



# The Bookpress Quarterly



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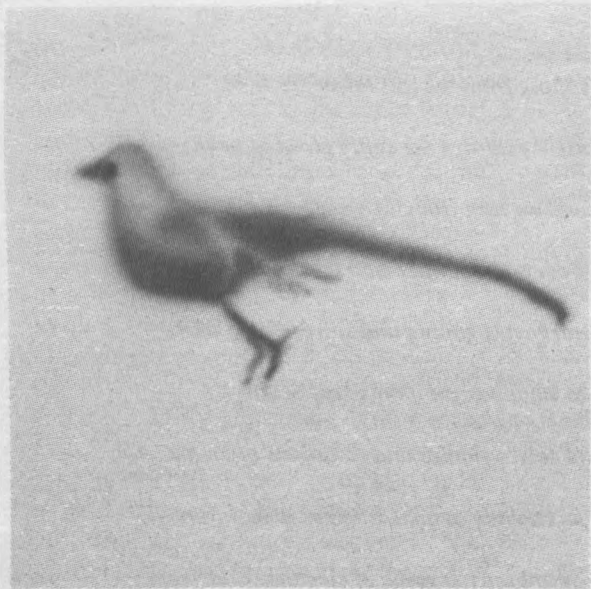
fiction

poetry

art

December 1997

## River Angel



Tim Merrick

### A. Manette Ansay

*River Angel is an excerpt from a novel that is forthcoming from Morrow.*

#### Author's note:

*River Angel* is a work of fiction, the best way I've found to tell the truth. It is less the story of an individual than the history of a community; it is less about what did or did not happen in a town I have chosen to call Ambient than it is about the ways in which we try to make sense of a world that doesn't.

In April, 1991, in a little Wisconsin town about a hundred miles southwest of the town where I grew up, a misfit boy was kidnapped by a group of high school kids who, later, would testify they'd merely meant to frighten him, to drive him around for awhile. Somehow they ended up at the river, whooping and hollering on a two lane bridge. Somehow the boy was shoved, he jumped, he slipped — accounts vary — into the icy water. The kids told police that they'd never heard a splash; one reported seeing a brilliant flash of light. (Several people in the area witnessed a similar light, while others recalled hearing something "kind of like thunder.") All night, volunteers walked the river's edge, but it was dawn before the body was found in a barn a good mile from the bridge. Investigators constructed this unlikely scenario: the boy had drifted downstream, crawled out of the

water, climbed up the slick embankment and crossed a snow-dusted pea field. But if that were the case, then where were the footprints? The evidence of his shivering scramble up the embankment? And how could he have survived the cold long enough to make it that far?

The owner of the barn had been the one to discover the body, and she said the boy's cheeks were rosy, his skin warm to the touch. A sweet smell hung in the air. "It was," she said, "as if he were just sleeping." And then she told police she believed an angel had carried him there. For years, it had been said that an angel lived in the river. Residents flipped coins into the water for luck, and a few claimed they had seen the angel, or known someone who'd seen it. The historical society downtown had a farmwife's journal, dated 1898, in which a woman described how an angel rescued her drowning family during a flood. Now as the story of the boy's death spread, more people came forward with accounts of strange things that had happened on that night. Dogs had barked without ceasing till dawn; livestock broke free of padlocked barns. Someone's child crayonned a bridge and, above it, a wide-winged tapioca angel. Several people reported dream visitations by the dead. There were the stories about the boy himself—that he frequently prayed in public places, that he never once raised his hand against another, that a childless woman conceived after showing him one small act of kindness.

Though both church and state investigators eventually deemed all evidence unsubstantiated, money was raised to build a shrine on the spot where the boy's body was found. I have been to the River Angel shrine, and to others. I have traveled to places as unlikely as Cullman, Alabama and as breathtaking as Chimayo, New Mexico. I leaf through the gift shop books about angels, books about miracles, books filled with personal testimonies. Books in which supernatural events rescue ordinary people from the effects of a world which is becoming increasingly violent, dangerous, complex. Though I myself am not a believer, I understand the desire to believe. I live every day with the weight of that desire. Ultimately, I have found it is meaningless to hold the yardstick of fact against the complexities of the human heart. Reality simply isn't large enough to hold us. And so the sky becomes a gateway to the heavens. Death is not an end but a beginning. A child crossing a pea field into the indifferent, inevitable darkness may be reborn, raised up by our longing into light.

—A. Manette Ansay  
Plymouth, Wisconsin  
1996

*Thank you, Saint Martha, for favors granted. The following prayer is to be said for 9 consecutive Tuesdays: Saint Martha, I resort to your protection and faith. Comfort me in all my difficulties*

*and through the great favor you enjoy in the house of my savior, intercede for me and my family. (Say 3 Hail Marys.) I beseech thee to have infinite pity in regard to the favor I ask of Thee, Saint Martha (name favor) and that I may be able to overcome all difficulties. Amen. This prayer has never been known to fail. You will receive your intention on or before the 9th Tuesday, no matter how impossible it might seem. Publication must be promised. BD*

—from the Ambient Weekly  
December, 1990

The boy and his father stopped for the night somewhere west of Canton, Ohio. Around them, the land lay in one vast slab, the snow crust bright as water beneath the waxing moon. The nearest town was ten miles away, unincorporated, and there was nothing in between except a handful of farmhouses, Christmas lights burning in each front window; a few roads; fewer stop signs; a small white crossroads church. High above and out of harm's way were the cold, gleaming eyes of stars, and each was so strangely iridescent that if a man in one of the farmhouses were to have risen for an aspirin or glass of warm milk, he could have been forgiven for waking his wife to tell her he'd seen—well, something. A glowing disk that swelled and shrank. A pattern of flashing lights. And she could have been forgiven, later, for telling people she'd seen something too

Continued on page 46

## Inside:

An Excerpt from *The Mensch* by David Weiss

Poetry by Lynn Powell

Edward Hardy's "Assessment"



# Local Affairs

## i. Near Cambridge

How she holds back, then floods and giddies us,  
Dame Memory: her plump, patched hedges  
rich in song, her fen skies wide with the long  
drone of insects and distant aircraft. The smoke  
of garden fires sharpens, at a short remove, the air.

This close and too-sweet island, whose halls  
and chapels glow like honey in the failing light,  
draws at her children. Behind the cropped  
and proper yews, we imagine a hidden garden  
entered once, if at all, and then as a child.

It seems close again. Even the tight, pale nettles,  
clutche among hay s'ubble, catch at and repossess me.  
Faces and gestures rise, rise from the grass, friends  
twenty years out of mind; their movement and voices  
become all England's: light swelling from the fleshly earth.

## ii. Buildings

Quoin, buttress, mullion and corbel:  
foursquare banks and colleges  
stand on profits solid as themselves:  
the scholarship of hops and wool.

Who occupies their rooms, if only for a while,  
should be shriver of the masters' souls.  
Their poor and peasantry had little part  
in this: a lot not theirs to choose, although

Their work doles out our privilege  
and leisure yet. No theory sweetens  
without it's well provided for  
by merchandise, or government, or war.

Libraries and the tall chapels rise

in skilled deliberation. Will such craft  
and argument in fretted stone redeem  
each day's dull work for it? Know that  
rood screen and roof boss sweetly gilded  
were paid in the crash of battle; that the stuff  
of men's lives bought the mason ale and bread,  
who cut free these miracles of love.

Do we find his windows delicate enough?

## iii. Old World Order

Eastward over Europe, over years, how many windows  
glowed and dimmed and stayed unlit through war and terror  
and were remembered and made good after it?  
This crippled street in Budapest, in Warsaw,  
shows a dozen periods, starting and ending  
in the corners of each house. Every

square and alley recalls a hero: soldier,  
poet, patriot, whose provenance and name  
has changed as the demands of history change.  
It's easy to smile at a regime that so  
demotes and sanctifies its past, and easy to forget.  
But whatever history we choose construes us;  
retelling it we make our place:  
a style reflexive as this courtyard's walls  
turned in upon themselves, each course  
incorporating what it has replaced.  
As morning cloudlight from gold leaf and saints,  
the mind slides off such mass and won't be held.

Most of what had fallen was rebuilt

and cast into an image of itself. It is too square and neat.  
The lives within seem sheltered from the street

yet are the substance of its every twist.  
One who remembers may not understand  
but who forgets, forfeits his place and land.

## iv. The Vanity of Theory

Lifting from the last tower the light,  
night explores the softly glowing town  
and we turn from the window's blank,  
from the real pitch and loss of hold—  
gargoyles gaping and spires in the dark—  
to what we can if only half begin  
to solve: riddles and traditions of an art  
so recently assumed: codes to be invented  
or to break, a game of elegance and proof,  
which keeps far off for hours the void.

And while darkness slips out on the town  
and westward across the island, and lights  
flick and go out, a doubt lifts and blows  
among old papers, fear flickers in the gaps  
between houses, and we say: "It is only the night,"  
and think, if thinking be done at all, that  
we are safe in our model of the world.  
And the vision whispers and builds around us  
softly, softly; it is a theory which so nearly  
fits the facts, we will soon have accounted for all.

—Philip Holmes

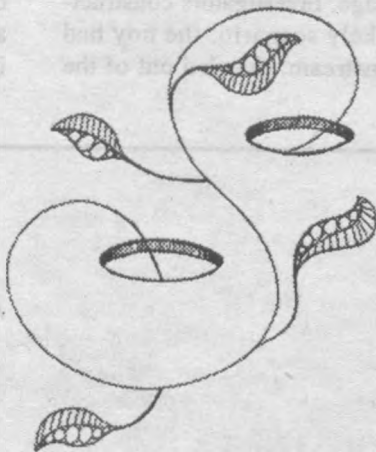
Philip Holmes lived in Ithaca for seventeen years. In 1994 he moved to Princeton where he teaches applied mathematics and mechanics. He has published three collections of verse, the most recent being *The Green Road* (Anvil Press). The poems in this issue are taken from a forthcoming collection.



### The Bookpress Quarterly Statement of Purpose

The Bookpress Quarterly is a journal of fiction, poetry, essays, and artwork, published as a supplement to *The Bookpress*. It shares with *The Bookpress* the goals of encouraging literary community and conversation in upstate New York and showcasing that region's best writers and artists.

Illustrations by: Laura Glenn, Julian Bell, Joseph Meyer, Zevi Blum, Tim Merrick, Ayrton R. Johnson, Gillian Pederson-Krab, Anne Campbell



Ayrton R. Johnson



# Assessment

Edward Hardy

From the onset, we understood that gaining access to the Pinchbeck Club would prove to be our most difficult task. Still, we remained confident that a full and fair assessment would eventually occur.

The property itself, otherwise designated as Lot 314 on Plat 7 of the tax assessor's maps, is situated in a hilly, mixed-use zone of residential and professional buildings. The site has been further improved by an immense gothic structure of 111 years in age. The exterior is brick, the roof slate, and aside from numerous stained-glass windows depicting peacocks and serpents, the building closely resembles other social clubs of that era.

According to available records, the structure contains 13,124 square feet of gross living area. However, for assessment purposes—as we are in the midst of a rolling revaluation and the Pinchbeck Club has never claimed tax-exempt status—the building's interior has remained uninspected since 1927. Records show references to numerous failed attempts, the most recent occurring in 1972, followed by the dismissal of that member of the assessor's staff. Nevertheless, we remain convinced that material improvements have occurred during the intervening decades, hence we assumed this task.

Initial contact attempts for assessment purposes were made by phone, though at no time did we in fact speak to any members of the Pinchbeck Club. Instead, our repeated calls reached only a string of answering machines attached to a series of apparent wrong numbers. Once, a gruff, female voice told us to, "Leave the speed data in kbs and hang up immediately." Later, a male voice suggested we, "Place our repeat orchid order at the beep."

Following regular and routine surveillance, we observed that daily activity at the Pinchbeck facility increases toward mid-week and peaks in the early evening hours. Through the arched first floor windows we observed a number of older individuals gathered for drinks in a room near the heart of the building—adjoining what we believe to be a dining area. The functions of the numerous upper rooms we find difficult to imagine.

Subsequent to our arrival at 5:49 p.m., as we lifted the parrot-shaped knocker on the oak door, all exterior lights were suddenly extinguished. Eventually, an elderly woman with red-rimmed eyes opened the door and said, "We have fulfilled our enrollment order—now lift on out of here!"

After collecting our thoughts, we knocked again. Following a longer interval, the door swung back to reveal a pink-faced, walrus-shaped man wearing a cummerbund, who said, "No one has sent for you—as of late."

We explained that we were from the municipality, and for the purposes of accurate and proper assessment we were required, by law, to view the interior. We added that, as the quality of our assessment would be reflected in the organization's tax bill, without proper access the municipality would perhaps be forced to speculate.

"Municipality?" The man removed his glasses. "Ha! We are a principality!" He slammed the door.

Admittedly, at this juncture we debated involving the authorities. However, as the sleet began in earnest,

we grasped the cold parrot-knocker a third time. In response, a tall, elderly woman holding a blue, beaded purse and wearing an obvious wig, opened door and said, "Who?"

We replied that our briefcase contained several quite valuable items which we thought might interest the Pinchbeck membership. This statement, of course, had no basis in reality and how it came to fly, improvisationally, from our lips remains a mystery. Perhaps because we were wet? The woman, however, stepped back as though we were expected. "You've come to play," she said.

Of course, we were surprised. Once inside, in addition to the noise and general clatter, we noted that atmosphere smelled of hickory and nutmeg, and felt somehow different, as though the air pressure had changed. We were startled by the intricately carved paneling in the front hall. The ceilings and upper walls were finished in light colors. The rugs were threadbare, but as non-structural items, these are not considered for assessment purposes.

A gaunt man wearing a well-cut suit hailed us by chopping the air with the side of his hand. Although clearly over six feet in height, the man also wore a helmet. Instead of asking our business, he began running his fingers across the headpiece's hammered surface and smiling, as though this were providing him with an intense sort of mental pleasure.

"I am wearing," he said, "fifteenth century, ceremonial, Italian military headgear." He closed his eyes. "As I bend lower, you will see that it has been hammered from a single sheet of metal. It was found in my home as we remodeled, wedged between the playroom studs."

He departed before we could register our surprise. In fact, the speed at which he fled implied that our response would have had no particular impact. Nevertheless, we followed the glint of his helmet on into the great room's general din. As open living space, this area encompassed approximately 60 square feet, and featured two blue-tiled fireplaces. Drinks were served along the western wall by the walrus-like man.

Although still on-duty, we concluded that a drink might be helpful and requested a gin and tonic. The walrus-shaped man shook his head, as though we had tried that ruse in the past and handed us a Manhattan in a martini glass. As we were finally viewing the structure's interior, while riding only the most vaporous of excuses, it seemed unwise to contradict.

"How was your trip?" the walrus-like man asked. "Good to see you've

returned." Before we could answer, he turned to serve a white-haired woman in a tooled leather coat.

We fully intended to continue our assessment. We planned on it, although we were admittedly distracted by the number of odd conversational fragments darting about the room. "Two in particular," "Oh, my father was a sinecure too," and, "There were untold nymphs in our family," rose to the surface. We noticed that club members who were not talking, all exhibited the same vacant expression, as though they were reminiscing or plotting a trip. We suddenly thought of the word—spa.

"At loose ends?" A man in a black turtleneck appeared before us. "Yes?"

he said. "If you only understood how I could be of service." We noted the white echo of a beard and three rings on each index finger. "The moon is causing all your problems," he explained. "It is causing problems for all of us. Tides, death, plagues seasonal imbalances. But reorganizing the solar system is within our capability. We must no longer be held captive to the tyrannical assumptions

of planetary order. We can extinguish the moon." He began a small dance. "We will. Would you like to see how?"

"Do you know these people?" we asked.

"Know?" he said. "In one sense, of course. Think of this as an island. excuse me." A tiny woman in a vivid green dress reached up to clink glasses with the turtleneck man. "Planetary realignment is only a fad," she said. "A blip on the continuum. Ancient steam-based material cultures performed this ritual on a regular—"

"I would much rather discuss the naked singularity, before the band starts," replied a man with painfully white hair. He had come by to distribute fresh drinks.

"Of love?" the woman in green asked. She shifted her gaze.

Of course we wished to linger, but the tall woman with the beaded-purse touched our arm. "One point two billion songbirds," she said in a sculpted voice. "World-wide. Killed annually by household pets. Cats killing recreationally. If we could only organize those birds—beforehand. She shook her head and we feared for the wig.

As she raised her eyes, we too gazed at the beamed ceiling and found ourselves entertaining a spiraling vision of tiny green and violet birds. A fluttering cloud. We noted that the room felt larger than we first assumed. Big, we decided. No—expansive. We began to feel faintly jittery, as though we had been missing something. "How does one join?" we asked.

"Historically," a rotund man said, pausing in mid-stride, "it involves a rhinoceros. It has always involved a rhinoceros."

"Or a set of presumptions," the man with the helmet added.

"Join?" said a woman clasping an empty cigarette holder. "Oh, my. Joining implies applications, procedures." Her voice sounded like one we might have recognized from an early-evening game show.

The beaded-purse woman wiggled her fingers. "It once involved a pheasant. A very pleasant pheasant," she said. "There are many pleasures of the tongue."

"References?" we asked.

"What good are those?" two people on either side of us replied.

"Then—" We were stumbling, puzzled, but sensing that something was again within reach. "Membership involves the non-literal use of animals?"

"Why of course," the beaded-purse woman said. "If you wish. Interest is all, eh?"

"Are you Canadian?" we asked.

"Ha! Always," she said. "Go on."

Our initial attempts felt thin and stunted. As though we were unsure of where to go and had not yet discovered the flickering balance between interest and length. But, as we recounted our recent discovery involving the use of golf clubs to divine the precise geoposition of marine archeological sites, the woman with the beaded purse began to nod. When we suggested that this had to do with unique qualities of the shaped graphite in their shafts, she rattled the ice in her drink. We noticed a warm flowing from the air circulating past our ears. We felt a slight increase in our heart rate. We recognized the presence of a pliable, but long-forgotten vein. When we mentioned once using a stapler to build an electrical charge around our being, thereby deflecting positive ions until we were ensconced in a healthy negative-ionosphere, the beaded-purse woman said, "Hmmmm. Are you joining us for dinner?"

We admitted that we were a little hungry.

"Constant truth-sifting can be so—tiresome." Her left hand began to float.

Within seconds, the man in the ceremonial helmet found us again and began to explain the technical intricacies of filling his swimming pool with blue Jell-O and exploring this creation using scuba tanks. Oddly though, as he went on, explaining how much weight was required to achieve equilibrium and describing the pleasantly distorted qualities of moving through a different, if somewhat familiar medium, we began to feel unburdened, as though we too, if only temporarily, were rising to the surface in a once-forgotten way.

When the man in the ceremonial helmet mentioned that his dog had recently learned to program, due to an increasing array of canine-related information management concerns, we too, suddenly recalled our Aunt Leah's captive crow, who—for a crow—made it quite far in the distribution end of the baked goods business. It is a very long story.

Edward Hardy grew up in Ithaca. His first novel *Geyser Life* was published last year.



Rides After the Dinner

19/100

For Blume

Zevi Blume



# River

*Continued from page 1*

as she'd stood by the bedroom window, sock-footed and shivering, her husband still pointing to that place in the sky.

But a wind came up in the early morning hours, scattering the stars and moon like winter seeds, so that by dawn the sky was empty, the color of a tin cup. It was the day before Christmas. They were on their way to Ambient, Wisconsin. The air had turned cold enough to make Gabriel Carpenter's nostrils pinch together as he stood in the motel parking lot, listening to his father quote figures about the length of time human skin could be exposed to various temperatures.

"It's not like this is Alaska, kiddo," Shawn Carpenter said, clattering bright yellow plastic plates and cups from the motel's kitchenette onto the floor of the station wagon. The old dog, Grumble, who was investigating the crushed snow around the dumpster, shuddered as if the sound had been gunshot. The previous day, she'd ridden on the floor between Gabriel's legs, her face at eye level with Gabriel's face, panting with motion sickness. There'd been nowhere else to put her. Behind the front seats, the space was packed with all the things that hadn't been sold or lost or left behind: clothing, cookbooks, a color TV, a neon orange bean bag chair, snow shoes, a half-built dulcimer, two miniature lemon trees in large matching lemon-shaped pots, and Shawn's extensive butterfly collection, which was mounted on pieces of wood and enclosed behind glass plates. Whenever she'd started barking crazily, they'd been forced to stop and let her outside. The last time it had taken over an hour of whistling to coax her back.

Shawn peeled off one of his gloves and held his bare hand out toward Gabriel. "One one-thousand," he said, demonstrating. "Two one-thousand. Three one-thousand. Four one-thousand."

An oily light spread toward them from the edge of the horizon, and now Gabriel could see I-57 in the distance, a thin gray line slicing through the snowy fields, unremarkable as a healed-over scar. A single car crept along it, and he imagined it lifting into the air as lightly as a cotton ball. He imagined it again. If you believed in something hard enough, if your faith was pure, you could make anything happen—his fifth-grade teacher, Miss Welch, had told him that. Miss Welch was born again. Still the car kept moving at its careful speed, and Gabriel knew he must have doubted, and that was the only reason why the car kept dwindling down the highway to a point no brighter than a star. "You see?" Shawn said, and he wriggled his fingers. "If this was Alaska, my hand would be frozen. If this was Alaska, we'd probably be dead."

Grumble had found a grease-stained paper bag. Her tail moved rapidly to and fro as if she believed something good was inside it. Yet Grumble wagged her tail just as energetically at snow plows and mailboxes, at the sound of canned laughter on TV, at absolutely nothing at all.

"A dog, on the other hand, is a survivor. Warm fur, sharp teeth. A survivor!" Shawn said, and he must have enjoyed the sound of that word because he said it again as they pulled out of the parking lot. Gabriel stared back at Grumble hoping she would look up, hoping she would not. Then he faced front and kicked the plates and cups aside, making room for his feet against the vent. He pulled off one of his mittens and picked up a cup, which he held in front of his glasses. Peering through the oval handle, he watched the land fit into that tiny space.

"She'll find a nice family," Shawn assured him. "She'll forget all about us."

Noreen had been much harder to leave behind. Shawn still owed her money from the camper, which they'd bought with money she'd saved from years of work at a small insurance company. That was when they still had plans to travel cross-country—Noreen and Shawn, Noreen's son Jeffy and Gabriel—to Arizona, where the weather stayed warm and dry. Noreen had a soft Southern accent which made the things she said seem original and true, and she knew how to do things like make biscuits from scratch. It had been five months since Shawn and Gabriel had moved into her one-bedroom apartment in Fairmont, West Virginia, and sometimes, during that first charmed month, when they'd taken their blankets onto the tiny balcony and

it was too muggy to sleep, lain there beneath the stars talking about the future—even Jeffy who was only four and didn't understand what anyone was saying. But the camper had brought one thousand dollars, money that would get them to Wisconsin, and feed them until Shawn found work. He handed Gabriel the thick wad of fifties and hundreds, letting him feel its weight. "You'll have to help out with expenses for awhile" he said. "A paper route, kiddo, how do you feel about that?"

Gabriel imagined slogging through the snowdrifts, dragging a wet bag of newspapers behind him. "Maybe I could work in a restaurant," he said, although he wasn't sure a ten year old could do that kind of thing, even if he was big-boned the way people said.

"A paper route would be better for you—exercise, fresh air, all that."

"OK," Gabriel said warily—was his father going to start in on his weight?—but Shawn stuffed the money back into the deep pocket of his coat and turned on the radio. More soldiers were arriving in Saudi Arabia; air craft carriers had moved into striking range of the Gulf. "Listen up, son," Shawn said. "There's going to be a war." The sun was gaining strength, bloodying the hoarfrost that clung to the shrubs and the tall wild grasses that poked up through the snow crust at the edges of the highway. They passed an intersection boasting the world's largest collection of rocks, a car dealership with its necklace of bright flags, a nursery selling Christmas trees beneath a yellow and white striped tent. The land was flatter than any place Gabriel could imagine except, perhaps, Heaven with its shining streets of gold. Miss Welch had told the class all about heaven and Jesus Christ, and how, if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they would be filled with the power of God and could perform any miracle they wished. "You mean," Gabriel said, "if I had a glass of white milk I could make it chocolate?" "That's right," Miss Welch said. "But you'd have to believe with all your heart. Most people can't do that. Most people have a little bit of doubt that they can't overcome no matter how hard they try. Otherwise it would be easy to make a miracle happen. Anyone could do it."

Gabriel picked up the rest of the cups and fitted them into a towering stack. He tried not to think about Grumble. He tried not to think about Noreen who must be waking up to an empty apartment and a bare spot on the lawn by the parking lot where the camper had been sitting. He reminded himself there would be other girlfriends and dogs and Jeffs, although his father had assured him that this time things would be different because Ambient was the place where Shawn had

grown up. This time, Shawn said, they were really going home.

In the past, when Shawn had talked about Ambient, it was to make fun of the people who lived there. Hicks and religious fanatics, he called them. Local yokels married to cousins. People with six fingers and bulging foreheads. Now he was talking about how much Gabriel was going to like country living. He talked about the way the sown fields around the town looked like a green and gold checkerboard, split by sleepy county highways where you could drive for an hour without seeing anything except meadow larks, sparrow hawks and red wing black birds and, perhaps, a sputtering tractor. He described the mill pond, how on hot summer days you could dive off the wall of the old Killsnake Dam and float on your back beneath a sky so blue it seemed like a reflection of the water itself. He talked about the Onion River, which ran all the way from the mill pond smack through the center of Ambient, where there was a park with a little gazebo and swings, and an old-fashioned town square with a five and dime, a pharmacy and a cafe with an ice cream soda counter. An angel lived in the river, he said. In fact, he'd even seen it once: small and white, about the size of a seagull, hovering just above the water. But the absolute best part about Ambient was that both Gabriel's grandfather and his uncle—Shawn's older brother, Fred—lived in a farmhouse big enough so that Gabriel could have his own room. At night, he could lie in bed and listen to the freight train passing through, just like Shawn had done as a boy, imagining he was a hobo, a stowaway, rocked to sleep inside one of the cars.

Gabriel raised the stack of cups so the top cup touched the roof of the station wagon. He wondered if the angel was real, or if it was just something his father had made up so he would want to live there.

"Ambient," Shawn announced, "is the perfect place for a boy like you to grow up, don't you think?"

The station wagon swerved a little, and Gabriel let the cups collapse, a shattering waterfall of sound. Shawn jumped and accelerated into the breakdown lane. There was the raw hiss of tires spinning on ice and, for a moment, Gabriel saw the long fingers of the weeds reaching for him, close enough to touch. Then they were back on the highway.

"Goddamn it!" Shawn said. "See what you made me do?"

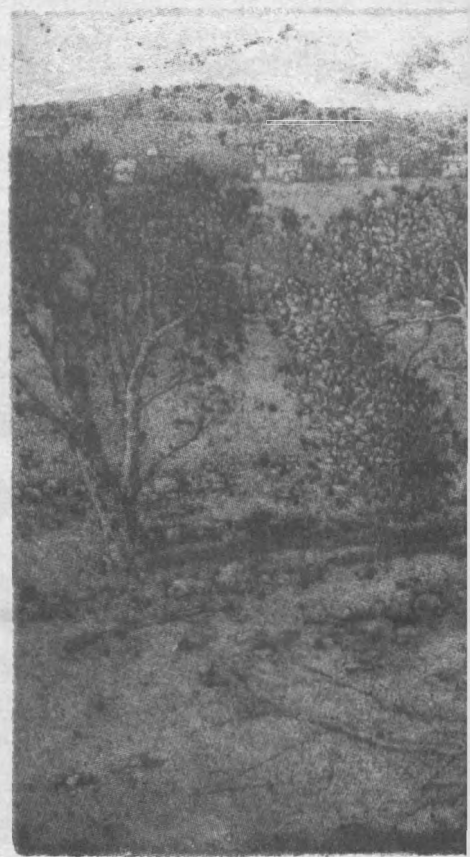
Gabriel picked up a cup that had fallen into his lap.

"You blame me for everything, don't you?" Shawn said. "This is your way of getting back at me. This is your way of getting under the old man's skin."

He turned up the radio and they drove without speaking as the red sunrise dissipated into the steely morning. People were arguing over what the war was going to be about, if there even was a war at all. Gabriel tried to topple a thin stand of trees. He tried to make himself invisible. When nothing happened, he searched his soul for the blemish of doubt which, somehow, he must have overlooked. Noreen had been Born Again just like Miss Welch, and she said that Miss Welch was right: pure faith made anything possible. She told Gabriel stories of people who'd had cancer and been completely cured without surgery or drugs, leaving the doctors mystified. She told Gabriel about modern-day people who'd seen Jesus sitting beside them on a bus or in a cafeteria or even walking

along the road, plain as day. She told him about one time when she'd been broke and she'd prayed really hard for a lottery number. One appeared in her mind as if God had painted it there with His finger; she'd won five-hundred dollars. Noreen was younger than Shawn and she wore red lipstick that stuck like a miracle to the complicated shape of her mouth. She loved bright colors and soft, sweet desserts. She was good to Jeffy, and she would have been good to Gabriel if he had let her, if he had not known in his heart that someday soon his father would decide he didn't love her anymore.

Just before noon, Shawn pulled over at a rest area and parked the car at the edge



of the lot, away from the kiosk. He moved the seat back as far as it would go. "Tired?" he asked Gabriel tenderly. They were at the edge of a tiny strip of woods. The frosted ground was merry with soda cans and candy wrappers and bags of garbage people had dumped from their cars.

"A little," Gabriel said.

"You'll feel better after a catnap. Ten-fifteen minutes, and the world will be a brighter place." He took off his woolly cap and tucked his gloves inside it, making a small round pillow. Then he wedged it between the seat and the door, put his head against it, and slept.

For a long time Gabriel waited, staring at the broad, blunt shape of Shawn's chin, the fine blonde hairs outlining his ears like an aura. He divided his father into parts and let his gaze move slowly, deliberately, over each one. The lean, rough cheek. The neck with its strong Adam's apple and the finger of hair curling out from the collar. The sloping shoulders beneath the dark coat, the long narrow thighs. He looked at his father's crotch—there was no one to tell him not to—but then he made himself stop. An eyelash clung to the side of his father's nose and, breathless, he reached over and flicked it away. When Gabriel was still a little boy, his father would occasionally allow him to comb his curly black hair, and afterwards Gabriel would smell his fingers, the bitter mint



# Angel

of dandruff shampoo, the oily musk of his father's skin. He'd make up his mind to concentrate harder, to stop daydreaming, to do better in school and make his father proud. He'd lie in bed imagining scenes in which he rescued his father from some terrible danger, and—over and over again—he'd imagine his father's gratitude.

Shawn Carpenter was so handsome that people, women, and sometimes men too, would stop on the street and turn their heads to look as he walked on. He had robin's-egg eyes speckled with green, a dimple in his chin so deep you wanted to heal it with a kiss. He was an accomplished welder and electrician; he could fix cars and photocopiers; he was a nat-

potatoes, but ultimately none of that mattered because, eventually, they became the same. Shawn unpacked his butterfly collection and his bean bag chair, his dulcimer, his snow shoes, his cookbooks. He hung the butterflies on the living room wall, worked a little more on the dulcimer, and prepared chilled soups and golden puff pastries and fish baked inside parchment paper. He'd get to work on time each day and, at night, cut back on his drinking. He was charming and energetic, when he spoke, he waved his hands in the air. But it was always during these optimistic periods that he started to look at Gabriel with a shocked, critical eye, the way that Gabriel himself had looked at the world the first time he was fitted for his thick eye glasses. "Kiddo, you were blind as the proverbial bat," Shawn told him. "Things must look pretty good to you now," but the truth of the matter was that everything had looked much better before, and sometimes Gabriel still took off his glasses to enjoy a stranger's smooth complexion or a soft gray street, its velvet sidewalk lolling beside it like a tongue, the slow melt of land and sky at the horizon. "Where are your glasses?" Shawn would say. "I didn't spend that kind of money for you to decorate your pockets." Then everything jumped too close and filled with complicated detail: acne and scars and colorful litter, painfully double-jointed trees, clouds with their rough, unsympathetic faces.

Suddenly Shawn would decide that Gabriel needed more exercise, less TV. Perhaps it would occur to him that Gabriel should learn French, and then every night he'd have to listen to a tape that Shawn had ordered from a catalogue. Sometimes it was cooking lessons, Shawn standing over him as he tried to make a smooth Hollandaise. It could be his posture, or his attitude, or his ineptitude at sports, and sometimes it was all three. He'd always remember one endless fall, when they'd lived in Michigan with a woman named Bell, her three sons and their basketball hoop. Every night Gabriel had to practice jump shots and lay-ups and free-throws with the other boys. Every morning, he'd cross his fingers and stare up at the sky, willing winter to blow in early and leave the driveway slick with ice.

Eventually, Shawn would give up on Gabriel and turn to the girlfriend they were living with. At first, there were only a few small things, and he'd bring them to her attention reluctantly, sweetly, and always with a remedy: a permanent wave, adult ed. classes, a more functional arrangement of the living room. He'd sit up late in the orange bean bag chair, drinking from his flask and writing scraps of poetry, and he'd sometimes oversleep in the morning. Around that time, the fights would begin, secretive at first: a hissed exchange in the bedroom; sharp voices from the porch. One night, Gabriel would awaken to find Shawn sitting on the edge of his bed. "What was I thinking?" Shawn would ask, his breath golden with Jack Daniels. "Next time," he'd say, "warn me, kiddo. I'm almost twenty-nine. That's too old to be making big decisions with the wrong damn head," and he'd lie down on top of the covers beside Gabriel, and if Gabriel threw an arm over his chest, his father didn't shrug it away.

It was always best between them just after they'd moved back into a place of their own or, more likely, pointed the station wagon toward a city or town where they hadn't lived before, some

place where Shawn still had a friend or two, somewhere he knew he could find work. Together they'd bask in the afterglow of leaving, and it was during these times that Shawn always brought up the possibility of moving back to Ambient. Maybe he'd find a job doing piecework for the shoe factory on the River Road, something that would leave him time to write a novel, a thriller, he was certain it would sell. Or maybe he could start a little business, run it with one of his brothers—a landscaping company or, perhaps, a used car dealership. "Kiddo," Shawn would say, "I have got to get a grip on myself. I've got to get things together." At times like these, with Shawn's face flushed and open and hanging too close, Gabriel thought he might die of love for his father. "Daddy, it's all right," he'd say. "We're fine, everything's fine." And when he thought about how fervently his father believed in those words, words which fell like manna from Gabriel's own mouth, he truly understood the power of faith.

But now his father was sleeping. They were on their way to Ambient. There was no need for Gabriel to say anything. He dug down between the seats, looking for loose change, and when he'd collected enough dimes and nickels he got out of the car and went over to the kiosk. The vending machines were lined up in an outdoor alcove at the back, and he took his time before deciding on an Almond Joy. He ate the first section in one sweet, greedy bite; the remaining section he ate more slowly, licking off the chocolate to expose the clean white coconut beneath. Then he explored the small wooded area behind the kiosk. Finally, he sat down on a graffitied bench and flattened the empty Almond Joy wrapper, folded it into a fighter jet, guided it through barrel rolls and screaming dives and bombing runs. He wondered if his uncle and grandfather would really be glad to see him. He wondered if he really could have his own room, or if he'd be sleeping on a couch until Shawn found them a place of their own. His butt was getting numb from the coldness of the bench. His nose was running. His toes hurt. He decided that even if there was an angel in the Onion River, his father had never seen it.

A thin winter sunlight trickled through the trees, and he let his head fall back, thinking about the shapes the branches made against the sky. If an Iraqi plane flew over, he'd make it disappear, leave all those soldiers hanging like cartoon characters in mid-air. He imagined them falling to earth. He imagined their souls rising like milkweed, like dandelion seeds. Though he felt the thump of Shawn's hand on his shoulder, it took him a moment to respond to it.

"Like an idiot," Shawn was saying, "with your mouth hanging open and chocolate all over your face. How old are you now? Eight? Nine?"

"I'm ten," Gabriel said.

"Almost grown up," Shawn said. "Almost a goddamn man. What do you think about when you sit there like a ninny? Girls?" He plucked the candy wrapper airplane out of Gabriel's lap and threw it at the ground, but the wind caught it and sent it wafting away into the woods. "I hope to God it's girls," he said. "Christ." He pulled Gabriel up by the shoulder. "Where did you get the money for that candy?"

"The car."

"A thief, on top of everything," Shawn said. "Well, maybe your uncle and grandfather will have some idea what to do with you. Because I do not. Because I

simply have had it up to here," and he made a slicing motion across his throat. They walked back to the station wagon. As soon as they got inside, Gabriel's teeth chattered stupidly. Shawn glared at him, then started the engine and turned the heat on high. "Scared me half to death," he said, and he raked his hands through his hair. "What possessed you to get out of this car?"

"Hungry," Gabriel said. His toes burned. He shifted them carefully, trying not to rattle the cups and plates and risk drawing further attention to himself.

"Hungry!" Shawn said, as if that were the most outrageous of possibilities. He pulled back onto the highway, and they drove for another hour, listening to talk radio. Now and then there were bursts of static, which made the people sound far away, as if they were calling from the moon. A man said the hell with the UN, the US should drop the bomb. A woman said that if people over there wanted to kill each other, let them. They passed billboards advertising an adult book store, a barn with See Rock City! painted on its roof, the carcass of a deer and, less than a mile beyond it, a hitch-hiker, his face hidden by a multi-colored scarf. They passed a low, brick church decorated with a banner that read: Put the 'Christ Back in Christmas.' They passed two white crosses at the mouth of an off ramp, each decorated with a small, green wreath. At the end of the ramp was a bullet-ridden stop sign where a van idled, as if the driver was uncertain, exhaust drifting lazily through the air. But all the county roads met at ninety degree angles. There was never any question which way was left, which was right, which was straight ahead.

When Shawn finally spoke to Gabriel, his voice was softer. "You frozen anywhere?"

"Maybe my feet."

"Kick your shoes off. Get them up against that vent. Does it hurt?"

"Yeah."

"That's good, kiddo," Shawn said. "Pain is the way we know for certain that we're living. If you only remember one thing your old man tells you, try and remember that."

A truck passed them, traveling too fast, splattering their windshield with icy slush. Gabriel pictured it rolling over, bouncing off the guard rail, bursting into a perfect globe of fire. But though he believed without reservation, just the way Miss Welch had said, the truck slipped into the dark eye of the horizon. They were coming up on an exit. A McDonald's sign floated high above the highway, dazzling against all that gray and white.

"Look at that!" Shawn said heartily. "The answer to our prayers! What do you want, a hamburger? Fish sandwich?"

*Help bring the Christmas story to life! Human and animal volunteers needed for Ambient's annual Living Creche to be held in front of the railroad museum from noon till three on Christmas Eve Day. Costumes and hot chocolate provided. The manger will be heated this year! And everyone is invited to warm up in the museum lobby where the Christmas Ornament Collection of Mr. Alphonse Pearlmutter will be on display until the New Year.*

—from the Ambient Weekly  
December, 1990

A. Manette Ansay has an MFA from Cornell. He novels include Vinegar Hill, Sister, and River Angel.



Gillian Pederson-Krab

ural salesperson, an elegant waiter, a creative and indulgent chef. And when he met another woman he wanted to fall in love with, it was hard for Gabriel not to be jealous. He watched him for the early symptoms of a crush like a parent alert for fever. There were sudden bouts of giddy playfulness, late suppers, a rash of practical jokes. Raw eggs in his lunch bag instead of cooked. A fart cushion under his pillow. Next came splurges: take-out pizza, television privileges, a toy that had been previously forbidden. There were professional haircuts for them both and, for Shawn, a trip to the dentist. Soon a woman's name would ring from Shawn's tongue too often, too brightly, an insistent dinner bell, and then would come the first awkward meal all together in a restaurant with candles and fancy wine and a waiter quick to mop up any spills. One night, Shawn would step out for a goodnight kiss and not return until the next day, and tears would glaze his eyes in that moment before he shouted at Gabriel for forgiveness. "It's hard," he'd say, "raising you alone. Every day of my life since I turned eighteen I've spent looking after you."

Eventually, they'd start moving a few things from wherever they were staying into the woman's apartment or trailer or house or camp, and sometimes these places were elegant and clean, and sometimes they smelled of dog or fried



## The

David Weiss

"Landlord!" barked Leon Roth for the third time. He rapped the door, harder this time, with his key ring. Off the hall's hard walls the word racketed like a rifle report. The vibrations of his own voice penetrating his chest made him queasy. Inside, he could hear a TV blaring, Latin music bubbling over. Roth hooked the keys back onto his belt loop and drummed the door with his fist.

"Landlord!"

The glass dot of the peephole dimmed, and Roth could make out an eyeball darting from side to side as if into an empty hallway. He glanced down at himself to make sure he was visible. Brown jacket over brown pants and boots, brown walls, brownish air: just barely.

"Landlord," he repeated.

"What do you want?" It was a gravely, uncleared voice.

"Mr. Morales?" said Roth, clearing his own throat.

"You're two months behind in the rent."

"I told your office I don't give them nothing till my stove is fixed."

"I sent the super up last week to take care of that, Mr. Morales."

"Yeah, Gaetana, he came up. But he didn't do nothing. It ain't no better than it was." The tinny, rhythmic shriek of an infant jabbed through the door. Roth poked a loose tile with his toe. They always broke loose by the doorsill.

"All right, Mr. Morales, let me in and I'll take a look at it." Roth pressed the tile back into place.

"OK. OK," the voice said. "Wait a minute. Just wait a minute." He could hear other voices now, chattering. Roth turned and scraped his palm along the craggy textured wall; mud-dark, originally greenish with a bronze patina, it swallowed most of the light. The glow from the fluorescents in the ceiling was sucked up like an echo. Day and night these lights buzzed like flies in the last stage of dying, spinning around, flat on their backs.

In his six years coming here, not one that he could remember had ever burned out, the only things in this building that didn't need replacing. If this building went down the tubes like so many others in the Bronx, Roth had the feeling that these lights, somehow, would stay on. They seemed to have an energy source all their own.

Eternity would probably look like this, narrow, dim, no way out. It would take a saint to live here that long. No one else could stand it. No one else should have to, even for part of a lifetime. A saint might even look forward to it; if you were St. Sebastian with all those arrows through your gut, a place like this might even seem like a blessed relief. Maybe they should run an ad in the classifieds: "martyrs wanted." Except that it wasn't necessary. With so many buildings torched in the past few years, they hardly had a vacancy anywhere. Even a priest would have trouble finding an apartment these days.

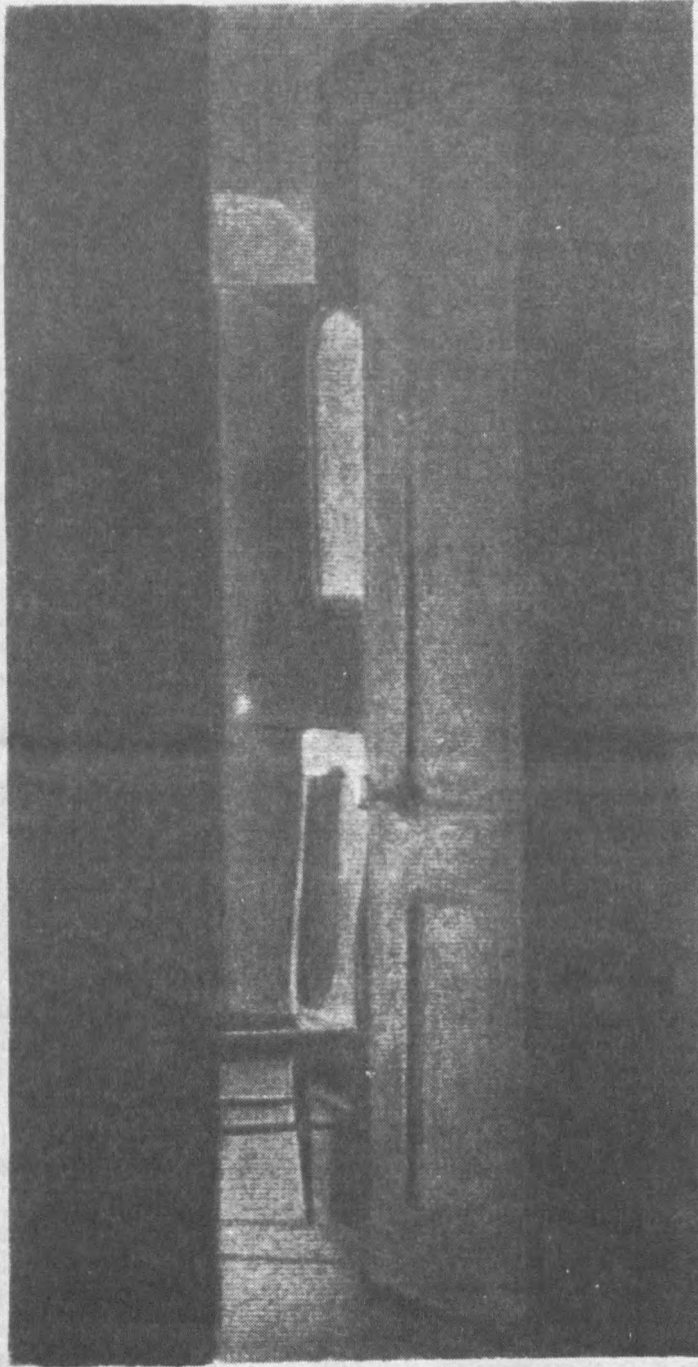
"Come on, Morales, come on," Roth seethed, toeing the wall. The air hung motionless and chilly as in a deep cave. It was amazing, he'd only just arrived, and already it felt like months, years. Already, it was hard to imagine that such a thing as day or "outside" existed at all. He felt like a stalactite forming.

\* \* \*

On the drive down, sunlight had slit open the belly of solid, gray clouds and smeared the buildings along the Grand Concourse with a thick, yellow glaze.

Idling at a light, he'd watched as each brick in the raking light stood out, etched so distinctly that every pit and pebble on its surface made or caught a shadow. Tiny worlds of rich, topographic detail, golden-red. Like the earth zoomed in on for a satellite map. So much going on in a space no larger than a billfold which a moment before had seemed flat, empty. Always the case, yet it stunned him.

His eyes throbbed as they did when he fought back his feelings at the heart-wrenching end of some movie or other. Like at *Old Yeller*. That one had really torn him up as a kid. The father raising



Joseph Meyer

the long barrel of his gun at the once faithful but now snarling, rabid dog. *Well, son.* The father seemed to say in his hokey Western drawl, *You have to kill what you love; otherwise You can't be sure you love it. The only way you'll grow up's to watch what you love die.* He'd hated that the bastards had made him love the dog. The film's arid landscape or the dog's fur or maybe its eyes were the same buttery yellow as this unnatural light.

As he nursed his container of coffee waiting at the light, Roth had the sensation that something was about to be revealed, like amethyst crystals cocooned in a crust of stone he'd often seen for sale in gift shops. Someone had tapped on that rough, ordinary surface to crack it open. Someone had known to do that. If the crude and violent earth could forge something so beautiful, however inadvertently.

He found himself hoping the light would fall on him, too, like a benediction. His car, however, lay in a building's long shadow. He was always in the shadow of something, it seemed. Then the traffic light had turned green, someone behind him leaned on the horn, and the sun's

brilliance withdrew from the sky as suddenly as it appeared.

\* \* \*

"Check it out!" said Morales. The air in the apartment was hectic with the tang of fried peppers, Bustelo and salsa. A parrot squawked in its cage. A boy and girl still in pajamas clung to Morales' legs as he led Roth past a living room bright with mirrors to the kitchen. From the darkness of a half-closed door, an old woman's face peered out.

Morales turned the knob for the oven.

Side by side in the narrow kitchen they listened to the gas hiss. "See, man, this ain't safe. I got kids here. I don't want them living in no dangerous place."

Roth shut off the gas. He got down on his knees and looked in through the broiler. The pilot was off. He got out some matches and relit the small, blue flame. He turned the knob; after a moment, the burner came on like a blue rug being rolled out.

"It's working, Mr. Morales. Sometimes the pilot goes out, that's all. If it does, you just have to relight it. Let me show you."

"No, man, that stove isn't safe. One day, I'm not here, gonna be a big explosion my wife goes to cook something. That stove's broken. I ain't living with no broken stove. I want a new one that works."

Roth turned the knob again and heard the soft whoosh of ignition. The boy and girl were down on all fours with their faces in the broiler door. Heat lifted their bangs. They held out their hands to feel the warm gusts. "Look, there's nothing wrong with this one," Roth repeated without conviction, the way he said most things. How did salesmen manage it day in and day out, conviction without belief? To feel strongly for no reason. Maybe that was the meaning of self-interest. *The trouble with you, Leon, is that you don't believe in yourself, Magda had said. It's even worse than that. You don't believe there's anyone there to believe in. That's what I like about you. Leon. You're attached by the thinnest thread.*

"Hey, you kids, how many times I got to tell you to keep away from there. I catch you near this stove again, I'm going to give it to you but good." The boy and girl jumped up and went back to clutching Morales' pants. Morales turned back to Roth. He was bleary-eyed and unshaven. An effluvia of beer and onions came off his breath. A mustache like rusty steel wool obscured his

mouth.

"I'm not giving you a cent till something's done about this." Roth turned the knob and the oven came on. "You can turn that all you like. The stove don't even cook right."

"What's wrong with the way it cooks?"

"Nothing tastes right that comes out of there. Everything is burned or raw. I get home from work, I want a good meal, not some oven that don't work right. Look at it. It's all banged up."

Morales pointed to the gouges where gray metal showed through the shiny white. An old, perfectly good stove. Roth debated whether to argue with him. The kids began slapping at each other, using Morales' legs as shields. They lunged and giggled, hitting hard and harder. Morales' pants slipped further down his hips.

"Maybe I can get you another one," said Roth. "Not new. But one without the enamel chipped off. I can't promise the pilot's going to be any different. Basically, it's just going to look better."

Roth could see Morales' slight, wiry body begin to unstiffen. He uncrossed his arms. A young woman in a short, tight skirt and a head of high, orange hair slowed, silently passing by the kitchen. The boy was chasing the girl around Morales' knees, squeezing between him and Roth as they went by. Roth heard the front door shut.

"You make sure it's a good one, otherwise my wife's gonna give me grief. Hey! Cut it out, you kids! What do you think I am, a fire hydrant or something?"

Roth hadn't seen the wife. But he was sure she was there, listening. The infant had quieted. Someone had turned the music down. As Morales led him back out, Roth wanted to ask about the rent again but couldn't bring himself to. Maybe he and Morales had an understanding, and Morales would give the rent to the super. He would tell the office that Morales would pay next week, by the eighth. That would keep them at bay. Otherwise, he'd find himself on the receiving end of another of Fine's lectures. *You gotta handle with these people, Leon. They expect you to. They don't respect you if you don't. Push. If they push back. You push harder. Threaten them with a dispossession. Give it to them if you have to. so they know you're not fooling around. Otherwise, all you're going to get is the run-around.* Roth had often heard Fine over the phone going at it hammer and tongs with a tenant. Fine kept a list of the names and numbers of recidivists on his bulletin board, and each morning he would work down it systematically, delivering sermons on basic economics, rights and responsibilities. Mr. Sanchez, if you don't pay your rent. how can I provide even basic services? Let me explain something to you. . . He made sweeping, decisive gestures with his hands which no one but Roth or the secretary ever saw. He spoke as if a failure to pay the rent on time loosened the very foundation stones on which the world was built. He was like a Lubovitcher, like any fundamentalist; no distinctions were made between small and large transgressions. Each offended the spirit of the law. Of course, Fine was shrewdly practical, too. Maybe it was persecution in the long-term that had baked self-interest right into the bricks of his being. This hadn't happened with Roth, who envied him. Fine would have maneuvered Morales into a silenced acquiescence. Mr. Morales, when you are late with your rent do I turn off your heat? do I cut off your hot water? Do I? Even the kids would have stopped playing and hidden behind their father. Fine



# Mensch

had wet, bulging eyes that never blinked as he talked at you. They made Roth feel ill, but he couldn't look away. It was like being hypnotized by a snake. Fine might not even have made a concession about the stove. He would have left Morales feeling grateful for the stove he had. *The trouble with you, Leon, Magda had said, is that you want people to be happy. so they'll leave you alone.*

He would switch the stove, Roth decided, with the one in the empty apartment, 2F, which Elvin was going to start painting tomorrow, and hope that Morales would come through before the unpaid rent was caught in the searching glare of Fine's scrutiny.

\* \* \*

The orange-haired girl was leaning at the elevator when Roth came out of the apartment. He could see between her stockings thighs the diamond pattern of tiles in the floor. In the dim air, perfume hung, tropical. One foot tapped electrically. A tiny red purse swung from her shoulder on silver chains. Where were her school books? Roth remembered girls like this from high school, just seven years ago, though it felt like a lifetime. Walking the halls they were like magnets in those physics class experiments that made all the metal filings move as if with a single mind. This one was like Monica. Always sullen and moody, angry at some guy, hard as porcelain. And disdain: she could really dish it out. Guys circled her, on the prowl. She barely gave them the time of day, it seemed. *The thing about Monica, Magda had explained, is that she thinks being tough is some sort of philosophy.* Monica copied Leon's homework; he let her cheat on tests. In return, she had let Leon hang around with her. With him, she was soft, weary, confiding. Leon didn't really count, he knew, but that's why they got along. The truth, he used to tell her, was not that boys wouldn't leave her alone but that she didn't want them to. She gave him a weak smile and a touch on the cheek. You're sweet, she'd said. Soon after that she'd stopped coming to school. Knocked up, someone had said. *The thing about Monica, Magda had said, is that she thinks her looks are some sort of diploma.*

In the elevator the girl glanced up at Roth. "You got any apartments for rent? I got a friend who's looking, my girlfriend's brother. I noticed one's empty

on the second floor." She looked down again. The gold hoops of her earrings swung against her cheeks.

"That one's already rented."

She tapped the heel of one shoe against the red patent leather toe of the other. "You got something else available?" Her

look glanced off his eyes then down to the toe again. This was a girl who couldn't ask a question without it sounding like an accusation. Roth had something on Burnside, something too large on Tremont, a cellar apartment further up the Concourse. The odor had been unbelievable when they broke into that one. The old Mick must have been dead a week. No

one had missed him. The cops had shut the door behind them and torn the place apart looking for his pot of gold.

"No, I've got nothing. Nothing at the moment," he told her.

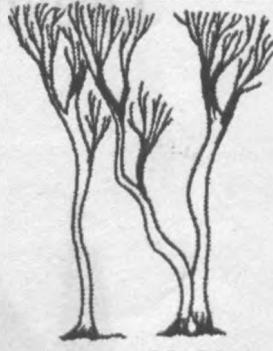
She nodded without looking up and shoved her hands further into her jacket pockets, pouting. She had the perfect, full lips for it. A real looker. The door opened at the lobby. Roth watched her ass twitch like castanets as she moved toward the front door. He felt an envy for her simple, musical unhappiness. *Music, Magda said, stroking the burgundy stain that snaked from her temple to chin, is the ladder I use to climb out of unhappiness. You, on the other hand, like to wallow in it. That makes you a sentimentalist, Leon.* The door slid shut.

Christ! She'd been beautiful, although Leon wasn't sure he'd thought so then. That he could be so stricken, made to feel so desolate by her! Christ! She'd really had his number. Well, almost anything could make him feel exposed, cast out, beyond the pale. But oh! that glittering, green-eyed sideways look she could throw at him which let him back inside the charmed circle. So lovely when its verdant light fell on him. It was like a drug. Only Magda could do that for him.

The elevator stank of urine. He hadn't noticed it before. The second time this week. Roth made a note. The walls were loud with voices. Taki 183. Kool 164. Death 179. Even the window had lately been spray painted. Arc 171.

At the basement, the door slid open. The platform stopped too high, and Roth had to step down to get out. He made a note. He patted his pocket. Bag of ten penny nails for the super. But no lock. He'd forgotten the lock.

**David Weiss is a poet who lives in Ithaca. The Mensch will be published in January by Mid-List Press.**



Julian Bell

## Wild Turkey

*The only way I knew it was a wild turkey*

*was from the pictures on bottles of burbon;*

*Otherwise it might have been a misplaced*

*marabou.*

*All morning it's been walking around in the*

*cold*

*surprised to find itself in a garden*

*full of snow in April. Maybe*

*that's what blew it off course—*

*the failure of spring to meet its expectations.*

*You can see it hoped for more than this*

*the way it spreads its three long toes*

*carefully so as not to sink low*

*into the cold slush and pokes its head forward, earnest with the effort.*

*My mother walked like that at the end,*

*the three-pronged stick placed first*

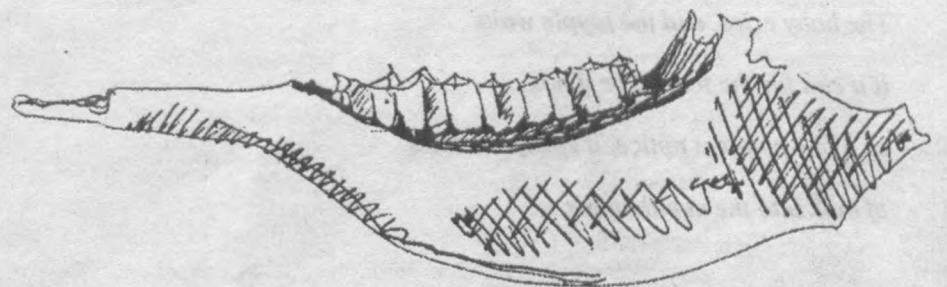
*on the paving stones, her head out,*

*determined not to break another bone*

*in a body that failed to meet her expectations.*

—Gail Holst-Warhaft

**Gail Holst -Warhaft is a poet and translator of mostly Modern Greek. She teaches part time in the Classics and Comparative Literature departments at Cornell.**



J.M. Barringer

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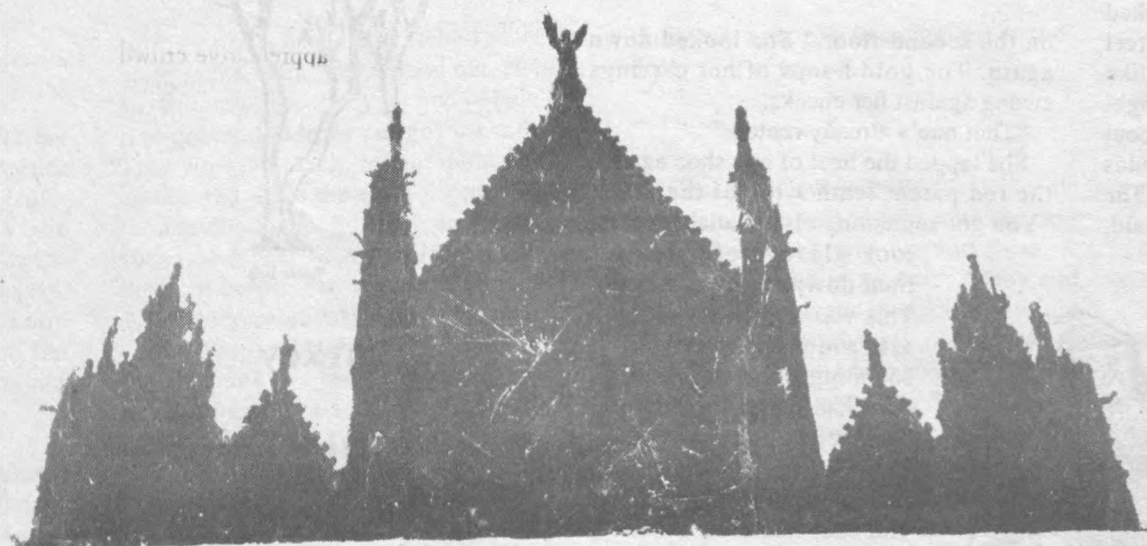


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# Dream and Memory



Tim Merrick

## *The Interpretation of Dreams*

A man preparing his suicide had a change of heart:  
 he aimed the glint of the forked tongue at my throat.  
 Dreamer's luck, it just slipped down my shirt!  
 All night I was frantic to be rid of it.  
 No place safe enough to bury it till I cleverly  
 poured molten lead into a block around it.  
 Now my luggage is so heavy, I cannot  
 raise myself onto the necessary train ....

My daughter rolls her eyes and gives me one of her looks.  
 Really, Mom what an idiot!  
 Why didn't you just throw the fork out onto the track?  
 The train would have crushed it, you know.

Then she heads for the door, gathering steam,  
 my admiration fluttering behind her  
 like a white handkerchief.

## *Gospel*

When a breast is round and hard  
 as Mary's was so often in the Renaissance,  
 it aches for a small mouth to relieve it  
 of a saved-up sweetness.

The baby cries, and the nipple waits  
 if it can for the tongue or if not,  
 as a few painters notice, it sprays its lines  
 of milk into the mouth of air.

Maddened by milksmell, the baby  
 roots, latches on, works skin to skin

in passionate nursery with the mother.

They keep and ponder all this in their hearts.

—Lynn Powell

Lynn Powell's collection of poems, *Old and New Testaments*, won the 1995 *Brittingham Prize in Poetry* from University of Wisconsin Press and the 1996 *New Writers Award* from the Great Lakes Colleges Association. This fall she is a Visiting Writer in the English Department at Cornell.

## *My Grandmother's Dishes*

I believe I heard that when she walked  
 own the street they peeked in awe at her,  
 tall her beauty and her majesty  
 But that was when? Eighteen eighty three?  
 In age, she was not beautiful; at least, not  
 Beautiful to me,

Nor is this porcelain marked "France T.V."  
 A delight. It isn't even "dish-washer safe."  
 Still I use it because I like the shape.  
 And am too lazy to buy another.  
 Besides, I'm not selling my grandmother  
 To the Salvation Army for a tax rebate.

Here they are: the tureen, cover, the large plate -  
 A century of use and going strong.  
 I think of my grandmother and her beauty both long gone  
 And yet, the china - perfect - at dinners where  
 She could not ever be.  
 The china, perfect, waiting to outlive me.

—Jane S. Wilson

Jane S. Wilson taught English at Los Alamos High School and was one of the women who made significant cultural, social, and intellectual contributions to that frontier community in its formative years.