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To Mary Klepser

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NOTES FOR A BILDUNGSROMAN

Be it known how it began:
The words that failed to tell, the gestures that
Were pressed upon the vital span,
Burst from the time when father waved his hat
And grinned from cheek to cheek.

Oh, how it passes the unique!
Ten years of rising to a walk,
A bumped-head prodigy who makes the neighbors talk,
The oatmeal clustered on his madras bib,
Side-vented with two buttons and a crest
(Which once he's half-unstitched in his bright crib):
He wears it so he'll look his very best
When father teases him, rhymes, tickles and
Dear mother chucks his chin and prays
A grimy spoon from his moist, clenching hand.

His first words are "ontology" and "mad."
He slings both with a frightening nonchalance.
By banging spoons then adds a couple more:
He speaks whole sentences at thirty-four.
Plays so intently hitting stones with sticks;
"Art is long," he says at forty-six.

The world for him is full of dogs and bears —
Some are stuffed and some have plastic eyes;
He whacks them all on the linoleum,
And gathers more till none can count the sum.
His smudgy playmates seem to come and go.
They'll leave him with a pat upon the head;
He'll see them later, sighing in the grass
Of sins they have just heard about at mass.
Or, wandering in pathless fields alone,
See Sammy hurt his toe against a stone,
Run past, his brow in painful knots.

The games go on, the forfeitures increase;
Soon nasty Saul forgets his childish things,
Leaves to our boy a fluffy bird that sings
"Life is short," and bird and boy both cease.

TALK AND LESS TALK IN A BROAD MEADOW

'But I suppose
I've talked too much again,'
he said, and looked down at the weeds
that tangled at our legs.
'I want to hear your side, and what . . .
and what you plan to do.'

I noticed how his gaze
turned on my face, then went beyond
to watch the easy bend
of the horizon holding back
the crushing blue of sky.

'I've staked my claims quite boldly,'
I admitted, breathless as my heels
dug up a rise. 'That's good!'
he said with hasty, fulsome glee,
although I felt encouraged at the time.
'Use the future while it's there, by God!'

Clearing my throat against the breeze,
I gathered a reply, and felt my eyes force water.
'What's wrong?' 'Some chaff or dust is caught,'
I mumbled, blinking, nodding toward the earth,
where each intruding step we made
sent insects for some twenty feet around
bounding away in great arcs of alarm.

'First things first,' I spoke as if grown wise.
'There's my course of studies mapped ahead,
and then . . .' Turning at a signal
from the corner of our eyes, we slowed
our step, and saw a random page of news,
mangled and rotten, soar and dip
before our bodies, rustling
like a lone, half-angry goblin.

We saw it catch in thistles, then
resumed our plodding numb and choked
with silences of summer's boundless fields.
But something else was sudden: a small band
of maddened Negroes fluttered far behind
us, radiating screams. Their echoes
turned upon our ringing ears,
paling to a whisper from my friend
'Jesus!' —
And we stumbled on until
Under a fatuous sun, in a thick frenzy
of pollen and purposeless specks,
lungs shrivelled at the mastering of each crest
which flattened, tame, each time we gained the top,
we cured our struggling speech, and fell, to sleep.
Dr. Faustus: Brilliant, first seen as an associate (or full) professor at the age of 30, teaching English at a small liberal arts school. Has published several scholarly works, for which he has become known as the most promising literary mind of the generation. Is presently working on another, much larger project: a synthesis of knowledge of the Renaissance, its roots, and implications of this knowledge for the ages following. Knowledgeable in many other fields: history, religion, art (has written a short essay on da Vinci, widely acclaimed), has a master's in philosophy also, and contributes occasionally to a biological journal. A short man, not extremely sociable, unmarried, and rather painfully aware at times that his associates question this. This awareness, occurring very infrequently, usually causes him to sit down and turn out another piece of scholarly work, inevitably bringing numerous accolades. Idealistic, ivory-towered, he one day meets:

Giles Buryman: Widely acclaimed as America's foremost man of the advertising world, he has come to visit the college president who, as an old prep-school buddy, is asking his advice on the college's plans for expansion. Giles has written such ads as "I dreamed I was Mod in my Matron-form Maternity bra," and "Ami! The acid that keeps you ALIVE!" (for a well-known soft drink). Buryman meets Faustus at a dinner at the President's home, a small group of friends. During the meal, Buryman is charming the smoked oysters out of their shells, and eventually turns to bringing Faustus out of his Faustus, wary, despising Buryman for his materialism, finds himself listening with sudden gnawing envy to Buryman's light-hearted quips about his adventures on the stock market (which of course Faustus is familiar with, being learned also in economics, sociology and psychology), and what Giles will do with his most recent million ... he's quite bored with safaris, and maybe will go with President Jonson on his next memorial tour of the Far East — pick up a white elephant in India for his private zoo. Faustus, who rarely speaks unless spoken to, is not sure how to respond when Buryman turns to him and asks him how his latest book is coming. But he is sure, when Buryman says, "Listen, old man, how about coming along with Lyson and me to the East — you look as if you need a vacation," that Buryman is insultingly condescending to him. He leaves the party soon, with the excuse that he must finish an essay, returns to his fourth floor office in the ivy-colored Lycidas Taylor Ticks building, and throws himself onto his cracked leather armchair. Finding that an uncomfortable position, he gets up and sits down in the cracked leather arm-chair; with blind vigah, he attacks his typewriter, a 1925 Olympus — Zeus model. Getting no further than the opening sentence of his essay: "The wages of the American mortal sin, materialism, is the ultimate success." — he realizes what he has written. First in horror, then in joy, he stares at the sentence before him — a new Credo. The following days are spent in a silent despair of decision. He cannot allow himself to childishly sulk over the insult Buryman has so cruelly thrust between the chinks of his Idvy-laved tower; yet his almost priestly devotion to Thoth and Pallid Athina seems hollow and unrewarding. He decides: Acadamnia, farewell, your seas have shrunk to dog-puddles, your founts of knowledge would not wet a babe's diaper. Farewell, and with that, he leaps from the quacked-leather arms of the chair — arms that no longer enthrall him, races to the soda-machine for a bottle of Ami, chugs it, runs home, stuffs his few belongings into a paper sack (symbolic, as we all know, of poverty of spirit), and jumps onto the computer express bound for the city. There he meets:

J. Carnalgie Rock: Affectionately known among his friends as Carnal Chuck, he is Buryman's rival in the advertising world; many a friendly barb has been forged in the smithies of these men's inner sanctums and delivered via inter-office memo. Faustus explains to Rock that he wishes to leave the Acadamia cradle, and become a success in the brazen-hued world of advertising. What are your credentials, gently queries J. C. Rocked-in-the-bosoms-of-Mary-Josephine-and-Christina, realizing that he is dealing with a genius of genesis. Faustus, not without his own cunning, thinks quickly, and says, "pay me ten thousand down and twenty thousand to go, I've got a rhyme for Rip that'll bring money like snow." Now, Rip being Ami's rival in the soda business, and not doing nearly as well for lack of a slogan as brilliant as Buryman's to marvel the ears of the masses, Rock realizes that he should at least pay attention to this man. Also, since it is snowing, he realizes that this man is aware of what's happening, baby, so he pushes a concealed button on the blotter pad, and a check-book with attached pen appears from its surface. Magic, breathes Faustus in awe, having never seen a check-book before. Rock amiably writes him a check for ten thousand dol-
lars, and hands it to Faustus, who says “Give Rip a sip, and you'll be hip; Rip for the Erector-Set!” “Marvelous,” says Rock. “Now, I'd set that to the famous madrigal tune of 'Lizzie, I can't kiss you, your ruff's too rough.' " 'Well, perhaps,” says Rocked-in-the-bosom-of-Manhattan, "we'll have our song-and-trance men work it out. Here's your other twenty," he says, pulling a twenty-thousand dollar bill gaily from his change pocket; “we usually come in at noon, in time for a cocktail before lunch.”

Ten years later:
We see Faustus ensconced in his pent-house offices, high above the roof of the Empire State building, in a huge chair with the leather carefully cracked by a secret aging process, known only to the master craftsmen of Sears-Roebuck, Inc., which Faustus now owns. Buryman has just left this office with messages for three of his former mistresses, all of whom now sit gracefully at the feet of Faustus. Buryman has become a Vice-President in charge of Parkinson's Legal Disease for Faustus, ever since Faustus bought out his firm during that first glorious year of freedom and success. Faustus has also bought out J. P. Gethim, J. C. Rock, and Onasis. He now holds a controlling interest in IBM, and GM, and AM, and FM, and every year, sends representatives to college campuses across the country to entice the finest young minds of America to his cave of Ali-Babble. And they come, in swarms, in herds like ostriches thundering across the plains, in tides of lemming-like love for this austere, sage oracular orifice; they come in streams of salmon returning to the home to spawn great paens of praise for the American dream. They come in awe clutching their diplomas and young wives by the hand to sit at the knees of this balding Buddha and learn the prayers their mothers never taught them. In a word, Faustus has become a suckcess. And when Addafamia returns to his mind (which is but rarely) he smooths the hacked-leather arm of his nearest broad fondly, and laughs to himself at the thought of all those poor succors, his farmer follegos, who are still bound by the ivy tendrils.

But ten years later:
Faustus is writing his memoirs, and has sent Buryman off to his old college to collect his old papers. The college president, in worship of Faustus, and to spite Buryman, now a nothing, invites him to dinner for ailed times sake (his favorite brand of that famous lice liquor), and smoked oysters on the hackshell. During the meal, the President tells Buryman that the college will be re-named the “Faustus Institute of Higher Yearnings” in horror of the magnificent accoutrements, the glarishous ghouls, the dizzying heights crept to by Faustus. “Who, even when he was with us,” spoke the coolhedge presidency, “was a marble of marvells.” “How true,” sighed Buryman, “I shall never forget the communion with him, that first smoked oyster shared across the table.” Thus did Faustus live in the hearts of all who had known him. So Buryman collects the papers and returns to Faustus, who thanks him gently, with a kind pat on the ankle and sends him away. Then Faustus with a tender pinch sends his three Musses back to their kennels, and turns to the thick sheaf of papers brought to him by Buryman. Amusement curdles his smile, cuddled in the worm lines of his granite-jawed visage. I was wise, he thinks to make that decision, to cast off that naive Factamania, to plunge deep into the magic of the market, to waver the will of the masses. Look, he thought, stretching sensuously, where I am today. I am the apex of suckcess, the slaked heart of millions, no man can go further, I have accomplished all. I... have... accomplished... all — No!! Frailing his arms (encased in the finest linen) frantically, he pushed every button on his desk console. From all corners of the building, from every floor — dropping their racing forms, their Matron-forms, their pay-now-go-later forms (an invention of Faustus), their sextuplicate memo forms, dropping their secretaries from their laps and leaping instead at the call of duty, they came running—Vice-presidents, janitors, office boys, foremen, managers, vice-managers, branch managers. twig managers , , , bruised secretaries, cleaning women, typists, accountants — they jammed the elevators (with gapes of wrath), they thumped up the stoned stairways, they fought for the home to spawn great paens of praise for the Wholly Phail, the symbol of my aspirations? Sir, spoke Buryman, it is in Fadacamia, where you left it, these twenty years ago. Sir, he said with a soft beam in his left eye, Famishamia beckons you to return, to take up your paper sack and return through its Wholly Phortals, give up, sir — his voice ring with ecstasies of greed —these futile fooleries, and return to the bosom of the Muses! Buryman! Never have you spoken with them in horror of the magnificent accoutrements, the glarishous ghouls, the dizzying heights crept to by Faustus. “Who, even when he was with us,” spoke the coolhedge presidency, “was a marble of marvells.” “How true,” sighed Buryman, “I shall never forget the communion with him, that first smoked oyster shared across the table.” Thus did Faustus live in the hearts of all who had known him. So Buryman collects the papers and returns to Faustus, who thanks him gently, with a kind pat on the ankle and sends him away. Then Faustus with a tender pinch sends his three Musses back to their kennels, and turns to the thick sheaf of papers brought to him by Buryman. 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Sir, he said with a soft beam in his left eye, Famishamia beckons you to return, to take up your paper sack and return through its Wholly Phortals, give up, sir — his voice ring with ecstasies of greed —these futile fooleries, and return to the bosom of the Muses! Buryman! Never have you spoken without slyness! here Faustus jumped down from the desk where he had left the imprint of his feet upon the blotter (which had the First National Bank concealed beneath it), but this tomb I will follow your advice. Back to work, all of you — and they turtled, humbled, tumbled back down the steers, down the elevator shafts, hass over hails, and the twig manager managed to snatch the least-broozed secretary on the way down.

Last seen, last asked:
Faustus in his penthouse, his pent-up sorrow blursting fourth, his three pent-up Musses bursting respectively, their girdles, Matron-forms, and mock-up. He smooths the arm of the quacked-leather
mare he has brought with him from Madacamia. A sigh gurgles forth from his now-dripping lips, and tears for the lost Phail escape from his eyes. Once again, he speaks into his dictaphone — Get this dun, Buryman . . . The title of the memoirs is to be “The Tragedy of Duckter Farcicus.” The epitaph . . . ah! shuddering . . . shall be “Nevermore,” . . . The first lime — last chapter — The world refused to allow me to return . . . to the Hollowed Hulls of Idvy . . .

NAMELESS.
THIS RUMPLESTILTSKIN EVIL

Mary Klepser

"'When you going to pay me, white man?
When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent . . .'
— Nancy, in Faulkner's "That Evening Sun"

What we have named
we know and are known by,
we covenant with,
accept and acknowledge
and are master over.
The nameless man, in stories,
is always the wild one,
the child-snatcher, the outlaw,
the black-robed spirit of evil,
the feared stranger.
Give him his right name, and we control him:
we can laugh out loud at him now if we want to,
scare, scold, summon, curse, or command him,
set up the bounds
of his behavior.
But a name that is not the right
name, that fails to fence in
the maverick, is met with laughter.
My students will chortle
if I say "affair."
It was not an affair,
sordid, chosen, stubbornly bountiful,
two lovers acknowledging
a passion to justify
all sin of adultery;
nor was it prostitution:
Stovall had not paid for
nor the woman solicited,
across the ditch, among the heavy magnolias,
that plundering in the dark unlockable cabin.
It was no intrigue,
of elaborate secrecy,
finesse, delicacy;
and "amour" suggests fine linen
and Parisian trysts.
A mouth that spoke truth of it
is kicked into silence,
spitting bloody teeth.
Unlabelled, unlimited,
the wrong persists.
Characters:

Henry       An Old Man
A Woman     A Little Girl

— Doorway —

Henry: Good-bye.
7 Voices (within): Good-bye.
Henry: I will be in the Sierras a long time.
Voice: A squirrel.
Henry: Yes, a squirrel for you, and five birds that no other child has ever had before.
Voice: No, I want a lizard.
Voice: And I a mole.
Henry: You are each very distinct, children. I shall satisfy you all.
Old Man: Very distinct.
Henry: What?
Old Man: May I carry your suitcases?
Henry: No.
(Laughter of children.)
Old Man: Are they your children?
Henry: All six.
Old Man: Long ago, I met their mother, your wife. I was a coachman at their house; but, to tell the truth, I am better off now as a beggar. Horses, ha ha ha! Nobody knows how horses scare me. Let a streaking bolt fall over all of their eyes. Driving a car is very hard. Oh! It is so hard. If you do not fear, you cannot become wise; and if you become wise, you do not fear. Horses are wicked creatures!
Henry (gathering his suitcases): Leave me alone.
Old Man: No, no. For a few coins, the smallest you have, I will carry them for you.
Henry: Quick. Let's go. I have to take the train at six.
Old Man: Ah, the train. That is another thing. The train is a foolish thing. Even if I lived a hundred years, I would not fear the train. The train is not alive. It goes and has gone ... But horses ... Look. Woman (in the window): My Henry. Henry. Don't forget to write me. Do not forget me.
Old Man: Ah, the girl! (He laughs.) Do you remember how he would jump up onto the wall, how he would climb trees just to see you?
Woman: I will remember it until I die.
Henry: So will I.
Woman: I wait for you. Good-bye.
Henry: Good-bye.
Old Man: Do not grieve. She is your woman and she loves you. You love her. Do not grieve.
Henry: It's true, but this absence weighs me down.
Old Man: There is something else that is worse. It is worse that everything passes and that the river sounds. It is worse that there is a cyclone.
Henry: I don't feel like jokes. You are always like this.
Old Man: Ha ha ha! The whole world, and you first, thinks that the important part of a cyclone is the disasters it produces, and I think totally the contrary. The important part of a cyclone ...
Henry (becoming irritated): Let's go. It's going to be six o'clock any minute.
Old Man: Well, and the sea? ... In the sea ...
Henry (furious): I said let's go.
Old Man: Aren't you forgetting something?
Henry: I've left everything perfectly organized. And besides, what does it matter to you? The worst thing in the world is an old servant, a beggar.
1st Voice: Papa.
2nd Voice: Papa.
3rd Voice: Papa.
4th Voice: Papa.
5th Voice: Papa.
6th Voice: Papa.
Old Man: Your children.
Henry: My children.
Little girl (in the doorway): I don't want the squirrel. If you bring me the squirrel I won't love you. Don't bring me the squirrel. I don't want it.
Voice: Nor I the lizard.
Voice: Nor I the mole.
Little girl: We want you to bring us a mineral collection.
Voice: No, no; I want my mole.
Voice: No; the mole is for me.
(They laugh)
Little girl [coming in]: Now the mole is going to be for me.
Henry: Enough! You'll be content!
Old Man: You said that they were very distinct.
Old Man: What?
Henry (powerfully): Fortunately.
Old Man (sadly): Fortunately.
(They leave.)
Woman (in the window): Good-bye.
Voice: Good-bye.
Woman: Return soon!
Voice (far off): Soon.
Woman: At night he will cover himself up well. He carries four blankets. Yet I will be alone in bed. I
shall be cold. His eyes are wonderful; but what I
love is his power. (She strips nude.) My back aches.
Ah! To abandon. I want him to spurn me . . . and
love me. I want to flee and have him catch me. I
want him to burn me . . . , to burn me. (Loud.) Good­
bye, good-bye . . . Henry. Henry . . . I love you. I see
you: You are small. You prance about the rocks.
Ah! To abandon. I want him to spurn me ... and
were a blossom. I could admit you, Henry ...
want him to burn me ... , to burn me. (Loud.) Good­
bye, good-bye ... Henry. Henry ... I love you. I see
Small. I would be able to ingulf you now, as if you
said no!
Little girl: Papa, I want the squirrel. (Breaks down
crying.) My God! I want the squirrel!

THE OLD MAN

Howard Brecher

The old man lived alone in the large and beau­tiful house suspended quite miraculously from the
wall of the mountain. If anyone chanced to pass by,
he would probably stand in awe. Then, leaning back
for a better view, he would fall into the valley be­
low. But of course, since no one ever passed by, and
the old man never came out, the house was never
seen. In fact, no one was even sure if there was a
house or an old man. Everyone, even the children,
had heard the stories. Some believed them, but oth­
ers thought that they were only myths that someone
had phantasized on a stormy night long ago. No one
knew for sure.

It was the responsibility of the old man to keep
the whole house in order. Although he considered it
a great honor that he had been entrusted with its
care, he was not certain of his worthiness. In the
beginning, everything was different and confused.
Even his whitish robe that wove itself into him,
seemed strange. He wondered what the order was
that he was supposed to keep. Finally he attributed
this all to the newness of his location. Soon he
would get used to the house, and eventually every­
ting would become familiar.

Each room in the house had been built according
to its own intricate design, but they were so numer­
ous, some were exactly alike. None had doors. A
room was either open or closed. The ones that were
open had interruptions in the walls that served as
entrances. The remotely placed entrances were dif­
ficult to find. The old man moved through the halls
searching for these openings, but was deceived
many times. What appeared to be an opening in the
distance, on approaching closer, was found to be
only a section of the wall.

The rooms scattered throughout the house linked
gether by a winding hallway. The length and
width, or even the hallway, could not be determined
because it was invisible. It tended to blend into the
complex of the rooms, adding to the vastness of the
interior. Anyone else would have been lost inside,
but the old man had learned to guide himself about
by following the invisible markings along the hall.
He suspected that they were also changing; the
same markings always led to different rooms.

The old man was moving about in the halls car­
ying a lamp, and noticed that he had entered one of
these rooms. Darkness disturbed from its sleep
yawned back at the light. He could see the creatures
on the floor, and remained transfixed on them as
they crawled about the room. How strange looking
they were. Little arms and legs, and even smaller
heads. He wondered what he looked like to them.
He had never seen himself, and there had never
been anyone to see him. No one except the empti­ness and the phantoms. They had laughed and told
him that he was old and foolish. He didn't know
whether to believe them or not. Weren't they just
the echoes of silent memories? These small crea­
tures would tell him the truth.

Even if the creatures could have lifted their eyes
high enough, and overcome the blinding light that
hid the old man, they would not have been able to
see him. Being primitive creatures and living totally
in darkness, their eyes had not developed to the
point of actually seeing. They could only make out
many indistinct images in the shadows where the
old man was.

The little creatures were wandering aimlessly,
crawling over each other, feeling for something. He
looked over the floor, unable to locate the object of
their undetermined search. He continued to watch
and finally recognized what it was. They were car­
rying some of the old man's threads. They were no longer their original color, but naturally assumed the color of the region where they fell.

The old man didn't understand the anxiety of these creatures struggling for his threads, but he was pleased that they wanted them.

They could not accustom themselves to the light and began constructing their own houses for shelter. Being inexperienced builders, they were not sure what materials would build the sturdiest houses. Consequently, they used everything they could find. Every house had a thread though each was a different color. The threads could not be used in the foundations because they weren't strong enough to support the other materials. They were used instead on the roofs as ornaments and symbols.

The original structures were crude, and disintegrated quickly. The materials and knowledge of the old houses were used to build stronger ones. The threads, though muddied, were woven to the patterns of the new houses.

Their behavior puzzled and irritated the old man. He didn't know why they wanted to live in their small and ugly houses when his was more beautiful and large enough for all of them.

As the buildings became stronger, the creatures came out less often. They remained inside the darkness where it was more comfortable. They soon forgot about the light. The threads were also gone, buried beneath the foundations.

The old man saw the threads missing and realized that the creatures no longer came out of the houses. The guests in his house had turned him out of their own. The old man became angry and destroyed their houses.

The little creatures, suddenly exposed to the light, were afraid. Crawling about in confusion and fleeing through the cracks in the walls, they returned to the room from which they had come. The old man tried desperately to follow, but there were no entrances for him.

The tiny bodies vanished before they entered that room. It was the strangest one in the whole house. Inside there was nothing — not even darkness.

The old man moved back to the hall. They were gone and he was alone again. He was weary of this house and he wanted to leave. But where would he go? He couldn't remember coming from anywhere. For all he knew, he had always been there. Well, the time had come for him to leave.

Suddenly, he noticed that he was at the window. Good, he'd always wanted to see the outside of the house; he would see it before he went. He looked down into the black valley and up to the starless sky. As his gaze began to focus, he recognized the formless white image on the mirror of darkness, and remembered.

---

THE FAT BOY

Karen Stanley

I walked into a single starset,
Watching
The fat boy
Rubbing his curly hand through his hair.
The fat boy,
Rubbing his hand and standing
In one-footed solemnity.
Chagall. Aleko. The dancing cows.
I said, turning my head to my right hand,
I seem to have
A rather right-handed mind.
At any rate,
I have found that my mind carries ink prints
And my right hand
Is stained
From, well, from ink and many things.
Curious, to
Bring two hands together to work at clay-building.

I stood
Watching the fat boy
Watching.
Then, in a turning wince
Unable to watch
The dancing fatboy on his
Solemn one-leg.
Leaving,
And the lights walking,
Playing starset
To a fat boy
Standing one leg onto the other.
I have seen trees turning into the wind.
It was hard
To understand, those branches thrashing the air
As if to punish it for emptiness.
A strange feeling, trees in the wind,
But built inside me
Like my own moment of birth, forgotten.

To a fat boy.
To a solemn-faced
Curly-eyed, heron-eyed,
Standing on his
One-leg, two-legs, curly-leg, heron-legs.
To a fat boy,
Heavy even in this afternoon
Of fiddles, fiddles, and dancing cows.

I listened, the other day,
To an orchestra make sound before it is an orchestra.
And I walked out of the audience, knowing
That each violin was a violin, and every flute
Played flute only to itself.
But when I walked back again, there it was;
And I did not understand, really, but I had found
The difference of a music.

One,
Two,
Three
Legs.
And the stars all playing lights,
And I not there.
SELECTED ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job.

Indeed, it came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"
Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it.

When the morning stars sang together, and all the seeds of God shouted for joy.
As each circle of lamplight slid past, the stone in his shoe grew. From a smooth grain, not much larger than sand, to a pebble conglomerated of rough sides, and finally to an animately cutting rock, the stone expanded with each step. And expanded, until he could visualize it slicing away the shoe leather, embedding itself in his foot, clinging and curling around it until his foot became encased, then his ankle... I'll be fossilized! However, this was not a matter which greatly distressed him.

"... And today, the problem of air pollution has reached such serious proportions that New York residents who are in any way afflicted with respiratory problems are requested to remain indoors as much as possible. This request comes from Doctor Julius Murphy, director of the City's Health Services, who grimly stated that 'New York's air is unfit for human consumption'...

A slight grin moving across his face found itself entangled with a shallow cough. Switching off the transistor, he slipped it into his pocket as he continued to dissect circle after circle of lamplight with his shadow. All for the best, it's too bad how they don't know that it's all for the best. Now, do they think they would have seen that beautiful sunset if it hadn't been for the smog? But then, do they ever see sunsets?

No, his memory of the sunset soothingly whispered, they work all day in the factories that pollute the air, they ride home at night on the buses that blanket the city with waste, and never once do they look to see the beauty they've created. Only youuu... the memory murmured, drowning in the growing stone in his shoe. All for the best, the nerves in his foot gasped, all for the best, pounded his uneven footsteps across the puddles of liquid light.

Everything has a purpose, he thought... a purpose. Why yes, he responded aloud to the empty mouths of broken windows, every... thing... has... a... purpose, but the mouths gaped unanswering. Even this stone, rolling under the ocean of my foot has a purpose; this stone growing beneath my life. I wonder which would win, if the stone grew a lot? Purpose! struck the one o'clock bells... purpose howled a coyote siren...

There must have been a reason for sticking a goddamn statue right in the middle of the street, grumbled the sanitation man the next morning, but it sure as hell isn't gonna stay there in my way. Who the devil is the guy, that they made a statue of him? In silent pinks the sun rose.
But they smiled;
They smiled all their ironies and said,
"As the elm grew in his day and the pine in his,
As the fish swam his morning
And your fathers sang their births out of themselves,
So you must
Beat of the death of the already-dead."
It was then I left the tools of the harvest,
Burned the fields,
Bore a horse,
And created, from the air, the blade of the plow.

III
The earth was warm; closely I crept into
Its darknesses, kissed it kisses
And carried into it all the beginnings.
I felt it in my hands,
The moistness of the clay, the taste of birth
Staining my fingers.
I will plant you, I said;
I will plant you and bring from you fruits
And a harvest of grain.

You will bring me bread and wine,
Balancing in the perfect rhythm of summer and death.
And I will love you in the spring
And I will love you in the fall
And all during the summer I shall be one with you,
And during the winter
We shall lie quietly
I beside you and you
Beside me,
Darkly waiting
And under the snow.

But they turned to me,
Saying in voices of gentle and bitter,
"As the field is laid bare
As the stones are buried deep in the earth
As the cold falls too swiftly
In the years of famine,
So will you waken to the sound of hunger and pain."
And it was only then that I pierced my
Eyes with darkness
And found a time of great light.
The following interview with short story writer and novelist Stanley Elkin took place in the basement of Dr. Bogart’s home one morning last spring, during Mr. Elkin’s weekend visit to Kalamazoo. Mr. Elkin teaches courses in English and creative writing at Washington University in St. Louis. The interviewers are Norm Buntaine, Eve Form, Edie Israel, Andy Morikawa and Ron Sharp.

Elkin: For my first number I am going to sing “Melancholy Baby.”

Sharp: I don’t think any of us are familiar with it, but there’s been a lot of talk about a new book by William Gass — Ommensetter’s Luck. I was told that you think it’s the best American novel since Moby Dick.

Elkin: Yes, I do.

Sharp: Could you tell us a little bit about it?

Elkin: Well, Gass is the best writer working today, it seems to me. I knew him at Illinois when he was a visiting professor shared by the Philosophy and English departments; and we used an office together. I would always see him writing. I might be having a conference with a student, talking, making all sorts of distracting noises and Gass would just be writing away. One afternoon I asked him what he was working on. He wasn’t working on anything; he was just writing. He wrote little sentences, trying to get down, you know, just what that radiator looks like, really looks like; how the walls mesh in the corner there. He was rehearsing, practicing the way a musician practices. This concern with language, this concern with writing is one of the most astonishing things about Ommensetter’s Luck as a novel. There isn’t a paragraph where one isn’t surprised by the new way in which Gass has perceived something. So over and apart from theme or structure, or organization or characterization or anything else that he has done in the novel — things that traditionally happen in novels — he has taken language and reminted it, and this is the best feature of Ommensetter’s Luck. In one long section — “The Change of Heart of the Rev. Jethro Ferber” — there’s a racy series of interrupting limericks which in a kind of way retell the story of the novel. I haven’t, and I don’t think anybody else has read the limericks without the interrupting prose, but I would like one day to do this to see what Gass has done, because I’m sure he’s done something. It would not make any sense to talk about the meaning of the book since you haven’t read the book. It’s a philosophic work, which deals with closed systems, many closed systems. One is magic. One is myth, legend, misconceiving personality as in one of those party games where one person whispers a message that is altered by the next person. Another is the closed system of the self, and — as the title, Ommensetter’s Luck, might suggest to you — it’s a tragedy. Call no man lucky till he’s dead — that idea. Before I finished the book, I was wondering what Gass was up to by not having very much dialogue; because there isn’t really an awful lot of dialogue in the novel. In a way it reminded me of Sherwood Anderson’s Poor White, which has only fifteen or sixteen lines of dialogue in the whole book; but I hadn’t finished it and in the last fifty or so pages there’s nothing but dialogue, and without any of your helpful “Dick said’s” or “Mary said’s” or anything like that. It’s an incredible book.

Sharp: William Burroughs has been working with images. He keeps these notebooks, and he clips pictures —

Elkin: Yeah, but he doesn’t do anything with them. William Burroughs is a bum and Gass isn’t.

Sharp: Right. I feel the same about Burroughs. When Richard Wilbur was here about a year ago, somebody asked him about his prose. He said he had written a few short stories, but that as a poet, having such an extraordinary concern for the right word, he thought it would be an “interminable task,” as he put it, to write a novel.

Elkin: Well, it is an interminable task. It took Gass ten years to write Ommensetter’s Luck.

Sharp: What kind of problems do you run into with language?

Elkin: I write — I don’t know what the question means: What kind of problems —

Sharp: In other words, Wilbur evidently meant that it would be so hard for him to pick the right word. He also mentioned that when he writes a poem —

Elkin: That’s what I’ve often suspected about poetry. In a kind of way, a poet has it easy; he has a very limited task that he sets himself. His poems are terminable tasks. He writes, you know, a ten line poem and the ten line poem does all sorts of things, compactly of course, but only all those sorts of things, and it only takes ten lines. What somebody like Gass tries to do is make a poem that goes all the way. It’s much harder.

I see now what you mean by your question: What sort of problems does one have? Can’t answer it but I can see what you mean.

Sharp: How much time does teaching take away from your writing, or don’t you teach an awful lot?

Elkin: Oh, I teach an awful lot. I teach full time, full-
Interview

Elkin: I teach the short story, and I try to tell the kids to get a viable situation because if they get the situation presumably the rest of the story will take care of itself. Structure and theme and point-of-view will all emerge and come out right in the end if they begin with a central, workable core situation. So one of the things I do in my class is endlessly to discuss a hundred dozen situations which they submit. Then I say, Well, I think that you will have better luck with this situation than you would have with this situation, and they go ahead and try to write the story.

Sharp: You mentioned before that Gass spent a lot of time exercising as a musician might do. Don't you think that a lot of people, say in their student days or when they're just beginning to write, do this kind of thing?

Elkin: No, because they always have an end in mind. They're going to write some kind of political two-penny page on Viet Nam; or a love poem and give it to their girl-friend. They clearly have the product in mind and Gass didn't. He was just writing. He wanted to know what that bicycle looks like.

Sharp: Did you write in college?

Elkin: I took all the creative writing courses that were offered — all of them. Of course, the ultimate value of a creative writing course in a college is not that it can teach you how to write. It can't do that. Nobody can teach anybody how to write. But it provides deadlines and a framework within which kids will work. Otherwise they won't work. I didn't. Those semesters I didn't take a creative writing course because one wasn't offered, I didn't do any writing. So it provides a deadline, a framework, a critical intelligence that can tell you, you know, don't do this the next time. It can't tell you what to do the next time, but it can tell you what not to do the next time. And it provides, too, a certain kind of steamy intensity because you're involved with people who are doing the same things you're doing and concerned with the same things you're concerned with. But it sure as hell can't teach you how.

Israel: Is there a tendency for you and for your students to sort of imitate the style of the professor?

Elkin: Well, I don’t even know that my students know that I write. I don't talk about it much. Well, I teach writing. Sharp: You can't write about a family?

Elkin: Yes.

Sharp: That's for one year?

Elkin: Uh-huh.

Sharp: Now, Jack Gilbert, the poet, is another fellow that was up here. He believed that it was impossible to write honestly while teaching at a university. I know this is an old question. Gilbert said you can't write with a wife and family, that if you have kids and the security of . . .

Elkin: You can’t write about a family?

Sharp: No, he said you can’t really write honestly if you have a family and kids and you’re teaching at a university in a very comfortable situation.

Elkin: Yes, the best writer on earth would be the guy with the biggest machine gun who could keep everyone off. Wilbur is right.

Sharp: That was Gilbert that made the comment.

Elkin: Gilbert was right too. Wilbur would have been right if he had said what Gilbert said.

Sharp: I think Wilbur shares your sentiments. So do I. Do students come to you with their writing?

Elkin: Well, I teach writing.

Israel: How do you teach writing?

Elkin: I teach the short story, and I try to tell the kids to get a viable situation because if they get the situation presumably the rest of the story will take care of itself. Structure and theme and point-of-view will all emerge and come out right in the end if they begin with a central, workable core situation. So one of the things I do in my class is endlessly to discuss a hundred dozen situations which they submit. Then I say, Well, I think that you will have better luck with this situation than you would have with this situation, and they go ahead and try to
"Well, let me fool around with this, let me change the combinations on the lock," and it just gradually develops. Nobody has style to begin with. Buntaine: So what did you do when you were beginning to write?

Elkin: I imitated Faulkner.

Buntaine: How long did it take you to move away from Faulkner?

Elkin: Well, I moved away from Faulkner — ha, ha — in 195. . . . I can tell you the truth, I really can. I can give you the month and year. I was in Virginia in the Army at the time and I was sending out stories and they were coming back, and in October of '56 a story was accepted by Epoch Magazine, which was published at Cornell. This made me feel very good. I gave a geshrei which is still echoing today somewhere in the piney woods. And then the very next day I got a second acceptance, from Views, a magazine now defunct (and then defunct, too, I think) — that it would accept this story of mine if the beginning were entirely rewritten. Now it so happens that the story they accepted was perhaps the most worthless story ever written. And when I sat down to rewrite it I saw that either I would have to tear it up, or do it all over again — or fake it. I chose to fake it. And I faked it by deliberately casting the first three or four pages in a kind of Faulknerian frame. This stuff sounded more like Faulkner than anything Faulkner had ever written. It wasn't even a parody. It was forgery. I sent it out and they accepted it. Why not? Why not accept something by Faulkner? It was published and it sort of ruined my stomach when I saw it and that was when I left Faulkner to go on to someone else. No, I don't think I did go on to anyone else after that.

Form: I'd like to ask a question. It seems, maybe over the past decade or so, that a great many of the leading American novelists have been Jewish, writing about Jewish opportunity.

Elkin: Well, Gass has given literature back to the Goyem. That's what he's done. Why?

Form: Yes, I wanted to know if you had a theory about this.

Elkin: I think that the success of the Jewish writer— Hitler made the success of the Jewish writer. Hitler made the Jewish writer for the Protestant reader, and he made the Jewish writer for the Jewish writer. I'll tell you what I mean. Before the war, before Hitler, Jewish writers worked in a kind of — have you ever heard the radio program, the "Eternal Light"? Well, they worked in that kind of vein, a vein which was very cozy and sort of fiddling on the roof, if you know what I mean. It was ethnic and cute and sentimental. It dealt with Jewish family life—the Goldbergs at this time, you know, was a very popular radio program — and the characters in a Jewish story would be Mama, Papa, Shelley, Rosy and the puppy dog Jake. They were yiddishistic Uncle Toms, self-deprecating defenders of a semi-vaudeville faith. Well, when people die in the kinds of vast numbers that Hitler made them die in, Papa, Mama, Rosy, Shelley, and the dog Jake, become invisible characters, and so what happened is the Jewish writer sort of toughened up. His characters didn't have to defend themselves, or do the routines any longer. They didn't need the masks of piety.

Form: But you think it's moving away from that now?

Elkin: Yes. Now you know where it is. Now it's in a kind of high camp ground. I was at the airport yesterday, in Chicago, waiting for the plane to Kalamazoo, and I was looking at the racks — paperback racks, you know — at the concession stand. It was incredible. There were five different Honey West novels — five, count 'em, five. Five different Honey West novels. There were four different Man from Uncle novels. Different. There was a Batman and Robin novel. There was a novel called Modesty Blaise, which is about this handsome lady who knows karate and judo. There was a book called Superhero; there was another book called Pop Heroes. All this stuff provides Americans with a sense of being in on a joke. We know the ironies, like the Greeks at Sophocles' opening night. Some of the journals even try to dignify a lot of this stuff. For example, the work of Thomas Pynchon. He wrote the novel V., which I find unreadable, and another novel called The Crying of Lot 49, which I find just as unreadable, and I've tried to read them both. Now Pynchon is a sort of — he's to pop culture what Shakespeare was to Elizabethan culture — he's the best going. That's where it is, but it's got to move away from there, it's got to move away from there, and God knows where it'll go. I mean the novel only really has one place to go — it must go where it's been — it must deal with character because that's ultimately what the novel is about. It's about human beings, specific, individuated human beings. And form — oh, you can screw around with form, you can be concerned with form — form is much less important than the particular glandular, psychological make-up of the person you're using the form for.

Sharp: Do you make much of an effort to keep up with all the new literature that comes out?

Elkin: Well, I like to read, but I don't make much effort to keep up with the literature that comes out. Compulsively, masochistically, I have to see who's coming out with what, who wrote the masterpiece of the week, to keep score, but I haven't, for example, yet read Herzog. I must be the only person in
this basement who hasn't. Have you read Herzog? Well, I'm not the only person then. Have you, you? Well, we out-vote these guys who have.

Sharp: What about things like science, politics, psychology?

Elkin: What problems do they cause me, you mean?

Sharp: Well . . .

Elkin: I watch Huntley-Brinkley every night. I was rooting for that man down in Texas with the artificial heart to live. I don't know how to answer the question. I'm not an activist, but in the last year I've signed every petition anyone has put in front of me. One is naturally caught up in the century. But when I was a kid, for example, I never knew the batting averages. I couldn't name all the players on the team. I mean I have no expertise.

Buntaine: To tell you the truth I was rather surprised to learn that you were a 35 year old Ph.D.

Elkin: I'm rather surprised I'm 35 years old.

Buntaine: But a Ph.D. engaged in creative writing?

Elkin: That only demonstrates a failure of nerve on my part, that's all. I always wanted to write. As a kid I thought I would write short stories for the newspapers. I thought that was where they were published. When I enrolled in college I decided to major in journalism because I still thought short stories were published in newspapers. I learned, I think in the second half of my freshman year, that it wasn't so — by subscribing to a newspaper. I started to take these creative writing courses as a sophomore, took them all through my undergraduate years and as a graduate student. What was the question? I forget.

Buntaine: Oh, nothing at all, I'm interested in your —

Elkin: Oh, the Ph.D. It was just a question of whether or not I had enough talent to make it. I thought maybe I better get this Ph.D. as a sort of security.

Buntaine: That was the trap that Jack Gilbert referred to. He called it a trap.

Elkin: Does he have a Ph.D.?

Buntaine: No, I don't think so.

Elkin: I'm thinking, well, forget that; go on to the next question.

Buntaine: We probably all read "The Guest" here, and . . .

Elkin: Gee, that's more people than read Herzog. I'm doing great in the basement.

Buntaine: The style of writing is very structured, I thought. You were very careful with word choices, you were very particular. Could you compare the validity of the type of creative writing that you do to the cut-out writing of Burroughs?

Elkin: Well, I don't consider Burroughs a writer. He does stuff with paper and scissors and paste. It's writing for the Barbie-doll or something.

Buntaine: I'm trying to get at your evaluation of the importance of structure.

Elkin: It's very important, because art is the imposition of order on the chaotic. And structure is a way to this. Now what Burroughs does is simply to promulgate a sort of imitational fallacy — the notion that the world is chaotic, and therefore his work ought to reflect that chaos. Well, chaos is best reflected, it seems to me, in an unchaotic way. I just read Dostoevski's The Idiot, which is also about a chaotic world; but it's an ordered novel, a structured novel.

Form: Do you keep up much with the theatre?

Elkin: Well, what do you mean? You mean do I read reviews of plays?

Form: No, I mean . . .

Elkin: In St. Louis, where I live, there is no theatre. But I would keep up with the theatre if there were a theatre to keep up with.

Form: That's what I was getting at. I've been reading and hearing that the American theatre is dead.

Elkin: Well, the American theatre has always meant the Broadway theatre. It's three blocks long.

Form: This problem of the writer trying to get his Ph.D. and being integrated into the community . . .

Elkin: Let me say this. I'm not sure the writer has to think in the second half of my freshman year, that it wasn't so — by subscribing to a newspaper. I started to take these creative writing courses as a sophomore, took them all through my undergraduate years and as a graduate student. What was the question? I forget.

Buntaine: Oh, nothing at all, I'm interested in your —

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Buntaine: I'm trying to get at your evaluation of the importance of structure.
Elkin: I think I can tell you about that. I think I know the answer to this question. As I write I read, and I am very conscious of my reaction. Well, this has been serious for three paragraphs now, I'm getting a little bored; let's mix it up a little. So with me, anyway, it's simply a question of alternations—of rhythm.

Sharp: It seems to me one of the dangers in the kind of thing you read yesterday, the chapter from your new novel, is having too many or too long completely hilarious passages. I thought you controlled this pretty well.

Elkin: For example, the part about Feldman's wife, where he's talking about all the things that Lily does: she gets bruised simply by rubbing herself with a towel; from sitting in drafts. Then he goes on about how she gets indigestion from thick steak. Thick steak!! I was conscious after I had written that passage that, my God, it sounds like a kind of night club routine. So I deliberately had Feldman react by saying, "By God, this sounds like a night club routine!" This gets me out of it, you see. But then I go on to validate it because if all I've done is simply gotten out of it and I have to say to myself, "Wow, that was a close one, you don't want to do that again," then what I've really done is undermined this "routine," and I ought to get rid of it. But I don't want to get rid of it, I want it to stay: so I have him say, "What if it were all true, what if Lily made these things, the jokes, come true?—Lily, the Joke Fairy." Just that single epithet—Lily the Joke Fairy—endorses all that I've done, it seems to me. So one writes by reacting; that's what I'm saying. That was a good answer that time, wasn't it?

Buntaine: How much of your view about art, of the definition of art that you gave here a while ago...?

Elkin: I didn't define art, I simply said what art does...

Buntaine: You said it is an ordering of chaos, not really a reflection of the world the way it is, but an ordering.

Elkin: Right.

Buntaine: How much of that do you teach in your creative writing class?

Elkin: I don't teach any of that in my creative writing class. I teach situations in my creative writing class. I mean, I don't see the point of talking about art in the abstract. I want to concretize it.

Buntaine: They have to know what they're doing when they put it down, and if they have no idea at all or they have the wrong idea...

Elkin: Well, I mean, you're suggesting that people ought to be able to theorize about the thing that they're doing, and I don't see...

Buntaine: People have to recognize what they're putting down in terms of what it really is.

Elkin: That comes later. What ought to come first is simply the thing itself. If they can do that, if they can handle that, they've done much more than simply put themselves in the position to say, "Well, I am ordering reality. I am doing this."

Sharp: In "Criers and Kibitzers," the whole time I felt a lyric background. I could almost hear the criers and kibitzers chattering throughout the whole story. In "The Guest," I heard the sour notes of Bertie's trumpet playing too.

Elkin: Well, that's because I tell you he's a bad trumpet player. I've noticed this about writing. I'm going to say this very clumsily I'm sure. If I were to get you down on paper and I said that you're a fellow who wears button-down shirts—you're wearing a button-down shirt, right? So am I, for that matter—the reader is going to have a negative response to your taste. I wouldn't have to say anything else, and he'd have a negative response to that character. By singling out the button-down shirt the reader will get the idea that there's something wrong with button-down shirts. If I were to say in a story that someone blows his nose in paper tissues the reader gets an idea of the character that diminishes the character. It's as though this is the gaudiest thing in the world. Details annihilate by emphasis. So simply to suggest Bertie's second-rate or third-rate trumpet playing is to make you hear it throughout the story. Just as, forever afterward, you would never use paper tissue for nose blowing. I don't know why this happens, but it seems to me that it's part of the physics of language. This thing will happen.

[Dr. Bogart came into the basement at this point, and entered the discussion immediately.]

Bogart: What has happened in the last, say fifteen years to the conception of character in the novel? What's different in the artist's attitude towards character? From say Jane Austen to George Elliot, or even as far up as—I imagine starting with Leo Bloom up?

Elkin: Well, it seems to me that there's been a reversal of assumptions. The traditional assumption is that the collective society ought to get the emphasis of value and credit. The new assumption—and it may be reversed, you know, Tuesday—is that the collective society is largely in the wrong, and that the assertion, the thrust of self is where value is. I think, briefly, this is what has happened in the novel.

Bogart: Do you feel that character is really more complex because of, say, psychoanalysis, existentialism, alienation?

Elkin: None of these things, it seems to me, make character complex. What they do do is yield what
I've just said — an implicit assumption that the self is more important than anything "out there."
Bogart: What I'm saying is, can you be more honest with an anti-hero, with the anti-self, than with a hero, say, in quest of himself?
Elkin: I don't know what an anti-hero really is, but I guess I sort of understand. It seems to me you can be more honest with this shabby, shabby fellow that you just spoke of than you can with Dick Do-Right, simply because Dick Do-Right is working under the other assumption — under the assumption that collectivization is virtue.
Bogart: If he slays the dragon, he frees society.
Elkin: That's right.
Bogart: And the anti-hero slays no dragon, and society still remains in prison.
Elkin: Right. Both things. That's a good way of saying it. That's what I thought you were going to say — and he is free. Literature has in a way stopped preaching — that's good — although you read the old stuff, you read Middlemarch, where Dorothea Brooke is a lady who wants to do good for people. Though she gets herself in trouble by maintaining this desire one knows that she's right — that she ought to be able to be a kind of grey lady to the universe. You read this stuff and you cry — you cry and you cry and you weep and you weep, because you would like to think the value ought to be...
Bogart: But even though the character in the modern novel has freed himself from playing the hero that frees society, and he's trying to be loyal and authentic to himself, what happens to such a character when...
Elkin: He gets drafted. (laughter)
Bogart: ... when he hasn't freed himself from the conscience that he's inherited from the society. What I'm saying is that there's a certain sort of cultural lag.
Elkin: Well, that's a problem. I'm facing in A Bad Man, the book I'm working on. I don't know myself whether Feldman is a bad man or a good man. I don't think I can resolve this for the reader. You simply have to be aware of the fact that you're important and also those guys are important. But you can't sacrifice yourself for those guys. Live and let live if possible. Live and let live, but live! I suppose that's the height to which virtue can now attain. That's as high as it gets.
Bogart: That's the new tension.
Elkin: Right — that's right.
Bogart: One more question.
Elkin: OK, then I really am going to sing "Melancholy Baby."

Bogart: What is the relationship of your art, craft, of your involvement in literature to death?
Elkin: Well, you might as well ask what is the relation of my own personality to death.
Bogart: Well, I'm asking a specific question to a specific writer.
Elkin: It terrifies me. It scares shit out of me. It's because of the fact of death that the old notion where the value is — collective or individual — gets1 ersaulted. We're simply not comforted anymore by Christian promises and you discover that you're in it for yourself. You keep your eye on the main chance. But the main chance isn't success anymore. There are new ways of being selfish. The main chance is life itself, experience. At the same time there's a kind of monkey on your back and the monkey is guilty. You've got to schlep it along. The alternatives — resignation and the Peace Corps — are too flat.
Bogart: You want more experience and it means less.
Elkin: That's right. There's a law of diminishing returns. It's too bad. I think we all want to get into the Skinner Box finally (laughter). Do they make big Skinner Boxes?
Sharp: How much of that experience do you get by reading?
Elkin: I get very little experience, personally, from reading. I enjoy reading and I am, of course, a professional reader inasmuch as I teach; but I think that as one grows older, one is less and less influenced by one's reading. We began by talking about Om-mensetter's Luck — here's one experience that I got from reading. I was encouraged by reading Om-mensetter's Luck. I saw how far a writer could go, the superior risks. I'd been counselled by some critics to be, well, more humane. They said humane but they meant conventional, tamer perhaps. I thought, gee, they're probably right. Then I read Gass and I was encouraged. So in that way, a reading experience has been meaningful to me. But only in an oblique and very personal way.
Sharp: Do you ever feel you get to know a writer by reading his books?
Elkin: Yes, I had that feeling about Saul Bellow. It was a funny experience. Bellow had come to Illinois and I was invited to have lunch with him. This was when I was a graduate student. I had always felt that I was on Bellow's wavelength, that I was really on his wavelength. Well, during that lunch (I didn't say very much, because here was a kind of hero) he couldn't take his eyes off me. He absolutely stared. I had to go to the bathroom. I got up and he said "Where are you going?" (laughter). I said "I'm going to the bathroom." He said "Come right back." I said "I will." He said "All right, good." It was funny, you know. I also feel I'm on Norman Mailer's wavelength. I think An American Dream is sensational.
It's really a great book. I have that feeling about Gass. I have it about some other writers.

Sharp: What about older writers?

Elkin: I'm on Melville's wavelength. He would have gone with me to the bathroom. (laughter)

Bogart: What about Faulkner? You weren't on his wavelength?

Elkin: Well, I liked Faulkner. I did my thesis on Faulkner. But, you know, really Faulkner's culture precluded my ever really being on his wavelength. I went to see Faulkner when he was at the University of Virginia and to shake his hand. And he didn't even look at me. I put my hand out and he couldn't find it. (laughter) You have that feeling with writers. Don't you all have that feeling?

Bogart: I wonder how many 'writers they've really met — good writers.

Sharp: Since I've been here at Kalamazoo, only Wilbur and Gilbert have visited, as far as I know.

Elkin: I'll tell you what I think the source of the feeling is. I think that certain writers really come across as human beings, and human beings are alike. But it takes one to know one.

Bogart: What do you think about all the mass education?

Elkin: This is so much fun.

Bogart: What do you think about all the mass education that we participate in, and what kind of audience are we preparing in college for the artists of the future? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about this?

Elkin: Well, I just read your interview in the Index, which I liked very much. Oh let me see, let me tell you what Dan Shea did. Dan Shea is a teacher at Washington University. He was teaching The Ambassadors one day and he said something about the book that struck him as particularly startling. No response; absolutely none. So he began deliberately to say about the novel everything that he did not believe. They wrote it all down. He was saying things that were absolutely wrong; that Lambert Strether, you know, betrays his integrity, everything wrong. And these kids took it all down. Finally one girl in the class raised her hand and said, "You know, Mr. Shea, I think you're wrong there." And he said, "Who are you to think I'm wrong?" She then began to discuss this thing and said very perceptive things about the book. Do you know what the students did? They defended Shea. At the end of the hour Shea told them, "You know what? Everything I said today was wrong. But not only that: everything I have said all semester is wrong." He's never gone back and corrected himself and those poor students still don't know.

Bogart: You're not optimistic about the audience being produced by mass education for the future of poetry and the novel and short stories?

Elkin: No — No, I think that what you say in your interview is good. You have to demass education. Ha, ha — it's like the Lone Ranger: Who was that mass man?

Bogart: I'm teaching a course in the short story, and the lectures are sophisticated, but there are a great many non-majors finishing the English requirement. I just got back sixty papers, and it's as if I am teaching a post graduate course to people who are in kindergarten. If you measure the meaning of your course by the student's ability to write about the material, the only hope one could have is that something else might be occurring on the verbal level.

Elkin: What do you think about the future of mass education? Did you come to this school because it is not a school where mass education is going on?

Sharp: Yes.

Elkin: Is that the case for all of you? How about you?

Form: More or less.

Sharp: It was mine. I went to Syracuse my freshman year, and came here for that very reason.

Elkin: I see.

Sharp: Are you going to sing for us now?

Elkin: I'll sing tomorrow.
I WOULD SOFTLY DARE TO WEEP
Leon Raikes

If you must go, then leave no footprints there.
Erase them from that beach which we have loved
To ooze between our toes, and softly bare
That silent sand with tender hands, now gloved
With apprehension. I would remember you:
My emptiness would vacuum out the sea;
And searching through the beach where once the blue
Of water dared to creep, I, silently,
Would dare to weep. The deepness of my ache,
Recalling long-forgotten seas as deep
As its own depth, would make a simple lake
Of oceans: I would softly dare to weep.
   I know that once the wan world wept the sea,
   And I would weep another — drowning me.

ON THE DIKE
James Harvey

The sticks and corks lay
Lumpy on the barren shore.
A soul of water hidden
In each roting pile,
Brown grass crawled, matted, wet towards
The hard and artificial hill.
We walked the muddy path along
Its narrow crown
And felt on our pinched shoulders
All the sullen weight
Of air pressed closer to us by
The cloud’s still sackcloth, rough and taut.
We had been told about the banks
That used to keep
The surging river in its
Comfortable course,
But could not see their outline or
Imagine bounds besides footprints
We made upon the muddy wall
Of earth and rock.
The wind brushed rudely past us
Down the inland side,
And stirred the naked trees and stones
Where Israel’s dead took modest space.
The stones were brown and squat
Like lumps of dung
Too crisp to work into the wormy soil
And build
A jungle that would nullify the hill
And terrify the minions of the sea.
One might have said (olympically
And calm), “They wait
In stiffened fear.” — What talk, unless
One knew they felt
That water seeping through their bones
Was physics (and, therefore, not true).
What we know on the fulcrum is
Our dizziness,
So we turn back, and stare
At neither left nor right:
Our slimy tracks are mystery enough
If everything must stay so neatly poised.

A DANCE OF CRETE
(to Mark Kieren)
Karen Stanley

There is something of a storm in the way you dance,
Of thunder in the feet.
The sound of hard rain echoes in,
A note of earth and sky-beat, narrowly and clearly
Along the cry within.
A dark touch of sudden along
The grey heat, and your eyes fill with the certainty
Of storm and a wind-chant.
I feel the cool, the cold, the chance
That in its arms comes bearing birth
To meet the roofs of tin, the windows blank to call to
storm
Your hands, your arms, your feet.
And then a whisper of begin comes
Calling through the corridors of Crete, where
You, in forms of strong, shall play the earth-bull
And, in death with victory, shall call the dance.
"NOTES FROM A FOREIGN DAUGHTER"

Judy Randall

As a sophomore at Kalamazoo College, Michigan, I was packed off to Atlanta, Georgia, for three months, on my "career-service quarter," to get out in the world and be free of any external authority (parent or college) for the first time in my life. At the urging of our job counselor, himself former director of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, who felt I should experience life in the South and make some worthwhile contributions toward a better society (and because my first three choices fell through), I finally agreed to a position at Southern Regional Council. My reaction was hesitant and slightly grudging agreement, because of a vague antipathy toward the South - the idea that I didn't want to live in the midst of that medieval, unenlightened world of gracious hospitality. Another reason was a little more well-grounded fear: that of "getting involved" and having to take a firm, specific, and honest stand on "the racial problem."

My acquaintance with The Movement had been very vague indeed; inexcusable, in fact, considering that I had lived all my life in the peripheral South (northern Virginia), attended segregated schools for ten years, and in spite of a fairly liberal upbringing, had managed to acquire a fair amount of prejudice, misconception, and distorted manners of thinking. Most northern white liberals consider the South a kind of foreign battle-ground, where they might go to serve a term of duty, but return gasping with relief to their right-thinking civilized homeland. This notion is encouraged by southern segregationists who rant at "northern agitators," and emphasize their alienation by the desire to handle things "their own way."

The South is, of course, only a part of the United States, but one whose local characteristics emphasize what is becoming more and more obviously a national problem. If in going North one seems to lose awareness of racial tensions, it is because the North provides an opportunity (admittedly diminishing) for avoidance. Basking in the smug doctrine of tolerance, Northerners point the accusing finger southward from their de facto segregated white ivory tower. Actual communication and understanding between northern Negroes and whites is rare, as illustrated by the reaction to open-occupancy legislation. Many white liberals have formed their convictions in the abstract, knowing few, if any, Negroes, and their thinking is apt to be burdened with stereotypes. They are distressed to find themselves regarded with amusement, indifference, or scorn by the objects of their concern.

The most striking change of attitude I found in the South is the constant awareness, by whites and more so by Negroes, of the racial issue. On arrival in the South, one is plunged into the turmoil of racial conflict, whether or not one has connections with civil rights work. It is literally impossible to remain aloof; one simply has to take a stand, and is daily forced to prove it. All the stories I have heard or read of the civil rights movement became vividly, violently alive. The image of Atlanta as a progressive, cosmopolitan city was quickly shattered by vestiges of a former culture, from racial tensions within the office of SRC itself, to the still separate lunch counters at downtown Woolworth's.

With a few exceptions, the attitude at SRC was one of "brotherhood," perpetuated somewhat forcibly by the whites and often ironically by the Negroes, but this camaraderie was limited to office hours. Interracial social life was for the most part confined to office parties, and there were incidents of whites "not seeing" their Negro co-workers on the street. While the common professional interests of Negro and white men in the higher positions of the staff frequently supplied grounds for a lunch together, the converse was true among the non-professional staff. The procedure I usually observed was that luncheon companions were chosen on the bases of congeniality, convenience, common interests, and color.

This was natural, for social opinion is still a potent force, and segregated housing easily precludes spontaneous relationships with members of another race. Yet despite a few important exceptions, I could not avoid a feeling of disappointment that this haven of racial harmony was for the most part superficial.

I cannot, however, underestimate the value of the situation as it did exist, because it gave me the opportunity to test, modify, and define my own attitude, and this may not have been the case in a less realistic setting.

Painful as it was to have my ignorance forced on me by time after time of shock and rude awakening, the knowledge and awareness which followed was painful in a deeper, more intense and heart-breaking manner. Blithely oblivious to glances and remarks, refusing to admit that such a majority of people were plagued in subtle to overt degrees by that mind-crippling and spirit-warping disease which is their heritage, I was able for a time to protect myself against the small daily incidents which no one can ultimately resist. Because I had never entertained the idea that a stranger could care whom I went to lunch with, I simply didn't see whites who would stop on the sidewalk and stand immobile with hatred when a Negro friend and I walked by.

A car trip through rural Alabama with three Negroes brutally clarified for me the definition of a "hate stare." Curious glances are only human and
can be easily overlooked; but this was an expression which was neither human nor animal, for no beast is consumed by an irrational and distorted hatred for another of its kind. I am almost forced to describe racism as ultra-human rather than sub-human, as an extension of the most despicable characteristics of human nature to the most ugly, insane extreme of which mankind is capable. Racists are victims of a mass psychosis, which the most sympathetic understanding cannot excuse or elevate.

A hate stare is marked by unblinking duration (long past the limits of civil curiosity) and intensity of emotion, casting a spell on the looker and the looked-at, which can transform in a moment something normal, even good and happy, into something un-natural, perverted, and diseased. It was suddenly as if we were all sitting in the car naked, or rotting visibly from leprosy. But even these extreme analogies miss the mark, for the first would produce astonishment, and the second, horror. The look on that truckdriver's face reflected something more powerful than either of these reactions, although it included both. It was compounded of fears, myths, facts, legends, in an indescribable brew of tradition and emotion which none of us, not even the most analytical psychologist, could have defined. It was a look that could kill, that wished us out of existence, and my reaction was first to stick my head out of the car and stare belligerently back at him, and then, in a second surge of feeling, to run over and smash in his face in a blind rage. But all that was left to us was to joke about it, while I choked back tears of bewilderment, frustration, anger, and a deep pain which I could only faintly comprehend.

A more subtle aspect of the Southern state of mind was revealed to me as I became aware of distinct social divisions, which promoted communication barriers in the Atlanta community, and whose reconciliation caused me some anguish. Different worlds, as I will call them, emerged, with conflicting aims, standards, and required attitudes. There was, of course, the visible, dominant, white world, to which I had a passport by my color, background, and experience. If I was deviously plotting subversive schemes, or even participating in demonstrations, I could "get lost in the crowd." It was, whether I liked it or not, my world, and the only world of most whites.

Second was the Negro world — smaller, friendlier to its members, and slightly defensive. I could live with them. I rode their buses, attended their churches and their parties, but I was not admitted to the esoteric society. This obstacle is one that can be overcome only by a duration of familiarity (for a society, this would require generations), and is the outstanding cause for discouragement among white liberals who find that "meaning well" isn't enough. They condemned my ignorance, but they refused to enlighten me. My sheltered upbringing was a constant stigma, but it was that very evidence which the Negro, especially the segregated southern middle class Negro, jumped on to prove his image of the white stereotype: "They think they're too good to know anything about Negroes." This is too often a correct view, but whites who are ashamed of their prejudices, but unsure of themselves around Negroes, are quickly labeled segregationists. It is asking a great deal of insight and generosity of spirit to demand of a person whose life has been handicapped with a label of inferiority that he respond willingly to white sympathy and refuse himself the psychological necessity of scorning his oppressors. If he were not able to dismiss "liberal" whites as ignorant or hypocritical do-gooders, the Negro would be forced to accept inferiority as a truth, and thus to welcome all white assistance with a servile gratitude which would negate the reasons for attaining equal rights. I see the following broad choice of alternatives for the "well-meaning white liberal": settle for your natural honest actions and reactions, with an open-minded attitude to different ideas, realizing that you will be accepted on a qualified basis ("you're dumb, but you're okay"); OR play a role, pretend to yourself and to the people you meet that you are something else; some people will be fooled, and eventually you will lose contact with your former "bourgeois" self. The first way is harder at first, heart-breaking, but it becomes easier, and it is honest. The second way becomes more and more difficult, less and less satisfying, and can lead to mental and emotional upsets.

In my efforts at amateur sociology, I distinguished two more "worlds" in Atlanta. One was that of poverty, which I discovered through Vine City, a Negro slum not far from SRC's office. Outcasts from the white world because of color, and from the (middle-class) Negro world because of economic and social status, the slum-Negro's problems and frustrations are doubled. (Note that parallel conditions of ostracism exist for poor whites, although less severely restricting.) This is a world of which many whites now have knowledge, and of which many Negroes have experience, but whether middle-class aversion towards poverty stems from repression, guilt, or ignorance, it achieves the result of isolating a slum community, forcing it to turn inward and multiply its socially destructive conditions.

Finally, there were the young civil rights workers, actively involved in affirming and demonstrating their convictions, separated by force of desire from "the American way of life." My age permitted entry into this world, which is as foreign to many adults as the "Negro world" was to me. Whatever inner strife it may have caused, this was the only world in which color was not a requirement. It was more strikingly evident in whites, but also true of Negroes, that these "angry young men" and women had rejected the middle class value system, and the
goal of their efforts was, paradoxically, to help the underprivileged attain a place in that society which they had renounced.

In the course of my work at SRC, and through other relationships, I joined in protest and picketing. But as I said, I did not become a “northern agitator” intentionally; in fact, I came South with distinct misgivings and fears of becoming “involved;” that is, being forced to make a commitment on my beliefs. I soon found, however, that what I considered noncommittal actions were labeled anything from “race-mixing” to “white liberalism” (spoken in acid tones by Negroes). The term “northern agitator” is itself rather misleading — to the northerner it is a gross exaggeration; to the southerner, white and black, it is a euphemistic understatement. White segregationists would prefer the expression “nigger-lover;” Negro SNCC workers would use “white bitch.”

A subtle process of acclimation quickly changed my former attitude. With clarity and some amazement I realized that the “extremist” civil rights workers were not some strange, incomprehensible, misguided animals, but normal, natural people asking for the most basic, mundane, middle-class rights, and resolving to attain them by extraordinarily mild, conservative methods. (Picketing, sit-ins, and petitions are pablum compared to the violent methods which have been used consciously and unconsciously for years and years by representatives of the white power status-quo, which deplores any “extremism” that may lead to “violence” in the struggle for human dignity.) My standards and values quickly settled in new categories, and I found that by merely acting like a “person,” without following a predetermined course, I was frequently the object of hate stares from whites. It soon became apparent that the real extremists were those who called themselves conservatives and moderates, clinging tightly to the status-quo, preaching gradualism over the noise of fire hoses and police dogs.

There were times when the only reason for not giving up the struggle for communication was the empty hypocrisy of the alternative. The psychological climate in which a white northern female, transplanted to the Negro Atlanta community, must function, can be unsettling, to say the least. The shift of racial, social, and cultural setting threw me into a limbo, and established a disturbing condition similar to walking on a frozen pond without knowing where the thin spots are. Coming from a different world, I hadn’t learned how, specifically, the Negro’s frame of reference (his definitions, his choice of psychological reactions) differed from my own. I only knew it was very different, and the Negro’s skill at hiding his emotions and true feelings made the task more difficult. I knew that friendliness could cover an attitude of suspicion, and that any chance remark by me could be triggering a hostile reaction. For example, my welcome to SRC by one Negro was: “So you’ve come down to find out all about the Movement and go back and lecture to your white friends.” My feeling was not one of indignation; I felt only too poignantly the shame of generations. Rather, it was one of frustration and grief, that such a high wall has been built, with both sides adding more and more bricks until the most willing person finds the wall insurmountable. Sometimes it was necessary to “think small,” to concentrate on people, so as not to be overwhelmed by a sense of futility, and to have faith in time and in myself.

For a naturally optimistic member of the white middle class, it was an instructive and frightening mental exercise to experiment with real pessimism, to try on the attitude of despair, and to feel to the soul the opposition of a society which calls you inferior, immoral, incapable, less than human. The experience is too overwhelming for most white people, for it requires the admission of a national and a personal guilt of the highest order. So most white Americans, like most “Aryan” Germans under Hitler, put blinders on their minds, and teach their children not to think too hard.

Extracting oneself from a middle class white orientation that emphasizes escapist optimism in race relations (“things couldn’t be that bad”) is a long and difficult task. It causes much agonizing guilt and anxiety when one is scorned and ostracized for one’s “bourgeois ignorance,” when one is afraid to speak for fear of revealing hidden prejudice, when one realizes the sheer impossibility of being blind to color. There are too many contingencies to be able to treat Negroes as whites, or vice versa. The only valid answer I have found is to treat them all as people, realizing that color will influence your relationships, if only because of society’s attitudes, and that our efforts now will make it easier for our children and grandchildren.

Most characteristics of the discouraging state of southern race relations can be recognized in the United States as a whole, although as I said, they can be more easily overlooked there. Sensitivity developed in observation of the South must evolve into a clearer view of the total problem, and one cannot condemn the South without pointing the finger everywhere.

My experience in the South has matured me beyond measure. I will probably not realize the extent of its influence for months or years. And I am determined to return to the South, not to gawk at the strange antics of the natives, but because living in the South is a confrontation — with oneself, with one’s background and values, and with one’s society. There is very little possibility for pretense in the South; almost everyone has to face reality. I belong here because life is, if hard, also real, and it has made me more real.
AM I NOT THE WIND?

Merwin Lewis

[Music notation]
AND STILL THE RAIN

Bruce Stewart

But the rain continued to beat down. The drops splattered on the balcony windows and slid off the ledge in a ragged sheet of water down to the sidewalk. Looking out the windows, William Bell watched small streams weave their ways between the cracks in the brick street and rush as they gushed into the gutter at the corner. Under the streetlight the endless strings of rain fell. The pool of water outside their balcony no longer had its filmy, spilled-gasoline glaze, but was a staccato of water outside their balcony no longer had its pond of water and drops, spilling over its banks.

Down in the street below there was a small flicker. At the corner a man had stopped, in the midst of what William Bell thought to be a monsoon, to light a quickly dampening cigarette. Twice the Spaniard struck a match only to have it extinguished by either the wind or the blowing rain. "Cielos," he muttered to the darkness; then he sloshed off around the corner and was gone.

"The last inhabitant of Granada, no doubt," William Bell said, turning from the window. It took a minute before his eyes could focus after he closed the balcony shutters. Walking deliberately over to the nightstand he muttered a curse against the rain and against Granada in general. "It's a dual image of full-blown womanhood and the Embassy cocktail party-poise, and the small child lost in the Retiro image which intrigued him so much, and which was the cause of so much trouble between them. If she had been more perceptive, more selfish, she would have played on her little girl image, but she didn't."

He looked long at her, sleeping there, the covers all neatly tucked up around her chin. He might even have appreciated the orderliness of the scene if it hadn't been for the rain. He groped on the nightstand for a cigarette. He might even have appreciated the orderliness of the scene if it hadn't been for the rain. He closed his eyes and mashed the lids down to better light a perfectly lit cigarette.

"You awake?"
"Mmmmmmm? Just . . ."
"Still raining," he said sullenly. "What happened to you?"
"I just dozed off. But I'm glad you woke me. It's too pretty a night to waste it sleeping."
"I didn't wake you! I was lighting a cigarette!"
"I'm sorry . . . I'm not quite all here yet . . . Bill?"
"Yes?"
"C'mere sweet."

He was still pacing. As he passed the bed she reached out, catching the sash of his bathrobe. He sat down and then lay down on the bed, beside her. There was silence, and then:

"I like lying with you," she said and meant it.
"When I was in college I never thought that someday I'd be in bed with a man, let alone married."

She waited for a reply and none came so she continued.

"And I never thought I would have children. We're going to, though, aren't we, and I'm so glad that you're working in Madrid oh I love you."

The quiet ran a finger down her back, and she was nervous. He lit a cigarette and lay there on his back, quietly blowing smoke at the ceiling. She watched his face glow and then turn dark again before she said anything else.

"Oh Bill, I know, but it'll just take some time. Everything still seems so new and strange, and I'll have the child and we can sorta start over — . . ."
"My god, Marge, it's been a year! . . . a year! . . . I'm sorry, sweetheart. Really."
"It's just that . . . I tr . . ."

She was trying to hold them back, but they came anyway — little choking, gasping sobs. She threw her arms around his neck and tucked her head between his shoulder and neck.

"Honey," he said, lying, "it doesn't matter. We love each other and Sex is just one part of it. The other things, like just watching the rain, knowing you're asleep and your mine, and you learning Spanish and making paella, and the looks we give each other . . . it's not your fault. Anyway, it doesn't matter whose fault it is . . . we're together . . . C'mon now."

He turned his head slightly and kissed her on the ear lobe. The little squeaking sobs were almost gone. He closed his eyes and mashed the lids down to better light a perfectly lit cigarette.

"She's so cute," he thought, "when she's sobbing, and completely helpless like a kid almost."

It was a dual image of full-blown womanhood and the Embassy cocktail party-poise, and the small child lost in the Retiro image which intrigued him so much, and which was the cause of so much trouble between them. If she had been more perceptive, more selfish, she would have played on her little girl image, but she didn't.

It was quiet again in the room—only an occasional sniffle and once a car swooshing by outside and then streaming out of hearing distance.

José Luis had come in by train that day from Madrid. Marge and William were there to meet him since he had telegrammed the day before, telling them what train he would be on. When he got off he looked about the same as when they had first met him in Santiago three years before, but when they were finally in the bar and having a round of Funda-
She arced, the Kings. The didn't want to enter? "I on the patio and it."

"These people are used to this weather, especially this year of; they expect the rain to last."

Marge laughed nervously, partly because she hadn't understood all of what Jose Luis had said, and partly because she didn't like the bar. She caught William's eye finally, and he understood what she wanted.

"Jose, let us go to the Capilla Real. Marge has not seen the tombs, and perhaps there is a bar close where we can have another drink later."

"All right, Jose?" she asked. "I would like to see it."

Jose appreciated her attempt at Spanish, and while he had very little interest in the Capilla Real, he agreed to go.

"First I must check in the hotel. It's not far from the Capilla. Good. Let us go."

It started to rain again as they tried to flag a taxi. Marge did not want to get wet and she waited at the door while William and Jose Luis stood on the curb waiting for a taxi.

"It is not like Madrid, true?"

"Hombre . . . there are cabs there," Luis said, agreeing.

Finally a taxi came and Marge and her two sdden escorts climbed in.

"Hotel Versalles," Luis commanded.

The taxi's windshield wipers dragged on their return stroke, and the rain on the roof, and off in the distance the reddish-brown, wet Alhambra made Marge all the more uneasy.

Later, at the Capilla she was still nervous, not wanting to go down into the tombs to see the old wooden caskets which held the Catholic Kings. Even Jose Luis insisted that there weren't that many steps and that his wife had ridden the Metro to Sol during the rush when she was eight months pregnant.

"No! I won't! Quit making it an issue," she said to her husband in English.

"Right. It is a real issue," he said sarcastically.

"It means bending your knees and picking up your feet. That's quite an issue. We brought you to see this damn thing and Jose is going to feel bad if you don't see it."

By that time it was an issue and she didn't go. She sat down on one of the uncomfortable wooden benches and intensely hated the Catholic Kings. The cold marble cherubs with their bows and arrows, mourning over the reclining figures of Ferdinand and Isabel watched and cried their frozen tears. And outside the rain kept falling on the patio and the steps of the open doors.

"What'cha thinking about?"

"Madrid mostly and how much we'd like a drink. The bar's still open. I'll go down and get a bottle of Carlos I — bring it up and we'll open the windows and listen to the rain."

He began dressing. As she was watching the white shirt move around in the room she had the urge to say it.

"Oh, Badger, I love you."

She giggled and pulled the covers over her head. He tripped over both shoes before he jumped on the bed. It was not even a struggle to pull her covers off.

"Badger, huh?"

He was tickling her and she was giggling hysterically, saying half-hearted say it. He was tickling her and she was giggling hysterically, saying half-hearted say it.

"No! I won't! Quit making it an issue," she said to her husband in English.

"Right. It is a real issue," he said sarcastically.

"It means bending your knees and picking up your feet. That's quite an issue. We brought the trouble of asking.

"Nothing happened . . . I, I was just thinking how confusing it is not being able to under-
stand what people say to you and all those men who say things . . . ."

"Piropos for a beautiful woman."

He wouldn't quit trying.

"It's really dead downstairs. Bartender said there have been two people in all night . . . . So! . . . here we are in Granada with a bottle of Carlos I in our room. Drink?"

Even so he looked worried, standing there with a yellow cellophane-wrapped bottle in one hand and two brandy snifters in the other. But when she turned around he winked and she knew she was being selfish.

"Fill 'er up," she said, knowing she couldn't and wouldn't drink much. Pregnant women aren't supposed to drink, she was thinking.

"Salud to the job, to Granada, to you."

The rain was not bothering him anymore, but after her answer he wasn't thinking about it anyway.

"You never were here in Granada, were you?" he said, starting it off. "Dad loved it here. We drove up from Málaga, up those curves that keep unwinding — and finally we came around a turn and there were the Sierras, snowcapped and huge. Mom thought we were going right through them. Then the last few kilometers into Granada Dad was quiet and impressed. I was telling them about what happened here and why, but right then Dad didn't care. Passed the Alhambra from a distance and there were tears in his eyes. He'd just sit and look . . . . . it was sad. I did want you to see it. Glad we had a couple of days off. Salud!"

He refilled the glass and looked at her.

"To the quiet woman of the night."

He refilled his glass.

"More?"

She half-smiled and shook her head.

"Well, okay — half," she said before he could be hurt.

"Bill? We will have the baby at the American hospital, won't we? I'd feel better."

"Dear Marge. Comma. Yes we can have the kid at the American Hospital. Sincerely William Bell."

For a diplomat, especially a young one, he didn't always practice his profession.

"My god, Marge, that's seven months off.
Can't we just sit here and talk about . . . "

"About what, Bill? Look, I've been married to you for a year and have known you longer."

She couldn't help it now.

"Shall we sit and talk about old times and you keep filling my glass, and then you get serious and tell me you love me and then off to the bed? I wasn’t making a big deal of the baby—it just crossed my mind and I said it!"

He looked at the closed balcony and chugged his brandy, refilled the glass, and felt defeated. Mostly he was angry, but not wanting to close the evening, decided to feel rejected instead. He waited. She had put her hand to her mouth and walked over to the balcony, facing the windows, very disgusted with herself and waiting for the retort which did not come.

"Say something. Tell me you don’t want the ‘kid’!, that you don’t think we deserve it until we’ve made love your way — till we’ve ‘come off!’ together. Say it, Bill! Bill, say it!! Bill!! Bill.

He was lying on the bed, sipping and spilling his brandy on his shirt; she was crying.

"Now, my passionate wife with child, tell me I’m messing up my shirt. Oh Bill, your shirt! I’ll wash it right now so . . . and I’ll wash it every time I think it needs it so I don’t have to make love to you. Your damn brat and the mother-secret-smile-knowing-unromantic!!!"

But it was her turn, she thought, and crying, walked over to the bed and sat down. She didn’t know where to start this time. Then she was speaking and he was looking at air, and trying to appear lost in thoughts of a forgotten time.

"I’m, I’m not doing any good, am I?"

"Not much. Drink? Yes I will, thank you!"

It was better, he had found, to stagger the silences with some words, so that he could remind her how rejected he was feeling.

"I’ll get it,” she said.

The bottle was barely a quarter-full, and any other time he would have been reminded of that fact, but she poured the cognac and lay down beside him, draping her arm over his chest and on his shoulder. He rested the glass on her arm.

And when the glass was gone and the brandy finished he moved her hand down on his stomach, gently rubbing it. At first he thought she was touching him as one might rub an alligator to soothe it to sleep, but when she undid his belt and his zipper he didn’t think that any longer.

"No, no, not this way, . . . when . . . when it’s not a remedy yes, but not . . . not . . . now!"

He knew he was still in command.

"It’s hot. Let’s open a window. I’ll be right back."

She did, as he knew, feel quite ridiculous when he got up suddenly to open the balcony windows. He stood for a moment, then opened them and the rain blew. Outside was becoming inside.

"Yes,” he thought, and turned to get undressed.

"You’re moist,” he said, running the moisture up over the slight hump of her abdomen and across her navel to her breasts and finally to her shoulders. Her hair was jetted out on the pillow and a faint glimmer from outside was on her neck. Only her eyes were fighting the desire which rose from the covers. Even with the wind she threw off the sheet and blanket, not thinking about it, not caring about it.

"Badger . . . uh I love you. Hold me and don’t ever let go and push me down in the mattress so it . . ."

"Oh I love you, rain and your thighs . . . and breasts, hair soft and slick . . ."

He rolled over, putting his hands on her thighs and lifting them high, and gripped her shoulders from behind her back, pulling toward him. She didn’t put him in and he was glad.

"Now! Oh, honey, I love you."

"Yes . . . yes. Love you."


"Not hard. easy. gentle. pull him close. Warm. So violent! slow. Will, Will, Bill!! Relax. now. off. tight. Lame duck, lameduck, lameduck, lameduck. Stopped. No don’t move. No keep filling my glass, and then you get

"Marge . . . Marge . . . can’t stop. Marge, Marge, Marge, Unamuno, Unamuno, Unamuno, Unamuno, Marge, Marge, Marge, Marge, Marge, Mar, Mar, Mar, Mar, ummmmmmm. Unamuno Spain. No keep . . . going she might go. Rab-bit, Rab-bit . . . ra . . . no

"Did you come off?” he asked.

She looked cut the window at the rain falling and falling. All the drops seemed sad as they fell. He was breathing hard and the light was on his white buttocks.

"Bill? . . . . . yes, Bill . . . . . I did.”