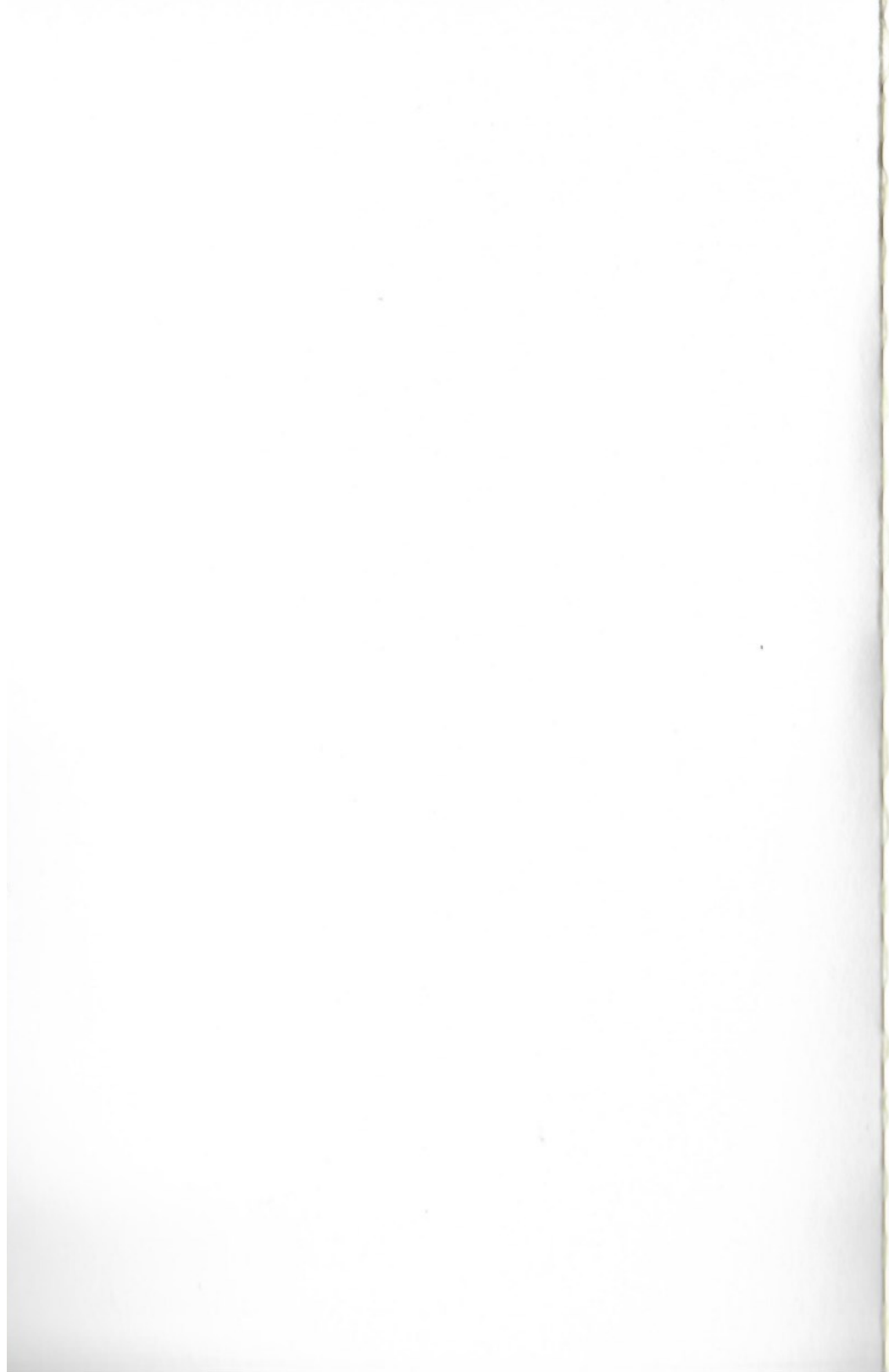


The
Trinity
Review





The
Trinity
Review

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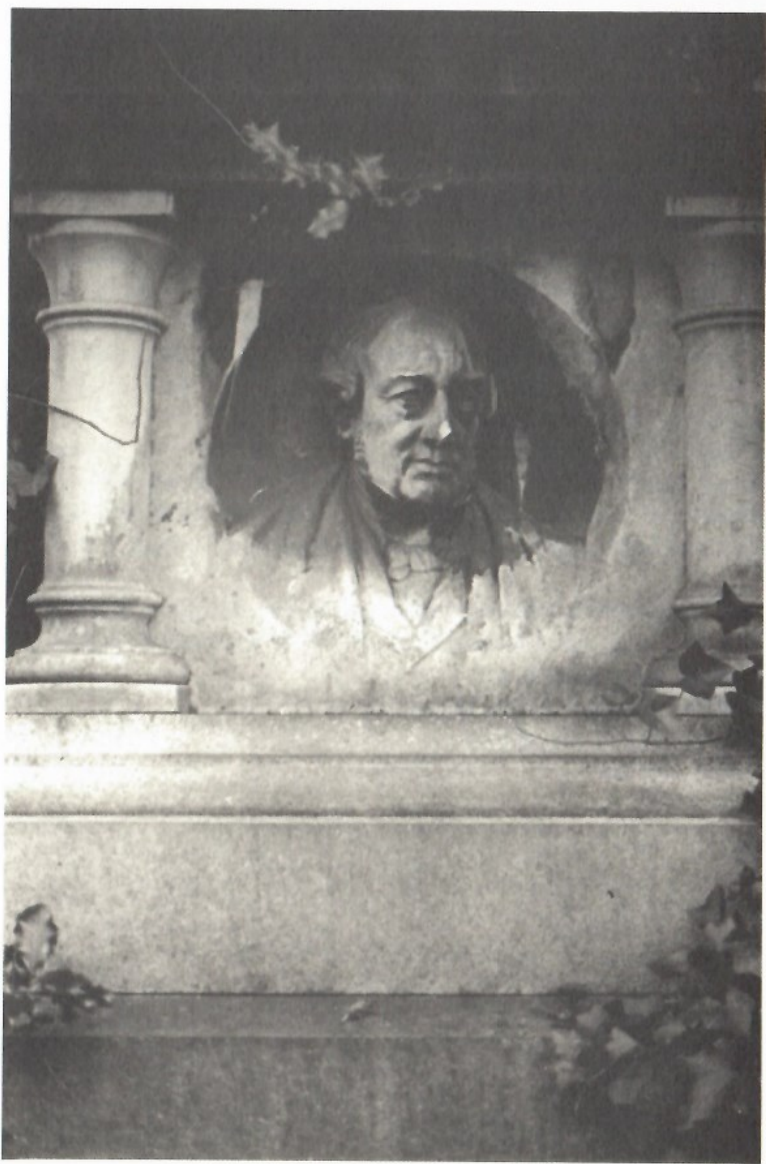
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PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Heroin(e)

From a half-opened drawer of a dresser a
lavender camisole dangles
in the passing insinuation of a draft
from underneath the door.
Dust-threads are loitering in the angles
of a ceiling pressing in upon a bed
where a single tousled bedsheet lies, greying
in the listless light that spreads along the floor.
More like an apparition in a faded photograph
with dawn-dimmed rings around the eyes
a woman rises on an elbow
to brush a straying curl out of her face, as though
stroking herself in the constant voyeur's
soothing sedative and embrace.

HANS WERNER

Paris Trilogy

I

La jeune martyre

Your pink-gold tresses
Flower in the river
Of everlasting sleep,
And in the light of the Louvre
You are radiant.
Ophelia, I never thought
That you would drift so far
From Denmark,
But here you lie
Recognized only by me
While around the corner
La Giaconda wanes.

II

Désespoir

The figure sits,
Head in hand,
At the bottom of the stairwell,
Lost in cold white marble thought.
He touches me,
But the Musée d'Orsay
Bars touch
And so my eyes adore the muse
Through a Luminar lens.
I long to carry his image
Away with me,
But beneath the cathedral ceiling
Hangs light which will,
However sombre, shine
In remembrance and despair.

III

Les catacombes

SHIONA MACKENZIE

Before the Fall

January 21, Yanus Pansiyon – Side, Turkey

I woke to the sound of turkeys and roosters in the courtyard of the pension. A couple of goats ate grass quietly by the side of the shed. The sun rose. I watched the fishermen at the dock. I walked along the beach, found a nice spot and listened to the waves for several hours.

After lunch that day Abraham, whom I had met before (he meets everyone who comes to Side), invited me to join him for some fish he had caught that morning. We ate in his boat.

Abraham is a fisherman. He looks like a fisherman and lives like a fisherman. And he is happy. 'Today is my birthday. Ya, and tomorrow is my anniversary – fifteen years – I have a son who is fifteen years old. I like that.' Every day is a celebration.

We went out in his boat to set his nets. A perfect day. A mile of nets. He showed me a photograph album that he keeps and afterwards as he held it, he thought and said, 'I like these pictures. It's nice to have good memories.'

He sang a bit of 'Lady D'Arbanville' but didn't know the words. He looks a little like Cat Stevens but with a fisherman's beard. I also thought of the 'Old Man and the Sea' though Abraham is not old.



CHARLES MORGAN

January 25, A bus stop – Veranşehir

I was asleep when the bus crossed the Euphrates. In fact, I slept through Urfa and didn't realize until we were half way to the Syrian border. At Veranşehir the bus stopped and we all got off. The whole lot of us laughed at my stupidity.

Veranşehir is a sleepy little village. Made of mud mainly. It was too early in the morning for there to be anyone about. Too cold to stand outside.

We all crowded around the coal stove in the centre of the room, sitting on little stools, doing our very best to communicate. I was an endless source of amusement to them all – each one trying to take over as chief question-asker, while the rest sat full of smiles and stares. I'm a bit of a novelty in these parts.

I was indeed centre stage. My fifteen minutes. 'One only has an "experience" when aware that one is living.' Sartre? – First, 'Photo?' – Photo! (in unison). Next, I got out some cards. We played a couple of Turkish games and then ... card tricks with mime. They were dazed and amazed.

They had earnest faces, deep brown eyes.



CHARLES MORGAN

January 31, Hotel Senol – Diyarbakir

I spent three days in Diyarbakir walking and seeing. Diyarbakir is a city on a hill above the Tigris and is surrounded by huge, black walls.

Outside the walls – the unbelievable beauty of nothingness. The sun breaking through the clouds giving life to the barren, to the desolate.

Within – the smell of coal, the narrow stone streets, the men selling ... everything. Little coal fires everywhere to warm hands, feet.

Old men on donkeys, beasts of burden both. Baggy-croched trousers, heads wrapped in scarves, wrinkled faces, deep brown eyes. Sheep, goats, cows – herded through the main street. Young men pushing fruit carts, boys with trays of bread on their heads, dolmuses carrying twenty-two people and several live stunned turkeys.

Hundreds of children, a dozen layers of clothing, bare feet in plastic sandals, dirty faces, ragged hair, snotty noses. A six year old girl with a baby on her back. Playing in the muddy streets and in the giant puddle. The little blond girl with the black dress – afraid of me, curious. All the curious children gather around me, shake my hand, 'Okay. Hello.' – shy, not so shy, too old, but still ... innocents in the mud under the grey sky.

CHARLES MORGAN



CHARLES MORGAN

Reading

Poetry, they whisper
As if compressed words
will spring up
Like mantis and grasshoppers
before my step in this hot textual field.
A slim wind begins to blow.

A short story, they say
Will twist tightly around an idea,
A face in the crowd, one grief out of many,
Threads binding around a ribbon
So tightly the ribbon tenses, shudders.
Then bows and punctuates upon itself.

Novel, isn't it?
To splay my arms and legs in this chair.
Page after page
the light hovers at my head at 186,000 miles per second.
Details dissolve and merge,
For an instant the hot field again,
monarchs orange and delicate rise
a silent beating cloud of wings.
The author has broken through her text
She enters, like Cupid at my eye
Now under my skin,
we frantically make larger and larger maps and
scenes until all thought – written and read –
swells into an ache and a memory.
Powerful as a planet.
Blue and green
circling.

CHRIS PANNELL

Fade to Black

'Did you see it?'

'Which one?'

'Ran.'

'Which one was that?'

'Did you, Jeeter?'

'I saw it with you, Shitplus, remember?'

'It's like King Lear but with samurais and shoguns cutting everybody's head off.'

'I can't stand those goddamn foreign films.'

'It wasn't that good. Subtitles stink.'

The car glided through gradations of dark, transfixed on dual cones of yellow-white mist. Inside, three formless heads bobbed sympathetically with its movement. Winged with side-shadows, a wake strewn by the proceeding light, the car made its way steadily, seeming to place street, sidewalk, lawn wherever the splash of its headbeams landed. It created the roads it followed, short cement paths rising before it, bordered by the near light but unending in the darkness. It conjured up intersections, sudden turn-offs, sufficiently wide alleys, followed them unerringly. It passed quickly down a side street, through two apartment blocks, the brick walls squeezing together on either side. It took a sharp turn down a curved street, came to its end, found there hedges, houses, lawns, driveways: cul de sac. It backed up.

Around another corner the arc of light illuminated an island of house, garage and encroaching foliage. The frozen image of a tree fell suddenly before a rise of grey-black asphalt slick with new wet, and the car entered a wide street from which unlit houses had retreated on both sides. It seemed then to fall back upon itself, seemed to lose its speed. The road before it was unchanging. To the three figures inside the car it seemed to be moving exceedingly slowly, leisurely, floating like a barge between walls of night.

Jeeter was an excellent driver. Rye and Darin knew it. He had told them so and they had seen for themselves. But telling them was enough. They believed. They had felt the police cruiser slip back, fade out, long before it actually had, and although no one checked, they were sure Jeeter had missed every glistening puddle in his make-shift obstacle course down a winding residential street devoid of stop signs. They had known they'd missed the raccoon; they had

even seen it scrambling in strobic motion against the rattling garbage can and over the garbage bag which they had hit, which had been full and solid and had made a queer noise beneath and then again behind them.

It was typical of all three that they didn't look back. The show was ahead: cut frames of stilled compositions projected against screens of black.

And Jeeter was creating it.

'What about Rambo 1?'

'Firstblood? Everyone's seen it. We saw - no, wait. Were you there? No it was just Jeeter and me.' Rye looked at Jeeter for confirmation.

'Darin likes to go alone so no one will know it when he wacks himself.'

'Fuck off.' Darin's voice trailed back weakly from the backseat, the knuckles of his long hands whitening over his tucked-up knees. But Jeeter was undaunted, throwing his voice like images up against the dark windshield.

'He saw 9 1/2 Weeks nine and a half times.' He snickered once to himself, paused, continued: 'Til they ran out of buttered popcorn.'

'Just fuck off.'

Rye beside Jeeter howled. Literally: the throaty cry rising in pitch then levelling, stretching out taut but not breaking. It seemed to press their bodies outward, filling the empty space of the car like a balloon expanding.

Rye deflated it suddenly with a burp. But the sound didn't clear his thoughts. The conversation had ended as if by common consensus and for a moment in the silence Rye called up an image of Kim Bassinger, placed it in the negative space within him. He saw her moving, soundless, fleeting. He closed his eyes, struggling to keep her there. Darin behind him, folded up on the backseat like a hairless tarantula on a shelf, might have shared his vision. But as far as Rye knew he might be thinking about Jeeter instead. As far as he suspected. And Jeeter now mute was undoubtedly reminded of Louise, who he always maintained looked exactly like Kim Bassinger. She was the girl he had gone out with all last year and had stopped seeing unexpectedly in the summer. Rye had been sick with jealousy until then; afterwards he adored Jeeter consummately.

'Lucky bastard,' Darin ventured. They knew who he meant: her co-star in the film. Probably. Rye took it a bit further, staring at Jeeter amid their murmured assents. Their mood was blackening.

'Do the route, Jeeter,' Rye suggested, surreptitiously tucking a roll of fat into his pants and without a word Jeeter redirected the car, turning abruptly down a side street that opened among lights and colours and movement into a main avenue. The route consisted of a complete run of Forest Hill, followed by an equally lengthy drive through Rosedale. They had just left the latter and were about to commence the cycle with their traditional starting point, a capacious highschool parking lot which adequately filled the requirements of a fantasy hangar. In this neighborhood the houses were largest, the streets more nearly engulfed by overhanging trees that seemed to grow fantastically at night; here the traffic was sparsest and the prospects of meeting someone actually slimmest. But the hope of it was brightest. It was not long before the lighted storefronts, bright restaurant signs, and the cool green and blue glass of less easily identified establishments gave way to the darker recessed expanses of foliage and brickwork, of rustless iron fencing and retreating gravel drives at the ends of which wall lamps glowed like submerged pearls in the hollows of shadowy foyers.

The car entered a long street skirted by dark lawns and inscrutable houses set far back from the path of its light. Reflected in innumerable puddles, the headlight beams split like broken glass down the street before them. Jeeter accelerated; no sign of the movement of his legs showed in his upper body. His eyes glowed hard white, irretractable and unchanging in his darkened face like the reflected headlights of on-coming traffic. But there wasn't any. Rye looked from him to the empty road ahead, the car's speed was increasing rapidly, splayed puddles making wet slapping sounds in succession.

'Look, what I want to know is how did he blow up the chopper ten feet away from him and not get hit with anything at all?' Darin had evidently been thinking about it for some time. He was unaware of the increasing speed.

'It wasn't ten feet.' Jeeter's voice edged between barely moving lips.

Rye turned his head slightly and twisted his mouth to the left to throw his own voice backwards between the seats.

'Who?' His eyes remained on the road.

'Rambo.'

'Who the fuck cares? He's Rambo!'

Jeeter hit the brakes suddenly. The car slewed ominously to one side then briefly to the other before coming to rest in the middle of a fourway intersection.

'Here,' Jeeter said.

He pulled the keys from the ignition and opened his door. Rye saw him in the rearview walking around the side of the car to the trunk. He and Darin were getting out the other side when Jeeter opened it.

On the third run of the route the headlights picked up a couple of figures walking towards them on the side of the road. They were on the passenger's side and Rye was mentally rehearsing his speech. If they are girls, first you ask them casually if they know so-and-so who's having a party. They won't because he doesn't exist. Then you inquire whether they are also going to a party. If so you pretend it was one of your options - 'You know him (or her) too, eh? Well, hop in.' And if they're merely returning home, so much the better: 'That's okay, we can still give you a lift.'

That much was easy, Rye felt. But if they say okay and hop in, well, that's when Jeeter can take over.

But the figures were obscure, ambling quickly, small, too far away. They disappeared up a driveway before the car could come close enough for a look. Jeeter deliberately hadn't sped up to intersect their path. You had to seem uninterested, easy-going. Serendipity was far more cogent than any human design and people generally complied with it unquestioningly. Especially if you also had free beer.

'Guess they live there,' Darin offered as the car passed the dark and empty driveway. Jeeter found him easier to ignore than Rye who had been giving a running monologue for the past forty-five minutes.

'You know what's even worse than subtitles?' he resumed. He had evidently already forgotten the two figures. 'When they try to match the voices with the lips and you see all these chinks speaking English when their mouths aren't moving.'

Darin was trying to connect the observation with their half-forgotten previous conversation. Rye took the silence for a show of agreement.

'That really sucks,' he added.

'You know what really sucks? Your constant talking,' Jeeter blurted.

Rye was snubbed but unhurt. Jeeter was always a little snappish in this neighbourhood, and his other side was coming out in full. He took a long gulp of beer from a can he had retrieved from beneath his thighs. It was still fizzy from riding in the trunk. Darin grinned goonishly in the rearview and Jeeter looked away to the car's front where something had already and unexpectedly begun to rattle.

'Loose,' he suggested.

'Not yet,' Darin returned.

Rye didn't speak for a while. You had to make allowances. It was Jeeter's car after all, a used κ-car, rust-patched and meticulously cleaned. Long lonely working summers had helped pay for it: it was his. And besides, he was the only one who had a licence. Don't forget too that he had won again tonight. Tonight was Jeeter's night, his tribute. He had downed his beer before the others. The ceremony of the First Can grounded in pink-eyed scrutinies and confrontational but good-natured belches, Jeeter usually won. Rye suspected he had a bigger mouth, judging by that and the cavernous drone of his belches. His empty can had been shaken for last drops, hammered open and shoved like a totem over the hood ornament of the car. In the lurid glow of intersection lamps, Jeeter had rechristened her, calling her tonight the Budmobile. It sounded better than the Heineken Machine and half made up for the fact that this evening they hadn't been able to afford the better brand.

'Try Walmur, there's always a party on there.'

Jeeter took the next left. Nothing moved in the headlights.

'It'll be too late now.'

'Catch them coming home. Drive around a bit. Where's the all-night stop?'

'Okay, but look, let me do the talking.'

'If they're on my side it's kind of hard.' Rye put a hand to the window handle in anticipation, put the other over his protruding stomach.

'And Darin, keep your ugly face out of sight. And don't give them any beer unless they get in.'

Darin swore under his breath and turned his face to the window.

'And Darin?' But he didn't answer.

'Shitplus?'

Darin perked up at the appellation. 'Yes?'

Jeeter let out a slow seismic cave-burp. Rye broke into uncontrollable laughter. No doubt. Absolutely doubtless. He shook his head to throw out the laugh that was quickly threatening to choke him, and sobered instantly to stave off the flow of bitter fluid that was rising instead. His eyelids clenched, he heard distinctly Darin's childish giggle. He felt the car turn wildly down a street and bolted forward against the dash when it stopped abruptly.

He looked up.

'Fuck.'

He was looking at the large square back of a truck parked in the middle of the road, dead centre, a couple of feet from the steaming headlights.

'Jesus fucking Christ.'

Jeeter pulled hard on the wheel, bending his elbows forcefully. The car didn't have power steering. His breathing came in short successive bellowed puffs.

The car passed slowly to the right of the truck. As they approached the raised driver's cabin, Jeeter rolled down its window ready to send out an extended finger but the cabin was dark, the windows dewy and impenetrable. They pulled ahead. The truck's headlights weren't on either and yet the motor was running. They could hear it; it sounded like a car engine only louder, more machine-like. Like hydraulics. Rye thought of ball-bearings rolling down a washing board. No, that wasn't quite right. It sounded more like grinding, like metal grinding. A garbage disposal maybe.

They drove on without conjecturing.

A block further on Rye called out 'Pickers.'

The others recognized the lights immediately: giant fireflies hovering above the bushes and flowers of shadowed front lawn. In a moment they could make out the small crouching figures beneath them. Kids collecting worms. Helmets with flashlights stuck on, cans tied to legs and hips – if you got close enough you could see what looked like wet pink mulch inside. They'd seen them often before. Jeeter called out to them as the car passed slowing.

'Hey kids, are there any parties around here?'

The figures, four in total, were silently working along an edge of darkness beneath the looming form of an unlit house. Jeeter had put his head out the window but now pulled it back inside.

'What time is it anyway – these kids stay out all night?'

Rye looked to his watch but couldn't read it.

'Do you think their parents care? They don't live around here.'

Darin was watching the moving lights spellbound through the back window.

'Hey kids ...' Jeeter tried again. Nothing. 'Ah, fuck it.' He stuck his head all the way out.

'Try vaseline. It's better!'

He hit the gas.

They tried the next two blocks, turned off, retraced some of their earlier path, entered a new part of the neighbourhood. The houses here looked newer, brighter, less ivy, more outside lights. And still no girls walking home unattended.

'Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.'

Jeeter looked over at Rye and raised his eyebrows questioningly.

'Don't you get it?' Rye was agitated, his voice rising. 'That truck, that grinding noise? Those kids don't sell the worms to fishing supplies. They put them in the truck.'

'Why would they do that?' Jeeter returned without much attention.

'Oh fuck, fuck. We've uncovered a secret, man. A real fucking scam. It's like Soylent Green. Remember that?'

'Never saw it.' Jeeter looked casually down at the gas, looked up, cast his glance like a spotlight about the street. Maybe they should call it a night. Darin was watching the back of Rye intently.

'Charlton Heston: "Soylent Green is people." The government's scamming everyone but here it's worms.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'Those kids and that truck. They're grinding down worms to put into food. Wormburgers. Ever read about that MacDonal'd's thing? They found ten percent worm meat in a Big Mac.'

'That's why I eat at Wendy's.' Darin smiled.

Jeeter caught his eyes in the rearview. 'That and the grease.'

'No, listen,' Rye was afraid of losing their attention. 'It's a scam, a real scam. They hire these shit-poor dumb kids to collect worms at night, pay them as much as paper route and then sell the worm meat to restaurants.'

'You know what I think,' Jeeter said. 'I think you're talking too much again.'

Rye sipped his warm beer.

'How could the government do that?' Darin's voice was ponderous; it had a garbled underwater quality. Rye looked back at him – is he really this stupid? He saw Darin's glazed eyes. No, he's already drunk.

'It's a movie,' Jeeter said. 'Anything can happen in a movie.'

Darin was trying to break into the conversation, now physically. He had lost his glasses somewhere in the cluttered dark of the back-seat while trying to locate with invisible hands a beer can he had dropped behind Rye's seat. He was myopic and for some time he had sat without them, vaguely troubled but too drunk to be panic-stricken, behind the conversing black shapes that cut holes in the lighted rectangle before him. He had been all the while listening intently. Moved by the flow of words he couldn't quite follow, he had pushed his head between the front seats and was squinting up at Jeeter; he tried to focus with his half-closed eyes on the moonlike face which was looking down at him, squirming his head at the same time forward. It looked to Jeeter like a mole poking its snout out of the ground and peeking blindly about. He had to suppress the urge to smack it.

Darin cast his gaze to the unreachable floor. It was the images in his mind that were stirring him.

'Hey, Jeeter....?'

Jeeter gripped the wheel, crushing a beer can he held against it and rotated it sharply. The can on the hood rattled distinctly. He was driving on impulse now, around block after block. Beer drizzled down his wrist.

'Hey Jeeter, what do worms eat?'

'Shit.'

'No, really.'

'All right. Birdshit. And the bird eats the worms, so we have, as Dreary Drury would say -'

'Mr. Pocks,' Rye interjected.

'Mr. Pocks.'

'The fucker,' Darin slobbered into the seat upholstery.

'As Mr. Pocks, the Fucker would say, a perfect closed ecosystem.'

Laughter rose unevenly. Darin made a ridiculous giggling noise between the seats. Foam tinted saliva glistened on his lips, collected there, dropped to the floor.

'They eat dirt, right?' he said after slow deliberation.

'So, you wanna try it? Man, what is your fucking hassle?'

'No, wait.' He was struggling now, grappling with something unseen, trying with his eyes to bring it up from the darkness below.

'What do you get from dirt?'

'Nutrients, shitplus.' Jeeter licked the rim of the bent can. He inverted it and tongued out the last drop.

'Pass me up another,' he said.

'Tall and chilly,' Rye chanted.

Darin threw his arm back behind him and began chasing cans along the seat. He caught one and passed it up over his head.

'Fuck, what're you doing back there, sitting on them? It's hot as hell.'

'All right, so where do the nutrients come from?' His voice was slow, accents forced but uncertain. It was like he was reading a script that had gone through a paper shredder.

'Man, you're really zood. From dead things, plants, garbage, maybe a dead squirrel or two.'

'And shit,' added Rye.

'And shit.'

They laughed as Darin stared down into the puzzling dark.

Jeeter stopped the car abruptly. Darin's body hit the pair of front seats like they were a practise-tackle. Only Darin never played football. He fell back groaning.

'Yours, Darin. Go do it.'

'Your turn.'

Several times during the night the can on the hood had to be stuffed back down firmly onto the ornament after the car's jostling had loosened it. It had been Darin's turn each time, and he had complied willingly. He didn't really mind. It was all part of the fun. Besides, it was Jeeter's car and Rye had chipped in more than he had for the beer.

He opened the door after three failed tries, dangled his legs out uncertainly. He was groggy and numb as if he had just gotten out of bed. He stepped out, breaking the cool risen wetness of the air outside. Jeeter and Rye could hear him bang against the car before they saw him clearly groping his way down the hood towards the squat cylindrical silhouette perched on its end. He leaned over to grasp it.

And the car disappeared suddenly from beneath him. Jeeter had hit reverse; he and Rye were racing snakingly backward. Darin on his knees moved from side to side, shrinking in the windshield. He looked up at them once before fading into the night.

Jeeter executed an awkward three-point turn and the car roared smoothly down a glistening street. They were still laughing moments later when they reached its end at a three-way intersection. Rye expected the car to pivot then, to turn full circle in the intersection, its headlights severing the close dark in a slow, even motion. But the car turned instead to the right and continued along the piebald pavement its lights discovered there.

Jeeter slowed to read a street sign at the second intersection and then sped to the next. With a cursory glance directed up to the top corner of the windshield, he turned the corner, the car's wheels slicing a clean arc that traced the curb deftly. He was holding the wheel in both hands now; Rye could see his fingers straining against the plastic. The tilt of his head, the directness of his gaze, mounds of mandibles suddenly rounded at the edges of his jaw, catching light and casting shadow, and lips, moveless, tight against hard teeth: Rye saw these things unclearly. They were obscure in the dimness of the car and made even less comprehensible by the vacuous sensation that had suddenly engulfed him. It was the beer, finally. The beer. He was being sent flashes of light and dark, segments of thought and slips of vision, things he was confusedly trying to connect, to string together. There was a grinding truck somewhere and someone shooting at a helicopter. They were driving away from Darin; Darin was somewhere else in the dark. They were parked outside a tall lightless house. Jeeter was quiet beside him. Was he still there or had he too

gone into the dark? No, he was here. And there was more, something Rye might have wondered at. Eyes that glistened like puddles in the lamp light.

They were on their way back to find Darin. Jeeter said it had only been a few minutes. To Rye it felt longer. He had his window rolled down and he had sobered noticeably with the entrance of cool air, but still he was struggling, swimming in cold water beneath submarine light, flashing light. Light and dark.

They were unable to retrace their paths amid the splashes of side-street and walkway, black bands glittering by swaths of sunken gutter and lightless black smears. Billowing mist rose from manholes, met their lights and then them, engulfing all, passed close above like descending sky. Returned to dark, faded to black. There was no way to recall. It was all old and all new. If a particular conformation of architecture, a distinct garbage can or a certain tree dissolved against the windshield, slipped in melting streams off its sides, it might easily arise there again a moment later. They watched, waiting. Interest was replaced with frustration and a slight buoyant ill-ease which Jeeter tried to associate with irritation. He let out a stream of profanity, bringing up with it swallows of gas. Rye, silent, peered through the windshield. He was trying to come around, looking for something he could recognize more to transfix his wandering mind than to bring them home to Darin. It had been so long. Would he have waited? It felt like ages, ages, but Jeeter said it hadn't been. Rye tried again to make out the face of his wristwatch.

'He'll be waiting,' Jeeter said.

Finally they turned down a street that seemed different from the others. Some quality alerted them. Jeeter slowed the car.

'This is it here isn't it?' Rye was sitting up now.

'Yup but no Shitplus.'

'Maybe we passed the spot. Stop, stop. We better get out and look.' Rye looked out the sidewindow and over his shoulder to the row of houses falling behind them. The motion brought back some dizziness.

Jeeter stopped the car.

'Fuck him. Look, he's probably hiding down one of those alleys or in someone's garage or something. Let him come out.'

'Or maybe he tried to cut us off going through the backyards—'

'Good for him.'

'Look, don't be a asshole. Let's just get him. We can kick his ass for it.'

Rye knew Jeeter was staring at him but wouldn't look. The car rocked slightly as Jeeter put it into park, opened his door and stepped out. He walked around the front of the car. His legs seemed to catch fire as he passed the headlights throwing up a white blaze and dark smoke into his face.

'Let's kick his ass then.'

Rye closed his door without its sounding and noticed before turning from the car that the can had fallen from the hood.

They walked back down the street a few paces before they noticed on a side street to the right ahead of them a light moving.

'Pickers.'

A half-block further down the same truck they had seen earlier was standing silently in the middle of the road. It had moved then. But they hadn't left the engine on this time.

Jeeter walked without motioning Rye to follow; he shouldered his way through the shadows which hung curtain-like between evenly spaced streetlamps, came to the sidestreet and stopped. Rye with his shorter strides took a moment to catch up, sloughing off darkness as he passed directly beneath a streetlamp and stood below Jeeter's shoulder. They crossed to the corner house; on its lawn they could discern an edge of hard shadow cutting against a dissolving light.

'Ask him,' Jeeter said. He shoved his hands into his pockets, turned aside noncommittally. Reluctantly Rye crossed onto the curb and over into the wet sinking grass of the lawn. His steps lightened as he approached the back of a figure crouched over the pool of light.

'Hey, did you see a guy around here just now - or maybe a little while ago?'

Rye perceived a motion but it was unresponsive, repetitive, the continual displacement and relocation of bodyweight from one foot to the other as the figure moved gradually along the strip of shadow between flowerbed and lawn. Its head was down. A flashlight fastened somehow to a hardhat or helmet illumined a hazy-edged patch of earth and yellow leaved foliage beneath it. Rye looked back at Jeeter who didn't seem to be paying any attention.

'Hey, kid!' his voice rose cockily. He stepped forward with his hand raised and held flat like a bumper before him. He pushed roughly but with an even exertion against the figure's shoulder as if against a revolving door. And just as easily the figure turned.

Rye saw dim eyes looking up at him, unbelievably dim and enfolded in limp skin wired up with deep crevasses.

'Jeeter, Jeeter -'

He passed Jeeter, stepping backward into the street's light. Jeeter watched his face receding, eyes wide open; it was like being passed on

the highway by a car in tow and watching the almost-human goggling headlights and lockjawed radiator going on mockingly before.

'Jeeter.... They're not kids.'

Even as Jeeter turned and he rose and he saw below the helmet's light a face hanging like a mask in the window of a curiosity shop, he knew that around them other figures were emerging, dragging shadows, shuffling forward into the street's light. Jeeter fell back, bracing himself for a sprint, but colliding with Rye standing stiff behind him his energy was absorbed, instantly lost to him.

And Rye in Jeeter's shadow said nothing. Framed in a darkness featureless as the fringes of the image that was welling up to contain them. He heard adjuncted to the scene, superadded to the form and motion, but incongruously like English dialogue dubbed onto sloppy, uncomplying lips in a foreign film, the sound of slow, low and horribly laboured grinding.

A. N. BOND



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Father

1.

you
who've always been 'tough as a bull moose'
and stubborn
seldom speaking
your pains and dreams
secret even from those closest

now you talk, talk, from your hospital bed
the fear in your eyes
(that same which drove Uncle, near the end
to church – after all those years)

you say you're a fighter
and then, well, you've had a good life

I watch the slack skin on your neck
the grey in your hair I didn't see
and slide away from your challenge
by saying 'you're going to be just fine'

2.

the elevator doors part
silently we watch as the nurse steps out
guiding you back to us

the wheels of the bed rattle
the iv line sways
feet first you're pushed through
into intensive care

when the nurse allows us in, she says you're doing beautifully
bloodied nostril stretched by plastic tubing
taped to your neck drainage lines
hoses drooping from beneath the green sheet
a jagged heart screen

pale, puffy face
a cold hand, and eyes that open slowly

you try to bring your knees up
jerkily your hand moves to your left side
soft mouth caving in where dentures should be
tells us that you hurt

3.
I find you in the hallway
gaunt as a scarecrow within your dressing gown
leaning into the window
you look down at the new snow

you catch up my hand, return my kiss
the warm pressure
of blood and bone

4.
the last day of the year
your fiftieth birthday
the worry smoothed from your brow
as by a cool wind off the river in summer

but the ringing of the telephone still scatters me

D. LAFRAMBOISE

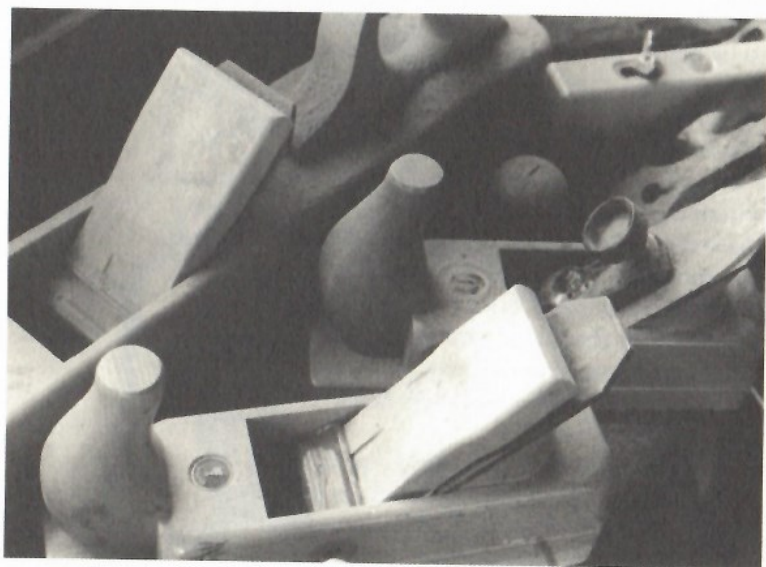


CYNTHIA FRASER

To my friend in black

Isn't that your goal?
to be highly unusual and misunderstood
like a rare bird tattered to pieces,
Operatic gore?
If it isn't then I'm sorry.
I wanted to take you down to a brushy road at night
where the frogs gurgle,
share wine or whatever on the roof of an old tin shed
and just talk
about the things kids notice – like beautiful starling
running over the grass to the sound of racing pianos, and
thrashing pieces of saran wrap in the sun,
Let you forget you have to wear black
and your head hurts
I know, my positivity is making you sick.
Still, I suspect you bother about these things,
Don't you know the rust on this old roof under us
is the same colour as the street lamps
before they go out,
the delicate peace of things being worn down.
Don't you feel at home?
You don't?

JENNIFER MCLEAN



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

A Logical Language

'He goes, he was going, he went, he will go,' Erik said to himself, conjugating German verbs, making his way down the corridor, still feeling somewhat precarious, somewhat fragile.

He had spent five days sick in bed, watching TV, starting with the game shows in the morning, moving into the soaps at high noon, following up with one or two talk shows, and then settling back into the steady stream of sit-coms which would take him up to his early bedtime. He drank liquids until he felt like a funnel, a hollow receptacle through which copious amounts of orange juice passed. When he stood up to go to the bathroom, he felt light and tentative on his feet, his legs threatening to buckle beneath him.

She called him up most days to check on him. She would fill him in on her day's events, and instruct him to get better soon, for she missed him. He could think of little to say, and, to fill the awkward silences, told her jokingly of the latest developments on the soap operas, or asked her a few of the questions he had heard on the quiz shows – what is the shortest river in the world? the smallest mammal? – chiding her for her ignorance.

He walked quickly now, eager to see her. After having witnessed so many apocalyptic confrontations on the television, he felt vaguely reassured that he had a melodrama of his own to act out.

He found her in her room, sitting at the desk, preparing a French composition.

'How are you feeling?' she asked, standing, moving towards him.

'New and improved,' he said. 'How was the party on Friday?'

'All right.'

'Mark told me he saw you kissing David.'

'Oh dear. No. It wasn't like that. David had had way too much to drink. He just suddenly kissed me. What was I supposed to do, slap him?'

'It's a thought.'

'Don't be like this, please. You're impossible when you get like this.'

'You got it, Pontiac.'

'Please.'

'Yes, yes, yes.'

'I missed you,' she said.

'Does he kiss well?'

'Oh, honestly!'

'Eight out of ten women say he does.'

'He was drunk.'

'You were probably flirting with him. You're a flirt. They should bring back the death penalty for girls like you. Completely insensitive.'

'Insensitive,' she said.

'Is it insensitive?'

'Yes.'

'Anyway, none of it matters. It makes no difference to me.'

'You're a hopeless liar, you know that?'

'You're wonderfully patient,' he said. 'You always have been.'

'Tu es complètement fou, chère.'

'French again.'

'You're crazy,' she said, smiling. 'You and your scenes.'

'Yes. I spent all week watching them on tv. This one isn't working quite as well. The lighting's wrong for one thing.' He tried to smile.

'Let's talk about something else,' she suggested.

Talk, he thought. She talks, she was talking, she talked, she will talk. Present, imperfect, perfect, future. He knew that everything had been smoothed over, and he felt, as he often did, defeated by her words.

'How much do you love me?' she asked him.

'Quite a lot,' he replied, but he could tell she was dissatisfied, disappointed by his failure with language.

He searched his mind for a more appropriate quantity. 'I love you infinitely,' he said. 'I love you so much I would die for you. I love you to the ends of the earth. I love you more than any man ever loved a woman. I love you more than Romeo loved Juliet, more than Antony Cleopatra. I love you more than anything in the world. I love you I love you I love you I love you a thousand, a million, a billion times over.'

'Not bad,' she said with a smile, but he looked away unhappily; it had not been what he wanted to say.

'You never speak German,' she said to him.

'It's not a very nice-sounding language,' he told her.

'French is lovely,' she said. 'You should learn French and then we could have conversations. I could teach you to say wonderful, romantic things.'

'I'm not very good at languages.'

'I don't believe it. What's your test on tomorrow?'

'Verbs,' he said, putting down his book.

'You're a good-looking boy,' she said. 'You could be a Greek statue.'

'It's the nose,' he said. 'Have you noticed how straight my nose is?'

She kissed his nose.

'Ma petite tortue,' she said.

'What does that mean?'

'My little tortoise.'

'Why do I remind you of a tortoise?'

'Guess.'

'I don't know. They're ugly as hell.'

'But don't you think a tortoise is proud? Don't you think he must be tremendously proud inside his shell?'

'Why are we talking like characters out of Jean-Luc Godard film?'

'I've never seen one of his films.'

'Let's make love.'

'No, no.'

'Why not?'

Because, because, because.

'In that case, what about a game of Scrabble?'

'Funny boy.'

'I'd only end up spelling the dirty words anyway. How many points for coitus?'

'Nous sommes très différents.'

'We're very different?'

'Yes. Don't you think?'

He stiffened; he didn't know what to say.

'What's wrong?' she asked.

'I think we should learn to accommodate one another's differences, and respect them.'

'You're talking like a commercial again.'

'It's David, isn't it? Tell me.'

'Oh, God.'

'How long has this been going on?'

'I thought we were through with all this.'

'Behind my back the whole time, isn't that right. What a fool I've been!'

'This whole thing is ridiculous, you realize that, don't you?'

'You're right,' he said. 'It's no use. I'm still not getting it quite right. Maybe if we had music. I'm thinking a blues tune, something long and drawn out. Would that help, do you think?'

'I think someone should take away your television set.'

He smiled with difficulty. 'Do you really think we're that different?'

'It wasn't a criticism,' she said. 'You always take things so personally.'

'Sorry.'

'It's getting late,' she said. 'Do you want to study some more for your test?'

She lay on the bed, reading, while he worked at her desk, going over his list of verbs. To say, to believe, to be, writing them out, conjugating them, saying them under his breath. He had most of them perfectly memorized. German was, in all, he decided, a very logical language. He rather liked it.

When he looked up after half an hour, she was asleep, curled like a cat on the bed. He watched her ruefully, the fluttering of her eyelids, the gentle rise and fall of her breast; he listened attentively to her quiet breathing.

He suddenly wanted to wake her and tell her about the time he had emptied out the drawer, removed the stack of letters and notes he had received from her, the hairpins she had left behind (he hoarded them greedily), the two bangles, the tube of lipstick. He had read through the notes one by one, devouring her words: so many I love you's, he thought. So many words. He collected the hairpins into a neat pile, attempted to put on a bracelet – it would not fit over his hand. He then tried to write her a letter, without the cliches, without the old words to support him. He scribbled down a few lines, promptly crossed them out. All he could do was write her name over and over again on the page, as if it were a magical incantation.

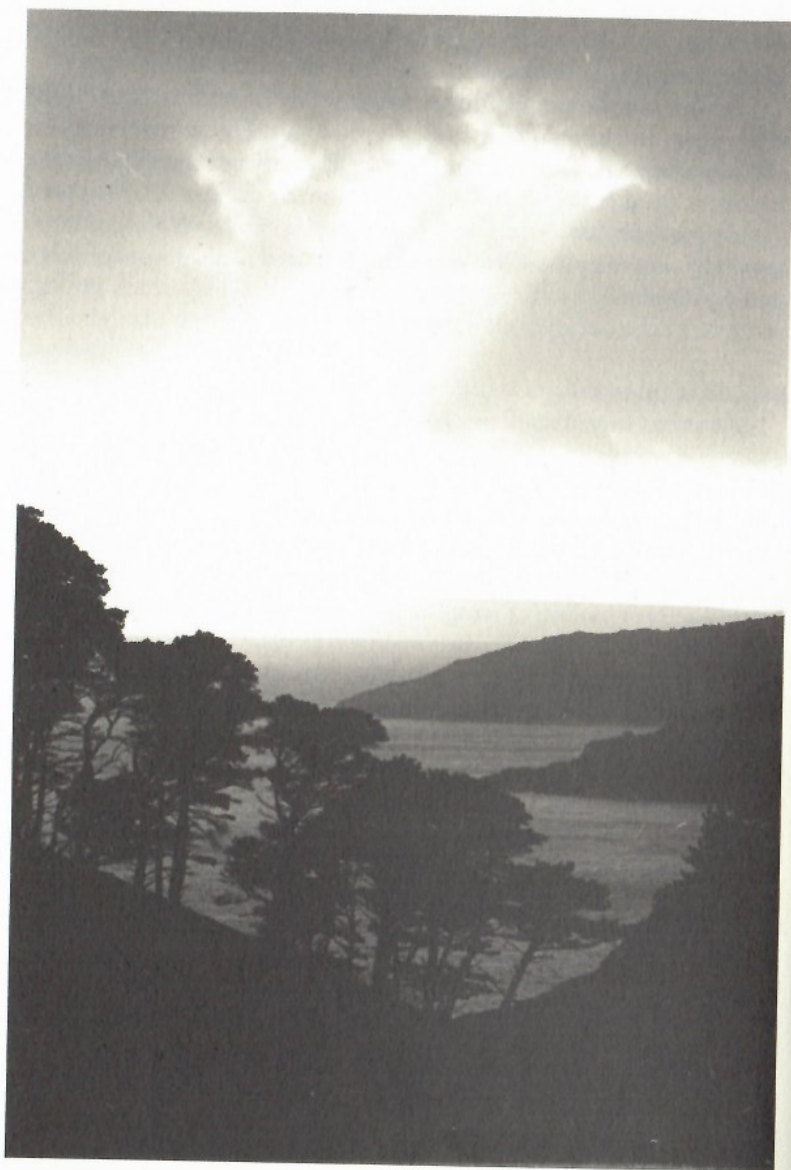
He stood up now, silently, so as not to wake her. He found a candle, lit it, placed it on the bedside table, then turned out the other lights. He had wanted to do this for a long time. He stood beside the bed, looking over her, watching the deep shadows in the folds of her clothing. The light fell on her cheek, an eyelid, the slope of her nose, warmed her auburn hair, collected around her mouth. She was beautiful, perfect, an image to be preserved on celluloid. He shook his head: the lingering close-ups, the whispered promises, the anguished declarations of love.

He felt that all they did was talk, that there were always words, even when there were no feelings. Always words to fill the gap. Once, during an argument, she had reared up from the bed to slap him, hand raised, palm flat, all that energy, eyes like imploding stars, then the energy abruptly contained, her hand hovering in the air, trembling. He had been startled by her sudden movement, genuinely frightened. But in that suspended moment he had felt an odd surge,

an instant of elation in which all the words had run out, played themselves out, and there were none left. Only this, this love contained within the palm of her hand.

He blew out the candle and sat down gently beside her. She shifted in her sleep and he took her hand, warm, in his. He sat there until his eyes became accustomed to the darkened room, and then said softly, so softly it was barely audible, a movement of his lips: 'I love you, I loved you, I did love you, I will love you; I could have, should have, would have loved you. I'll love you until there are no more words left in my belly.'

KENNETH OPPEL



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Letters from a Friend

(in four parts)

I Labour Day: The Joke

Have you ever heard the expression,
He's so drunk he's legless?

Well, you've heard it now

The other night when Michael and I
and Angus and Angus' old one went to see
Tom Waits we were driving –
(in my car) – along Queen Street
when I saw this old drunk bum who wanted
to End It All

he was lying out on the tracks
waiting for the streetcar to come
and end his misery – and these people
were there trying to drag him away
from the tracks before it came

And he kept hitting out at them with his plastic bags
and yelling and finally

They managed to pull him up by his arms
and then I saw he had no legs

I mean he was legless

And I said, 'Look, he's so drunk he's legless'

(Whoops the other people in the car
didn't think that was funny and now

I wondered why I was laughing so hard.)

II Thanksgiving Day: Love Match

There is a new woman in my life
I don't know why I always end up with
these really *fleshy* women.

I asked Michael and he said

'*maternal*' and it didn't matter

what I said after that because

he always had this smirk on his face

as if that was the answer to everything.

The seduction thing is okay
But sometimes I feel like asking what I'm getting
like I saw this short bald guy on Jarvis
talking to a tall blonde hooker
and she was laughing and I heard him say
'You're *really* skinny, eh' and she said
'Sure' and he said 'Let's see your gut'
and pulled up her shirt and
there was this nice little roll of fat like a sausage
just over her tight jeans and he said
'What's this then' and she laughed and said
'Oh that - everybody's got one of those'
And they went off around the corner
Like it was love at long last.

III All Saints' Day: Death's Head

People get so morbid sometimes
It's depressing
I went to the worst Hallowe'en party
last night where half the people
knew somebody with AIDS
And the conversation was like
 'Robin's dead - and Peter's dying.'
 'Has Kevin got it?' 'Gary died last month.'
(The only high point was a man
who came as a penis -
but he had a balloon on his head for Playing It Safe)
All the kids out trick-or-treating
were dressed as skeletons
I bought a death's head ring just in case
it's a city-wide trend
And the vendor who sold it to me
 looked just like one of his rings
Come to think of it all the vendors
 look like that
Like a row of skulls
Pretty soon it'll be a new look -
 Chic to be sick.

iv Remembrance Day: The Last

Not much going on now

Last night I was walking home from the subway
and there was this old man in a wheelchair
who was wheeling himself by inches up the hill
like he does every night – he goes all alone
past house after house to the top of the hill
He has to hold onto his wheels the whole time
so he doesn't roll down to the bottom again.

It takes him hours

He was going so slow last night
and looked so tired I offered to push him up.

He gave me a toothless smile and nodded

(His trouser legs were tied together with nothing in them.)

I pushed him to the top and I could

smell the bourbon like a cloud around him.

He said. 'I think that trip would have been my last.'

NATSU HATTORI



CYNTHIA FRASER

phaedrus revisited

words decay
in the body
moments before
they are
spoken

look

in my hand
is the nothing
i can
give you
the nothing
you will
take away

language
runs ahead
of the heart
in its sad
determination

DENIS DE KLERCK



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

Taking Things

A little after dinner and they are drawing out the evening over coffee in the living room. Though it is almost ten, Will jr., two and a half years old, isn't getting tired or cranky, so they leave him to his own devices. He seems content to watch his mother's and father's mouths in conversation with their guests. The discussion is breaking into two as it always does when the evening wears on. Will stretches on hands and knees to reach something on the coffee table; his mother Angela catches the movement out of the corner of her eye and gives it a cursory glance while her friend withdraws her foot from the pressure of the child's hand and settles herself in her chair. Will retrieves the ash-tray shaped like a boomerang and retreats behind his father's chair.

Will sr. is speaking enthusiastically about investments, in which he is genuinely interested, but his friend is making things hard for himself – trying to shoot holes in a discussion that is nothing more for his host than a pleasant row. Meanwhile the two women bring things to a natural close and lean back in their chairs. Angela turns her head with satisfaction in the direction of her husband. A less patient listener wouldn't hear the vigor under his monotone; the same spontaneity that will come through a week or so later when he will suggest that it might not be a bad idea to nurture the kid on some of the symphonies they've got lying around the house – the more lively ones maybe.

'I'm sorry,' the guest smiles at Angela, 'but what name does your little boy go by?'

Will looks over at his wife, provokes her in the familiar way: 'Billy.'

She cringes, smiles. 'Mostly William.'

In fact, one day when she was playing with her baby, she had been seized by one of those untraceable whims of a new mother and had named him 'Gelly' like it would be a secret nickname between just the two of them. Maybe it was some phonetic instinct or just coincidence that the word resembled Guillaume.

Will steers the conversation to lighter topics to save his harangued friend who is beginning to pick the lint more and more furiously from his pant leg. They drain the evening to another pleasant end. The baby has stood it gamely but is now looking forlorn and making the first trial grimaces. Angela picks him up and puts him on her shoulder to take him upstairs. They say goodbye to their guests and Will follows the child who is facing backwards and making grotesque faces at him – a trick the father had taught him to distract him from bedtime panics.

In the nursery his mother talks while she undresses him and he is beguiled a little longer by the brooch on her breast that winks slowly with her movements. When they leave him alone he talks to himself for a while but doesn't cry.

While Will is in the bathroom she sits at her dresser, stretches her back and unzips herself in one motion, then takes off her brooch, her bracelet, her ear-rings. She hunches over the dressing table, the bodice of her dress bunched in front of her, waiting for the sound of the electric toothbrush to stop. She contemplates the mess on her dresser, gathers up pieces of jewelry here and there to put in her box. She notices just in time before she drops them in something else: grey, soft like a handkerchief. A live moth. She is tired enough that the hiss of her startled breath drawn in isn't any harsher than the hum of Will's toothbrush. She watches the moth dumbly. It revives itself and flies out of the box, tings against the ceiling lamp. Annoying: if it rests too long there it will be a mess. It has already dusted the velvet lining of her box with fine grey scales.

'There's a moth in the room.'

'Where'd it come from.'

'It was in here.' She waves vaguely at the jewel box.

'William. He's bringing bugs in the house, I'll have to talk to him in the morning.'

She is about to say something but he's already in bed and dozing off. She looks at her box again, toys idly with the drawers. Where is that old bronze pin she used to wear, and her jade bracelet she had on only yesterday? She scans the top of the dresser, looks on the floor, checks the drawers of the box again. William? It's too late at night to wonder if this is going to be a problem. Tomorrow she'll get them back. She would just ask him in the morning and he would tell, simply. But something not quite like embarrassment – maybe it is the old playfulness – makes her decide not to, not just yet. They've got to be around the place somewhere, hopefully not outside – she can just see herself having to root around in the garden, already thinking like a thief.

As she lies in bed, in that short time when the mind is neither asleep or awake and the sensible ideas can come out, before she drifts off, she knows they are in the cupboard under the sink. She sees them in a row, in a certain order: the piece of jade, the bronze pin, the buckle with wrinkled pearls in it. In a certain order ...

Like the procession of plastic dinosaurs lined up to see the baby Jesus. It had stretched across the living room undisturbed because she respected the gravity of infancy, its desire for order; she had seen it at other times, this frown on her baby's face: imperious, no need to

explain, just an impatient movement of the tiny hand – No. This one, then this one, then this one. She was at first tolerant and then charmed by his untraceable logic. So, she thinks she sees her jewelery in a row on the waterstained paper underneath the sink.

In the morning she dresses the child hurriedly, as was the habit lately. William mentions the moth at breakfast. 'Did you put it there in your mother's jewel box?' His father's voice is calming, the child rarely has to lie.

'Yeah,' jiggling the yod in that Yeah like an unborn laugh.

'What for, William?'

'To feed it.' But he gets a hint of his own error in their puzzled faces and refuses to explain any more.

'I don't want you to bring bugs in the house anymore, ok? You can keep them outside.' He kisses Will goodbye and heads out the door.

She waits to hear the sound of the car start up and drive away. She opens the cupboard. They're not there? Now what? There's the very real possibility that they were stolen. Still she doesn't ask Will about it but checks everywhere, preoccupied with the idea of burglary. She reassures herself, goes through their papers and the drawers in the office, returns to Will who is playing with the crusts of his father's toast.

'Gelly' she begins, 'if you want to play with something of mine you should ask me first.' No, how does William do it? He handles these things better. Gelly looks up, the oblique warning has made him anxious. She tries again but her words sound alien to her. A memory that loosened off from the night's dream comes back to her: It was when William was away and the baby wasn't a year old. She would sleep knowing that he would wake up first and kneel with his arms braced against the crib, watching her until she wakes. The sunlight would seep through the blankets until she was too warm and she would wake to look into his giant, solemn eyes. Then he would laugh and she would pick him up and play and lie around in the sun.

That room had been his nursery, he should touch anything. She wonders if she wouldn't have thought her jewelery was anything but trinkets, would have only been concerned that he might stab himself; she would snap off the pins and give them to him except the pearls he might swallow. How is she going to do it from now on? She envies her husband's good sense; with him their child will turn out all right after all. It's not really stealing. With other things; car keys, matches, hairpins, he examines them all politely and returns them to their owners. What surprises her in the sound of 'my things' is how she didn't notice when she had lost the intimacy of the first few months.

'It's not uncommon to feel that way.' They are standing under the ferns in the solarium, Angela and her friend touching a brown leaf now and then while they talk. Will is shy of the visitor and keeps running in and out of the kitchen, humming excitedly, but his mother relaxes in the company of another adult, forgets what was bothering her.

Will runs in again, talking to himself, turning his arms above his head. She spies a glittering violet piece of glass tucked in his fist, the brooch she wore last night. She smiles in understanding and reprobation and can't help but laugh out loud. It might have been the memory of something before Will and the baby, how the ancient would throw gems into a well out of superstition, that she dismisses so quickly. She has the sudden urge to chase him, lay her fingers heavy with diamonds on the straps of his corduroys. As if he was someone else's child who was thieving, robbing from her. As if mischief was more, engaging her, there is something about stealing that she has forgotten.

He is an animated chip off something different from herself, something still amoral, asexual, amazed, separate of herself. But the news is no cause for alarm, it's only one more 'blade among the pinions,' the new blade on her love already bristling with small hooooks and the claws of birds that snag deeper in her with time.

It will bother her at first – having to form her mouth around the word No. It will scratch the roof of her mouth the first hundred times she says it but it will lose its roughness. It's just a phase and it will pass.

JENNIFER MCLEAN

Bones

Every household has a crypt

'Are these empty boxes?' –
piled three deep in a closet
behind the flowered curtain

hatboxes striped boxes tasselled cake boxes
monumental in dust
The memory of mothballs
kept secret in tissue paper.

Shake them –

'Not all of them are empty.'

Some boxes do not rustle,
but rattle –

In the dark
large dry pieces rolling,
chipped with age
Fragments in crevices
chalk-white and brittle as shell –

'Whose bones are these?'

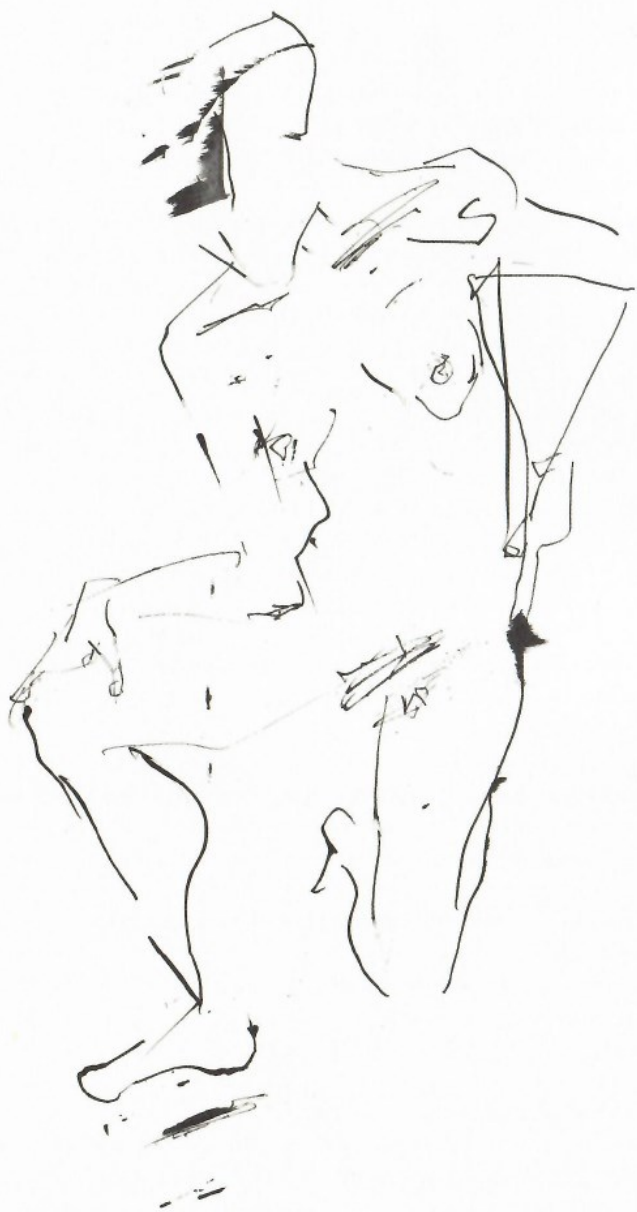
'Who knows? everyone since the war.
They all look the same.
We should have got proper caskets
or at least labelled them –
but you can't tell them apart any more.

Put them all in one box.'

For once an age the dust will shift

And even crypts
must be turned out.

NATSU HATTORI



ALBERT LIU

Movement

His flight had been delayed until morning, and the airline put him up overnight in a hotel. From the balcony of his room, he could see the glow of the city in the distance and felt oddly dislocated from it, as though viewing it from the tiny window of a banking plane. The hotel smelled like all the others he had stayed in, stale and antiseptic. In his room was a queen-sized bed (he tested it with his hands: the mattress was uncomfortably hard), a television on a table, a mirror, two chairs and, bolted to the walls, the obligatory hotel paintings, the snow-covered landscape and the schooner under full sail in a storm; in the bathroom, a sanitation wrap around the toilet, a counter with four cheap tumblers, also wrapped, and a basket filled with little soaps and packets of shampoo.

The balcony, four floors above the ground, looked out onto a stagnant river, gray, viscous, spanned by a concrete bridge which made a ghostly moaning sound when cars passed over it – a sound which, he knew, would keep him up most of the night, anxious and attentive.

He stretched out on the bed, exhausted, and clasped his hands behind his head. His eyes rested for a moment on the telephone, but he imagined that her voice would be faint and far-away, dissolving in static, as though they were already separated by a vast distance.

He looked at his watch: one o'clock. Sleep seemed ridiculous – soon it would be time to make his escape, to leave, on a plane which would take him back to the coast, to a sea that met the horizon, after sunset, like a strand of blue neon. He could remember his last arrival, walking down the interminable succession of ramps and corridors, weaving through the lethargic crowd, still shrugging off sleep, his heart contracting to be here again. He had seen the mountains from the air, and the ocean, which the plane had glided over on its final approach, its belly, it seemed, almost skimming the surface of the water like some great seafaring bird.

He unfolded the ticket from his pocket, and, opening it to check the departure time, released a fine filament of hair, drawn upwards slightly, floating, in the swirl of air created by his movement. He caught it carefully in his hand, closing his fingers around it, netted butterfly. He would often find strands of her long blond hair coiled through the fabric of his sweaters, the sleeves, the collar, and he would extract them carefully, one by one, measuring them out between his hands, amazed at their length. He would find them, insistent as memory, marking the page of a book, on his bedsheets in

the morning, tightly curled, or entwined sometimes through his own hair.

'How long does it take for your hair to grow this long?' he had asked her.

He shook his head, refused to think. He had eaten poorly, in anticipation of the flight, and was now beginning to feel hunger, hollow and aching in his stomach. He pushed himself up off the bed, jingled his pocket for change and went down the corridor – walls of red and purple, a floral pattern – to the vending machine. A loose fluorescent tube in the ceiling flickered violently, making his motions seem slow and stuttered, threatening to stall his movement, to transfix him.

'How long does it take for your hair to grow this long?' he had asked her.

'A couple years. I don't know exactly. A long time.'

'How old is this?' he asked, brushing the very ends.

'Two years maybe.'

'Then we began, say, here.' He moved his hand upwards an inch or so.

'About then, yes,' she said, smiling.

The lounge downstairs was quite empty; it contained, within its claustrophobic clutter of furniture and artificial foliage, only a few tired-looking people, travellers like himself, he imagined, who had reluctantly decided to stop here for the night. A spidery man with a guitar was playing country and western in a corner. At the bar were a man and a girl, whose conversation reached him, diffusing through the smoke-tainted air, as he passed.

'Tomorrow?' she whispered urgently.

'No,' he said.

'The day after?'

'No, not the day after.'

'When?'

'I don't know yet.'

'When, goddam it?'

'Go to hell.'

He watched them, in that moment so still they seemed etched against the background, the country and western singer's voice hanging on the same note, one, two, three seconds, the man hunched over, motionless, glaring at the counter-top, the woman turned to him, the fingers of one hand almost touching his forearm.

At three he gave up trying to sleep. In the bathroom, he unwrapped one of the tumblers and filled it with water. He sat down in a chair, flipped on the television and was greeted successively by test patterns, a bizarre documentary on horse breeding, and an Italian Hercules film, dubbed into English with the most impassive of voices, the words completely incongruous with the actors' jerky, emphatic movements. After switching off the television – images flattened against the screen – he sat down on the edge of the bed, listened to the white noise of the air conditioning, vaguely sickened by the hotel smell and the hotel colour scheme. He stood up again and walked around the room, pausing before the painting of the ship. It was riding the waves at an impossible angle; in a moment, it would capsize. 'For those in peril on the sea': the title of the immense oil painting hanging in the museum staircase. Women kneeling on the floor of the church sanctuary (tall gothic arches lost in shadow, cold stone), hands clasped in prayer, hands over faces. Lighting candles. Lighting candles beneath the Virgin. Neither of them had liked the painting, but the inscription made him think of Odysseus returning home to Penelope, of a long-awaited arrival. And now, standing there in the hotel room, he knew it was impossible to stop the flow of images which were circling through his mind like a loop of celluloid, a strand of memory.

'How long does it take for your hair to grow this long?' he had asked her.

'A couple of years. I don't know, exactly. A long time.'

'How old is this?' he asked, brushing the very ends.

'Two years, maybe.'

'Then we began, say, here.'

'About then, yes,' she said, with a smile.

He remembered, as a child, reading a story about a craftsman who carved minute scenes, impossibly delicate, into a single strand of hair, a circus procession with somersaulting clowns, elephants with their trunks held high, a caravan, a cage with a lion. He was seized by the thought that perhaps, with enough magnification, he would find, inscribed in each long filament of her hair, a series of static tableaux, like the individual frames on a strip of film, joined back to back to show the staggered, stop-motion movement of her life.

'So here,' he said, measuring her hair carefully, 'the first time we made love, and here, the weekend at your brother's cottage in the spring – do you remember? – and here, the summer – your hair's still sun-warmed – and somewhere along here,' he paused, but was unable to halt his words, 'a moment of infidelity.'

'Don't,' she said.

'I'm sorry. I still think about it sometimes.'

'You look for things,' she told him. 'It's as if you deliberately search for things to make yourself unhappy.'

'No,' he said, though he knew that she was quite correct, that he was a self-indulgent bastard, taking an almost perverse pleasure in unearthing hurtful things, like artefacts from an ancient ruin.

'You still haven't forgiven me, have you?' she asked.

'Have I been that cruel? I don't use it as a weapon, do I?'

She shook her head. 'I guess not, no. But I can tell that you still think about it. I see you sometimes, looking at me reproachfully.'

'I wish we could cut that bit out,' he said, looking at her hair.

'That's silly,' she said.

'Did you love him much?'

'I don't think about him anymore.'

'Truly?'

'Truly, yes.'

He pulled gently at her hair, helpless, certain that the memory must be there still, etched with unerring precision. The instant he had opened her diary, like violating holy ground, he knew he would regret it – child's searching fingers reaching for the oven element, Pandora's box, can of worms. A description of a man not himself, a man unfamiliar to him, someone she had worked with over the summer while he was back home on the coast. A description of arms that were not his, the taste of a different mouth, eyes a lighter shade. What had he been doing, he wondered, that moment – putting his fist through the wall in frustration, in fear of their separation, or walking along the beach at dusk, mercifully oblivious, at peace, building walls of sand against the incoming tide.

'It was so long ago,' she said, 'so unimportant.'

'You never told me.'

'You were never supposed to find out. What you did was a breach of trust, too.'

He watched her attentively, puzzling over this double betrayal, seeing her in sharp focus, the rest of the room flattened to a single plane. He breathed against the tightening of his chest, the tangible sense of constriction, the unhappiness, the wariness. He touched her hair, thought once more of her embrace with another, dutifully recorded there, each strand a reminder.

He lay quite still on the bed, his thoughts – he was certain they must have filled the room by now, whispering along the floor, whirling in

the corners of wall and ceiling – punctuated by the moaning of the bridge and the rhythmic sweep of car headlights across the drawn curtains. He felt a moment of panic, of confinement, a twinge of airplane claustrophobia; he felt trapped within the room, within the walls, the ceiling and floor, boxed in, as a film image fixed, motionless, within the borders of its frame. He wanted suddenly to explode everything – the television set, the paintings nailed to the wall; he wanted the whole goddamn room ruptured, combusted, the walls exploded outwards, the hotel furniture devoured in this clap of atomic thunder, and the lurid hallway, and the vending machine which had eaten his change, consumed in the conflagration, and the bridge outside his window, and the river it spanned, vaporized, and to hell with the memories he had inscribed in her hair, and in himself, and to hell with the jealousy he held inside and to hell with the jealousy that contained him. He wanted to accelerate time, not merely to the point of his departure, but past that to his arrival – film run in fast motion to its very end: nothing left but a rectangle of light – to the moment when he would return to her heart-whole, everything shorn from him.

That moment: touching, warmth between her legs, mouths so dry they could barely kiss, promises made, legs open to him, gently, lips brushing across his, ribs pressing against him, her breasts, fitting against him like a puzzle, yin and yang, curving into him, caught beneath his movement, gentle rocking, hair across her face, strands held in the corner of her mouth, arms moving smooth across his back, fingers tracing shapes on his skin, eyes closed, kissing her breasts, the softest thing he knows, hard pointed tip, smell of perfume distilled by her body, her heat, promises made again, holding himself aloft, as if preparing for flight, her hands moving down his flanks, holding him into her, then the long train journey, drawn, urged forward on tracks of light, the rails glistening light and the cross pieces light also, and the arrival ahead in the distance glittering on the plain like a jewel.

It was not until close to dawn, a gray lightening behind the curtains, that he could feel sleep coming to him – that wonderful, delirious moment when sleep was inevitable. And he saw, playing through his mind, one after another, a sequence of images: a plane floating, effortless, above the city in the early morning before dawn, an immense constellation, viewed through the window, expanding endless before him, the banking aircraft making its final descent, and, a train, shuddering by night into the heart of the city, hurtling along the tracks, bringing him closer to her, the lights of the city fast approaching, guiding him along the network of tracks, and, a car

moving along the highway, the light from the streetlamps sweeping through the window, illuminating him for a brief moment, the expressway slinging him into the city, six lanes of throbbing traffic, accelerating. These were the images which travelled through his mind in the moment before sleep took him, these images of arrival.

KENNETH OPPEL

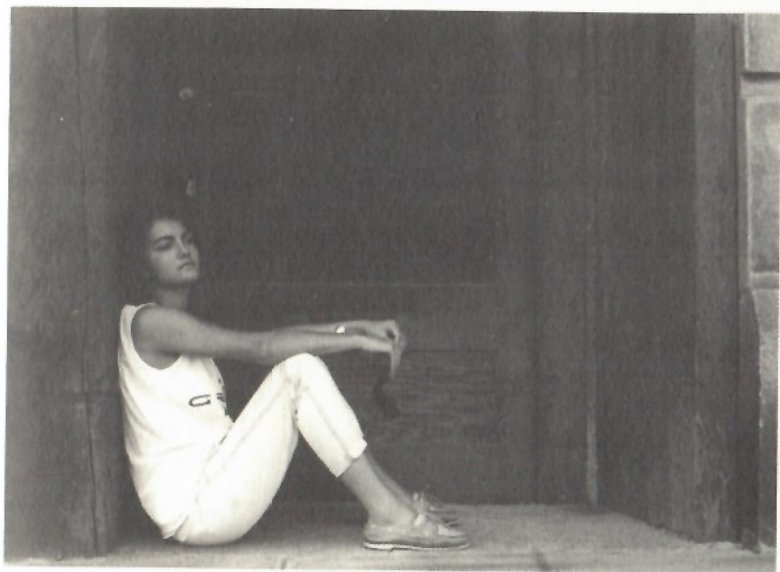


CYNTHIA FRASER

By Lac Castor

You and she and I
Have been trespassing
On virgin snow.
In search of tranquillity,
We uncover tension
In the crunch under our snowshoes,
In the creak of leather bindings,
And in the glances under the sunglasses
From her to you –
From me to her –
From you to us –
She senses our closeness.
I sense our distance.
Our legs stride in harmony,
But our silence ...
When at least we reach Lac Castor,
We find it frozen over
And we stop and marvel.
You set up the camera
And we sit smiling close together.
The sunshine is crisp.
The camera clicks
And we are frozen together
In black and white.

SHIONA MACKENZIE



PETER RIDDIHOUGH

