel, *The Favorite Game*. I love you in the morning, your kisses deep and wa-ar-arm, Cohen sang-spoke into the hotel room. It was morning, and Katherine grabbed Andrew's arm as he walked past from the tape-player to the bathroom, so as to oblige him and create that link

between art and life that he spoke of so often. But he kissed her on the forehead and pulled his arm away.

Like Cohen's adolescent lovers Breavman and Tamara, Andrew and Katherine had told their parents they were visiting friends and had checked into a very cheap hotel in a part of the city neither of their parents frequented. Andrew, of course, fit the Breavman mold perfectly. Canadian, Jewish, a songwriter and a poet, he even had a half-mad mother who bitched incessantly. Katherine had thought for a while that this last detail was a fabrication of Andrew's, something that he thought would make him more like his God in her and everyone else's estimation. But when she actually heard the infamous one telling him, screaming at him in a hundred words or more to get off the telephone, she realized that her scepticism was unfounded.

During the course of the evening, between sessions of finger-play on the creaky bed, Katherine and Andrew had lain together in relative peace and discussed *The Favorite Game*. It was Andrew's favorite book, so Katherine had bought a second-hand copy and this tattered paperback with the cheesy picture of a naked woman on the cover, this source of poet's wisdom and cut-out paper dolls' clothes, was for a while her bible. She felt that it told her more about Andrew than she could ever discover just by talking to him and being with him; that it gave her old and wise advice about how to behave for him, what prayers to offer to please him.

In *The Favorite Game*, the Breavman character leaves every woman who seems to fall in love with him. He resents being made into a Christ figure, and abhors religious relationships. This is a part of the book that Katherine always tried to ignore. She had no interests in these prophesies.

'You know what Breavman's favorite game really was, Katherine?' Andrew said in conclusion to their discussion.

Katherine waited breathlessly in anticipation of the Word, this divine oracular wisdom.

Andrew continued, 'It wasn't love, or sex, or hypnotism, although it did include all these. It's all expressed in the very last part. When he was sitting in the all-night café listening to the juke-box after just leaving his girlfriend. He is writing a bunch of stuff down on his napkin about his childhood sweetheart Lisa's favorite game when they were little.'

'Yeah, with the snow angels, when they would swing each other around in circles and let go and they would go flying and land in some crazy position,' Katherine, eagerly, 'and they would get up very carefully ...'

'So as not to disturb the impression they had made.' Andrew interrupted. 'This is what Breavman loved to do, or maybe couldn't help doing, in his relationships. He would enter a woman's life all of a sudden and make a mark on her life which was as beautiful as he could make, and then leave, so that he could do the same again with someone else. So that he was a poet in his day-to-day life as well as on paper. His relationships were poetry, and this, of course, explains why he always had to move on. I mean, a poet can't just write one poem. You see?'

And Katherine, mortal Katherine, at the time could only say 'Yes.'

Looking back, she now thinks that Andrew's interpretation of Cohen's metaphor was inaccurate in one important respect. Andrew spoke of Breavman leaving his mark on women, on people. But Lisa and her playmates were leaving their bodies' impressions on a field of untouched white snow, a pure medium, unformed. Surely Cohen hadn't meant to use new snow as a metaphor for a real, living person with all the scars and rewards of experience, with roots, and previous relationships.

No, Katherine thinks, Breavman and Cohen and Andrew didn't want to be simply another memory or another tiny scar on those they encountered. For they were creators, artists; they belonged to the caste of initiators, not contributors.

Katherine knew that Andrew was playing his favorite game with her. He wanted to give her tastes, opinions, books to read, poets to listen to; he wanted to change her life – to be it, not just a part of it. And Katherine realizes that she played the game willingly. She would have been absolutely delighted to be, if it were possible, a pure untouched block of marble for this Pygmalion. But changing oneself into stone, re-entering the womb, is not easy, Katherine now knows, not possible in fact.

Before Andrew, she had had a long succession of extremely unsuccessful attempts at relationships. Again and again some boy would find her at a party, and attracted by her blue eyes, strong teeth, and naïve virginal innocence, would express interest. However, bombarded by Katherine's delight that they considered her worthy of attention, constricted by her unrelenting passion fuelled by dreams of eternal kissing happiness, it didn't take one of these boys more than three weeks to feel the need to escape. And their favorite way of executing the escape was to stop calling. Katherine like to put the reason for their unanimous choice of this painful method down to the inherent cowardice and cruelty of the male sex.

The scene in Katherine's home was not at all pretty for the few days after each boy had parachuted out of her life. The energy put towards the positive passion with which she had smothered Peter, or Jeff, or Mark, was equalled if not surpassed by that expended during her bouts of passionate self-hatred and self-pity. In short, Katherine was easily wounded, and the scars were still highly visible when she met Andrew. And they damaged the marble so badly that a perfect sculpture was impossible.

Katherine once wrote a letter to Andrew. It was towards the end of his long on again, off again withdrawal from her. She was desperate and no longer able to endure not knowing and his refusal to talk about what he wanted – his insistence on purity. So she picked off the scabs. She had no conscious intention of making him feel guilty; 'for some reason, that I can't figure out, I just have to tell you these things – maybe it's the naïve hope that there's been some kind of misunderstanding and that you'll tell me that my fears are unfounded,' she wrote.

'I've come to the depressing realization that my relationship with you is

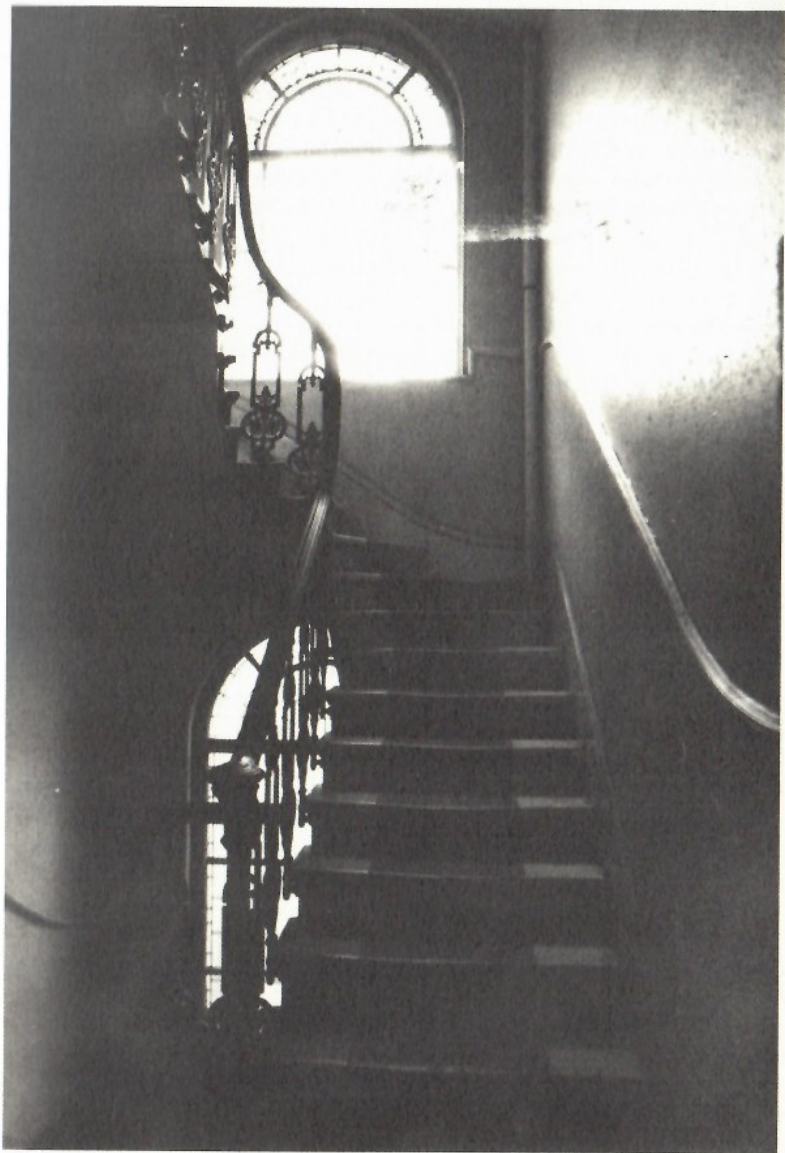
destroying me, in a way, and at the same time I can't abandon it. You see, I'm hopelessly in love with you. It's a kind of love, however, that dooms me to unhappiness. I love you because you're an incredible person. Your brilliance and your beauty stun me and I can't get enough of you. It's not the kind of love based on trust, or consideration or even passion, shared by two people. I'm painfully aware that it's totally unrequited and I'm also aware that it would be impossible for you to be in love with me. I'm not inspirational or beautiful or particularly intelligent; I'm not any of the things that you epitomize, or that you see as worthy of love.'

The self that Katherine bared in this letter was without inhibitions and without defences and trying its best to deal with insecurities which she now realizes Andrew didn't want to hear about. He answered her letter, telling her, too late, exactly what he did want her to be and not be.

'I like you very much, Katherine, but you must realize a very important trait and become aware of its truer meaning. Honesty does not come out in a violent flood; it cannot be revealed by a flashing of skin and wound - honesty is a process of bits and pieces that one can put together to *near* the ultimate integrity. When it is dished out in piles it is sterile and scar-less. It is a self-righteous and naïve belief that whatever one says is sincere and non-instrumental ...'

Katherine put down the letter she was reading for the tenth time, buried her head in her pillow, and let the blood and tears flow as the sculptor's chisel cut deeper into her flesh.

LESLIE TOPP



PHILIP LEE-SHANOCK

This ain't a depression

Mr Tippet spilled his drink into the soft pile shag carpet and it spread in a stinky beery stain that you could hardly see because of all the little rayon balls that collected on the tips of the pile that had never been hoovered and looked like little tumbleweeds in a dustbowl except there was no wind and they weren't rolling and you'd have to be on your knees to imagine you were in Kansas.

DENIS DE KLERCK

Eating Crow

Her face is in tatters; it's all wet and rubbed off except for a little patch of smiling eyes, some of the cheek and one pigtail. The writing is almost all gone too. It says only 'SING' on top in big faded black letters and below it 'IS TAT.' You can't read the name, can't see the face. All that work to print them, to put them up, hoping someone might be able to recognize her, to remember her. A face as clear as your own reflection. One good shower shredded it completely. But that's probably how she looks now anyway.

Damn, there's another one. Did you see him? Simcoe? Do you see him? There. Wings must be three feet across. What's he looking for back there? There's nothing back there.

She'll never be back now; the time has passed. Sometimes you know right away; other times it takes a while: a few nights of murmured pleas, a few more of cloying avowels. Unconvinced, uncommitted. An anaesthetic optimism and a kind of lurid curiosity keep you going. Until that final night of silent childish raging. That's when it's over. Morning comes and you awake from a past life as from a vague and troubling dream.

Hey, that's not bad: morning. Mourning.

Don't make that face; I'm not going to start again. It's just that I know what they're going through, each and every one of them. It's been months since the first but you never really forget. Not really. There've been four and now little Janis Tate. You know, she used to walk right by my door every day on her way home from school, dawdling, chasing cats, plucking up daisies from right off my lawn. The kind of image you get straight away whenever you're made to think 'little girl.' She was nine, or ten perhaps, and lovely at that age. Lovely. With a kind of beauty that presages itself. You know what I mean? You look at her and you see other things.... It presages itself, its own growth, limitlessly. Childhood giggles – when she's chasing out a cat, teasing it out of a bush – if you listen closely, pre-echo volumes of adult laughter, of adult joy; of love perhaps. Of life. Of loss.

I know what the Tates are going through, and what's yet to come. The waiting you can't stand, the police searches that are almost worse. The imagining. There, that's the worst. Forgive me, Simcoe, but we've all seen rot, neglected summer garbage, dead animals in the roadside. We all know what's really worse than the absence in death: the presence. That stench, unique, impossible to duplicate, impossible to forget. The dynamics of accelerated change; the movement of tiny opportunists. Living that returns in a parody of its former self. You know, they'll never find her – and I don't just mean alive. I doubt they'll ever find anything at all.... I know what happened to her, to all of them. It's fairly obvious.

Ah, so I get your attention now do I? Well, listen then. Campbell next door had an idea. It wasn't bad, if significantly flawed. Actually, it was rather clever.

The cemetery on Bathlic Hill is only three – no, if you count Chesmount, four blocks away: easy access, say under nightcover, and large enough to offer up one or two freshly mounded graves, even per month. And what better cover than the palpably overt? Plus, the bodies would be small, four small children – and now Janis – hardly a moundful.

But untreated the bodies would be detectable; the police were using dogs up there on the weekend and came up with nothing anyway, so the idea's out. Unless, of course, the bodies were treated. Or bagged. Bagged might work. Say, a Glad bag, only sealed better than a twist tie. Maybe Krazy Glue?

I overheard the Campbells talking with a sergeant from Thirty-First when I was cutting the hedge: Snick – Snick – Snick. Don't you hate that sound? Got to keep the shears oiled all the time, clean too, keep them from rusting. But look at the results. As even as a brick wall. I'm pretty handy with those things. Even if the hedge is half Campbell's. But he never cuts his side.

The police are still opting for the serial killer theory but they're wrong. And they may have the opportunity to realize that for themselves, before long. Why, the evidence was as plain before their faces yesterday as it is before ours now. When they finally see it all, well, you might just say they'll be eating crow.

What do you think? Have you got it yet? Let me help you ... 'eating crow?' Simcoe, you look nonplussed. But it's so clear, it's here now with us, with all of us, never-leaving, like the traces of true night that remain even in daytime. All you have to do is look closely enough. The police couldn't guess it because they don't live here. They don't have a chance to observe things over time....

Brace yourself, Simcoe: A visitation of enormous crows has held this neighborhood in some form of subtle suspension for quite some time. Listening, never singing. Watching, always watching. Crows on the lines of roof tops like upended shadows; shadows in trees like inner foliage, shadows against the sky, pressed flat, black against the sun. Now do you get it? Everyone sees but no one notices; but when the time is right you don't even have to go looking for evidence. It presents itself to you, even ostentatiously. My bedroom went suddenly dark just an hour ago, before I came out here with you, and turning I encountered a huge black wing disappearing fast in the window.

This isn't to say that these birds are monstrous. See for yourself – there's one lingering under the hedge right now. Looks sort of like a man in a trench-coat standing in an alley, don't you think? Gives one the creeps. But it isn't monstrous; just about the right size to be stuffed and mounted on one's desk. No, it's something else about them. From this very porch I watched one drooling. I had dropped a peanut right there and it had spotted it from its perch atop Campbell's tree; I was sitting right here like I am now, but I had my shirt off then, trying to put some healthy color into my skin. Sitting inside too long, getting too pallid. She always used to ride me about it, Gina. This crow was sitting above me watching, emitting great drops of saliva from the tip of its beak. A sinister image, don't you think?

The only point I want to make is no one knows – or at least I don't,

although I find it curious – where they came from and why they're here. As far as I know, as far as anyone knows ... it may not have been the peanut.

What's the matter with you? Don't you think that's funny? When I first thought about it I almost died laughing. Honestly, it just killed me. Listen, it gets better. What the police don't know is what else is missing. Mrs. Searles two doors over lost her cat, Mandy; it just disappeared. That was about two weeks ago. Before that the Patterson's dog went missing. They figured it had been run over and sanitation had cleaned it before anyone found out. But you have to be observant, Simcoe. There was also, not even three months back, another dog, a mongrel that used to come around scrounging. And tell me, do you remember how many squirrels there used to be out back here?

And of course the children, and of course now Janis. Janis not yet ten with smiles that made me imagine and made me remember. So much like my own daughter, like she was. She looked herself so much like her mother, Gina, it was uncanny. Gina. You know, Simcoe, that day clothed in black she was not unlike a large crow herself. In her dissolving flight through my glassy mind and the pernicious drip of her ...

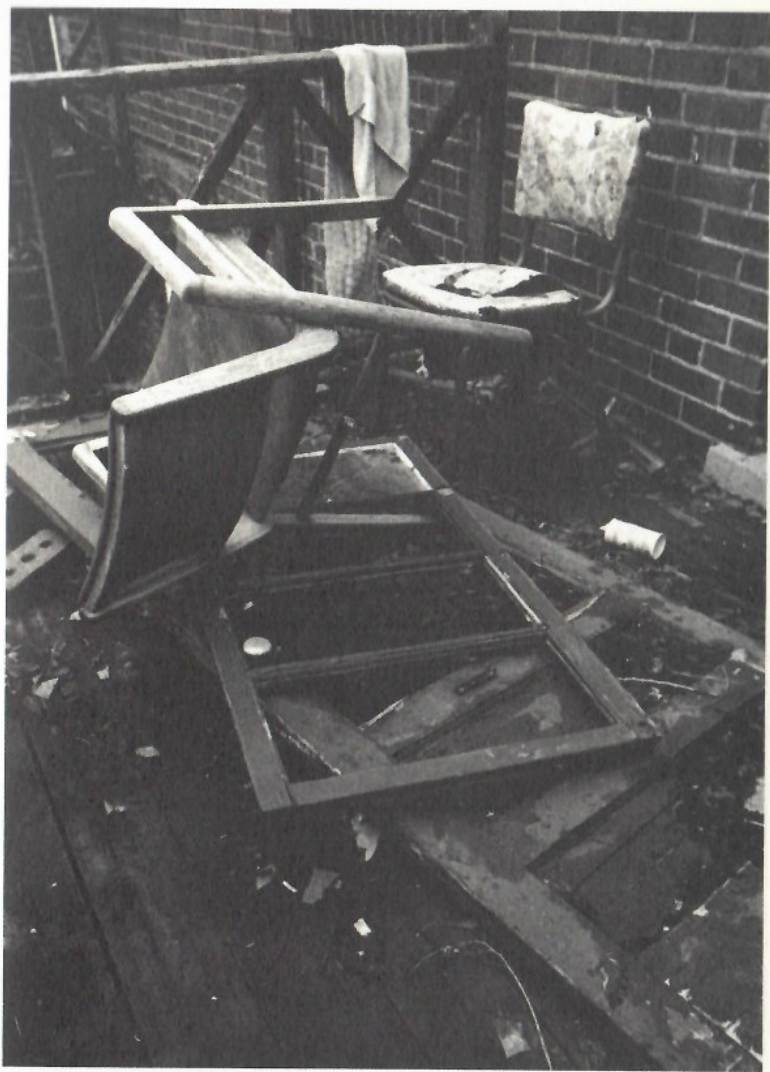
Excuse me, Simcoe. I don't know what got into me. It's just that ... sometimes I can't help it, you know? Thinking about it.

Anyway, I must be getting tiring. I was only kidding about all that crow nonsense. It's not really very funny except for the punchline. I forgot the punchline. You know Campbell's kid, Dicky, next door? He's next. Sometimes you know right away. You just get this feeling. Like yesterday after his parents went inside and the sergeant from Thirty-First got into his cruiser and left. I was trimming the hedge – Snick – Snick – Snick – when I saw little Dicky below me glowing like a painted cherub in the sunlight that fell upon him from over my shoulder. He was playing with his Tonka trucks and didn't even notice me, didn't even hear the shears going Snick – Snick – Snick over his head. Slowly I stepped forward pressing myself farther into the hedge. I just wanted to see how close I could get; I almost wetted myself with the tension. My shadow on the lawn below inched silently towards him. And then just when it was upon him, when it had touched him with an intangible, insensate caress of shade, I held the shears slightly open, pointing outwards beside my head. In the shadow on the grass beside him – this part will just kill you – they looked like a crow's beak.

A. N. BOND

She feels like nothin I've ever seen
hands as thin as father's old pencil leads
but eyes like lights of a september dump truck
both running on ether and everyone else's
darker dreams.

THOMAS CZEGLÉDY



ANDREW PORTER



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

The Parking Lot

There is violence in this place, in the white lines which dissect the blackness of the parking lot, in the mesmerizing night heat trapped in the asphalt. I drive through slowly, past the long strip of closed shops, their windows brilliantly illuminated, listening to the hollow strains of supermarket music pulsing from hidden speakers.

I come here sometimes during the day, but seldom: it's not the same. Heat rises visibly from the pavement, light gleams off the rows of parked cars, people fill the sidewalk, the music is all but drowned out. Many of the shops are vacant, with brown paper covering over the glass from the inside, concealing their hollow innards. Across the highway you can see the new shopping centre under construction, hear the roar of winches and cement mixers. You can see the crane swinging around and round and watch as the building slowly pushes itself up out of the ground, up, up, up, while everything around here is crumbling down, falling down. So I rarely come during the day. Besides, it happened when it was dark.

I take the car out into the middle of the immense parking lot, now empty, blackness extending on all sides, suggesting a slow slide into oblivion. I let the engine die and then sit up on the hood, my back resting against the windshield. I hear the hum of the tall parking lot lamps, and the distant throbbing of traffic from the highway.

There's a group of kids who come down here on their skateboards every night. I don't know how old they are, fourteen, fifteen maybe. They come here to practice. They do their stunts along the boardwalk, over the curb, down onto the road, twisting over the speedbumps. I usually hear them before I see them – the harsh whir of their wheels on the asphalt always makes my heart quicken. They weave back and forth down the slope at the far end of the lot, crouched slightly, arms outstretched for balance.

You see these kids all over the city, loitering outside the Macdonald's, blocking the steps of a church, carrying their skateboards onto the bus; they are always in groups, always together. They aren't like the usual streetkids downtown, dressed in plaid logging-jackets or jeans jackets, with hair down to their shoulders, strutting belligerently, restraining an immense dog on a leash, smoking, swearing, leering at old ladies. These skateboarders look amiable enough – but you look in their faces, and you bet they could be killers. Their lazy, languid movements belie the fearful, tight-coiled energy of their steel cable sinews and their tar-machine hearts.

She had called me up one night after working late, asked if I would come down and pick her up at the plaza. She had left her lights on and the battery was dead. She sounded a long way away on the phone: I'm not sure if it was a bad connection, or whether she was standing back from the receiver, looking out from the phone booth nervously, watching them gather.

When I arrived, I could see her car parked at the far end of the lot, but she wasn't there. All I could see were the skateboarders, weaving around the car, cutting zigzags across the asphalt, the sound of the wheels violating the night silence: a sharp tearing sound. Back and forth around and around the car. They would rush towards it, and then swirl around on their boards the moment before the collision.

As I drove closer, swallowing them up in my headlights, they moved back away from her car. I got out and looked around: there was no sign of her. Xylophones tinkled from the boardwalk speakers. I could feel my throat constrict in a mixture of fear and strange anticipation. My heart quickened; blood throbbed at my temples.

'Hey,' I called out. 'Have you seen a girl around this car, about half an hour ago?'

They shook their heads, some looking at one another, snickering, speaking softly amongst themselves. I couldn't make out the words, but I could hear the hiss of their sibilants, the cutting edge of their s's.

'Are you sure?' I asked, walking closer.

They stood before me in a line. There was nothing overtly violent about them, but I hesitated and did not come any closer. 'A woman,' I said and I knew that there was a pleading quality in my voice now. 'I was supposed to pick her up. This is her car.'

The words had barely diffused through the heavy night air when they were a blur of movement, rushing towards me. But they didn't hit me, they veered around me, streaking past on all sides in a flurry. I stood paralysed, watching their faces as they passed: young, sometimes beautiful, but so hard, smooth and reflective as the glass and steel surfaces of the building going up across the highway. And in that one whirlwind moment I was aware of so many things, my senses heightened, my veins expanding, shot through with adrenalin, my lungs filling like bellows. I was aware of the tall parking lot lamp throwing a pool of light around me, hurling my shadow to the asphalt; I could smell the smell of the highway, dust and rubber and gasoline, and I could see the tall crane looming up across the highway – was it swaying, teetering? When the skateboarders had finally all flown past me, when I finally turned round to follow them, they were almost out of sight, melted into the blackness of the parking lot, and there was nothing but the distant thunder of their wheels on the asphalt.

I hate her a little for leaving me, even though I know, I know, that she had nothing to do with it. But you just don't leave someone alone in a place like this, you just don't desert them. She knew how much I wanted to leave the city, to escape, and we were going to do it together, all it would have needed was a little patience, but she chose the easy way. I can see her walking out into the midst of the skateboarders – a sacrificial offering: all her actions had a suicidal edge to them towards the end. It was as if she had been gradually poisoned by the city, by some sort of demon's mixture made up of heat and humidity and chemicals in the air. It is jealousy, I know. I am insanely jealous of her

escape, performed with the grace of Houdini, such flair, such composure: vanished into thin air.

The first few times I had returned, I had been frightened, sickened almost, with a wrecking ball weight in the bottom of my stomach. My heart fluttered uncertainly, my legs trembled at the knee. I would park out in the middle of the lot, watching the skateboarders perform against the backdrop of lighted store windows, accompanied by a score of hollow music played over the outdoor speakers. And nothing happened. It has been almost two months now. The skateboarders don't seem to be the least bit interested in me. I curl lazily on the hood of my car, like a cat which absorbs the heat from the engine on a winter day. Perhaps I am leading a charmed life; I can certainly feel a change in myself since that one night, a deepening.

Tonight something is going to happen.

I have seen the tramp several times before: wrinkled, unshaven face, with a mouth that is always moving, always on the verge of forming words. I see him sleeping crumpled against the wall, by the loading entrances around back, or sprawled in the strip of shrubbery which insulates the parking lot from the highway. I am always rather surprised to see him here, so far from the city's heart. But perhaps, like me, he is on a personal exodus, shrugging off the city, moving gradually towards the periphery. My fantasy for him is that the moment he inadvertently stumbles past the city limits, he will undergo a marvellous transformation: he will be clean-shaven, dressed in a modest, but respectable suit. A farmer will pick him up at the roadside and give him a ride far, far out into the country, and then, seeing that he is an honest man, offer him a job, milking cows.

The skateboarders are noisy tonight. It is a Friday and they have been drinking beer procured by an older brother. I watch them, strangely impassive, as their stunts become more fantastic, more dangerous. They move swiftly through the pools of light on the asphalt and are harshly illuminated, made gaunt and terrible. They spin and whirl, around and round. One of them is suddenly thrown to the pavement. He stands up almost immediately, holding his grazed hands before his face, and licks the cut clean, tastes his own blood. An empty beer bottle explodes against the asphalt.

A man on a motorcycle takes a short cut through the lot, the engine roaring. He is returning from a date with a girl he has met only once before, in a bar downtown. Tonight he told her things that mattered to him, things he cared about and he doesn't even know her. On a narrow bed in the dark, with only a sliver of light coming through the window from a streetlamp outside, he told her things he had never told anyone else before, and now he is returning home, sickened, not so much by all the alcohol as by this strange new intimacy, which leaves him vulnerable as a freshly opened wound. He will wake with a start tomorrow morning, his sheets wrapped tightly around him, cold with sweat, his heart racing, his mouth dry, and he will curse the city, once, twice, three times.

The truck's headlights sweep across the parking lot as it turns in off the

highway. The driver pulls over and I can see him, back-lit by the shop windows, fumbling with a road map. He is on his way out of the city, anxious to leave things behind. He unfolds the map impatiently, knocks it flat with the back of his hand. He is travelling to the coast, to a small village whose name he has heard only a handful of times, whispered in his ear like a magical incantation. He knows no one there. It is a sixteen hour drive and he will not stop, neither to eat nor sleep, until he can smell the ocean. The first thing he will do upon arrival – it is an image which is swirling through his mind: dust illuminated by a beam of sunlight – is shed his clothes and walk out along the sand (there is miles and miles of it, they told him), through the mist, and the mist will envelop him, wrap itself around him, and he will be breathing the mist, exhaling it, unable to see through it, but he will be led by the sound of the waves and when he reaches the water he will hurl himself under as long as he can, and when he rises to the surface, when he breaks the surface of the water, he will be free, he will be changed.

The sound of harsh laughter crosses the parking lot like a thunder clap, in a long, reverberating roll. I see the tramp, walking uncertainly towards the skateboarders: a stumbling comic figure. The teenagers stand balancing on their boards, watching his approach, an appreciative audience for a moment, and then they are all moving, gliding around him, surrounding him. Blood pumps furiously through my veins; I am trembling inside, not from fear this time, but relief, elation: the moment is almost upon me. I lose sight of the tramp for a moment, blocked out of view by the swirl of skateboarders. I slide off the hood of my car; the noise from their wheels is almost deafening as my feet touch the asphalt.

The man in the truck stares out through the windshield at the spectacle, transfixed. One hand is poised on the handle of the door; there was a moment when he was prepared to step out, to investigate, but it is passed now, and he is ready to start the engine, to fly. I walk on ahead, towards the circle of skateboarders. The tramp is in the middle, down on his knees – has he fallen, or was he struck, bludgeoned? – and they are revolving around him slowly. Their laughter shimmers across the parking lot in waves. Blood pounds at my temples, my throat constricts in anticipation, my chest heaves for air. I am almost there. The tramp is on his knees, heaving vainly at the pavement, the motorcyclist has fallen asleep, already sweating, the man inside the truck is ready for flight, and I am almost, almost there: we are all of us waiting to be resurrected.

KENNETH OPPEL



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

