



The Cauldron
Spring/Summer 1979

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The Children Are Going to Far Places

I will take the lawn into my recollection
of leaves, ginko, oak picked off by the wind.
The katydid's throb to be kept in a box
with a set of proper words. Winter.

The children are going to far places
in the poem I will write after it snows.
Marigolds to fit into my description
of the town they leave in the summer.
Seasons in between? Trillium, spring,
asters, fall.

The children have come back from Germany
and France. I am writing the poem in which
they leave again for The Netherlands. Snow
on a path to the letterbox.
Here's a letter describing summer

in The Hague. Begonias, phlox. If I open
up the box of katydids, the words won't sing
in a special way. Best to go to Limousin
with grandiose plans; dinner with Lady Diana
in a vanilla confection of a dress. A surfeit
of lilies. Spring.

Dave Macak

Here in the tide toward Chicago that
Boston is to me,
I wait for more news.

In the afternoon,
on the other side of the window,
the leaves are yellow and brown and rust-colored,
gone through their brilliance,
falling and fallen.

In Chicago
my father sat at the window, useless and quiet
in his uselessness,
looking out or reading.
I turned his chair and his pages, and
when I got older I shaved my father every other day.
After school I stayed a year for my father and
a year for my mother,
and seeing then that
there was nothing
more to do,
I came to Boston, and
sent my mother money and
went back every Thanksgiving to eat cranberries.

We will have to fly back, of course,
I and my wife;
my son, only two, will stay with my wife's parents in Wellesley, and
I'll be borne
back to Chicago
to my father shaved and combed and powdered,
a thing of dust with no hair on its face.

Dave Macak

The country bride went toward the house from the barn after taking the morning's milk. In the rim of her vision she caught the shape of the wild horse, huge and heavy, the color of blood-charged earth, leaping over the corral gate. She turned: he reared, standing for a moment like a man, and came down.

In the afternoon she lies,
the dark bruise hanging over her
face like a moon.
The milk goes sour.

Larry Barrett

I know you are down there, you bastards
Waiting for me

Old humpback with picket fence jaw, I know you
Man maimer, rib-cage crusher
And you too, you squid
Your obscene arms corpse colored
And far in the deep dark you little crabs
Waiting to nibble on eyes, lips
Waiting

I know you all
We were made that same daybreak
When the morning stars sang together
Yes, you bastards, my brothers
I was formed your food from the first

Meantime, while life lasts
I will skate this thin membrane
Between down pushing air and up thrusting water
And, long as hull holds
I will walk on your backs

Just be patient
Already the planks part
Soon, some night of sea surge
I shall come down to your feasting
All quickness quenched

And believe me, my brothers
That is all right with me
Who am I to contend
Who was made your meat on that morning
When all to sons of God shouted for joy?

Yes, you bastards
It's all right with me

Larry Barrett

Names of the Stars

I have taught you shiphandling, the signs of foul weather
And rules for right of way in harbors and thoroughfares
Now, most important of all, remember the names of the stars

Antares, Arcturus, Alphecca, Deneb and Vega
Remember them all. Remember their names and their places
You will find you forget them, unless you remember them daily

Your sonar feels out the deeps, undulant hills and dark dells
Fingers the shape of lost ships whose names are forgotten
Given good charts, you can sail by the soundings
You need no star sights, taken at twilight, no running fixes

At Rebecca Shoals and Cape May the towers hoop the seas in
hyperbolae
Fair weather or foul, they give you your fixes
On the green tubes you will read your coordinates
You will make no observations, morning and evening, no calculations

Through night radar reaches, touches land for you
Shoulder, breast, smooth flank of coastline, yearned-for harbor
Past headland and seawall and transistors and tubes lead you
homeward
You can forget the names of the stars

You must therefore remember them daily, each one in its own
constellation
Each morning twilight, each sundown, you must climb to your bridges
and name them
Rigel, Betelgeuse and Bellatrix burn in Orion
Aldebaran flares, the red eye of the Bull
Alphenat hangs in Andromeda and Altair in Aquila
Arcturus is the brightest in Bootes, Spica in Virgo
And Sirius in the Dog
Remember them all. Remember their names and their places

For, when your sweep circuits fail and the radar goes dead
When they tell you something is wrong
And that no replacements for your readout tubes have come through or
can soon be expected
When your messages go unacknowledged
And the shore stations drift into silence

Then, if you remember their names, the stars will be waiting
The red eye of Taurus will take you safely to Tarshish
Spica, in Virgo, will lead you past Scilla and Circe homeward to
Carthage
And you can always steer by Polaris, to which is tethered the Bear

Ellen Everett

Hitch

Leaves and I lean toward the water.
I forget who is coming from California, and
who has been staying with me.
At the town market, I remember again: Buy

1. limes for tequila
2. coconut for pinacoladas
3. fruit for ice cream

Tang is for sharp. Tang is for sweet.
Someone is using just one hand to get here, Kate.
Those same damn birds were bitching again this morning,
and I thought of you two.
They were hungry.
You crank up strands of jazz.
I grind out a cigarette.
He ought to be here soon.

Ellen Everett

I dream that his lady friend
dressed like a nurse or a
bride or a waitress
comes into the bedroom with
a hammer starts nailing the
window shut and the drawers
doors so I can't get to my
clothes or toothbrush or
anything else She is smiling
and I am dreaming I take
her hammer and whoop whoop
am a yoyo I swing and the
mirror somehow cuts my arm
She cracks up We regret
everything Her uniform if
it is a uniform is still
incredibly clean and I can't
understand how it gets that
way so I ask (a little bitchy
maybe but only honest) who's
got the hottest blueberry blood
in town?

Ellen Everett

She always hit hard, fell upon morning from the
top bunk, but this one isn't so solid. Now she
takes to the water like Mark Spitz, Pontius Pilate,

Lady Macbeth. She whistles toothpaste on a Nor*mark
knife in the sink, very unconventional. This girl
takes the cake and loses it in her shower, touches

spongy ears, gasps, opals from Florida she'd dreamed
were gone, sits on the drain, soaps eyes wide
intentional. Now she wants to finish off the oranges

relatives sent and, peeling, it's quick hands to ears
again plugging against that damn virginity. Down
South they made her sleep on great-grandma's death

bed, and quite illogical, she thinks she must have
soaked something up to make her this butcher block,
that Dutch boy's thumb.

Harry Thomas

Little Elegy
for my grandfather

I found you on the floor
holding out your hand,
palm up and open, as when
severe and professorial
you'd determined
to prove some point to a friend.
But the arrogance gone,
you seemed hollow, a box
exposed at the end of the trick,
and the hand that I'd seen
for hours in the ground,
tamping, uprooting,
instructing the soft
lilies to grow,
that hand was held like a beggar's,
like Jesus suffering the children to come,
like someone at the window
checking for rain.

Harry Thomas

Contagion

Sometimes when we wake day isn't day
but a dream that didn't unwind,
a stain we can't wash away.

We luff until noon, then surrender
like nothing that day, and the next.

Long work is a cure for some men.
For some nothing works. I try
taking a kayak upriver,
tracing the moon on the water,
but no matter what I do it stays.

It will stay till one week
ends in exhaustion, as in
a ramshackle house on whose walls
even the swearing has faded,
and our room is ready.

I lie still and listen.
Sure as the river, sure
as the moon that could not cleanse,
this thing so insistent inside me
goes on.

Harry Thomas

The Steps

Your steps, born of my silence,
Godly, familiar, slow,
Proceed, mute and cold,
To the bed of my vigilance.

Shadow and person, divine, complete,
They are so soft, your reticent steps!
God! All the gifts that I imagine
Come to me on those naked feet.

And if, with your ready lips,
You are preparing to appease
The life within my thoughts
With the sustenance of a kiss,

Do not hasten such tenderness,
Sweetness of being and not-being:
I have lived for you by waiting,
And my heart was but your steps.

From the French of Paul Valéry

Harry Thomas

I Cannot Give You More

I cannot give you more.
I am not more than I am.

Oh, how I'd like to be
sand and sun in summer.
You'd stretch out like a flame
there in your rest,
and when you left
you'd leave me with your body, an imprint
precious, flushed, unforgettable.
And with you you'd take
my slow kiss, a dark color
spreading over you
from head to foot,
a tan.

And oh, how I'd like to be
quilted silk, thin glass, or sandalwood
that keeps its fragrance
here, and its color,
though made a thousand miles away! To be
the stuff that pleases you,
that you touch every day,
and that you see without looking
around you
— necklace, flask, old silk —
the things that when they are missing
you ask: "Where can it be?"

And oh, how I'd like to be
a joy above all others,
the only joy, the one
in which you'd always rejoice!

A love, a single love:
the love with which you'd be in love!

But
I am not more than I am.

from the Spanish of Pedro Salinas

Patti Gossman

The Summons

"A summons has come and I am ready for my journey." (Tagore)

The wind that swept into nothing
Bandiagara where I was born
Itself was born on the potter's
Wheel, turning
 and turning on the rim
Of the Sahel. The well that swelled
In the throats of my people yawns
Shallow and choked
On the dust of the dying
Of so many. Of nothing
Now but a wind wheeling
 out of nothing making nothing
Of all it touched: Potters,
Crockery and goats.

When I was born my hands tore
Apart from each other. Clutching dry
The dust-feel of flesh my hands dangled
In skin like yam and spanned
Their earth. Thrust from dust
 into dust, my hands danced
With themselves in the sky.
 there was nothing to hold to.
By absence we are convinced
Of having had
And stuff our hands between our knees
Afraid to name
 the space between

Patti Gossman

Points of Closure

Unbidden, I opt for journeys:
Two wires cross on a path and a
Past, the flock that memory
Suspends, the dance of birds
Bending on the sky.
Octobers, my blood runs thin
In my veins. I crane
My neck southward till the bone
Snaps, yielding to the migratory
V, the elbow of my urging
Toward a need I cannot name.

We define our lives by angles:
The road that pulls away behind
Our backs, the tracks that come
Undone in our hands. And the others —
Those we cannot measure:
The shaft of the half-open door,
Or the tent of the book, face-down.
Minds meet on a point of distraction,
Contracting on a stitch of black
Beak, biting the sky.

And when you grip my wrist
So hard, and drop your jaw to speak,
My knuckles tense white and crumple
Like wings beaten back on the wind.
At night when it's quiet
I tip back my chair to the south.
I am troubled by dreams
Where pieces of birds

Fall, like leaves from a ravelling sky.

On the Road to the Court

Noel Muyskens

Jesterin is a perfectionist in theory, and a theorist by profession. Anything analytical spins his head, his lust for mind expansion throttles him, his mind is as straight and as sharp as an arrow. That might sound strange, and indeed it is, that mathematics should be his mind's soft flowing virgin in the night, but Jesterin has some strange attraction for me. I somehow see a warmth in his awkward posture, with that ever-present sliderule sticking up out of his bell bottom pants' pockets. At any rate, he's definitely not a perfectionist. He makes mistakes, he's human.

Jesterin is not particularly attractive, and he apparently doesn't care too much. His hair is always greasy, glossy, very short, it has the appearance of being snapped on. He wears thick black glasses high on his face, with tape on each corner to hold them together. Any cartoonist would love to frolic with his dogged features. Yet he has intensely blue eyes which would be awesome in any other face, and without those awful glasses. They shine out like dots, like lasers, as straight as his mind, but colorful, really colorful. His body is long and skinny, and knobby like a tree. His arms hang as stiffly as branches, and his fingers have a clawlike appearance, with their long, unkempt nails. His pants never seem to fit.

Jesterin is a computer jock. After school, while the football players are cracking their helmets against padded dummies, Jesterin is challenging the PDP 10 on the head, playing computer games. He takes great pleasure in beating the computer; it is an unfair match, since Jesterin himself wrote the programs which he plays, and so the computer reels like padded dummies under the constant onslaught of his calculations.

Jesterin once wrote a program that would generate random English names. The program was designed to create plausible sounding names by prohibiting the selection of unlikely consecutive letters. He chose a name for himself, out of thousands he generated one afternoon, and made it his official nickname. Thus, the few kind people who address him politely, including his teachers, called him by this strange name, "Jesterin". I, in fact, did not know his real name is John, too, no big coincidence, of course, but I was pretty drunk the night of that party, and it really amazed me then. It was enough of a surprise just to see Jesterin at that party. He is the type to be easily swayed by medical reports which say that alcohol kills brain cells and marijuana makes your toenails fall off. I was that way when I was a sophomore. Now I'm a normal person, although still a reasonably good math student. I know alcoholics and acidheads, and even three girls who have had abortions. I've grown up so fast in the past two years. (Isn't it funny how one always attaches maturity to one's current point of view and sees so much childishness in one's past? It's an infinite regression that totally denies the possibility of wisdom and adulthood. I wonder if my parents know that.)

I met Jesterin at the beginning of this year, in a twelfth-grade math class. He is currently in my college level Calculus class. He is rather a genius, of that there is no doubt. He has a manner of attacking questions in class that is really quite shocking if you're not used to it; his teachers always feel like zookeepers throwing questions to the lions. Even his writing is intense, little squiggly lines which look like equations chewed and spit back on the page. In class last Wednesday he was at his very best, his long sharp jaws devoured derivation after derivation until the whole class moaned in unison. The moaning broke into haughting derision as Jesterin made one of his numerous simple mathematical errors. It seems that true brilliance accompanies a total inadequacy in the performance of the basics. Addition troubles Jesterin.

And so does Karen Simpson. Her face is so perfect that Jesterin wastes joyous time staring at her when the lectures are too simple. The curve of her face is as smooth as a catenary, and her eyes have a deep blue three-dimensional quality that is truly unique. She is not his type, if any girl is. She is a social creature, a beauty queen, capable of dangling anyone in the school by a string with her wide-eyed charm. And indeed, she strings along quite a great number of jock-type admirers. She is a party girl, and when she's drunk, anything can happen.

On this particular Wednesday, she was giggling with Eric Ivan about the party coming up at Eric's house. Eric is the meanest defensive end in the Southern Conference, all-state as a junior, and, rumor has it, even better in bed than on the football field. He is the type who thinks that anyone who can't drink twelve beers in an hour is pretty worthless. His nickname is "King".

Karen was telling King about how several "rockers" plan to crash the party, doped to the limit, no doubt, with their greasy hair and sleazy chicks. She was interrupted by Jesterin's cackling voice reciting Rolle's theorem.

"Let f be differentiable on (a,b) and continuous on $[a,b]$. If $f(a)$ and $f(b)$ are both 0, then there is . . ."

"There goes the faggot again," King said matter-of-factly.

"I don't know, I think he's kind of cute," replied Karen with a flickering smile. But her statement wasn't sarcastic; it was warm, like always, and King glanced back skeptically. "Let's invite him to the party," Karen went on. King laughed.

"Why not?" he asked after a moment, knowing as well as she did that he'd never accept.

And so, after class, Karen approached Jesterin and addressed him warmly. Jesterin looked up, started, then twitched nervously and fingered his sliderule. She didn't pause, but went right on.

"Would you like to come to our party Friday night? King is having one on the grounds of his father's estate, and we'd like to see you there."

Jesterin gulped. Karen looked so perfect, the finest girl in the school,

Q.E.D. Before he knew what he was doing, Jesterin choked out an O.K. Then he turned absent-mindedly to leave, stopped, spun around, and squeaked.

"What time"

"Around nine."

"O.K."

Jesterin walked away dizzily. It happened so fast. Karen and King were left standing in amazement.

Parties in our high school can be quite unbelievable. They take a group of Sunday-School children (that's how parents always like to picture their kids, it seems), and carry them into the adult world of Vodka and sexual positions. The seniors with their parents' cars are proud of their independence, and not very careful with it. Accidents are frequent, and always make for great stories at lunchtime.

Jesterin's mother drove him to the party. He must have gotten out at the gate and walked up the long drive, past the Ivans' private tennis court, past the pool, where the automatic random sweeper swims around like a metal catfish when no one is in. I'm a fairly good friend of King now, although I only met him and his friends recently. I've swum in his pool several times. I'm no jock, but at least I'm somewhat athletic looking, even kind of cute, my girlfriend says, now that I wear contacts instead of glasses.

I was outside with my girlfriend and a few of King's friends (all line-backers except for one right tackle) when Jesterin came walking up the drive. I gave my girlfriend an excited nudge as he approached. He recognized me; we have spent many hours of computer time in the same room, exchanging scattered technical words, and I was probably the only person he knew. So he walked up in his nervous gangling gait and nodded to me. I turned to face him, trying to hide my surprise.

"Well, Jesterin, how are you this fine night?" I asked strangely.

He shrugged. "Nice house," he said finally in a rather shaky voice. "Thought I'd take a study break. The mind has to lie down and take a rest sometimes. Where is the beer?"

I pointed to the keg, then stared after him in disbelief. Only then did I notice the coffee mug he had in his hand. It appeared to have a differential equation inscribed on the side. I had an urge to point him out to everybody. But I just stared. And only I saw how much trouble he had figuring out how the keg worked. I could feel the terror he must have felt, trying not to look perplexed as he pumped and pumped but no beer would come out. It was like the first time I tried doing a bong; I sat there coolly in front of everyone, took the bong, and started sucking on the bowl cleaning rod attached to the bong by a string. No one said anything, but peoples' eyes grew wild in astonishment and embarrassment for me as I realized that smoke could never be sucked through a string, and put

my mouth in a more useful place. Jesterin finally figured out the keg, and poured his mug right down the middle, giving himself nothing but foam. He then returned to my side, somewhat flustered.

King came out of the house, with Karen at his side. They are currently loosely involved with each other. When they saw Jesterin, they made their way very obviously through the crowd. For them, Jesterin's presence was quite a "trip", like listening to Jimi Hendrix or staring at a black light poster. Karen whispered to King as they walked towards him,

"He looks so cute standing there with his foam."

King laughed. They were both already quite wasted.

When Jesterin saw Karen coming, his eyes flickered, and he had the look of someone with a stone sitting in the pit of his stomach. (Maybe even more like a boulder) He tried to smile. She gave him an emphatic welcome, and invited him along with several others to come inside. I went with them.

In the living room, the chairs were all taken. King turned to Jesterin and said, "pull up a floor," and then laughed idiotically. He was high, like everyone else. The room reeked of dope, and a joint was being passed around when we entered. It came to me as I took my place cross-legged on the floor. I took a hit and handed it to Jesterin, who didn't look very comfortable, like a piece of driftwood, with appendages sticking out everywhere. He shook his head jerkily, with a wierd expression on his face.

"Hey man, aren't you gonna have a toke?" came a mocking voice across the room. Jesterin was sweating. His eyes darted several times over at Karen, and even I could see that she was the only reason he was there.

The talk centered around nothing very important, which is always the most outstanding quality of that type of party. But "nothing very important" would appear to be a very humorous topic for discussion, because the parties are always filled with plenty of splitting laughter. It wasn't long before the crowd turned to Jesterin to sustain the humor. Karen started it by asking Jesterin if he'd done his homework yet. They were laughing already. Jesterin nodded. Everyone laughed again.

Karen said, "I like Mr. McMillan. He seems to know his shit pretty well. What do you think, Jesterin?"

"Yes, he's interesting. All math teachers are," Jesterin said. I could almost sense that he was shaking. He was sweating even worse by now, like an actor under extremely hot spotlights. He took another sip of foam, grimacing slightly.

"Why do you find math so interesting, Jesterin?" Karen persisted, and so did the laughter. Now I was sweating for him too, as if his perspiration wasn't enough.

"I don't know. It's kind of challenging." Jesterin stopped nervously.

Then, out of nowhere, he went on. Everyone looked back, surprised that he wasn't finished.

"Numbers interest me. Functions interest me. Everything is a function." Suddenly Jesterin seemed intense, like in class. "For example, the amount of marijuana you smoke is a function of many things, like how much homework you have, the price of marijuana, etc." This brought some scattered moans, a few laughs, and a collective incomprehensive stare at the fidgety figure next to me.

Jesterin continued with barely a pause. "It would even appear that life can be written as an equation, with all the variables of nature and individual experience being functions. Plotting life against time, the graph would look similar to $-e^{-x}$, in that it would approach a "y asymptote", perfect life, absolute wisdom, whatever you want to call it, as time approaches infinity. But like any asymptote, you'd never get there. The derivative of life with respect to time would give the rate of personal growth at any point in life." Jesterin obviously could have gone on, but the incredulous laughter caught him by surprise. He seemed to totter for a moment and looked around the room.

I could tell that the crowd of stoned people was quite entertained. But the laughter still had an edge to it, not so much a derisive edge, but a blunter tone of disbelief, not so much threatening as discouraging. But Karen's smile, as always, was warm. Jesterin caught her glance, then looked away abruptly. Someone noticed his mug was empty, all the foam had disappeared.

"This boy really downs 'em," said the guy next to me. Without even asking Jesterin if he wanted more, he poured the rest of his beer into Jesterin's mug, and turned with a smile towards the door with his own mug now empty. Jesterin eased into a more comfortable position.

"Would you like to hear the proof that all numbers are interesting?" he continued, stretching his legs. Karen giggled.

"Consider the set of all numbers characterized by some distinctive trait, such as all prime numbers, pi, e, gamma, etc., etc. These are interesting because they exhibit unique characteristics. Now consider the set of all numbers not in this 'interesting set', the set of all apparently uninteresting numbers. The lowest of these is interesting, because it is uniquely less than every other number in the set. Thus we place it in the set of interesting numbers. Our new 'uninteresting set' has a new member which is uniquely lower than all the others. Thus we remove it too. In this manner, I could prove that all numbers are interesting. Now you know why I think math is interesting."

People were really laughing now. It was definitely encouraging laughter, laughter which brought a pleasant expression to Jesterin's face. Not exactly a smile, but almost; his expression was timid and intense at the same time, his eyes were bright like candles.

"You know, you're pretty weird," someone said. Jesterin actually laughed, nervously, of course. He took a long swig of beer, choked, and

drooled on his double-knit pants (apparently special for the occasion. It was also noteworthy that his hair was clean).

Jesterin went on about his parrot, Polynomial, whom he said he had taught to recite L'hospital's rule. Some people were beginning to experience excessive stomach pain and even difficulty breathing as Jesterin continued absurdly about things too incredible to be conceived possible. Yet I believed every one. Maybe I'm a fool, but it seemed to me that Jesterin was just unique enough to flip pennies 10,000 times in one controlled experiment to determine empirically the true odds of getting heads or tails. (Incidentally, in the very long run, it is less often that you get a head.)

Jesterin had almost run out of things to say, and was looking a bit more unsure of himself again, when word came that the rockers had arrived, and all strong people were needed to drive them off the premises. The wasted jocks followed King out of the room, they filed past Jesterin, giving him friendly pokes on his boney shoulder as they left. Jesterin and I stayed. I somehow felt really good when all those guys responded so well to Jesterin. I wanted to tell him that I would like to be his friend, I even had an urge to tell him that I could introduce him to several girls who were pretty nice, even on the intellectual side. But before I had a chance, Karen invited him over to sit in King's vacated seat. He managed to remove himself from the floor and walked over. He sat down beside her with a thud, and his glasses fell off his nose. She smiled at him.

"You know, you're kind of cute."

Jesterin blushed.

My girlfriend complained that I wasn't being very sociable that night. I wasn't. I was in a rather sentimental mood. I stared absent-mindedly at the wall. Over the couch, a photograph hangs of a very young child with brilliant eyes. King once told me that it was a portrait of his mother at age six. She is now an alcoholic, separated, and living in New York with a lawyer.

My girlfriend rattled on, but I began straining to hear the conversation from the other side of the room.

"I think you're pretty," Jesterin said barely.

Karen smiled. "What's your real name?" she asked.

"You mean you don't know?"

"No."

"It's John."

"I like that better."

"Oh . . . well you can call me John."

I lost track of the conversation for a while. I became lost in thought, as my girlfriend rambled on, using the word "relationship" an obnoxious number of times in one sentence. Just a few years ago, all "relationships"

were either direct or indirect, and I only had to use the word in math class.

I glanced over and saw Karen kiss Jesterin. Jesterin didn't know what to do. He appeared totally intoxicated, dreamlike, awed, and pretty pale. He still looked uncomfortable, he received Karen's kisses stiff as a board, yet his elbows and knees seemed a little less un-naturally jumbled in that chair.

I watched as Jesterin's smile actually smoothed some of the hard lines of his face. A sheepish smile, to be sure, but still tingling with feeling. I doubt he ever smiled like that before. At that moment, King re-entered. He was drunk, mad, and bleeding. Seeing Karen kissing Jesterin didn't make him any happier.

"I've been out there fighting those damned dirtballs, and you've been in here flirting with this fool," he said rather unemotionally, to give a feeling of understatement to the exclamation. He then snatched Karen up, and she followed him obediently back outside, where the party was still alive. Jesterin sat there a while, then got up, walked across the room, and phoned his mother. After a brief conversation, he put the phone down, turned, and walked outside. I followed.

"Are you leaving already?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I still have some work to do. I want to get ahead." He appeared to be still in a dream as he walked off down the long curving road to the gate.

The party was definitely still alive. Next to me some poor guy threw up all over the rose garden. Obscenities were flying around the yard, the children were getting just too excited. King was yelling at Karen for forgetting to take her pill that morning. I watched as Jesterin's silhouette faded into pinetree shadows by the tennis court. I was quite sad, for some reason.

Journal of a Young Man

Mike Moyer

Detroit (UPI) — A Grosse Pointe youth brandishing a fork brutally stabbed a woman in a crowded restaurant here today. Names of the attacker and victim are being withheld pending further investigation. Police say the assailant is under psychiatric observation. No motive for the bizarre incident has yet been identified.

I remember a lot about the day I did it. I really do — the white brings it out of me. The white of these walls, the white paper, the white silence. I make these hieroglyphics — they are born, take shape under my hand, and who reads? Who unlocks the why of me hidden in funny markings I create for the benefit of this whiteness all around. The clock responds and no other — I can tell she's listening, as she answers in metallic rhythm. She tells me it's nine o'clock now. Soon the woman all dressed in white comes. She has white shiny teeth and a white "How are you feeling, Robert?" and she gives me the white paper cup.

Only then do I break through. The redness within the white cup lingers, slightly glistening before me, grasped in the pale outstretched woman hand that soon withdraws untouched. A metallic claw, I muse, useful and purposeful. I take the redness from the cup and it slides, I feel it, a rippling glissando down my throat to free my flight. Sleep will bring soaring, but that is later. I must first tell about the day I did it while all is free of sleep's haze. Someone must know.

But first my cast or characters. Father would approve of such crisp resumé form, so businesslike and proper.

Robert John Eisley, our star, in his eighteenth year of what some caustically refer to as life. Promising young pre-law student, shackled for the summer to the noble occupation of washing dishes. Citizen of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and the Gainesville Academy, Gainesville, New Jersey. Hobbies: Reading, writing, girls when available, music.

Comments: Socially adjusted, but has come to develop a preference for solitude and a flair for writing. References available upon request.

Harold Nielson Eisley, 48, rising and ambitious legal counsel in the employ of a large and famous automobile company. Successful in everything he does, except communicating with his son, the aforementioned Robert.

Hobbies: Working, spending, occasional walks (post-coronary practicality), and working.

Comments: Fond of recounting how he "worked his way up the hard way." Expounds frequently on the virtues of those mythical constructs, "The American Way" and "Free Enterprise."

Denise Gibbon Eisley, 42, alias Mother. Plucked early from a Seven Sisters vine by the rising and ambitious Harold, and withering ever since. Hobby: The Pursuit of Lost Youth.

Comments: Fond of frequent vacations via jet airplane or distilled spirits. Fits son into her schedule occasionally between Junior League functions and bake sales.

Eve Vandenberg, 18, schoolmate of Robert, she his paramour. Of great beauty. Shatterer of the dream and glory through biological manipulation.

Hobbies: Silence, naivete, following.

Comments: Equipped with a contemptible possessiveness. Specializes in longing looks and strategic use of tears. A Huntress.

Nathan, Ellen, Vera, last names unknown and unimportant. Seasoned veterans in the dishroom where Robert works. The Trapped Ones. Sad quitters of life, day-to-day sufferers in a system and cycle out of their control.

Hobbies: Simplistic banter and drivel, inane humor, excessive laughter.

Comments: Human tragedies in that they'll never have the chance, the ability to know what they want or how to live.

The phone had jolted me out of dim midnight notions and the disc spinning slowly, slowly around the turntable. I swore a little at the old man's business friends for calling so late, but it was she. She was home in Connecticut — I hadn't spoken to her since school. Finals had been pressurized, a roiling cauldron of worry and no sleep and nerves, and she pulled me down and I had said no, but she pulled me down. With all her goddamned ramblings about "somedays" and "caring" and "commitment", the cutesy "Love Is . . ." cards to me all the time. I tolerated, humoring her, keeping her occupied, I suppose — attention is nice now and again. And such a fool, FOOL! I was, I am.

So there we were, talking over what to do, and she was crying long-distance, **one-thousand mile sobs**, mind you, and that just made me madder, and she wanted to know what I was going to do, for Chrissakes, as if darling Robert were going to drop all his future and come rushing in astride some sort of white Charger to clean up her mistakes.

And she kept sobbing, and that whining, "You must help me", and I could just see her twining her clutching fingers around my life. I was shouting, and she changed tack, giving me her big threats to do something drastic. I remember saying I'd call her back when she'd stopped acting like a baby, just before I slammed down the receiver. And then it was me and damnable midnight and the silence. My parents never heard a thing (not that they would have done much anyway). The house was too damn big.

Thus robbed of precious sleep, my night gave way to another fine working day, my day to answer. We pulled out of the too-long driveway in the too-long car and started to work our way toward the big city. Daddy, Mummy and little Bobby were being trendy and playing car pool. The

three of us together, just like old times, whatever they are. I remember snuggling on the back seat on late-night trips home from Grandmom's. I could smell the sweet coolness and barnyard droppings of the country night as I stared at the stars. They were so constant. No matter how fast we went, bumps rhythmically sliding beneath the wheels, the stars held their place as I peeked on through the frame of the rear window. It was I who was entitled to enchanted memories. Now a full belly not wanted threatened to engulf and destroy dreams, one growth stifling another.

I stared out at the manicured green of Grosse Pointe and started taking down mind notes. It's a little habit I have, making mental observations so as to keep my head free of unpleasanties.

Father whistled through his nose as he breathed, and drove. I looked past the makeup crust on mother's cheek to the mansions and sycamores beyond. The outside world swirled in mists of a half-rain as we drove past exhibit after exhibit of success. "The Pointe" was all cascading lawns and luxuriant trees and regimental castles of imported stone.

Fat black squirrels hopped and squatted, and a noble Irish setter with silken red flanks trotted past my rain-spotted window. These were the scant signs of life; I lived in a grand, well-tended museum, a still-life diorama of privilege. Not one child played, shinnied up a tree, wrestled in the dew-flecked blankets of green. A lush nursery, lavishly equipped and never used.

My back-seat vision yielded two gray heads of my unwilling progenitors. The heads never swiveled, eyes never met eyes. Once passion had flared in them, briefly, before the gray. But it was all a mistake; a gilded snuffer had long ago lowered and extinguished. A single flesh-and-blood remnant of that scandalous rift in their best-laid plans was all that remained to nag at them, call attention to their enduring slip.

I wanted them to look at me. But my eyes met the backs of gray heads, one short-cropped and one streaked with brown tint.

We were reduced to our common denominator, silence. Oh sure, there was a voice, but it was the morning traffic control report on AM. I wanted to talk to them, I wanted them to know that a new voice in a womb far away threatened to squeal out a common identity and continuity. I hated them for their refusal to listen to me. I was brave enough to tell them, let there be no doubt, but they would write off my success as fully as they wrote me off. I might receive a brief burst of outrage, and certainly the money for a sanitary cleansing away of the problem in a posh downtown clinic. (Times have changed since the mistakes of their youth.)

Or maybe they'd try to stem me and talk lightly of accepting the next generation. How it was my decision, my responsibility.

No. They had to know, they had to feel denial as I had felt it. There was a way to make them look at me, deal with me. They would hear me in my own voice.

So it was all calculated, you see. The efficiency of what happened that

day is what makes it so easy to remember and write down.

It was easy to think these things each day, reinforce notions as we commuted together in silence. Detroit sprawls away from the car window in all directions as what is real radiates from the one who conceives the real. And what sprawls is gray and concrete and brokenness. People break, things break, dreams break. I look at lumbering Nathan, three hundred dish-washing pounds of retarded black man who, I'm sure, lives in filth and lovelessness amidst this sordid panorama. He smiles in his idiocy, dreams only of apple pie at lunchtime, and rambles delightedly on (in bass voice from cavernous chest) about how much more overtime he'll get to scrape plates and dump garbage.

There is also Ellen, with white skin, vacant mind and city scars far deeper than a dumpy body betrays. She chatters, she laughs frenziedly as she feeds dishware to the monster all day long, the monster dish machine that vomits steam and fire and long rows of clean, white plates. She finds disgusting pleasure in Nathan's spills, cackles at jokes two weeks old, hugs everyone with red-blotched arms. I shudder. Is there NO way to lift these people?

These are ones without higher reasoning — perhaps the divines excuse them. (The inner city shambles I reflect on from the fast lane makes me doubt the presence of **any** saving grace in such decay.) There are no excuses, however, for the Veras of this world.

I work side-by-side with Vera and marvel afresh each time I think of what she has done. Twenty-five years on dishcrew. No waitressing, no management training, nothing. She proudly sports her silver pin, trinket from an employee anniversary party. She is the fastest person in the world at clearing a lunch tray, no doubt — Guinness should pay a visit for the record.

But Vera **has** a mind, and there is no excuse for twenty-five years of wasting it. I read and write. And when you get right down to it, I'm pretty good at it, too. I must confess that I **am** in truth somewhat modest, but I really plan to use what I have upstairs to enter the law, to help others toward their goals and some measure of fulfillment. Sure, you might say, it's noble, idealistic crap. I admit I'll allow a little compensation to ensure comfort — but I really mean what I say about my ambitions.

Now look at Vera. Trudging into the slimiest job in the universe each day, hennaed hair tightly bound in a plastic web. And all for what? To work like a galley slave all the day long, puttering with other people's garbage. Just so she can say with damnable pride, "I earned my check this week."

She, playing her harmonica like some misplaced court jester, getting the whole crew singing, clapping, dancing their little circle games and Hitlerian jigs. I sit back and watch, revolted. Fools made by a dying city, a system that destroys their brains, destroys their ability to choose the higher, the right path.

They laugh, they clasp hands and dance the fools' dance, surrounded

by a suffering, a big city decay for which they can never know the causes.

And suddenly I know the cause.

We arrive at work and I see my Father's unspeaking gray head as I leave. And I know there is an army of unspeakable gray heads. They're behind it, my father and men like him. The Men of Business that must be met, must be stopped. And we, the sons who know and hurt for others, we must stop them. We, the new guard of public service and law.

Unspeaking Gray Heads, sanctioned by the cover of my Mother and her army of tinted heads, the fine ladies of good deeds and mistake children. Giving so graciously and eagerly to orphanages and hospitals even as they placidly ignore the sickness of their city, the disease within their families, their children of error.

I'm not saying it's **all** like this; I'm a man who doesn't believe in the formlessness of absolutes and generalities. The concrete, the specifics, the Fathers and Mothers must know what they really do. The Nathans and Ellens and Veras, chained in their sadness to Father-made despair and hopelessness, must know what has been done to them.

And all of this perpetuated by life, a collective life that **allows** one man's evil against another, one man's ignorance against another's exploitation. We do not choose, we are permitted. And this is what we are permitted.

I am not alone in my misery, my shackles within a system that stamps a manchild's existence with colorless uniformity. I see this as I enter the dishroom, pierce its thick, screening walls.

I see this as I slip on my starched, white uniform, as we all slip on our white uniforms — Black Nathan and red-blotched Ellen and hennaed Vera. I see this as I stand to receive the burnt offerings of Ellen's dish machine — the long, regular columns of dishes scalded white, riding the conveyor belt that never ends, never stops, not even at night when we all go home and the steamy hell escapes us momentarily in sleep.

We graciously receive secondhand the phantasmagoric colors of garbage, each slovenly diner's uniqueness bequeathed. It is our wealth, our imaginative hue that swirls and bursts on each plate's whiteness, each uniform's whiteness. We are imbued at once with rainbows, patterns of the expressed why that cries to be known, understood. Shapes and forms, the bright scattering of marking that tell of lost tribes, civilizations risen and fallen, their legacy of truths and lessons coded in markings desperately in need of translation. Their found message calls for heralds, trumpeters of answers uncovered and quest's transcendent end.

But the cryptic markings vanish, destroyed by men who fear their message, who deny the truths of mystic letterings. The great machine spurts burning water unceasingly, the jets of soap remove all trace of our priceless endowment. The lustrous greens, the brilliant yellows, the flashing oranges that can save us from this wet inferno are swept away as dishes are blasted, uniforms are changed in the rhythm of the Father's unending

conveyor, the unspeaking Gray One's time clock clicking off mercilessly, ordering this chaos from the colorful glory that abounds into a weekly worship of faded green paper, given the worth of crinkling and touching human hands, immeasurable and suffering.

The conveyor must stop.

Someone must take the responsibility, someone must choose to save, end this madness. It's very simple. We are permitted to enter the madness, innocent and unformed, destined to hurt and be hurt. Ours is an immutable system where strong crush weak, strong trick weak, and love can never grow. And it goes on and on and on.

But a choice remains. We can choose to save the innocents. We can deny the Unspeaking Gray Fathers the satisfaction of heritage. The Son can awaken the sleeping Gray Heads and Veras and let them know as he knows.

And I had a visitor as I worked. I was called to the splendid dining room, the gilded arena of gray heads that gorged and slobbered in contemptible disregard of the dishroom, their enslaved process. Their eyes are screened by reticent walls, walls that free them to rest unspeaking, unaccountable for that which they do but do not see.

And in the arena of unseeing gray heads Eve's eyes met mine in an instant. She was crying, mumbling something about an early morning flight and sharing the problem and I could tell her lips were shaping "we." But I was transfixed by her eyes, windows to the nascent unhurt soul within her belly.

And I knew the belt rumbled in endless circles and there were screams of scalded white dishes and I knew the Gray Heads and started to turn and I knew it was time for the message to reach them and I seemed to touch her deep soft belly again and again and again and again before the blackness.

The white walls and white sheets are before me. The woman in white makes me lay down my pen soon. Sleep and dreams have come, and I can leave this place for awhile.

But the words, they stay. I have conceived, I have created, and only the necessary child, beyond hurt, will carry on, carry the message. The Father has learned, the Mother has learned; those around me saw, listened to my statement.

And before I go — this stay in whiteness is but a temporary thing. Soon I will be back to proper schooling and the pursuit of the law. My work will continue as I dedicate myself to the betterment of others. The selfish impulse in this world will prove a noble adversary, but I am up to the task. The words will flow and capture the record of this lost civilization. To form and preserve this legacy is the highest level to which a man can aspire.

Contributors

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